DePaul University
UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES

DePaul University
Digital Commons@DePaul

College of Education Theses and Dissertations
College of Education

Spring 2021

Dancing in the Liminal Tension: A Phenomenological Study of how Queer Black Boys Manifest Happiness in an Urban Midwest High School

Kendrick D. Johnson

Follow this and additional works at: https://via.library.depaul.edu/soe_etd

Part of the Curriculum and Instruction Commons

Recommended Citation

Johnson, Kendrick D., "Dancing in the Liminal Tension: A Phenomenological Study of how Queer Black Boys Manifest Happiness in an Urban Midwest High School" (2021). *College of Education Theses and Dissertations*. 205.
https://via.library.depaul.edu/soe_etd/205

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the College of Education at Digital Commons@DePaul. It has been accepted for inclusion in College of Education Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons@DePaul. For more information, please contact digitalservices@depaul.edu.

DePaul University

College of Education

Dancing in the Liminal Tension: A Phenomenological Study of how Queer Black Boys Manifest Happiness in an Urban Midwest High School

A Dissertation in Education
with a Concentration in Curriculum Studies

by

Kendrick D. Johnson

© 2021 Kendrick D. Johnson

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements
for the Degree of

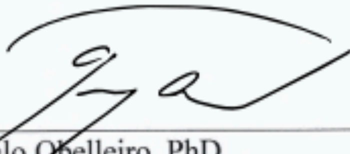
Doctor of Philosophy

June 2021

We approve the dissertation of Kendrick Johnson.

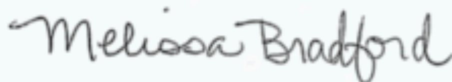
Jason Goulah, PhD
Professor and Director
Institute for Daisaku Ikeda Studies in Education
DePaul University
Dissertation Committee Chair

5.19.21
Date



Gonzalo Obelleiro, PhD
Assistant Professor, Curriculum Studies
DePaul University
Dissertation Committee Member

5.19.21
Date

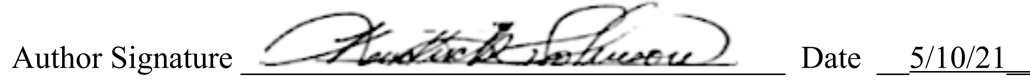


Melissa Bradford, PhD
Professional Lecturer, Educational Leadership
DePaul University
Dissertation Committee Member

5/19/21
Date

Certification of Authorship

I certify that I am the sole author of this dissertation. Any assistance received in the preparation of this dissertation has been acknowledged and disclosed within it. Any sources utilized, including the use of data, ideas and words, those quoted directly or paraphrased, have been cited. I certify that I have prepared this dissertation according program guidelines as directed.

Author Signature  Date __5/10/21__

ABSTRACT

Urban public schools, as social institutions, have historically played an integral role in reproducing the oppressive ideologies of society writ large. As we depart an era of cautious optimism, many LGBTQ students are teetering on the brink of hopelessness and despair. So often many of these students' voices—particularly those of queer Black boys—are still silenced. Ergo, there is a sense of urgency on the part of educators, researchers, and policy-makers to understand how and why queer Black boys consistently disrupt the hegemonic terrain of schools by transforming them into liminal spaces; it is in these sacred spaces-in-between that new identity narratives are constructed, value is created, and authentic happiness is manifested.

The purpose of this research in Curriculum Studies is to explore how the narratives of queer Black boys can be used as powerful forms of cultural, political, and social protest that help foster their personal growth toward the pursuit of authentic happiness. This study draws its epistemological lens from queer phenomenology and employs phenomenological interviewing as the method for gathering data from four queer Black high school boys and one transgender female from a small, predominantly African-American city in the Midwest. Drawing upon queer-of-color critique, Daisaku Ikeda's concept of human revolution, and Tsunesaburo Makiguchi's framework for value creation and happiness, the researcher captures how queer Black boys attain inner liberation and pursue happiness, despite seemingly insurmountable odds. Although schooling is the primary institution investigated in this study, the researcher takes on a comprehensive approach to understanding the lifeworld of queer Black boys by also exploring homonegativity within other social institutions such as the Black family, the Black church, and the media—all of which, the researcher argues, stems from a tradition of White supremacist patriarchy. Schwab reminds us that the student, the teacher, the subject, and the

milieu are all co-equal forces in the ongoing development of educational programs. The educational setting is especially important in this phenomenological study of happiness with respect to queer Black boys in an urban high school because it brings into concert all of the other commonplaces in their lives.

The participants in this study use their narratives to illustrate how they forge liminal spaces through which to connect, educate, create value, and inspire others to create value amidst adversity, regardless of who one chooses to love, how one chooses to identify, or how un/willing one is to adhere to the status-quo politics of gender and sexual conformity. Drawing on Ikeda's perspective of human revolution from the "lesser" to the "greater" self, the researcher posits that a human revolution in queer Black boys promotes a sense of transcendence from their lesser 'self', which starts with reclaiming ownership of their truths and their queer bodies.

This study ultimately examines the imperative of value creation in the lives of queer Black boys because it helps bring forth their full human potential, while emancipating them from identities that infringe upon it. Their stories help to re-theorize our understanding of "orientation" in "sexual orientation" by deconstructing how queer Black boys reside in, and understand, the spatial and temporal aspects of sexual desires.

Table of Contents

LIST OF DIAGRAMS .... **viii**
LIST OF TALBLES .... **ix**
ACKNLOWLEDGEMENTS .... **x**
DEDICATION .... **xii**
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION **1**
Problem Statement 5
Purpose of the Study & Research Questions 8
Positionality 9
Dissertation Roadmap 11
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE **13**
Introduction: 13
Theoretical Perspectives 15
Queer-Of-Color-Critique 15
Daisaku Ikeda's Human Revolution 17
Makiguchi's Value-Creative Happiness 20
Bakhtin's Theory of Dialogue 26
Dialogue for Education, Peace, and Global Citizenship: Bakhtin, Makiguchi, & Ikeda 31
Institutional Implications 36
Absolving Sodom: The Black Church Through a Queer Lens 36
Homonegativity and The Black Family 38
Media Consumption: Gangsta' Discourse and Negro Faggotry 39
Schools as Liminal Spaces: Negotiating Racial and Sexual Identities 44
In Search of the Black Queer Male Perspective 48
Academic & Curricular Interruptions 50
Social Interruptions 52
Legal Interruptions 53
Beyond the Liminal Silence: Presentation of Findings from a Pilot Study 56
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY **67**
Phenomenology 67
Queer Phenomenology 69
Method of Data Collection 72
Recruitment: Description of Site and Participants 76
Data Analysis 79
Ethical Concerns: Risks and Benefits 81
Summary of Overall Strengths and Limitations of the Study 84
CHAPTER 4: PARTICIPANT PROFILES **85**
Introduction 85
Meet DeShaun 85
Meet Regina (assigned Reginald at birth) 92
Meet Tremaine 99
Meet Jabari 108
Meet Kelsin 113
CHAPTER 5: THEMATIC ANALYSIS **123**
Introduction 123
Table 1: Themes 123
Theme #1: Triple Consciousness 125

Theme #2: Toils of Greed, Anger, and Foolishness 134
Theme #3: Human Revolution as the Basis for Value Creative-Happiness 141
Theme #4: Spiritual Eroticism 154
Conclusion 167
CHAPTER 6: IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS 168
Introduction 168
Human Revolution: The Essence of Human Happiness 168
Why Human Revolution?: Engaging Eastern and Western Perspectives 171
Recommendations for Curriculum, Theory, Policy, and Practice 174
Dialogue and the Literary Imagination: Pedagogic Possibilities 176
Queering Teacher Preparation Programs 181
Multicultural Education: The Missing Puzzle Piece? 183
Frameworks for Improving Teacher Preparation Programs 185
Language Affirmation as a Tool of Resistance 187
Conceptual Tools for Active Language Monitoring 190
Sex Ed: A Nation Divided 193
Ideology and the Queer Factor: Beyond the Abstinence-Contraception Debate 195
Implications for Substantive Change 198
Conclusion 199
References 202
Appendix 233

LIST OF DIAGRAMS

Diagram 1: *The Components of Happiness* **...20**

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: *Themes* **123**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am overwhelmed with joy at the tremendous support that I received throughout the writing of this dissertation. First and foremost, I would like to express my deepest appreciation to the best committee ever! Jason Goulah, Gonzalo Obelleiro, and Melissa Bradford, thank you all for making this process a joyful one. At times when I felt unsure of myself, your words of affirmation reassured me that I was capable of making it to the finish line; and so, here I am! I am sincerely grateful for your constructive feedback, substantive dialogues, and profound belief in my work.

I would like to offer a special thanks to my advisor, Jason Goulah, for your patience and academic guidance, and especially for introducing me to the teachings and philosophies of Daisaku Ikeda and Tsunesaburo Makiguchi; it is because of them that I always choose hope! I value your mentorship more than I can ever express. Even when I took a hiatus from my dissertation research, I always knew that you were just a phone call away. I appreciate you for keeping in touch throughout the years and for always finding ways to gently nudge me back into my academic studies. I will forever cherish the grace, wisdom, and compassion that you have extended to me over the years.

I would also like to extend my sincerest gratitude to the Ikeda Center for Peace, Learning, and Dialogue for your moral, intellectual, and financial support in completing my dissertation. The Education Fellows Program granted me access to resources and advisors who were fundamental in shaping and refining this project. To the advisory committee—Larry Hickman, Virginia Benson, Ann Diller, Jim Garrison, Jason Goulah, Ming Fang He, Isabel Nuñez, and William Schubert—thank you for your insightful comments and practical suggestions throughout the writing process. I hope that I've made you all proud.

Thank you to my extended DePaul family—all of my professors, classmates, and friends who have contributed to my academic, personal, and professional growth over the years. I will always hold a special place in my heart for you all, and I'm sure that our paths will cross again in the near future.

To my brilliant participants: I am deeply humbled and indebted to you all for entrusting me with the responsibility of sharing your narratives and revealing your truths throughout this research study. I remain in awe of your courage and resilience to forge ahead and manifest happiness in your lives, despite the seemingly bleak circumstances that life throws at you. This journey has proven to be both insightful and liberating for me as a researcher and a queer Black man. Thank you for sharing with me (and the world) a glimpse of your Black boy joy!

Lastly, I would like to acknowledge my family, loved ones, and closest friends for your unwavering support and patience throughout my doctoral process. I am so blessed to be surrounded by a village that shows continuous, unparalleled love and dedication. To my mom, I will always cherish you for selflessly encouraging me to be my authentic self, to explore new paths in life, and to seek my own destiny. This journey would not have been possible if not for your incomparable faith in me, so I share the success of this milestone with you.

DEDICATION

For those whose humanity has been unjustly denied:

May you continue to forge ahead courageously, brazenly, and victoriously so!

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Racism, heterosexism, heteronormativity, homophobia, and genderism are all hegemonic constructs that profoundly shape the lives of queer youth (Wernick et al, 2013). In my study, the term "queer" will be used to represent the collective group of non-gender and non-sexuality conforming individuals. Public schools—as social institutions—have historically played an integral role in not only perpetuating these oppressive constructs, but also in creating platforms for resistance, liberation, and even happiness. Queer, in this study, serves a dual purpose: First, it is about "queering" what we initially deem unusual or strange in sexualized and politicized spaces by transforming them into liminal spaces, or transitory-worlds-in-between (Ranciere, 1991) where queer youth negotiate race and sexual identity; additionally it refers to the re-theorizing/"queering" of "orientation" in "sexual orientation" by deconstructing how queer Black boys reside in and understand the spatial and temporal aspects of sexual desire in schools, how they then create value, or meaning, through a process of human revolution (Ikeda, 2010), and how, thereby, they ultimately manifest happiness.

Therefore, a human revolution is not a quest to find the "truth" of the queer self, but to be emancipated from identities that infringe upon it. The concepts of human revolution and happiness, as used in this study, stem from a larger field of scholarship on the principle of *sōka*, which literally means "value-creating" and refers to the pedagogical approach to curriculum that emerged in 1930s Japan in response to "increasingly militaristic educational system focused on creating subjects of the state rather than contributive citizens of local and global communities" (Goulah & Sharma, 2017). The pioneers of this approach include Japanese educators and thinkers, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi (1871-1944), Josei Toda (1900-

1958), and Daisaku Ikeda (b. 1928) (e.g., Goulah, 2010, 2018; Goulah & Gebert, 2009; Goulah & Ito, 2012).

In this study, I engage specifically with Ikeda's perspective of value-creating approaches as they pertain to human revolution. Ikeda consider human revolution to be "[t]he most fundamental and central value is that of life itself. … The fundamental criterion for value … is whether something adds to or detracts from, advances or hinders, the human condition" (p. 246). As a direct disciple of Toda and, thereby, of Makiguchi, Daisaku Ikeda has sought to actualize on a global and secular scale the principles of learners' lifelong happiness that were initially developed by Makiguchi and Toda. This sentiment ultimately led to Ikeda's creation of an international network of kindergartens, elementary, junior and senior high schools, a women's college, and two universities.

With regard to value creation, Ikeda asserts that "all life has the fundamental desire to create value. Value is a relative notion, and in this world, this tapestry of relationships, life is always seeking to create ever better relationships, that is, ever greater value" (Ikeda et al., 2000-2003, Vol. 1, p. 211). He continues: "Life tries to weave a more beautiful tapestry (the value of beauty), a more useful tapestry (the value of benefit [i.e., gain]), a better tapestry (the value of good). I think there can be no doubt that creating value is a very important characteristic" (Ikeda et al., 2000-2003, Vol. 1, p. 211). In this sense, the persistent struggle to create value that serves oneself and others is "proof of life" (ibid).

I draw on Ikeda's particular view of value creation because I am interested in investigating the unique qualities that queer Black boys possess which empower them to create personally and socially beneficial meaning (and thus happiness) within their schooling experiences, while also understanding how they transform personally and humanistically despite

the myriad adverse circumstances that they may endure. This process of inner transformation, or human revolution, emanates from the deep interiority of our lives. Ikeda proclaims, "Human revolution is not something extraordinary or divorced from our daily lives. It begins with an individual identifying and challenging those things which inhibit the full expression of his or her positive potential and humanity" (Ikeda, 2010, p. 247).

This study explores Ikeda's aforementioned philosophical perspectives as a parallel to the critical theoretical framework of Queer of Color Critique (QoCC). While QoCC focuses on the structural elements (systems and institutions) of intersectionality around race, gender, sexuality, and class, Ikeda's perspectives, informed by Buddhist humanism, provide a necessary alternative framework from which to articulate Black queer men's agentic and happy self. This is not to say the men themselves are or must be Buddhist or practice Buddhism, but it provides an authentic and fuller sense of self. Moreover, Ikeda is acutely aware of the evils of racism, discrimination, and bullying as outlined in his various books, lectures, and peace proposals. More specifically, when Ikeda visited Chicago's Lincoln Park neighborhood in October 1960, he witnessed a young Black boy being discriminated against by a group of White kids. In that moment, he determined that he had a profound mission to combat racism on behalf of that boy and all children who are subjected to discrimination of any kind (see The New Human Revolution, vol. 1). Ikeda lambasts baseless discrimination based on race, socio-economic status, gender, or sexuality has no place in society. In terms of racism specifically, Ikeda (2000) writes:

> The roots of racism run deep. Movements to fan racial hatred for political, economic or religious advantage are always with us. The seriousness of this problem lies in that it is so closely tied to people's spiritual and emotional desires. In other words, we might say that the desire for an identity—to know where one came from and where one is going—

> lies at the root of racism. People cannot withstand a vacuum of ideas; a philosophical and ideological void drives people to seek their identity in their race. (see *The Wisdom of the Lotus Sutra*, vol. 1, 2000-2003, pp. 8–9)

Therefore, use of Ikeda's work can be viewed in some ways as a direct line to his . In other words, my use of Ikeda's philosophical views against violence, discrimination, bullying and racism was not a haphazard decision; indeed, his engaged resistance against these evil forces has taken place since 1960 and provides a nuanced context to this study.

Schools can sometimes be hostile environments where queer students experience a relatively high degree of marginalization due to violence, bullying, and harassment (Kosciw, Greytak, Palmer, & Boesen, 2014). This form of social stigmatization produces short-term and long-term damage to students' psychological, emotional, academic, and social well-being (Olson, Kann, Vivola-Kantor, Kinchen, & McManus, 2014). In fact, multiple studies have found that students who experience homophobic victimization are more likely to drop out of school (Hickman, Bartholomew, Mathwig, & Heinrich, 2008), demonstrate poor academic performance (O'Shaughnessey, Russell, Heck, Calhoun, & Laub, 2004), feel disconnected from the overall culture of the school (Swearer, Espelage, Vaillancourt, & Hymel, 2010), and suffer from negative mental and psychological health, resulting in high incidences of suicide, promiscuity, and substance abuse (Almeida, Johnson, Corliss, Molnar, & Azrael, 2009). Considering these detrimental factors, there is a sense of urgency on the part of educators, researchers, and practitioners to understand how queer Black boys disrupt the hegemonic terrain in schools by cultivating liminal spaces that allow them to produce new identity narratives and create happiness.

Problem Statement

While the corpus of scholarship surrounding queer students in schools is plentiful, the literature specifically around queer Black boys and their schooling experiences is still emerging. Moreover, there is a need for phenomenology to investigate human happiness, not as a narcissistic pursuit, but as a genuine philosophical endeavor for queer emancipation. The intersections of race, gender, and sexuality "trouble" basic social science concepts and necessitate a more integrative approach to understanding the experiences of those whose identities overlap within multiple categories of "other." Because there is not simply one way to be "queer," to be "male," or to be "Black," there is not just one way to understand the perceived realities associated with these intersecting identities. The research problem can therefore be contextualized through three lenses: the need to 1) expand research designs and methodologies to investigate queer experiences, specifically those of Black boys; 2) expand value-creating approaches specifically related to race, gender, and sexuality; and 3) create an intersectional framework for understanding how queer Black males interpret and manifest happiness within their schooling experiences.

First, and most notably, previous educational research in Black queer studies has included only small sample sizes (Friedman, Koeske, & Silvestre, 2006), lacked inclusivity of racial and ethnic minority students (Meiners & Quinn, 2010), and failed to shed light on how Whiteness, privilege, and racial segregation further complicate the plight of queer students of color (Berlan, Corliss, Field, Goodman & Austin, 2010). While the existing literature surrounding the experiences of queer Black boys in schools provides rich context on how harassment, bullying, and victimization that they endure impact their schooling experience,

these narratives fail to paint a comprehensive picture of queer Black boys in educational settings.

Scholars interested in queer-of-color critique (Ferguson, 2004) and intersectionality inquiry are making valiant efforts to expand the scope of multicultural education, urban education, and queer studies to include a more in-depth inquiry into how intersectionalities complicate the schooling experience for students whose identities intersect in several marginalized categories. This critical theoretical lens, adapted from Black feminism, seeks to disrupt the heteronormative power constructs that perpetuate homophobic ideologies within educational settings, invariably impacting queer-of-color youth. Recent queer-of-color literature suggests an interest in queer Black boys and their schooling experiences in urban high schools. These studies focus primarily on how queer Black boys negotiate masculinity, prioritize Blackness, downplay queerness, and foster agency in order to navigate the homophobic terrain of comprehensive urban high schools (Goode-Cross & Good, 2009; Goode-Cross & Tager, 2011; McCready, 2010; Misa, 2001; Brockenbrough & Boatwright, 2013; Patton & Simmons, 2008; Quinn, 2007). Nonetheless, since queer-of-color critique is still emerging, there are gaps in the literature specifically with regard to examining this framework in the contexts of queer Black boys in high school settings.

Lastly, there is a need for comprehensive, intersectional frameworks for pursuing queer-of-color inquiry. Brockenbrough (2015a) explores queer-of-color critique as an analytic framework to unpack queer agency in educational institutions. At the end of his article, he invites other scholars to continue critical dialogue around these lines of inquiry. Specifically, he poses one of the following questions: “How do the cultural and institutional politics of difference act upon the multiple and intersecting identities of queer students of color, and how can these

students agentively negotiate these politics and their own identities as they strategically navigate educational spaces?" (p. 39). In light of these studies, a more comprehensive narrative is warranted for my study of happiness in urban public schools among resilient populations. I argue that public schools are, in fact, places and spaces where personal (as political) capacities should (and must) be fostered and cultivated. By examining the theoretical lenses of queer-of-color critique (QoCC) (Ferguson, 2004) through the lens of Ikeda's (2010) perspectives of human revolution and value creation for the cultivation of one's own socially self-actualized happiness, I posit that careful consideration must be given to how educators and students engage in social spaces in order for queer Black boys to live in their truths and ultimately strive toward happiness. For Ikeda and Makiguchi a "value-creating life is socially integrated, contributive and, thereby, fundamentally happy" (Goulah, 2012, p. 1000). It is important to note that I chose to explore non-Western perspectives of happiness because literature around happiness in modern Western contexts is limited in its scope and lacks a connection to a more humanistic purpose—that of moral good, which is core to value creation outlined by Ikeda, Toda, and Makiguchi. The rugged individualistic nature of Western ideology limits the potential for happiness that contributes to justice for the greater good of society as well. In fact, studies show that happiness (as solely a personal gain) can actually contribute to greater feelings of loneliness, cause people to disregard others' feelings, and force individuals to forego their connections with others (Anderson, Laudenslager, Mauss, Savino, Tamir, & Weisbuch, 2012; Bargh & Barndollar, 1996; Crocker & Park, 2004).

Additionally, this notion of happiness assumes that it is a feeling that can be measured objectively. This scientific approach has inspired a plethora of happiness research using self-help guides (Argyle, 1987), positive psychology (Seligman, 2003), happiness profiles (Carr,

2004), and other self-reporting mechanisms such as surveys. As a result, happiness, in many Western contexts, is diminished to an instrument to maximize one's potential to get what they want and set up a system of hierarchy that values certain types of happiness over others. This research has important theoretical implications considering that scholarship which seeks to understand how Ikeda's framework of human revolution and value creation as the font of happiness applies to queer Black boys does not exist.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this phenomenological study on happiness is to understand how queer Black boys develop and exhibit agency, how they create meaningful value from life's circumstances, and ultimately how they manifest happiness, all while navigating the heteronormative spaces of urban public schools. In this study, I purposely explore how queer Black boys "manifest" happiness, not as a finite pursuit, but as point of resolute conviction to always choose to seek happiness despite life's circumstances. While the practice of becoming happy is an ever-iterative process, the unwavering decision to pursue that path is what I mean by "manifest"; in other words, once the volitional decision is made to be happy, then it can be achieved in all the vicissitude of life through dialogic interactions and human revolution. The capacity to persistently seek happiness contributes to an awakening of the fullness of one's human dignity. Therefore, this study builds on scholarship in the field of queer-of-color critique, Ikeda/Soka studies in education, and intersectionality research and takes a multidimensional approach to exploring the process by which queer Black boys exhibit happiness amidst disparaging schooling experiences. As such, the following research questions will guide and frame this study:

1. In what ways has the institution of schooling influenced how queer Black boys manifest happiness?
2. In what ways do social institutions—family, religion, and media—impact how queer Black boys develop happiness through value creation?
3. What is the process by which (and the circumstances causing) a kind of inner-motivated transformation occurs at the deep interiority of their lives?
4. What can educators and policymakers learn from the narratives of queer Black boys that best support them in their personal, social, and educational growth toward a happier and more fulfilled life?

Positionality

"There's no enunciation without positionality. You have to position yourself somewhere in order to say anything at all" (Hall, 1990, p. 18). Reflexivity and positionality exist as dialectical relations in which the subjective and objective converge. I am other. I wasn't aware of my "otherness" until my sophomore year in high school when I began to confront my romantic feelings for a classmate named Randy. My high school experience was full of social and cultural diversity that was both intriguing and daunting. Before going to high school, I never ventured outside of my small community on the Westside of Chicago, where my neighbors were disproportionately poor, African American, and heterosexual. This invariably shaped my identity and worldview toward gender, race, class, and sexuality. My perception of what it meant to be a man was also heavily impacted by the women who raised me (mother, aunts) along with the number of other influential women in my life, such as cousins and close friends.

Nevertheless, the idea of confronting the conflicting (and often confusing) feelings that emerged with regard to my sexual orientation still seemed unthinkable. In my community—and in my family, for that matter—discussions on this taboo topic occurred within one of three contexts: in a religious context (in order to rationalize why homosexuality was an "abomination"), in a social context (in order to ridicule or demean those who lived this "lifestyle"), or in a cultural context (by labeling it a "White man's disease").

These feelings lingered within me throughout college. Ironically, I attended an all-male, historically Black institution in Atlanta—a city considered to be the Black gay "Mecca" of the south. Throughout my matriculation, there were no outward displays of flamboyant gender expressions on campus, nor were there clubs or organizations that serviced queer students—students desperately sought to uphold what seemed to be most sacred to Black men—masculinity. Ideally, students were expected to not only develop a critical consciousness around what it means to be Black in America, but more importantly they were expected to subscribe to the notion of Black manhood. Moreover, there were clear cultural codes and parameters around identity, culture, dress; I was being molded into a romanticized version of Black male heterosexuality.

Since graduating and becoming an educator in some of the lowest-performing school systems, I've been interested in understanding the dynamics of urban public schools, specifically in relation to the experiences of queer Black boys. As my line of inquiry centers on the intersection of race, gender, and sexuality, my identity as a Black gay man, thus, cannot (and will not) be suspended during the research process. My positionality and epistemological lens are so entangled with this topic that the notion of bracketing seems virtually impossible. However, since knowledge does not come unmediated, understanding the unique position of

the researcher, the participants, and the world is crucial in my study. I seek to develop a habit of informed skepticism—"of questioning and examining the authority of all knowledge sources," including my own (Tokacs, 2003, p. 31).

Dissertation Roadmap

This dissertation is comprised of six chapters. Chapter 2, the literature review, starts by engaging the four theoretical perspectives that anchor my dissertation: Queer-of-color critique, Ikeda's concept of human revolution, Makiguchi's framework for value creation as the foundation for happiness, and finally Bakhtin's theory of dialogue. The latter half of the literature review examines the roles that heterosexism and homophobia play in institution within the Black community, namely the Black family, the Black church, schooling, and the media. I conclude this chapter with a summary/analysis of findings from a pilot study on this same topic.

Chapter 2 outlines the methodology (queer phenomenology), along with my research protocol summary and plan of work. Chapter 4 reveals my participant profiles. Each profile provides a glimpse into the lifeworld of my participants before I delve into the thematic analysis. It was important that I humanize them and allow the reader to develop a deeper sense of who they are beyond their subjectivity in this study. Chapter 5 is the thematic analysis, which provides an examination of my participants narratives in relation to emerging themes as well as theoretical perspectives from the literature review.

Chapter 6, the final chapter, brings the literature, thematic analysis, and implications for schooling and further research into concert with one another. This chapter will begin by first examining the relationship between the phenomenological essence—human revolution—and the participant responses from interviews. From there, I will examine the "why" behind Ikeda/Soka Studies and its importance in helping to frame and shape this study. I will conclude by

examining specific recommendations for curriculum, pedagogy, policy, and practice that are influenced by QoCC, Ikeda/Soka Studies, and Bakhtin's dialogue.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

In this chapter, I outline the theories, philosophical perspectives, and empirical studies relevant to my study as well as extant literature that informs my research questions pertaining to queer Black boys' ability to create value and manifest happiness in their lives. I begin by summarizing scholarship in the emerging field of queer of color critique (QoCC) in order to lay the epistemological foundation for intersectionality around race, gender, sexuality and class. This serves as the vehicle through which to analyze and critique my participants' experiences in school.

From there, I shift my discussion to Ikeda's concept of human revolution, and then move to Makiguchi's theory of value creation and human happiness. Drawing on their conceptual lenses, I posit that queer Black boys' consciousness of their existing reality helps foster a human revolution within them, which allows them to create meaningful value out of their circumstances, and ultimately manifest true happiness. Thus, human revolution cultivates agency, which is essential to the path toward happiness because of the deliberate and intentional choice to raise one's self beyond any restricted, limited, or mundane world and strive toward a loftier, more profound, and more fulfilled life (Ikeda, 2010); value creation is, therefore, a *decision*, and creating value is the agentic process by which we develop our own happiness from within. This kind of genuine or authentic happiness both sustains us and provides a model for us to create more value thereafter, again toward happiness (Goulah, 2018).

After analyzing the conceptual lenses of Queer of Color Critique, human revolution, and human happiness, I then unpack Bakhtin's theory of dialogism, which serves as a vehicle to cultivate and sustain human happiness and harmonious coexistence. This theoretical perspective

is important to address in this chapter because it sets the stage for discussions around the thematic analysis in Chapter 5 as well as its implications for schooling and further research in the final chapter of this study.

After addressing the conceptual frameworks for this study, I then explore scholarship around institutional responses to homophobia, specifically within the the Black Church, the Black family, and media, stemming from slavery and White supremacy. Ultimately, this section of the literature review seeks to paint a comprehensive picture of how "unhappiness" codes reinforce hegemonic discourses that negatively impact the lives and experiences of queer Black boys. This literature is tantamount to my study, considering that these ideologies permeate the institution of schooling since schools are microcosms of both their local communities and society at large. Thus, understanding the historical, social, and cultural perceptions of queer Black students outside of school settings is crucial to understanding how they might navigate and negotiate race and sexuality within school spaces, a phenomenon that William Schubert (2009) refers to as the "outside curriculum"; other notable curriculum scholars such as Giroux and Purpel (1983), Anyon (1980), and Jackson (1968) also address the covert hegemonic messages that life in school purveys.

The next section of this literature review focuses on the role of schools as liminal spaces where queer Black boys negotiate racial and sexual identities. It is in this space-in-between where students become value creators and where queer Black boys develop the ethical agency to transform hegemonic spaces into spaces where they are able to live more authentically in their truths.

Finally, I situate the scholarship from the literature review into a practical context by using it as a lens through which to analyze data from a pilot study that I conducted. These

findings provide the basis for engaging with the theoretical perspectives in this chapter while also setting the stage to discuss the findings and implications for schooling in subsequent chapters.

Theoretical Perspectives

Queer-of-Color Critique

Queer-of-color critique (Ferguson, 2004) has emerged in order to destabilize intersecting queer modes of oppression due to White supremacy. It argues that existing heteronormative structures rely on normalcy, legitimacy, and vindication within the existing political order and does not incite the necessary conditions for disruption and disorientation to occur (Ferguson, 2004). Within this framework, the queer subject is not merely concerned with acceptance or validation; rather, the queer subject does not seek vindication at all. Instead it focuses on re-imagining new possibilities for ways of being that are devoid of hegemonic ideology (Greteman, 2014). Queer-of-color critique debunks the idea that race, class, gender, and sexuality are separate entities, apparently insulated from one another. This theoretical perspective challenges ideologies of discreteness, in an attempt to disrupt the notion that racial and other social formation are deliberately disconnected. As such, queer-of-color critique seeks to decode social and cultural formations from a position within the existing fields (often White, middle class, and straight), rather than outside of them. Moreover, queer-of-color critique extends black feminism by investigating how intersecting racial, gender, and sexual practices "antagonize and/or conspire with the normative investments of nation-states and capital" (Ferguson, 2004, p. 4).

bell hooks, a notable Black feminist scholar, echoes these sentiments in her texts *We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity (2004)* and *Talking Back (1988)*. She states, "Often

Black gay folk feel extremely isolated because there are tensions in their relationships with the larger, predominantly White gay community created by racism, and tensions within Black communities around issues of homophobia" (hooks, 1988, p. 125). For hooks, fear of racial contact translates into fear of Black male sexuality; during slavery and even in the Jim Crow era, when a Black man was lynched, his genitals were exposed or severed. This ritualistic castration illustrated both a hatred of and a longing for the Black body; severing the Black man's penis was a means for White men to literally possess the masculinity that they ascribed to Black men (Abdur-Rahman, 2012). White colonial obsession with sexuality, based on slave narratives, was deemed strange by Blacks.

Consequently, it is this repression of Black sexuality that caused Black men to embrace a sense of detachment and abandonment toward women and disdain toward gays. hooks argues that a Black man's sexual prowess, thus, is measured by his ability to "fuck" as many women as possible and spread his seed (hooks, 2004).

In Fanon's (1967) postcolonial exposé *Black Skin, White Masks*, he demonstrates how there is a symbiotic relationship between racial identity and sexuality. He argues that "if we want to understand the racial situation psychoanalytically, not from a universal viewpoint, but as it is experienced by individual consciousness, considerable importance must be given to sexual phenomena" (p. 141). What seems most problematic, according to Fanon, is when the colonized African is "turned into a penis" that subsequently morphs into a racialized subject called Negro. Hence, the inferiority complex that manifests in the psyche of colonized people is a direct result of power relations inherent in White supremacist ideology.

Black men who embrace patriarchal ideals of manhood through sexual desires have become pathologized (Fanon, 1967). Sex becomes addicting to most men because it is seen as

the only place where they can get fulfillment and where they are held in a higher regard than White men (Fanon, 1967). Thus, they must demonstrate their sexual prowess as a means of coping with their marginalized, downtrodden psychological state due to racism and patriarchy. What, then, does this mean for Black males who deviate from these White-supremacist hetero-patriarchal "codes"? How does the Black community respond to queer male subjects who are oriented toward queer forms of being? This question is paramount to understanding how queer Black subjects cultivate the agency in their quest to be happy.

Daisaku Ikeda's Human Revolution

> There are all sorts of revolutions: political revolutions, economic revolutions, industrial revolutions, scientific revolutions, artistic revolutions, distribution and communications revolutions, and many others. Each has its own significance and, often, necessity. But no matter what one changes, the world will never get any better as long as people themselves—the guiding force and impetus behind all endeavors—remain selfish and lacking in compassion. In that respect, human revolution is the most fundamental of all revolutions, and at the same time, the most necessary revolution for humankind. (Ikeda, 2010, p. 256)

The lifeblood of Buddhism is characterized by an emphasis on the possibility of inner transformation, a process which brings forth our full human potential (Ikeda, 2010). The school of Buddhism propounded by the 13th century reformer Nichiren, in particular, teaches that despite life's hardships and challenges, we possess an unlimited amount of potential to change our lives and the world for the better. Soka Gakkai International (SGI), a lay Buddhist organization engaged in practices that correspond to the spirit of the Nichiren's Lotus Sutra-centric teachings, has inherited this mission (Goulah, 2010). "Human Revolution" is a term that

Shigeru Nambara, president of Tokyo University, coined shortly after the end of World War II, but was popularized and promoted globally by Ikeda (Goulah, 2010). It describes an essential process of inner growth and transformation that allows us to discard the ways of our "lesser self, bound by self-concern and ego, growing in altruism toward a greater self, capable of caring and taking action for the sake of others—ultimately all humanity" ("The Struggle to Transform," 2017, p. 6; see also Goulah, 2021, p. xvii). Daisaku Ikeda, was a direct disciple of Toda. He became third and currently honorary president of Soka Gakkai and founding president of Soka Gakkai International. Ikeda has embraced and expanded Toda's sentiments around human revolution and the power that such a process entails. Nichiren Buddhism is based on an unwavering faith in a pure, optimistic, and enlightened outlook on life that exists equally within all people. As such, a human revolution transforms life at the very core and is characterized by qualities of wisdom, courage, and compassion which ultimately emboldens us to create authentic value from all of life's circumstances (Goulah, 2021).

According to Ikeda (2010b), human revolution is not about mastering, overcoming, or moving beyond the self. On the other hand, in the context of this study, it is about the way of inhabiting a homophobic, hetero-patriarchal world on one's own terms, specifically with regard to narratives of beauty, sexuality, religion, and family; this can only be achieved through an ethos of perpetual self-becoming. Human revolution, therefore, becomes an aesthetics form of contestation—a struggle between two heterogeneous beings for equal recognition in the existing social order. These spontaneous interruptions/events are devoid of pretenses that are considered normative and provide the resilience for queer Black boys to cope with instances of unhappiness, such as violence, bullying, voicelessness in both subversive and overt ways. Ikeda believes in using the power of human agency and self-transformation to thwart suffering and

dehumanization through human revolution. This epitomizes self-realization and critical self-reflection, not as an individualistic endeavor, but as an initial step to changing one's orientation toward suffering in order to change and influence one's environment (Garrison, Hickman, & Ikeda, 2014). Thus, the (re)distribution of what is sensible—what is knowable, visible, conscionable, and audible—is negotiated in this space and new essences of Black queerness are established.

In the Buddhist tradition, human revolution is not merely an abstract sentiment; rather, the Buddha nature reveals itself in concrete ways, which is outlined in an edited compilation of Ikeda's writings titled *The Wisdom for Creating Happiness and Peace, Part 2* (Ikeda, 2017b): It starts with a steadfast belief that life is imbued with infinite potentiality and human dignity. Secondly, the life state of "Buddhahood" is characterized by the wisdom to understand that even in times of seemingly insurmountable suffering, the things that we previously view as impossible are, in fact, possible. Lastly, our vitality is determined by our decision to take a step forward and confront our obstacles with a sense of inner liberation. Indeed, pursuing a human revolution in times of intense agony empowers us to not only improve ourselves from yesterday to today, but also grants us the courage and compassion to make the 'self' of tomorrow better still (Ikeda, 2017b).

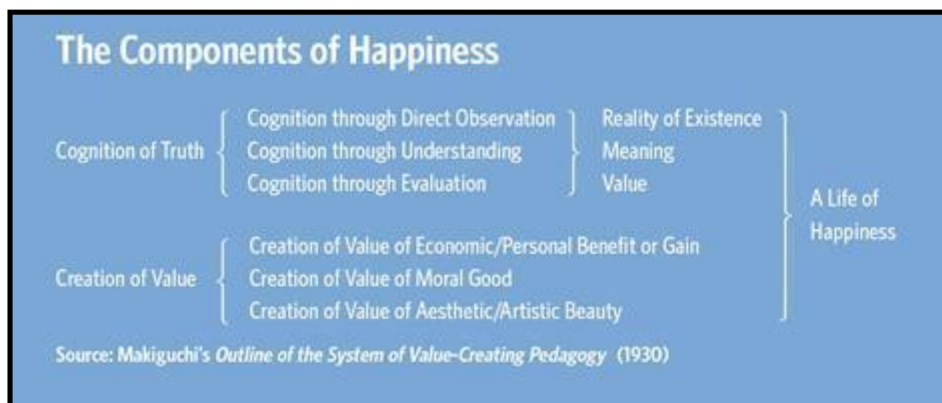
What is important in Ikeda's expression and expansion of the principle of human revolution is that he has returned it in certain ways to the secular. Of course, human revolution through Buddhist practice is still core to his philosophy, but Ikeda also discusses the term as a general process—often emanating from engaged dialogue with the other—possible by anyone, anywhere, of any faith community (Goulah, personal communication). Goulah (2018) refers to human revolution as a volitional, conscious, and continuous effort to foster one's own wisdom,

courage, and compassion. Often, this type of resilience manifests in the form of subversion and is necessary to Black queer boys' survival. Human revolution, therefore, gives queer Black boys the impetus to transform the social and political landscape and challenge the existing heteronormative social order and ultimately allows them to manifest happiness.

Makiguchi's Value-Creative Happiness

In this section, I explore the manifestation of happiness through an Eastern philosophical lens. Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, a Japanese educator and school principal, developed a reverence for human dignity, which resulted in the codification of his ideas into one of his most important works—*The System of Value-Creating Pedagogy* (1930; see Bethel, 1989). In this work, Makiguchi outlined his theory of happiness that works in concert with Aristotle's regarding its associations with becoming fully human. Similar to Aristotle, Makiguchi is also careful about not confusing happiness with mere pleasure. Happiness—both as an epistemological lens and an ethical end—is the telos of his philosophy of value creation (Gebert & Joffee, 2007). Makiguchi openly critiqued the prevalent doctrine of truth as value on the basis of its assault against human dignity—it stultifies intellectual and spiritual freedom, happiness, creativity, and dialogue, all of which are threads that undergird, and serve as the impetus for, his system of value creation, and thus happiness (Gebert & Joffee, 2007). As shown in Diagram 1, happiness is achieved through a synthesis of two broader components, which can be conceived as *cognition of truth*, or facticity, and *creation of value* (Goulah, 2012):

Diagram 1: The Components of Happiness



Makiguchi argued that authentic happiness emerges specifically from one's creation of value. Makiguchi's theory of value is a philosophical adaptation of the neo-Kantian philosophy of truth, beauty, and good that was popular in Japan in the 1920s, as well as the Buddhist aspects of courage, hope, compassion, and inter/intraconnectivity (Miyata, 1997). Makiguchi, however, removed truth from his trifecta because of its static, finite, a priori nature, and replaced it with gain, representing both advancement and benefit in the individual's life. The essence of Makiguchi's theory of value centers on his critique of "Truth" as a fundamental element of value. According to Makiguchi, value is derived from the subjective interactions between humans and their surroundings, and it is only in this exchange that value can be created. Though the cognition of truth is pivotal in the manifestation of happiness, it is important to understand that Makiguchi's critique of "Truth" stems from his belief that "Truth" is a matter of qualitative equivalence; it does not have value in and of itself (Gebert & Joffee, 1989). His role as educator also gave him the platform to operationalize and hone his theory of value creation, which underscores the dialogic roles of beauty (natural, spiritual, and inter/intrapersonal), individual gain, and moral good:

> "Beauty" (and its opposite) is a measure of partial, sensory response within an individual. "Gain" is the measure of a relationship that extends and expands the

> total vital experience of the individual ("loss" is that which shrinks and limits this). "Good" is to the life of social collective what gain is to the life of the individual ("evil" is the societal equivalent of individual loss). (Gebert & Joffee, 2007, p. 69)

While Makiguchi did not reject "Truth" in the positivist sense, he did reject the positivist notion of Truth as a value. The subjective value of any given truth, therefore, Makiguchi averred, is relative to the meaning, relevance, or impact the truth had on the individual's life (Gebert & Joffee, 2007). Makiguchi believed that communities, and the creation of value for that matter, are not developed in isolation; they are fostered in concert with one another. Makiguchi did not see the value in individual gain in consciousness if it did not benefit the greater good of a plural community, and vice versa. Notwithstanding these humanistic endeavors, Makiguchi was not naïve to the reality of suffering or the real structural and political inequalities in the world.

The objective Truth of something, Makiguchi believes, is either correct or it is not. What he dispels is that this Truth, just because of its objectiveness, is thereby subjectively valuable. Instead, he encourages people to develop the capacity to create value from the cognition of Truth(s). In the context of my study, the objective Truth of one's gay identity isn't in and of itself objectively good or bad—it's a neutral fact that could have a subjective value (or meaning) created by the individual who engages that Truth (e.g., a gay individual or someone interacting with him/her). So, while media and culture may find this truth to lack value, this study examines how queer boys create value from cognition of this identity truth and create all manner of value from it, and thereby create authentic happiness. Makiguchi's perception of happiness as the aim of both life and education is predicated upon the awareness that while

humans cannot create matter: "What we can create, however, is value and value only. When we praise persons for their 'strength of character,' we are really acknowledging their superior ability to create value" (Makiguchi, 1983-1988, vol 5, p. 13; in Bethel, 1989, p. 6). Truth, from this lens of value in one's life, is an iterative, ever-evolving, dialogic process between self and other in human interactions (Hatano, 2009). This dialogic process must be bi-directional in order for authentic value to be created. When value is mistaken for truth, then a unidirectional process of privileging one's voice over another ensues, thereby ceasing to be dialogic and value-creative in nature (Hatano, 2009). Makiguchi forewarns that "the confusion of cognition and evaluation is an unparalleled source of negative conditions in the contemporary world" (see Hatano, 2009, p. 176). Makiguchi's perspective of the value creation can also be understood as process toward critical consciousness and praxis (critical reflection and action). The thing for Makiguchi, though, is that the cognition of truth is essential to create value. In other words, we can't create meaningful value unless we have accurately understood (cognition) the objective conditions of things and situations.

Happiness, as discussed by Makiguchi, refers to the condition of an individual's life when they are engaged in the process of creating value. Education, therefore, becomes the means by which members of a society are provided the competence to become creators of value and thus determine happiness. This is the spirit behind Makiguchi's assertion that happiness is the ultimate aim of education. As such, educators have an awesome responsibility—to cultivate both the personal and social elements of happiness and to foster the capacity for this in their students. Notwithstanding, Makiguchi seemed to take for granted that the dual social-personal nature of human beings is understood. For Makiguchi, educated or conscious individuals recognize and accept the moral responsibility to balance the values of

individual gain and social good on behalf of their own lives and for the society in which they are a part. To this end, then, how might queer Black boys create value from the "given" social spaces of schools to reconfigure and transform these into a font of authentic happiness that Makiguchi outlines? In this study, I posit that when considering such happiness in queer Black boys, there is another element that needs to be added to the social-personal duo—the political.

If happiness is the ultimate goal of life, as Makiguchi, Aristotle and other philosophers proclaim, then human beings need to be careful not to view themselves through the criteria and perspectives of value determined by those in political power, which has proven to be historically and politically problematic for some. Feminists' critique of the "happy housewife," Black scholars' critique of the "happy slave," and queer theorists' critique of "domestic heterosexual bliss" have demonstrated how the pursuit of happiness has, actually, been used as mechanism for oppression and social control (Ahmed, 2010). These discourses have shown how the quest for happiness can sometimes be an unhappy endeavor. Hence, happiness is inextricably linked to power, not just coercive power or power over—as evidenced in structural, institutional, or systemic power—but also to the sense of one's inner strength to create value even in crisis, what Makiguchi refers to as "character value" (Ikeda, 2014) This inherent sense of power is often neglected in discourses around the political. Indeed, this notion of happiness includes all the complexities in life that infringe upon one's manifestation of happiness; nevertheless, it is through the cognition of truth and creation of value that marginalized groups can make a conscious decision to thwart them. Agency is, therefore, paramount to manifesting happiness as it is not determined from without, but instead from within. To this end, I agree with Goulah's (2018) argument that happiness is volitional—a choice to constantly disrupt

the perceived state of normalcy by exploring infinite possibilities to bring something new—to create value—into the world. This sense of natality is empowering and cultivates value creation, rather than "value consumption" (Goulah, 2013, p. 35), which is a passive acceptance of ideals that reinforce power imbalances through narratives that privilege some while marginalizing others. Rather than a "pure" politics, discourses around happiness need to begin focusing on creativity in the political, for this is where agentive change manifests.

Makiguchi understood, all too well, the importance of not just self-liberation, but also political struggle. He feared that without an understanding of the distinction between evaluation (consciousness of the emotional and intellectual impact of a phenomenon through apperception) and cognition (grasping of the meaning of a phenomenon through observation), people's ability to intellectually respond to experience and injustice would be impaired, therefore reinforcing attitudes that pose a threat to the quality of human life (Bethel, 1973; Goulah, 2017; Goulah & Gebert, 2014). Makiguchi, ultimately imprisoned as a thought criminal for his beliefs, lived a life of resilience and praxis, never sacrificing his dignity, even in the most compromising situations. What is most admirable about his quest to dismantle the nationalistic tenor of Meiji Japan is the fact that although he was faced with strife and contention, he never considered himself a victim—he continued to seek ways of disrupting the social terrain in order to help others exercise agency and find happiness even amidst suffering. Such moral agency, I argue, likewise grants queer Black boys with the courage to challenge identity politics while also negotiating power in spaces where they are exposed to persistent violence, along with other social factors such as racism, poverty, and discrimination.

The agency that ensues from the development of cognition is especially important in the experiences of queer Black boys; agency breeds self-empowerment, and empowerment

fosters resilience, which has always played a major role in Black and queer survival in this country. Makiguchi was skeptical of discourses that seemed to victimize the political subject, however (Goulah, 2013). If an individual is to become happy, he/she must have agency on his/her own accord. In essence, happiness is not something that is done to or on behalf of individuals; rather, the decision to be happy is an a priori condition of those who choose to act on their own behalf and of their own volition (Ikeda, 2017). Once this agency is established, queer Black boys use it to engage in a process of human revolution, thereby developing the wisdom, courage, and compassion to make value-creative decisions and actions that benefit themselves and others. This ultimately allows them to transform political spaces into liminal spaces, ultimately contributing to dis-identification with queer identity politics and disruption of the existing social order.

Bakhtin's Theory of Dialogue

Dialogue—not mere conversation or debate—a is the thread that undergirds the aforementioned conceptual frameworks around human revolution, value creation, and human happiness. Dialogue, at its core, necessitates humanistic exchange in order for growth, development, and transformation to occur; in other words, dialogue cultivates a symbiotic relationship between "self" and "other" (Marchenkova, 2005). Bakhtin's theory of what Holquist (2002) terms "dialogism" contributes admirably to the discourse around dialogue as a continual, dynamic, and transformative aspect of human existence. His scholarship serves as a foundation for interpreting the potential impact that dialogue has on school reform initiatives, particularly by cultivating a critical consciousness within educators around the imperative of such models.

Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of dialogism lays the theoretical foundation for the potential transformative impact of dialogue and language (spoken and written) in our lives. A Russian thinker and scholar, Bakhtin experienced struggle first-hand as he watched his country slip into the dictatorial clutches of Stalin during the Russian Revolution (Cohen, 1996). As a response to authoritative discourse, Bakhtin developed his corpus of work on dialogue to remind us that life is an ever-iterative, co-creative process, that too much dogma makes us narrow-minded, and that no one has the ability to monopolize truth (Cohen, 1996). Bakhtin's philosophy on dialogue also offers valuable insights into the field of public education and the institution of schooling, specifically around critical pedagogy, literacy education, and teacher preparation (Morrell, 2004). According to Marchenkova (2005), Bakhtin posits the idea that human beings exist only in relation to other; knowledge and understanding, thus, are only attainable if done so in concert with other voices (heteroglossia) that together help shape—and reshape over time—the meaning of *being* human. Furthermore, he believed that "In the realm of culture, outsideness is the most powerful factor in understanding" (p. 7). Holquist (2004) builds on Bakhtin's ideas when he states, very simply, that "in dialogism consciousness is otherness" (p. 18). These principles are the building blocks of educational reform, specifically in the realm of queer advocacy in schools.

Bakhtin's principles, though at times seeming overly simplistic, actually have positive implications for educators in regard to shifting power dynamics and creating a platform for new ideas to penetrate these, otherwise, heterosexist spaces. Creativity and critical thinking, for Bakhtin, illuminates itself in the limitless possibilities for human beings to transcend struggle through ongoing dialogic interactions, as well as through the cathartic laughter and humor addressed in his theory of carnival/the carnivalesque—a subversion of power born out of calamity and turmoil (Holquist, 2004). Carnival is an anti-hegemonic strategy that involves

collaboration between the powerful and powerless in order to temporally and spatially transcend the hierarchical order (Lachmann, Eshelman, & Davis, 1988). Thus, Bakhtin's carnivalesque is deeply epistemological; it is a dialectical negotiation between the monolingual nature of authoritative knowledge and the subversive nature of carnivalesque knowledge, which challenges the very foundation of our taken-for-granted beliefs and understandings.

Bakhtin's theory of carnival is characterized by performativity and liminality; it occurs at the moment when everything, save violence, is permitted. As with any carnival culture, it is a type of figurative communal performance—usually characterized by displays of excess, play, and laughter—that creates a situation in which multiple voices are in concert with one another, breaking down structural conventions and fostering authentic dialogue (Lachmann, Eshelman, & Davis, 1988). Carnivalesque cultivates opportunities where nuanced perspectives and a new order is conceived, demonstrating the relative nature of all that exist (Sullivan, 2010). The ultimate aim of carnivalesque is not simply to deconstruct dominant, hierarchical structures, but also to envision an alternate way of living based on play. It this way it is subversive (but not destructive) and signifies regeneration and rebirth to the status quo. And, while order is eventually restored, both parties are transformed and emerge anew in spite of authoritative discourses (Elliot, 1999). It comes with no surprise, then, that laughter is a key element is in carnival according to Bakhtin:

> Laughter works philosophical changes upon life and society. Laughter erupts from the collective body, but its most important function is internal; it defends freedom of thought. Thus the life of the body and its relationship to the world...intersects with the internal processes of perception, thinking, and speaking: the fundamentals of Bakhtin's philosophy of dialogue. (Elliot, 1999, p. 131)

The invocation of carnivalesque behavior within a school community could help with establishing the foundational tenets upon which harmonious coexistence with queer students may exist. It is important, therefore, to distinguish carnival from anarchy. Carnivalesque has the potential to create counter-hegemonic spaces, and can provide some powerful insight into prospects for activism, advocacy, and allyship in dismantling homonegative school cultures. As evidenced here, carnival neither threatens an educator's authority nor does it infringe on other students' heterosexuality. It merely assists in dispelling the deprecating treatment of students that prevent educators from seeing the value in converting authoritative or monologic discourses around heteronormativity into mult-directional discourses that ultimately benefit the school community as a whole. Likewise, what carnival also requires is a dismantling of the pejorative beliefs that render students as conspirators in the assault against authority. This myopic perspective drastically limits a teacher's ability to seize teachable moments that could emerge from disruption and disorientation, and potentially transform a student's sense of self-identity; in other words, teachers must model behavior of authentic democracy (Dewey, 1916/2012) and harmony within their instructional practices.

Overall, Bakhtin's (1981) theory of dialogism is centrally concerned with language and its various forms and uses. He claims that our very existence, including "human thoughts, acts, and intentions," is constructed (and ever-evolving) based on our communication and encounter with otherness (p. 149). Learning, for that matter, is fluid and contingent upon the interaction of multiple voices (heteroglossia) that fuses together disparate discursive knowledge in order to form a new dialogic whole. Thus, the disparaging language used by adults and students against queer individuals in and outside of school settings—as discussed in the previous chapter—is antithetical to Bakhtin's beliefs. The unidirectional orientation of sarcasm, insults, and yelling

creates a binary between self and other, but not in the transformative way in which Bakhtin intended. These techniques, instead, induce feelings of intimidation and anxiety, rather than a motivation to learn through mutual reciprocity. Exploring Bakhtin's dialogic concepts can certainly help shift the tide away from these repressive notions of 'bodily betrayal,' which defy non-interventionalists' perspectives around the necessity for students to develop a critical self-consciousness in order to exercise inherent discipline over their own minds and bodies. Dialogical school cultures are imperative to 21st century education because they afford students the freedom to express empathy, challenge ideas, and consider multiple perspectives as a collective body; ultimately, these are ideals necessary for developing the skill-sets that students need to assume agency in a democratic society.

In order to actualize these ideas, it would require some drastic changes in how teachers and administrators understand the role of education, as well as the role of students in co-creating new epistemologies on tolerance, acceptance, and agency. To shed some insight on this possibility, I draw on Sfard's (1998) two metaphors for learning: *acquisition metaphor* and *participation metaphor*. Currently, many schools employ the acquisition metaphor, in which learning is seen as "gaining possession over some commodity" (p. 6). This is in turn emulated by students through gender policing, homophobic bullying, and other discriminatory harassment. In contrast, adopting the participation metaphor (in which learning is seen as fluid with regard to roles and identities around shared practice) would require a decentering of learning as a set of strictly cognitive processes, and instead, see it as a more socially/morally-oriented endeavor.

Bakhtin believed that "We do not speak, learn, and communicate in a vacuum…This is so because there is an intimate connection between the project of language and the project of selfhood: they both exist in order to mean" (reference in Holquist, 2004, p. 23). The notion of

heteroglossia as the crux of *being* human is a revolutionary idea that could reshape Western perspectives about education for the better, as it underscores the interdependence of politicians, teachers, administrators, parents, community members, and most of all, students in all decision making. Currently, legislative decisions are made about education policies without consulting the voices of all stakeholders involved. This speaks to the hierarchical, monoglossic/monolithic manner in which our society is structured, contributing to the competitive, individualistic spirit between the 'have' vs. 'have-nots,' the powerful vs. the powerless, the rich vs. the poor, white vs. other, and queer vs. straight. Sadly, these binaries are at the very core of what makes our White-supremacist, patriarchal, homophobic society function and thrive. True education reform, thus, begins not within the four walls of a school building, but rather through actively pushing back against the system of heteronormativity in society. Dialogue, not merely the act of having a conversation, but the psychological and spiritual act of being transformed by the profound conviction that humankind is symbiotically connected, is the ultimate goal and power of education. Therefore, foundational tenet of any institutional change must be grounded in an unwavering ethos that all students—despite their gender, race, or sexuality—are inextricably linked and that all voices are equally as valuable within the school community.

Dialogue for Education, Peace, and Global Citizenship: Bakhtin, Makiguchi, & Ikeda

In continuing with Bakhtin's ideas of dialogue, creativity, and critical thinking, this section explores confluences between Bakhtin, Makiguchi, and Ikeda. It is necessary that these voices engage with one another in this study because they set the tone for how to actualize their ideas in practice. Makiguchi saw teachers as integral forces in supporting students' cognitive development through gradual release of responsibility. More specifically, Makiguchi states,

> The aim of education is not to transfer knowledge; it is to guide the learning process, to enable the acquisition of [the methods of] research. It is not the piecemeal merchandizing of information; it is to enable the acquisition of the methods for learning on one's own; it is the provision of keys to unlock the vault of knowledge. The goal is not to enable children to usurp the mental estates revealed by others, with no particular effort of their own; it is to enable students to advance on their own process of discovery and invention. (Bethel, 1989, p. 168; reference in Goulah, 2009, p. 97)

In addition, Makiguchi believed that education should prepare students to live a happy, fulfilled life, which is actualized through an authentic pursuit of dialogue toward value creation (aesthetic beauty, individual gain, and societal good) and happiness for self and other. Within this trifecta, Makiguchi did not see the value in individual gain in knowledge, achievement (as measured through assessments), or profit if it does not benefit the greater good of the community. This ethos pushes beyond the cognitive sphere, capitalizing on the humanistic experience and human dignity inherent in everyone. This selflessness, in Makiguchi's opinion, is the source of true happiness. Through dialogue, not just with teachers, family, and members of one's local community, but also with the surrounding natural and geographical landscape, one develops the ability to confer meaning and value on self and place. This is the impetus that should drive the work of educators, according to Makiguchi (1897/2010): "cultivating character from the egoistic and selfish to the altruistic and sympathetic we enable children to practice in community life" (p. 51).

Since our identity formation is constituted through language, it is inherently subjective. Due to the subjective nature of language and knowledge construction, our individual identities are never in a fixed state—they are in constant flux based on our dialogic interactions

with others. In essence, we remain in a perpetual state of becoming; our individual subjectivities emerge through our dialectical interactions, which cultivates what Applebee (1996; reference in Goulah, 2010b) calls "knowledge-in-action," whereby new epistemologies and identities are forged in concert with other voices through dialogue. Makiguchi and Ikeda believe that dialogue has the transformative power to change beliefs, ideas, assumptions, and attitudes. It is, therefore, imbued with limitless human potential, possibilities, and realities.

Influenced by the Darwinian notion of evolution, Makiguchi's recognized that competition was an engrained social and psychological phenomenon of society, and that this force can impede our engagement and investment in dialogue for the benefit of society. According to Makiguchi, a healthy sense of competition, or *humanitarian competition* (Ikeda, 2009), is a result of both selfless and communal desires and attempts at transforming one's personal, local and national community by synthesizing gain and social good. Thus, he realized that calling for a complete dismantling of the 'system' would be dismissed as fruitless and utopian; nonetheless, rather than continuing to uphold the traditional survival-of-the-fittest, predatory mindset, he called for a paradigm shift to 'competition with a human face.' In so doing, Makiguchi sought to maintain the energy and vitality embedded in competition, but sought to shift its spirit of coercion and abstraction to a spirit of cooperation and coexistence (Ikeda, 2009). He foresaw an age where the "power of character" and "humane qualities of individuals and whole societies" take precedent over military prowess, or political and economic control (Ikeda, 2010, p. 5). Echoing Dewey, who called for a harmonious whole of all contributing races, Makiguchi saw humanitarian competition as the basis for social progress after other forms of competition has been exhausted (Geography, translated in Miyata, 2000).

Ikeda, a disciple of Makiguchi, brings the concepts of dialogue, value-creative happiness, and humanitarian competition into full scope, as his ideas of harmonious coexistence and global citizenship encourage all cultures, languages, religions, and ethnicities to work together cohesively to promote conscientious citizens who are genuinely concerned with peace and prosperity of the world. Ikeda deliberately states, "Education, based on open dialogue, is far more than the mere transfer of information and knowledge; it enables us to rise above the confines of our parochial perspectives and passions" (referenced in Goulah & Ito, 2012, p. 63). Similar to Bakhtin and Makiguchi, Ikeda writes and speaks about the interrelatedness of the human experience. He further elucidates the power of dialogue and mutual sharing of ideas as a means of nurturing creative thinking and fostering the authentic development of free, self-disciplined individuals. Through dialogue on a global level, people become more tolerant and accepting of the multiple cultures, identities, sexualities, languages, and ethnicities that occupy this planet simultaneously. In Ikeda's (2010b) perspective, the purpose of education is the creation of wise, courageous, and compassionate citizens who first find value and beauty in themselves and their local communities, so that they can ultimately do good in the world. This ideal is the true power of education—an ethos that could essentially help us re-imagine the role of education in society (or better yet, the role of society in education!). This ideal plays an integral role in my research study because the notion of global citizenship, as a dialogic principle, is about liminality at its core; in other words, it represents being comfortable in the space in between. As change agents, queer Black boys consistently use human revolution to confront and dialogue with differences at school and in their local communities as a means of fully expressing their human dignity. Therefore, queer Black boys are, indeed, global citizens! Their resilience and agency in reshaping heteronormativity in their school community exemplify

the fullness of the concepts of human revolution and global citizenship. As a result of their efforts, what emerges is a new vista of possibilities for harmonious coexistence in urban public schools and beyond, regardless of one's sexuality or gender identification.

For Ikeda, investment in these basic tenets is imperative to attaining the virtues of wisdom, courage, and compassion, which are all necessary in order to sustain peace—not simply absence of war—and creative coexistence on earth. This seemingly idealistic view of education stems from a spirit that all human beings—despite their color, creed, age, or sexual orientation—are interrelated and interdependent on one another to thrive. Fear breeds competition and angst, but Ikeda's three shared elements of humanitarian competition (a shared sense of purpose, a shared sense of responsibility, and a shared field of action) becomes the lens through which to explore social justice and equity in public education, ultimately contributing to a happier and more value-creative life—the recognition of what it means to be "fully human" (referenced in Goulah, 2010). The manifestation of happiness and the recognition of value and dignity in all life is the focal point of humanitarian competition and can be actualized through our dialogic interactions with others.

Bakhtin, Makiguchi, and Ikeda, though their historical, political, and sociological contexts may differ, all contribute admirably to the discourse around dialogue as a continual, dynamic, and transformative aspect of human coexistence. Accordingly, each thinker's interpretation of the role of dialogue in society is worth examining in order to later make connections to its potential impact on school reform, particularly as a means of cultivating a critical consciousness within educators in order to push back against hegemonic discourses that breed unbridled hostility and dissention within and amongst members of school communities.

Institutional Implications

Absolving Sodom: Slavery and The Black Church

Homophobia in Black theology has a tenuous and paradoxical history. Horace Griffin (2000) speaks poignantly to the source of this conflict:

> Two primary reasons account for African American's negative view of homosexuality: 1) Slaves were mainly converted to Christianity by conservative White Christians who were sex-negative and opposed to homosexuality; 2) African Americans have recognized that conspiring with mainstream society in targeting homosexuals as the 'despised other' frees them from the deviant label of being sexually immoral and provides a degree of social acceptance. (p. 114)

Discourses on Black emancipation and equality were born out of the Black biblical hermeneutic that reflects a prideful declaration that all men and women, despite race or creed, are valuable parts of God's perfect creation. The painstaking work of validating, both fundamentally and spiritually, the righteous place of Blacks on this earth is an endeavor that the Black community cherishes.

Ironically, though, while the Black church played a major role in liberating Black people from the biblical narrative of White supremacy, it, on the other hand, still condoned and perpetuated some of the same dogma of punitive exclusivity used to substantiate the enslavement of Black Africans (Kornegay, 2004). This is, indeed, problematic considering that the same biblical hermeneutical ideologies used by the Black Church to uplift a downtrodden race of people are also the impetus for intra-racial oppression and rejection in the form of sexuality and gender expression. The Black Church, a safe-haven and trusted institution in the Black community, is a place where homophobic ideology becomes habitus; rather than create

solutions to sexual silence, we, instead, adopt White cultural norms around the family unit. Douglas (1999) notes, "One of the primary ways in which White culture has created an image of Black people as sexually deviant has been through its attacks on the Black family" (p. 99). Resultantly, heterosexual patriarchy becomes the marker of a "healthy" family, and anything else that diverts becomes unacceptable and devalued. hooks (1988) vehemently lambasts the Black community's blind acquiescence to such disparaging messages that further fragment the community:

> Individual members of certain churches in Black communities should protest when worship services become a platform for teaching anti-gay sentiments. Often individuals sit and listen to preachers raging against gay people and think the views expressed are amusing and outmoded and dismiss them without challenge. But if homophobia is to be eradicated in Black communities, such attitudes must be challenged. (p. 123)

Moreover, colonialism, which fuels Black homophobic discourse, is driven by what Haynes (2000) refers to as the "archetypal other," which depicts Black identity through the powerful lens of binarism. Kornegay (2004) explains how Black binarism seeks to condition Black identity as "too flawed, too abnormal to be normal in and of itself; it must have a culturally prescribed normal pole to give it value" (p. 33). White supremacy, thus, becomes the barometer of this perceived normalcy and the means by which Blacks compare themselves in order to assimilate or overcome their otherness. Since the measure of what it means to be a man, a woman, a father, and a mother is always in relation to White cultural values, Black heterosexuality, over time, became the essence of a Black identity that was perceived as authentically our own. Homosexuality, then, became a "White man's disease" that was seen as

one of the few things that had not "infected" the Black community (Loutzenheiser, 2008). As a result, the Black church endorsed Black homophobic discourse not only to counteract and escape the notion of archetypal otherness, but also to help the Black community manifest an "authentic" identity that is righteous, prototypical, and beyond the shadows of White normativity.

Homonegativity and The Black Family

Bolstering the belief that homosexuality is a threat to Blackness is an argument that jeopardizes the stability of the Black family and consequently endangers the fragility of Black masculinity (Douglas, 2003). One of the myriad ways in which White mainstream culture has fashioned the image of Black people as sexually deviant has been through its attacks on the Black family. From narratives of fatherless home (as a result to some inherent flaw or inability for Black men to care for their families) to narratives constructed around the Black teen mom epidemic, White racism have made it virtually impossible to conceptualize an image of the Black family residing in the same household (Douglas, 2003). White culture has even attacked the familial models that Black people have constructed as a tactic for survival. Rhonda Williams (1997) addresses these manipulative attacks on the Black family as a result of White supremacist patriarchy:

> Black families have long functioned as markers in the public imagination: they generally signify and manifest a morally problematic sexually agency, a cultural degeneracy. The conventional social scientific wisdom is clear: "the problem" is that so much black sexuality and kinship formation transgresses the boundaries of married (and therefore healthy) heterosexuality. (Williams, 1997, p. 142)

The Black community's prevailing response to these attacks upon Black sexuality and the Black family has been to uphold and encourage White familial norms; in other words, Black families promote a model that is more palatable within a White supremacist patriarchal world (Ferguson, 2004). This idealized model grants Black men the farcical advantage of enjoying male privilege within their homes because such privilege is not afforded to them (as a result of their Blackness) in society at large. This semblance of inclusion and quest to protect the Black family is abruptly disrupted when Black queers enter the context (Williams, 1997).

Furthermore, eliminating gender and sexuality from conversations about the Black family can be damaging because it limits the full scope of Blackness and what that has historically meant. It shifts our focus from liberation to the protection of manhood, which creates a pathway to homophobic ideology (Douglas, 2003). Ergo, it comes as no surprise that the strong Black mother is blamed, stigmatized, and criticized for the "creation" of the gay Black male. Inclusion of intersectional identities is paramount in understanding that "Black" is not a monolithic category; in fact, there are many Black LGBTQ figures like Marsha P. Johnson, Bayard Rustin, and James Baldwin who have all played a major role in our liberation and moreover, that homosexuality has existed in Africa for thousands of years before we were even brought to this country (Douglas, 2003).

Media Consumption: Gangsta' Discourse and Negro Faggotry

bell hooks (2004) sounds the clarion call on what she deems as the root of the Black man's plight—an inability to break away from the physical, emotional, and psychological trauma resulting from media representations, patriarchal capitalism, and the current prison system. These institutions, according to hooks, have served not only to disenfranchise Black men, but have also caused them to internalize and perpetuate the sentiments and behaviors of White supremacist

ideology. The demoralization of Black men, through the perception of them as the "White man's burden," is ironically both required and rewarded in order to maintain the status quo belief of Black men as hypersexualized, violent, lazy, and brutal psychopaths (hooks, 2004).

In Cornel West's (1993) *Race Matters* as well as Isaac Julien's (1994) documentary *The Darker Side of Black*, they focus specifically on the threat that media poses on the Black community due to nihilism—a phenomenon, according to West (1993), that is attributed to the intrinsic and appalling feelings of "meaninglessness, hopelessness, and (most important) lovelessness" that saturates so much of Black life, especially among the poor and working poor communities (p. 14). Before delving into the notion of the nihilistic threat, West makes it apparent that the rise of this phenomenon is attributed significantly to the vicious exploitation of market forces during the unstable climate that began in the 1980s. West proclaims, "Black people have always been in America's wilderness in search of a promised land. Yet many Black folk now reside in a jungle with a cutthroat morality devoid of any faith in deliverance or hope for freedom" (p. 41). West draws a direct parallel between nihilism and the damaging effects that gangster rap has had on the Black psyche. According to West, when issues between nihilism and hip-hop culture emerge, it is imperative that individuals acknowledge the degree to which death, destruction and disease are ravaging the Black community; therefore, it is no accident that rappers construct songs that depict these depraved circumstances.

Julien's *The Darker Side of Black* further elucidates the role that nihilism plays in the African American/Jamaican community, particularly in contemporary Black music such as hip-hop and gangster rap. In doing so, the documentary examines the pop culture of three distinct societies: Jamaica, America, and Britain. The film attempts to convey the disparaging consequences that gangster rap has had, and continues to have, on the mentality of Black

youth. As the film segues into the nihilistic threat in sex culture, Cornel West is featured and reminds the audience that the representation of guns in pop culture now targets a new group of people—homosexuals. The film discusses how the hit Jamaican song by Buju Banton, "Boom Bye Bye," which condones violence against gays, permeated throughout the hip-hop arena on an international level. Incidents such as this paint the picture that the Black race is more homophobic than its White counterpart, mainly because the mainstream media fails to portray non-homophobic individuals with empathy and compassion for homosexuals. Instead, the media solely focuses on the negative aspects concerning homophobia.

This pejorative perception impacts the relationships between Black men and women and heterosexual Black men and their queer counterparts, and is further perpetuated through media and pop culture; homophobic rap lyrics and sexist gangster movies, though problematic, did not create the problem of patriarchal socialization. It is what hooks calls "plantation economy" that is to blame for the perpetuation of patriarchal behaviors—the need to defend one's manhood through violence against women and gay men who they deem weak and "womanlike." Nonetheless, rage, as long as it is acted upon against other Black people (both men—gay and straight—and women), is condoned. Those who deviate from this norm are portrayed in the media and in the Black community as effeminate, flamboyant sissies, and are outcasted as not being authentically Black. In "Black Macho Revisited: Reflections of a Snap! Queen," Marlon Riggs (1999) expresses his disdain for the legacy of hate and homophobia that is perpetuated by straight men in the Black community. He laments, "I am a Negro Faggot, if I believe what movies, TV, and rap music say of me. Because of my sexuality, I cannot be Black. A strong, proud, 'Afrocentric' Black man is resolutely heterosexual, not even bisexual" (p. 307).

Other media portrayals of the Black gay experience, such as *Paris is Burning* (Livingston, 1990), *Tongues Untied* (Riggs, 1989), and more contemporary TV series such as "Noah's Arc" and "The D.L. Chronicles" attempt to debunk stereotypes about homosexuality and challenge the monolithic image of the gay Black man. Particularly, *Paris is Burning*—a provocative documentary filmed during the mid-to-late 1980s—chronicles the ballroom culture in Harlem. Livingston captures the complex intersections of race, class, and sexuality during an era when homosexuality was much less accepted and even more taboo to discuss openly. The ballroom scene—an event where gays and transgenders compete in "performances" by embodying whatever aspect of gender, class, and race that they desire—became a safe-haven that gave queer communities a sense of "home" and self-affirmation, despite the fact that society deemed them outcasts and deviants. The salience of the film is captured in a response from one of the interviewees:

> I remember my father telling me...you have three strikes against you in this world...every Black man has two. That they are Black, and they are male...but if you are Black and male and gay you are gonna have a hard fucking time...and if you are gonna do this, you are gonna have to be stronger than you ever imagined. (Livingston, 1990, *Paris is Burning*)

In the hit Fox series "Empire," Lee Daniels' (2015) blows the lid off homophobia in the Black community during a riveting episode that tells the story of a hip hop mogul (Lucious) who struggles to mend the relationship with his gay son (Jamal), shedding light on homophobia in both the Black family and the hip hop industry. In Episode 8, Jamal comes out to the world in a song that he performed at a launch party for the family's upcoming album. Lucious has a flashback to when Jamal was younger and caught wearing his mom's pumps and scarf.

Disgraced by his son's queer behavior, Lucious throws him in a trashcan in the alley and places the lid on it. In a *Huffington Post* interview, Daniels professes, "Homophobia is rampant in the African American community, and men are on the DL...They don't come out, because your priest says, your pastor says, mama says, your next-door neighbor says, your homie says, your brother says, your boss says [that homosexuality is wrong]. And they are killing African American women. They are killing our women. So I wanted to blow the lid off more on homophobia in my community" (Sieczkowski, 2015).

More recently, when the film *Moonlight* (2016) debuted, it was heralded as a groundbreaking artistic expose about the intersecting identities of race, gender, and sexuality, and it later won an Academy Award. Conversely, it also provided a glimpse into the darker side of schooling experiences for queer and non-gender conforming Black boys in our k-12 education system. Chiron, the main character, spends his teenage years in a drug-ravaged, impoverished neighborhood in Miami where acts of violence are commonplace. In school, he endures oppressive conditions, such as bullying, rejection, and alienation, all of which are real circumstances that queer Black youth bear on a daily basis—particularly in urban, under-resourced schools and communities. The turning point in Chiron's life happens at the pivotal moment when he is expelled from school for retaliating against a classmate, Terrel, and a gang of boys who consistently terrorize him and eventually jump on him. When no disciplinary actions occur against Terrel and his crew, Chiron snaps and attacks Terrell, which causes him to get expelled from school, despite the fact that he was, arguably, the victim. This begins Chiron's descent into the juvenile justice system in the film, but sheds a larger societal light on the school-to-prison pipeline (Kim, Losen & Hewitt, 2010) and how it disproportionately impacts students of color and LGBTQ students. The intersections of

Black, queer, and male and the disparate representation of these students in the prison system is unfortunately not on the radar of many educators. Similar to Chiron's teacher, many educators sadly turn a blind eye to homophobic acts, rather than actively affirming safe, nurturing spaces for queer Black youth. *Moonlight* forces us to explore and challenge the hidden curriculum (Jackson, 1968) as it pertains to heteronormativity and anti-queer discrimination.

Black homophobia reinforces our belief of Black abnormality. The real fear for the Black community is a subconscious belief that homosexual "performance" is a reinforcement of Whiteness, and a constant struggle to break away from the ties of White supremacy and "clean up" the demoralizing and disparaging perceptions of Black sexuality in society (Douglas, 1999). Moreover, as Kornegay (2004) reminds us, "White fear of Black sexuality is a fear of Black identity and Black power; Black fear of homosexuality is a fear of White power's ability to deny us the crumbs that are found on the floor of their 'tents'" (p. 44).

Schools as Liminal Spaces: Negotiating Racial and Sexual Identity

The creation of liminal spaces has been integral for survival in the Black queer community. As such, schools, as microcosms of society, also provide platforms for liminality when negotiating these political spaces. Schooling institutions have historically played an integral role in both reproducing hegemonic systems such as heteronormativity, homophobia, and racism, while also creating platforms for resistance, liberation, and happiness (Kosciw, Greytak, Palmer, & Boesen, 2014). Considering these adverse factors, there is a sense of urgency on the part of educators, researchers, and practitioners to understand how students respond to these oppressive circumstances, while also negotiating racial and sexual identities in these liminal spaces.

Rohr (2002) notes that liminal spaces are spaces of transition, of waiting, and of the unknown. They are also,

> a unique spiritual position where human beings hate to be...It is when you have left the tried and true, but have not yet been able to replace it with anything else…It is when you are between your old comfort zone and any possible new answer. If you are not trained in how to hold anxiety, how to live with ambiguity, how to entrust and wait, you will run…anything to flee this terrible cloud of unknowing. (p. 18)

Liminal spaces, for this reason, can also be difficult to navigate. The self-transformation that occurs once one becomes aware of his/her liminality can have a ripple effect into others also disrupting the social order in that space. Regardless of the change, it is important to note that our volition remains intact. For that reason, it is important to have the right accompaniment to help you be critically introspective so that you can challenge assumptions about the self that have been absorbed through hegemonic ideology, while unearthing new truths in your in-between.

For queer Black boys, it is not simply queerness that they have to contend with in these liminal spaces. Accordingly, researchers and practitioners have recently focused more on examining the compounding effects of other dominant narratives—such as the normalization of Whiteness and racial segregation—and the subsequent impact that these discourses have on sexual minorities of color in urban communities (Fetner & Kush, 2008; McCready, 2004a, 2009). There are myriad factors that impact queer Black boys in the contexts of urban schools where the majority of students are poor, ethnic minorities (non-White), and/or non-native speakers (McCready, 2004a). Accordingly, researchers and practitioners have recently focused more on examining the compounding effects of other dominant narratives—such as the normalization of whiteness and racial segregation—and the subsequent impact that these

discourses have on sexual minorities of color in urban communities, although the research is scarce (Fetner & Kush, 2008; McCready, 2004b, 2009).

Furthermore, the literature suggest that the internalization of whiteness poses further barriers to teachers and queer youth advocates in addressing the unique needs of sexual minority youth of color (Chambers & McCready, 2011; Meiners & Quinn, 2010; Sandlin, O'Malley, & Burdick, 2011). McCready (2004b) suggests that teachers need to become aware of the multiple forms of oppression and power dynamics that make urban schools ineffective and unsafe. In a survey conducted by the Gay, Lesbian, & Straight Educational Network (GLSEN, 2008) that sampled 1,580 urban school principals, approximately 30% of them rated their teachers as 'fair' or 'poor' in addressing the needs of sexual minority students of color. This speaks to the fact that historically, gender and sexuality discourses for ethnic minorities remain underexplored. The extant literature that exists on queer studies has been hegemonically centered on the theoretical and empirical analysis of the lifestyles, politics, and culture of White gay men (Chambers & McCready, 2011).

These findings suggest that explicit attention must be given to understanding how minority students experience discrimination and marginalization in schools, beyond just their sexual identities, lifestyles, and orientation. For example, queer African-American male students, on average, tend to feel less safe in school settings (Grov, Bimbi, Nanin & Parsons, 2006; Rosario, Schrimshaw, & Hunter, 2004). This research suggests that without the establishment of a school community that is empathetic, knowledgeable, and accommodating of its students' specific cultural needs, sexual minorities of color may continue to struggle to produce knowledge that is applicable to their well-being in schools.

Despite the seemingly vertical view of power as depicted by the data above, there are instances of horizontal power dynamics, where sexual minorities 'interrupt' the hegemonic spaces in an effort to forge their own discourse within urban school settings. This phenomenon seems to align well with Foucault's (1980) conception of power and resistance as symbiotic constructs—a term he labeled as "reverse discourse":

> There are no relations of power without resistances; the latter are all the more real and effective because they are formed right at the point where relations of power are exercised; resistance to power does not have to come from elsewhere to be real, nor is it inexorably frustrated through being the compatriot of power. (p. 142)

Butler (1990) extends Foucault's discourse on queer theory and reverse discourse, and resituates gender and sexuality as a central focus of power relations and discursive knowledge. Unlike Foucault who saw sexuality as a psychoanalytic discourse to be studied, Butler explored how gender and sexual identities are socially produced through performativity—bodily acts, gestures, and behavior patterns that disrupt dominant normative discourses. These ideologies become critical in the investigation of sexual minorities of color and their employment of subversive strategies and techniques to forge identity and social capital in school settings.

To that end, a necessary component of this review centers not only on how LGBTQQ students grapple with victimization and marginalization, but also how they resist in an effort to carve out their own space within the social fabric of the school community. In a concerted effort to establish voice, legitimacy, and "naturality," queer students of color employ a multitude of approaches to assert themselves and reconstruct their own identities within hetero-dominant euro-normative spaces. This following section explores such scholarship, ranging from

academic, to social, to legal forms of resistance that sexual minorities of color utilize in an attempt to resist victimization within urban school settings.

In Search of the Black Queer Male Perspective

As mentioned in the introduction, empirical research that specifically addresses the schooling experiences of queer Black males is scarce. While there are a few studies that investigate a range of experiences of queer Black college students,—namely case studies (Means et al., 2018; Carter, 2013), narrative-inquiries (Coleman et al., 2020; Craig, 2017), and quantitative studies (Travers, 2012)—the studies that critically examine the experiences of queer Black males in urban high schools is still under-represented in the literature. Lance McCready's is one of the pioneers in this field; his body of scholarships contributes to the discourse on gender-nonconforming Black males students and their experiences with marginalization in urban high schools (McCready 2013; McCready, 2010a; McCready, 2013; McCready, 2009; McCready, 2004a; McCready, 2004b; McCready, 2001).

In his published book, *Making Space for Diverse Masculinities*, McCready (2010a) draws on Black feminist intersectionality and uses action research, ethnography, and interviewing to examine how queer Black male students negotiate "spaces" (spatial and temporal) at a comprehensive high school in California. McCready investigates four queer Black male students' patterns of participation in extracurricular programs and activities (specifically a Gay-Straight Alliance—Project 10— and an African Dance Program); these programs, according to McCready, have rationalized and normalized within-school segregation (WSS) around race and class (2010a). In this study, McCready provides a framework through which to disrupt social and cultural norms of school extracurricular programs and organizations in order to "make space" for diverse masculinities/identities (2010a). McCready

supports a multidimensional approach to create possibilities for schools to become counter-hegemonic institutions that support diverse masculinities for gay and straight Black male students.

Ed Brockenbrough extends Ferguson and Munoz's concept of queer-of-color critique by situating their framework within the context of urban public schools with students and male teachers/educators of color (Brockenbrough, 2012a; Brockenbrough, 2016). By examining the intersections of race, socioeconomic status, gender expression, much of Brockenbrough's research addresses the perceived role of Black male teachers (gay and straight) in urban schools, specifically around mitigating punitive disciplinary policies that disproportionately affect poor and queer students of color (Brockenbrough, 2015b; Brockenbrough, 2012b). His narrative inquiries shed light on the unique role that Black male educators have in negotiating and mediating disciplinary practices for students of color.

Brockenbrough's (2018) other research interests are also dynamic in the sense that they employ ethnographic methods to highlight the impactful role of Black queer male (BQM) adults who mentor Black queer male students whose lives are situated at the intersection of various structural inequities and injustices. In this study, Brockenbrough (2018) explores two mentorship experiences at a community-based youth organization involving queer youth of color, ranging from homelessness to risky survival sex. Brockenbrough (2018) highlights both the possibilities and dilemmas when BQM adults attempt to address the challenging needs of Black queer youth. Brockenbrough contributes admirably to the canon of queer-of-color critique by examining the dialectical interplay between hegemony, resistance, and empowerment and how it subsequently shapes the lives of queer youth of color in schools.

Brockenbrough (2016) also employs ethnographic research to encourage educators in urban schools to rely on the voices of youth to generate pedagogic possibilities, specifically around providing culturally-responsive sexual health programs that help slow the spread of HIV/AIDS in communities of color. Brockenbrough takes a well-rounded approach to understanding the plight of queer youth of color through the multidimensional framework of queer-of-color critique.

Academic & Curricular Interruptions

Undoubtedly, the social and cultural productions of queer youth of color are disruptive of the state sponsored curriculum, which focuses primarily on student acquisition of content and skills (Apple, 2006; Kincheloe & Hayes, 2007; Popkewitz, 2000), and may only partially explain why such a vast number of sexual minorities of color are disengaged from school (Blackburn & McCready, 2009). Cruz's (2013) ethnographic research homes in on sexual minorities of color and their struggle to construct knowledge in school environments where their presence is neglected, and often where they are victims of violence, harassment, and other forms of homophobia. She explores how African-American and Latino queer students build their own curricula using video poetry and other forms of media as means of cultivating a critical consciousness around issues of identity, poverty, oppression, and violence. This outlet of "storying the self" serves not just as a coping and survival mechanism against violence, racism, HIV, and homophobia, but also as a space for political mediation in their quest to reconcile the various forms of oppression suffered by others (Lankshear & Knobel, 2011).

Performativity, as noted by Butler, is an important theme in the literature concerning sexual minorities of color, as it serves to create "theories in the flesh" that subvert identity categories which render some students invisible (reference in McCready, 2013, p. 513).

Empowerment literature, namely that of activist Augusto Boal (1985), laid the groundwork for the use of action research in theater and dialogue to promote social activism and combat racism and other social oppressions, such as homophobia and violence. This initiative was aptly called Theater of the Oppressed. Proponents of this movement sought to empower youth by allowing them to become cocreators of knowledge and reality in an effort to inspire new narratives, action, and civic engagement (Dessel, Rogge, & Garlington, 2006; DeTurk, 2006; HartzKarp, 2005). While there is minimal empirical research on the impact of creative self--expression with regard to sexual minorities of color, studies such as the one involving youth—based organizations Neutral Zone and Riot Youth (2009) provide some insight into the potentiality and shortcomings of this method for queer youth of color. The dialogues and performances were conducted over a one-year period between high school and middle school students; the aim of the study was to promote advocacy (from both queer and non-queer students) around anti-LGBTQQ bullying and harassment. The findings from this study suggested that White students' likelihood to intervene in bullying situations involving a queer student increased significantly after the series of performances, while students of color had marginal confidence to successfully intervene (Wernick, Dessel, Kulick, & Graham, 2013). This imbalance was attributed to the possibility that perhaps this initiative failed to address other compounding issues, such as discrimination and whiteness, which may be more relevant to participants of color as well as sexual minorities of color (Wernick, Dessel, Kulick, & Graham, 2013).

Queer students of color, along with the help of adult advocates, have also been responsible for creating curriculum for teachers. In one study, a student, David, built a series of professional development sessions for teachers to educate them on meeting the need of sexual

minorities (McCready, 2001). Queer youth of color also make space within the official curriculum, vis-a-vis classroom projects, to educate peers and teachers about themselves as queer individuals (Blackburn, 2003).

Social Interruptions

LGBTQQ youth of color also wield more radical channels of expression to confront power differentials in schools combat anti-oppressive forces. Johnson (2008) examines instances of same-sex harassment and bullying that occurred in an urban public school district by a gang of African-American lesbians called DTO (Dykes Taking Over). This group was formed out of lesbian students' need to protect themselves against previous encounters with homophobic bullying; their outward declaration of masculinity presents an interesting perspective and serves as their defense mechanism against the binary-oppositional culture that schools enforce to regulate gender and sexuality, which inevitably creates hostile spaces for sexual minority youth. Moreover, these gendered interruptions have forced school districts to reconsider their policies and pedagogical practices around bullying, homophobia, race, class, and more importantly, power. Johnson's research around heterophobia presents an intriguing, and alarming, perspective on how victims ultimately become the victimizers and exploiters of power.

Moreover, while social capital is inevitably formed amongst these homosexual lesbian gangs, it is done so out of violence and retaliation, hence complicating the extent by which this anomaly affects their manifestation of other forms of capital. Not all social interruptions lead to alternative forms of violence and bullying. Advocates and supporters of gay-straight alliances (GSAs) seek to give sexual minorities as well as straight students a platform and safe space for student-led discourse that ultimately promotes a safer and more supportive culture

for queer youth (Fetner & Kush, 2008). The mere presence of GSAs sends a message that hate speech and crimes will not be tolerated. Studies have even shown how the presence of GSAs in urban schools have increased the academic performance of sexual minorities of color, contributing to a more positive social atmosphere (Lee, 2002). Notwithstanding, a growing number of studies reveals that non-White, multiracial, poor, and working class communities have a hard time initiating, accessing, and/or sustaining their schools' GSAs, whether due to lack of funding, fear, or overall disinterest (McCready, 2004a).

Legal Interruptions

Meyer and Stader (2009) present another articulation of defiance by queer youth, this time in the form of political activism around civil rights. The authors review a sampling of legal complaints proposed by LGBTQ students in response to their efforts to dismantle the institutionalized norming of gender conformity in schools. Court cases surrounding three main legal arguments are inspected: Title IX, Equal Protection, and the Equal Access Act and state nondiscrimination laws. Each case, whether won or lost, testifies to the earnest attempts by queer youth to improve their overall educational experiences. These efforts set the tone and tenure for radical political change, specifically to surmount the existing hetero-regulated regimes that saturate school systems. Their efforts set the tone and tenor for radical political change, specifically to surmount the existing hetero-regulated regimes that sat urate school systems. Meyer and Stader (2009) emphasize how such political audacity on the part of students require courage, compassion, and critical consciousness, which are not qualities that most middle and high school students possess. This is yet another way in which queer youth demonstrate an unwavering determination to push back against forces that attempt to devalue their existence and quell their identities.

Marquez and Brockenbrough (2013) build on the aforementioned body of research by interrogating the absence of race and class in legal discourses pertaining to queer students of color in marginalized urban communities and schools. Their legal discourse analysis draws upon Harper's (2000) scholarship on queers of color and "speculative knowledge" in order to scrutinize the absence of racial politics from legal discourses on queer students' rights (Marquez and Brockenbrough, 2013). In their study, they interrogate the spike in lawsuits and legal victories against school districts across the United States, stemming from harassment and bullying of queer students. More specifically, Marquez and Brockenbrough reveal how legal scholarship neglects to address the intersections of multiple oppressive identities (i.e. race, gender, and sexuality), which often incite harassment and bullying of queer students. The authors re-imagine new epistemologies on queer youth of color that may inform legal protections for students; moreover, they address the imperative for school districts to create anti-discriminatory policies that allow for schools to become safe spaces for all students, specifically at-risk students of color. This study emphasizes the salience of intersectionality in the lives of queer students of color and necessitates a call-to-action for more conceptual, theoretical, and pedagogical frameworks that challenge multiple normativities and oppressions (Harper, 2000).

Historically, schools have been cultural institutions charged with the responsibility of instilling dominant cultural narratives within students (Garrison, 2009). And, while efforts to push back have been plenty, scholars and practitioners in urban education still focus much of their attention on issues associated with the achievement gap, such as school systems, standardization, accountability, and testing. Notwithstanding, there is a paucity of research surrounding discriminatory politics around heteronormativity in urban schools (McCready,

2013). Queer pedagogues, many whom operate from the theoretical lens of critical theory and feminist theory, must also consider the unique challenges that sexual minority students of color face in school settings as they attempt to navigate the intersecting layers of dominance and oppression (Meyer, 2007). Without a strategic, dialogic, multidimensional, and comprehensive approach to reshape discursive knowledge around gender and sexuality, the likelihood of achieving equitable, amicable, and inclusive learning environments for queer students seems bleak.

In the following section, I incorporate an excerpt of a thematic analysis from a phenomenological pilot study that I conducted with two queer Black boys at a single-gender, urban high school around the phenomenon of happiness. In this study, I utilized Seidman's (2013) method for face-to-face phenomenological interviewing, the interviews occurred in three rounds, each lasting approximately 90 minutes: the first focusing on life history, the second on details pertaining to their schooling experiences, and the final interview reflecting on meaning and interpretation. Through these interviews, I sought to understand, from the participants' perspective, their lived experiences as students while navigating being Black and queer.

The purpose of including pilot study data in the literature review is so that I can lay the theoretical and epistemological framework for queer happiness using scholarship from queer-of-color critique and Ikeda/Soka studies in education. Until now, these two fields of scholarship have never been explicitly explored in concert with one another; therefore, my pilot study will serve two purposes: 1) to establish a conceptual lens through which to understand the intersections of queer-of-color critique and Ikeda/Soka studies in relation to queer Black boys' manifestation of happiness; and 2) to establish the need for further

exploration into these two emerging fields in order to develop new insights and expand creative possibilities for their application in education.

Beyond the Liminal Silence: Presentation of Findings from a Pilot Study

There are of course good reasons for telling stories about queer happiness, in response to and as a response to the very presumption that a queer life is necessarily and inevitably an unhappy life.

—Ahmed (2010, p. 94).

Introduction

Now that the social, historical, and cultural forces that contribute to queer Black unhappiness have been explored in the above sections, I seek to shift the conversation to the phenomenological question: what, then, does it mean to be happy? More specifically, what does it mean to be happily queer and Black? These are questions that queer scholars have neglected to address as there are few phenomenological studies that delve into this pursuit (Heffernan, 2014). But why? Perhaps one reason is because happiness has taken on myriad associations, connotations, and representations in society, depending on the cultural, political, and historical contexts. These contexts make it difficult to prescribe a specific definition for what happiness is and a path to achieving it. Scholarship on happiness can be traced back to Aristotle (350 B.C.E/2011) and one of his most influential works, *Nicomachean Ethics*, where he outlines a theory of happiness that still reverberates throughout much of the literature around happiness today. Aristotle sought to answer the perplexing philosophical question, “What is the ultimate purpose of human life?”

For Aristotle, happiness is linked to the ultimate value of one's life as experienced in totality up to this moment, measuring how well one has lived up to the full potential as a human being. As such, happiness is a perpetual process of becoming fully human. This is achieved through the exercise of virtue—the outward display of wisdom, justice, courage, compassion, and generosity throughout the course of one's life. Hence happiness is a both a means and an end in and of itself, not a means to an end, nor a temporary or permanent state of being. The misconception with the notion of happiness in the modern Western context is the fact that it is often perceived as a subjective state of consciousness or a pleasurable sensation, such as having fun at a party or enjoying quality time with friends. Aristotle's happiness, on the other hand, is teleological and encompasses the totality of one's life. Moreover, happiness requires the cognition of truth through intellectual contemplation, which, according to Aristotle, is the ultimate realization of our rational capacities. It, then, becomes difficult to measure happiness in a single experience because the flourishing of human life has not yet been realized or cannot be encompassed in an isolated circumstance or situation.

Gender scripts and the promise of hetero-normative bliss are what orient individuals toward heterosexual happiness (i.e. for girls, happiness in marriage and living happily ever after; for boys, happiness in the prospect of fulfilling the patriarchal expectations of being a provider for one's family and the "man of the house"). Hence, the imminent unhappiness of the deviant queer serves as not only a foreboding admonition ("if you do this, you will get that!"), but also as censure ("so don't do that!") (Ahmed, 2010, p. 91). Thus, happiness scripts subversively and overtly encourage us to avert the potential repercussion of deviating from a

path of heterosexual righteousness; this contrived crisis demands that our moral compass is pointed (socially, culturally, psychologically) toward the imperative of living a "straight" life:

> The queer who is happily queer still encounters the world that is unhappy with queer love, but refuses to be made unhappy by that encounter; the risk of promoting happy queers is that the unhappiness of the world can disappear from view. To be happily queer can also recognize that unhappiness; indeed to be happily queer can be to recognize the unhappiness that is concealed by the promotion of happy normativity. (Ahmed, 2010, p. 117)

Queer happiness becomes misguided when one seeks out happiness through the wrong channels, such as internalization of Whiteness, heteronormative capital, and hetero-patriarchy. These conventional routes to happiness inhibit Black queer individuals from being *happily queer* (rather than a happy queer). Since queer Black boys have a history of being pathologized and institutionalized in the existing hegemonic order, they have embodied an acute awareness of consequences associated with sexual non-conformity due to the schools' rigid cultural values around masculinity and femininity (Grov, Bimbi, Nanin, & Parsons, 2006; Rosario, et. al., 2004).

Agency in the form of resilience is often identified as a way in which queer Black boys challenge forms of racism and homophobia. It is important to note that although hetero-patriarchy, homophobia, and genderism are pervasive structural institutions, they do not necessarily govern the outcomes of queer Black boys' lives and the choices they make. These students engage in a type of resistance that is far from passive acquiescence; they practice what Goulah (2013) refers to as a "engaged resistance," or a pragmatic compromise where they work to transform hegemonic systems from within their existing constructs. Too often, society

underestimates the capabilities of "nondominant students," but Makiguchi rejects this sentiment as "empty theorizing" (Goulah, 2017) if we don't consider worthwhile solutions that assist these students in creating value in spite of their social conditions; this, according to Makiguchi, is what levels the social landscape (Goulah, 2017).

These discourses provide a lens through which to explain certain aspects of queer Black boys' experiences; however, is also important to note that the participants' experiences cannot be fully understood without respect to the racist legacy in this country. The intersections of race and sexuality become richly complex as queer Black boys identify, negotiate, and appreciate their sexuality. As such, liminal spaces become important to this discussion, precisely because they allow queer Black subjects an outlet to confront oppressive discourses and create new ones through a process of human revolution. My interpretation of the pilot study data takes on this stance. I attempt, as much as possible, to analyze the everyday experiences of my participants—their words, behavior, action, and perspectives—through a queered lens.

Participants:

My two participants, Elliot and Melvin, attended Wesley Prep High School (pseudonyms used throughout), which is a predominantly African American high school in a large, metropolitan city in the Midwest. The community in which Wesley is located has a history of poverty, but is currently being gentrified. In 2013, the school transitioned from a comprehensive school to single-gender academies. The Young Men's Academy was the site of my research inquiry, as I sought to unpack the experiences of queer Black boys in all-male environments. Though unique in their own right, both young men shed light on the interesting

experience of queer Black boys in all male high schools. Below is a summary of the emergent themes from the study.

Theme #1: Human Revolution: Wisdom, Courage, & Compassion

The overarching themes that resonated throughout the interviews were self-transformation and self-recovery, as both participants told stories of dark days when they were insecure, confused, and self-loathsome, but managed to emerge anew. The participants seemed to be comfortable with their queerness, and through self-recovery and reconciliation, learned to love this aspect of themselves.

Melvin's insecurity and overall fear of homophobia led him to use deceptive measures, also via social media, to transform into the persona that he felt had been repressed on the inside. This is not uncommon, especially among the Black community (Parker, Garcia, Philbin, Wilson, Parker, & Hirsch, 2016). Deception, including the down-low (DL) phenomenon (men who secretly sleep with other men, while maintaining an, otherwise, heterosexual life), has plagued the Black community for decades. Although this practice has been a topic of taboo in the Black community, it was J. L. King (2005)—with his New York Times Bestseller *On the Down Low* and appearance on Oprah—who shed light on the ravaging impact that DL men have on the Black family and the Black community. A man who lives his life on the down-low (DL) is one who has heterosexual relationships with women—even to the extent where he gets married and has children—while secretly having sex with men (King, 2004). In other words, he lives a double life, often having romantic relationships with women, yet covertly pursuing male sexual partners. DL men usually don't identify as gay, or even bisexual for that matter, and often considers themselves heterosexual due to the stigma associate with being gay in the Black community (Phillips, 2005). Numerous studies outline the health risks associated with such a

lifestyle, including the disproportionately high rates of HIV/AIDS (Dodge et al, 2008; Millett et al, 2005; Mays et al, 2004; Kennedy & Doll, 2001). DL Black men have been considered prime agents of HIV transmission in the Black community, many of which transmit it to their female significant others who are usually oblivious to their lifestyle (Barnshaw, 2010).

The fear of being ostracized, discriminated against, and potentially hurt leads many young Black males to perpetuate a life of deception just to be accepted, wanted, and valued. Ikeda (2010b) characterizes the profound inner transformation of human revolution as the lifeblood of humanity and a prerequisite for harmonious coexistence. Invoking the wisdom of the Buddhist teaching of the Lotus Sutra, Ikeda (2000) declares, "that the inner determination of one individual can transform everything; it gives ultimate expression to the infinite potential and dignity inherent in each life" (p. 7). Thus, the sense of powerlessness that Melvin felt as a result of the unfortunate situation is also the impetus that propelled him to make a concerted effort at recovering psychologically, emotionally, and spiritually.

Elliot's realization for self-transformation took on a slightly different approach—though just as powerful—as he endeavored to find his authentic, what Ikeda (2010a) would call his "greater," self. This inner queer transformation that Elliot undergoes is not only a testament to his struggle with identity, but also a testament of his courage, resilience, and tenacity in the face of adversity. His use of the third person to refer to his gender-bending persona bespeak his initial lack of confidence with juggling who he authentically was versus what society wanted him to be.

Reconciling these identities is a process that ultimately made him value and appreciate his beauty and worth without pigeonholing himself into a life of heteronormative conformity. Elliot's volitional manifestation of value creation is crucial to his journey toward human

revolution. This human revolution—the social self-actualization of understanding his true identity—allows Elliot to create value and become a hero of his own happiness.

Similar to Elliot, Ikeda (2012) takes a moral, ethical, and personal stand against bullying, calling it an "absolute evil" (p. 64). Cooperation from home, school, and society is necessary for the sake of children's happiness, so as not to compromise the development of their virtue and character. This becomes a dialogic process where all invested in the child's life contribute to his/her moral development. Children who exhibit bullying behavior, according to Vincent Harding—a confidant and advisor to Martin Luther King Jr. and interlocutor with Ikeda—are products of the pathologies and ethical failures of contemporary society, and believe that they are important to no one (Harding & Ikeda, 2013). According to Ikeda (2012), we must create a society where each child recognizes his or her self-worth; a recognition of one's own dignity and value, as fundamental principles, and allow individuals to also acknowledge that other lives are equally as precious. This is vital to instilling a value system where we actively refrain from harming others to mask our own insecurities and self-loathing. As a victim of bullying himself, Elliot had to undergo self-reformation before he could recognize his full humanity, which gave him the courage and compassion to advocate on behalf of others.

Similar to the metaphor of the lotus flower, present in Ikeda's writings, emerging from the muddy swamp, Elliot realized his own human potential, amid and despite the trials and tribulations that life threw his way. Ikeda notes how it is the mud and dirt of the lotus pond that represents our problem-filled world; nevertheless, no matter how murky and grimy the pond gets, the lotus flower—representing each individual life—still blossoms beautifully (Weiming & Ikeda, 2011). This is the ethos behind human revolution—our human dignity and growth are

measured by our courage to overcome the difficulties that life throws our way. In essence, struggle is a necessary part of establishing an unshakable self, amidst the afflictions of the world. Makiguchi affirms, "Thus, genuine happiness requires sharing the sufferings and joys of the larger public as a member of society; and it can easily be understood that full and harmonious life within society is an indispensable element for any concept of authentic happiness" (reference in Goulah & Gebert, 2009, p. 124).

The blossoming that my participants experienced speaks not only to their tenacity, but also to their human dignity and yearning to coexist peacefully and harmoniously, creatively. Melvin and Elliot's sense of self-efficacy is mitigated with humility along with empathy, compassion, and a deep sense of interconnectedness of human beings. Melvin declares, "So for instance, if somebody sees a gay person at school, they see nothing but the fact that you like boys. It's nothing like you got a life, and feelings, and experiences just like everybody else. I'm human too, just like you, and there is no reason why we shouldn't be able to get along." Interestingly, despite participants' apparent cognizance of their status as "other," and despite the differences with how they expressed themselves, they ultimately felt connected—on a humanistic level—to others who may not share their same lifestyle or sexual orientation. Elliot echoes Melvin's perspective toward harmonious coexistence.

Theme #2: Disorientation

Understanding a queer life from the perspective of queer phenomenology is a commitment to inhabiting the world through a lens of deviation, whereby one does not completely disregard the familiar, but instead works to make the familiar strange by implementing a queer hermeneutic that re-interprets taken-for-granted understandings of life experiences (Ahmed, 2006). Ahmed provides the example of how some individuals describe

queer gatherings as family gatherings as a means of experiencing happiness and joy in the unusual effect of deviating from a "familiar" context to a form of queer kinship.

Despite the fact that the participants realized that they were outliers in heteronormative spaces, they still managed to navigate them and eventually find a place/community that was both accepting and supportive of their lifestyles and identities. This was accomplished through their abilities to "disorient" their traditional notions of the family unit, and instead, re-orient themselves in a "queer" manner. Both participants addressed the fact that their biological families were in denial and refused to accept their lifestyle choices, even when it seemed self-evident.

Undoubtedly the church plays a crucial factor in the perpetuation of homophobia because the Bible still remains a powerful instrument in the world. This institution essentially attempts to categorize all Black men into one homogenous group, and stems from the very worst aspect of White supremacy, which asserts that all Blacks are interchangeable and substitutable (Douglas, 2003). Ultimately, this facet of sex culture denies Black diversity, Black multiplicity, Black humanity and Black heterogeneity. West (1993) sees this action as unfavorably imposing certain control and regulation over women, gays, and lesbians and policing those regulations, which contributes to the cyclical and reverberating role that nihilism has played in Black life.

While familial rejection can be devastating for adolescents seeking validation and acceptance for their sexual orientation, Melvin and Elliot found solace in individuals who served as surrogate families in times when they needed support and nurturing. The act of "queering" the family unit became their mode of survival in navigating the often enigmatic terrain of queer identity formation. Outside of school, it was clear that Melvin sought refuge in the "gay scene" of Chicago: "I've been in two families already (gay families)...the Romans

and the Cores. They took care of me and looked out for me when I need to get away. My gay mother taught me how to survive as a gay man in Chicago." At school he found support systems in adults as well as other students who seemed to understand who he was at the core:

The level of empathy that Elliot described from staff member, especially Black male teachers, was heartwarming and quite shocking, considering how the Black community is saturated with homophobic discourse and ideology that continues to shape the meaning of what it means to be a Black man in this country (Parker, et. al., 2016). Similar to Ikeda's perspective of human revolution, West (1993) provides an ethic of hope and self-recovery that seeks to counteract the ravaging effects of nihilism—a necessary condition for the establishment of solidarity within the Black community and peaceful coexistence beyond.

Conclusion

Makiguchi's and Ikeda's philosophies are deeply embedded within the values and beliefs of peace, harmony, happiness, and creative coexistence. These perspectives are desperately needed in western inquiry around intersectionality. A growth model is imperative to 21st Century urban education and queer Black studies—one that balances critical perspective with humanistic aim which underscores the notion that difference is vital, as it is the lifeblood that preserves humanity. We all have unique value that we contribute to society; moreover, we all learn and contribute to each other's learning in dialogic ways. For Makiguchi and Ikeda, difference contributes to harmony, rather than dissention, as in Western contexts. Thus, this study aims at understanding happiness as a harmonious pursuit toward reconciling multiple identities, including gender, race, and sexuality. It is important that queer Black boys experience a community where they are first and foremost understood, and where their "queerness" is appreciated and valued, both within and outside of schools. Communities are not always

formed through volitional endeavors, commonality, and consensus; in fact, many are involuntarily forged as a byproduct of oppressive forces that seek to marginalize them. Hence, understanding how queer Black boys—as a community of gendered, racialized, and sexualized "other"—manifest happiness and harmonious coexistence in their home life, in their respective communities, and at school is a nuanced approach to the existing discourses on queer youth of color and Ikeda/Soka studies in education.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This study employs queer phenomenology as its methodological design. The purpose of this methodology section is to: 1) articulate the epistemological roots of phenomenology as a method of inquiry and explore its philosophical and theoretical limitations, 2) address how queer phenomenology will be operationalized in this study in order to strengthen research findings and add more focus, depth, and dimension to the data, and 3) discuss how this study will employ phenomenological interviewing as the method of data collection and thematic analysis as the mode of data interpretation. This research study has four guiding questions, which are vehicles employed to gather insight into the life histories of participants. The research questions are as follows:

1. In what ways has the institution of schooling influenced how queer Black boys manifest happiness?
2. In what ways do other social institutions—family, religion, and media—impact how queer Black boys develop happiness through value creation?
3. What is the process by which (and the circumstances causing) a kind of inner-motivated transformation occurs at the deep interiority of their lives?
4. What can educators and policymakers learn from the narratives of queer Black boys that best support them in their personal, social, and educational growth toward a happier and more fulfilled life?

Phenomenology

Husserl's phenomenology provides methodological guidance for qualitative researchers seeking to make lived experiences—as perceived through human consciousness—the object of inquiry (Horrigan-Kelly, Millar, Dowling, 2016). Heidegger, a student of Husserl, approached

phenomenology from a different epistemological lens—one that upholds an interpretive process for understanding and disclosing cultural experiences and their meanings through language, rather than the merely descriptive categories of the "real" as proposed by Husserl (Horrigan-Kelly, Millar, Dowling, 2016). Thus, this process allows participants, as cultural actors, to manifest what is normally hidden in human experiences and human relations (Spielgelberg, 1976). Phenomenologists (Solomon, 1987; Gadamer, 1976; Heidegger, 1962) make the following assumptions:

- Pre-understanding or worldview is a structure for being in the world, and every human being possesses it—it's inescapable.
- Humans are embedded in the world to such an extent that subjective experiences are inextricably linked to social, cultural, and political contexts.
- Human cultural activities are seen as "texts" toward interpretation of intended or expressed meaning

Phenomenologists believe that this approach is not just a way of conducting research, but also a way of being in one's lifeworld. Descriptive phenomenology research necessitates that researchers "bracket" their personal opinions and experiences related to the phenomenon for the sake of demonstrating scientific rigor in data analysis (Drew, 1999). Hermeneutic phenomenologists, however, realize that it is virtually impossible for researchers to bracket their worldview and perspectives in respect to phenomenological inquiries. Yet, through authentic reflection, individuals may become aware of the myriad assumptions that undergird our experiences (Ricoeur, 1985). Despite this nuance in hermeneutic inquiry, researchers are still placed in a position of other, never fully coming in concert with the voices of the participants. Since my research centers on the intersection of race, gender, and sexuality, my identity as a

Black gay man cannot (and will not) be bracketed during this process. Therefore, the proceeding section outlines a nuanced methodology—queer phenomenology—which attempts to situate the research experience into a more authentic framework between the researcher and the queer Black participants.

Queer Phenomenology

Unlike the traditional phenomenological methodology as outlined above, queer phenomenology (Ahmed, 2006) focuses our attention on the question: what compels us to orient ourselves toward certain objects in this world and away from others? In so doing, queer phenomenology attempts to disrupt our "natural" orientation toward things in this world by questioning the concept of orientation *in* phenomenology as well as orientation *of* phenomenology. Thus, if traditional phenomenology orients the researcher toward certain objects, things, and perceptions in the foreground, then queer phenomenology disorients the researcher, causing him to intentionally direct his attention toward things that are, instead, in the background, both spatially and temporally.

The term "queer" in phenomenology serves as a double meaning. First, it is about naturalizing what we initially deem strange or odd in sexualized spaces; moreover, it is also about re-theorizing the concept of "orientation" in "sexual orientation" by unpacking how we reside in and understand the spatial and temporal aspects of sexual desire (Ahmed, 2006). Queer phenomenology redirects our attention toward divergent objects, those that are less forthcoming or even those that deviate or are deviant. In other words, in order to become oriented in this world, we must first embrace disorientation. With regard to sexual orientation, how might one conceptualize what it means to become oriented sexually? Ahmed (2006) approaches this question from the perspective of becoming rather than being. As previously

mentioned, heteronormative scripts are learned through social and cultural interaction and investment. There are usually moral and ethical codes attached to adhering to the "straight and narrow" path in life.

As Simone de Beauvoir (1997) notes, one is not born, but rather becomes straight. In order to investigate this phenomenon, we have to consider the importance of familial orientation toward the matter. Orientation, in this sense, speaks to both the physical and ideal objects that one upholds as worthy of a path well-trodden. This means that within social and familial units, certain objects, paths, lifestyles, and decisions are put into reach, while others are not. Butler (1997) further elaborates this point: "Heterosexual genders form themselves through the renunciation of the possibility of homosexuality, as a foreclosure which produces a field of heterosexual objects at the same time as it produces a domain of those whom it would be impossible to love" (p. 21). As such, orientation is about the directions we take that put some things and not others within our grasp, both physically and metaphysically.

Ahmed (2006) notes that those who inhabit queer bodies must be leery of simply attempting to conform to sexual and social conservatism by seeking acceptance into heteronormative institutions such as marriage, child rearing, inheritance and the family unit. Instead, queer individuals should use these institutions as "disorientation devices," where one gains happiness and satisfaction out of deviation. Merleau-Ponty (2002) notes that dis/re-orientation involves not only "the intellectual experience of disorder, but the vital experience of giddiness and nausea, which is the awareness of our contingency, and the horror with which it fills us" (Merleau-Ponty, 2002, p. 296). Accordingly, and ironically, we might even find joy, pleasure, happiness, and even excitement in the horror of such deviation.

In this study, schools are seen as liminal spaces—a time between the 'what was' and the 'next'—where transition and uncertainty are embraced (Rohr, 2002). Research suggests that rather than using these liminal spaces to "come out," participants instead use them to "come into" their queer happiness (Rivers & Ward, 2012). McKeown, Nelson, Anderson, Low, and Elford (2010) insist on the "importance of theorizing social location when examining the intersections of ethnicity and sexuality" (p. 12). Queer Black boys' visibility in the liminal space of their school is not due to their in-your-face flamboyance; rather, their visibility is a direct result of challenging the normalcy and ordinariness of heterosexuality, denouncing the internalization of Whiteness, and developing an association with others who are also invisible in this space because they are situated outside of or beyond the ordinary. These liminal spaces, therefore, become a proverbial battleground for the emergence and visibility of non-normative narratives and interests, devoid of moral stigmas based on existing ideologies around what is means to be queer and Black.

As the Ahmed epigraph to this section describes, mini narratives play a key role in transforming the social landscape and normative assumptions around possibilities for queer Black happiness. As a researcher, my focus is on capturing, as accurately as possible, the voices of participants in order to tell their stories as they relate to their process of becoming happy. This is no easy feat as I will have to "queer" my own interpretive lens by suspending my natural attitude toward all presumed understandings of the social and historical world as it related to happiness. My phenomenological experience as a queer Black male contributes to the growing narrative around schooling experiences of queer Black boys.

Using the metaphor of Husserl's writing table, Ahmed elaborates further on how what is familiar to us—our worldview and moral and ethical orientation toward the world—is the

crux of our potential toward happiness. The table serves as the zero point of orientation—"the point from which the world unfolds" (Ahmed, 2006, p. 545). As such, queer phenomenologists are careful about merely advocating for little tables amidst the one larger table, where each victim is given his/her own table. Bawer (1994) forewarns us about this—queer politics is neither about creating new tables nor seeking acceptance at the larger table. Indeed, the desire to join any normative table speaks to one's yearning to become a part of the very place of moral, social, and corporeal rejection. Such rejection is not to say that homonormativity is the case for a new orientation in queer politics. As Derrida (1982) reminds us, oppositional thinking keeps us bound up in the very system it claims to challenge. Hence, merely supplanting one form of hegemonic ideology for another is not a desired effect of queer phenomenology either. Rather, deviation and disorientation from certain "straight" lines are the essence of a queer orientation in the first place.

Method of Data Collection

The primary method of data collection in this study was phenomenological interviewing (Seidman, 2013). According to Seidman (2013), phenomenological interviewing is centered around four essential themes: Theme 1) The temporal and transitory nature of human experience, which draws attention to the fact that in human experiences, the "will be" becomes the "is" and the "was" in an instant (p. 16). In other words, there is no absolute "is" or state of being. Being is fleeting and always in a state of flux; Theme 2) Subjective understanding—a phenomenological view of experience from the participants' point of view, which Schutz (1967) considers to be the optimal objective of phenomenological interview because it situates the true nature of "is" within the point of view of the participants' "subjective understanding" (Schutz, 1967, p. 20); Theme 3) Schutz and Max Van Manen

(1990) stress the importance of lived experience as the foundation of phenomena, but note that it is only when we step outside of the stream of flowing action and engage in thoughtful, critical reflection that those lived experiences become phenomena; and Theme 4) Meaning-making in context, which Schutz argues does not reside in the lived experience itself, but rather it's the "act of attention" into our "intentional gaze" that becomes the conduit to meaningfulness (Schutz, 1967, pp. 71-72).

Since participant interviewing was the primary mode of phenomenological research (Seidman, 2013), I relied heavily on using their personal narratives to capture how they create value and manifest happiness over the course of their high school careers. Using Seidman's (2013) model for face-to-face phenomenological interviewing, my interviews took place in three distinct phases: the first focusing on life history, the second on details pertaining to their schooling experiences, and the final phase reflecting on meaning and interpretation. Through these interviews, I sought to understand, from the participants' perspective, their lived experiences while navigating being Black and queer. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I was limited as a researcher in the modes of data collection to utilize. Therefore, in order to follow social distancing guidelines to ensure the safety of myself and my participants, I focused solely on remote interviewing which took place via Zoom. I video-recorded the interviews in order to watch them at a later date for the purposes of transcription as well as to analyze body language, disposition, and tone of the participants in response to the question that I ask.

The use of a semi-structured interview format was employed in order to allow participant narratives to guide the study, while leaving some flexibility to probe deeper into certain responses. In addition, during the interviews, and directly thereafter, I took detailed field notes and write analytic memos (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011). The purpose of the analytic

memos were to remind myself to remain keenly aware of the "taken for granted world" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006) of my participants that I may otherwise be oblivious to, such as details about setting, gestures, code words, the flow of the session, or any other thoughts or follow-up questions that may be relevant to the interpretation of their life histories. This qualitative research method demanded that the world of participants be rigorously examined with the assumption that nothing is trivial, and that every detail (no matter how small) may provide a clue to a more thorough and inclusive understanding of their worldviews.

Before I conducted formal interviews with participants, I met briefly and informally with each one of them (also via Zoom) in order to share my life history and positionality and explain/clarify the purpose of the study and their roles relative to it. This decision allowed me to build respect and rapport with each participant, ensure that each of them understands my research intentions, and clarify any misunderstandings or concerns that may arise. Each interview was divided into three manageable categories. Participants were able to focus on specific narratives within their lives and within their respective social institutions (family, church, schools, media) in order to elucidate how the taken-for-granted assumptions about people's way of life can actually help propel them throughout their daily activities (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006). The three-phase interview process was conducted as follows:

- **Interview One:** Focused Life History—Birth to Middle School (~*90 minutes*)
    - Questions in the first interview sought to understand (broadly and comprehensively) the participants' experiences with being queer Black males in their communities, households, and other social institutions. Before delving into their experiences as high school students, I first needed to understand the stories of their life inside and outside of the school setting, including family

and community ties, involvement in the church, and experiences in elementary and middle school that have shaped their frame of reference; as a researcher, this allowed me to form a comprehensive picture of their identities throughout their life span. Schools, as microcosms of society and thus a microcosm of the participants' consciousness, can only be understood in relation to the larger social and cultural contexts and milieu.

- **Interview Two:** <u>The Details of Experience</u>—High School to Present (*~90 minutes*)
  - The second round of interview questions focused on the participants' experiences with being a student at their current high school setting, in hopes that in this conversation, they surface topics around their queer identity, gender expression, homophobia, heteronormativity, invisibility, in/exclusion, resilience, value creation, human revolution, and other themes that connect to existing extant literature regarding the experience of queer Black boys. It was through these broad themes and lenses that I, along with the participants, were able to co-construct meaning in relation to how they navigate the terrain of urban public schooling.
- **Interview Three:** <u>Reflection on the Meaning</u> (*~90 minutes*)
  - Questions in Interview Three asked participants to reflect on the meaning of their experiences. Meaning-making required that participants make connections between how factors and conditions in their lives interrelate to bring them to their present situation (Seidman, 2013). Even though the participants were making meaning throughout all three interviews, this interview sought to contextualize the two previous interviews in order to put

> experience into language and bring the meaning-making process to the forefront of our attention (Vygotsky, 1987). In this instance, the researcher and participants recognized each other's otherness, and sought to create an "intersubjective realm between them" (Zayed, 2008, p. 562).

Each interview was spaced out no more than 3 days to a week apart. This allowed me to work with participants over the course of 2-3 weeks in order to establish a substantive relationship with them to reduce the impact of possible "idiosyncratic interviews"—that is, participants having a bad day, being sick, or distracted in a way that impedes the quality of an interview (Seidman, 2013, p. 25). The phenomenological interviewing process allowed me as a researcher to abstain from using an authoritative voice and privileging my own interpretation over that of the participants.

In order to ensure privacy and security with using the Zoom platform, I used a personal meeting ID and this number was not be shared with anyone. Each meeting was set up with its own password that was only be accessible to myself and participant; they each needed to enter the password in order to enter the meeting room. Furthermore, I turned on the waiting room function, so that I could make sure that no one could enter the meeting room without my permission, and I locked the room after the participant entered. That way, no one else could enter. When using the "record" function, I ensured that I did not record to the cloud; I recorded the interviews to my computer, and then properly transferred the to a secure storage, in this case Box, to make sure that files were stored and shared securely.

Recruitment: Description of Site and Participants

Gateway Senior High School is a predominantly African American high school situated in a small, majority Black metropolitan city in the Midwest. Gateway is situated in an insular

community, and as such, constituents not keen on accepting outsiders into their community. The state report card was used to access the following socioeconomic demographics in this study: the school district serves approximately 6,000 students in grades preschool through 12th grade. Nearly all students in this district enter school at-risk for academic failure due to extreme poverty; 100% of students qualify for free/reduced price lunch. Over 93% of students are low income, 5.9% were categorized as homeless, 97.1% of students are African-American and 1.4% are Hispanic. The percentage of students with a diagnosed disability (qualifying for special education services) is 16%. The 4-year graduation rate is 71% and those graduates noted as ready for college coursework are only 5%.

This study utilized criterion sampling in order to delimit factors based on predetermined set of criteria, specifically race (Black), gender (cisgender male), and sexuality (queer/gender non-conforming). My study included five participants who identified as Black and queer. For the purposes of my study, participants needed to be open about discussing their sexuality and sexual orientation. This helped with creating a more comfortable, trusting environment when discussing their schooling experiences without fear of being outted. Nevertheless, it was not necessary for them to be out to their family and friends.

Participants ranged between the ages of 18 and 20 and were either seniors or recent graduates (within one or two years) who spent majority of their high school career at the school site in this study (at least three years). Due to the sensitive nature of the topic, I utilized gatekeepers—the principal of the high school and the senior counselor—to gain access to willing participants. The gatekeepers were accessed through our existing professional relationship based on educational consulting services that I rendered at the high school school over the past four years. The gatekeeper helped to mediate the research experience so that the

students felt safe and secure. If things became uncomfortable for either of the participants, they helped alleviate any confusion or discomfort. This was paramount to my establishing credibility and rapport with the participants, even before meeting them.

Based on the existing relationships that gatekeepers built with students, they identified potential participants and set up one-on-one conferences with these students to provide basic information about the purpose, focus, and scope of the research study and gauge their interest in moving forward in the process. If interested, gatekeepers provided potential participants with my phone number and email and instructed them to reach out to me expressing interest in being a part of the study. After receiving correspondence stating interest, I then set up a face-to-face meeting via Zoom within one week to meet and screen the potential participants, describe my research study, explain their role in it, and answer any questions that they may have.

Prior to screening potential participants, I emailed them a copy of the Informed Consent form so that they could come to the meeting with any questions or concerns. This emailed version of the consent form did not mention the sexual orientation aspect of the study in order to protect their confidentiality since email is not a secure communication. I let the participants know that the emailed version of the consent form was a vague version and I reiterated the purpose of the study and the inclusion criteria dealing with queer Black men. After confirming eligibility, I engaged participants in the verbal consent process: I read through each section of the Informed Consent form, stopping periodically to clarify language and information and answer any question that they had. I also asked open-ended questions in order to verify participant understanding and summarized their participation in the study. Participants indicated they understand their role in participating in the study by verbally consenting to participate in the

study. A final copy of the consent form was then emailed to them indicating their verbal consent to engage in the study and the date. When participants chose to move forward in the study, I set up dates for their interviews. Those who did not consent to the study did not continue to participate. At any point in the study, if a participant chose to opt out of participation, they could do so without consequence.

In addition to the demographic criteria, I sought out participants who perceived themselves as productively navigating the vicissitudes of their lives. Whether their life circumstances were positive or negative was left up to interpretation by my participants. This was an important aspect of my study because it ensured that I refrained from pigeonholing my participants into one monolithic group; moreover, it prevented me from victimizing them based on perceived deficiencies. Indeed, human beings are complex and multifaceted individuals who endure a range of life experiences, including periods of struggle and resiliency. This study sought to acknowledge participants' wide range of lived experiences and captured their narratives in a way that authentically elucidated how they have managed to emerge at this point in their lives. The ultimate goal was to provide educators, policymakers, and researchers with a glimpse into the lifeworld and trajectories of these young men and woman for the purposes of epistemological, political, and legislative changes.

Data Analysis

Since I employed phenomenological interviewing as my primary method of data collection, my first step in unpacking my data was to transcribe the interviews directly after each of the three session. I transcribed each participant's narratives immediately following each interview in case they spoke on a certain idea or topic that required further clarification or probing at the following interview; this allowed me time to prepare follow-up questions. I

created a codebook using an Excel spreadsheet in order to organize and manage emergent codes. Using a codebook granted me an opportunity to consistently check that my codes were flexible (cover multiple participant responses), create contrast with one another, and help reduce data (Blair, 2015). I began the initial process of thematic analysis (Riessman, 2008) by listing, sorting, and labeling participant responses. I implemented the open/inductive coding process using the line-by-line method—at the phrase, sentence, and passage level—in order to elicit a variety of broad thematic categories pertaining to participant responses (Saldana, 2016). This process allowed me to continually reduce the descriptors down to their essential form versus what was already known about the phenomenon.

I then used phenomenological reduction to synthesize the initial open codes into larger buckets. By employing this practice of phenomenological reduction, I was able to achieve horizontalization at the initial data analysis stage, whereby I laid out all data and treated it as though all aspects had equal weight and value (Merriam, 2002). I continued to reduce these categories by synthesizing recurring statements into broader themes and removing non-repetitive categories in order to unlock the essence of the phenomenon. This cycle of data re-examination was integral to ensuring validity, and was rigorously employed in order to address inconsistencies and reach thematic consensus by regularly asking myself, 'if theme X was eliminated from the list, would that drastically change the way the phenomenon is understood or interpreted?' This mode of analysis ultimately granted me the ability to derive structural themes from the data (Blair, 2015).

Once the open/inductive coding and analysis was complete, I then juxtaposed the inductive codes with themes inherent within the theoretical perspectives underpinning this study to see if there were underlying similarities between the literature and participant

responses. When appropriate, I deductively linked the themes to principles such as expressions of wisdom, courage, and compassion (human revolution), value creation (Makiguchi's framework for happiness), disorientation (queer-of-color critique) in a process of deductive coding. The purpose for using both inductive and deductive coding in my data analysis was to ensure that data saturation was reached.

To further ensure accuracy and validity, various other data sources were triangulated (Wiersma, 2000); coded data from memos, journal reflections, interviews, and the participants' own interpretations were juxtaposed in order to ensure reliability of thematic connections across all data sets. The trustworthiness of the data was assessed based on the frequency with which aggregated codes appeared. This process was repeated until the data became saturated and full consensus around thematic trends was attained (Riessman, 2008). This checks-and-balance process required intellectual rigor on both parts of the researcher and the participants; however, as a researcher, I was careful about finding the balance between "providing enough openness for the participant to tell their stories and enough focus to allow the interview structure to work" (Seidman, 2013).

Ethical Concerns: Risks and Benefits

Research ethics are important for a number of reasons: first, they promote the purpose of research, such as contributions to the expanding field of literature; second, they reinforce the values inherent in the research process, including collaboration, including mutual respect and reciprocity; and most importantly, they uphold the moral and social principal of doing no harm, which helps garner public trust and support (Shamoo & Resnik, 2015). To that end, human participation in any research study raises some level ethical questions and concerns. Since this study explored the intersections between race and sexuality in a large,

predominantly African-American high school, I took thorough measure and precaution to ensure absolute confidentiality and anonymity. Pseudonyms were provided for each participant, and other identifying descriptors, such as the institutional name were disguised. This approach helped me leverage the trust factor, especially for those participants who had difficulty confiding in a third-party researcher.

Participation in this study was be strictly voluntary; since I planned to work with a vulnerable population, issues around homophobia and queer-related violence posed a real threat. I intentionally required 18 to be the minimum age of my sample for several reasons. First, at this age, participants would have had ample time to reflect on their elementary, middle, and high school years in a way that yielded lucid responses and robust narratives. Moreover, at the age of 18, participants were of legal age to verbally consent without parental approval, which was especially important to those students who were not out to their families or friends, and for those participants who felt at risk of receiving backlash or negative recourse from their family.

Due to the tendency to distort, pathologize, or problematize minority and marginalized populations in research processes, McAreavey and Das (2013) suggests that gatekeepers are important mediators who maintain an important role in ensuring that researchers do not jeopardize relationships in their community. Therefore, gatekeeper consent was generated through a formal face-to-face meeting to outline the purpose, focus, and scope of my research. At any point, if participants chose to opt out of the study, they were granted the freedom to withdraw, and any former data gathered or collected was destroyed and discarded. All data collected on participants will be kept in a password-protected computer, and will be discarded after one year.

Due to the sensitive nature of the study—asking students to reflect on, and construct meaning from, potentially detrimental experiences of harassment, bullying, etc.—there was minimal risk for psychological and/or emotional distress or discomfort (Elmir, Schmied, Jackson & Wilkes, 2011). In anticipation of such instances, I employed strategies such as building rapport, appropriate and sensitive use of open questions, self-disclosure, and ensuring a comfortable environment and appropriate time to meet with participants (Elmir, Schmied, Jackson & Wilkes, 2011). Furthermore, since this study asked participants to disclose their life history as a means of understanding how queer Black boys ultimately create value, discussing their experiences in a safe and respectful environment was my ultimate goal, which helped with gaining "closure and personal control or efficacy over the event or situation" (Elmir, Schmied, Jackson & Wilkes, 2011).

In addition, I mitigated psychological distress by utilizing proactive strategies such as clearly communicating my role as a researcher to offer assurances of confidentiality and privacy. I ensured that I used judgment-free language, mannerisms, and facial expressions. I paid close attention to non-verbal cues that indicated distress. In such instances of emotional distress, I used empathetic language such as, "I appreciate this may be difficult for you" or "I understand what you are going through," as a way of affirming and validating their experiences. If participants exhibited behaviors that suggested that the interview is too stressful, then I stopped the interview and gave the participant a chance to take a break. if after the break the participant feels able to carry on, I resumed the interview. If not, I move on or re-scheduled the interview for another day.

The anticipated indirect benefit of participation was the opportunity to discuss experiences, feelings, perceptions, and concerns related to being a queer Black male in urban

high schools. Participants also benefitted from knowledge gained about human happiness and value creation in the lives of queer individuals. The potential risk of the research was reasonable in relation to the indirect benefits because gaining knowledge about ways to live a happier and more fulfilled life helped to resolve any negative or traumatic experiences that participants endured in the past.

Summary of Overall Strengths and Limitations of the Study

This study had several strengths and limitations. First, the sample size of my study consisted of only five participants; however, this is a norm of qualitative research and yielded rich, comprehensive data, which was an overall strength of the study. Particularly, in qualitative research the focus is on depth rather than breadth, so understanding participants' experience was the optimal goal rather than establishing findings that were generalizable to a larger population (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). Thus, by using five participants, I was able to focus on probing deeply into their worldview, rather than merely trying to use their narratives to classify all queer Black males into one monolithic group.

CHAPTER 4: PARTICIPANT PROFILES

"*I grabbed the garbage bag full of my clothes and stuff, walked around the corner, and balled my eyes out for about an hour on the street.*"

—DeShaun (Interview, 2021)

Introduction

I begin this chapter by introducing each participant with an individual participant profile; these profiles provide a brief narrative of key life events that have helped shape the participants' experiences as gay, queer, or non-gender conforming individuals. The five participants are: DeShaun, Regina (assigned Reginald at birth), Tremaine, Jabari, and Kelsin. Each individual was either a current senior at Gateway Senior High School or a recent graduate (within two years). These brief bios provide some context into the lifeworld of the participants. After creating a sketch of the participants using thick description, I conduct a cohesive analysis of their collective experiences in relation to the emergent themes and theoretical frameworks presented in the literature review; the analysis is presented in the following chapter.

Participant Profiles

Meet DeShaun:

DeShaun is a 19 year old senior at Gateway Senior High School, and seems to be very popular with female students. He is unapologetically gay and unabashedly Black and proud. He is a member of the cheerleading team, the dance team, and the cosmetology program in the career and technical education (CTE) department at his school. His vibrant personality and flamboyant mannerism could be seen and heard before he even approached you. He is five feet, five inches tall and weighs about 130 pounds, but what he lacks in stature, he certainly makes up in personality. He wears his hair in a well-groomed fauxhawk (a modern style which copies its

form from a mohawk, but not as dramatic in length and usually still leaves some hair on the sides). His radiant smile (he is always smiling!) lights up the room, and he walks with such pep in his step that it almost looks like he's skipping. DeShaun is light-skinned with a few freckles right over the bridge of his slender nose. He has no facial hair except his perfectly arched eyebrows, and he appears to wear lip gloss or some kind of shimmery lip balm, which made his prominent lips stand out even more. In my few encounters with DeShaun, he typically wore a Black pride t-shirt etched with some type of affirming phrase, such as "Melanin King," "Power to the People," or "My Black is Beautiful." With the upbeat manner in which DeShaun carries himself, one would think that he has no cares in the world, but his story is far from carefree.

DeShaun lives in a two-parent household with his strict Christian parents and his younger sister. His father is Jamaican which, according to DeShaun, added another layer of homophobia to his home life growing up. At an early age, DeShaun learned through his mother's visceral reactions to gays on television that homosexuality was shunned in his household. He describes his mother's dramatic outburst anytime a gay scene appeared on television or in a movie:

> *'Yuuuuuccckk, that is freakin' disgusting!' or ''Eww, so nasty!' is what she [his mother] would say anytime something kinda gay flashed across the screen. She didn't even react like that to bloody murder movies. I was pretty young when I got the hint that she didn't like gay people [laughs].*

When asked about his coming out process, DeShaun lets out a slight giggle, followed by an exasperated sigh, and then recalls,

> *I wasn't always like this [referring to his feminine personality]. I mean, I guess you can say I was always a little feminine, but up until I turned fourteen, I tried to live a 'straight boy's' life, whatever that means. I dressed in baggy clothes, I flirted with girls, and tried*

to act as macho as possible because I knew that if my parents knew how I secretly felt inside, they would kick my ass and disown me, especially my homophobic Jamaican dad. I just figured I would wait until I went away to college in order to, you know, do what I really wanted to and be who I really wanted to be. Too bad the shit hit the fan before that [he chuckles even harder this time; it was an awkward laughter as though he was desperately holding back his emotions as he began to tell me his coming out story]. You just don't understand; my parents is so religious that when I was younger I attended some type of church function damn near every other day. It was too much! Anyway, one weekend when I was sixteen, I lied and told them that I was going on the youth church retreat, but I actually went with my friend—who was seventeen at the time with a car—to this house party in [names the adjacent city]. Omg! It was lit! I was looking sickening that night, too. I had on this fishnet tank top with these ripped black skinny jeans and my maroon Doc Martin boots. You couldn't tell me shit, baby! I was too thirsty [sic; excited] to finally be around other gay dudes without feeling judged, you know. Everything was cool until those idiots started shooting at the damn party and fucked up my whole night. That's when my life changed forever; my friend that I had gone with got grazed by a bullet and was rushed to the hospital, but thank God it just grazed his arm and he was ok, but this left me with no choice but to call my parents to pick me up. Oooooh chile! They was already blowing up my phone because it was so late. When I answered, my mother was screaming on the other end about how she was gonna whoop my ass for lying to her, blah, blah, blah. But lying about where I was at was the least of my concerns. I was actually more nervous about what she would say when she saw my gay ass outfit [slaps his leg and lets out a loud cackle]. So she finally get there, and the

first thing she does is scream at me, 'What the fuck do you have on? Are you a fag or something?' I froze, but a part of me was just like end it now, tell her and get it over with. So I shouted back, 'yes mom, I am.' Clearly she wasn't expecting that response because she just froze too and didn't say another word to me for the rest of the ride home; but she was texting the entire time and I knew she was telling my father. I almost pissed my pants just thinking about my dad's reaction.

DeShaun's worst nightmare was actualized when he and his mom finally made it home:

When we made it home, I found a garbage bag full of my things packed by the front door. My father came flying down the stairs screaming at me in his thick Jamaican accent, which only came out when he was really pissed off. He yelled that I was an abomination under God, that no child of his could be gay, and that I need to get the demon out of me. My mother was no longer angry though. She was now crying her eyes out as though she had just found out that I died. She just touched my shoulder and told me to get out. I tried begging and pleading with them, but they wasn't trying to hear shit I had to say, so I was just like, fuck it, I'm out. I grabbed the garbage bag full of my clothes and stuff, walked around the corner, and balled my eyes out for about an hour on the street.

Following his coming-out ordeal, DaShaun was so angry with his parents that he went to live with his grandmother for a few months in a surrounding suburb, which took an emotional toll on him. The time away from his parents and younger sister—despite how traumatic his home life appeared to be—was hard for DeShaun. In order to ease the psychological pain and separation anxiety that he endured, DeShaun began cutting himself without his friends or family knowing:

The only way I could cope with the pain was by cutting myself because I was so gone in the head. Cutting myself was the only pain I had control over. Even though I love my

grandmother to death, I was so fucked up about being away from my little sister and parents, as crazy as that might sound. I was so upset at myself for being gay and even more confused about why it was so wrong. I knew things between me and my parents was never gonna be the same.

Eventually Deshaun was allowed to come back home, but under strict conditions: he could not discuss or do anything "gay" in his household, and he had to go to mandated therapy (which he later realized was gay conversion therapy) that his parents arranged. During this time, DeShaun couldn't really relate to any of the therapists that he encountered; many of them had traumatic stories that contributed to their homosexuality, such as being molested as a child, being put in the foster care system, being homeless, or being addicted to drugs.

DeShaun followed their house rules staunchly at first, but then as the years went by, he slowly began expressing himself as he does now, and his parents slowly stopped addressing it:

I guess they just got tired of beating my ass, putting me on punishment, sending me to therapy, and praying the gay away [laughs]. This life is mine and mine alone, so if they don't like it, oh well! I hope that my dad eventually comes around, but if not I'll just have to love him from a distance.

His father still barely speaks to him except for necessary matters, even though it's been three years since the incident; he has since reconciled with his mother and she seems to be more understanding of him, even though she made it abundantly clear that she would never accept his lifestyle.

Me and my mother is in a good place right now. I think that what makes it so hard for her and my dad is that I will never live the life that they pictured in their head—you know, a happy marriage to a Black woman with plenty of grandkids for them to spoil. I

try to tell my mom that I can still have that lifestyle and be happy, but it just won't be in the traditional way that they see it, you know. I hope that they eventually realize that me being happy is the only thing that really matters. But hey, who knows, right?

DeShaun attributes much of his healing to the relationships that he developed with teachers in high school. These allies did not make him feel "othered," nor did they simply take pity upon him. They helped DeShaun evolve, develop a resilient attitude, and become an advocate in order to seek justice for himself and others. For example, they spearheaded an anti-bullying campaign as a result of their support for DeShaun and other vulnerable students like him:

Let me tell you: Ms. [P] and Ms. [T] will always have a special place in my heart. I was in a dark place for most of my high school years, and they took me in and loved me like I was their son, and they didn't judge me. I could talk to them about anything. I mean, anything! And they would just listen and give me advice. I remember my sophomore and junior year I was being bullied by some guys at school, specifically this dude on the football team. He hated me! At first, I used to ignore him and then one day I couldn't take it no more and I snapped. We got into a fight and I busted his nose, and everybody was saying that I won the fight. The dean tried to only suspend me, talking about I threw the first punch and started the fight. What they failed to realize was how many times he threw stuff at me, pushed me, and attacked me for no reason. Plus he was a star on the football team, and they had made it to the championship, so if he got suspended he couldn't play. They thought they was slick, tryna blame it on me so he could get off easy. But Ms. [P] and Ms. [T] was not havin it! They raised hell because they knew how this kid was bullying me and they knew that the dean was on some BS. In the end I didn't get suspended thanks to them. After that, Ms. [P] and Ms. [T] demanded that the school

> *create a anti-bullying policy that specifically included LGBTQ students and to allow me to be a part of the campaign. We created posters and did a assembly and stuff to bring awareness to bullying.*

The powerful relationships that Black students develop with Black teachers, what Irvine (2003) calls "Other Mothers," is paramount in helping queer Black boys navigate and negotiate space, not just in school environments, but also in their personal lives. The incident with the football player made DeShaun aware of the caste system being perpetuated by a heteronormative system. They were both Black males, but the football player's heterosexuality afforded him advantages that DeShaun was not privy to within the social landscape of the school. His position as a star football player, a "ladies' man," and an overall symbol of masculinity is what placed him in a position of privilege. This type of inequitable treatment based on race, gender, and sexuality is exactly what Vasquez (2018) forewarns all educators against:

> [Y]ou will not be a successful teacher for Queer Black boys unless you are challenging school policies that perpetuate institutional racism, institutional transphobia, and institutional homophobia simultaneously. You can't fight one issue at a time; all issues are connected. Be vigilant that the cycle of inequity is multilayered for Queer Black boys, and multiple approaches must be taken to address systemic oppressions. (p. 225)

DeShaun cherishes the meaningful bonds that he forged with some of the staff at his school, and even though he had to overcome some difficult times, he wouldn't trade his experience for anything else.

> *I'm grateful for it all—the good, the bad, and the ugly! [laughs] I think it has all made me who I am today. I'm stronger and smarter than I think. My teachers remind me of that every day. I have some good memories at this school, but I'm also ready to get the*

> *hell outta here! [laughs] I can't wait to get out of this close-minded city either. I'm gonna apply for fashion school in the fall, but first I want to work for a year starting my own t-shirt line in order to stack some cash.*

DeShaun's high school experiences have not only helped to shape his character and build his confidence as an individual, but it has also made him aware of his interconnectedness to the entire school community. DeShaun is happy to leave behind his legacy of advocacy; he hopes that the yearly anti-bullying campaigns will continue to cultivate counter-spaces that facilitate critical consciousness in the student body to push back against bullying in all forms.

Meet Regina (assigned Reginald at birth):

Assigned Reginald at birth, Regina's pronouns of choice are she/her/hers. Regina is a 20 year old transgender female who is currently in the process of fully transitioning into a woman. She graduated from Gateway Senior High School two years ago. When I met her, she was modestly dressed: her long sandy-brown braids were pulled together in a side ponytail, and were adorned with gold hair cuffs around several braids throughout her head. She was not wearing any makeup; she was, however, wearing long eyelashes that fluttered every time she blinked her eyes. She has a dark chocolate skin tone, and her complexion is naturally radiant. Her smile was faint, though, and she appeared to be reticent about being interviewed by me. Her sunken eyes made her appear tired and aged, despite her otherwise youthful appearance. I would soon come to realize that the look in Regina's eyes represented wisdom and vitality, indicative of her complicated, yet tenacious set of life experiences. She wore a blue and white striped asymmetrical top with fitted ripped light-denim jeans and black ankle-length leather rider boots. Regina carried a multi-colored hobo bag that appeared to be filled to the brim with belongings.

Her voice was surprisingly soft, nasally, and brittle, and when she spoke you could hear the pain behind her words. Initially, it took a while for Regina to open up enough for me to capture her story, but eventually she felt comfortable enough to express her truth in an authentic and compelling way.

Regina grew up in a single-parent household headed by her mother, with five other siblings of which she is the oldest. Regina notes that she has always felt more mentally and spiritually connected with being a female. Her mother worked three jobs to provide for their family, which left Regina in charge of caring of her siblings much of her adolescent years and the early parts of her teenage years. Regina recalls feeling invisible; her mom was usually too busy to monitor her whereabouts, which left Regina with more freedom than a teenager should have probably had. Since she was always very effeminate growing up, she stated how she really didn't have an official coming-out story—people just knew. She notes how bitter-sweet it was having a mom who, on one end, allowed her to express herself freely, while on the other end, was never really there to help guide her through the rite of passage into womanhood.

> *I guess you can say that I don't have a dramatic coming-out story. I was always very feminine. I always felt like I was a girl deep down inside. When I was younger, I dressed in my mother's clothes and wore her make-up—you know, all the typical trans stuff [laughs]. But I didn't really know what it meant to be a woman. I was figuring it out as I went, and boy let me tell you, my journey was far from smooth. When I began transitioning at the age of 15, I was so wild! I was partying, smoking weed, having sex, ditching school, just everything wrong. I started secretly wearing makeup, weave, and girl clothes behind the scenes—that's when I became Regina. My life got super complicated when my mom got a boyfriend that moved in with us. One day when she was*

at work and my sisters was at my aunt's house, he came into my room in the middle of the night with nothing on but his bath robe after he got out the shower. This fuckin' perv opened his robe and tried to touch me. I screamed, jumped up out of bed, and told him that I would tell my mom, which I did. Let's just say that it didn't go over too well, and that marks the moment when me and my mom fell out. I don't know what that nigga told her, but she took his side and when she came home from work, she beat me with a broom and called me all type of faggots and hos Then, she told me to get my shit and get out of her house.

Regina describes the moment of being put out of her mother's house as the moment when her life began to spiral out of control. Initially, she bounced around to different family members' houses until she turned 17, which is when she began living with an older man she was dating at the time and who took care of her financially.

I met Papa on Facebook. He used to blow up my DMs for so long before I even responded and decided to talk to him. I was 17 and he was 27. He kept telling me how pretty I was and that he wanted to take care of me. I was young and dumb, so I started dating him and eventually moved in with him. He was a drug dealer, so I started selling pills [ecstasy] and weed. I was making some good money and was even able to help take care of my brothers and sisters. It was all good until I became my own customer [laughs]. At one point, I was addicted to pills and purple drank [sic; also known as lean—a mixture of codeine cough syrup, soda, and hard candy]. I was out there bad. I stopped going to school and just lived a party life. Papa was a freak, so we used to have all type of orgies and sex parties. Then it all went south when Papa got sent to the feds

[federal penitentiary] for like 15 years, and I was back on the streets again trying to figure out my life.

Regina disclosed how she often had unprotected sex during many of the sex parties, and ultimately ended up contracting HIV as a result. It was at this point that she felt like her life was over. It wasn't until her HIV counselor introduced her to (who would soon become) her "gay mother" that she began to regain a sense of purpose in life. Gay mothers, who usually are the head of "houses," are an integral part of the gay and ballroom subculture.[1] Houses serve as alternative families, usually for Black and Latino individuals who identify as gay, queer, or gender-nonconforming. These "houses" provide solace, guidance, and safety to youth of color who have been kicked out of their familial homes.

I'm still a proud member of [says House name], headed by Mama Trisha [pseudonym]who saved my life. She took me in when I didn't have nobody and wanted to kill myself, especially when I found out I had HIV. I ain't have no money for prescriptions and thought I was gonna die of AIDS, but she helped me get into a program where I get free medication. Since I met her, I started getting my life back on track because she encouraged me to keep going and not give up. She would say stuff like, 'Your life has purpose ReRe [nickname given by Mama Trisha]; you may not be able to see it right now, but trust me baby, you have the power to change the world, but you gotta believe it for yourself.' I really held on to those words every day and whenever I got down on myself, I knew I could always call Mama Trisha for some good ole' inspiration.

[1] Ballroom culture is a community and network of Black and Latino LGBTQ individuals, who compete in ritualized underground events around gender expression, modeling, dance, and lip-syncing (Kubicek, McNeeley, Holloway, Weiss, & Kipke, 2013).

She is still a part of my life to this day. After joining her house, I enrolled back into school and was able to eventually graduate.

Regina recounts times in her neighborhood where she was the target of homophobic bullying and harassment. One day, a man threated to kill her if she didn't move away from his car. Regina was on her way to meet a friend at a house party:

'We kill faggots like you round here,' he yelled at me from his driver side window. I remember being scared and pissed off at the same time. I usually carried a weapon on me for punks like him, like a knife, mace, or taser, but I had forgot it at home because I was rushing out. The shit never stops. Straight dudes get drunk and just start harassing me for no reason. But if I protect myself, then people still want to blame me as though my existence gives niggas the right to just fuck with me. I'm so sick of it because I really do be just minding my business—I don't fuck with nobody.

Regina goes on to discuss her experiences in high school:

In my junior year in high school, I got jumped twice. I got into a fight with this dude because he kept calling me 'he-she' and 'shim' [derogatory slurs against a transgender people]. Then he went and got his cousins and a couple of his friends and they jumped me twice. At that point, I wasn't even dressing in girl clothes like that. They just wanted to beat me up for no reason, just because they could.

Regina also recaps times when she even overheard some of the security guards and other adults joining in with students to talk about her instead of advocating to put an end to the harassment. This contributed to why Regina dropped out of school for a while; she felt as though everyone was against her, so there was no need to continue putting herself at risk. She noted how she internalized a great deal of external hate, which made her feel like she was the problem. Regina

credits her friends and gay family with helping her get through those rough times. Regina attributes much of the homophobic bullying in the Black community to the pervasive need to valorize violence.

I get it; I was a sissy so naturally I was more of a target. But somebody was always getting they ass whooped—it wasn't just me. And it was both boys and girls fighting like animals. It was just a violent high school; fighting just seemed like a normal way of socializing. It was almost like you was expected to jump somebody. By the end of my freshman year, I had already got jumped three times.

A recurring theme that Regina also describes is the policing of her identity, either by peers who policed her through violence and verbal harassment, or by authority figures who regulated her queerness through surveillance and control (Dwyer, 2008). Regina highlights a time when she came to school dressed in full drag because she was performing in the school-wide talent show. Aside from the verbal taunts from students, school administration tried to force her to change into "appropriate" attire and threatened to suspend her if she didn't because she was "disrupting the learning environment." It became clear to Regina that deviation from heteronormative codes and scripts made her vulnerable to scrutiny at school by both adults and students. As a result, her queer performativity became the subject of vilification and violence in an effort to police proper heteronormative behavior (Dwyer, 2008). Those who deviated from this norm were confronted with the risk of dismissal or expulsion (Lugg, 2006).

Aside from persistent threat of homophobic violence and gender policing, Regina reveals that her most difficult struggle, beginning in high school, was with the work force:

I remember me and my two best friends being super excited about getting jobs at this clothing store at the mall. They advertised on Facebook that they was hiring on the spot.

> *I ended up not going up there with my friends because I had to go to the DMV to get a copy of my state ID first. Getting a copy of my ID also made me nervous about the fact that my ID said male instead of female, so I was already scared that they would discriminate against me. I thought about going as Reginald, but Mama Trisha encouraged me to be true to who I was, so I went as Regina. I walked in and introduced myself to a staff of cisgender females and a guy who was the manager. They looked at me up and down without even glancing at my resume and was just like, 'sorry, all of our positions are filled, but we'll give you a call if something else comes up.' I tried to give them the benefit of the doubt because maybe my two friends, who went a day before me, took the last two positions; then I heard about two other girls from my school getting hired on the spot two days after I went up there.*

This wasn't Regina's first or last rejection when seeking employment. The overt and subtle forms discrimination that she endured encouraged her to start a YouTube vlog to educate and document the hidden (and often ignored!) aspects of trans life, such as harassment in schools and discrimination in the workplace; she also showcases positive aspects of transwomen making positive impacts in their lives and their communities. Through her YouTube vlog, Regina has proven that transgender women can and should be key contributors in the construction of knowledge about their life stories. They are experts about the transgender experience, and blogging is one method by which Regina demonstrates this expertise. Transgendered women are viewed with contempt and disdain in society, and their human dignity is often disregarded (Singh, Hays & Watson, 2011). Regina hopes to change this narrative by dismantling social stigmas about trans life being solely about sex work and drugs. She hopes that her blog affords her an opportunity to be an ambassador or liaison for her community in an effect to change

policy and legislation that prioritizes trans safety in schools and on the street, and also ensures equal access to employment opportunities.

Meet Tremaine:

Tremaine is 19 years old and graduated from Gateway Senior High School in 2019. He identifies his sexual orientation as gay. He is about six feet, two inches tall and has a lean, yet muscular build similar to a basketball player's physique. He has a dark brown complexion, a bulbous nose with a small nose ring, light brown eyes (from contact lenses), a mustache and goatee, and a small curly afro that was well-tapered. Although Tremaine has a deep, raspy voice, he speaks with a prominent lisp that would be considered stereotypically gay. He usually dresses in track suits with sneakers or simply a sweatshirt or polo and ripped jeans. Like many teenagers his age, he seems to prefer the name-brand labels, and primarily wears Nike, Ralph Lauren, True Religion jeans, and the latest Jordan sneakers.

Tremaine grew up in a two-parent household, headed by his mother when his father was on the road driving trucks and not around. Tremaine's mother is a hair stylist, so growing up he was always with her at the salon. Tremaine's mother is also very nurturing—he is a mama's boy. Since he was always with his mom as a child, he became accustomed to doing domestic work (or activities that were stereotypically considered "girl stuff") around the house. Tremaine recounts,

> *I guess you can say I grew up attached to my mother's hip. I literally did everything she did, including the girl stuff, I guess [laughs], like cooking, cleaning, and washing dishes. I was never into sports as a kid, except track. I ran track in middle school, but nothing else really. At home, I always thought I was just helping momma out. I didn't see*

anything wrong with it, and apparently momma didn't either. Momma would blast her old school dusties on the radio every Sundays and we would clean the house together and have fun. That's why my family and friends say I have a old soul—I grew up listening to all the Motown cuts [laughs]. It was just me and my momma for years before my little brother was born, and my father was usually on the road for weeks at a time; he was a truck driver. Whenever he came back home, I still felt like he still wasn't really there. I mean, he was there, but not 'there' for me, I guess. I don't know how to explain it. I mean, we did stuff as a family, but he was usually the one who whooped me or yelled at me when I was bad. He didn't show a lot of emotion, except anger [laughs]; he was good as showing anger, at least toward me. I guess he saw something in me at a young age that he just didn't like.

At the age of six, Tremaine would come to realize that his mother served as a buffer between him and his father. He was about six or seven years old when his father first began making him "man up." Back then, he didn't understand why his father always scolded him for how he talked, walked, and acted, which at times caused tension between his parents.

I had to be about six or seven when it all started to go downhill between me and my dad. I would sometimes overhear him and my momma arguing but at that point in my life I was too young to really understand what was going on. It wasn't until later that I realized that many of their fights was about me because momma would take up for me when he was too hard on me.

When Tremaine was eight, his father retired from truck driving and spent more time at home monitoring his actions. To his dismay, Tremaine was miserable during much of his adolescent and teenage years because he could not escape the iron fist of his father dictating to him how he

should behave overall. Tremaine could not understand how this man, who had been in and out of the house until he was eight, felt that he could all of a sudden regulate his actions and behavior. Tremaine was at peace whenever his father went back on the road for extended periods of time, and he was left with just his younger brother and his mother:

> *I always talked with a heavy lisp. They called me tied-tongue growing up [laughs]. So I always stressed words that had a 's' or the 'sssss' sound [imitating is lisp]. Whenever I did, Dad would just look at me with the stank face and say, 'Stop talkin' like that!' or 'Stop pronouncing those damn esses so hard!' At that point in my life, I thought maybe I really had a speech problem. I didn't realize until later that what my dad was really telling me was, stop sounding so gay! I remember one day in the summer, I was walking back from a friend's house two doors down and my dad got super-duper mad at me and yelled, 'Come back here and walk different!' I was so confused by what he meant, but of course I did what he said, or he would have beat my ass. He made me walk for what felt like an hour in the hot sun, up and down the driveway. I really didn't know how to feel: embarrassed, pissed off, sad? But of course I didn't show any emotion. I just walked my ass up and down that gravel pavement until dad was pleased. I remember going back to my room whenever dad did something like that and thinking: Who the fuck does he think he is telling me how to talk and act now that he's retired? I swear, I wanted him to go back on the road forever and never come back. He used to urk the hell outta me.*

Tremaine's coming-out story is bitter-sweet. Although he always had effeminate mannerism, for some reason he felt as though his parents would remain oblivious to his sexuality if he technically never told them:

> *Silly me, I guess I thought: don't ask, don't tell [laughs]. I figured if I never spoke to them [his parents] about my love life or who I was interested in, then they would just assume that I was still straight.*

He planned on doing just that until his mother "stumbled" upon his secret. One day after rushing out of the house to make it to school on time, Tremaine mistakenly left his phone in his room on the charger. After getting home from school and realizing that his mom went through his phone and read his text messages, Tremaine knew that there was no way his mother didn't know he was gay:

> *At first, when I realized that I left my phone at home, I really didn't think anything of it. I was salty about it at first, mainly because it was my way of texting my friends in class and keepin up with Facebook when my teachers weren't looking, not because I thought my mother would actually go through it and find out I was gay that way. The shit was crazy, but she was a lot cooler about it than I thought. When I got home, she just casually said that my phone had been blowin' up all day and a guy named Rome kept calling and texting. A chill went down my spine, but I tried to play it off as smooth as I could, hoping that she didn't actually answer the phone or go through my text messages because if she did, whew baby, she was gonna be in for a rude awakening! When I got to my room, my worst nightmare came true. There was no notifications on my phone, which means that she read my text messages. All of my damn text messages! I mean, there was all type of nasty shit in my phone—dick pics, ass shots, nasty messages about the different positions that he [Rome] wanted to have sex in. I swear, I wanted to jump out of my bedroom window and kill myself. But I had to play it cool and just act like nothing ever happened.*

But knowing momma, with her nosey ass, I knew she was gonna find a way to bring the shit up somehow.

Ironically, his mom was less impacted by the fact that he was gay, and more concerned with Rome's age because she couldn't understand how a teenager would have so much time throughout the day to call and text if he was supposed to be in school:

She [his mother] was apparently giving me a chance to get myself together because after about fifteen minutes, she crept into my room and was like, 'You got something you wanna tell?' Trying not to blow my cover, I responded, 'Nope, but do you have something you want to tell me?' She told me to stop being a smart ass and confirmed that she did go through my phone. I just stared at her without admitting nothing. She said that she knew I was gay. Then she said that she wasn't totally surprised, but wished that I told her myself. She said that she still loved me no matter what and I would always be her baby. That made me feel better about being gay, but I was still embarrassed by how she found out. Then she quickly changed the conversation to Rome's age. Even though he was twenty one, I lied and said that he was my age and that he missed school that day because he was sick. After that, she asked me all the typical stuff a mother would ask a teenager about dating: was I having sex, was I using condoms, and if I'm the top or bottom [laughs]? She then asked me the question I was most scared about: 'Are you gonna tell your father?' I was like, 'Hecky naw!' I didn't want that smoke at all. We both laughed and agreed that it would probably be best if he didn't know for sure, even though she said that he already had his speculations.

Although Tremaine was sure that his father had already formed his own conclusion about his sexuality, he still felt that a verbal confirmation would send his father into a conniption fit, and he surely did not want to incur his wrath.

In elementary school and around the neighborhood, Tremaine was often taunted and called derogatory names. Tremaine spoke about how when he was younger, he did not truly understand the meaning, impact, and ramifications of such words other than the fact that they must be offensive. Unbeknownst that he was even being bullied, Tremaine's dad reinforced heteronormative scripts and patriarchal codes around how men, particularly Black men, should "perform" and carry themselves in society. Although his father's approach was authoritarian, Tremaine was still ironically compassionate toward him because in retrospect he knew that he ultimately was trying to shield him from the inevitable recourse of being a gay Black male in society:

> *And as bad as it may sound, the older I got the more I realized that my dad was probably just tryna prepare me for what to expect in this fucked up world being Black and gay, even if his way of doin' it was fucked up [laughs]. I don't hate my dad. I can't stand him sometimes, but I definitely don't hate him, and I know he loves me. He was just raised different, you know?*

It was difficult for Tremaine to make friends in elementary school due to bullying related to identity stereotypes that others held and projected onto him. He learned early on the consequences for transgressing those stereotypes through taunting from peers who attempted to police his gender and sexuality:

> *I got called faggot, fag, sissy, and Froot Loop so much that I was about to change my middle name to one of them [laughs]. From 3rd to the beginning of 7th grade, my mom*

used to dress me real preppy; you know, polos, khakis, Sperrys, button down shirts, and turtlenecks. I don't know, I was really into looking fresh as a kid—I loved it, but my classmates didn't. They was just a bunch of haters because they was dusty [laughs]. I used to get bullied for how I dressed and how I talked. I mean, the girls was cool and they loved me. But the dudes couldn't stand all the attention I got from the ladies, even though I didn't want them. I never hung out with guys; I guess I just didn't have nothing in common with them. I would come home with scratches and bruises from getting jumped on or smacked around by guys in the locker room. I never tricked because it woulda made it worse, but some of my female friends used to tell teachers, but they ain't never do shit. My momma used to ask questions about the bruises, but of course I lied and just said stuff like I fell during gym or ran into a wall or something. She only believed that for a minute. So, it's like, after a while, my momma started telling me, you know what, if the school ain't doing nothing about it, you gotta do something yourself. She told me to stand up for myself and if the school called her, she would handle it and let them know that if they not gonna do nothing about it, then damn right my son is gonna fight back. So after that, I got into about three fights and then they stopped fucking with me.

Queer students are often aware of teachers' apathy in intervening when homophobic bullying or violence occurs at school (Diaz & Kosciw, 2009; Kosciw, Greytak, Palmer & Bosen, 2014). Adult silence usually results in queer youth not relying on them for support or intervention (Pritchard, 2013); instead they assert themselves by strategizing for their own survival and developing defensive coping tactics, which further perpetuate the cycle of violence that they

experience at home and in their communities (Snapp, Hoenig, Fields & Russell, 2015; Mayo, 2009).

It wasn't until Tremaine got to high school that he was fortunate enough to find a group of male friends who did not taunt or bully him and seemed to appreciate his friendship. It was refreshing for Tremaine to have straight male friends because he typically just hung out with females. These guys mostly consisted of gamers and chess players because those were the two clubs that Tremaine joined once he got to high school. He also joined the track team, and to his dismay, he had the opposite experience with his teammates; yet again, he was forced to follow gender and heteronormative scripts that were regularly reinforced by his teammate and even the coach. Even though he performed well on the field, Tremaine felt outcast and ostracized by his teammates because of how he carried himself. Tremaine recounts how:

> *The coach pulled me to the side one day after practice and basically told me that I make the other guys uncomfortable in the locker room because of how I act, and asked me if I could tone it down a bit. I was so confused because I couldn't think of anything that I did to any of them to make them feel like that. I swear I used to think something was wrong with me. I just couldn't understand why boys felt some type of way around me no matter how macho I acted. I mean, it's not like I was coming on to them or something. So after that season, I just quit and said fuck it.*

After he quit the track team, Tremaine began to explore his sexual desires for males. Ironically, during this time of exploration, he ended up secretly being sexually intimate with one of his former track teammates who was on the down-low. Although Tremaine was not out of the closet yet himself, Tremaine soon learned the dangers of dealing with guys who were insecure with their sexualities. One day Tremaine and the young man were hanging out in the neighborhood

park and were spotted by two guys on the track team. Apparently nervous about how the other guys would perceive their relationship, the young man went back to school the next day and spread rumors that Tremaine was gay and tried to come on to him. Tremaine's best friends were ready to fight the young man for spreading lies about him, but Tremaine talked them out of it because he was afraid that if they found out the truth, they may not accept him. It wasn't until his sophomore year, when Tremaine started dating another guy from the school—and was late from engaging in sexual activities with him in the basement of the school—that he was forced to disclose his sexual orientation to his friends after they questioned him on his whereabouts because he was late for chess club.

> *I walked in and they started talking shit about me being late because we had a tournament in a couple days. They was like, 'Where were you?' I was like 'My bad I lost track of time when I grabbed lunch from the Chinese restaurant.' They asked what I ate, and I told them my usual: the lunch special orange chicken with shrimp fried rice. This, of course, was a setup because my silly ass forgot that the Chinese restaurant was closed for remodeling, so of course they caught on to my lie. They started crackin' up and was like, 'Tremaine, tell us the truth, dude.' I was like, ok but first I need to let y'all know that I'm gay, I like dudes. I was so scared waiting for their reaction and was surprised when they all started laughing again. They was all like, 'We knew it! I told you!' I didn't think they would be so cool about it. Then they surprised me when they said, 'Dude we don't care cause at the end of the day you gonna be our nigga for life.' I felt so much relief, like a ton of bricks was lifted off me.*

Tremaine cherished his network of friends because their social bond is what helped him navigate through his high school years. No matter what, Tremaine could rely on these individuals for

moral support or upliftment. Whether it was issues with bullying, academics, or simply social-emotion support, Tremaine credited his friendship circle for being his encouragement when he needed to vent about gay issues, or just issues with life in general.

Meet Jabari:

Jabari is an 18 year old senior at Gateway Senior High School who identifies as bisexual. He classifies himself as discreet, but not down-low. He doesn't broadcast or flaunt his sexuality, but he also made it clear that he is not ashamed of his identity. Jabari is six feet, three inches tall with a lean, muscular frame. He typically wears basic athletic attire: white t-shirt with a black Nike backpack that he rarely took off, navy blue, black, or gray sweatpants, and Air Jordan 11 Retro sneakers or some other model of Jordan shoes. He has a golden-brown complexion with thick eyebrows, a chiseled jawline, a thin well-tapered mustache, and a faint goatee. Jabari's high cheekbones made his crescent-shaped eyes appear smaller than they actually were. There is nothing about Jabari's personality or mannerisms that are stereotypically queer. He is a member of the basketball team and is popular with male and female students. Much of his struggle as a member of the LGBTQ community is internal and stems from his inability to confront, acknowledge, and reconcile his romantic feelings toward both males and females.

Jabari lives in a single-parent household with just his mother ever since his father passed of a heart attack when he was 12. The thirteen year age gap between him and his sister has put her in a position to play many roles in Jabari's life: best friend, confidante, and cool mom figure. Jabari and his mom also have a very close relationship, and he has always felt like he could talk to her about anything, including intimate matters such as sex. Jabari first began to explore his sexuality at the age of 11 when he got his first girlfriend in middle school. He began

experimenting sexually with her in eighth grade. At that time, Jabari felt like he was in love. She was a smart, sweet girl and their families had been attending the same church since they were babies. Jabari has been a basketball player and an honor roll student throughout most of his schooling. He is desired by the young ladies in his neighborhood and at school, but he is very selective about the girls that he dated, and often receives scrutiny from his mom and his sister if they feel like a particular girl is not "good" enough for him. Teachers and staff love him, and he is admired in the neighborhood for being a wholesome young man.

When Jabari was 14 years old, he received a scholarship to attend an elite basketball summer camp. This two-week program took place every July, and Jabari was pretty much a shoe-in each year. While there, Jabari became especially close with one of the other campers named Gavin. They were bunkmates every year during basketball camp and mainly connected around sports, video games, girls, and music:

> *Gavin was cool as hell. Every day after practice was over, we would just go back to the room and play video games and talk shit about sports and girls. Every year, we both came back to camp and roomed together; we grew closer and closer. Our conversation started to get deeper and deeper; pretty soon I found out that he was adopted, and both of his parents was dead. Man, he told me some pretty heavy shit, but that was my nigga. One day while we was playing video games in the room, Gavin pulled out his phone and told me he needed to show me something. He opened his phone and started playing a video of a girl giving him head. I immediately was like, dude, why you showing me that gay shit? We both started laughing and he asked me if I ever got head before. I was like, yeah, but never recorded it. After that, he would do lil [sic; little] suspect stuff like that, but I didn't really think too much of it; I would just laugh it off. Another time was when I*

woke up in the middle of the night to use the bathroom, and he was watching porn on his phone and jaggin' off [sic; masturbating] in the bottom bunk. He just looked at me and started laughing, but he didn't stop.

Before those events, Jabari never gave much thought to what it meant to be gay or bisexual. It took another year, and another encounter with a childhood friend in his neighborhood before he even entertained the idea that he might be bisexual. Unlike many gay or bisexual individuals, Jabari did not feel like he was born this way. Sometimes he still questions whether he really likes guys or if his experience with Gavin was just an isolated instance of boys being boys—experimenting with sexuality and the depths of friendship. During his junior year, Jabari began exploring a relationship with a childhood friend. This guy was on the down-low and they mainly masturbated and occasionally performed oral sex on one another. During one of their sexual encounters in his garage, Jabari's friend told him that he wanted to engage in intercourse, which was the first time that Jabari penetrated a guy. This was the moment that Jabari realized that he liked guys just as much as he liked girls. However, he made it clear that he's selective about the "type" of guys that he likes:

I'm still figuring it out. I mean, I like some guys, but I have to admit that I don't like the feminine ones. I like dudes that act like dudes, you know. If I wanted a girl, I would be with one. I mean, I still like girls, so guys that act like girls just don't do it for me.

Following that experience, Jabari describes a situation that occurred after he disclosed his sexual orientation to one of his teammates at school, who was also a close friend. One day while they were smoking weed, his friend got high and began telling him how much he respected and admired him because he had just made honor roll and won MVP on the team:

We was high as hell [laughs]. He was like, 'Man you my boy for life, my ace. I ain't never had nobody to have my back like you. I got so much respect for you, man.' I was like, 'Oh word? Well, what could make you lose respect for me?' He was like, 'Huh? Nothing bro! You a real ass nigga.' Then I asked, 'Well, what if I told you I was bisexual? Would that change your mind?' So anyway, he was like, 'Wait, hold up bro, are you?' I replied, 'Yeah bro, I am.' He claimed he didn't care about that and would never judge me, and that I would be his homie for life. Things got weird after that because he avoided me for a couple days. When we finally talked, he told me that he needed some time to think because me coming out to him made him uncomfortable, and he thought I was coming on to him; he said that he didn't understand why I was bisexual when every girl wanted me, but he claimed he wouldn't tell nobody.

To Jabari's dismay, his friend told everybody: teammates, classmates, mutual friends, and even their coach. It was an unspoken scandal at school, but Jabari did not feel like it was malicious on his friend's part, however. He felt that his friend was confused and probably just wanted to see other people's reactions before he could internalize being friends with a bisexual person. This caused a huge rift in their relationship and they grew distant. A few months later, his friend called and apologized to him; Jabari accepted his apology and was appreciative of the gesture, but the damage was already done. During this time, Jabari knew that it would eventually get around to his mother and sister, so he needed to figure out a way to tell them before the rumor mill reached them.

Since Jabari was young, his mother had always openly encouraged him to be true to himself and embrace who he authentically was; nevertheless, he still wanted to tell his sister first. He braced himself for a negative response, but he was stunned when she said,

> *'You're my baby bro, my heart. And if you ever thought that I would have a problem with you living your truth, you're crazy. And you're hearing that directly from me! The only thing I ask is that if you decide to start a life with a girl, please be honest with her because you never want to take away her freedom to choose.'*

This affirmation gave Jabari the confidence to accept himself and tell his mother. His mother was the most progressive and supportive of his sexuality, but she was more concerned with society's perception of Jabari and how he would be treated as a result. Also, Jabari's mother made comments that influenced him into thinking that bisexuality meant having a wife or girlfriend and a guy on the side. In other words, she endorsed the notion that bisexual men live a DL lifestyle. Jabari later realized that his mother's mindset stemmed from the fact that his sister was once in a committed relationship with a man who cheated on her with another man. These experiences, coupled Jabari's viewing of television and films such as *The DL Chronicles* and *Brokeback Mountain*, helped to reinforce and shape his sense of identity pertaining to his sexual orientation.

Jabari's masculinity affords him the privilege of "passing" as heterosexual in homonegative spaces, even when his secret was well-known throughout campus. As a result, he avoids becoming a victim of homophobic violence due to his sexual orientation. He did, however, bear witness to several instances of straight male students harassing both gay students and individuals who were perceived as being gay at school:

> *They [classmates] always had something to say about anybody that wasn't super masculine. They would say shit like, 'Look at that booty-bandit over there' or 'His sweet ass!' But these were some of the same mothafuckas that would secretly try to get up with me [sic; come on to him] on the low.*

Jabari's initial passive acquiescence as a bystander made him realize that he was a part of the problem. As a graduating senior, Jabari has matured mentally and spiritually, and doesn't seem to be as concerned about people using his sexuality as a weapon against him. Although it has been a difficult journey with negotiating and reconciling his sexual identity in high school, Jabari plans to use his college experience as a fresh start with being his authentic self. He is excited about securing a basketball scholarship at a Midwest college, but he also recognizes the toxic masculine sports culture that he is stepping into. And, while he doesn't plan to flaunt his bisexuality, he also made it clear that he will not be ashamed about speaking up and being an advocate when he needs to.

Meet Kelsin:

Kelsin is an 18 year old Black male who identifies as gay. He is a senior at Gateway Senior High School, and has attended the school all four years. He is a trim five feet, eight inches tall with golden-brown skin, a light mustache, and no other facial hair. He wears dreadlocks that hang shoulder length and are typically very well managed. The ends of his locks are dyed an auburn/copper color. He has large, almond shaped eyes that are a sparkling light brown color, especially when the light hits them. He is thin-framed, weighing approximately 150 pounds, and his clothing style is similar to that of a casual skateboarder; he is often seen in skinny jeans or khakis, flat-soled shoes (usually Vans or Chuck Taylor Converse), and a somewhat fitted t-shirt in either a bright or neutral color. Kelsin seems to be a pretty reserved guy and had difficulty maintaining eye contact when he was engaged in conversation with someone. He grew up in a single-parent household, headed by his grandmother and is an only child by his mother and father. Kelsin's grandfather died when he was just two years old, so he didn't remember much

about him—outside of the hilarious stories that his grandmother told about him—but Kelsin could tell that he would have loved his grandfather, and oddly enough, sometimes yearned for his presence in his life.

He and his grandmother live in a two bedroom apartment in one of the local housing projects in the inner city. Kelsin considers himself to be religious (Christian Baptist) by default from growing up with his grandmother. He discussed that when he came out to his grandmother at the age of 16, she simply told him that she already knew and didn't really say much more about his sexual orientation after that. Kelsin noted that his grandmother's indifference toward his lifestyle really bothered him the most:

> *I still remember the day; it was a Sunday afternoon after church. My grammy was cooking Sunday dinner like she always did after church. I had rehearsed my coming out speech over and over, and in my sixteen-year-old mind I thought it would be more dramatic than it was. Instead, my grammy was just like, 'Oh, so you gay now, huh?' I was like, 'Yeah grammy. I like guys' Then she simply replied like, 'Hmm, ok then,' and went back to cooking Sunday dinner without another word. I guess I wanted her to hug me and tell him that everything was gonna be ok, and that she loved and supported me no matter what. Even if she did the opposite and cursed me out and told me that I was going to hell with a gasoline suit on, I would have been more at ease. Either way, I needed something more from the woman that I loved the most in this world and the one person who opinion actually mattered. What I got was just blah.*

Although Kelsin hasn't been to church in over two years, he recalls how uncomfortable he was whenever the pastor talked about homosexuality being a sin in his sermons (which he

often did!), and how his grandmother would just glance awkwardly across the pew at him whenever it came up:

I just got tired of all the BS! I stopped going to church because I just figured if God hates me so much, then what am I wasting my time praising him for? I just got exhausted with tryna figure out how God created me like this and then turned his back on me. And grammy didn't make it no better—always looking crazy whenever the pastor talked about it. It was almost like he was saying what she really wanted to, but couldn't because she loved me.

While his grandmother never directly condemned his lifestyle, she also never outwardly supported him or even tried to protect him from the negative influences and discrimination from people around him, including his own mother.

Kelsin's mother—who struggled with drug addiction his entire life (and the reason he was raised by his grandmother)—took the news of him being gay the hardest. Kelsin noted that he couldn't understand how the woman who abandoned and betrayed him could be so adamantly against his lifestyle choice:

My mother used to blow [sic; annoy; irritate] the fuck outta me. She was a crack head my whole life and the one time when I needed her support, she tries to lecture me about the way I'm living. Bitch, you a crackhead! She even let out some fake ass tears, talkin' bout I needed to change my life and repent so that I can enter the gates of Heaven. I'm like, this must be the drugs talking. Where was those tears when you was in and out of rehab or stealing from grammy to buy some dope? Girl bye! Save that lecture for the person that looks back at you in the mirror.

Or perhaps, Kelsin proclaimed, maybe it was the absence of his parents that contributed to him taking the path toward homosexuality:

> *Sometimes I used to sit up and think: maybe I'm fucked up because my parents were not in my life. After watching shows like Dr. Phil, I would start thinking about what my life would be like if both my parents was in my life. You hear all these stories about Black men and what happens when they father is not around. Then it starts making me question myself, like: Would I be gay if my daddy was around? Am I gay because I'm looking for a man to fill my daddy's shoes? Is my life in some way fucked up because of my parents are both fucked up? I just be thinkin'.*

He spoke of being confused and even angry with himself for being homosexual. Kelsin claimed that his mother's opinion really didn't bother him (although his body language and trembling voice when discussing it said otherwise) and that his reason for telling her was simply because he knew that eventually his grandmother would, so he preferred that it came from him first. He disclosed that his mother's reasoning for being against his sexual orientation was strictly religious: it's sinful. She often quoted bible verses to back up her emotional rants whenever she came over to the house to ask his grandmother for money to support her drug habit. He and his mother's relationship remains tenuous due to her inability to accept his lifestyle, as well as her other struggles with substance abuse.

On the other hand, Kelsin revealed that even though his father was absent from his life, they had a "good" relationship. His father, who at one point was also addicted to drugs in his childhood, has since become a recovering addict who remarried and had two other children with his new wife. He lived in an adjacent city, and while they were relatively close in distance, Kelsin only saw him a handful of times every year. Kelsin described how the disclosure of his

sexuality to his father was accidental. On his seventeenth birthday, his father came to visit him, and they went for a drive. At the top of a hill in their neighborhood, his father stopped the car, looked at him in his eyes, and told him that he knew he was gay:

> *He [his father] was acting weird all day. It was my birthday and I was turning seventeen, but he was so pressed about us taking a drive and having a father-son talk. I was hoping that he was just saying that to surprise me with a new car at the top of the hill. Instead, he drives me around the neighborhood talking about stuff that we had discussed a thousand times before. He finally drives me up the hill with all the fancy houses and pulls over and parks the car. I remember being confused. He looks over at me and say, 'Look, Son, I love you and I want you to always feel like you can talk to me about anything. I know you gay, and although I don't necessarily understand how this happened, I want you to know that you will me by son no matter what and I love you.' I just stared at him. My first reaction was to deny it, but I knew that my mother had already told him. I just said, 'ok' and that was that. He gave me a pat on the shoulder, cranked the car back up and headed back toward grammy's house. It was silent and awkward in the car the entire drive back, except for a few times my dad reminisced by telling stories about his childhood as we passed certain spots in his old neighborhood.*

Kelsin stated that he pretty much stays to himself, and spends most of his time outside of school working at a local supermarket. He remembers times when kids in his housing project would mumble derogatory things under their breath just loud enough for him to hear, and then burst out in laughter whenever he walked through the courtyard of his housing unit where kids often hung out. Kelsin recalled a time when he was 14, one of his neighbors [nickname Rock], who was a known drug dealer and was in and out of the juvenile detention center, spit on him and called

him a faggot in front of a group of his peers. He stated that the kid told him that the only reason why he didn't put him in the hospital was because he respected Kelsin's grandmother too much to actually "fuck him up." Nevertheless, he made sure to let Kelsin know every time he saw him that his "type" was not welcome in "his" projects.

> *That nigga [referring to Rock] used to just fuck with me for no reason. I hated walking through the courtyard every day. And no matter what time I came home, he was always out there; I couldn't shake his ass. I knew I would get it bad if he had an audience. He would say shit like, 'Oh look y'all, the faggot ass nigga is home. Look what he got on today. I should beat yo' ass, but you lucky I love yo' grandma, pussy boy. If you come through here walking like a sissy again, Imma break yo mothafuckin legs and put you in the hospital. These my projects, nigga!' Before I knew it, this nigga just up and spit right in my eye. Of course all of the niggas around him start crackin up, but I just kept walking. It was weird to me because some of the dudes who laughed with him was actually cool with me when he wasn't around. But everybody was scared of Rock, so I guess I kinda understood why they did it. I never got mad at 'em and whenever I kicked it one-on-one with them, I never even brought it up. It was like I tried to wipe the memory from my mind and just change my swag so that hopefully he wouldn't fuck with me no more.*

Remembering what his father had said, Kelsin interpreted these messages as a disdain for the effeminate, and so he tried to mask any outward display of femininity, and sought to change his "swag," in hopes that if he acted more masculine, he would be less prone to be targeted with homophobic violence.

Kelsin revealed that he got some relief from Rock later that summer when he went to jail for drug and gun possession, and since he had turned seventeen that spring, they tried him as an adult and he receive three years in state prison. Although Kelsin wasn't happy about seeing Rock waste his life being locked away, a part of him was elated at the fact that he wouldn't have to worry about being terrorized by him for a while. Interestingly enough, when Rock was released, Kelsin's first interaction with him was at the grocery store where he worked. Kelsin recaps the story:

> *I was at work minding my business, when all of a sudden I look up and see this nigga turn the corner of the can good isle where I was restocking the shelves. It was like I saw a ghost when we finally made eye contact. But to my surprise, he walked up to me with this goofy ass smile on his face and gave me dap [sic; a handshake typically done by Black men as a form of greeting a friend]. He asked how I had been and how was my grandma. I was in complete shock as I stuttered to get words out. I wasn't sure if this was a trick and he was gonna slap the shit out of me next, but he just acted like nothin' happened, like he didn't use to fuck with me and bully me all the time. I don't know, maybe prison changed him, but I shole [sic; sure] hoped that this new Rock was here to stay.*

Kelsin explained how they even exchanged phone numbers and Rock started texting him randomly asking if his job was hiring and if they hired felons. Kelsin spoke to his manager and indeed they were a felon-friendly organization, so Kelsin put in a good word and helped to get Rock a job in shipping and receiving. As a "thank you" to Kelsin, Rock invited him to smoke some weed one night at his apartment while his mother was gone to work. Reluctantly, Kelsin obliged, still stunned at this new-found friendship that he forged with his former nemesis. Kelsin noted how Rock was shirtless when he walked in, wearing just basketball shorts and flip flops.

He finally apologized about terrorizing Kelsin all those years ago, citing that he was in a "fucked up head space." By the end of the night after smoking about three blunts, Kelsin recalls how he made a sexual advance at him, resulting in Kelsin performing oral sex on Rock. This was Kelsin's first sexual experience with a male.

Since many of the same kids that were in Kelsin's housing project also attended school with him, he experienced some of the same homophobic violence in elementary school that he did in his neighborhood community. The trauma that he endured in elementary school, according to Kelsin, is something that he actively tries to suppress. He said that he just faded into the background and felt like he had no allies to help him navigate his experiences, curtail the bullying, or help him understand how to cope with being Black and gay. Teachers in his elementary school turned a blind eye to bullying and homophobic violence, so he figured that the less he said or did, the less visible he would become; then maybe people would forget that he even existed and leave him alone. His saving grace was middle school. Before transitioning from elementary school, was presented with an opportunity to test into the only selective enrollment middle school in the city; it was a math and science academy and he was one of only three students from his elementary school to get accepted:

> *Thank God for my middle school experience. Thank God I was able to get away from all the hoodlums because that's where I really got a chance to find myself. When you grow up Black, a little feminine, and confused about your sexuality, people keep telling you what you can and cannot do, or who you should be and how you should act. I spent a lot of time un-learning all those stereotypes and giving myself permission to be me and be great…you know, listening to my own voice and…umm… realizing that I'm not the problem…and that…umm…I have a lot of potential.*

Kelsin transitioned back to a predominantly Black setting when he entered high school, which was also a culture shock for him. Unlike in middle school, his race became a secondary part of his identity, and his sexuality became the focus of attention and ridicule. Kelsin was, however, able to find clique of good friend, as he was active in the arts program and chorus; therefore, many of his friends were artsy and eclectic students who were open-minded and liberal. Many people enjoyed being around Kelsin because of his calm, cool, level-headed demeanor. He and one of his close friends, who was also gay, would discuss life and those in school who they suspected was gay. Kelsin credits his friendship circle as a strong source of support against the inevitable bullying that he thought he escaped in elementary school. One day, when confronted with an episode of homophobic bullying, Kelsin finally asserted himself because he was tired of being the object of ridicule:

> *One time in my sophomore year this dude tried to front on me [sic; challenge, bully] in front of the whole cafeteria, and I was just fed up with his bullshit. He was all loud in front of everybody like, 'Yo, y'all look at this faggot ass nigga.' Before I knew it I was like, 'Yeah, I'm a faggot, but yo brother shole [sic; sure] love it when I suck him up, and you would love this mouth too. I can take you in the bathroom now and show you if you want me to.' He was speechless and so was the other dudes in the cafeteria. This seemed to be the moment when dudes decided to stop fucking with me. My junior and senior year was a lot more peaceful than my freshman and sophomore year.*

At this point in his schooling experience, Kelsin relied on two important outlets to help him navigate his experience as a gay Black male in high school: his chorus teacher and his weekly blog. His chorus teacher, who is a straight cisgender man, encouraged Kelsin to write about his experiences through blogging. Kelsin found this experience of venting, connecting, and

networking with other guys online to be rewarding and cathartic. His penname provided enough anonymity where he could truly express and be himself without a real threat of recourse. Kelsin feels validated and empowered knowing that telling his story can help save someone's life. He has received positive feedback (and quite a bit of negative feedback) on his blog so far, but still he forges ahead; he hopes to eventually write a best-selling novel one day about a gay romantic love story.

CHAPTER 5: THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Introduction

This chapter presents findings from five participants based on the phenomenological interviewing method (Seidman, 2013). After transcribing, analyzing, and coding participants' responses from three rounds of interviews (fifteen total), four themes emerged from the data: (1) *triple consciousness*, (2) *toils of greed, anger and foolishness*, (3) *human revolution* and *value-creative happiness,* and (4) *spiritual eroticism* (see Table 1: Themes). These themes are explored in relation to how they have impacted the lifeworld of participants within the institutions of family, church, and media (social media/television/film) and their subsequent impact on the schooling experiences of queer Black boys.

Many of the themes emerged in triads: the concept of triple consciousness arose from the investigation of the *racial, gender*, and *sexual* identities of my participants based on their engagement in social institutions; the notion of human revolution was employed to analyze the participants' embodiment of *wisdom, courage*, and *compassion* when navigating their experiences as queer individuals in school and at home; and value-creation sought to theorize how the participants internalize *beauty, gain*, and *good* in order to create happiness from seemingly bleak circumstances. This section concludes by exploring the possibility of a nuanced epistemology of Black queer liberation, which I call *spiritual eroticism*. A brief synopsis of each of the aforementioned theme is outlined below in Table 1: Themes.

Table 1: Themes

Triple Consciousness	This is a term that I adapted from W.E.B. Dubois's (1903/2007) concept of "double consciousness," referring to the internal conflict that African Americans endure in trying to reconcile an authentic Black identity in an oppressive society. This "twoness," according to Dubois, occurs because Black people

	are always looking at themselves through the lens of "others" (White society) who view them with disdain and pity. In addition to the aforementioned double consciousness, I address a third consciousness in this study—a *queer consciousness*—which emerged from the data and had a deleterious impact on the psyche of participants due to their intersecting identities of being Black, male, Christian, and queer in society.
Toils of Greed, Anger, and Foolishness	The findings suggest that the "three poisons" (Urbain, 2010) of *greed, anger*, and *foolishness* were at the crux of the participants' suffering and unhappiness as queer individuals, either through the direct consequence of their destructive behavior or as a result of the homophobic harassment from others who disregarded their human dignity.
Human Revolution	Although all participants experienced some level of discrimination and bullying, they refused to succumb to victimization. Ikeda's *human revolution* helps to elucidate the participants' embodiment of wisdom, courage, and compassion in an effort to successfully affirm themselves and their identities, as well as the human dignity of those around them. Ikeda (2010c) defines these three characteristics as follows: • The ***wisdom*** to perceive the interconnectedness of all life and living. • The ***courage*** not to fear or deny difference; but to respect and strive to understand people of different cultures, and to grow from encounters with them. • The ***compassion*** to maintain an imaginative empathy that reaches beyond one's immediate surroundings and extends to those suffering in distant places. (p. 55; see Goulah, 2021)
Value-Creation	Participants refused to internalize society's negative stereotypes and disparaging narratives about queer Black males. Using Makiguchi's (1930; reference in Goulah, 2013) notion of value-creation (aesthetic beauty, individual gain, and communal good) as a theoretical framework, I address how the participants, instead, created positive value from their educational and life experiences, which has helped them shape their reality toward a more fulfilled and ultimately happier life.

Spiritual Eroticism	Seeking freedom from anti-queer Christian discourse on sexuality, the participants embodied a thematic concept that I call *spiritual eroticism*—a subversive strategy utilized by queer individuals to challenges the dichotomy between the spiritual and the political (mind/body) through erotic play, primarily as an alternate way of interpreting their queer sexual desires and practices; this theme helped the participants re-imagine the very basis of their knowledge construction and positionality in society.

Theme #1: Triple Consciousness

Using W.E.B. Dubois' (1903/2007) notion of "double consciousness," in which Black people struggle to find an authentic "self" amidst an anti-Black society, I posit that queer Black males experience a third consciousness—a queer consciousness—that adds another complex dimension to the discourse on race and gender. With this *triple consciousness*, queer Black boys struggle to reconcile the tensions between two cultural groups—the gay community and the Black community—in an effort to understand masculinity in America.

The intersecting identities associated with being Black, male, and queer can sometimes cause friction in terms of how one chooses to represent oneself. In a study conducted by Marcus Anthony Hunter (2010), Black men who identified as gay were asked to define themselves based on race and sexuality. Hunter found that the men in his study classified themselves in three distinct group: 1) those who prioritized neither race nor sexuality, 2) others who led with either their racial (most participants) or sexual identity, and 3) individuals who noted that it depended on the circumstance, situation, and people involved. One participant explains:

> I am Black first and always. That's what people see, and that's what I deal with. The gay thing is something else. It's not that I locate it elsewhere, or don't identify with it. But I choose Black first. Gay is an action, and Black is a way of life. (p. 87)

Another participant, on the other hand, proclaimed that he is gay first and Black secondary: "We don't get anywhere because some dudes can't admit that they are gay…that they like men…so I see myself as pushing that when I tell people that I think of myself as gay before Black" (p. 88). These conflicting sentiments demonstrate how deeply entrenched White racism and heteronormativity function in society to manipulate how sexual minorities identify themselves along with the social norms and gender scripts that they choose to uphold.

All five participants in my study grew up in a predominantly Black community in the Midwest, and all of them attended Black-majority schools in the same district (except Kelsin for middle school). Since this community has a legacy and history of producing prominent Black athletes and political activists, there is a resounding sense of pride within the constituents, despite the fact that the poverty rate is a staggering 38% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). The participants involved in my study recall being immersed in a rich culture that promoted Blackness within their community and within the school system, where majority of their teachers were also Black. One of the participants—DeShaun—noted that "It was like Black History Month all the time." Although these positive images of Black figures were imprinted in their minds, participants also had to contend with the pejorative representations of Blackness within their community. Counter-images, such as absentee fathers, felons, prostitutes, crack addicts, drug dealers, and high school dropouts were major points of contention within the community; nevertheless, according to the participants, there was no

other image more egregious, more threatening, or more insulting to the Black community than a *homosexual* Black man. Williams (1997) writes,

> Black queers betray the quest for healthy black families, a regulated and normalized black sexuality. Whether viewed as a product of broken families or betrayers of family life together, black gays and lesbians are a potential anathema to straight African Americans whose resistance to racist narratives inspires them to "clean up" images of black sexuality. (p. 145)

Participants understood the repercussions of not adhering to this dogmatic belief; yet, this ideology was so pervasive within their community that nearly all participants' identities—except Jabari who could "pass" as straight in anti-queer spaces—were policed in an effort to regulate their behavior and reinforce heteronormativity. Consequently, participants developed a *triple consciousness* that they believed was antithetical to their Black identity; this multi-consciousness was often in response to the homophobic violence inflicted upon them.

Even in social spaces that were majority Black, queer participants did not have the privilege of bracketing their race in order to reconcile sexual identity issues, a concept that Bartone (2020) refers to as racial shelving; their racial identity, instead, became the very grounds for invalidating their sexual desires. The misconception that homosexuality is a "White man's disease" became the motive that participants' family members and peers used to admonish their choice to deviate from heteronormative codes. The findings suggest that participants who embody a *triple consciousness* become hyper-aware of their Blackness, and in return experience cognitive dissonance in an attempt to reconcile their sexual orientation alongside their Black identity.

DeShaun's homophobic father made it clear that there was no place for homosexuality in the Black community:

> *My dad just couldn't understand how Black men could be gay. He took pride in being Black and after I came out, he would make slick comments about how being gay was 'White people shit' as though it was a disease or something. He would tell me how gay people in Jamaica would get chopped up with a machete or burned to death, and nothing would be done to the people who did it. I guess you can say that before I came out, being a Black dude was something to be proud of, but after coming out, me being a Black gay dude was almost a crime.*

A major reason why homosexuality is seen as a threat to the existence of the Black heterosexual family is because non-heterosexual coupling does not, in and of itself, produce children (Douglas, 2003). The underlying belief that homosexuality is genocidal for the Black race is imbued with several assumptions. First, it assumes that if homosexuality is not eradicated, then all Black women and men will become gay; secondly, it assumes that Black gay and lesbian couples do not have children and cannot contribute to the stability of the Black family unit, both of which are inherently fallacious and ridden with heterosexist patriarchal ideology. There are even Black thinkers and scholars who have perpetuated harmful rhetoric that credits homosexuality as the reason for the disintegration and decaying Black family structure, namely Black sociologists Nathan and Julia Hare in their 1984 book, *The Endangered Black Family.*

Unlike DeShaun's father, Kelsin's dad expressed his acceptance of his son's sexuality, but with the caveat that Kelsin must uphold the illusion of Black masculinity. In other words, Kelsin had to embody a machismo attitude in order for his sexuality to earn approval because, according to his dad, that was the only acceptable (and honorable) way in which Black men

should carry themselves. Kelsin recalled how his father had no qualms making ignorant comments about flamboyant gays whenever he saw them on television, in a grocery store, or anywhere else, for that matter. Whenever a feminine gay men were in their presence, Kelsin's dad would tell him not be one of the "those" gays and that he was first and foremost a Black man.

> *'You see that shit, Kel?,' he [his father] would say. 'That don't make no damn sense! [referring to a flamboyant gay guy]. Now I understand that what you do in your own bedroom is your business, but don't throw that shit in everybody else face. We don't want to see that faggot ass shit around our kids and stuff. The shit's disgusting. Promise me this son: be a man first, a proud, strong Black man. Leave that sissy shit for them Saltines' [derogatory name for white people, as in "cracker"]. He was just ignorant and didn't give a fuck and apparently didn't care about how it made me feel either. I wasn't really pressed about it at first because I never identified with the flamin' type of gays anyway. I consider myself a pretty chill, regular dude and don't want my sexuality blasted all over my face for the world to see anyway [shrugs shoulders].*

Bolstering the belief that homosexuality is a threat to Black masculinity is an argument that jeopardizes the stability of the Black family and consequently endangers the fragility of Black manhood (Douglas, 2003). For Kelsin's father, race became the mitigating factor that dictated whether one's behavior was socially and culturally acceptable.

Not only did Kelsin's sexuality provide a lens through which to understand his *triple consciousness*, but his experiences of feeling targeted by White teachers in middle school also made him keenly aware of his Black male identity:

> *All the Black kids had to get bussed to my middle school because it was kinda outside of our neighborhood and up the hill with all the upper-class folks. In middle school I started to love art, so I used to draw a lot. Me and one of my White friends, Aiden, both loved to draw. But a lot of times when we was in class, Ms. [A] would always call me out for not paying attention and drawing, even though Aiden was doing the exact same thing. It was crazy! Like, he was even sitting in the front row, but she never said anything to him—only me! Other kids used to notice it too. Hell, even Aiden hisself was like, 'Damn, bro, why is Ms. [A] always calling you out?'*

Although Kelsin became cognizant of his gayness—and the ramifications thereof—at an early age, the racial microaggressions experienced by White teachers in middle school also made Kelsin acutely aware of his Blackness as a cisgender male. This anecdote sets the tone for discussion about his understanding of the intersecting identities that he possessed. Juxtaposing his gender and racial identity as a Black male to that of his White friend demonstrates Kelsin's mindfulness of Ms. A's attempts to police his behavior. Various studies have shown that teachers often hold biased perceptions and have lower expectations of African American students (Diamond, Randolph, & Spillane, 2004). Kelsin, along with other Black students, felt this throughout their middles school experience. Usually Black students took classes together and very few were admitted into the honors or pre-AP program. This experience made Kelsin hyper-aware of his Blackness and the consequences of being a minority in a White-dominant setting.

On the other hand, Jabari experienced *triple consciousness* as a result of observing the behavior of effeminate gays and wanting to combat the stereotypes that pigeonhole Black males into one monolithic group within the LGBTQ community. Jabari explains,

> *As a Black dude, part of my hesitation for coming out as bisexual was because I only saw one type of gay dude: the super sweet ones switching down the street and wanting to be a girl. I used to be so confused when I saw it because I never really seen any other Black guy in my life act like that, so for me, being a Black bisexual dude didn't look like that, and I definitely didn't want to be associated with nothin' like that. I used to be like: why you so damn extra? It was funny to me, too. I used to think like: is this how I'm supposed to act? Is this the shit that gay dudes do? Nah, I'm good! I mean, no offense, you know, be yourself. But I'm also not a thug, know what I mean? I'm just in the middle—a regular Black dude.*

Jabari's *triple consciousness* forced him to re-negotiate what it meant to be Black and male as a result of his bisexuality. By classifying himself as a "regular dude," he sought to dispel the illusion that Black LGBTQ males only fell into two stereotypical categories: hypermasculine homo-thugs or uber-feminine queens. Before confronting his sexuality, his identity and performativity as a Black male was never in question, mainly because most men in his life conducted themselves in certain predictable ways, causing him to follow suit. It wasn't until he was confronted with individuals who deviated from his conception of masculinity and normalcy that he began questioning his own place within both the LGBTQ community and the Black community. Jabari's seemingly hierarchical perception of "masculinity" fails to consider the fluidity of expression inherent within both Black and gay communities. The goal, however, is to achieve what Conerly (2001) classifies as "a multiplicity of nonoppressive black lesbigay identities that takes into account the diversity among us" (p. 21).

Tremaine's sense of *triple consciousness* emerged as a result of his father's constant beratement of his speech, behavior, and mannerisms. As Tremaine noted, as a child he thought

his heavy lisp was the result of a speech impediment. It was his father's persistent taunts and scolding that made him realize that his dad's disdain ultimately lied in the fact that his performativity were stereotypically gay. His father prided himself on being a hardworking Black man who provided for his family, and while he fulfilled the financial aspects of parenthood, he also inflicted psychological trauma on Tremaine in the process. Ironically, despite the verbal and emotional abuse that Tremaine endured, he still granted his father grace because he knew that his dad's attempts to "straighten up" his mannerism were ultimately to brace him for the homophobic bullying that would inevitably ensue. Tremaine developed an internalized sense of guilt for being gay as a result the harassment that he endured. Although his mom eventually encouraged him to fight back and protect himself, Tremaine still felt a sense of self-reproach, as though he was the problem:

> *My momma was like, hell naw! Fight back! I got into about three fights by sophomore year and then they stopped fucking with me, but I hated fighting. Even though I was just protecting myself, every time I got into a fight I always felt bad about it, you know? Why did I have to act so different from all the other boys? Like, if I wasn't gay, none of this shit would be happening to me.*

Cornel West (1993) expounds on this sense of internalized shame around Black sexuality:

> This demythologizing of black sexuality is crucial for black America because much of black self-hatred and self-contempt has to do with the refusal of many black Americans to love their own black bodies—especially their black noses, hips, lips, and hair. Just as many white Americans view black sexuality with disgust, so do many black Americans—but for different reasons and with very different results. (p. 85)

Gay Black men, thus, struggle not only in negotiating their Black and gay identities simultaneously, but also in understanding what it means to be masculine in America and the consequences of deviating from heterosexist codes.

While the other participants' embodiment of *triple consciousness* was in direct relation to their sexuality and race, Regina's experiences yielded a unique outlook. According to Regina, her identity as a pre-op transgender woman was first and foremost centered on sexual desire, rather than sexuality and race. Regina noted that her trans body often made her an object of desire—a novelty—rather than a human being. She described the difficulty in prioritizing race or sexuality when her fundamental struggle was, above all, to be seen as a human being:

> *My struggle is different from the gays. When people look at me, they sometimes see a creature or alien. They don't see me as a woman. They don't see me as a man. Hell, they don't even see me as a person. They see me as a thing to either fuck or kill. I've been treated like garbage from all races of men—it didn't matter if they was Black, White, or purple! So my struggle is not to be seen as gay or Black. My struggle is to be seen as a human being, as a person first and foremost.*

Similar to some of the participants in Hunter's (2010) study, Regina did not place her race or sexuality at the forefront of her identity; instead, her humanity became a true indication of her selfhood. Her *triple consciousness* was therefore a byproduct of the transphobia stemming from the sexual dissonance experienced by cisgender heterosexual men who secretly wanted to "fuck" her. These men represent "objectified embodiment" whereas their erotic desires are rooted in the transwoman's bodily appearance and physical anatomy (Reback, Kaplan, Bettcher & Larkins, 2016).

The notion of a transphobic society problematizes straight men's (especially straight Black men's) erotic sexual desires toward transwomen on the one hand, while on the other hand it challenges their fundamental ability to accept them as women or even as human beings. What further complicates transphobic discourse is how some Black men sexually fantasize about transwomen while simultaneously feeling utter contempt for the remaining LGBTQ community. Numerous studies have shown that although men who have sex with pre-op transwomen romanticize that they are engaging in sexual intercourse with a cisgender woman, they are also cognizant of the fact that they are having sex with a woman with a penis (Mauk, Perry & Munoz, 2013; Operario, Burton, Underhill & Sevelius, 2008; Bockting, Michael & Rosser, 2007). In many instances, men view transwomen's penises as essential components of their sexual desire, yet they still do not classify themselves as gay or bisexual (Reback, Kaplan, Bettcher & Larkins, 2016). This corporal objectification is what Regina alluded to when she expressed her desire to first be seen as a human being, not merely an object of eroticism. The construction of transwomen as merely illusions (Plummer, 2005) complicates Regina's quest to uphold humanity over race and sexuality. Therefore, racial identity for Regina, unlike the other participants, did not seem to play a defining role in her *triple consciousness*.

Theme #2: Toils of Greed, Anger, and Foolishness

Although the phenomenon of human suffering is inescapable, according to Ikeda and Buddhist philosophers, there are other evils that further perpetuate misery and unhappiness, namely the existence of three earthly desires: *greed, anger* and *foolishness* that permeate human life. Buddhist philosophy (Ikeda, 2017), positive psychology (van Kleef, De Dreu & Manstead, 2004), financial discourse (Wang & Murnighan, 2011), and legal scholarship (Hartwell, 2006) all discuss the harmful impacts of *greed, anger*, and *foolishness* on the

manifestation of human happiness. One does not need to be religious—or even spiritual, for that matter—to understand the enduring effects of this toxic trio on the sanctity of human dignity. Nevertheless, there are undeniable parallels between how Buddhist philosophers and academic scholars discuss the adverse ramifications of the triumvirate of *greed, anger*, and *foolishness*. Nichiren Buddhism teaches that in order to awaken people to their full inherent potential, they must first learn how to overcome their propensity toward these fundamental human afflictions or "three poisons" (Ikeda et al, 2000-2003). Psychologist, legal scholars, and financial analysts further substantiate that living a life that is rife with these emotions, whether subtly and overtly, can take one down a pathway of moral and ethical destruction, financial ruin, and loneliness—all of which accelerate one's proclivity toward unhappiness and despair.

The findings from this study suggest that these "three poisons" are at the core of much of the anguish experienced by the participants, either as a direct result of their actions and decision or as consequences imposed by those (e.g. family, peers, teachers) attempting to police their queer behavior and impose heterosexist ideology; regardless, at various points in their lives, these destructive impulses stifled their manifestation of happiness and ability to engage in creative coexistence.

As depicted in the Participant Profiles, queer Black males experience various levels of trauma while navigating their sexual identities within social institutions. In this analysis of findings, it is necessary to first understand how *anger, greed*, and *foolishness* contribute to the unhappiness of participants before discussing their human revolution to overcome these forces. Whether as a direct consequence of their self-destructive behavior or as a result of internalized homophobic bullying and violence, the participants in this study were subjected to the

inevitability of suffering. Their quest for happiness, therefore, became an ever-iterative effort to transform both self and reality (Ikeda, 2000). Indeed, human happiness must exist in dialectical relation to others (Ikeda et al, 2000-2003). Ikeda (2017) warns that sole happiness for the individual is an impossible feat; happiness cannot exist exclusively for oneself. Happiness is, therefore, a reciprocal endeavor—the happier we make others, the happier we become (Goulah, 2021). Ergo, if misery exists, our authentic happiness cannot be fully manifested. The following analysis unpacks the participants' experiences in relation to the root causes of their unhappiness—the disparaging impulses of *greed, anger,* and *foolishness*.

After coming out as gay, DeShaun incurred the wrath of his parents and, in turn, reciprocated *anger* toward them because he felt abandoned at the most vulnerable point in his life:

> *I ain't even gonna lie, I hated my parents at that point in my life. I just couldn't understand how they could be okay with putting me out the house because of how I chose to live my life. If they suppose to love me unconditionally, how could they betray me when I was at my lowest point? I didn't want to see them, talk to them, or nothing. I was just angry inside.*

Moreover, when he moved in with his grandmother for a few months as a result of being put out of the house, DeShaun began exhibiting symptoms of self-hated and rage, which caused him to start cutting himself:

> *I was mad at my parents, but I was even madder with myself. I was confused, depressed. I missed my little sister, and in a weird way I started missing my parents, too. I was mad at the world for hating gay people. I was mad at myself for coming out [the closet] to*

them. I was mad at God for making me gay. Shit, I was mad at everybody. I just started cutting myself. I guess it was my only way to deal with the other pain.

This evidence suggests that DeShaun allowed his resentment for his parents to consume him to the point where he began purposefully inflicting pain and harm onto himself. What is most noteworthy about *anger*—as opposed to the other two poisons— in relation to Deshaun and other participants is the fact that their feelings of outrage in many circumstances were justifiable; in other words, *anger* was not the root of the problem, per se. This adverse emotional reaction, in Tremaine's case, indicated his awareness of a moral or ethical breach of trust from his parents. He felt betrayed because of their seemingly careless disregard for his feelings, dignity, and existence. Hence, it was not in his experience of *anger*, but rather his reaction to it, that infringed on his manifestation of happiness. In Tremaine's case, it led to further unhappiness and loneliness, causing him to suffer depression and anxiety.

Regina had various encounters with the "three poisons" as well. As a young transgender woman, she mentioned that her struggle was not only to be seen and respected as a woman and queer individual, but it was—most importantly—to be treated as a human being on a fundamental level. Her passive and willful ignorance toward the sacredness of life led her to pursue a life of promiscuity, which led to unprotected sex with older men as an outlet for the pain that she suffered, ultimately causing her to contract HIV. Ikeda (2017) affirms that sometimes "We are impelled in ways that defy reason, allowing short-term self-interest to undermine our very survival" (Chapter 7, para. 1). This "fundamental darkness," as it is described in Buddhist philosophy (Ikeda, 2017), almost led to Regina's demise because once diagnosed with HIV, she believed that her life was over. As a result, she started making even more impulsive decisions that further put her health and life at risk. Of the three earthly desires,

foolishness was the most fundamental for Regina because it initiated the development of *greed* and *anger* as well.

Because Regina was compelled by willful ignorance, she began partaking in activities that channeled her desire for *greed* and indulgence. Influenced by her older boyfriend at the time, Regina began selling drugs and eventually became addicted to the very substances that she was selling. Her quest for money and hedonism caused her life to spiral out of control:

> *I gotta be honest, the money was good and fast [laughs]. Between selling drugs and being taken care of by my man, I was finally able to afford the things that I never could and help my mom out, too. I got caught up in the lifestyle, though. And I slipped up; I fucked up by breaking the number one rule of hustling: never become your own customer.*

Regina also made life decisions that were rife with *anger* and resentment. Due to the persistent homophobic violence and harassment that she endured at school, she decided to drop out. Although her frustration with being bullied and vilified by both students and staff was understandable, the manner in which she coped with it (by dropping out of school) was defeatist. This decision granted her tormentors the power to eradicate her trans identity and queer presence from the social landscape of school. In addition, it prevented her from pursuing an education in order to achieve her life goals and move beyond the street life. Regina's decision to forego a formal education, which she thought would make her feel powerful and autonomous, instead drove her deeper and deeper into a state of despair. Essentially, Regina relinquished her agency; she became blind to the reality that these poisons undermined her individual happiness and stifled her unique creative potential for "engaged resistance" (Goulah, 2013) to dismantle the hegemonic system from within its existing construct:

> *I couldn't take it no more. I was just like, fuck it, you know. Why continue coming to a place where the students, teachers, security guards, hell everybody, hates you? And before I ended up fuckin somebody up, I was just like, peace I'm out. I dropped out. I didn't have nobody protecting me—I had to protect myself.*

Tremaine also succumbed to *anger* and rage, which caused him to get into fist fights and other physical altercations at school as a way of protecting himself from the onslaught of violence that he experienced due to his sexuality. The article "Winning Over the Three Poisons in Life" in *World Tribune* (2018) reveals that "Anger causes one to despise others and harbor resentment toward one's own life, thereby leading to delusions about oneself and others" (p. 9). For Tremaine, fighting became a coping strategy; his normalization of *anger* and violence was in direct relation to the innate belief that his sexual identity was somehow fundamentally abnormal:

> *I had to show trade [sic; straight boys] that just because I'm gay or whatever, I'm still nobody's bitch. I didn't like fighting at all, but if they tried to pull it with me, you better believe I was throwing hands. Period. It got to a point where I almost went looking for fights just to show them that I wasn't no punk. I wanted to make them feel as much pain as I felt on the inside.*

Hence, Tremaine's *anger* arose out of his inability to shift his mindset from blaming external factors in his life, when in actuality, the root of his unhappiness lied in his internalization of powerlessness and self-loathing. He was determined to make his abusers feel as much physical pain as he felt emotionally and psychologically.

Jabari's engagement with the three poisons presented itself in the form of *greed* and *foolishness*. Jabari's masculinity afforded him the privilege of being able to thwart bullying by

"passing" as straight in heteronormative spaces. He was a basketball star and a popular guy with both male and female students, yet his passive ignorance to the relentless homophobic violence suffered by his fellow peers in the LGBTQ community was palpable:

> *Even when the secret came out that I was bisexual, people still acted like they didn't believe it or care, I guess. Nobody ever really messed with me about it. As a matter of fact, nobody ever really talked about it to me, so I guess I'm lucky. I used to see how they fucked with the queens and at first I thought they deserved it a little bit. Like, why was they acting like a girl? I just didn't understand. But I guess a part of me also didn't want to bring attention on me being bisexual, so I just pretended like I didn't see stuff whenever the fellas was turnin' up [sic; harassing] on a gay dude.*

Jabari's *greed* presented itself in the form of selfishness toward self and other. First, his role as a passive bystander meant that he was so self-absorbed with his reputation and image that he allowed the suffering of gay student around him to go unaddressed, even though he knew that he had the power to stop it. Second, since Jabari chose to downplay his sexuality, he did not grant himself permission to live in his authentic truth and enjoy the full range of his identity. Jabari's role as an acquiescent onlooker was rooted in cowardice and egoism, and resulted in Jabari feeling empty inside because he was blind to the laws of cause and effect in his life. The bullying that Jabari witnessed not only had a deleterious impact on the victims, but it also impeded his access to individual happiness and fulfillment.

Lastly, Kelsin's cycle of unhappiness developed as a result of his deep-seated feelings of abandonment, stemming from his parents' absence from his life due to drug addiction and abuse. These feelings were magnified when Kelsin's mother later condemned him for being gay once he came out, which caused an even deeper wedge in their relationship. Her reaction caused him to

despise her and simultaneously hate himself. Kelsin desperately wanted to rid his gay away; similar to Tremaine, he went through a period of self-hate, *anger*, and confusion:

> *I tried my hardest not to be gay. Like, it didn't matter how Black I was, how smart I was, or how nice I was, people only saw me as gay ass nigga. I didn't understand why people worked so hard to try to tear me down. I even tried to like girls and force myself to act masculine and stuff like that.*

As outlined in the narratives above, *greed, anger*, and *foolishness* undermined the participants' manifestation of individual happiness, stymied their relationship with others, and curtailed the full blooming of their unique creative potential (*SGI Quarterly*, 2005). However, as we will see in the following section, the power of the human spirit extends far beyond the clutches of these three delusions.

Theme #3: Human Revolution as the Basis for Value-Creative Happiness

Now that the root of the participants' suffering has been analyzed, I will use this section to move into a discussion of the findings that addresses how they use *human revolution* to overcome adversarial situations in a quest to transform their lives and the lives of others. As discussed in the literature review, *human revolution* (Ikeda, 2010) is a volitional transformation in our fundamental mindset that incites changes within our own lives to overcome hopelessness and despair. According to Ikeda (2017), "Being true to yourself means continuously growing while looking toward tomorrow. It is striving to become a better person than you were yesterday. It also means living a life you can be proud of" (Chapter 7, para. 2). The concept of *human revolution* is, thus, the crux of any endeavor toward peace and happiness. At the core of this methodology is self-reflection, but not mere self-pondering or contemplation; rather, it requires deep introspection and critical self-examination that leads to personal and social change.

Throughout history, human beings have initiated many types of revolutions, including political, social, industrial, religious, and scientific, albeit these revolutions are often not sustainable because they fail to place the dignity of human life at the core of any endeavors to transform society (Ikeda, 2017). The gravity of Ikeda's *human revolution* exists in the power of human agency and self-transformation to thwart suffering and dehumanization:

> Human revolution means turning our lives in a positive direction, from unhappiness to happiness. A great human revolution in just a single individual will help achieve a change in the destiny of a nation and further, will enable change in the destiny of all humankind. (Ikeda, 1994, p. viii).

This sentiment epitomizes self-reflection and most importantly self-actualization, not as a mere selfish pursuit, but as an initial step to change oneself in order to, then, impact one's environment (Garrison, Hickman, & Ikeda, 2014). Influenced by Makiguchi's (reference in Goulah, 2013) philosophy of value creation, Ikeda considers *human revolution* an endeavor of "creative coexistence." Makiguchi's (1930) reverence for human dignity resulted in the codification of his ideas into one of his most important works—*The System of Value-Creating Pedagogy*. In this work, Makiguchi outlined his vision for humanistic coexistence and *value-creative* happiness, which consists of beauty in one's surroundings, personal gain, and collective good. Makiguchi was influenced by many thinkers, including Dewey and Herbart, but the crux of his philosophy around value creation stems heavily from Kant and Makiguchi's latter influence from Nicheren Buddhism, blending both philosophical and religious lines in his thinking. Notwithstanding, Makiguchi's theory of value creation recognizes the importance of the individual and serves as a complement to a broader, more collective whole—the shift from a "me" to a "we" paradigm and consciousness. Makiguchi believed that neither communities nor

value is created in isolation; they are fostered in concert with one another. Makiguchi did not see the value in individual gain in knowledge or profit if it did not benefit the greater good of the society. This selfless quest for harmonious coexistence is the source of true happiness and the lifeblood of humanity (Goulah, 2010).

Actualizing a state of absolute happiness is the greatest (and ultimate) aim of human revolution. Therefore, the philosophies of *value creation* and *human revolution* are essential to my discussion of the phenomenon happiness as it relates to the lived experiences of the queer Black male participants in this study. The idea of reflexivity inherent in both of these concepts is ultimately about striving to dedicate our actions toward something higher than ourselves (not super or supra-human, however), deeper than ourselves, and broader than ourselves.

I postulate that *human revolution* provides a necessary theoretical and methodological lens through which to understand how queer Black boys navigate social institutions within their lives, such as family, church, school, and social media. Since these institutions are liminal spaces, or neutral zones that are also amoral, *human revolution* provides the ethical agency necessary for queer Black boys to subvert the existing hegemonic order. It is important to note that this study is not about mere negotiation of sexual identities; rather, it is about how queer Black boys arrive at liminal subjectification, which defies the distinctions and binaries inherent in identity politics (i.e. gay/straight, man/woman). This is done through praxis—critical self-reflection, inner transformation, and action—as well as acts of disruption that seek to reconfigure the social landscape around political equality and inclusivity. In this study, queer identity becomes political when it “exposes the contingency of sex, gender, and sexual categories and designations, and challenges the social norm that the proper place of queerness is

the private sphere" (Ruitenberg, 2010, p. 623). This becomes evident in the data as my participants strive toward queer visibility, human dignity, and inner liberation.

DeShaun experienced several occurrences of *human revolution* in his quest for inner transformation, which fostered a paradigm shift to stop blaming external forces for matters that needed to be reconciled intrinsically. Daschke and Ashcraft (2005) reminds us that "A deep change in our outlook, the inner reality of our life, produces changes in the external workings of our life, in other people, and our community" (p. 123). When describing how he overcame the emotional and psychological trauma inflicted by his parents and peers at school, DeShaun confidently expressed,

> *I just decided that I needed to do me, you know. I had to become my own person no matter who disagreed with it, even if those people happen to be my own parents. Even though they tried their best to control my life, they really didn't have any power over me. At the end of the day, they can't live my life for me. Sometimes I got very sad and went into a deep depression about it, but then I would snap out of it and realize that I got a lot going for myself, you know? At the end of the day, none of that [abuse, harassment] mattered to me because the only way that I can live in my truth is by being me and not apologizing for it. It was definitely a tough journey to get here, though*.

What further propelled his *human revolution* is that during his junior year in high school, DeShaun—with the help of two teachers and other allies—spearheaded an anti-bullying campaign that specifically aimed at eradicating all forms of bullying on the campus, including homophobic bullying, violence, and harassment. This was the start of DeShaun's perpetual journey toward winning against forces that sought to quell his spirit and human dignity:

> *It was nice and felt good to be a part of something that hopefully makes a difference, you know. I just hope that the administration don't turn a blind eye to all of the hard work that we put into this campaign. I learned a lot about myself, about my strength, you know? At first I was scared because I thought it would put a bigger target on my back, but people actually came up and thanked me for being so brave. I couldn't take it anymore. I mean, I just couldn't stand seeing myself and other students being bullied and stuff and do nothing about it. Thank God for Ms.[P] and Ms. [T].*

DeShaun understood the value of *harmonious coexistence* and sought to use his voice as an instrument toward peace among *all* of the student body. Moreover, DeShaun used his *human revolution* to step outside of his comfort zone, elevating his own life conditions and helping others in the process. He challenged his perceived limitations, and through this process, he has been able to heal and move beyond misery and torment to *compassion* and *courage*. DeShaun embodied the sentiment of Ikeda through his selfless pursuit of peace:

> An inner change for the better in a single person is the essential first turn of the wheel in the process of making the human race stronger and wiser. This "human revolution" is, I believe, the most fundamental and most vital of all revolutions. This kind of revolution—an inner process of self-reformation—is completely bloodless and peaceful. In it everyone wins and there are no victims. (reference in Daschke & Ashcraft, 2005, p. 121).

Furthermore, after graduating high school, DeShaun has plans to further his reach in the community by going away to college in Atlanta and majoring in social work because he wants to help improve the lives of students, particularly those in the LGBTQ community, who tend to be

voiceless and most vulnerable. He stated that he never wants to see a kid or teenager experience what he had to endure due to their race and sexuality:

> *Black people already got alotta stuff that we got to deal with, like racism and poverty and stuff. When you add on being gay, it's like a double struggle, you know? I plan to go away to college next year, so I'm planning for that. I got accepted to [names a historically Black college in Atlanta] and I'm too geeked [sic; excited] about it! I want to major in social work because I want to inspire young people and be there for them like Ms. [P] and Ms. [T] was there for me. Sometimes when kids don't have the support at home, they need an outside family to look out for them. Everybody need somebody, you know?*

DeShaun found comfort and solace in the relationships that he forged with several teachers during his high school tenure; they encouraged him to live in his authenticity and not allow anyone to dictate how he should behave or live his life. Those teachers empowered him to be bold and brazen and not hide for fear of being Black, gay, and proud (*courage*). These teachers were almost like surrogate mothers to DeShaun, and when he graduates, he wants to continue this legacy of *compassion* by ensuring that the next generation of LGBTQ students have allies and advocates who *courageously* help them navigate social spaces and combat institutional stigmas in society.

Lastly, DeShaun used his spirituality and personal relationship with God to forge ahead, even though he was often confronted with anti-queer doctrine that sought to discredit his spiritual centeredness. Ultimately, DeShaun's steadfast, unconquerable sense of self led to a perpetual journey toward maximizing his fullest human and spiritual potential. *Human revolution* granted DeShaun the power and agency to push back by recognizing his own

humanity, dignity, and worth outside of the social meanings prescribed by his oppressors. This type of resilience requires emancipation from the very conditions that make heteropatriarchy, racism, and anti-queer religious doctrine possible in the first place. Ikeda (2005a) reminds us that "transforming our own lives at the most fundamental level actually holds the key to changing society" (p. 123); Tremaine's expression of *human revolution,* along with a deep-seated spirituality, helped to usher in peace and happiness in the latter years of high school and within his life.

Regina's *human revolution* developed in response to discrimination in the work force. Even though Regina faced many setbacks regarding employment, she still remained steadfast in her desire to move forward and forge ahead; Regina's response to her inability to secure work was to develop a social media platform through which to educate others by cultivating awareness about the transgender community:

> *Of course I got discouraged a lot. Hell, I wanted to give up on myself, or even go back to doing illegal stuff like selling drugs or sex work, but I decided that the best thing to do was create my own lane and educate people. I started a YouTube channel and started making videos to show the other side of transgender life that the media don't really show you. My channels is doing pretty good and my subscribers are growing every day.*

This outlet affords Regina the opportunity to share her story and be visible in spaces that had otherwise ignored her or disregarded her existence. Ikeda's (2010) philosophy of *human revolution* helped to shift her mindset around what can and should be seen and heard regarding gender and sexuality. Furthermore, Ikeda's (2010) *human revolution* enhanced the three qualities of *wisdom, courage*, and *compassion*, which granted Regina the fortitude to embrace her identity and overcome the social, cultural, and psychological alienation of living life as a trans woman

with multiple layers of oppression. Oppression, then, becomes a psychological state of alienation that must be overcome through self-agency. Regina's *human revolution* allowed her to develop what Ikeda calls a stand-alone spirit that treasures the sanctity of all human life, including (and especially) her own. Regina's courage resulted in the manifestation of her YouTube channel—born out of her heartfelt concern for the well-being of others.

The inner transformation that Regina has undergone is not solipsistic in nature, but is connected to a greater belief that in order to live harmoniously with others, one must first seek and obtain inner peace and happiness. For Regina, 'self' became the locus of control in the manifestation and fulfillment of a happy, harmonious life; her YouTube vlog has become an instrument to help her actualize this purpose. This virtual space provides Regina a platform to create value from her traumatic experiences (*beauty* out of chaos); the community that she forged online not only affirms her identity and humanity, but also grants her access to opportunities that had been initially denied to her. Moreover, this platform allows her to share wisdom and be a beacon of hope for many other queer youth across the world who share a similar struggles for survival against interpersonal violence and trauma (*good*). As her followers grow on YouTube, so does the opportunity for her to make monetary gain and support herself, her mother, and her siblings financially (*personal gain*).

Regina has taken a leap of faith and stepped out on *courage*, taking deliberate and risky steps toward achieving her goals of advocating for visibility and inclusivity of the Black queer and trans community. Her narrative speaks to the shared physical and emotional struggle that trans and cisgender women of color encounter on a daily basis. Despite tribulations that Regina and other transgender women of color endured on a daily basis, she still not resentful toward her peers, families, or schooling experiences. Her larger life goals of educating society about

transgender life is beyond herself; she plans to continue giving back to her communities by bringing about awareness that changes the stigmas of homosexuality in society. Regina possesses the characteristics of Ikeda's wisdom, courage, and compassion. Regina's genuine wisdom and compassion for this project stems from empowering others and helping them unlock their inner strength to overcome their transphobic victimization, with the hope of relieving suffering and giving joy. Goulah (2021) asserts that "without a combination of the two [wisdom and compassion], we are even likely to lead others in the wrong direction and will not be able to achieve our own happiness" (also see Ikeda, 2008). Regina hopes that her social media platform becomes a pathway toward women empowerment against adversity everywhere.

Tremaine's friendship circle at school and ally network via social media helped to facilitate his *human revolution*. Tremaine credits the bond with his friends as being the reason for maintaining his sanity throughout high school. They were his confidantes and provided a reassured faith that gay males could develop and sustain authentic, enduring, and substantive friendships with straight guys. In addition to his friends at school, Tremaine used the internet and social media platforms to create a gay network (since the social circle of openly gay students was nearly nonexistent at his school), to explore romantic relationships, and to make contributions to other facets of the LGBTQ community. He subscribes to Instagram primarily because this is a platform where he feels he can be his authentic self and socialize without the sole expectation of having sex, unlike other social media outlets such as Grinder, Jack'd, and Adam4Adam. Tremaine uses his social media page to exhibit images that deliberately counter the dichotomous stereotypes and tropes surrounding gay Black male identity: the flaming queen and the down-low homo-thug. His Instagram page has morphed into a visual portfolio that expresses the varied, multifaced, and wide-ranging representation of Blackness, gayness, and

masculinity. His ultimate goal is to author and publish a visual look-book that aims to normalize queer representation and all of the versatility that it entails.

I can't wait to start on my look-book! It's gonna be so bomb! I want to capture images of regular, everyday gay Black dudes going about their daily lives. I think that it's important for people to see that gay Black men are just like everybody else. I mean, yes there are all different sizes, shapes, personalities and stuff, but you see that even with straight people. I really hope that it change the way the Black community looks down on us, like we're the reason for all of Black people's problems. That would make me so happy, like, for real.

Since queer Black students have been deemed "imperceptible" and "unintelligible," according to Ruitenberg (2010)—both as queer subjects and as equal people—their visibility has been constructed only in relation to heteronorming messages around sex, gender, and sexual norms. Tremaine's social media venture seeks to dismantle these constructs. In addition to educating society about the versatile lives of queer Black males, Tremaine's Instagram project also allows him to educate himself about the multiplicity of gay life through lived experiences of queer Black males outside of his local area (*personal gain; wisdom*). Tremaine's popularity on Instagram emphasizes social media's usefulness as a tool to reinforce group and community dynamics and also to foster trust. As Ikeda (2010c) reminds us, wisdom is not just about knowledge; rather, it is about the perception of the interconnectedness and interdependency of all life. Taking photos and introducing visual storytelling into his dialogic process of *human revolution* expanded Tremaine's recognition of the importance of embracing differences around sexual orientation, gender expression, and identity. Through his journey toward wisdom and *compassion*, Tremain sought to use his Instagram project to not only recognize and honor the

particularities of queer people's identities and experiences, but to also reveal our universal and shared humanity beyond these identity dimesions (see Goulah, 2021). During Tremaine's *human revolution*, he realized that in order to effect significant change in his life and the lives of others, it ultimate came down to his volitional decision to first transform himself on a deep level by believing in his power to not only create value and manifest happiness within himself, but to also contribute to the happiness and peaceful coexistence of others.

Upon realizing his privilege as a "straight-acting," "straight-appearing" bisexual Black male in social spaces, Jabari experienced a *human revolution* that allowed him to leverage his influence with peers in order to persuade them to stop bullying queer students. Despite his initial reluctance (for fear of drawing attention to his sexuality), he eventually built up the *courage* to confront teammates and peers around homophobic harassment:

> *At first, I was just tryna stay under the radar, but eventually it made me rethink my whole thought process. I started tellin them niggas to chill and leave people alone. Since they respected me, they would leave 'em alone, but there was no telling what they did or said when I wasn't around. The shit was petty, and I just got tired of them fuckin with people for no reason. Like bruh, enough is enough!*

After spending so much time being fearful of what people might say about him for speaking out against bullying, Jabari decided that he had to do something to combat these violent displays of homophobia (*courage*). Jabari capitalized on the respect that his classmates had for him in order to eventually shift from bystander to advocate (*compassion*). Jabari looked beyond himself and developed an empathy for those suffering around him. He overcame his fear of being outted and mustered up the courage to push back against those who bullied his fellow classmates because of their sexuality. Goulah (2021) notes that "fear of difference, of the Other, prohibits their

realization" that wisdom and compassion are inherent in all human beings. Once Jabari overcame is fear, he was able to tap into his true sense of compassion and wisdom. At their core, compassion and wisdom are inextricably linked; compassion, thus, becomes a conduit to wisdom: "Therefore, it is when we act with compassion that our life is brought into accord with the universal life force and we manifest our inherent wisdom" (*SGI Quarterly*, 2003). Jabari's own internalized heterosexism made it difficult for him to take this leap, but each time he was brave enough to address the bullies, it made him feel less conflicted and more willing to navigate his own sexual identity (*wisdom*), while also being empathetic toward the struggle of others (*compassion*).

In other words, the compassionate act of inspiring and sharing hope arouses within us a proclivity to move beyond egoism and strive to develop an altruistic spirit. And, according to Ikeda (2017a), "If we cannot feel hope, it is time to create some" (p. 6). Our ability to create hope is what makes us fundamentally human; it allows people to direct all energies away from forces that contribute to their unhappiness toward virtues that foster absolute happiness for themselves and others. Ikeda (1995) writes, "To be master of one's mind means to cultivate the wisdom that resides in the inner recesses of our lives, and which wells forth in inexhaustible profusion only when we are moved by a compassionate determination to serve humankind, to serve people" ("Homage to the Sagarmatha," 1995). Jabari became a master of his own mind by triumphing over his insecurities in order to advocate for those most in need. Despite how minimal Jabari's acts of *compassion* may appear to be on the surface, they established the basis for a perpetual transformation toward change in his life and the lives of those who were victims of abuse within his school community.

Lastly, Kelsin's embodiment of *human revolution* was revealed through his interactions with Rock, a drug-dealer in his neighborhood who routinely tormented Kelsin due to sexuality. When Rock was sent to jail for drug and gun possession, Kelsin admitted that he got pleasure out of knowing that he would not have to endure his harassment for a while; upon deeper reflection, Kelsin realized that Rock was just another sad statistic of a misguided Black male becoming a victim of the justice system in this country. When Rock was finally released, Kelsin assisted him in securing a position at the grocery store where he worked. When asked why he helped Rock out after all those years of abuse from him, Kelsin said,

> *That's a damn good question! Hell, I don't even think I have a good answer for it [laughs]. I don't know, I guess I just felt sorry for him and thought that if I could help another Black man turn his life around, then why not? I'm not the type to hold grudges because I understand that people grow and mature, so maybe this was his second chance at life. My grandma would always tell me that it's a blessing to be a blessing to someone else.*

Kelsin could have harbored hatred and resentment in his heart based on the awful treatment that he received from Rock; instead, he chose to be a blessing to Rock, who seemed to have learned the errors of his ways while being locked away in prison. Furthermore, Kelsin genuinely forgave Rock for his past transgressions, and they ended up forging a friendship in spite of their differences.

Above all, the most promising and empowering message of human revolution is its insistence on winning against our own limitations and negative propensities—a struggle to achieve one victory after another (Ikeda, 2017). This reverberating message grants us the fortitude to face life's struggles with vitality and perseverance, rather than succumbing to them.

Human revolution shifts our mindset away from feeling fearful and anxious about life's toils to harnessing a joyful and courageous attitude to conquer all challenges. The participants in this study experienced a paradigm shift toward inner peace when they realized their innate ability to create value and actualize happiness in their own lives. Their daily displays of courage and compassion toward others (despite how they were treated) is what propelled them to transform their life state to carry out individual human revolutions for the betterment of themselves and their communities (Ikeda, 2017).

Theme #4: Spiritual Eroticism

There is a paucity of research (Bardella, 2001; Amador, 2006; Chávez, 2008; Garcia, Gray-Stanley, & Ramirez-Valles, 2008; Beagan & Hattie, 2015) that specifically addresses the spiritual practices that queer youth employ to navigate their sexual identities while coping with internalized struggles related to homophobic violence and discrimination. Moreover, when factoring in other ideas related to queer sexual practices, notions of the erotic, and religion/divinity, the range of literature becomes even more scare. This is precisely why it is important that queer individuals reclaim narratives about their identities and explore new epistemologies about their sexual desires; otherwise their genuine expressions of love become reduced to mere pleasure, debauchery, and promiscuity. Scientific literature and research centering on HIV/AIDS prevention, in particular, tend to characterize men who have sex with men (particularly Black and Latino men) as pathologized subjects (Clerkin, Newcomb, & Mustanski, 2011; Millett, Flores, Peterson, & Bakeman, 2007; Mustanski & Newcomb, 2013; Newcomb, Ryan, Greene, Garofalo, & Mustanski, 2014; Rosenberger et al., 2012). This myopic perspective is reflective of the national narrative that reinforces Black males as being down-low and Black sexuality as being inherently perverted and depraved. Ellison and Douglas (2010)

warn us that these White, middle-class, socio-cultural narratives not only question Black people's very humanity, but also their relationship with, and access to, the divine:

> Such a depiction clearly renders black people as little more than beasts, driven—like other beastly creatures—by their baser instincts and bodily desires. Because of this, black people are assumed to have no capacity for rational thinking. Their bodily desires simply overwhelm their rational faculties…Thus, homoeroticism is considered improper…This means that lesbian and gay persons are to abstain from sexual intimacy altogether. (p. 55)

While the staggering rate of HIV transmission in minority communities is of substantial public health concern, researchers must be careful not to limit HIV prevention efforts to the measures of scientific inquiry alone. Some studies are beginning to examine other elements associated with HIV prevalence and prevention, such as cultural, social, institutional, and historical factors; in addition, this study can potentially provide some insight into future research on HIV education and prevention, specifically the inclusion of non-rational aspects of sexuality, such as religion, love, desire, passion, and the erotic.

The erotic is of particular importance to this study because it speaks to a dimension of spirituality that moves conversations beyond basal forms of lust, arousal, and sexual acts (although these, too, are important aspects of the erotic!). Rather, it grants participants the fortitude to create alternate epistemologies and reconcile dichotomies between queer beings and the supernatural. *Spiritual eroticism*, as an emergent theme in this study, assists participants who are haunted by Christian dogma. Since Christianity and the Black Church remain the primary sources of queer spirituality, many individuals in the LGBTQ and Black communities have internalized Christian ideologies that aim at eradicating "deviant" sexual practices as a means of

sexual control and spiritual health (Chavez, 2008). In response, Christians in the LGBTQ community have begun developing queer-centered churches and adopting queer theologies in response to anti-queer discourses about the sacred (Althaus-Reid, 2001; Bardella, 2001).

Hence, it is imperative that this thematic analysis address both the sacred and the secular in order to understand the multifaceted role of *spiritual eroticism* in the lives of queer Black boys. Robert Solomon (2001) reminds us that the erotic stems from *eros* in Greek philosophy, which was upheld as a virtue by Plato since it transcended sexual passion toward a "longing for the good, the true, and the beautiful" (p. 33). It is through this ethos and philosophical lens that the theme of *spiritual eroticism* will be framed and explored in this section. *Spiritual eroticism,* therefore, positions my participants' constructed knowledge of the erotic (i.e. epistemologies of love, passion, and desire in their deepest meanings) at the forefront of discussions about the supernatural as well as the possibilities for social change. Audre Lorde (1984) expounds on our understanding of *eros* as "…the personification of love in all its aspects– born of Chaos, and personifying creative power and harmony" (p. 55). Thus, the erotic is a vital principle of human life, not to be reduced to mere pornography and sexual arousal.

For example, despite the homophobic discrimination that DeShaun faced at home, in his community, and at school, he remained resilient and used his spirituality to help him navigate through the difficult times. In his interviews, he explained that since coming out, he still went to church, but just not as much as he used to. He attributed his spirituality to being an integral part of his development as a Black gay young man, despite the complexities of his religious journey trying to reconcile his personal faith with the messages in Christianity that cast homosexuality as a sin:

I still talk to God every day and I believe that he still listens and loves me. I refuse to believe that he hates me, you know. He knows my heart and that I'm a good person, so that has to count for something, right? [chuckles] I would even say that I grew closer to God since coming out. Plus, there are so many closet queens [sic; undercover gay guys] in church that it makes it hard to believe that God hates us [erupts in laughter]. I remember hooking up with one of the youth ministers on Jack'd [a gay dating app that's often used for sexual hookups]. He disguised his profile picture and at first we were just chatting. He said he was DL and discreet, and that he wanted to host at his house for an anon [anonymous] hookup. I was nervous at first, but a part of me was super excited. I first clocked his T [sic; "truth," as in he figured who he was] because I saw his car in the driveway—a jet black Impala with tinted windows and [says the name of the minister's fraternity] on his license plates. When I went in it was pitch black; all the lights was off, and he was laying on the living room couch naked with a skull cap pulled down completely over his face. I'm not gonna lie, when I was giving him head I felt like I was possessed or something [laughs]. I guess part of it was knowing that he didn't know who I was, but I knew who he was. But there was also something magical about giving a man head for the first time…I could've just melted away [laughs].

The manner in which DeShaun intertwines both the spiritual and the erotic into his narrative begs the question: what spiritual/emotional supports do queer Black males have access to when they are victims of violence in their homes, in their schools, and in their communities? DeShaun's spirituality became a source of survival and mental health, despite his parents' infliction of anti-gay religious rhetoric that jeopardized his psychological, spiritual, and emotion welfare. Furthermore, his use of words such as "possessed," "magical," and "melt away" when describing

erotic experiences provide some context into the potential linkages between the erotic and the spiritual. *Spiritual eroticism* may potentially offer us more understanding of how we might support queer Black boys in developing positive, safe outlets for their expressions of love, passion, and desire, yet there is still much to be explored on this topic.

It is important to note that when my participants engaged in sexual acts with their lovers, they seemed to function within a no-trance state (Wolinsky, 1991); in this liminal space, they break away from discursive Christian beliefs and recognize their agency as creators, or at least co-creators of meaning. Some participants described an ironic sense of empowerment and liberation when engaging in these erotic encounters, namely because these were safe, neutral spaces where participants could re-imagine a reality free from moral and ethical sanctions. Unlike in many of their personal and social experiences—where their queer bodies and sexual desires were subjected to scrutiny and censorship—*spiritual eroticism* became a space of transcendence that refused complete subservience to constructs of hegemony and power, particularly within the realm of religion.

Another way in which sexuality and *spiritual eroticism* might be linked to queer experiences is with the cultural phenomenon of cruising, which usually results in spontaneous, anonymous sex between men; the allure of cruising is that it takes place discreetly in semi-public indoor spaces such as bathrooms and locker rooms or in outdoor spaces, like parks, truck stops, and forests. Warner (1999) declares that the eroticism of public life among queer individuals has a transcendent factor. Furthermore, he asserts that cruising with strangers gives queer men a sense of "belonging to a sexual world, in which one's sexuality finds an answering resonance in sexuality not just in one other, but in a world of others" (p. 179). Martin (2006) echoes this idea by noting that sexual encounters during cruising allow gay men to "transcend individual

selfhood, not by momentary merger with a sexual partner, but by expanding their group consciousness" (p. 221).

Participants in this study sought freedom from anti-queer Christian discourses on sexuality by challenging the dichotomy between the spiritual and the political (mind and body/sacred and erotic). In the spaces where they engaged in erotic play, they were also able to re-imagine alternative meanings, epistemologies, and realities associated with their queer identities and desires. According to Chavez (2008), play is one marker of spiritual transcendence. Within this study, the participants who engaged in *spiritual eroticism* came to realize how essential play was to their spiritual transcendence and queer liberation. Berger (1970) notes,

> Play sets up a separate universe of discourse, with its own rules, which suspends, "for the duration," the rules and general assumptions of the "serious" world...Nevertheless one of the most pervasive features of play is that it is usually a joyful activity...Joy is play's intention. When this intention is actually realized in joyful play, the time structure of the playful universe takes on a very specific quality—namely, it becomes eternity. (p. 58)

In the process of erotic play, sexual exploration begets self-discovery and signals limitless possibilities for one's identity, devoid of oppressive discourse around propriety, pleasure, and sexual orientation. Although play can be found in many facets of life, erotic play becomes transcendent when it points beyond the confines of human nature and reaches toward the supernatural (Berger, 1970). I would like to bring attention to the fact that play, in this context, does not refer to mere silliness or immaturity. Maria Lugones (1987) emphasizes that only when we feel truly safe in a space can we engage in an authentically playful experience. Moreover, Chavez reminds us that "sex can be about exploration, child-like discovery, and of course, joy"

(p. 9). Jabari recounts an experience with his roommate from basketball camp, where a playful encounter quickly turned into erotic fun:

> *One night when we [he and Gavin from basketball camp] was arguing over who was the best point guard of all time, and eventually started play fighting and wrestling. I was winning and when I pinned him down, he tried to get out of it by grabbing my dick to distract me, so I grabbed his back. We both got hard instantly. Then before I knew it, he pulled my basketball shorts down and started giving me head. I remember being confused: a part of me felt like what we was doing was wrong, but another part of me so turned on and loved it. It was different from getting head from a girl, not just because it felt better [laughs], but, you know, we was two bros busting nuts together. We was all over each other like animals. I didn't want it to end.*

Johnson (2000) suggests that same-sex attraction grants partners opportunities to transcend the ego more easily than opposite-sex attraction because, in a way, the allure lies in the fantasy of actually *being* the other person. In other words, same-sex lovers subconsciously yearn "to have his body, to be what it is we love about him, to feel what he is like inside, and to be attractive to the loved as we perceive him to be because we are in love with him" (Johnson, 2000, p. 23). Johnson further notes that the likelihood of this spirit of transcendence happening in a heterosexual relationship is rare because men may not wish to be his female lover. Kelsin describes his perspective on this subject:

> *I don't know how to explain it. The feeling that I have when I'm with a dude is like, so different from a female—and I've been with quite a few girls [laughs]. We don't have to worry about people judging us. We be in our own little world. At first, anytime I was with my guy, I used to think about my momma throwing Bible scriptures in my face and*

> *telling me I was going to hell and I would just always be on edge. But after a while I was eventually able to let all that negative stuff go and just live in the moment and be happy. I can completely be myself with him. I'm more open to trying new stuff and figuring out more and more about what I like and who I am. But it gotta be with the right person.*

The lingering trance of Christian dogma (with its extreme regulations on spirituality and sexual restraint) diminishes the potential for Kelsin to experience joy through erotic play; although Christianity creates a negative correlation between spirituality and sexuality (unless under specific conditions, usually matrimonial, heterosexual, and pro-creative), Robert Solomon's concept of erotic love illustrates an alternative view on the subject:

> Erotic love is so central to spirituality (although this is precisely what is rejected by some familiar religious traditions) because it is so *exciting*. Spirituality is not merely peace of mind, tranquility, contentment. It is a passion, the passion for life and the world. It is a movement, not a state. Unlike many of the virtues (amiability, trustworthiness, fairness, modesty, temperance), erotic love has its violent aspects. [. . .] Physical arousal, like sex, is morally and hedonically neutral; its role in our lives depends on context, and, in particular, on the emotions that accompany it and the relationships in which it comes to count as expression. (p. 37)

This notion of the erotic epitomizes queer spirituality in a sense because it stimulates imaginative inquiry which allows queer individuals to break away from the trances of Christian precept and reclaim their agency in creating and controlling the narratives of their lives and the world around them. Regina expressed this sentiment when she described how her sexual experiences with men were inconsequential to her Christian faith:

> *Yeah, I'm a Christian—so what? And I'm a woman, too. A woman with desires just like anybody else. I don't feel like I'm sinning when I'm fucking my man because that's the only time I truly feel like a woman that is loved unconditionally. Most people on the street don't see me for what I see myself as. My man respects every part of me and my body. If only the world could be as understanding as him. Even back when I was with Papa, I felt the same even though I ended up getting HIV from that situation. I guess you can say that I knew the risks of fucking raw. I knew I should have been having safe sex, but sometimes when you feel a connection with somebody that is so strong, ain't nothing nobody can tell you. It's almost like wearing a condom came between me and his body being one. Having babeback sex is honestly like having a outter-body experience, especially when it's with somebody you love, even though it comes with risks. Of course I wouldn't recommend people to have bareback sex with just any body. I mean, I got HIV from it, but even still, I have no regrets in life. I just have to live with my choices, though.*

Audre Lorde (1984) deepens our understanding of the erotic through her proclamation, "Recognizing the power of the erotic within our lives can give us the energy to pursue genuine change within our world, rather than merely settling for a shift of characters in the same weary drama" (59). Lorde reminds us that the concepts of play and the erotic not only have their place in sexual practices, but within other facets of our lives as well. Tremaine spoke directly to this ideas as he navigated me through an experience where he linked sexual practices to mental health. His understanding of *spiritual eroticism* was not only revealed in the physical act of sex with his lover, but also in the resulting feelings of catharsis and healing that allowed him to cope with the burdens of his personal and social life:

Since I'm versatile [both giver and receiver during sex] I don't feel like I have to fit into a box. I can be as feminine as I want to be or as masculine as I want to be—ain't no limits. I can be Tremaine or I can be Tremeka! [pseudonyms] Me and my guy love and accept each other for who we are. It's not just about us fucking each other's brains out, it's about us connecting on a deeper level. Just being with him helps me get through the rough days. He makes me feel like anything is possible. It keeps me from being depressed about this fucked up world.

DeShaun elaborates further on how *spiritual eroticism* has empowered him to maintain a positive outlook on his life and sexual identity:

It's crazy because when I'm with my man, I forget about all of my worries. I feel like I'm in heaven! He makes me feel safe, you know. We always talk about the 'what ifs.' Like, what if this world ain't hate gays so much, then we would be able just live and be happy without people hatin' on us. Even though sometimes we have to sneak to spend time with each other, our time together is probably one of the few times I feel proud to be gay. It makes me want to be an advocate for my community.

Although John Dewey (1916/2012) did not specifically write about homosexuality or the erotic in his scholarship, his concept of the religious offers a philosophical lens that can be applied, in a universal sense, to the aforementioned phenomenon of *spiritual eroticism* through imagination and play. Dewey was convinced that all people encountered "religious experiences" with regard to principles of unity, faith, harmony, humanism, coexistence, and peace. An examination of scholarship on Dewey's notion of the religious reveals that he viewed religious faith as a secular ethos rooted in democratic ideals (Garrison, Hickman, & Ikeda, 2014; Dewey, 1916/2012; Baurain, 2011; Garrison, 2009; Garrison & O'Quinn, 2004); as such Dewey's notion

of religious is a pragmatic conception rooted in human agency. Dewey does not deny the revolutionary, cathartic aspects of religious experiences; he just rejects that the source lies in the supernatural. This characteristic is important for Dewey because it supports his articulation of the religious element of experience with esthetical dimensions of imagination and play. For Dewey, the highest form of imagination is creative imagination, which allows us to see situations and objects anew. His concept of creative imagination, therefore, becomes religious at the point where it is holistically integrated into human life (Dewey, 1934/2005). According to Dewey, the aesthetics of the mind creates a dialectical relationship between parts (self) to the development of the whole (society). Its primary function is meaning-making and consciousness-building through experience. Dewey saw intellect as consisting of two components: the *imagination*, or the idea which is not present, and the *image*, or the tangible pursuit of that idea (Chambliss, 1991). These must work in tandem as one continuously strives toward the actualization of an imaginative ideal. Thus, imagining and participating in action are not different types of experiences, but rather a continuous stream of experience (Chambliss, 1991). Dewey illustrates the timeless nature of the human spirit; moreover, he reminds us that what binds us as human beings is not necessarily our commonalities, but also our reliance on differences; these differences allow us to reimagine a society based on integrated cultural life, for only when we move away from static, monolithic, status-quo do we realize the power of a society based on multiplicity.

Along similar lines as Dewey, Ikeda (1993) argues that there must be a dialectical balance (a third path) between faith in our own internal capabilities as human beings and recognition of powers external to us. Ikeda asserts, “It is only through fusing and merging ourselves with the eternal—that which lies beyond our finitude as individuals—that we can

manifest the full scale of our potential. And yet that potential is not foreign to us, but is of us, within us, and always has been" (p. 7). Although Ikeda's speaks from a Buddhist perspective, this does not suggest that my participants are Buddhist or need to practice Buddhism. In fact, my participants still considered themselves to be Christian despite the anti-queer rhetoric they were often subjected to. What is most important to take away from Ikeda's universal message is that allowing any internal (overinflation of the ego) or external (religious or otherwise) forces to consume you is detrimental to humanity and deepens despairs. Upon achieving this third path, my participants were able to maintain a "dynamic fusion" (Ikeda, 1993) between their religious tradition and their innate ability to manifest love and happiness, even if in non-traditional form.

Spiritual eroticism demands that we reconceptualize discursive perspectives on gender identity, self-liberation, sexual orientation, sex, reproduction, and biopolitics, and seeks to define humanity through the vast range of possible modalities. These modalities are not fixed, however. Rather, they are "open" essences that are phenomenological in nature, not material or substantive: that is, "they are not qualities we as human beings possess but are possibilities for being and acting in which we as human beings may take part" (Fryer, 2012, p. 9). Dewey's vision of the imagination rejected any singular manifestation of subjectivity; since our understandings of human beings is formed in relation to other(s), no one person possesses a finite identity—we are always in a constant state of flux and becoming. As "hybrid beings," we are at the mercy of outside ('othered') forces that we cannot control, and thus our attempts at trying to preserve our present vision of humanity is futile, limiting, and dangerous. This is the essence of my participants sentiments around erotic love and sexual desire.

Spiritual eroticism is, therefore, not a quest to find the "truth"—from a positivist sense of knowledge and consciousness—of the queer self. Queer transcendence is also not a

metaphysical journey separate from the bio-political nature of human sensibility (identity, feelings, emotions, desires) that are tied to queer bodies. Instead, it is about developing a critical consciousness of the dominant pathological ideologies tied to discourses on queer being, in order to subvert them and re-articulate them as rhizomatic and shareable. Horncastle (2008) echoes Greene and Dewey's sentiments around the power of the imagination when he affirms that "a 'going beyond' as a movement through knowledge, is linked to the will to know, the senses of perception, embodiment, critical thinking, self-reflection, and dialogue" (p. 207).

In addition, *spiritual eroticism* is not merely about mastering, overcoming, or moving beyond the self. On the other hand, it is about the way of inhabiting a homophobic, hetero-patriarchal world on one's own terms, specifically regarding narratives of beauty, sexuality, religion, and family; this can only be achieved through an ethics of open-mindedness and an ethos of perpetual self-becoming. As Dewey notes, the imagination is heuristic in nature, and as such, intersubjectivity is paramount, as a genuine care of self undoubtedly requires a constitution toward others. Queer transcendence does not occur in vacuo, isolated from the world and others around us, even if the initial process of achieving it is personally introspective.

Spiritual eroticism provides a complex lens which can be applicable to a wide range of queer discourses. It requires an understanding of both "transcendence" and "transcendental" in order to qualify what I mean by "move beyond," not as an abstract, conceptual, disembodied phenomenon, but as a theory of queer becoming—demonstrating the dialectical relationship between queer mind and body and its potential impact on queer actions and behaviors (Horncastle, 2008). While an important aspect of queer transcendence is "moving beyond" as a journey toward harmonious coexistence (Makiguchi, 1930; reference in Goulah, 2013), Foucault (1982) reminds us of the importance of "coming back" or "returning" to the self as a necessary

aspect of self-ethics and self-care. These two components are not mutually exclusive; both are necessary in the de/reconstruction of a consciousness, knowledge, and being that is beyond the limits of discourse. My hope is that these participant narratives will broaden the scholarship related to the experiences of queer Black boys in school and society. The aim of *spiritual eroticism* is to move beyond the propensity to simply push back against external institutions and constructs (as queer politics tend to do) and instead focus on value creation and freedom of/from discursive knowledge, for this is the sine qua non of queer liberation and happiness.

Conclusion

This analysis of findings provides a small, yet substantive glimpse into the lived experiences of five queer Black boys at an urban high school in a Midwest city, and therefore should not be generalized for all queer Black males. The candor and courage unveiled throughout their narratives is admirable, and their experiences bespeak a resilient spirit that refuses to conform to societal stigmas that infringe upon their ability to successfully navigate through their intersecting identities. Ultimately, this thematic discussion lays the groundwork for further educational research and curricular implications for queer happiness in urban schools, which will be explored, in detail, in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 6: IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

This chapter draws on the thematic analysis in Chapter 5 and the literature review in Chapter 2 in order to contextualize the implications for schooling and further research. More specifically, I will 1) contextualize the implications for schooling through the lens of human revolution, an emergent theme from my analysis that also serves as the phenomenological essence of this study; 2) establish the purpose and importance of engaging human revolution alongside QoCC in this study to develop a nuanced framework for understanding queer Black boys' schooling experiences and how this ultimately contributes to the field of Curriculum Studies; and 3) make explicit connections between the reviewed literature in Chapter 2 (QoCC, Soka/Ikeda Studies, and dialogic theory) and the curricular/pedagogical recommendations outlined in the latter section of this chapter.

Human Revolution: The Essence of Human Happiness

The phenomenon of human happiness, as the external aspect of this study, is strongly based on the internal essence of human revolution, as evidenced throughout the thematic analysis. Ikeda's philosophy of human revolution expresses a new humanism that encompasses theoretical, practical, and educative application for queer individuals (Ikeda, 2010a). Human creative power, self-empowerment, and resiliency are, therefore, the basis for human revolution (Busacchi, 2016). Ikeda (2010a) reminds us:

> No matter how complex global challenges may seem, we must remember that it is we ourselves who have given rise to them. It is therefore impossible that they are beyond our power as human beings to resolve. Refocusing on humanity, reforming and opening up the inner capacities of our lives – this kind of individual human revolution can enable

> effective reform and empowerment on a global scale. (p. 17; see Ikeda & Marinoff, 2012)

Through their narratives, the participants in this study demonstrated the power of the human spirit to change their lives, and the lives of those around them, for the better. Human revolution, as the essence of this study, was woven throughout every emergent theme in Chapter 5. It proved to be the starting and ending point for human happiness. In this study, the participants (as human beings) were the basis of everything, and as a result, they wielded the power to shape their lives while inducing a positive chain of circumstances within their school, families, communities, and society. Human revolution—as an approach of faith, and not necessarily reason—is an important lens through which to situate the findings because it always errs on the side of hope (not rationality) and demonstrates the tenacity of the human spirit to transform even the most difficult situations.

For example, even when experiencing triple consciousness, the participants found ways of re-imagining what it meant to be Black, male, and queer. Despite the deleterious effects on their psyches due to heteronormative ideologies, the participants still used their human revolution to transform the internalized self-hate into self-empowerment, which ultimately had positive impacts on their lives and the lives of those within their school community. On one hand, the participants contended with the hyper-awareness of their Blackness/otherness from society at large, namely in the wake of rampant racism and police brutality (e.g. George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Tamir Rice, etc.); on the other hand, they contended with feelings of despair from being ostracized within their own community because of their sexuality and/or gender identity and expression. Essentially, they felt like they did not belong in either world. Human

revolution allowed them to reconcile these overlapping identities and envision positive, creative outlets through which to explore their sexualities and create value in their lives and in others.

Additionally, though the toils of greed, anger, and foolishness caused significant disruptions and anguish in the lives of my participants—through drug use, promiscuity, violence, and arrogance—they were eventually able the overcome these delusion and not allow them to inhibit the awareness of their full human potential for happiness and creativity. In many instances, human revolution was the catalyst that saved their lives. Without coming to the realization of their own human dignity and their ability to bring forth their fullest potential, my participants could have succumbed suicide, AIDS, drug addiction, or school drop-out.

Lastly, even at the core of spiritual eroticism was human revolution. Christian dogma characterized my participants' lifestyles, desires, and identities as perverse and evil. Before experiencing their human revolution and foregoing anti-queer Christian discourse, they internalized their sexuality as inherently flawed and sinful. Human revolution allowed them to conceptualize alternate ways of interpreting their queer sexual desires and practices; it helped the participants re-imagine the very basis of their knowledge construction, worthiness, and positionality in society as sexualized/politicized beings.

Ultimately, human revolution served as the fundamental process by which my participants' evolved from their lesser selves to their greater selves (a Buddhist concept that has secular implications in this study), not simply for their own gain, but for the benefit of others as well; this does not suggest that the participants are or need to be active practitioners of Buddhism. Rather, it speaks to the universality of Ikeda's perspectives, informed by Buddhist humanism, in providing a necessary alternative framework from which to articulate queer Black men's agentic and happy self. Through this practice, my participants were able to heal and

revive their lives from pain and torment to compassion and determination. Human revolution was so integral to the findings of this dissertation because of its non-stigmatizing element; in a world that judged and discriminated against my participants for their lifestyle choices or errors that they made in life, it was refreshing to engage with a framework born out of an ethos of acceptance and hope. In fact, Ikeda (1996) insists that the greater self does not mean simply foregoing the lesser self; they exist in dialectical relation to one another. However, it is important to note that the lesser self must be correctly oriented and controlled as a means of advancing society for the betterment of all human beings (Ikeda, 1996). For instance, without undergoing greed, anger, and foolishness, my participants may not have realized the importance of renouncing egoism and using their platforms (e.g. anti-bullying campaign, YouTube blog, visual look book, and sociology degree) to potentially educate and help others avoid some of the mistakes that they made. In other words, tapping into their greater selves allowed my participants to create value in their lives and the lives of others, giving rise to the manifestation of harmonious coexistence and ultimately happiness.

Why Human Revolution?: Engaging Eastern and Western Perspectives

Initially, I struggled with negotiating how to frame this study in a way that would contribute to the intellectual discourse in emerging fields of Ikeda/Soka Studies and queer of color critique. It was important that I not alienate queer of color communities and scholars in my attempt to bring in concert the voices of Eastern and Western thinkers in these respective fields. I considered my audience and dialogued with myself around how much of this study should be taken up by queer theories of color versus Soka/Ikeda Studies. Based on the findings in the study, I resolved that both QoCC and Ikeda/Soka Studies—specifically the concept of human revolution—should both have legitimate places and spaces in this dissertation on human

happiness. Therefore, in this study it was imperative to juxtapose the critical/structural elements of QoCC with the humanistic elements of Ikeda's ideas on human revolution.

As outlined in the review of literature, QoCC emerged out of women of color feminism, rather than queer theory or gay and lesbian studies (Ferguson, 2004). This framework operates from an analytic understanding that the intersections of race, class, gender, and sexuality inform social practice (Ferguson, 2004). As such, QoCC is centered on power, identity politics and practice, and discursive knowledge. This particular theoretical lens was necessary in this study to combat the exploitative sanctioning and control of Black and Brown bodies and sexualities. In general, QoCC serves to disrupt the hegemonic, hierarchical order of race, class, gender, and sexuality politics in today's society (Ferguson, 2004). QoCC also provided me the language to reframe anti-queer victimization inherent within various institutions (school, church, family, and media, as outlined in the literature review) in order to truly explore and understand the lived experiences of queer Black boys with depth and nuance.

Ikeda's human revolution, on the other hand, centers the human being and focuses on cultivating the full human potential of each individual (Ikeda, 2010a). Therefore, it approaches education from the perspective of unwavering respect for the dignity of life and seeks to create self-sustaining individuals who can create value in their own lives and in society (Ikeda, 2010a). Ikeda (2010a) affirms that the aim and function of education (and therefore, life!) is the overall happiness of the individual. In the wake of various models of technocratic educational reform, human revolution provides a nuanced lens through which to situate my queer participants' schooling experiences as well as the subsequent implications for policy and practice that are addressed later in this chapter. Since this study centers on the phenomenon of happiness, it was important to incorporate a theoretical framework that addressed non-individualistic modes

of achieving happiness, a concept that is not present in many Western psychological frameworks. Moreover, the human revolution does not focus primarily on structural power; rather, it focuses on the inherent power of educators and students, through dialogic interactions, to transform themselves and the world.

Therefore, it was imperative to bring the voices of scholars in both QoCC and Ikeda/Soka Studies together with one another in this study; QoCC provides the lens through which to understand and analyze the intersections of anti-queer victimization for students of color, while Ikeda/Soka studies provides the strategies and ethos to overcome it. Together, these perspectives—both equally necessary in shaping my dissertation—helped to establish a multidimensional framework for understanding the complexities surrounding how queer Black boys contend with anti-queer victimization while also developing their capacity to create value and manifest happiness from within their own lives.

As outlined in Chapter 1, this study contributes admirably to the field of Curriculum Studies in various ways. First, this study adds to the existing canon of literature about queer Black boys that examines their resiliency and steadfast ability to productively navigate hegemonic spaces (Boykin, 2012; Johnson, 2008; McCready, 2010). The paucity of research on the schooling experiences of queer youth often paints a myopic image of how they cope with bullying, anti-queer victimization, and homophobia (Gresham, 2009). Furthermore, the intersection of race, gender, class, and sexuality further complicates the experiences of students whose identities overlap in multiple marginalized categories.

In addition, this study also contributes to the scholarship in Ikeda/Soka studies in education by examining the intersections of race and sexuality within the institution of schooling; more specifically, using Ikeda's framework for value creation, human happiness and

human revolution, this study explores the idea of authentic happiness emerging from seemingly insurmountable odds, while also addressing implications for educators and policymakers in understanding the dynamic schooling experiences of queer Black boys. Finally, this study contributes to the field of Curriculum studies because it helps educators to understand and embrace new epistemological perspectives on queer identity and reject the reductionist approach that simply portrays them as victims. A few of these perspectives and recommendations are addressed in the following sections of this chapter.

Recommendations for Curriculum, Theory, Policy, and Practice

> I do not aim to offer strategies that work. Rather, I hope to offer conceptual and cultural resources for educators and researchers to use as we rethink our practices, constantly look for new insights, and engage differently in anti-oppressive education. (Kumashiro, 2002, pp. 25-26)

Aligning with the concepts of dialogue, Ikeda/Soka Studies, and QoCC from the literature review, this section will re-imagine new possibilities for educational research, theory, curriculum design, pedagogy, and policy-making related to the safety, advocacy, and value-creative happiness of queer Black boys and queer students in general. More specifically, the following four conceptual implications/recommendations for schooling and formal k-12 education will be discussed:

1) Revisiting Bakhtin's theory of dialogue along with Maxine Greene's concept of the literary imagination, this section will examine prospects and pedagogic possibilities of incorporating dialogic practices within the literary curriculum that are queer-centered and queer-inclusive. By merging queer of color scholarship from the literature review with

Bakhtin's bildungsroman and Greens narrative-in-the-making, this section addresses practical implications for how Language Arts teachers, for example, can use the strategy of "reading queerly" to confront oppression, normalize difference, and dialogue with "otherness" within the classroom and school community. It begs the question: how, then, can these dialogic principles discussed in the literature review be actualized in the Language Arts classroom?

2) Pulling from empirical studies in the literature review, specifically pedagogical practices that align to QoCC in schools, I will address the need to "queer" teacher preparation programs by offering courses on queer theories of color (e.g. queer-of-color critique, Quare Theory, Queer Asian Studies, Gay Latino Studies, Black queer theory, Queer Latinx Studies, Black queer feminism, etc.) as licensure requirements, not just electives. These theoretical frameworks, I argue, are important for educators because they could enhance pedagogic possibilities for value creation and creative coexistence for all students in the school community. By examining the intersectionality of oppression from both a structural and interpersonal lens, these theories critique the impact of power dynamics (bi-directional, vertical, horizontal) on queer people of color, and they ultimately encourage a call-to-action for political, social, and cultural activism within marginalized communities of color;
3) This section will address a push toward language monitoring as a basis for cultivating and sustaining a positive, dialogic culture and climate in school settings. Again, the importance of utterances and discursive language will be addressed in order to encourage educators to critically examine and combat daily, taken-for-granted speech that reproduces heteronormativity and heterosexism.

4) Using Brockenbrough and other QoCC scholars as a backdrop, I address the need for comprehensive sex education programs that cover the histories, sexualities, and gender politics associated with the LGBTQ community and other queer communities of color in order to create queer-inclusive health programs that thwart the rate of HIV/AIDS transmission, particularly among queer boys of color.

Dialogue and the Literary Imagination: Pedagogic Possibilities

Queer scholars are constantly thinking of ways to disrupt the hidden curriculum in schools in order to combat anti-queer discursive knowledge (Blackburn & Miller, 2017; McCready, 2013; Blackburn & McCready, 2009; Blackburn, 2003). Specifically, Blackburn and Miller (2017) suggest that LGBTQ-themed novels in the ELA classroom are necessary for representation and inclusiveness. They also suggest creating "safe zones" in the classroom to discuss queer-themed topics. While this is definitely a necessary first step, simply teaching LGBTQ-themed novels or literature does not address the pervasive and often toxic ways in which homophobia and transphobia manifest in schools; rather, teachers must strive to infuse and create meaningful dialogue about these texts *throughout* the curriculum (Epstein, 2000; Page, 2016; Ryan & Hermann-Wilmarth, 2013; Sanders & Mathis, 2013; Schall & Kauffman, 2003). Students are so inundated by heterosexual scripts within their schooling experiences that the idea of merely acknowledging a homosexual relationship in literature or in real life becomes taboo. For instance, some curricular shortcomings may include examining the Civil Rights Movement without acknowledging the monumental role that Bayard Rustin played in organizing the March on Washington or never citing the historical significance of the Stonewall Rebellion on gay rights (Blackburn & Miller, 2017). Educators need to move beyond surface discussions on bullying and tolerance (although they are important concepts) and work towards normalizing

LGBTQ-themed topics and centering queer identities within their pedagogical practices. Literature, according to Maxine Green and Bakhtin, becomes the conduit through which we re-imagine the world in dialogic ways. Their philosophies provide insight into how we might repurpose the role of literary texts in empowering students toward social action in their school community and beyond.

Maxine Greene's (1995) *Releasing the Imagination* is thematically centered on the role of literature and the dialogic imagination in creating pathways for educators to re-conceptualize the aim of education. As such, her work takes a comprehensive approach in examining both the macro (societal and structural) and micro (pedagogical) elements used to educate children for a democratic society. Greene uses literature as a vehicle through which she takes the reader on a quest to chart new paths in the institution of schooling.

Greene's dialogical perspective is anchored in education, particularly the role of schooling in fostering a democratic society through the cultivation of human curiosity, which an only be achieved through dialogic interactions with others. She offers both a social and cultural critique of education as a way of encouraging her readers to always be alert and conscious when "reading" the world. Similar to Freire (1968/2000), Greene posits that if we become debilitated by illiteracy, we lose our agency in seeking to understand the world. This is particularly significant because by reading the world, we develop the ability to "name" the world, and in so doing, the capacity to ultimately transform it (Freire, 1968/2000). The spirit of Freire's ideas reverberate throughout Greene's book as she consistently reminds us that our dialogic transactions with others ultimately reveal our interdependence as social beings. This intellectual emancipation gives us the courage to disrupt hegemonic structures that quell our voices and inhibit us from being the authors of our own narratives.

Consciousness, as Greene notes, must be inextricably linked to imagination; awareness, therefore, consists of leaving something behind (in the case of education, leaving behind social efficiency models of education) in order to reach for something new. Nonetheless, in order to maximize this sense of imagination, we must simultaneously engage in critical introspection as a means of opening pathways of engagement in the multiple discourses of everyday life, a concept that Bakhtin—as analyzed in the literature review—refers to as heteroglossia (see Holquist, 2002). This is precisely why concerted efforts should be made to secure the availability of high quality literature that centers multiplicity of queer identities and voices; however, even if such texts are not readily available, queer themes can still be infused into the Language Arts classroom (Blackburn & Miller, 2017). Helmer (2015) and Morris (1998) explore the notion of "reading queerly" as a critical reading practice that explores texts from a queer perspective. Reading queerly attempts to disrupt heteronormativity by addressing power constructs, identity, social justice, and inequality, and by questioning the presence and absence of sexualities and gender identities within any text (Helmer, 2015; Kumashiro, 2002). The critical act of reading queerly contributes admirably to Green and Bakhtin's discourse around literacy and its role in cultivating the fullest of human potential through dialogic engagement with texts.

Similar to Greene, Bakhtin also believes in the power of texts to facilitate dialogue. For Bakhtin, the *bildungsroman*, or the novel of becoming, is not simply a literary text, however. The bildungsroman is, indeed, a reflection of life—it is made up of a complex web of symbols and language that is translated into experiences and meaning, and ultimately synthesized into internally persuasive discourses (Holquist, 2002). Neither Bakhtin nor Greene suggest that dialogue is a seamless process; in fact, they both note how particularly disorienting

and disruptive the process is. Indeed, dialogue is not mere passive engagement in conversations or discussions, but rather critical engagement in questioning difference and relations of power in our social world that is reproduced through ideology. Reading queerly gives teachers agency to center the lives of queer people by examining intersectionality and heteronormativity (Blackburn & Smith, 2010). By removing the stigma associated with queer identities, teachers are able to dialogically engage marginalized students in understanding themselves (and the world) through the lens of others.

Bakhtin's *bildungsroman* focuses specifically on the convergences of spoken and written utterances and the necessity of self and other in their dialectical exchanges of meaning. Literature, in Greene's (1995) perspective, also gives us a way to process voices and stories of other in relation to our own. By engaging with our imaginations, the characters, situations, concepts, and ideas embedded in literature give us a way of re-orienting ourselves in the world; in that sense, there are at least three layers of dialogue occurring simultaneously when we partake in imaginative inquiry with literature—dialogue between reader and text; between reader and author; and between reader and him/herself.

What is most admirable about Greene is that her philosophy is not just aimed at closing a deficit in student consciousness; undoubtedly, she is just as concerned with educators overcoming intellectual subjugation as well. With regard to teacher education, Green (1995) proclaims that even pre-service teachers must learn to tap into their imaginations to question social reality and, most importantly, see "alternative ways of being in and thinking about our world" (p. 90). Imaginative literature can also open up new modes of perceiving the purpose and function of education. Greene (1995) proposes that we dispel the autocratic pedagogical models that silence our students and "impose inarticulateness," and instead adopt an ideology that

empower our students to enter into a field of "possibles" by allowing them to see and "name" new realities that may be lacking in their present lived experiences.

For Bakhtin and Green dialogue, thus, is knowledge. Language, words, and the manner in which we communicate them, must be deconstructed. Utterances (between self and other) lack meaning in themselves; instead the elocutors must be simultaneously engaged in dialogic interaction in order to bring meaning and value to them. We, therefore, do not learn, communicate, and grow in isolation. All language (and the ideas that language inherently contains and communicates), according to Bakhtin (reference in Holquist, 2002), is part of a dynamic, fluid, and reciprocal process of endless reshaping of the world—what Toni Morrison calls "rememory" and what Greene refers to as "relearning" the world (Greene, 1995).

Indeed, literary texts are powerful social tools; as such, they serve as prosthesis of consciousness and possess the capacity to materially affect change within the social milieu of any particular time, place, or space. Bakhtin and Greene provide a framework for using the novel to read queerly, which serves as a conduit into a world of limitless human possibilities—possibilities that can be actualized only through dialectical exchange with others. Through the fusion of queer voices and identities across genres, the act of reading queerly illustrates the timeless nature of the human spirit; moreover, even though the characters are fictional, they remind us that what binds us as human beings is not necessarily our commonalities, but also our reliance on differences; these differences allow us to reimagine a society based on integrated cultural life, for only when we move away from static, monolithic, status-quo politics do we realize the power of a society based on multiplicity. Greene reminds us that a true democracy thrives not by resting on the accomplishments of the past, but by being acutely aware of future prospects.

Bakhtin and Greene gravitate to the novel because of its existential quest toward becoming, which creates platforms in discourse from which the multiplicity of social language can be perceived. Language Arts teachers can use these theoretical perspectives to shape their curriculum to be more inclusive and ultimately make substantive change in the lives of marginalized students. As Ikeda (2005b) reminds us in the literature review, true dialogue, which serves to co-construct something new and progress on something of value, is undoubtedly challenging considering our biases, selfishness, discrimination, and tendency towards aggression. Therefore, if school districts and educators are unwilling to invest in teaching texts that are inclusive of queer populations, then it sends a clear message that only certain students are deemed valuable. As Bakhtin notes, authentic dialogue does not exist without an a priori disposition towards and recognition of the intrinsic legitimacy of the other as counterpart. A hyper focus and attachment to difference obstructs an honest and open exchange and true mutual recognition of the dignity of queer students.

Queering Teacher Preparation

Public schools tend to have a myopic perspective of multicultural education and its impact on student identity, particularly regarding notions of gender and sexuality (Zacko-Smith & Smith, 2010). Moreover, little attention is given to the necessity for meaningful integration of gender and sexuality discourse within the curriculum as well as within the social fabric (milieu) of the school community. With such an emphasis placed on standardized testing and college readiness, many students are deprived of meaningful opportunities to engage in, and benefit from, processes of social reproduction that will sustain them throughout their adult lives (Collins, 2009). Urban schools must be sure that marginalized groups (queer students, in particular those

of color) are treated as valued social actors within their school communities. This section engages and synthesizes conceptual and practical recommendations for addressing deficits in teacher preparation curricula, specifically as it pertains to queer students and queer students of color. The research canvassed throughout this section sheds light on the potential benefits of gender and sexuality discourses within teacher preparation programs and urban school communities, and their subsequent impact on LGBTQ students and their manifestation of happiness.

As surveyed in the literature review, queer students of color and teachers have always found creative ways to push back against toxic heteronormativity in school settings and provide safe spaces for students to co-create knowledge and value, while also learning the standard curriculum. QoCC, specifically, offers a lens through which to center queer identities, while providing a platform for student-centered, co-constructed instructional practice. Cruz's (2013) research on "storying the self" offers a nuanced approach to students using mixed medium to tell their stories of suffering and oppression through their own lens and in their own words, which gives agentive power to their efforts. This strategy is also dialogic in nature because it not only focuses on the self; instead it reconciles various voices and forms of oppression suffered by others as well (Lankshear & Knobel, 2011). The literature review also referenced Boal (1985), who created Theater of the Oppressed as a means of giving marginalized students the outlet of performance and drama to express the realities of their conditions; this practice also engages students in understanding the role of civics and democracy in society. QoCC scholars have examined similar approaches to re-imagine the role and function of education, educators, and students in k-12 schooling and beyond (Blackburn & Miller, 2017; McCready, 2013; Blackburn

& McCready, 2009; Blackburn, 2003). While these pedagogical practices have proven to yield powerful results, they are still scarcely utilized in schools.

Although the participants in this study had allies at school, they still did not have active outlets such as "storying the self" and Theater of the Oppressed to help them cope and reconcile the academic and social/emotional aspects of their schooling experiences. Moreover, not all of their teachers created safe spaces where they felt protected against anti-queer violence. This is why teacher preparation programs must equip its candidates with an in-depth knowledge of queer theories of color, along with instructional methods to support them. This proposal is especially important, timely, and relevant in 21st Century social justice education. This section outlines tangible possibilities to improve teacher education programs and make them more inclusive of not just race and class, but also sexuality and gender expression as well.

Multicultural Education: The Missing Puzzle Piece?

Multiculturalism has received harsh criticism over the past several decades, namely due to its perceived desire to create homogeneity, acceptance, "sameness," and equality (Zacko-Smith & Smith, 2010). However, throughout the years, difference has grown to be something to celebrate and enrich the educational experience, rather than merely "melt" them away (Zacko-Smith and Smith, 2010). With the push to close the achievement gap in this country, politicians and educators, alike, are in a perpetual state of flux regarding the purpose and function of teacher education and preparation. While there is consensus around the necessity for quality teacher preparation, there is no one-size-fits-all approach or methods to prepare teacher for multiculturalism and social justice work, specifically regarding the emergence of sexuality and queer topics in education (Clark, 2010). Despite this conundrum, one thing is certain: throughout a teacher's career, they will undoubtedly encounter a variety of students with varying

interests and myriad worldviews. While these factors may not always have a direct impact on curricular choices, they certainly influence the daily interactions, experiences, relationships, and social capital that are fostered within the student body as a result of such diversity. The teacher training process is so crucial to social justice work because teachers are not just charged with obligations to instill knowledge in students, they are also responsible for regulating culture and climate in school buildings by fostering safe spaces for adolescents of all backgrounds to thrive academically, personally, and socially/emotionally.

Gorski et al. (2013) unpack the curricula of a variety of teacher preparation programs that have foundations rooted in social justice and/or multiculturalism, in an effort to manifest the deficits that exist within the realms of heterosexism, homophobia, and other LGBTQ concerns. The authors argue that issues pertaining to gay, lesbian, and queer identity are disproportionately void within teacher-education contexts, and that this absence is often due to the fact that power structures at the university level inhibit professors from purposefully infusing queer discourse within the architecture of teacher preparation programs. Their methodology for deconstructing this phenomenon involved content analyses of over 41 syllabi as well as interviews with over 80 educators and professors who taught multicultural courses for teacher preparation programs (Gorski, Davis, & Reiter, 2013). Their investigation had a dual purpose: first, to find correlations between the (in)frequency by which LGBTQ concerns are incorporated within coursework; and second, to juxtapose these findings with the actual methods—conservative approach, liberal approach, and critical approach—used by instructors to engage teacher candidates in discourse around these issues.

Gorski et al. (2013) found that even the world of academia—a space where diversity of ideas, perspectives, and worldviews should be embraced—is susceptible to the same threats of

heteronormativity that run rampant within society at-large. Notably, they underscore the fact that "those [professors] who attempt to teach about heterosexism may experience elevated hostility from colleagues" (p. 228). As a result of this "hostility," which, ironically, is usually portrayed through mere silence, LGBTQ scholarship for pre-service teacher development is omitted from the curriculum, making teacher candidates inadequately equipped with the awareness of how to foster equitable educational communities for LGBTQ youth in school settings. Their research is critical in setting the stage for examining the pervasiveness of heteronormativity within society, and for providing insight into how this phenomenon plays out in school settings.

Even within teacher preparation programs that offer courses on Queer Theory, the curricula still pushes mere acceptance and tolerance (Zacko-Smith & Smith, 2010); queer pedagogues advocate that pre-service programs take a more active stance and role when addressing the experiences that surround gender, sexuality, and sexual orientation in their classrooms (Zacko-Smith & Smith, 2010). Moreover, they ask that educators help expose "rigid normalizing categories…beyond the binaries of man/woman, masculine/feminine, student/teacher, and gay/straight" (Meyer, 2007, p. 15). The following section highlights some meaningful recommendations that should be incorporated into teacher preparation curricula across the country as a means of addressing the deficits around sexual racism and cultural unresponsiveness, systems of oppression, and systems of power and privilege for our most vulnerable youth.

Frameworks for Improving Teacher Education Programs

Society is moving to an era where diverse identities are appreciated and seen as valuable tools that strengthen our global citizenship (Zacko-Smith & Smith, 2010). Certainly, human

differences must be de-stigmatized and used as tools to propel our educational system forward in positive, productive ways. There are several research-based approaches in the past decade that teacher education programs should employ nationwide to demonstrate the minimal necessary components of a teacher's knowledge based on gender, sexuality, and sexual orientation. Therefore, I am recommending that the following conceptual ideas be integrated within any teacher preparation program:

- A critical examination of queer theories/studies of color in a multitude of intersectional and cultural contexts, such as queer Black studies, Black queer feminism, queer-of-color critique, LatCrit Studies. While many teacher preparation programs have begun incorporating Queer Theory into their curricula, it is important that they expand course offerings to address the identities and unique needs of our most vulnerable students. This is especially necessary to those educators who wish to pursue a career in urban education. Understanding the interplay of race, gender, sexuality/sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status is important to a comprehensive social justice framework. Queer theories/studies of color draw on post-structuralist theories of identity and dispel a romantic view of accomplishing inclusion; rather, they aim at examining ways in which sexual identities are negotiated through daily social interactions, such as in schools (Nelson, 2002);
- Methods courses that offer queer-responsible and queer-responsive pedagogical strategies that incorporate dialogic and liberation ideologies into the formal curriculum, co-created by teachers and students. It is also imperative that embedded within such methods courses are opportunities for educators to engage with pedagogies that call for merging of theory, practice, and activism as an embodied politic of resistance. Embracing

conceptual frameworks such as "theory in the flesh" is especially important in teacher preparation programs because it emphasizes "the diversity within and among [LGBTQ] people of color while simultaneously accounting for how racism and classism affect how we experience and theorize the world" (Johnson, 2001, p. 3). Theory in the flesh was born out of a necessity to bridge the contradictions of our experiences (skin color, socioeconomic status, location, sexual desires, etc.) by "naming ourselves and telling our stories in our own words" (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 23). Originally born out of a Black feminist tradition, theory in the flesh drew attention to the health inequities experienced by queer Black people in the UK; theory in the flesh has since evolved into a tradition of activism that pushes back against sexual racism and advocates for the mental, emotional, and sexual health of people of color throughout interconnected communities (Cruz, 2013). This is relevant to queer Black boys and other queer youth of color, namely because the physical realities of their lives are being omitted from the curriculum, ignored in social spaces, or denied within the interpersonal relationships that they encounter on a daily basis.

- Pre-service curricula should explore the "unique psychological, emotional, and educational needs of gay, lesbian, and bisexual students, including research studies on internalized homophobia, alienation, and other psychosocial aspects of peer, family, and societal rejection and acceptance" (see Zacko-Smith & Smith, 2010);

Language Affirmation as a Tool of Resistance

Language yields power, and power grants one the ability to name, create, and control dominant narratives in society (Meyer, 2007). Thus, the usage of language to communicate and make sense of social phenomena is perhaps the most dynamic social tool developed by human

beings to date. Language has evolved into sophisticated heuristic systems that are also politically-charged sources of power through which oppressive knowledge is legitimated and substantiated (Anyon, 2009). The concept of language as power was introduced by such theorists as Foucault (1998, 1986a, 1986b), Derrida (1982; 1986), and Lancan (1957/1986). They explored both the overt and subversive power of words to bolster the dominant ideology through discursive practices. Although these structures creates power imbalances in society, Foucault (1998) declares that power does not merely exist in a vertical manner; rather, it is mutually supportive and bi-directional. Similar to Foucault, Apple challenges the myopic notion that power is wielded through mere acts of domination or coercion. Foucault (1998) declares, "power is everywhere" and "comes from everywhere" and thus is neither agentive nor structural (p. 63). Instead, power is regulated and manipulated through discursive knowledge as "truth."

Bakhtin's theoretical framework explores the idea of language as well. Nevertheless, his perspective not only involves the reciprocal relationship of *understanding* others and *being understood* by them, but it also declares that language and mutual communication are the only conduits through which one can truly understand the self (Marchenkova, 2005). Bakhtin's ideals have transcended historical and cultural boundaries, in his effort to create a systematic way of dismantling dominant, hegemonic discourses. One could argue that Bakhtin's longevity is partly due to the enduring nature of his fundamental principles—at the core of his theory are the underlying messages of freedom and hope. Notwithstanding this optimism, Bakhtin's theoretical framework is ridden with conflict and dualism as well. Indeed, as political hegemonic forces quell authentic opportunities to engage in dialogic activities, social inequities inevitably ensue. This has become especially glaring within the institution of schooling, not just in America, but throughout global society.

Bakhtin's theory of dialogism can sometimes be difficult to implement within traditional educational settings due to the contrived, hegemonic nature of learning that often exists in school and classroom settings. Both written and spoken languages are negotiated across cultural, historical, and social context, which demands that teachers consider not just students' cognitive needs, but also their personal and cultural merit as individuals within the historical-spatial contexts of here and now. Without a teacher's assistance in negotiating these hegemonic spaces, learning becomes obsolete. Therefore, the educator plays an integral role in helping students, including queer students, navigate heteronormative classroom spaces as well as ensure that positive representation is incorporated into the curriculum. Without effective mediation from teachers in the zone of proximal development, students will be ill-equipped to negotiate and legitimize their existence in authoritative spaces, especially marginalized groups such as queer students of color. Providing students with the pedagogical tools to address this dualism in the classroom, however, will inevitably equip them with the perspicacity to handle similar situations should they arise in future occurrences. If students are able to recognize and confront 'outsideness' as a necessary and meaningful aspect in the process of human *being,* then the boundaries of their human potential would prove limitless.

Queer theorists also believe language and discourse play a pivotal role in the interplay of power, behavior, and performance; hence, in an effort to disrupt heteronormative ideologies, queer theorists attempt to normalize languages and discourse around sexual behaviors and identities that are considered odd, peculiar, or immoral (Sedgwick, 1990). In so doing, they challenge power constructs in society that seek to enforce, institutionalize, and substantiate knowledge (re)production for queer students (Sedgwick, 1990). Apple provides an interesting perspective by which these ideals may be actualized. He posits that we must situate knowledge

(epistemology), the school (as a social institution), and the educator him or herself (as agents) within these hegemonic traditions so that they can "master" and "relearn" them; in so doing, educators not only develop a critical "consciousness" about being systematically oppressed, but they also recognize how these structural and cultural arrangements that "control" them were actually built by them. The educator must intervene when cognitive and socio-cultural dissonance arise in the classroom, which is namely due to the symbiotic relationship of language and identity. Pedagogy, thus, serves two purposes within this context: one context serves to analyze the instructional responsibility of teachers when transmitting languages of 'other' to students, and the other investigates some implications for how students could use these cognitive tools to ultimately engage in the formation of the authentic self.

Conceptual Tools for Active Language Monitoring

Dismantling the disparaging effects of homophobia, heterosexism, and heteronormativity in schools is a daunting undertaking; surmounting these constructs starts with unpacking and investigating our epistemological understanding of the word "queer" and all of its derivatives. Kissen (2002) suggests that educators must actively understand and monitor the language that they use and "undo" the pejorative connotations associated with the term "queer" since it became a slur back in the 1920s. Whether they realize it or not, educators constantly receive messages, codes, and scripts from the dominant culture that seek to establish a baseline for what normalcy is and how it is defined (e.g. heterosexual two-parent household); therefore, re-defining what is deemed status-quo and pushing back against demoralizing queer rhetoric are important first steps in resisting the rigid categorization upon which all oppression is based.

Unfortunately, as Meyer (2007) notes, "much of the information about bullying and harassment is flawed because it fails to address some of the underlying social forces at work" (p.

16). The entanglement of sexuality, danger (sexual violence), and surveillance (disciplinary policies/practices & actual surveillance) lead to covert and often overt censorship of sexuality in schools, which translates into self-censorship defined and dictated by others. In these contexts, schools pathologize and silence outward displays of sexuality, while educators continue to assert their own normalized discourses of sexuality into their professional practice. C.J. Pascoe's scholarship around "fag discourse" discusses the importance of gender performativity as a socialization and acculturation mechanism. In his article, "Dude You're a Fag," Pascoe underscores how homophobic teasing is more so characterized by one's masculinity than sexuality, due to contemporary constructs of adolescence. Pascoe's perspective is that the term fag, which is mainly used by males, does not necessarily reflect one's sexual orientation. More specifically, he notes that "By attending to these meanings I reframe the discussion as one of a fag discourse, rather than simply labeling this sort of behavior as homophobia. The fag is an 'abject' position, a position outside of masculinity that actually constitutes masculinity" (Pascoe, 2005, p.133). The author also mentions that the word fag is often used as a disciplinary mechanism: "It is fluid enough that boys police most of their behaviors out of fear of having the fag identity permanently adhere and definitive enough so that boys recognize a fag behavior and strive to avoid it" (Pascoe, 2005, p.125). This bespeaks the idea that boys do not associate the word fag as an identity for homosexual boys, and that any boy can become a fag, regardless of his actual self-perceived sexual orientation. In other words, as Meyer (2007) points out, "it is clear that these behaviors act to create and support a social hierarchy that privileges mainstream identities and behaviors over marginalized ones" (p. 16).

One way in which educators can challenge discursive anti-queer language in their classroom is by supplementing books that illustrate a heteronormative picture of romance and

dating with books that instead show the possibility of same-sex relationships, romantic bliss, and other vicissitudes of healthy queer bonds and connections. Educators must begin to make the classroom and school experience about exploring the power of language and investigating the root of stereotypes, values, labels, and stigmas. Britzman (2000) notes that schools should be "a place to question, explore, and seek alternative explanations rather than a place where knowledge means 'certainty, authority and stability'" (p. 51). Kumashiro (2002) suggests four techniques that can allow educators to examine language disparities and injustice in school settings: 1) the "education of other," the "education about other," the "education that is critical of privileging and othering," and the "education that changes students and society."

In essence, language, words, and the manner in which we communicate them, must be deconstructed. Utterances (between self and other) lack meaning in themselves; instead the elocutors must be simultaneously engaged in dialogic interaction in order to bring meaning and value to them. If the language being used in such exchanges is derogatory and defamatory, then there is no authentic value being created. We, therefore, do not learn, communicate, and grow in isolation. Thus, we must re-imagine the role of educators, administrators, policy makers, and other stakeholders move beyond a mere technocratic mode of communication toward a more dialogic mode of social interaction. Confronting and monitoring anti-queer language in schools are necessary educator practices because they reminds us that what binds us as human beings is not necessarily our commonalities, but also our reliance on differences; these differences allow us to reimagine a society based on integrated cultural life, for only when we move away from static, monolithic, status-quo politics do we realize the power of a society based on multiplicity. The following section explores another recommendation for curricular change vis-à-vis sex education programs.

Sex Ed: A Nation Divided

In the literature review, Brockenbrough (2016) lays the theoretical and practical foundation for the following curricular recommendation toward culturally responsive, queer-inclusive health programs. Moreover, as Brockenbrough (2016) reiterates, when you consider the homophobic and transphobic bullying in schools, the heteronormative hidden curriculum in school-based sexual health programs, and the disproportionate exposure to HIV/AIDS with young men of color, it becomes especially imperative to incorporate sex-positive, queer-inclusive programming that is sensitive to the multiple oppressions and cultural experiences of queer boys of color. The issue of inadequate access to quality sex education programs is of particular importance to QoCC scholars because it not only speaks to racial inequity, but it also highlights an issue with classism. Since the HIV/AIDS rate disproportionately impacts marginalized communities, there is no sense of urgency to transform our educative practices to thwart the rate of infection and promote queer positivity.

Sex education, in general, has always had a contentious history in this country, stemming from vehement efforts to regulate and censor morality through control over bodies, speech, and knowledge (Whitman, 2008). Despite this reality, the controversy surrounding sex education politics poses an interesting dilemma: On the one hand, public polls since the sixties show widespread support for sex education (Irvine, 2002); paradoxically, communities across the country are still divided on the issue for reasons related to politics, religion, morality, and purpose. These critics believe that if we discuss topics of sex or sexuality with children, they should be censored; otherwise it creates a slippery slope that leads to immoral thoughts and destructive behaviors. Indeed, debates over the role of sex and sexuality in education are inextricably tied to romantic constructions of childhood innocence and adults' roles in preserving

said innocence (Mintz, 2004). Ideological conceptions of the "ideal" child forges rifts between parents, politicians, teachers, and religious activist over "what's best" in preserving the purity and sanctity of childhood; as such, the heightened emotional sentiments surrounding children is what make sex debates particularly volatile.

Both old and new paternalism play major roles in the discourse of childhood. Whitman (2008) defines paternalism as "principles or system of governing that echoes a father's relationship with his children" (p. 34). When this relationship is mirrored through governmental policies and practices, it compromises individual freedom and justifies psychological and corporeal control by appealing to one's moral and ethical codes. These funds of knowledge get transmitted culturally until they become common-sense modes of thinking.

The old paternalism sought to use forceful tactics to help people surmount moral failures, whereas the new paternalism uses language and codes to assist individuals in leading better lives, while preserving one's freedom in the process (Whitman, 2008). Through persuasive rhetoric and covert tactics, the new paternalism uses peoples' freedom and "choices" to actually control them (Whitman, 2008). This libertarian paternalism gives people a semblance of freedom, while in turn setting up rules that advocate certain behaviors. In essence, the new paternalism is still a mechanism of social control, yet it uses more subversive methods of reinforce certain ideologies. With regard to childhood innocence, sexuality, and sex education, language and performativity are two powerful cultural tools that reinforce these paternalistic endeavors, and remains at the crux of political, social, and cultural controversy

As Irvine (2002) notes, sexual language is not inherently disturbing; rather, it is colored by the cultural and historical narratives that stigmatize sexuality as a deviant and dangerous domain. Since the mid-nineteenth century, the Christian Right—including conservative

Catholics and Christian evangelicals and fundamentalists—has funded myriad organizations, think tanks, and political campaigns aimed at upholding and restoring "traditional cultural values" related to childhood, sexuality, and the family (Irvine, 2004). Since these organizations are usually well-funded, and they control the discourses that get disseminated and legitimated in public conversations about sex and education; these rhetorical frames often incite hysteria, confusion, and ambivalence, resulting in mass mobilization towards conservative values and beliefs.

Despite this seemingly myopic view of childhood, there have been several iterations of this topic throughout history, namely the pre-modern and the modern child. The pre-modern child was ideologically constructed as an adult-in-training. Their primary purpose was to learn the "ways" of adulthood so that they could assume their proper place as a productive member of their community; religiously and morally, they were seen as deficient and incomplete—as empty vessels waiting to be filled so that they could transition into adulthood. The modern child, on the other hand, was constructed as innocent, fragile, malleable, and universal. In addition, proponents of this ideology believe children had to be shielded from the evils of the world and their purity had to be preserved for as long as possible (Mintz, 2004). Conservative critics in camp feel that openness about sex or sexuality is misguided and destructive. Furthermore, they place restrictions on other forms of sexualities and sexual expression, such as homosexuality and masturbation; placing strict limitations on sexuality discourse, in their opinions, is the best way to ensure that sexual intercourse is confined to marriage and that other social stigmas, such as prostitution, abortions, and sexually transmitted infections are minimized (Irvine, 2004).

Ideology and the Queer Factor: Beyond the Abstinence-Contraception Debate

Sex education is one of the few outlets where youth receive pertinent (and often life-saving!) information about sexuality and sexual health. There is substantive research to show the positive impact of well-designed and well-implemented sex education programs on thwarting risk behavior and reducing STIs and pregnancy (Kohler, Manhart, & Lafferty, 2008; Advocates for Youth, 2008; Kirby, Laris, & Rolleri, 2007).

However, for queer youth—especially queer youth of color—representation in sex education is virtually non-existent. In order to receive comparable health-related benefits as their heterosexual counterparts, it is imperative that sex education programs become queer-inclusive. According to Advocates for Youth (2016), inclusive sex education programs are those that "help youth understand gender identity and sexual orientation with age-appropriate and medically accurate information; incorporate positive examples of LGBTQ individuals, romantic relationships and families; emphasize the need for protection during sex for people of all identities; and dispel common myths and stereotypes about behavior and identity" (p. 1).

Whether politically and legally prohibited or religiously sanctioned, queer-inclusive sex education is simply not an option for most youth in schools. In a GLSEN National School Climate Survey (2013), fewer than 5% of queer students reported that they had health classes that included positive representations of LGBTQ-related topics, and in 2015 only 12% reported that their sex education classes addressed same-sex relationships. This research demonstrates yet another area of schooling where queer youth are ostracized, omitted, and actively stigmatized, which leads to a heightened risk for adverse sexual health outcomes.

Queer of color scholars attribute this lack of inclusivity, especially in marginalized, poor communities to the health inequalities and disparities that have always impacted Black and Brown communities (Brockenbrough, 2016; Johnson, 2001). This imbalance in power serves as

a means of production—production that generates a desired effect or behavior favored by the dominant group—a phenomenon that Foucault referred to as economic functionality of power (1980). This functionality of power typically translates into social constructs that instantiate and sustain dominance (e.g. race, class, gender, sexuality). In this sense, the hierarchical power divisions that emerge in school settings—through both formal and informal curricula—serve as a production of power (through heteronormative speech and practices from adults and derogatory, profane, and abusive behavior by students) that subjugates queer students while privileging non-queer students.

The absence of conversations about sexuality in schools not only impacts the formal and informal curriculum, but also the teacher-student and student-student interpersonal relationships. This can be damaging in perpetuating hegemonic modes of thinking that marginalize queer students and adults in a school. Thinking about sex and sexuality through a postmodern lens might allow a platform to re-imagine sex as a new emancipatory space for queer and non-queer students to critically explore the social construction of sexuality (Field, 2008). This way, new discourses can be forged through an examination of the historical and political nature of childhood and adolescence, making dialogue a necessary component to developing critical consciousness. Freire (1968/2000) saw education as truth-seeking praxis, consisting of dialogue, action orientation, and critical reflection. Undergirded by values of humility, hope, love, trust, critical thinking, and mutual respect, dialogue serves as a horizontal communication among persons on a critical quest to understand the world and, consequently, to transform it (Freire, 1968/2000). In order for this type of transformation to occur, education must contain the volatility of sexuality; otherwise, learning becomes stifled. Desire—and our most intimate experiences—can shape how we perceive the world, and if not addressed and unpacked, could

contribute to perpetuating hegemonic, patriarchal status quo. The following section outlines some specific strategies to make sex education more inclusive for all students, including queer students.

Implications for Substantive Change

Queer-Inclusive sex education provides students with important life lessons and pertinent information on sexual health, mindsets and values about sexuality and healthy relationships, as well as critical interpersonal skills (Kohler, Manhart, & Lafferty, 2008). Such programs also encourage students to be more vulnerable and open to parents/caregivers about their sexual practices and provide the foundations for effective communication skills to sustain productive relationships. Other benefits include students deferring the age of their first sexual intercourse, diminishing their number of sexual partners, curtailing unprotected sex, and decreasing the rates of teen pregnancy, HIV, and other STIs (Advocates for Youth, 2008).

Ultimately, sex education is an equity issue. Queer youth deserve to benefit from the same access to information as their non-queer counterparts. Overcoming this opportunity gap requires substantive changes in policy to create sex education curricula that are inclusive of the unique identities, needs, and worldview of queer youth (Kirby, Laris, & Rolleri, 2007).

According to Advocates for Youth (2016), the bare minimum of any sex education program should include:

- Include information for all students about sexual orientation and gender identity that is medically accurate and age-appropriate
- Be designed with the needs of LGBTQ students in mind and be implemented with awareness that all classes are likely to have some LGBTQ students

- Include depictions of LGBTQ people and same-sex relationships in a positive light in stories and role-plays
- Use gender-neutral terms such as "they/them" and "partner" whenever possible
- Ensure that prevention messages related to condom and birth control use are not relayed in a way that suggests only heterosexual youth or cisgender male/female couples need to be concerned about unintended pregnancy and STI prevention
- Avoid making assumptions about students' sexual orientation or gender identity (p. 6)

Although comprehensive sex education programs (k-12) are far from being widely implemented in U.S. schools, inclusive sex education in any capacity is an important next step in promoting non-stigmatizing messages on gender and sexual identity as a part of human development. This is especially crucial in the wake of some defamatory legislature that counteract any productive measures towards this goal. In fact, there are actual laws prohibiting any advocacy of homosexuality—often referred to as "no promo homo" laws (GLSEN, 2019). These local and state legislation forbid teachers of sex education to mention or address LGBTQ people or even related topics; some even forbid teachers from discussing it at all (GLSEN, 2019). If queer people are discussed, these laws require that they are spoken of in a pejorative or erroneous way. This is damaging to the psyche of queer young people because it inhibits them from learning important information about their health, while further perpetuating pessimism about queer people.

Conclusion

In his provocative piece, "A Letter from Birmingham Jail," Martin Luther King, Jr. (1963) proclaims that "injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere" (reference in Watson, 2004, p. 17) These eloquent words encapsulate the sentiments and urgency that I've

attempted to explicate throughout this study. The discriminatory politics around heteronormativity in schools have indelible, and often irreversible, effects on the psyches and bodies of queer Black boys who already struggle with reconciling their belonging within larger societal contexts. From school boards, to schools of education, to the classroom, all stakeholders play a substantial role in leveraging the toxic schooling experiences that queer Black boys experience as a result of ubiquitous heteronormative practices and policies.

Despite this reality, queer youth are becoming much more forthright in advocating for their civil rights while also negotiating power in spaces where they are exposed to persistent violence; the range of conceptual frameworks, implications, and recommendations that I've explored within this chapter all support the need to re-negotiate their existing exclusion from the social, cultural, and curricular landscape of schooling. Collins (2009) addresses how social relations are invariably reproduced through peer-to-peer interactions in schooling institutions, and how these reproduction processes can often create inequitable environments for those outside the elite strata of class, race, gender, and sexuality. Thus, without dialogic collaboration from adults in helping to reshape discursive knowledge around gender and sexuality, the likelihood of achieving equitable, amicable, and inclusive learning environments for LGBTQ students seems bleak. Nevertheless, the data captured in this study sends a resoundingly clear message: queer Black boys have always forged their own paths forward and manifested happiness in spite of the narratives that vilify and demonize them. This dissertation, above all, is a project of hope, and my participants have proven to exemplify what Ikeda considers the ability to "savor joy at all times" (Ikeda, 2017, p. 33). Hope is, therefore, an indestructible sense of joy and nothing is more powerful than it (Goulah, 2021). Ikeda (2017) writes, "People who never lose hope, no matter what happens, are truly happy" (p. 33). The queer Black boys in this study

are the embodiment of this enduring sense of hope, joy, and happiness, which emanates from the deep interiority of their human dignity. This ethos is both the aim and source of education, and ultimately the purpose life itself (Goulah, 2021).

References

Abdur-Rahman, A. I. (2012). A*gainst the closet: Black political belonging and the erotics of race.* Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Advocates for Youth . (2016). A call to action: LGBTQ youth need inclusive sex education. Retrieved from http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/blogs-main/advocates-blog/2553-a-call-to-action-lgbtq-youth-need-inclusive-sex-education

Advocates for Youth. (2008). *Science and Success: Sex Education and Other Programs that Work to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, HIV & Sexually Transmitted Infections*. Washington, D.C.: Alford, S. et al.

Ahmed, S. (2010). *The promise of happiness*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Ahmed, S. (2006). Orientations: Toward a queer phenomenology. *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies, 12*(4), 543-574.

Ahmed, S. (2006). *Queer phenomenology: Orientations, objects, others*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Almeida, J., Johnson, R. M., Corliss, H. L., Molnar, B. E., & Azrael, D. (2009). Emotional distress among LGBT youth: The influence of perceived discrimination based on sexual orientation. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 38*(7), 1001–1014.

Althaus-Reid, M. (2001). Outing theology: Thinking Christianity out of the church closet. *Feminist Theology: The Journal of the Britain & Ireland School of Feminist Theology,* 27, 57-67.

Amador, N. (2006). Somos luchadores: Queer Latino youth reclaim culture, community, and spirituality. *Fellowship*, *72*(3/4), 20.

Anderson, C., Laudenslager, M., Mauss, I., Savino, N., Tamir, M., & Weisbuch, M. (2012). The pursuit of happiness can be lonely. *Emotions, 12*(5), 908-912.

Andoh-Arthur, Johnny. (2019). *Gatekeepers in Qualitative Research. SAGE Research Methods Foundation*. London: Sage Publications.

Anyon, J. (2009). *Theory and educational research: Toward critical social explanation*. New York: Routledge.

Anyon, J. (1980). Social class and the hidden curriculum of work. *Journal of Education*, *162*(1), 67–92.

Apple, M. W. (2006). *Educating the "right" way : Markets, standards, god, and Inequality*. 2nd ed.. New York: Routledge.

Apple, Michael W. (2004). *Ideology and curriculum*. New York: Routledge.

Applebee, A. N. (1996). *Curriculum as conversation: Transforming traditions of teaching and learning*. Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press.

Argyle, M. (1987). *The psychology of happiness*. London: Methuen.

Bakhtin, M. M. (1990). *Art and answerability: Early philosophical essays.* 1st ed. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Bakhtin, M. (1981). Discourse in the novel (M. Holquist & C. Emerson, Trans.). In M. Holquist (Ed.), *The dialogic imagination* (pp. 259-422). Austin: University of Texas Press.

Bakhtin, M.(1968). *Rabelais and His World* (H. Iswolsky, Trans.). Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.

Bardella, C. (2001). Queer spirituality. *Social Compass*, *48*(1), 117-138

Bargh, J. A., & Barndollar, K. (1996). Automaticity in action: The unconscious as repository of chronic goals and motives. In P. M. Gollwitzer & J. A. Bargh (Eds.), *The psychology of action* (pp. 457– 471). New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Barnshaw, J. (2010). The low down on the down low: Origins, risk identification and intervention. *Health Sociology Review*, *19*(4), 478-490.

Bartone, M. D. (2020). "Ok, so Zion's not a sissy anymore he's gay so let's call him that": From elementary school to college: Schooling experiences of Black gay males leading to understanding and self-possession of their intersecting racial and sexual identities. In J. Gregorio Smith & C. Winter Han (Eds.), *Home and community for queer men of color: The intersection of race and sexuality* (pp. 49-74). Maryland: Lexington Books.

Baurain, B. (2011). Common ground with A common faith: Dewey's idea of the "religious." *Education and Culture*, *27*(2), 74-91.

Bawer, B. (1994). *Place at the table: the gay individual in American society*. New York: First Touchstone.

Beagan, B. L., & Hattie, B. (2015). Religion, spirituality, and LGBTQ identity integration. *Journal of LGBT Issues in Counseling*, *9*(2), 92-117.

Berger, Peter L. *Rumor of angels: Modern society and the rediscovery of the supernatural*. Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1970.

Berlan, E., Corliss, H., Field, A., Goodman, E., & Austin, S. (2010). Sexual orientation and bullying among adolescents in the Growing Up Today Study. *Journal of Adolescent Health, 46*(4), 1–6.

Bethel, D. M. (1973). *Makiguchi the value creator*. New York: Weatherhill, Inc.

Bethel, D. M., ed. (1989). *Education for creative living: Ideas and proposals of Tsunesaburo*

Makiguchi. Ames: Iowa State University Press.

Blackburn, M., & Miller, M. C. (2017). Teaching LGBTQ-Themed Literature in English Language Arts Classrooms. Equity by Design. *Equity Assistance Center Region III, Midwest and Plains Equity Assistance Center.*

Blackburn, M. V., & Smith, J. (2010). Moving beyond the inclusion of LGBT-themed literature in English Language Arts classrooms: Interrogating heteronormativity and exploring intersectionality. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, 53*(8), 625-634.

Blackburn, M. V. (2003). Disrupting the (hetero)normative: Exploring literacy performances and identity work with queer youth. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, *46*(4), 312-324.

Blackburn, M., & McCready, L. (2009) Voices of queer youth in urban schools: Possibilities and limitations. *Theory Into Practice, 48*(3), 222-230.

Blair, E. A reflexive exploration of two qualitative data coding techniques. *Journal of Methods and Measurement in the Social Sciences*, *6*(1), 14-49.

Boal, A. (1985). *Theatre of the oppressed*. New York: Theatre Communications Group.

Bockting, W., Michael, M., & Rosser, B. R. (2007). Latino men's sexual behavior with transgender persons. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, *36*(6), 779–786.

Bogdan, S. K. & Bicklen, R. C. (2006). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theories and methods* (5th ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Botzakis, S. & Fecho, B. (2007). Feasts of becoming: Imagining a literacy classroom based on dialogic beliefs. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, 50*(7), 548–58.

Bourdieu, P. (1986). The forms of capital. In J. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of theory and research for the sociology of education* (pp. 241-258). New York: Greenwood.

Boykin, K. (2012). Agency and abjection in the closet: The voices (and silences) of Black queer

male teachers. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, *25*(6), 741-765.

Britzman, D. (2000). Precocious education. In S. Talburt & S. Steinberg (Eds.), *Thinking queer: Sexuality, culture and education* (pp. 33-60). New York: Peter Lang.

Brockenbrough, E. (2018). "We don't see a lot of people like you": Black queer men mentoring Black queer male youth. *Youth Sexualities: Public Feelings and Contemporary Cultural Politics*, *1*, 229-254.

Brockenbrough, E. (2016). Becoming queerly responsive: Culturally responsive Pedagogy for Black and Latino urban queer youth. *Urban Education, 51*(2), 170–196.

Brockenbrough, E. (2015a). Queer of color agency in educational contexts: Analytic frameworks from queer of color critique. *Educational Studies*, *51*(1), 28-44.

Brockenbrough, E. (2015b). The discipline stop: Black male teachers and the politics of urban school discipline. *Education and Urban Society, 47*(5), 499–522.

Brockenbrough, E. (2012a). Emasculation blues: Black male teachers' perspectives on gender and power in the teaching profession. *Teachers College Record, 114*(5), 1.

Brockenbrough, E. (2012b). "You ain't my daddy!": Black male teachers and the politics of surrogate fatherhood. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, *16*, 357-372.

Brockenbrough, E., & Boatwright, T. (2013). In the MAC: Creating safe spaces for transgender youth of color. In K. Jocson (Ed.), *Cultural transformations: Youth and pedagogies of possibility* (pp. 165–182). Massachusetts: Harvard Education Press.

Busacchi, V. (2016). Ikeda's philosophy of human revolution. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science, 6*(2), 63-72.

Butler, J. (1997). *The psychic life of power: Theories in subjection*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Butler, J. (1990). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. New York: Routledge.

Carr, A. (2004). *Positive psychology: The science of happiness and human strengths*. London: Routledge.

Carter, B.A. (2013). 'Nothing better or worse than being black, gay, and in the band': A qualitative examination of gay undergraduates participating in historically black college or university marching bands. *Journal of Research in Music Education 61*(1), 26–43.

Chambers, T., & McCready, L. (2011). "Making space" for ourselves: African American students' responses to their marginalization. *Urban Education, 46*(6), 1352-1378.

Chambliss, J.J. (1991). John Dewey's idea of imagination in philosophy and education. *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, *25*(4), 43-49.

Chavez, K. R. (2008). Breaking the trances and engaging the erotic: The search for a queer spirituality. *Liminalities: A Journal of Performance Studies*, *4*(2), 1557-2935.

Clark, C. T. (2010). Preparing LGBTQ-allies and combating homophobia in a U.S. teacher education program. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 26*, 704-713.

Clerkin, E. M., Newcomb, M. E., & Mustanski, B. (2011). Unpacking the racial disparity in HIV rates: the effect of race on risky sexual behavior among Black young men who have sex with men (YMSM). *Journal of Behavioral Medicine*, *34*(4), 237–243.

Cohen, T. (1996). The ideology of dialogue: The Bakhtin/de man (dis)connection. *Cultural Critique*, *33*, 41-86.

Coleman, R.D., Wallace, J.K., & Means, D.R. (2020). Questioning a single narrative: Multiple identities shaping black queer and transgender student

retention. *Journal of College Student Retention : Research, Theory & Practice* *21*(4), 455–475.

Collins, J. (2009). Social reproduction in classroom and schools. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, *33*(1), 33-48.

Conerly, G. (2001). Are you Black first or are you queer? In D. Constantine-Simms (Ed.), *The greatest taboo: Homosexuality in the Black community* (pp. 7-23). California: Alyson Publications.

Craig, C. (2017). Courting the abject: A taxonomy of black queer rhetoric. *College English, 79*(6), 619-639.

Crotty, M. (1998). *The foundations of social research: Meaning and perspective in the research process*. California: SAGE Publications.

Cruz, C. (2013). LGBTQ youth of color video making as radical curriculum: A brother mourning his brother and a theory in the flesh. *Curriculum Inquiry*, *43*, 441–460.

Daisaku Ikeda Website Committee (2020). Soka schools. Retrieved from https://www.daisakuikeda.org/main/educator/edu-instit/soka-schools.html

Daschke, D., & Ashcraft, M. (Eds.). (2005*). New religious movements: A documentary reader.* New York: New York University Press.

de Beauvoir, S. (1997). *The second sex*. New York: Vintage Books.

Derrida, J. (1982). Differance. In A. Bass (Trans.), *Margins of philosophy* (pp. 3-27). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Derrida, J. (1986). Of grammatology. In H. Adams & L. Searle (Eds.), *Critical theory since 1965* (pp. 94-119). Tallahassee: University Press of Florida.

Dessel, A., Rogge, M., & Garlington, S. (2006). Using intergroup dialogue to promote social

justice and change. *Social Work*, *51*(4), 303–315.

DeTurk, S. (2006). The power of dialogue: Consequences of intergroup dialogue and their implications for agency and alliance building. *Communication Quarterly*, 54(1), 33–51.

Dewalt, K. M. & Dewalt, B. R. (2011). Understanding the Black church: The dynamics of change. *Journal of Religious Thought*, 56/57(2/1), 95-113.

Dewey, J. (1934/2005). *Art as experience*. New York: Berkley Publishing Group.

Dewey, J. (1916/2012). *Democracy and education*. New York: Macmillan.

Diamond, J. B., Randolph, A., & Spillane, J. P. (2004). Teachers' expectations and sense of responsibility for student learning: The importance of race, class, and organizational habitus. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, *35*(1), 75-98.

Diaz, E. M. Kosciw, J. W. (2009). Shared differences: The experiences of lesbian, bisexual, and transgender students of color in our nation's schools. New York: GLSEN.

Dodge, B., Jeffries, W. L., Sandfort, T. G. M. (2008). Beyond the down low: Sexual risk, protection, and disclosure among at-risk black men who have sex with both men and women (MSMW). *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, *37*(5), 683-696.

Douglas, K. B. (2010). Black and blues: God-talk/body-talk for the black church. In M. M. Ellison & K. B. Douglas (Eds.), *Sexuality and the sacred: Sources for theological reflection 2nd Edition* (pp. 48-66). Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press.

Douglas, K. B. (2003). Homosexuality and the well-being of the Black community. In C. West & E. Glaude Jr. (Eds.), *African American religious thought: An anthology* (pp. 1006-1018). Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press.

Douglas, K. B. (1999). *Sexuality and the Black church: A womanist perspective*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.

Drew, N. (1999). A return to Husserl and researcher self-awareness. In E. C. Polifroni & M. Welch (Eds.), *Perspectives on philosophy of science in nursing: An historical and contemporary anthology* (pp. 263-272). Philadelphia: Lippincott.

Dubois, W. E. B. (1903/2007). *The souls of Black folk*. Minnesota: Filiquarian Publishing.

Dwyer, A. (2008). Policing queer bodies: Focusing on queer embodiment in policing research as an ethical question. *Law and Justice Journal*, *8*(2), 414-428.

Elliot, S. (1999). Carnival and dialogue in Bakhtin's poetics of folklore. *Folklore Forum, 30*(½), 129-139.

Elmir R., Schmied V., Jackson D., & Wilkes l. (2011) Interviewing people about potentially sensitive topics. *Nurse Researcher*, *19*(1), 12-16.

Epstein, D. (2000). Reading gender, reading sexualities: Children and the negotiation of meaning in "alternative" texts. In W. J. Spurlin (Ed.), *Lesbian and gay studies and the teaching of English: Positions, pedagogies, and cultural politics* (pp. 213-233). Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.

Fanon, F. (1967). *Black skin, White masks*. New York: Grove Press.

Ferguson, R. (2004). *Aberrations in black: Toward a queer of color critique*. Minnesota: Regents of the University of Minnesota.

Fetner, T, & Kush, K. (2008). Gay-straight alliances in high schools: Social predictors of early adoption. *Youth and Society*, *40*, 114-130.

Fields, J. (2008). *Risky lessons: Sex education and social inequality.* Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Foucault, Michel (1998) *The History of Sexuality: The Will to Knowledge*, London, Penguin.

Foucault, M. (1986a). The discourse on language. In H. Adams & L. Searle (Eds.), *Critical*

theory since 1965 (pp. 148 -162). Tallahassee: University Press of Florida.

Foucault, M. (1986b). What is an author? In H. Adams & L. Searle (Eds.), *Critical theory since 1965* (pp. 138-148). Tallahassee: University Press of Florida.

Foucault, M. (1980). *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977.* 1st ed. New York: Pantheon Books.

Freire, P. (1968/2000). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Continuum.

Friedman, M., Koeske, G., Silvestre, A., Korr, W., & Sites, E. (2006). The impact of gender-role nonconforming behavior, bullying, and social support on suicidality among gay male youth. *Journal of Adolescent Health, 38,* 621-623.

Fryer, D.R. (2012). *Thinking queerly: Race sex, gender, and the ethics of identity*. Boulder: Paradigm Publishers.

Gadamer, H. G. (1976). *Philosophical hermeneutics*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Garcia, D. I., Gray-Stanley, J., & Ramirez-Valles, J. (2013). "The priest doesn't know that I'm gay": The religious and spiritual journeys of Latino gay men. *Journal of Homosexuality*, *55*(3), 411-436.

Garrison, J. (2009). *Daisaku Ikeda and John Dewey: A religious dialogue*. Revised article based on a lecture in *Humanizing Our Lives, Humanizing Our World* delivered at The Ikeda Center for Peace, Learning, and Dialogue, Cambridge, MA.

Garrison, J., & O'Quinn, E.J. (2004). Reflections on Whitman, Dewey, and educational Reform: recovering spiritual democracy for our materialistic times. *Education and Culture, 20*(2), 68-77.

Garrison, J., Hickman, L., & Ikeda, D. (2014*). Living as learning: John Dewey in the 21st century.* Cambridge: Dialogue Path Press.

Garrison, M. (2009). *A measure of failure: The political origins of standardized testing*. Albany: SUNY Press.

Gebert, A., & Joffee, M (2007). Value creation as the aim of education: Tsunesaburo Makiguchi and Soka education. In David T. Hansen (Ed.) *Ethical Visions of Education: Philosophies in Practice*, (pp. 65-82). New York: Teachers College Press.

Giroux, H. A., & Purpel, D. (Eds.). (1983). *The hidden curriculum and moral education.* California: McCutchan.

GLSEN (2019). "No Promo Homo" Laws. Retrieved from http://www.glsen.org/learn/policy/issues/nopromohomo

GLSEN. (2014). The 2013 National School Climate Survey: The experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth in our nation's schools. New York: Kosciw, J. G., Greytak, E. A., Palmer, N. A., & Boesen, M. J.

Goode-Cross, D. T., & Good, G. E. (2009). Managing multiple-minority identities: African American men who have sex with men at predominately white universities. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education, 2*(2), 103–112.

Good-Cross, D. T., & Tager, D. (2011). Negotiating multiple identities: How African-America gay and bisexual men persist at a predominantly White institution. *Journal of Homosexuality*, *58*(9), 1235-1254.

Gopaul, L., Julien, I., Manley, M., Ranks, S., West, C., Rose, T., & O'Connor, F.(2005). *The darker side of black* [Film]. New York: Filmmakers Library.

Gorski, P., Davis, S., & Reiter, A. (2013). An examination of the (in)visibility of sexual orientation, heterosexism, homophobia, and other lgbtq concerns in U.S. multicultural teacher education coursework. *Journal of LGBT Youth, 10*(3), 224-248.

Goulah, J. (2021). Introduction: Daisaku Ikeda, and hope and joy in education. In I. Nuñez & J. Goulah (Eds.), *Hope and joy in education: Engaging Daisaku Ikeda across curriculum and context* (pp. xiii–xxxiv). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Goulah, J. (2018). The presence and role of dialogue in Soka education. In P. Stearns (Ed.), *Peacebuilding through dialogue: Education, human transformation, and conflict resolution* (pp. 55-70). Fairfax, VA: George Mason University Press.

Goulah, J. (Ed.). (2017). *Tsunesaburo Makiguchi in the context of language, identity and education*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Goulah, J. (Ed.). (2017). *Makiguchi Tsunesaburo in the context of language, identity and education*. New York: Routledge.

Goulah, J., & Sharma, N. (2017, April 25-26). Division B Pre-Conference Seminar: Soka Studies and Value Creation Curriculum: The Urgency of Non-Western/International/Comparative Curriculum Inquiry. Division B - Curriculum Studies Pre-Conference Session presented at *Knowledge to Action: Achieving the Promise of Equal Educational Opportunity*, the American Educational Research Association Annual Convention. San Antonio, TX.

Goulah, J., & Gebert, A. (Eds.). (2014). *Tsunesaburo Makiguchi (1871-1944): Educational philosophy in context*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Goulah, J. (2013). Makiguchi Tsunesaburo and language, value-creative composition instruction, and the geography of identity in community studies: A response to politicized imagining and ineffective critical approaches. *Journal of Language, Identity, and Education, 12*(1), 22-39.

Goulah, J. (2012). Creating value. *SGI Quarterly, 67*, 13-14.

Goulah, J., & Ito, T. (2012). Daisaku Ikeda's curriculum of Soka education: Creating value through dialogue, global citizenship, and "human education" in the mentor-disciple relationship. *Curriculum Inquiry, 42*(1), 56-79.

Goulah, J. (2010). From (harmonious) community life to (creative) coexistence: Considering Daisaku Ikeda's educational philosophy in the Parker, Dewey, Makiguchi, Ikeda "Reunion." *Schools: Studies in Education, 7*(2), 253-275.

Goulah, J. (2010b). CHAPTER SIX: Dialogic resistance in education: Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, Daisaku Ikeda and transformative language learning. *Counterpoints, 376*, 83-103.

Goulah, J. & Gebert, A. (2009). Tsunesaburo Makiguchi: Introduction to the man, his ideas, and the special issue. *Educational Studies*, *45*(2), 115-132.

Goulah, J., & Gebert, A. (2009). Tsunesaburo Makiguchi: Introduction to the man, his ideas and the special issue. *Educational Studies, 45*, 115-132.

Greene, M. (1995). *Releasing the imagination: Essays on education, the arts, and social change*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Gresham, S. L. (2009). Negotiating cultural contexts: An exploratory investigation of Black gay male strategy employment. *Journal of GLBT Family Studies*, *5*(3), 247-267.

Greteman, A. J. (2014). Dissenting with queer theory: Reading Ranciere queerly. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, *35*(3), 419-432.

Griffin, H. (2000). Their own received them not. In Delroy Constantine-Simms (Ed.), *The greatest taboo: Homosexuality in Black communities* (pp. 110-23). New York: Alyson Books.

Grov, C., Bimbi, D., Nanin, J. E., & Parsons, J. T. (2006). Race, ethnicity, gender, and generational factors with the coming-out process among gay, lesbian, and bisexual

individuals. *The Journal of Sex Research*, *43*(2), pp. 115-121.

Hall, S. (1990). Ethnicity: Identity and difference. *Radical America, 13*(4), 9-20.

Harding, V., & Ikeda, D. (2013). *America will be!: Conversations on hope, freedom, and democracy.* Cambridge: Dialogue Path Press.

Harper, P. B. (2000). The evidence of felt intuition: Minority experience, everyday life, and critical speculative knowledge. *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies, 6*(4), 641– 657.

Hartwell, S. (2006). Humor, anger, rules, and rituals. *Clinical Law Review*, *13*(1), 327-377.

Hartz-Karp, J. (2005). A case study in deliberative democracy: Dialogue with the city. *Journal of Public Deliberation*, 1(1), Article 6. Available from http://services.bepress.com/jpd/vol1/ iss1/art6.

Hatano, K. (2009). Voice in EFL education in a Japanese context: Makiguchi's perspective in the concept of "voice." *Educational Studies*, *45*, 165-180.

Haynes, S. R. (2000). Original dishonor: Noah's curse and the southern defense of slavery. *Journal of Southern Religion, 3(*6), sections 1-6.

Heffernan, G. (2014). The phenomenon happiness: Prolegomena to a phenomenological description. *The Humanistic Psychologist, 42*(3), 249–267.

Heidegger, M. (1962). *Being and time* (J. Macquarrie & E. Robinson, Trans.). New York: Harper and Row.

Helmer, K. (2015). Reading queerly in the high school classroom: Exploring a gay and lesbian literature course. Dissertation. University of Massachusetts, Amherst.

Holquist, M. (2004). *Dialogism* (2nd edition). New York: Routledge.

Holquist, M. (2002). *Dialogism: Bakhtin and his world*. New York: Routledge.

hooks, b. (2013). *Writing beyond race: Living theory and practice*. New York: Routledge.

hooks, b. (2004). *We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity*. New York: Routledge.

hooks, b. (1988). *Talking back: Thinking feminist, thinking Black.* Cambridge: South End Press.

Horncastle, J. (2008). Queer being and sexual interstice: A phenomenological approach to the queer transformative self (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Murdoch University, Perth, Western Australia.

Horrigan-Kelly, M., Millar, M., & Dowling, M. (2016). Understanding the key tenets of Heidegger's philosophy for interpretive phenomenological research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 15*(1), 1-8.

Hunter, M. A. (2010). The nightly round: Space, social capital, and urban Black nightlife. *City & Community*, *9*(2), 165-186.

Iddings, A. C. & McCafferty, S. G. (2007). Carnival in a mainstream kindergarten classroom: A Bakhtinian analysis of second language learners' off-task behaviors. *The Modern Language Journal*, *91*(1), 31-44.

Ikeda, D. (2017). *The wisdom for creating happiness and peace, part 2*. Santa Monica, CA: World Tribune Press.

Ikeda, D. (2017b). *Hope is a decision*. Santa Monica, CA: Middleway Press.

Ikeda, D. (2014). Value Creation for Global Change: Building Resilient and Sustainable Societies. Peace Proposal. Tokyo: The Soka Gakkai.

Ikeda, D. (2012). Human security and sustainability: sharing reverence for the dignity of live. Peace Proposal. Retrieved from https://www.daisakuikeda.org/assets/files/Peace_Proposal_2012.pdf

Ikeda, D., & Marinoff, L. (2012). *The inner philosopher: Conversations on philosophy's*

transformative. Cambridge (MA): Dialogue Path Press.

Ikeda, D. (2010a). *Soka education: For the happiness of the individual*. Santa Monica: Middleway Press.

Ikeda, D. (2010b). *Discussions on youth*. Santa Monica, CA: World Tribune Press.

Ikeda, D. (2010c). *A new humanism: The university addresses of Daisaku Ikeda*. New York: Weatherhill.

Ikeda, D. (2009). A dialogue on humanitarian competition and global mindsets. Peace Proposal. Japan: Soka Gakkai.

Ikeda, D. (2008). *My dear friends in America: Collected U.S. addresses 1990-1996* (2nd ed.). World tribune Press.

Ikeda, D. (2006). *To the youthful pioneers of Soka: Lectures, essays & poems on value-creating education*. Tokyo, Japan: Soka University Student Union.

Ikeda, D. (2005a). Human revolution. In D. Daschke, & M. Ashcraft (Eds.), *New religious movements: A documentary reader* (pp. 121-123). New York: New York University Press.

Ikeda, D. (2005b). Toward a New Era of Dialogue: Humanism Explored. Peace Proposal. Tokyo: Soka Gakkai International.

Ikeda, D., Saito, K., Endo, T., & Suda, H. (2000–2003). *The wisdom of the Lotus Sutra: A discussion* (Vols. 1–6). World Tribune Press.

Ikeda, D. (2000). *The wisdom of the Lotus Sutra (vol. 1).* Santa Monica: World Tribune Press.

Ikeda, D. (1995, November 2). Homage to the Sagarmatha of humanism: The living lessons of Guatama Buddha [commencement address]. Retrieved from https://www.daisakuikeda.org/sub/resources/works/ lect/1995nov2-tribhuvan-university-lecture.html

Ikeda, D. (1994). *The human revolution, (vol 1).* Taplow, U.K.: Soka Gakkai International.

Illinois State Board of Education Report Card (2019). Retrieved from https://www.illinoisreportcard.com/

Irvine, J.M. (2004). *Talk about sex: The battles over sex education in the United States.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Irvine, J.M. (2003). *Educating teachers for diversity: Seeing with a cultural eye*. New York: Teacher's College Press.

Jackson, P. W. (1968). *Life in classrooms*. New York: Holt, Reinhart, & Winston.

Jenkins, B., McCraney, T. A., Romanski, A., Gardner, D., Kleiner, J., Laxton, J., & Sanders, N. (2016). *Moonlight* [Film]. Elevation Pictures.

Johnson, D. (2007). Taking over the school: Student gangs as a strategy for dealing with homophobic bullying in an urban public school district. *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Social Services*, 19(3-4), 87-104.

Johnson, E. P. (2008). *Sweet tea: Black gay men of the south an oral history*. Chapel Hill, N.C.: The University of North Carolina Press.

Johnson, E. P. (2001). 'Quare' studies or (almost) everything I know about queer studies I learned from my grandmother. *Text and Performance Quarterly*, *21*, 1-25.

Johnson, T. (2000). *Gay spirituality: The role of gay identity in the transformation of human consciousness.* Los Angeles: Alyson Books.

Kennedy M, Doll LS. Male bisexuality and HIV risk. *Journal of Bisexuality*, *1*(23), 109–135.

Kim, C. Y., Losen, D. J., & Hewitt, D. T. (2010). *The school-to-prison pipeline: Structuring Legal Reform*. New York: NYU Press.

Kincheloe, J. L., & Hayes, K. (Eds.). (2007). *Teaching city kids: Understanding and appreciating them*. New York: Peter Lang.

King, J. L. (2005). *On the down low: A journey into the lives of 'straight' Black men who sleep with men.* New York: Harlem Moon Publishing.

King, M. L. Jr. (1963). "Letter from Birmingham jail." In King's (Ed.), *Why We Can't Wait* (pp. 77-100). Boston: Beacon Press.

Kirby, D. B., Laris, B. A., & Rolleri, L. A. (2007). Sex and HIV education programs: their impact on sexual behaviors of young people throughout the world. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, *40*(3), 206-217.

Kissen, R. M. (Ed.). (2002). *Getting ready for Benjamin: Preparing teachers for sexual diversity in the classroom.* Lanham, MD: Rowan & Littlefield.

Kohler, P. K., Manhart, L. E., & Lafferty, W. E. (2008). Abstinence-only and comprehensive sex education and the initiation of sexual activity and teen pregnancy. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, *42*(4), 344-351

Kornegay, E. (2004). Queering Black homophobia: Black theology as a sexual discourse of transformation. *Theology & Sexuality, 11*(1), 29-51

Kosciw, J. G., Greytak, E. A., Palmer, N. A., & Boesen, M. J. (2014). *The 2013 National School Climate Survey: The experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth in our nation's schools.* New York: GLSEN.

Kubicek, K., McNeeley, M., Holloway, I. W., Weiss, G., & Kipke, M. D. (2013). "It's like our own little world": Resilience as a factor of participation in the ballroom community subculture. *AIDS and Behavior*, *17*(4), 1524-1539).

Kumashiro, K. (2002). *Troubling education: Queer activism and anti-oppressive pedagogy.* New York: Routledge-Falmer.

Lacan, J. (1957/1986). The agency of the letter in the unconscious or reason since Freud. In H. Adams & L. Searle (Eds.), *Critical theory since 1965* (pp. 738-756). Tallahassee: University Press of Florida.

Lachmann, R., Eshelman, R., & Davis, M. (1988). Bakhtin and carnival: Culture as counter-culture. *Cultural Critique*, (11), 115-152.

Lankshear, C., & Knobel, M. (2011). *Literacies: Social, cultural and historical perspectives*. New York: Peter Lang.

Lee, C. (2002). The impact of belonging to a high school gay/straight alliance. *The High School Journal*, Feb/Mar, 13–26.

Lin, A. M. Y. & Luk, J. C. M. (2005). Local creativity in the face of global domination: Insights of Bakhtin for teaching English for dialogic communication. In J. K. Hall, G. Vitanova, & L. Marchenkova (Eds.), *Contributions of Mikhail Bakhtin to understanding second and foreign language learning* (pp. 77-98). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Livingston, J., Labeija, P., Pendavis, K., Pendavis, F., Corey, D., Xtravaganza, V., & Ninja, W. (1992). *Paris is burning.* United States: Fox Lorber Home Video.

Lorde, A. (1984). Uses of the erotic: The erotic as power." In A. Lorde's (Ed.), *sister outsider: Essays and speeches*. Berkeley: The Crossing Press.

Loutzenheiser, L. W. (2008). "If I teach about these issues will they burn down my house": The possibilities and tensions of queered, antiracist pedagogy. In K. Kumashiro (Ed.), *Troubling intersections of race and sexuality: Queer students of color and anti-oppressive education*. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

Lugg, C. A. (2006). Thinking about sodomy: Public schools, legal panopticons, and queers. *Educational Policy*, *20*(1), 35-58.

Lugones, M. C. (1987). Playfulness, 'world'-travelling, and loving perception. *Hypatia*, *2*(2), 3-19.

Makiguchi, T. ([1897] 2010). On the significance of social aspects that Mr. Parker says should be incorporated into the school experience. *Schools: Studies in Education, 7*(1), 49-55.

Marchenkova, L. (2005). Language, culture, and self: The Bakhtin—Vygotsky encounter. In J. K. Hall, G. Vitanova, & L. Marchenkova (Eds.), *Dialogue with Bakhtin on second and foreign language learning: New perspectives* (pp. 171-188). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Marquez, R., & Brockenbrough, E. (2013). Queer youth v. the state of California: Interrogating legal discourses on the rights of queer students of color. *Curriculum Inquiry*, *43*(4), 461-482.

Martin, J. I. (2006). Transcendence among gay men: implications for HIV prevention. *Sexualities*, *9*, 214-235.

Martinus Nijhoff. Strong, D. (Writer), & Daniels, L. (2015). The Lyon's roar [Television series episode]. In B. Grazer, L. Daniels, D. Strong, & F. Calfo [producers], *Empire*, Illinois: 20th Century Fox Television.

Mauk, D., Perry, A., & Muñoz-Laboy, M. (2013). Exploring the desires and sexual culture of men who have sex with male-to-female transgender women. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, *42*, 793–803.

Mayo, C. (2009). The tolerance that dare not speak its name. In A. Darder, M. Baltodano, & R. Torres (Eds.), *The critical pedagogy reader*, Second edition, pp. 262 - 273. New York: Routledge.

Mays, V. M., Cochran, S. D., & Zamudio, A. (2004). HIV prevention research: Are we meeting the needs of African American men who have sex with men? *Journal of Black Psychology*, *30*(1), 78–105.

McAreavey, R. & Das, C. (2013). A delicate balancing act: Negotiating with gatekeepers for ethical research when researching minority communities. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *12*, pp. 113-131.

McClure, H. and Fischer, G. (1969). Ideology and opinion making: General problems of analysis, Unpublished paper. Bureau of Applied Social Research, Columbia University, July.

McCready, L. (2013). Conclusion to the special issue: Queer of color analysis: Interruptions and pedagogic possibilities. *Curriculum Inquiry*, *43*(4), 512-522.

McCready, L. (2010a). *Making space for diverse masculinities: Difference, intersectionality, and engagement in an urban high school*. New York: Peter Lang.

McCready, L. T. (2010b). Black queer bodies, afrocentric reform and masculine anxiety. *International Journal of Critical Pedagogy, 3*(1), 52–67.

McCready, L. T. (2010c). Conclusions to the special issue: Queer of color analysis: Interruption and pedagogic possibilities. *Curriculum Inquiry, 43*(4), 512-521.

McCready, L. T. (2009). Troubles of Black boys in urban schools in the United States: Black feminist and gay men's perspectives. In W. Martino, M.B. Weaver-Hightower, & M.

Kehler (Eds.), *The problem with boys' education: Beyond the backlash* (pp. 124–148). New York: Routledge.

McCready, L. (2004a). Some challenges facing queer youth programs in urban high schools: Racial segregation and de-normalizing Whiteness. *Journal of Lesbian Issues in Education, 1*(3), 37-51.

McCready, L. T. (2004b). Understanding the marginalization of gay and gender non-conforming Black male students. *Theory Into Practice, 43*(2), 136–143.

McCready, L. T. (2001). When fitting in isn't an option, or, why Black queer males at a California high school stay away from Project 10. In K. Kumashiro (Ed.), *Troubling intersections of race and sexuality: Queer students of color and anti-oppressive education* (pp. 37-53). Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.

McKeown, E., Nelson, S., Anderson, J., Low, N., & Elford, J. (2010). Disclosure, discrimination and desire: Experiences of Black and South Asian gay men in Britain. *Culture, Health and Sexuality, 12*, 843-856.

Means, D.R., Collier, J., Bazemore-James, C., Williams, B.M., Coleman, R., & Wadley, B.A. (2018). 'Keep your spirit aligned': A case study on black lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer students defining and practicing spirituality. *Journal of College Student Development, 59*(5), 618-623.

Meiners, E., & Quinn, T. (2010). Doing and Feeling Research in Public: Queer Organizing for Public Education and Justice. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 23*(2), 147-164.

Merleau-Ponty, M. (2002). *The phenomenology of perception*, trans. Colin Smith. London: Routledge.

Merriam, S. B. (2002). Introduction to qualitative research. In S. B. Merriam & Associates (Eds.), *Qualitative research in practice: Examples for discussion and analysis*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Meyer, E. (2007). But I'm not gay: What straight teachers need to know about queer theory. In N. Rodriguez & W. Pinar (Eds.), *Queering straight teachers: Discourse and identity in education* (pp. 1-17). New York, NY: Peter Lang.

Meyer, E., & Stader, D. (2009). Queer youth and the culture wars: From classroom to courtroom in Australia, Canada and the United States. *Journal of LGBT Youth*, 6(2), 135-154.

Millett, G. A., Flores, S. A., Peterson, J. L., & Bakeman R. (2007). Explaining disparities in HIV infection among black and white men who have sex with men: a meta-analysis of HIV risk behaviors. *AIDS*, *21*(15), 2083–2091.

Millett, G., Malebranche, D., Mason, B., & Spikes, P. (2005). Focusing "down low": bisexual black men, HIV risk and heterosexual transmission. *Journal of the National Medical Association*, *97*(7), 52S–59S.

Mintz, S. (2004). *Huck's Raft: A History of American childhood.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Misa, C. M. (2001). Where have all the queer students of color gone?: Negotiated identity of queer Chicana/o students. In K. K. Kumashiro (Ed.), *Troubling inter-sections of race and sexuality: Queer students of color and anti-oppressive education* (pp. 67–80). Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield.

Moraga, C., & Anzaldúa, G. (2015). *This bridge called my back: Writings by radical women of color* (4th edition.). SUNY Press.

Morrell, E. (2004). Bakhtin's dialogic pedagogy: Implications for critical pedagogy, literacy education, and teacher research in the United States. *Journal of Russian & East European Psychology*, *42*, 89-94.

Mustanski, B. & Newcomb, M.E. (2013). Older sexual partners may contribute to racial disparities in HIV among young men who have sex with men. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, *52*(6), 666–667.

Nelson, C. (2002). Why queer theory is useful in teaching. *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Social Services, 14*(2), 43-53.

Neutral Zone. (2002). Retrieved April 9, 2020, from https://www.neutral-zone.org/

Newcomb, M. E., Ryan, D. T., Greene, G. J., Garofalo, R., & Mustanski, B. (2014). Prevalence and patterns of smoking, alcohol use, illicit drug use in young men who have sex with men. *Drug and Alcohol Dependence*, *141*, 65–71.

Olsen, E. O., Kann, L., Vivolo-Kantor, A., Kinchen, S., & McManus, T. (2014). School violence and bullying among sexual minority high school students, 2009-2011. *Journal of Adolescent Health, 55*(3), 432-438.

Operario, D., Burton, J., Underhill, K., & Sevelius, J. (2008). Men who have sex with transgender women: Challenges to category-based HIV prevention. *AIDS & Behavior*, *12*, 18–26.

O'Shaughnessy, M., Russell, S., Heck, K., Calhoun, C., & Laub, C. (2004). *Safe place to learn: Consequences of harassment based on actual or perceived sexual orientation and gender non-conformity and steps for making schools safer.* San Francisco, CA: California Safe Schools Coalition and 4-H Center for Youth Development.

Page, M. L. (2016). LGBTQ inclusion as an outcome of critical pedagogy. *International Journal*

of Critical Pedagogy, 7(1), 115-142.

Parker, C., Garcia, J., Philbin, M. M., Wilson, P. A., Parker, R. G., & Hirsch, J. S. (2016). Social risk, stigma and space: key concepts for understanding HIV vulnerability among Black men who have sex with men in New York City. *Cult Health Sex*, *19*(3), pp. 323-337.

Pascoe, C.J. (2005). "Dude, you're a fag": Adolescent masculinity and the fag discourse. Sexualities, *8*, 329-346.

Pascoe, C.J. (2011). *Dude you're a fag: Masculinity and sexuality in high school.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Patton, L. D., & Simmons, S. L. (2008). Exploring complexities of multiple identities of lesbians in a Black college environment. *Negro Educational Review*, 59(3–4), 197–215.

Phillips, L. (2005). Deconstructing "down low" discourse: The politics of sexuality, gender, race, AIDS, and anxiety. *Journal of African American Studies*, *9*, 3-15.

Pinnegar, S. & Daynes, J. G. (2007). Locating narrative inquiry historically: Thematics in the turn to narratives. In D. J. Clandinin (Eds.), *Handbook of Narrative Inquiry: Mapping a Methodology* (pp. 3-34). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Plummer, K. (2005). Male Sexualities. In M. Kimmel, J. Hearn, & R. Connell (Eds.), *Handbook of studies on men and masculinities* (pp. 178-195). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Popkewitz, T. S. (2000). *Educational knowledge: Changing relationships between the state, civil society, and the educational community.* Albany: State University of New York Press.

Pritchard, E. D. (2013). For colored kids who committed suicide, our outrage isn't enough: Queer youth of color, bullying, and the discursive limits of identity and safety. *Harvard Educational Review, 83*(2), 320-345.

Public Religion Research Institute. How race And religion shape millennial attitudes on sexuality and reproductive health findings from the 2015 Millennials, Sexuality, and Reproductive Health Survey. Washington, D.C.: Jones, R. P. & Cox, D.

Quinn, T. M. (2007). "You make me erect!": Queer girls of color negotiating heteronormative leadership at an urban all-girls' public school. *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Issues in Education, 4*(3), 31–47.

Ranciere, J. (1991). *The nights of labour*. Philadelphia: Templeton University Press.

Reback, C. J., Kaplan, R. L., Bettcher, T. M., & Larkins, S. (2016). The role of the illusion in the construction of erotic desire: Narratives from heterosexual men who have occasional sex with transgender women. *Cult Health Sex*, *18*(8), 951-963.

Ricoeur, P. (1985). *Hermeneutics and the human sciences: Essays on language, action, and interpretation*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Riessman, C.K. (2008). *Narrative methods for the human sciences*. Los Angeles: Sage Publications.

Riggs, M. (1999). Black macho revisited: Reflections of a SNAP! queen. In D. Carbado (Ed), *Black men on race, gender, and sexuality: A critical reader* (pp. 306-311). New York: New York University Press.

Riggs, M. T., Hemphill, E., & Callet, B. (2006). *Tongues untied*. Berkeley, Calif.: Signifyin' Works.

Rivers, I., & Ward, R. (2012). Out of the ordinary: Representations of LGBT lives. Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Robson, C. (2002). *Real world research: a resource for social scientists and practitioner-researchers*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers.

Rohr, R. (2002, February). Grieving as a sacred space. *Sojourners.* Retrieved from https://sojo.net/magazine/january-february-2002/grieving-sacred-space.

Rosario, M., Schrimshaw, E., & Hunter, J. (2004). Ethnic/racial differences in the coming-out process of lesbian, gay, and bisexual youths: A comparison of sexual identity development over time. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, *10*(3), 215-228.

Rosenberger, J. G., Reece, M., Schick, V., Herbenick, D., Novak, D. S., Van Der Pol, B., & Fortenberry, J. D. (2012). Condom use during most recent anal intercourse event among a U.S. sample of men who have sex with men. *Journal of Sexual Medicine*, *9*(4), 1037–1047.

Ruitenberg, C. (2010). Queer politics in schools: A Rancierean reading. *Educational Philosophy and Theory, 42*(5), 618-634.

Ryan, C. L., & Hermann-Wilmarth, J. M. (2013). Already on the shelf: Queer readings of award-winning children's literature. *Journal of Literacy Research, 45*(2), 142-172.

Said, E. (1995). *Orientalism: Western conceptions of the Orient.* London, United Kingdom: Penguin.

Saldana, J. (2016). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers (3rd ed.).* London, UK: Sage.

Sanders, A. M., & Mathis, J. B. (2013). Gay and lesbian literature in the classroom: Can gay themes overcome heteronormativity?. *Journal of Praxis in Multicultural Education, 7*(1), Article 6.

Sandlin, J. A., O'Malley, M. P., & Burdick, J. (2011). Mapping the complexity of public pedagogy scholarship: 1894–2010. *Review of Educational Research, 81*(3), 338-375.

Schall, J. & Kauffmann, G. (2003). Exploring literature with gay and lesbian characters in the

elementary school. *Journal of Children's Literature, 29*(1), 36-45.

Schutz, A. (1967). *The phenomenology of the social world* (G. Walsh & F Lenhert, Trans.). Chicago: Northwestern University Press.

Schwab, J.J. (1973). The practical 3: Translation into curriculum. *The School Review, 81*(4), 501-522.

Seidman, I. (2013*). Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education & the social sciences (4th ed.)*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Seligman, M. (2003). *Authentic happiness: Using the new positive psychology to realize your potential for lasting fulfillment.* London: Nicholas Brealey.

Sfard, A. (1998). On two metaphors for learning and the dangers of choosing just one. *Educational Researcher, 27*(2), 4-13.

Shamoo, A., & Resnik, D. (2015). Responsible conduct of research (3rd edition). New York: Oxford University Press.

Sharma, N. (2018). *Value-creating global citizenship education: Engaging Gandhi, Makiguchi, and Ikeda as examples*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Sieczkowski, C. (2015, January 20). Lee Daniels is using 'Empire' to 'blow the lid off' homophobia in the Black community. *The Huffington Post*. Retrieved from http://www.huffingtonpost.com.

Singh, A. A., Hays, D. G., & Watson, L. S. (2011). Strength in the face of adversity: Resilience strategies of transgender individuals. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, *89*(1), 20-27.

Smith, G. P. (1998). *Common sense about uncommon knowledge: The knowledge bases for diversity.* Washington, DC: American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education.

Snapp, S. D., Hoenig, J. M., Fields, A., & Russell, S. T. (2015). Messy, butch, and queer: LGBTQ youth and the school-to-prison pipeline. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, *30*(1), 57-82.

Solomon, J. L. (1987). *From Hegel to existentialism*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Solomon, R. C. (2002). *Spirituality for the skeptic: The thoughtful love of life.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Spielgelberg, H. (1976). *Doing phenomenology*. The Hague, the Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff.

Staicu, M. L., & Cuţov, M. (2010). Anger and health risk behaviors. *Journal of medicine and life*, *3*(4), 372–375.

Sullivan, P. (2010). Vygotskian dialectics and Bakhtinian dialogics: Consciousness between the authoritative and the carnivalesque. *Theory & Psychology*, 20(3), 362–378.

The struggle to transform the age (2017, July 14). *World Tribune*, *4103*, 6-7.

Three poisons—the source of the problem (October 2005). *SGI Quarterly*, retrieved from https://www.sgi.org/ru/philosophy/buddhist-concepts/three-poisons-the-source-of-the-problem.html.

Tokacs, D. (2003). How does your positionality bias your epistemology? *Thought & Action, 19*(1), 27-38.

Travers, C., Duran, A., & Craig, J. (2018). A quantitative analysis on mindset and masculinities among straight and queer black college men. *Spectrum* *7*(1), 47–57.

Urbain, O. (2010). *Daisaku Ikeda's philosophy of peace: Dialogue, transformation, and global citizenship.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

U.S. Census Bureau (2017). Poverty in East St. Louis. American Community Survey 5-year estimates. Retrieved from https://data.census.gov/cedsci/deeplinks?url=https://factfinder.census.gov/bkmk/table/1.0/en/ACS/17_5YR/S1701/1600000US1722255

van Kleef, G. A., De Dreu, C. K. W., & Manstead, A. S. R. (2004). The interpersonal effects of anger and happiness in negotiations. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *86*(1), 57-76.

Van Manen, M. (1990). *Researching lived experience: Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy*. Canada: The University of Western Ontario.

Vasquez, B. (2018). Learn about us before you teach (about) us: Queer Black boys. In E. Moore, Jr., A. Michael, & M. W. Penick-Parks (Eds.), *The guide for White women who teach Black boys*, pp. 220-226. California: Corwin.

Vygotsky, L. (1987). *Thought and language* (A. Kozulin, Ed.) Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Wang, L., & Murnighan, J. K. (2011). On greed. *Academy of Management Annals*, *5*(1), 279-316.

Warner, M. (1999). *The trouble with normal: Sex, politics, and the ethics of queer life.* New York: Free Press.

Watson, M. S. (2004). The Issue Is Justice: Martin Luther King Jr.'S Response to the Birmingham Clergy. *Rhetoric & Public Affairs, 7*(1), 1–22.

Weiming, T., & Ikeda, D. (2011). *New horizons in eastern humanism: Buddhism, Confucianism, and the quest for global peace.* New York: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd.

Wernick, L. J., Dessel, A. B., Kulick, A., & Graham, L. F. (2013). LGBTQQ youth creating change: Developing allies against bullying through performance and dialogue. *Children*

and Youth Services Review, 35(9), 1576–1586.

Wernick, L. J., Kulick, A., & Inglehart, M. H. (2013). Factors predicting student intervention when witnessing anti-LGBTQ harassment: The influence of peers, teachers and climate. *Children and Youth Services Review, 35*(2), 296–301.

West, C. (1993). *Race matters*. Massachusetts: Beacon.

Whitman, D. (2008). An appeal to authority: The new paternalism in urban schools. *Education Next,* 8(4), 53-58.

Wiersma, W. 2000. *Research methods in education: An introduction* (7th ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Williams, R. (1997). Living at the crossroads: Explorations in race, nationality, sexuality, and gender. In W. Lubiano (Ed.), *The house that race built: Original essays by Toni Morrison, Angela Y. Davis, Cornel West, and others on Black Americans and politics in America today* (pp. 136-156). New York: Pantheon.

Winning over the three poisons in life (2018, July 13), *World Tribune,* 4139, 9. Retrieved from https://www.worldtribune.org/2018/07/winning-three-poisons-life/

Wisdom (January 2003). *SGI Quarterly*, retrieved from https://www.sgi.org/ru/philosophy/buddhist-concepts/wisdom.html

Wolinsky, S. (1991). *Trances people live: Healing approaches in quantum psychology*. Falls Village, CT: The Bramble Company.

Zacko-Smith, J.D, & Smith, G.P. (2010). Recognizing and utilizing queer pedagogy: A call for teacher education to reconsider the knowledge base of sexual orientation for teacher education programs. *Multicultural Education, 18*(1), 2-9.

Zayed, R. (2008). The changing nature of the phenomenological method: Lessons learned from dialogical psychotherapy research. *Janus Head, 10(2)*, 551-577.

Appendix

Interview 1

"This conversation is being video recorded for research purposes. Please let me know now if you do not agree to being recorded. You may request that the recording stop at any time. Do I have your permission to proceed?"

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol:
Focused Life History—Birth to Middle School (~90 minutes)

Family Background and Demographic Data:

1. How old are you and what year were you born?
2. Sexual Orientation and Identity
   a. How do you identify? (bisexual, gay, queer, trans, etc.)?
   b. How "out" are you? (e.g. family, friends, peers, etc.)?
   c. When did you first disclose your sexual orientation to others?
3. Describe the type of household you grew up in. What was your relationship like with family members growing up? How did they treat you? How do you treat them?
4. What is it like being a queer Black boy at home? In your neighborhood?
5. Did you grow up in the church?
6. Have you attended school in this district your entire life? If not, when did you begin attending school here?

Elementary School:

1. Tell me about your childhood…
   a. What moments stand out for you, especially ones that you feel shaped who you are? Why?
   b. Who was/were the most influential person/people in your childhood? How so? Why?
   c. Did these moments and experiences shape or influence your life in elementary school? Explain why or why not?
   d. What were your interactions like with peers in elementary school? How did this impact your identity?

2. What do you remember about how your family discussed race? Sexuality? What did they say?
   a. What lessons did you learn from these discussions?
   b. Did they ever discuss issues that affect LGBTQ individuals in the community? What did they say?

3. When did you first realize that you were Black and the how did you come to understand how important that identity was in your life?

a. How about when you knew you were gay?
b. How did your understanding of race and sexuality help shape your perception of who you were?

4. In elementary school, what experiences helped you understand your racial identity? Sexual identity?
   a. What were some similarities and differences from your family's discussion of race and sexuality?

5. Who were some role models or people you admired during this time in your life? Why?
   a. What drew you to them? Describe what lessons your learned from them and how they impacted your life.

6. How did church discuss sexuality? Was this similar or different from how your family discussed it?

7. Are there any other moments of experiences from elementary school that we haven't discussed but you feel has shaped your life and racial and/or sexual identity?

Middle School:

I will follow the same interview protocol as above, but with a few changes

1. During middle school, how did you navigate dating, crushes, and other conversations with peers about romantic topics?
   a. Can you describe the moments/experiences when these conversations conflicted with your sexual identity? What about your racial identity?
   b. What did you learn from these experiences? Did you have support and people that you could talk to about it? Explain.

2. Describe in detail your relationship with you family during middle school. Were they more or less supportive of you than in elementary school?
   a. What about your peers?

3. How did you begin to express yourself during middle school?
   a. Describe how you presented yourself in terms of your racial and sexual identity.

4. Describe your interactions with your teachers and other members of the faculty and staff?
   a. How do they treat you? How do you treat them?

Interview 2

"This conversation is being video recorded for research purposes. Please let me know now if you do not agree to being recorded. You may request that the recording stop at any time. Do I have your permission to proceed?"

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol:
Details of Experience—High School to Present (~90 minutes)

<u>High School:</u>

1. Talk about your experiences in high school. What was it like being a Black male?
2. What was your high school like for LGBTQ students? How did this impact your identity and how you felt about your sexuality?
3. To what extent did you feel like you were a member of the school community?
    a. How did you feel included? What role do you play in that community as a queer Black boy?
    b. If you felt excluded, explain why you felt excluded.
    c. Do you feel safe in this school? Explain why or why not.
4. What was your social life like during this time?
    a. Did your social circle consist of only gays, straights, or a mixture of both?
5. Was there a visible LGBTQ community in your high school?
    a. If so, what role did you play in it?
    b. How did this community impact your sense of identity and help you navigate high school?
    c. Were there any clubs, organizations, groups that you were a part of? What were they?
    d. If not, discuss why you chose to not be a part of it?
    e. Were there other queer Black males, and what was your relationship like with them?
6. Describe your interactions with your teachers? How do they treat you? How do you treat them?
7. When and why did you disclose your sexual identity in high school? To whom did you disclose your identity?
    a. Describe in detail your feelings before, during, and after this event.
    b. What were their reactions?
    c. Explain how their reactions and behavior toward you after impacted your life.
8. How did you navigate dating and romantic relationships?

a. Describe those moments and what you did and why you did what you did.

9. How did you present yourself during this period in high school?
   a. How would you describe the way you wanted others to see you?
   b. Why did you want them to see you that way?
   c. What was the reaction from family, peers, teachers and others?

10. Describe your interactions with your teachers and other members of faculty and staff?
    a. How do they treat you? How do you treat them?

Interview 3

"This conversation is being video recorded for research purposes. Please let me know now if you do not agree to being recorded. You may request that the recording stop at any time. Do I have your permission to proceed?"

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol:
Reflection on the Meaning (~90 minutes)

<u>Reflection on Meaning:</u>

1. Describe moments when you faced challenges related to your race and sexuality.
    b. How did you overcome it?

2. Through all of these life experiences, what have you learned about yourself that has shaped your sense of identity?
    a. How have your perspective shifted and evolved over time about being Black, gay, and male?

3. Would you describe yourself as "productively" navigating through family, school, and society?
    a. What does "productively" mean to you and how has this impacted your sense of who you are?