What’s the “I”?: Stories of Queer Youth of Color Navigating School and Negotiating Their Education

Tomás Boatwright

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

Supervised by
Professor Edward Brockenbrough

Margaret Mead Warner School of Education
University of Rochester
Rochester, NY

2016
Dedication

This work is dedicated to the savvy queer youth who trusted me with their stories. Thank you for sharing your wisdom with me. I also dedicate this work to the fabulous youth who continue to follow their heart towards their goals.
Biographical Sketch

Tomás R. Boatwright was born on July 15, 1986 in San Jose, CA. Tomás is a first-generation college student, and attended Occidental College from 2004 to 2008. Tomás graduated from Occidental College with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Sociology and a minor in Education. After completing undergraduate studies, Tomás went on to pursue graduate studies in Education. Tomás was selected as a Scandling Scholar and matriculated into the Teaching & Curriculum doctoral program at the Margaret Warner School of Education, University of Rochester in 2008, and earned a Master of Science degree in Education in 2012. While at the University of Rochester, Tomás was an engaged educator and taught courses exploring diversity, society and identity in education, youth cultures, research methods and LGBTQ-lived experiences. In addition to teaching, Tomás conducted original research with Professor Brockenbrough exploring the educational needs of LGBT youth of color from 2009 to 2011. From 2011 to 2015, Tomás participated as a research assistant for a longitudinal participatory action research study exploring social justice, transformation and literacy, under the direction of Professor Larson. Tomás pursued research exploring intersectionality, queer youth and education under the direction of Professor Brockenbrough.

The following publication was a result of work conducted during doctoral study:

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the Divine Creator, the universe and my guardian ancestors for guiding me and watching over me throughout this process.

I have survived quite the journey, and I would not have seen the end without the care and support of some very beautiful people in my life. With the sincerest gratitude, I thank my family. I am thankful for my beloved parents for their support and unconditional love. I would also like to thank my brothers, cousins, primos, primas, aunties, uncles, tios, tias, grandma, papi, abuelita, mis cuñadas, nephews, nieces, my good friends from elementary school, high school, undergrad, graduate school, and the Rochester community. My success is a result of a supportive community. I am also grateful for Dr. Chin and Dr. Trevizo for encouraging me to go to graduate school. You inspired a whole world of new possibilities.

I would also like to thank the Warner school faculty, mentors, and community partners who have supported me along the way. Thank you for believing in me.

Finally, I am grateful to my advisor and committee for supporting my vision and work. Thank you for sharing your wisdom and guidance.
Abstract

Current research across multiple disciplines confirms that the climate in many schools across the U.S. sustains discrimination, victimization and marginalization of queer youth, and encourages silence about queerness. Through analytic examinations of schooling experiences, the existing literature has done well to draw attention to the frequency of victimization of queer students. As a result, current education research has illuminated the unique social, political, economic, health and academic challenges that queer youth face in formal school settings. However, the body of literature has focused on mostly white and cisgender youth, and only a portion of this literature discusses the more complex dimensions of queer youth identities. Moreover, it has also tended to over-determine queer youth victimization as representative of queer youth lives. Further research exploring queer youth identities and lived experiences can benefit from multidimensional analysis and a deeper investment in diversity and inclusion.

The stories of queer youth of color are often marginalized in both mainstream gay culture and education research. This dissertation study is a critical narrative inquiry into the lived experiences of these youth. Participants were invited to share their stories on how they navigated school, negotiate multiple intersecting identities and negotiate the purpose of formal education in their lives.

Participants shared stories describing experiences of discrimination, identity policing and violence in school and in the home. Additionally, findings also illuminate the salience of queer youth of color’s multiple identities, their analyses of the purpose of education, and the framing of relationships as a valuable resource. These stories have implications for the discourse on queer youth.
Contributors and Funding Sources

This work was supervised by a dissertation committee consisting of the chair, Dr. Ed Brockenbrough of the Department of Teaching & Curriculum, and committee members, Dr. Joanne Larson of the Department of Teaching & Curriculum, Dr. Cindy Cruz of the Department of Education and Dr. Lance McCready of the Department of International and Multicultural Education. All work for the dissertation was completed independently by the student.

This research study was made possible thanks to funding from the Susan B. Anthony Institute for Women & Gender Studies, University of Rochester and the American Education Studies Association.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Dedication ii

Biographical Sketch iii

Acknowledgments iv

Abstract v

Contributors and Funding Sources vi

Table of Contents vii

List of Tables xi

List of Figures

---

### Chapter One: Introduction

Who are Queer Youth of color? 2

Defining youth 5

Representing Queer Youth 8

Rationale for this Study 14

Significance of Study 19

"Homeplace" of this Study 22

Organization of the Dissertation 40

---

### Chapter Two: Literature Review

Statistically Speaking of Queer Youth Victimization 43

Complicating the Victim Discourse 49

Intersections of Race 51
Addressing the Color Gap

Chapter Three: Theoretical Framework

Queer Theory or a Queer of Color Critique

Intersections of Sexuality, Race and Gender

Women of Color Feminism

Intersectionality

Queer of Color Critique

Heteropatriarchy

This is a Queer of Color Critique

Chapter Four: Methodology

Narrative Inquiry

Field Site

Site Entry

Participants

Sampling Strategies

Data Collection Methods and Data Sources

Artifacts

Life Maps

Focus Groups Interview

Timeline

Researcher Positionality

Data Analysis
Triangulation and Trustworthiness 108
Limitations 109
Conclusion 110

Chapter Five: Ten Stories of Savvy Queer Millennials of Color Navigating School and Society 111
Cat: The Mythology of Cat 116
A.E: Youth of the Future 122
Angel: Center Stage 127
Lyric: I Had to Cross Over a Bridge to Get There 130
Gogo Yubari: What is the Machine? 136
Ronnie: Ain’t Nobody Going to Walk Over Me Now and Nobody is Going to Put a Hand on Me 142
Sam: Finding Yourself While Breaking Stereotypes 147
Niqko: You Have To Be Ready For It 155
Vinny: Free as a Bird 159
Archie: Highly Involved 163

Chapter Six: Insights 167
Findings 169
Queer Youth of Color Experiences of Discrimination and Policing 171
The Purpose of Schooling and Education 182
Identity Matters 188
List of Tables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Table 1: Participant Demographics</td>
<td>229</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 2: Data Collected for Each Participant</td>
<td>231</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Figures

Figure 1: Cat’s Life Map 116
Figure 2: A.E.’s Life Map 122
Figure 3: Angel’s Life Map 127
Figure 4: Lyric’s Life Map 130
Figure 5: Lyric Sees Color 133
Figure 6: Gogo Yubari’s Life Map 136
Figure 7: Ronnie’s Life Map 142
Figure 8: Sam’s Life Map 147
Figure 9: Niqko’s Wordle 155
Figure 10: Vinny’s Life Map 159
Figure 11: Vinny’s Queer USA 161
Figure 12: Archie’s Life Map 163
Figure 13: Description of Angel’s 1st Grade Experience 179
Figure 14: Gogo Yubari’s Self-Directed Path Towards Opportunity 187
Figure 15: Life Map Example 235
CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

T (ˈtē), noun

1. meaning truth, information, or story; “What’s the T?” or “What’s T?” as in “What’s going on?” or “What’s the story?” (Johnson, 2008).

2. referencing that someone is gay, lesbian, or transgender; “He’s or she’s [t]” or “I didn’t tell him [t]” (Binky, youth participant and college student).

T is a colloquialism that I learned from Binky. Binky was a transgender teenage girl I met during my initial research investigation at the Midtown AIDS Center (MAC) (Brockenbrough and Boatwright, 2013). Like many of the youth at MAC, Binky often used unique queer-centric terms in her everyday speech. She used symbolic language to pass onto others clandestine information. At the same time, Binky and others use queer slang to keenly, creatively, and intellectually articulate social location. Social location is someone’s point of reference, relating to the complex interactions and intersection of their identities—e.g. race, gender, sexual orientation, and socio-economic status. Those intersections of identity situate one’s lens or view of the world and ultimately influence knowledge production (Allen, 2010; Giampapa, 2011). Similarly, queer1 youth of color2 often use language as a savvy tool to

---

1 For the remainder of this dissertation I use the term queer instead of the LGBT acronym. Queer is a political identity used to complicate and resist the social domination of gender binaries and sexual orientation privileged by Eurocentric identity constructs (Driver, 2008). In its ambiguity, queer can also index additional intersecting identities such as race and ethnicity, gender expression and socioeconomic status (Driver, 2008; Kumashiro, 2001). Similarly, queer reflects and coalesces the diversity of gender and sexual orientation dissenters, who often nuance rigid identity labels (e.g. “butch queen” meaning gay male). Singular identity labels—(L)(G)(B)(T) often fail to capture this complexity.

2 Within this dissertation, the term “queer youth of color” specifically identifies queer youth of non-white racial/ethnic identities. “Queer youth” refers to queer youth of all racial/ethnic identities.
mediate insider and outsider access to their communities and knowledges (Sausa, 2005). Like other gaybonic (Blackburn, 2008) terms, T is a metaphor with multiple meanings, further contextualized by the relationship between the speaker and the listener. In addition to its use as a colloquial greeting, when someone asks, “What’s the T?” they are inviting a story to be told. T elicits a truth or story to be told that may be clandestine or unknown. To this end, it is a fitting notion to invoke when pursuing new insights in addressing the issues and needs that queer youth of color face in formal school settings.

Queer youth of color have stories to tell, yet research on queer youth has tended to overshadow the complexities of their identities. As a result of the narrow focus, less is known about queer students of color and their experiences in K-16 schools. In addition to what researchers and stakeholders in queer communities have asserted about the schooling experiences of queer youth, more research attention is needed to better understand the influence race, gender, and sexuality (among other identity markers) have on queer students’ lived experiences in formal school settings. This dissertation study is a critical narrative inquiry into the lived experiences of queer youth of color, and invites them to share their T on how they navigated school, negotiate multiple intersecting identities and negotiate the purpose of formal education in their lives.

Who are queer youth of color?

This section will provide a definition and conceptual frame for the identity label queer youth of color. Queer youth identify themselves in nuanced and fluid ways. Driver (2008) suggests that “queer youth are not discursively containable” nor “reducible to any single dimension of their embodiment, identity, or situation” (p.2). For the purpose of defining queer youth, I engage queer for its transgressive power, and its ability to draw
political attention to historical and social marginality of sexual minorities (Kumashiro, 2001; Manalansan IV, 2006).

Moreover, the identity label *queer youth of color* encompasses youth (often students) who claim multiple salient and interconnected social and political identities relating to race, ethnicity, class, gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation, among other identifiers (Driver, 2008; Kumashiro, 2001; Manalansan IV, 2006). These youth can also be identified as marginal members of marginal groups (Manalansan IV, 1996). Queer youth of color claim diverse and variant gender identities, gender expressions, and sexual orientations that often contrast or transgress conventional gender binaries and/or heteronormativity, while simultaneously maintaining salient racial and ethnic identities. While these youth may use other terms to describe their gender identity or sexual orientation that differ from *queer*, this dissertation project draws upon a definition of *queer youth of color* used by some scholars (Driskill, 2010; Driver, 2008; Ferguson, 2003; Kumashiro, 2001; Manalansan IV, 2006;) that includes a wide range of youth experiences and gender and sexual identities, including same-
gender-loving\textsuperscript{3}, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender\textsuperscript{4}, transsexual\textsuperscript{5}, queer, questioning\textsuperscript{6}, intersex\textsuperscript{7}, pansexual\textsuperscript{8}, two-spirit\textsuperscript{9}, and HIV+ (SGLLGBTQIP2SH).

There is a persistent myth that communities of color are unprogressive and exceptionally homophobic (Banerjee, 2007; Savage, 2008). To suggest that any racial or ethnic community is more homophobic than any other is extraneous to the fact that there exist in the U.S. anti-queer practices that marginalize queer individuals and queer communities. What is more accurate is that we do not often discuss the intersection of race, sexuality and gender. As a result of silence around those identity intersections, queer young people of color remain particularly vulnerable in school and in society. I will discuss this claim of the vulnerability of queer people of color further in the subsequent sections of this chapter. But, I mean to draw attention to an increasingly critical need to understand the identities and lived experiences of queer youth of color in order to support their survival.

Here is the $T$: race is so glaringly absent in mainstream gay media and research that we must be deliberate about its inclusion. Researchers and stakeholders must see queer youth with new eyes. Holmes and Cahill (2003) encourage researchers to utilize identity

\textsuperscript{3} An analytic and discursive lens, and African American generated identity term marked by same-sex desire and physical sexual acts accompanied by commitment and/or romantic love (Melancon, 2008).

\textsuperscript{4} An individual who does not fit neatly into traditional gender binaries of male or female (Brockenbrough & Boatwright, 2013).

\textsuperscript{5} Relating to the process of transforming the body with the use of surgical or hormonal modifications to have the physical features of another sex (Ault & Levens, 2015).

\textsuperscript{6} Refers to an identity of being in a state of questioning or not confirming one’s sexual orientation.

\textsuperscript{7} Relating to the condition of being born with “ambiguous genitalia, sexual organs, or sex chromosomes" that deviate from the "norm" (Preves, 2003).

\textsuperscript{8} A theory of sexuality that includes all modes of sexuality existing in humans, whether permanently or occasionally (Brooms, 2008).

\textsuperscript{9} Two-spirit is a Native American term that refers to the availability of mixed gender roles or a personal subjectivity consisting of masculine and feminine energy (Gilley, 2011, p. 127).
development models that can accommodate nuances of race. Similarly, Lance McCready (2004) advises stakeholders to conceptualize the identities of queer youth of color as mutually constituted. He explains, “[…] seeking to understand and design interventions for youth who are marginalized by multiple perceived differences is best done using multidimensional frameworks” (p. 137). With this dissertation project, I seek to intentionally invoke race in the conversation on queer youth, and invite queer youth of color to share and compare their own stories.

**Defining Youth**

This project presents analysis drawn from in-depth narratives provided by ten diverse queer youth of color. This research study is informed by an anthropological conception of youth (Bucholtz, 2002; Lesko, 1996), rather than defined by chronological age. A broader concept of youth draws more attention to needs, lived experiences, transition, and youth autonomy, and challenges traditional concepts of human development that do not acknowledge intersectionality or inequality.

The participants enrolled in this study can also be identified as millennials, a segment of the youth population in transition to adulthood. Some define the generation as born between 1980 and the mid 2000s (whitehouse.gov). Ng, Schweitzer and Lyons (2010) define their age as being between 18-27. The millennial generation cohort is also defined by their size, access, and sociocultural diversity. In 2013, they represented one-third of the total US population. They are the first generation to have grown up with internet access and other digital technologies like smart cellular phones. Millennials also stand to be the most ethnically diverse and educated generation. About 40% of the millennial generation identifies as non-white, and about 60% of millennials have attended college (whitehouse.gov). There
are several reasons why it is important to be talking about millennials of color. An examination of the lived experiences of this youth demographic is meaningful because it can offer more intimate insight on identity-based inequality. Additionally, millennials stand to make a great impact on society in economic, cultural and political ways. It behooves us to reflect on their potential, and the future they will create.

However, although millennials are often stereotyped as the privileged and entitled generation because of their access to smart technologies and having grown up in a more racially diverse and integrated society, these assets do not necessarily shield some millennials from serious educational, social, economic and health instabilities. According to a recent study, students of color are six times more likely than white students to attend a low-performing school (Human Rights Campaign, 2013). As school is often considered a pathway to upward mobility (Amos, 2008), attending a low-performing school can have lasting consequences on a student’s potential and future.

Additionally, queer millennials of color are disproportionately marginalized and impacted by violence. According to one report, LGBTQ and HIV+ youth survivors of violence (up to 24 years old) were 2.5 times more likely to be injured due to hate violence. LGBTQ and HIV+ young adults (19-29) who reported experiences of violence were 1.8 times more likely to experience physical violence (Ahmed & Jindasurat, 2015). According to a national study conducted by the National Coalition of Ant-Violence Programs (NCAVP), in 2014 there were 20 documented homicides committed against LGBTQ young adults. 80% of all homicide victims in 2014 were people of color. The majority of victims were Black, and half of all victims were transgender women. This statistic represents an increase in deadly violence used against LGBTQ and HIV-affected people since the previous year, and
highlights a disproportionality of experienced violence against LGBTQ youth and young adults—particularly those of color. (Ahmed & Jindasurat, 2015).

Queer millennials of color are also challenged by poverty. Due to anti-queer bias and a systematic lack of protections against those biases, many queer youth are vulnerable to wage disparities and poverty. Educational attainment is one indicator of one’s risk of experiencing poverty. For example, young people who do not have a college degree are at greater risk to experience poverty. According to the MacArthur Foundation on transitions to adulthood, young people (18-24) who do not have a four-year degree are more than 14 times more likely than their college-educated peers to experience poverty. Blacks and Latinos experience the highest rates of poverty (http://transitions.s410.sureserver.com/). Similarly, a recent study on poverty in the LGB community (Albelda, Badgett, Schneebaum, & Gates, 2009) identifies poverty as a major factor contributing to the social marginalization of queer people—with queer people of color experiencing disproportionately higher rates of poverty than white queers. In further contextualizing anti-queer bias in the workplace, one study’s analysis of a large dataset of Canadian postsecondary respondents indicated that LGBT-identified workers stand to earn lower salaries than their heterosexual counterparts (Lewis & Ng, 2013). Furthermore, the lack of federal protection for gender identity and expression leave queer, gender non-conforming, and transgender workers at a greater risk for poverty and unemployment. According to a recent study on transgender employment, transgender workers report unemployment at twice the rate of the general population. Transgender workers are also four times more likely than the general population to have a household income of under $10,000 (LGBT Movement Advancement Project, 2013).
Additionally, many queer youth of color confront several persistent social and health-related vulnerabilities that often make it difficult to plan for the future. For example, while the rates of HIV/AIDS infections have significantly decreased among whites, infection rates have increased exponentially among Black and Latino youth communities. According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC.gov), incidences of HIV infections declined in 2008. Yet, HIV/AIDS continues to particularly impact the Black population, as they make up half of all those infected. Though Latinos make up only 15% of the U.S. population, they account for 17% of all HIV infections. Blacks and Latinos are disproportionately impacted by this still-thriving epidemic. In 2009, young people aged 13-29 accounted for 39% of new infections, even though they make up only 21% of the U.S. population (CDC.gov). While the racial disproportion leaves much to be speculated, these data also prompt an evaluation of the quality of sexual health resources available to youth.

Despite much emphasis placed on millennial’s entitlement and access, young queers of color, as these statistics would suggest, are a vulnerable population. In addition to clarifying those vulnerabilities and illuminating their disproportionate frequency, throughout this dissertation I seek to flesh out the complexity of what we know and what we need to know about queer youth. In the following section I will compare contemporary representations of the discourse on queer youth.

**Representing Queer Youth**

Black lesbian feminist scholar Audre Lorde (1984/2007) lamented society’s inability to see her as whole and her identities as multidimensional. She explained:

I find I am constantly being encouraged to pluck out some one aspect of myself and present this as the meaningful whole, eclipsing or denying the other parts of self. My fullest concentration of energy is available to me only when I integrate all the parts of
who I am, openly, allowing power from particular sources of my living to flow back and forth freely through all my different selves, without the restrictions of externally imposed definition (p 120-121).

Similarly, while queer youth have become more visible in society and contemporary media, their representation across media, and in research literature, remain limited. Their lived experiences continue to be reduced to narrow and seemingly individualized encounters with homophobia\(^{10}\). And their identities are still overwhelmingly represented as white, middle class, and cisgender (Driver, 2008; Kumashiro, 2001; Paceley & Flynn, 2012). Such narrow conceptions of queer youth identities undermine the complex realities of queer youth identities, lived experiences, and needs. It also filters how we understand queer youth experiences in school.

Adults are very influential to the understanding and representation of queer youth. The limited framing of queer youth can be explained as a manifestation of ageism.

Scholarship on queer youth in education has tended to overemphasize youth marginalization by representing queer youth with limiting and ageist positionalities (Driver, 2008; Reck, 2009; Savin-Williams, 1989). Driver argues:

> When cultural examples are studied by queer theorists, they have tended to focus on the sophisticated maneuverings of adult cultural production and reception, ignoring the unique predicaments of young people. Generational hierarchies are unwittingly constructed, which tend to separate adult and youth cultures and implicitly privilege the former, leaving youth stranded as neither fully belonging within mainstream heterosexist cultural research nor integrated within queer cultural niches (p. 11).

In other words, scholars who theorize about the complexities and negotiations of queer youth identity must be astute and acknowledge ageist assumptions about queer youth.

---

\(^{10}\) The term *homophobia* originated and was popularized in the 1970s. It is used to describe the “dread” and “repulsion” expressed toward homosexuals. The term is commonly used today to refer to the unreasonable fear, hatred and prejudice expressed against queer people (Campos, 2005).
lives and identities. Critical pedagogy theorist Peter McLaren offers this analysis of power in
describing how narrow conceptions of youth reinforce ageist hierarchies and limit the
production of knowledge. He explains, “This Manichaean perspective on youth (morally
upright/sexually deviant, and approvingly decent/unrepentantly corrupt) further supports a
paternalistic and authoritarian politics and policing of the unconscious by limiting access to
more progressive and liberatory vocabularies and practices of knowing” (1995, p. 106).
According to McLaren, the limited frame of youth identities constrains an ability to
recognize their autonomy. The limited and ageist assumptions of queer youth also reinforce a
power hierarchy in which adults seem to always know what is best for youth. Such
hegemonic conceptions of youth identity do not necessarily help youth, but can undermine
progressive attempts to conduct liberating social justice work that supports rich and complex
representations of youth.

Susan Talburt (2004) argues that educators and policy makers often base appeal for
queer-inclusive school practices on victimizing descriptions of queer youth, their problems
and needs (p. 116). For example, in 2010, gay author Dan Savage founded the flawed “It gets
better” (IGB) media campaign as a means to inspire hope in queer youth experiencing
bullying and harassment. The campaign saw an outpouring of supportive messages from
adults, youth, queers, and allies. The well-intentioned do-it-yourself (DIY) video campaign
inspired a lot of critical conversation about the plight of queer youth in the U.S.—particularly
those attending U.S. public schools. On one hand, the IGB campaign went viral and was
embraced by a number of celebrities and officials, including President Obama. However, the
campaign was not without its critics. In addition to its apparent colorblindness, IGB was
criticized for its narrow, neoliberal, “pull yourself up by your bootstraps” appeal (Puar,
2010). Critics thoughtfully questioned how does it get better, and for whom does it get better? Given the salience of race, consider exactly what quality of better is attainable for queer youth of color. For queer youth of color, “it” (pain? suffering? oppression? life?) may not get better—if “better” equates to a false sense of normalcy that simply mirrors class elitism, white supremacy, and heteropatriarchy. IGB attempted to suggest that youth and sexuality are just temporary inconveniences. If queer youth of color are supported to transition to adulthood, “it” may not necessarily get better. The oppressions they experience may be negotiated differently as they get older. Yet, better is relative, and not a guarantee.

The framing of queer youth lives influences how stakeholders address their issues. Focusing on deficiency and deviance is a strategy queer youth advocates utilize to draw attention to queer youth identities and issues. Hackford-Peer (2010) identifies two major discourses employed that construct queer youth as either innocent victims or activist educators. Hackford-Peer explains, “These discourses are employed in sometimes supporting, and sometimes competing, ways in the name of creating safer schools and a safer society in general for queer people and particularly queer youth” (p. 544). The innocent victim discourse relies on an ageist power relationship between adults and youth that undermines youth autonomy. In school, positioning youth as innocent victims conversely means that effective change and power is to be vested in adult protectors. In this sense, adults act on behalf of youth as a means of preserving their presumed innocence and saving them from their assumed naivety.

There are intended benefits of employing the innocent victim discourse. This discourse relies on an acceptance of instability and danger as the status quo and tends to evoke action through social shaming (Hackford-Peer, 2010). While queer students may not
be regarded as innocent because of their politicized sexual and gender identities, the innocent victim discourse can still be employed for political movement (Hackford-Peer, 2010). Positioning queer youth as innocent victims often means casting them as martyrs. This strategy seeks to raise public awareness and broadened acceptance of the queer community through emotional appeal. The most apparent operationalization of the queer innocent victim is demonstrated in the current anti-queer bullying epidemic discourse, and is also exemplified in the IGB campaign. Queer youth who die by suicide are often memorialized as innocent youth victimized by individualized encounters of homophobia. In the media and among educators, the appropriation of queer youth suicides has generated unprecedented conversation about queer youth in recent years (Hackford-Peer, 2010; Puar, 2010; Talburt, 2004). However, this approach tends to oversimplify bullying as an individual act of extreme teasing, rather than reflective of an oppressive heteropatriarchal social order structure present in schools.

On the other hand, the second discourse that Hackford-Peer highlights is that of queer youth as activist. In spite of the barrage of negative experiences and statistics that are often associated with queer youthhood, many queer youth take on a strong politicized identity. Queer youth have been known to take up a variety of political issues including establishing GSAs (gay straight alliances) (Cohen, 2005; Johnson, 2007) and speaking out on policies that prohibits taking same-sex dates to dances. They have been instrumental in honoring the “Day of Silence,” in which protestors demonstrate and put a spotlight on anti-queer harassment in schools (Cohen, 2005, p. 546). Youth activism is important and should not be taken for granted. Queer youth can benefit from developing strategies that will help them advocate for themselves and their right to be educated in a safe and inclusive environments.
The dominant discourses on queer youth divides their experiences into two stories. We often see queer youth as activist or as victim. Yet, there is a much fuller range of experiences that queer youth have while in school and society that requires further investigation. Viewing queer youth solely as victims is problematic, because it dismisses the diversity and autonomy among queer youth, as well as their unique experiences and needs. The narrow conception of anti-queer discrimination limits how we understand the issues that impact queer youth (Kumashiro, 2000; Savin-Williams, 2001). Queer youth of any color are marginalized in and out of school because they claim sexual orientations and/or gender identities that challenge the heteropatriarchal\textsuperscript{11} status quo. The theory of heteropatriarchy refers to a structure of power that privileges patriarchal, cisgender\textsuperscript{12} and heterosexual hierarchies. I will discuss this further in Chapter Three. Nevertheless, queer youth are diverse and have different needs that are influenced by their identities. Though there is a body of literature documenting the intricacies of racism as an educational obstacle (e.g. Ferguson, 2001; Noguera, 2003), some scholars (Blackburn & McCready, 2009; Cruz, 2012; Diaz & Kosciw, 2009; Harley et al., 2002; Harper, Wardell, McGuire, 2011; Johnson, 2008; Kumashiro; 2001; Majied, 2010; Marquez & Brockenbrough, 2013; Misawa, 2004; 2009; 2010; Monteiro & Fuqua, 1995; Parks, 2001; Quinn, 2007; Russell & Truong, 2001; Sausa, 2005; Vaught, 2004; Wall & Washington, 1991) have explored how multiple intersecting forms of discrimination based on race, sexual orientation and gender identity impact the

\textsuperscript{11} Heteropatriarchy is a theory of power derived from legal studies and queer indigenous studies. It describes oppression as a colonial relationship of dominance (Smith, 2005). Heteropatriarchy is defined by “internalizing hierarchical gendered relationships and heteronormative attitudes towards sexuality” (Finley, 2011, p.33-34; Smith, 2006; Vakles, 1996).

\textsuperscript{12} Self-perception of one’s gender identity is congruent to one’s assigned sex
academic lives of queer youth in formal school settings. I will explore this body of work in more detail in Chapter Two.

Russell and Troung (2001) note that while it is difficult to conclude that queer youth of color are at a greater risk for victimization at school, their experiences are qualitatively different from their white peers (p.117). At critical intersections of race, class, gender-identity and sexuality, many queer youth of color find themselves marginalized by multiple forms of oppression with little recourse (Kumashiro, 2001; Talburt, 2004). Queer youth of color are not often afforded the same benefit of the doubt that white privilege engenders, because oppression of people of color is often accepted as the status quo (Hill Collins, 2004).

So then, who among queer youth are afforded an identity as innocent or as a victim? In addition to representing queer youth as either victim or activist, I propose conceptualizing the discourse on queer youth through a survivalist frame. I wonder what new stories will be told when the focus is shifted to queer youth autonomy, agency and diversity. Driver asserts that the goal of re-conceptualizing queer youth identities is to “initiate provisional and detailed analysis of the ways they precariously make and unmake sense of their lives in relation to the world around them” (p.2). Not only do researchers and stakeholders need to see queer youth with new eyes, but they must also be open to youth articulations of their own queer identities and lived experiences. As stakeholders continue to explore innovative strategies for supporting queer youth in schools, it is crucial that they begin to re-imagine queer youth identities with rich complexity (Talburt, 2004).

Rationale for this Study

Sexual and gender identity and gender expression, much like race, are often positioned as barriers within schools. Reflecting society’s status quo, school tends to function
as a regulatory site and reproduction center of identity stereotypes. Mayo (2007) suggests that schools are “organizationally structured to keep out gender and sexual dissenters” (p. 82). In addition to the anti-queer harassment present in many formal school settings (Diaz & Kosciw, 2009), queer students face structural and social obstacles in their academic career because many schools do not recognize the presence or identities of queer students. Instead, schools tend to foster official silence when it comes to queerness (Mayo, 2009). Schools’ lack of acceptance or acknowledgment of queerness, and schools’ curricular silence of queer identities, experiences, needs, and issues are examples of official silence (Mayo, 2009). Moreover, as a result of keeping gender and sexual dissenters out, along with a ubiquitous preference for cisgender heteronormativity, school often do not adequately address the concerns of sexual minorities. Even less attention is focused on those students who claim sexual, gender, and racial minority identities.

Despite a variety of obstacles—as described earlier in this chapter, some queer students do manage to survive K-16 settings (In “Homeplace” I share my story). They develop their own liberating initiatives and acts of resistance through multiple formats, aesthetics and politics, including grassroots organizing, narratives, music, performances, and revisions of familial networks (Brockenbrough & Boatwright, 2013; Driver, 2008; Harper, Wardell & McGuire, 2011; Kumashiro, 2001). Thus, with this dissertation study, I offer an account of how some of the most vulnerable students have survived school and society. The justifications for this study are to acknowledge that schools can dismiss queer youth identities, needs and lived experiences, to highlight the savvy survival strategies of queer youth of color, and also contribute to the limited education research focused on queer students of color.
One of the rationales for this study reasons that some schools suppress knowledge and dismiss queer youth identities, needs and lived experiences. One strong example of school’s silence on queerness can be illustrated in youth access to comprehensive sex and HIV education. According to Results from the School Health Policies and Practices Study, 90.2% of states have adopted national or state health education standards (p. 21). These standards include access to “valid information, products, and services to enhance health” in 90.0% of states’ elementary schools, 90.2% of states’ middle schools and 92.0% of states’ high schools (p.22). Additionally, a 2010 data brief from the National Center for Health Statistics supports the claim that most teenagers receive formal sex education before the age of 18. The brief reveals that a majority of teenagers have been taught about sexually transmitted diseases and how to prevent HIV/AIDS (Martinez, Abma and Copen, 2010). A deeper examination of the kinds of accessible sex education resources and information reveals a unique problem. Current health education standards do not adequately address the needs of sexually active, curious, or victimized youth. The brief reveals that a “larger percentage of teenagers reported receiving formal sex education on “how to say no to sex” more often than they reported receiving formal sex education on methods of birth control (p. 2). State mandated school curricula mandating comprehensive sex and HIV education are consistently unavailable across the U.S. (Donovan, 1998). Of the 50 states, only 20 and the District of Columbia mandate both sex and HIV education (Donovan, 1998; Guttmacher Institute, 2011; 2014).

Most US states do not offer a sex education that accommodates for youth autonomy or the diversity of youth sexualities, gender identities, and experiences. Most sex education content requirements restrict information that youth may find useful for their lives. The
Guttmacher Institute 2014 brief on *Sex and HIV Education* shows that where sex education is taught, many states have enacted content requirements. Many of these states do not mandate a comprehensive sex and HIV/AIDS education that includes abstinence as the best method for avoiding sexually transmitted infections and unintended pregnancy, and also teaches about condoms and contraception, gender identity and sexual orientation, and/or interpersonal and communication skills (Advocates for Youth, 2009). Abstinence is required to be stressed when sex education is taught in half of U.S. states (Guttmacher Institute, 2011; 2014 p.1), although abstinence-only programs have not been proven to delay the engagement of sexual intercourse (Advocates for Youth, 2009; Donovan, 1988). Comparatively, only 13 states require that the information be medically accurate (Guttmacher Institute, 2011; 2014 p.1). Moreover, while some of these requirements restrict sex-positive approaches to sex education, some also explicitly marginalize queer youth identities and queer lived experiences. For example, three states require that their sex education include only negative information when referencing a sexual orientation other than heterosexuality (Guttmacher Institute, 2011; 2014). In fact, eight states have some form of “no promo homo” laws which restrict classroom content about queer people and queer issues, and restrict the portrayal of homosexuality in a positive light (Fernandez, 2013). So, although queer youth of color may have access to sex education, the information available to them is so often filtered by ageism, heterosexism and outright anti-queer discrimination that it is rendered incompatible with their lives or the issues they encounter.

Identity continues to matter in society. Identities misaligned with the hegemony of Eurocentric normativity are regularly policed, interrogated, and alienated in society and within schools (Noguera, 2003). This is often the case for many youth in schools where they
navigate and negotiate identity-marginalizing practices manifested in the form of policing, overrepresentation in school sanctions and absence in school curricula (Noguera, 2003). In addition to limited access to resources, Anderson and Collins (2007) explain that these marginalizing practices simultaneously discipline individuals to accept systemic forms of patriarchy, heterosexism and Eurocentrism as the status quo.

In light of the silence that pervades formal school settings, for more than 30 years, education research has offered insight into the lived experiences of queer youth in schools by bringing the sociocultural issues that these youth experience to the forefront of research agendas. Current research suggests that many schools foster an anti-queer climate that undermines the academic careers of queer students. Moreover, the growing body of research centered on the lived experiences of queer students often points to social barriers that put the health and educational futures of queer youth in a precarious balance. These social barriers further exacerbate academic challenges faced by queer youth. For example, queer students are disproportionately impacted by absenteeism, truancy, drop-out, bullying, and missed opportunities for college access (Diaz & Kosciw, 2009; Elze, 2003; Grossman et al., 2009; Holmes & Cahill, 2003). Furthermore, some scholars suggest that queer youth academic achievement and their access to resources are undermined by multiple intersecting forms of social marginalization within family, school, and other social institutions (Blackburn & McCready, 2009; Díaz & Kosciw, 2009; Driver, 2008; Grov et al., 2006; Kivel, 1994; Kumashiro, 2001; Majied, 2010; Parks, 2001; Reck, 2009; Russell & Truong, 2001; Talburt, 2004; Vaught, 2004). While we know a lot about how queer youth are marginalized and victimized in school, we know less about how they strategize their survival through formal school settings. To this point, we know even less about how queer students of color
experience school. The additional rationale for this study is to speak to the quietness of queer youth of color stories in education research. Between the 70s and early 2000s, “only 9 articles and two book chapters” focused on LGB youth of color; and no articles focused explicitly on transgender youth of color (Ryan, 2002). While addressing the needs and concerns of queer students, this dissertation project offers a queer of color critique of schooling and the purpose of school by putting the stories of queer youth of color at the center of this research investigation.

**Significance of Study**

It is only within the last three decades that researchers, scholars, and public media have given substantial attention to the lived experiences of queer youth (Elze, 2003). Hetrick and Martin’s (1987) seminal research study on gay and lesbian adolescent development marks a contemporary shift towards greater educational research investment in critical examinations of the lived experiences of queer youth. Hetrick and Martin’s investigation is noteworthy, not simply because of its explicit focus on queer youth but because of its unique analytic focus. They described queer youth victimization as systemic and as a structurally perpetuated discrimination, while explaining the connection between the high percentage of teen attempted suicides and the isolation that queer youth often experience in society. Hetrick and Martin’s study stimulated awareness by emphasizing the social context of queer youth marginalization.

The pervasiveness of anti-queer marginalization impacts the production of new research about queer youth. Mayo (2007) explains that there are many constraints to researching and theorizing about queer youth and education, including difficulty identifying queer youth, getting past the stigma of examining sexuality and education, and gaining
institutional access and parental approval (p. 87). Because of this, early queer work on sexuality and education primarily focused on advocacy and normalizing representations of the queer community. More recent queer research has focused on critiquing the limits of the “politics of visibility” (to be in or out of the closet) (p. 80) and on interrogating rigid identity categories. The emphasis on social acceptance through greater visibility continues to manifest itself in empirical work by positioning queer youth as innocent victims (Diaz & Kosciw, 2009; Elze, 2003, Holmes & Cahill, 2003). Moreover, persistent social issues such as homophobic policing and the HIV/AIDS epidemic that ravaged populations in the latter part of the 20th century have also impacted the scope of education research about queer youth. As a result, research has tended to focus on the impact of homophobia on the lives of youth.

There is still much to be learned about the lived experiences of queer students of color. With this dissertation, I seek to illuminate insight on the survival of queer students of color, and offer a queer of color critique by critically examining how queer youth of color navigate school, negotiate multiple intersecting identities and the purpose of formal education in their lives. In doing so, I am aligning this research study with the existing research (Blackburn, 2005; Brockenbrough & Boatwright, 2013, Cruz 2012; Davidson, 2008; Dixon et al. 2010, 2011; Grossman, et al., 2009; Johnson, 2007, 2008; Mac An Ghail, 1994; Majied, 2010; McCready, 2004; Misa, 2001; Quinn 2007; Reck, 2009; Varney, 2001; Vaught, 2004) that focuses on schooling experiences contextualized at the intersections of identity. These works demonstrate that queer youth possess the capacity to articulate definitions of their identities and to theorize about their own lived experiences.
In the following section I explore the origins of this investigation and my emic positionality to this project by sharing my story.
“Homeplace” of this Study

Heartbreak opens onto the sunrise
For even breaking is opening
And I am broken
I am open
Broken to the new light without pushing in
Open to the possibilities within
pushing out
See the love shine in through my cracks
See the light shine out through me?
I am broken
I am open
I am broken open
See the love-light shining through me
Shining through my cracks
Through the gaps
My spirit takes journey
My spirit takes flight
Could not have risen otherwise
And I am not running
I am choosing
Running is not a choice
From the breaking
Breaking is freeing
Broken is freedom
I am not broken
I am free.

-Pariah (Rees, 2011)
I start this section of the dissertation with a poem from the Black lesbian coming-of-age film, *Pariah*. Poetry was my first literary love, and through poetry I came to love and appreciate the written word. Poetry presented me with a medium to freely express my ideas and lived-experiences. Through my interest in poetry I discovered scholars in whom I saw myself reflected—Audre Lorde, Langston Hughes, James Baldwin, Nancy Morejón, and Zora Neale Hurston to name a few.

Alike, the main character in *Pariah*, wrote the poem as a reflection of her experience finishing high school and coming to grips with becoming estranged from her parents after disclosing to them that she identified as a lesbian. Alike’s poem resonates a similar struggle in me that I have carried throughout my doctoral program and not until now have I felt strong enough to put words to those buried emotions. I too am broken open. Though perseverance has been a challenge to summon, that I am still alive is a blessing and a testament of strength. Alike’s poem inspired me to reframe my sense of victimization into a new *homeplace* for constructive critique.

The *homeplace*\(^{13}\) of this study begins first with my own struggle as a 20-something queer student of color. In light of the parallels of my social positioning as a young person to the young people at MAC, I begin with analysis of some of my own lived experiences, including my most recent student experiences in graduate school. In this section, I share my story. By doing so, I intend to resist a traditional researcher/participant hierarchy (Dillard, 2012; Kirkman, 1999; Misawa, 2009), because I believe my reflections also offer valuable insight into conceptualizing intersections of identity, and offer an emic understanding of the impact of imbricate forms of marginalization that some queer youth experience.

\[^{13}\] The place or source where critical consciousness is developed (Johnson, 2001).
Subsequently, I seek to draw attention to the use of multidimensional analytic frameworks that I believe best accommodates the identities of queer youth of color when conducting education research. In this section of the dissertation, I will explore my personal *homeplace* by sharing my own lived experience as a 20-something queer student, just as I intend for the participants to do. Within my story, I code switch between Spanish, English, my home-speech, *gaybonics* (Blackburn, 2005), and academic language. I do this to expose how I negotiate multiple identities and simultaneous realities (I offer rough translations within parenthetical notes to reflect that process). I use terms and share intimate experiences that may elicit an emotional response or clash with the conventional and distant academic voice. Delimiting the filter of the conventional academic voice and incorporating those multiple voices and languages is important to the integrity of this narrative inquiry study. For example, I will use terms like *mamá* and *daddy* rather than mother or father. I intend to illustrate a juxtaposition of intimacy and vulnerability by code switching between the formal academic voice and the presumably informal voice of home. Though nameless within this text, using terms like mamá and daddy shifts the focus of my parents’ identities from simple descriptive terms to intimate indexes of the quality of my relationship with them; in a way this also resists the traditional parent/child hierarchy. Specifically relating to my use of the term, mamá, the spelling also indexes her Latina heritage (though my father’s blackness could also be implied with the use of daddy). Lastly, I contend that within this section of the dissertation, those multiple identities and realities are allowed to coalesce (or collide) within this reflection of my *homeplace*.

Performance artist and scholar E. Patrick Johnson (2001) locates the development of consciousness at *homeplace*—a site where one cultivates understanding of oppression and
learns how to navigate it (p. 19). *Homeplace* compares to what pedagogue Paulo Freire (2003) identifies as conscientização. *Conscientização* refers to a critical awareness or learning of relationships of power (p.59). In opening up to the revelation that suffering can be reframed for action, I am choosing to learn from the brokenness I have felt, as a means to understand how to better navigate and negotiate domination experienced by other young queers of color. In this regard, it is fitting to refer to Latina lesbian feminist scholar Gloria Anzaldúa. Anzaldúa asserts that knowledge production is an intimate experience that occurs within complicated relationships of power. She refers to the meaning-making of these conflicts of power as an embodied knowledge production or “theory in the flesh.” Anzaldúa identifies this acquisition of knowledge as possessing a mestiza consciousness. Mestiza consciousness is “based on a construction of mixed race histories and multiple cultural and political positions that derive from the collision between colonial and indigenous oppositions, positions the new mestiza as nothing less than ‘a struggle of flesh, a struggle of borders, an inner war’” (Cruz, 2001, p.660).

Like Anzaldúa, prominent Black gay writer James Baldwin honored the epistemological value of lived experience. He challenged the notion that scientific fact and truth are mutually exclusive. Baldwin suggests that there is a difference between knowledge for survival (for negotiating and navigating society or school) and statistical knowledge that we often get to explain our lives. In the essay *Notes for a hypothetical novel* (1998), Baldwin critiques the establishment of social sciences (e.g. Sexology) as truth mediators of communities of color. He asserts, “We think that once one has discovered that thirty thousand, let us say, Negroes, Chinese or Puerto Ricans or whatever have syphilis or don't, or are unemployed or not, that we've discovered something about the Negroes, Chinese or
Puerto Ricans. But in fact, this is not so. In fact, we've discovered nothing very useful because people cannot be handled in that way” (p.222). Lorde (1984/2007) corroborates the notion that instead, experiential knowledge is a valuable tool for marginalized people, even though it is often dismissed in dominant academic structures, and is in contention with academic enterprise. In her canonical essay, “The Master’s tools will never dismantle the Master’s house”, Lorde describes how those marginalized in society can learn from their oppression by working outside of the master structure, by speaking across difference, conceptualizing difference as asset, and building coalitions among those on the outside. Lorde explains:

Those of us who stand outside the circle of this society’s definition of acceptable women; those of us who have been forged in the crucibles of difference – those of us who are poor, who are lesbians, who are Black, who are older – know that survival is not an academic skill. It is learning how to stand alone, unpopular and sometimes reviled, and how to make common cause with those others identified as outside the structures in order to define and seek a world in which we can all flourish. It is learning how to take our differences and make them strengths (p. 112).

As warned by Lorde, survival may not be an academic skill; however, this dissertation seeks to illuminate the experiential knowledge of queer youth of color in order to generate tools that support their survival in society and nurture their burgeoning intellects.

Research has the potential to not only raise awareness of queer identities and social issues but also to generate action for addressing those issues. Yet, current education research on queer youth barely reflects the complexities of their identities. Because of this, the identities and lived experiences of queer youth of color remain eclipsed by narrow and ostensibly normative analytic lenses (Savin-Williams, 2001). To the contrary, there is value in focusing on the marginalized voices of queer youth of color, because their experiences
within school elicit a deeper examination of the impact of interlocking forms of domination such as racism, classism, heteropatriarchy, and transphobia.

Social marginalization that queer youth of color experience in society and within schools harms our voices—but will not completely suppress our voices. Within my lived experience in school, I endured thousands of cuts to my young brown body. Some were physical, while others worked at my mind and heart. In this part of the dissertation, I bare my “struggle of flesh” in order to illuminate knowledge that may shine through those wounds. I reflect on aspects of my upbringing and family and offer my analysis of how I navigated school and society, and negotiated multiple salient identities and interlocking forms of domination. Ironically, I did not know my own strength until I was afforded this opportunity to critically examine my own lived experiences. Moreover, my experience reveals a unique paradox that many other queer people of color negotiate—the utility and harm of silence.

My earliest recollection of a homeplace of critical consciousness is located in my family. I grew up in intersections, believing that embracing difference was beautiful and self-preserving. Difference was a way of life for us. And it was within my multi-ethnic home that I developed knowledge about intersectionality, society, asymmetric power structures, and community. I learned about endurance and ways to subvert dominance by observing my parents and listening to them talk about their lives. However, these “survival” knowledges were consistently at odds with my academic career. In school I observed individualism and hierarchical ranking as the norm.

My story starts when my parents met and forged a unique union of identities. My parents met in California, where I grew up, but the two came from two seemingly different worlds. My daddy was born in the late 1940s and was raised in rural Oklahoma until he was
a teenager. My kin on his side are a mixture of Black, Cherokee, Choctaw, and European ancestry. When asked how my daddy identifies his race or ethnicity, he would most likely say Black and claim the theory of the “one drop rule” to substantiate that response. But when he told stories about his upbringing he would acknowledge his different mixtures. I usually refer to that part of me as mixed-Black American. I also identify as Mexican by virtue of my mamá. My mamá was born in the mid-1960s and was raised in a pueblo in the Mexican state of Chihuahua. She would eventually immigrate to the U.S. as a teenager. My mamá’s family is Mexican, but my identity as Mexican is nuanced by geography and politics. My mamá and my tías (aunts) and tíos (uncles) are Mexican because they were born in México, while my brothers, primos, primas (cousins) and I are considered Chicanos because we were born in the U.S.

Education has always been very important to my parents, but they have not always had the insight to guide me through my academic journey. They have their own complicated experiences with schooling. Like bell hooks, my daddy’s educational experience was compromised by the racist politics that came with desegregation. I recall listening to his emotional recollections of the supportive Black school he attended before being forced to attend an integrated school that he believed and felt did not want him. The marginalization he experienced as a young student shaped his understanding of oppression as pervasive and structural. After graduating high school, he served in the Vietnam War. My mamá’s schooling experience was different in context and duration. My abuela (grandma) sent my mamá to the U.S. believing she could have a better life. My mamá found herself in the U.S. a teenage mother with limited English speaking skills which made it difficult to access the academic support she needed to be successful in school. She eventually would sacrifice her
academic career to work a strenuous low-wage housekeeping job to support our family. Even though my parents did not pursue further formal education, they have kept their minds engaged by going to church where they read, reflect, and dialogue several times a week. These observations of my parents as students exemplify their strength and resourcefulness. They nurtured my intellect even when they did not realize it.

My parents supported my independence from a very early age by encouraging me to pursue my own educational goals. Within my academic studies, I found a space to cultivate autonomy and feel independent. But it was mamá and daddy who raised the strong student in me. Every day before I left for school, my daddy would remind my brothers and me to listen to the teacher and to always do our best. With their love and support, I graduated college and became the first person on either side of my family to earn a bachelor degree. My academic achievement would eventually see me relocate across the country to pursue a doctorate degree.

As expressed earlier, I attribute much of my success to the critical consciousness I developed in my upbringing. I grew up in a working class section of a large urban city in Northern California. Though my multi-ethnic family would stick out in many other cities, we actually reflected what some would refer to as the “new normal” in the present U.S. In 2002, TIME magazine declared my city the most racially and ethnically diverse and integrated city in the U.S. (Stodghill & Bower, 2002). In 2010, the U.S. census showed that 55% of the city’s half-million residents identified as “non-white” or people of color (census.gov). Not surprisingly, some of my most profound learning experiences have involved lessons and activities that honored ethnic diversity within the classroom. Aside from my parents and extended family, the first educators I learned from were young Black and Brown women who
taught at the local Head Start program. These women taught with care and inspired hope in me that I might aspire for a successful educational future. They taught me how to take care of myself by teaching me the value of cultural practices like sharing, eating diverse and healthy foods, and brushing my teeth. At that time, my daddy was much healthier, so he would chaperone many of our learning expeditions to unique epistemic sites like San Francisco’s Chinatown or the local zoo. It was quite natural to learn in tandem with adults—even my parents. This was also typical at church and at home where my daddy was a Spanish-language learner and my mamá was an English-language learner. My early academic years were full of exciting and supportive pedagogical practices that had lasting impact on my learning. To illustrate, I recall my kindergarten where I was taught by a white woman teacher who also lived in my neighborhood. This teacher organized a lesson to teach us students how to count to ten in all of the languages that we spoke at home—English, Spanish, Hmong, Russian, Hindi, Romanian, Tongan, and Mandarin. In my kindergarten class, knowledge was constructed collaboratively and identity (particularly race and ethnicity) was positioned as a critical epistemic source. My kindergarten teacher would later recommend me to be tested to participate in the gifted and talented education (G.A.T.E.) program, which profoundly changed my life.

As the opportunity to be further educated was presented, I invested more of myself into my education, but eventually I experienced some push-back from the hegemony of the status quo. As early as 2nd grade, I could sense that my identities complicated my academic experience; I felt as though the culture and language of school were at unwarranted odds with those practiced at home. By the 2nd grade, 30 (out of nearly 500 students in the school) of my classmates and I were identified as gifted and bussed to the suburbs where the G.A.T.E.
program had been relocated. The move was a daily struggle and a metaphoric lesson in competitive swimming. I would leave one body of water for another—still wet from the last dip and not always ready to dive into a new change in current. Sometimes I struggled to keep my head above water. After 2nd grade, all of my teachers would be middle class whites who spoke Standard English. The vast majority of my teachers and professors later in my career could also be described in these terms. I have felt that many of my teachers were disconnected from my lived experience as a working class queer student of color and were unable to understand my needs or anticipate them. It could be the case that some of them did not see me in all the ways that I saw myself and unknowingly rendered those parts invisible. However, the ones whom I believe cared about me were attuned to the salient influence my many identities had on my academic experience. For example, my 5th grade teacher would allow me to stay in the classroom and read during recess, after I admitted to her that I had become the boys’ object of aggression because I routinely choose to hang out with the girls instead. She provided me with a place to escape to.

To be clear, I did not verbally “come out” to my parents until graduate school, but I maintain that I have always been soft (read: sensitive and effeminate) whether or not I put a label on it. When I was younger, I was asked often by my peers if I was a boy or a girl. For as long as I can remember, I have possessed both masculine and feminine energy and believe that my being born this way is a blessing from The Divine. I began to label my sexual attraction (that I like men and women) when I was 16 and disclosed this to some of my school friends, but resisted publicly coming out because I felt that the ritual of coming out was not beneficial to me. I did not find it important to confess my sexual orientation, as it felt like I was admitting to a crime. Supposedly, the coming out confession would relieve
heterosexual cisgender people of the angst they felt while being in close proximity with a queer person. I surmised that cisgender heterosexual angst is not my problem, nor my responsibility to address. I loathed moments when my friends would express their offendedness when they discovered they were not the first to be told. It was a different story with my parents. I assumed silence because I did not want to risk the loss of food, shelter or emotional support. By the time I was established in graduate school, I was completely independent and felt secure enough to confront those potential risks. Obviously, my parents had already known of my queerness but they struggled with their own heterosexist expectations of me and feared intensely for my safety and future as an independent, soft queer of color.

Not until I moved far away from home for graduate school did I accept my privileged educational experience. As a young queer of color, I realize how crucial it has been to have my family’s love and support. Not until now could I articulate how my homeplace has informed how I navigate society and see my future. By the time I reached the dissertation stage of my doctoral program, I felt almost completely beat-down. I had begun my graduate study directly after completing my bachelor degree and neglected to take any breaks from school since Head Start. Whether or not it was true, I told myself that this blessing and privilege to be educated was my only opportunity to transcend the poverty and silencing I experienced growing up. Somehow I had “made it.” I made it alone. I was often the only person in my classes who identified as young, queer, and of color. I was quite troubled racking my brain over with why me, because the exclusiveness of my success has not felt just. While in graduate school, I nearly lost my love for school, because I was tired of waiting
for school to liberate me from oppression, and because the silence-making culture of society reflected in my graduate school experience was harming my voice.

As emphasized in the previous sections, queer youth of color are disproportionately impacted by structural marginalization and systemic oppression that harms their psychic, emotional, social and physical wellbeing, and undermines academic goals. I have personally experienced a number of the inequalities that disproportionately impact queer youth of color. I experienced anti-queer violence in elementary school (I usually avoid fighting, but this was one of the rare moments in my life when I felt compelled to physically defend myself), and my middle school years were a traumatic time for me for reasons beyond feeling out of place and awkward in my then chubby, effeminate body, clad in cheap K-Mart clothes. I made peace with being superficially othered. My experience was traumatic because I only knew how to survive being othered by practicing silence.

In the middle of 7th grade, my world became dramatically more complicated. After having enjoyed an overnight fieldtrip to the Shakespeare Festival, I returned home to find my room completely packed into boxes and black plastic garbage bags. To my horror, my family was moving. Actually, we had lost our house. I never cared to ask my parents about the details of our sudden move, because knowing would not have made a difference. My parents saw to it that our family stayed together and survived the move. My extended family came to our support without hesitation. For months, my mamá, my daddy, younger brother and I lived in one of the two rooms of my auntie’s apartment, while my older brother and his girlfriend stayed at a cousin’s home. Eventually, my family of five was able to move into our own two-bedroom duplex. Alas, a year later my daddy would call a family meeting to reveal his HIV+ status and explain that we moved in part because of his health challenges and the difficulty of
trying to live off of my mamá’s meager housekeeping wages. I never told any of my teachers what was happening to me outside of school. My parents resolved to keep our “problems” private, and my brothers and I accepted this new reality of my daddy’s condition by keeping to business as usual. I was a confused wreck inside and tried not to let it show, so I cloaked my pain by projecting an aloof and jovial appearance as often as I could muster. I never asked for extra time or extra consideration to complete assignments, because I assumed it was my responsibility to figure it out. In the midst of all of the instability, I felt it was my responsibility to do well in school and not let my world outside of school impair my ability to do so. I managed to keep average grades throughout the transition of moving, but I was completely distracted. Frankly, none of my teachers seemed to detect that anything was wrong, or express concern for me. At that time, I had no mentor or advisor to call upon for help. I assumed my teachers did not care about me because many of them talked to me only when they were reprimanding me for talking too much in class. I assumed silence in order to get by. I assumed silence because I did not know what else I could do.

I went through a similar state of denial and depression during graduate school where I survived a number of consecutive silence-making experiences at my elite, private, and predominately white institution. At times, my graduate experience was quite lonely and isolating. In all of my classes, I was the only out, young queer of color. This was not difficult to accept in the beginning, but as I advanced in my program, I felt increasingly alone in my ideas and among my peers. I relied heavily on support from friends from home and communities I was a part of prior to my doctoral experience. I drew upon these kinship networks for emotional and spiritual care, as well as professional advice. Kinship networks that queers develop are dynamic and valuable resources. For marginalized queers, these
intentional support networks function as a social mechanism to recuperate resources and knowledge (Brockenbrough & Boatwright, 2013; Oswald, 2002). I looked forward to care packages from my parents filled with *pan dulce* (sweet bread) and notes of encouragement. While I know they supported my academic career aspirations, I felt at a loss being apart from my family and friends back home. The loss I felt hit deeper than homesickness. I did not simply miss home; I longed to be nurtured and affirmed in the way that home offered.

In retrospect, I began to assume silence in my second year when I experienced several great losses of my community and self. My best friend, Ying, was diagnosed with cancer near the beginning of my second year and passed away months after she was diagnosed. I do not have the space to describe what she meant and still means to me, but beyond our friendship, Ying was my sister and comrade. She and I met the summer after my traumatic 7th grade year, at a college preparatory program for academically motivated students attending low-income schools. We reunited in high school where we were both awarded scholarships to an elite private school in an affluent neighborhood on the nice side of the tracks. We supported each other through major academic milestones and inspired each other to use our intellects to support our communities. For example, while many of our peers went on college tours with their parents, she and I did not have access to that luxury. Instead, we scheduled college visits in the nearby area, borrowed a family member’s car, and took ourselves to meet with financial aid directors and admission counselors. Our parents could not be there for us in the ways that our classmates’ parents could, but we were there for each other.

I often felt alone among my peers in graduate school which worsened a profound sense of loss. While I was in class one night I got the unfortunate call that my flight back
west was cancelled, and that I was going to have to miss attending Ying’s funeral. I stepped outside to listen to some of the worst news anyone could get in a voicemail. Overcome by shock, I wilted over in pain and burst into tears. I tried to regain my composure before I returned to class to retrieve my things and leave, but I was rocked to my core. I felt embarrassed to be so vulnerable and exposed in front of my peers. And I also felt alone and unsupported; none of my white classmates reached out to me to express concern or comfort, not even after I returned to class the following week. I think my crying and emotional vulnerability may have made them feel uncomfortable, though I do not completely understand why that might have been so. My feelings were hurt and only exacerbated my anxieties about being invisible and silenced on campus.

The year following Ying’s passing fared no better than the last. In the spring, one of my past students from a college preparatory summer program was killed in a fatal car accident. The loss cut deeply. I felt every bit of the loss of the young bright mind. Regrettably, the year would get worse before there were any signs of hope in my heart again. During the late summer and shortly after my 25th birthday, I took a short beach vacation to clear my mind and focus on healing. My trip, however, was marred by violence that queers like me experience all too often in society (Dixon et al, 2011, 2012, 2013). I was sexually assaulted. I am still processing how to make sense and unmake sense of what happened to me, but the assault was oppressively silencing. According to a report produced by the national coalition of anti-violence programs (NCAVP), “gay people, LGBTQH people of color, immigrants, transgender people, youth, and young adults were disproportionately impacted by hate violence in 2011” (Dixon et al. 2012, p. 9). According to the study, “people under 30 were 2.56 times more likely to experience hate motivated sexual violence.” I sought
help and resources from the health clinic on campus, but that experience was traumatizing. The nurse practitioner was quite brash in our interaction and did not seem to understand how I, a male-bodied queer, could have been a victim of sexual assault. She neglected to offer me any resources for processing my trauma, and I left that appointment with an expensive bill for the lab work used to test for HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted infections. Alas, my grief would not let up. Upon returning home from the vacation, I learned that one of the MAC youth I worked with had suddenly passed away.

After two years of tragedy, I retreated into silence. The pain was so vivid and draining that I prayed for anger to liven me up. I became hard and jaded waiting for hope and love. As I learned in middle school, I tried to keep all of my feelings to myself because I was convinced that I did not have a community on campus to care for the wounded me. This was corroborated in one way or another, as I tried to pick myself up from the brutality of the years of loss. One day, as I was walking home from class I crossed the street, and an older white woman sped through a crosswalk and hit me. She stopped her car for a moment; from the rear-view mirror I saw her eyes dart into my direction as I stumbled to my feet. But she drove away and out of sight before I could act or speak with her. She did not even roll down the window to acknowledge what she had done. It seemed she had no regard for me. *What should I have done?* To add insult to injury, later that semester I found my car vandalized in the parking lot of my university. Someone keyed the word “nazi” and etched a swastika into the side of my car. When I reported it to security, I was told there was nothing they could do but refer me to the local police. The police also told me that there was nothing they could do. As remarkable as it may sound, that was not the last time that I would have to confront blatant racist intimidation on campus. Two students spray-painted what looked like a
swastika and “ss” bolts (a symbol often used to brag about committing violence against people of color) onto a large boulder in front of the residence hall where I worked. I took a picture of the symbol and reported it to my supervisor who later met with the students. The students who had received permission to draw on the boulder told my supervisor that they intended on painting a mathematic symbol and did not realize the swastika resemblance. Regardless of the intentions of the symbols, there was no recourse or response to the damage that had been done to our community. This made me feel terribly unsupported and unsafe. There was no recourse for the trauma I felt confronting those hate symbols.

Though I contemplated it, like many queers do, I could not bring myself to end my own life. My parents loved me alive, and it would have hurt them too much. I feared hurting them and other loved ones because I never want anyone to experience the depth of pain I have felt from loss and victimization. As suggested, I sought out a therapist to help me manage my fear and sadness. I also sought out a spiritual advisor, prayed incessantly, and tried to open up to friends. Still my feelings were too strong to ignore, for the feelings I bottled up swelled inside me until I could no longer hold them in my heart. The hurt manifested itself in inflamed abrasions all over my brown skin (I was diagnosed with psoriasis). I was boiling inside, and the pain, anger and fear poured out of my heart and all over me.

At this point, I now see no other option but to work towards freeing myself and my voice from the harm of fear and dominance. Silence has not protected me. While I recognize that someone may read my account and suggest that these experiences are isolated and incidental moments of hurt, I insist that that is only one way to analyze my trauma. As a young queer of color, I see my experiences of loss and victimization, and the fact that I felt
unsupported throughout them, as exemplifying a structural perpetuation of queer of color marginalization and frequent encounters with professionals and institutions unprepared to appropriately address our issues. Similarly, Hill Collins (2005) suggests that instead of conceptualizing rape or other forms of violence as race or gender specific forms of social control, an intersectional view of dominance understands the disproportionate impact of violence on Blacks, for example, as a manifestation of structural racism. Legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991) addresses this concept of intersectionality in her canonical text exploring race and gender dimensions of violence against women of color. She showed that Black women were systematically disadvantaged by having no legal redress to account for the intersections of race and gender or recourse for addressing interlocking forms of oppression. Similarly, I have often wondered how young queers of color manage to survive in society that systematically victimizes them. I have racked my brain several times over wondering how I made it this far.

I nearly lost my love of school because I was waiting for my school to miraculously save me from society’s perpetuation of queer silence and invisibility. The young people at MAC and my parents and other kinship networks inspired a healing perseverance in me during those years of loss, and supplied me with much needed support. Though my parents could not offer me insight for navigating my academic career, they were never sparing with showing me and telling me that they loved me. I realized that I had to quench fear with knowledge. So, with this dissertation study I intend to draw upon the wisdom of guardians in Lorde, Baldwin, Anzaldúa, and others. I am broken open to the possibility of drawing upon my lived experiences and using my voice to illuminate the savvy and resiliency of young
queers of color who experience loss and confront dominance and trauma in school and society.

In my hometown, next to the neighborhood high school, there is a wall with an axiom painted across its bricks which reads, “It takes a community to raise a child”. I cherish this saying as a guiding principle for how I teach and work with others. The saying is actually reflective of Ujima, one of the seven mores of the African American celebration of Kwanzaa, which relates to “collective work and responsibility – the decision to build and maintain ourselves and our communities together and to recognize and solve our problems together” (Lorde, 1984/2007, p. 43). As admonished by Lorde, silence will not protect. This dissertation is a testament to my surviving voice that eked out of hurt and harm. As a result, I maintain a sense of responsibility to use my intellect to care for my community much like my guardians did, but I also recognize that this work cannot be done alone.

**Organization of the Dissertation**

This first chapter of the dissertation focuses on framing the context of research on queer youth, situating the salience of imbricate identities (e.g. youth, race, sexuality and gender), and addressing the impact of multiple, interconnected forms of dominance. Within the chapter I clarified the focus demographic—queer youth of color, the rationale of the study, the significance of the study, and I shared my personal story as a queer student of color. Chapter Two offers a rigorous review of the topic’s relevant literature and explores claims, insights, and research gaps. In Chapter Three I present the overarching theoretical framework: queer of color critique. Chapter Three focuses on the strategies and theories of queer of color critique and its genealogical theoretical frame, women of color feminism. The final section of Chapter Three offers a conceptual introduction to the burgeoning theoretical
lens, queer of color critique (Cruz, 2001; Driskill, Finley, Gilley & Morgensen, 2011; Eng & Hom, 1998; Ferguson, 2004; 2005; Hong & Ferguson, 2011; Johnson & Henderson, 2005; Martínez, 2013; Muñoz, 1999; Rodríguez, 2003). This study intends to contribute theory by drawing from women of color feminism and queer of color critique to produce new perspectives on intersectional identities, multidimensional lived experiences, and youth-collaborated critiques of the purpose of formal education. The theoretic framework, multidimensional analytic framework, and methodological processes utilized within this research study are strategically selected to accommodate the nuanced experiences of queer youth of color and disrupt narrow frames of queer youth. The details of this qualitative research study and methodology are described in Chapter Four. Research findings are summarized in Chapter Five and Chapter Six. Chapter Five offers ten unique stories derived from interview narratives. Each of the ten individual stories are constructed as a queerlore—a story passed on by word of mouth, revealing queer of color practices, traditions, culture and knowledge. Chapter Six offers insight illuminated from analysis of participant narratives. It also includes a critical discussion of data findings and offers implications for queer youth of color, families and educators and policy makers. Finally, Chapter Seven is the concluding chapter and offers implications for future research.
CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

The existing literature exploring the formal school experiences of queer youth has documented the many ways in which queer youth are particularly vulnerable to poor academic performance, absenteeism, and drop-out due to anti-queer discrimination (Diaz & Kosciw, 2009; Grov et al., 2006; Hacker-Peer, 2010; Holmes & Cahill, 2003). Isolation and anti-queer discrimination that queer youth experience in school can significantly contribute to a decline in academic participation (Campos, 2005). Moreover, queer, gender non-conforming, and transgender youth are vulnerable to the marginalizing operations of heteropatriarchal school cultures that perpetuate silence on queer and transgender identities and issues (Harley et al., 2002; Marquez & Brockenbrough, 2013; Mayo, 2007b; Sausa, 2005).

Within recent years, new research foci have sought to explore the lived experiences of queer youth in schools. These experiences are often typified by experiences with homophobia, heterosexist isolation, harassment, and even physical violence (Diaz & Kosciw, 2009; Driver, 2008; Grossman, et al., 2009; Grov et al., 2006; Hackford-Peer, 2010; Holmes & Cahill, 2003; Kivel, 1994; Russell & Truong, 2001; Talburt, 2004). While it is important that those issues are addressed, these kinds of representations describe only some of queer youth experiences. For one, the narrow representations of the lived experiences of queer youth have tended to marginalize the experiences of queer youth of color. Throughout this review of the literature, I offer three claims that can help broaden the scope of how the lived experiences of queer students can be interpreted:
1. Rigid focus on queer youth victimization overshadows the presence of queer youth’s multiple and complex identities (Hackford-Peer, 2010; Talburt, 2004).

2. The narrow focus on queer youth marginalization manifests ageism and paternalism that privileges adult interpretations of sexuality and identity, and positions youth as passive victims in need of saving (Driver, 2008; Talburt, 2004).

3. Narrow representations of homophobic victimization, which are often skewed as happening mostly to white queer youth, limit queer youth experiences to individualized anti-queer encounters, rather than seeing them as symptomatic of structural inequity (Holmes & Cahill, 2003; Kumashiro, 2001).

This literature review focuses on works that have intentionally addressed the identities of queer youth of color and their lived experiences in formal school settings. I do make some references to literature that addresses queer youth in general, in order to describe how the qualitatively different experiences of queer youth of color fit into the broader research context. Furthermore, this review of the current literature addresses these three claims with three thematic constructions of the literature: queer youth victim statistics, the victim discourse, and intersections of race. In the final section of the chapter, I address some of the gaps in the extant literature.

**Statistically Speaking of Queer Youth Victimization**

Representations of queer youth are often reduced to statistics. Statistical representations of queer youth experiences are disheartening to read but are circulated in order to generate great public awareness (Hackford-Peer, 2010). However, the narrow focus on queer youth marginalization manifests ageism and paternalism that privileges adult interpretations of sexuality and identity and positions youth as passive victims in need of
saving. Of the scholarship on queer youth, social marginalization and victimization have tended to dominate the current discourse of queer youth experiences in schools (Hackford-Peer, 2010). Much of this research and advocacy literature representing queer youth schooling experiences fits their narratives into narrow statistical composites (Crawford, Allison, Zamboni & Soto, 2002; Diaz & Kosciw, 2009; Himmelstein & Brückner, 2010). For example, state-level surveys conducted by organizations including The Massachusetts Governor’s Commission on Gay and Lesbian Youth, Safe Schools Coalition of Washington, and the Rhode Island Task Force on Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Youth provide clear accounts of the frequency of victimization experienced by queer youth (Campos, 2005). The Massachusetts study reveals that gay and lesbian students were five times more likely than their heterosexual peers to miss attending school due to fear for their safety. About 40% of Rhode Island gay and lesbian youth reported experiences of violent physical assaults perpetrated by their peers. And surveys conducted in Seattle and Vermont concluded that gay and lesbian youth were more likely to report having been threatened with or injured by a weapon while at school (Campos, 2005). Empirical works such as these offer conclusions of what some queer youth experience, but often overlook how queer youth might address these victimizing experiences. These climate surveys offer a limited representation of queer youth. Conceptualizing queer youth only as illustrative of tragic statistics reinforces the imbalanced power relationship between adults and queer youth in which queer youth are confined to representations that see them only as victims in need of saving.

In an attempt to generate awareness about epidemic homophobia present in many U.S. schools, the 2009 Gay Lesbian Straight Education Network (GLSEN) climate report specifically focused on queer students of color and their experiences of victimization in
school (Diaz & Kosciw, 2009). According to this study, “students of color who were severely harassed in school because of both their sexual orientation and race/ethnicity were more likely to miss school in the past month (57%) than those who were severely harassed based on sexual orientation only (43%), race/ethnicity only (39%), or those who did not experience high severities of either type of harassment (16%). In addition, students of color who experienced high severities of harassment based on both their sexual orientation and race/ethnicity had significantly lower grade point averages (2.3) than students who reported experiencing a high severity of harassment because of only one of these characteristics (2.6), or did not experience high severities of either type of harassment (2.8)” (Diaz & Kosciw, 2009, p. xii).

Statistical composites of queer youth victimization have deeply influenced the current discourse on queer youth schooling experiences. GLSEN’s study explains that the findings offer a greater understanding of the LGBT issues impacting students and schools by examining the negative issues that stand in the way of their learning (p ix). The disparaging statistics of the GLSEN study were used in an effort to raise awareness and generate socio-political critique of systematic homophobia in schools. The presentation of the statistics attempts to inform how queer students of color experience school by suggesting that queer youths’ schooling is undermined by experiences of victimization. On one hand, the study offers a composite of the obstacles that students of color experience in school. On the other hand, while these composites draw attention to inequities in schools, the study inadvertently perpetuates a common victimizing discourse of queer youth that has become too common. Again, the survey is part of a national climate survey seeking to investigate the schooling experiences of queer students of color. The investigators identify the study as a quantitative
project, though the methods section of the study is limited and say little about the particular quantitative procedures used to conduct the study. The actual study does not offer an explicit research question, nor does it include any of the survey questions. The benefits of climate surveys like GLSEN’s are complicated. Surveys, as such, can be used to generate public dialogue about the discrimination experienced by marginalized groups. And this particular GLSEN survey may inspire more research to be done to explore how queer youth of color may want their schools to treat them, while also drawing attention to the schools’ failure to mediate anti-queer discrimination and violence. And yet, the ever-popular fixation on queer youth vulnerabilities reinforces the presences of certain discourses about queer youth that minimize their representation to victims or those at-risk of victimization. Viewing queer youth in this way, draws from ageist and paternalistic assumptions because there is no discussion about their agency. That is, these kinds of approaches to addressing anti-queer youth victimization often position youth as passive victims in need of saving (Driver, 2008; Talburt, 2004).

These sobering depictions of queer youth experiences are often used by educators and activists to generate awareness about queer youth issues, in the hopes that action will be taken to address these forms of oppression. For example, in Massachusetts, action motivated by a climate survey was seen in the formation of a youth commission. The youth commission was charged with providing important feedback on how the state could better support marginalized queer youth to be healthy and successful in schools (Campos, 2005). In this example, the queer youth as victim discourse was successful in formulating an empathic response that honored queer youth autonomy and invited youth to act against injustices imposed on them while at school.
Representations of queer youth experiences are filtered through a number of factors. While the discourse of youth as innocent victims has been successful in raising awareness, it is important to promote alternatives to the routine characterization of queer youth as passive victims. D’Augelli and Dark (1995) do a good job of illuminating the complexities of negative queer youth experiences with a deeper explanation. In an article on lesbian and gay youth as a vulnerable population, D’Augelli and Dark offer statistics on the frequency of victimization experienced by gay and lesbian adults. They explain that adolescents are at greater risk of victimization because of their youth, meaning that disproportionate to adults, youth are most often victims of violence. They suggest that this reality is further exacerbated by the social stigma of identifying as queer. In this instance, D’Augelli and Dark use the statistics to differentiate what happens to queer youth while also highlighting nuanced impact of their identities. Similarly, Hetrick and Martin’s (1987) seminal research text on gay and lesbian adolescent development also presents a balanced view of the context of queer youth marginalization and potential supports and acts of agency. Hetrick and Martin’s analysis draws upon empirical data collected from 329 adolescents (ages 12-21). The study does well to contextualize the social implications of queer youth victimization. They claim that one-third of those youth have attempted suicide and explain that the high percentage of these teen attempted suicides reflects the impact of isolation that queer youth often experience in society. It is not enough to simply state the frequency of victimization, but rather, D’Augelli and Dark (1995) and Hetrick and Martin (1987) provide awareness by emphasizing the structures of power that construct those experiences of victimization.

Conducted in 1995, this particular dataset draws from responses from over 20,000 seventh through twelfth grade students. The investigators provide a clear line of inquiry for data analysis. They sought to explore “the connections between school experiences, attitudes, and goals for queer racial/ethnic minority students’ academic success and self-esteem” (pp. 117-118). Additionally, they attempted to explore the correlation between experiences, attitudes, expectations of queer youth of color, school performance and self-esteem. Finally, they sought to examine the relevance of identifying these youth as doubly marginalized or stigmatized. Russell and Truong’s research study design is comprehensive. The researchers had to interpolate the factors they believed would indicate school experiences, attitudes and expectations, because the study draws from data that they did not originally collect. Those factors and the justifications for their selection were described in a terse outline of their study design. This study is particularly strong because it reframes (or queers) a national survey that was not initially queer-centric. Moreover, their chosen method of population sampling allowed them to compare subsets of the data to those heterogeneously-attracted youth counterparts. Their chosen quantitative research methods also allowed for a more nuanced view of the relationship between schooling experiences and queer youth academic success.

I do not mean to insinuate that there is no use for statistical composites of the victimization of queer youth, but I do contend that this kind of information must be viewed with critical acknowledge of diverse queer youth representation. Qualitative research can complement such statistical portraits of queer youth victimization by further exploring how queer youth describe the felt realities of these lived experiences. In the next section I will review the extant literature that explicitly investigates the lived experiences of queer youth of color.
Complicating the Victim Discourse

Identity continues to matter in shaping how lives are organized and what opportunities and resources are accessible (Anderson & Collins, 2007). Queer youth are victimized, in part, because they are often less protected as marginal or minority members of society. Research has documented the frequency of queer youth victimization, but has attributed less attention to understanding the disproportionality of victimization and the salience of intersectional identities. Nevertheless, rigid focus on queer youth victimization overshadows the reality that queer youth possess multiple identities and experiences (Hackford-Peer, 2010; Talburt, 2004).

A vast majority of the existing literature on queer youth characterizes their identities as deficit and frames their experiences as explicitly at-risk. There is substantial evidence that corroborates these claims. For example, in comparison to heterosexual youth, queer youth are more vulnerable to a variety of health risks, including suicidal ideation, drug and alcohol abuse, and HIV infection (Grov et al. 2006; Kivel, 1994; Russell, 2002; Talburt, 2004). Research highlighting these dangers suggests that intense victimization and social alienation from school and other social institutions significantly contribute to the use of risky coping mechanisms (Grov et al. 2006; Reck, 2009; Talburt, 2004). Several scholars have pointed out that the impact of queer youth marginalization is particularly severe because many queer youth experience simultaneous forms of oppressions from multiple areas of their lives—family, peers and within school (Campos, 2003; Grov et al. 2006; Harley et al. 2002; Harper, Wardell & McGuire, 2011; Kivel, 1994; Majied, 2010; Parks, 2001; Reck, 2009; Rofes, 1995; Russell, 2002; Talburt, 2004; Unks, 1995; Wall & Washington, 1991; Washington,
Moreover, Russell (2002) suggests that the capacity for queer youth to fully engage society is stifled by barriers within family, faith and educational institutions (p.258).

Queer youth are often represented as victims of structural bias in schools and society where they endure policing and surveillance. A recent national longitudinal study examining school sanctions asserts that non-heterosexual students suffer disproportionate punishments by schools and the criminal justice system (Himmelstein & Brückner, 2010). Himmelstein and Brückner’s study found that youth who experience same-sex attraction experienced higher incidences of school expulsion, as well as adult conviction within the criminal justice system. An intersectional view of this finding would also consider how the intersection of gender and race mediate the frequency of these sanctions. The study concluded that non-heterosexual identified youth, especially girls, were at particular risk of experiencing biased punishment in schools and within the criminal justice system. Although the authors note that the limited sampling size precluded the analysis of racial subgroups (p. 55), it would be helpful to know which non-heterosexual girls experience this disproportionate discrimination. The answer to this inquiry matters, in part, because it would offer insight on how to address this bias.

The extant literature demonstrates that research has well documented the frequency and kinds of victimization queer youth experience. While this work identifies the complex set of challenges that confront queer youth, there is still much to be learned about queer youth. Driver (2008) further elaborates on the limited frames of queer youth identities:

Categorizing queer youth as passive victims or normalized subjects obscures a more fractured and complex dynamic of power and inequity through which youth negotiate their gender and sexuality across racial, national, class, ethnic, age, and ability boundaries of desire and identification (p. 5).
In order words, situating queer youth as continually in crisis reifies a paternalistic relationship between researcher/educator/adult stakeholder and queer youth. This kind of relationship of power undermines queer youth autonomy.

It behooves researchers and stakeholders to question the lens with which they view queer youth issues. Marquez and Brockenbrough (2013) illuminated the need for researchers and stakeholders to utilize an intersectional lens when thinking about the complexity of queer youth rights. These scholars surveyed legal discourse on the rights of queer youth in California and constructed a queer of color critique to address the justice system’s inaction to redress racial bias contributing to queer youth victimization. In reviewing ten lawsuits involving anti-queer bias and harassment, Marquez and Brockenbrough point out that there was no mention of the racial identities of the parties involved, which seemingly undermines the possibility that racism could also mediate an experience of victimization. This blind spot illustrates a serious need for critique of the lack of attention to the intersection of sexual orientation and racial identity, and poses important questions about how race might also mediate anti-queer victimization.

There exists an interesting tension in how the lives of queer youth are portrayed in education research. On one hand, we know a lot about how some queer youth are victimized in schools and in society. That work has been important in illuminating the pervasiveness of anti-queer marginalization. And yet, there are many other issues that queer youth of color experience that need further attention.

**Intersections of Race**

Narrow representations of homophobic victimization, which are often skewed as happening mostly to white queer youth, limit queer youth experiences to individualized anti-
queer encounters, rather than seeing them as a symptom of a structural inequity where queer youth are marginalized en masse and queer youth of color are dismissed. This is an issue for queer communities of color and white queer communities, because a lack of investment in diverse representations of queer youth lived experiences undermines a deeper understanding of queer life and may limit useful strategies for negotiating anti-queer discrimination (Holmes & Cahill, 2003; Kumashiro, 2001).

Research and literature focused on queer youth of color is limited (Holmes & Cahill, 2003; Kumashiro, 2001, Ryan, 2002). Ryan’s (2002) assessment of professional literature and research on LGBT youth found that between the 70s and early 2000s, “of the 166 academic articles or chapters published on GLBT youth, only 9 articles and two book chapters” focused on LGB youth of color; and no articles focused explicitly on transgender youth of color. While some literature on queer youth included minimal and isolated mentions of queer youth of color, many articles tended to generalize all queer youth experiences. This is an issue, because ignoring the intersection of race and queerness further perpetuates a discourse of white neutrality. However, the scope has broadened a bit since Ryan’s initial assessment. The following parts of this section will explore the scant literature that explicitly puts queer youth of color at the center of research investigations. By exploring this literature, I intend to disrupt the assumption of white queer neutrality present in education research about queer youth, while also illuminating the point that anti-queer marginalization is reflective of larger structural issues of power and inequity.

In spite of the imbalanced queer research focus, Kumashiro (2001) advocates for a “queering of racism” (p.13). Kumashiro suggests that racism should also be conceptualized as a structural system that colonizes, sexually objectifies and exploits. He goes on to suggest
examining the gendered subtexts embedded within experiences of racism. Thus far into the dissertation, I have described the impact and frequency of queer youth victimization, and I have described the ways in which queer youth of color and their unique experiences are marginalized, silenced, and dismissed. Within this section of the literature review I intend to draw upon a queer of color critique (In the next chapter I will elaborate on queer of color critique as this study’s theoretical framework.). Akin to Kumashiro’s encouragement of an intersectional and multidimensional research approach, a queer of color critique (Ferguson, 2004; 2005; Hong & Ferguson, 2011) directs its analytic focus to the intersections of identity and lived experience, and challenges the perception of a queer status quo (Driskill, 2010). Drawing upon this critical lens, I will guide my exploration of the literature with this question: How are queer youth students represented at the intersections of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality?

Queer youth of color negotiate multiple intersecting identities, which has led researchers to speculate that their distress comes from an inability to integrate their queer and racial or ethnic identities. Mayo (2007) posits, “[…] being out as a queer of color in particular home community settings feels like a disruption of community solidarity or an affront to the community’s tacit approval of sexual difference” (p. 68). Part of this assumption relates to an overemphasis on publically confessing one’s queerness. However, coming out is a fluid process that occurs on various occasions throughout a lifetime. Contrary to Mayo’s claim, I contend that the source of queer youth of color’s distress relates more to a lack of available resources or support for queer youth who claim multiple salient identities. These youth are underserved in a world that usually sees individuals as one-dimensional. It is not necessarily the case that queer youth of color are distressed, but that they are doing
critical and complex negotiations of their identities, while also navigating space and place in a heteronormative society. Misawa (2010) and Wall and Washington (1991) conclude that many mainstream universities have inadvertently created a norm of heterosexuality, and because of this climate, many offices and student resources are often unprepared to accommodate complex queer identities.

Queer youth of color are underserved in schools due to a pervasive inattention to multiple intersecting identities. The erasure of queer people of color in school is reflective of a mainstream gay culture that routinely whitewashes gay social identity (Berube, 2001; Han, 2010). McCready (2001; 2010) found that the racial divide at a local Californian high school mediated queer Black students away from the school’s gay-straight alliance. The Black queer males profiled in the investigation suggested that they did not feel safe or necessarily supported by the alliance. As David put it, “[…] it wasn’t doing anything for me. There’s nothing there for me” (McCready, 2001, p. 46). David’s assessment of the club as “tea time for [white] lesbians and their friends” underscores that some queer youth of color feel marginalized in gay places. This gay-straight alliance exhibited a particular inattention to the intersection of race and sexuality that is too common.

Furthermore, Harley et al. (2002) note that queer students of color often do not receive the same psychological support from the gay community as white queer students do (p. 529-530). The findings of Monteiro and Fuqua’s (1995) study of young Black gay men illustrate how those qualitative differences take shape in the lives of queer youth of color. They found that their participants did not feel compelled to make a public declaration of their sexual identity. They explain that sexual orientation and race do not develop in isolation, but that many Black gay men feel conflicted because of society’s inclination to dismiss the
possibility of an integrated Black queer identity. Parks (2001) suggests that urban school administrators need to be aware that queer youth often choose not to self-label as gay (p. 46). If queer youth of color are to receive the support that they need to thrive, then it is important to understand how they identify. More research is necessary to take up where these projects end.

Reck (2009) offers a complex portrayal of queer youth of color lived experience. Reck’s study explores the lived experiences of homeless queer youth of color in the historic Castro district of San Francisco. The article first presents compelling statistics of the challenges that queer homeless youth face, but the analytic power of Reck’s exploration is found in how she conceptualizes homelessness as a systemic issue. Reck explains that queer youth are disproportionately impacted by homelessness because their position as youth and queer make them more vulnerable to a number of social challenges, including psychological challenges and risky behavior. The William Institute estimates that about 40% of homeless youth are LGBTQ (http://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu). Moreover, Reck suggest that race further exacerbates these challenges by citing Thompson, Kost and Pollio’s (2003) study which found that African American and Latino youth are more likely than any other ethnic group to run away from home or be kicked out (cited in Reck, 2009, p.224). Reck’s study underscores the necessity for multidimensional approaches to understand queer youth lived experiences. Reck concludes:

[Because] these youth’s structural locations allow them to ‘flexibly look at issues from multiple perspectives and have complex and sophisticated views on any number of personal or social issues’, their stories offer important insights into the challenges facing at-risk homeless and marginally housed youth of color in our contemporary world (p. 227).
Russell and Truong’s (2001) examination of a national dataset of school experiences sheds light on some of the qualitative influences of race and ethnicity on the lived experiences of queer youth. They clarified, “[…] It is hard to conclude from past studies that queer youth of color are at greater risk for victimization at school; rather, queer youth of color may experience different forms of victimization or discrimination compared with their white queer peers (p. 117)”. The differences are exemplified in an indexed psychological study surveying homophobic victimization in schools. In the report, lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) white students reported more physical harassment from peers, while LGB students of color reported more physical victimization by teachers (Pilkington and D’Augelli, 1995). Additionally, Russell and Truong found that LGB white students were less comfortable than LGB students color to disclose their sexual orientation to people at school. LGB students of color were more likely to disclose their sexual orientation to people at school, but were much less comfortable disclosing to their families. Lastly, Russell and Truong found that sexual orientation minority status negatively impacted all LGB students’ GPAs. The findings of Pilkington and D’Augelli’s and Russell and Truong’s studies further emphasize the point that queer students need differentiated support. Moreover, LGB students of color and white students may have different and unique needs that require culturally relevant strategies.

The work of Harper, Wardell & McGuire (2011) reflects a recent shift in queer youth research that draws analytic focus to the implications of multiple intersecting identities. The scholars profiled a young biracial gay undergraduate student named Tyson and analyzed the ways he negotiated multiple identities. Tyson was described as a strong student who excelled in school. However, Tyson’s academic achievement often placed him in challenging situations and settings where he was marginalized. Tyson experienced being mocked by
other Black students for being “too white” because he took advanced classes and participated in activities where there was little Black representation. Tyson also reported feeling alienated by other white students who reacted to his intellect with surprise and suspicion. Moreover, Tyson also described feeling caught between two socioeconomic worlds as a result of his parents’ divorce. Amidst feeling out of place and othered, Tyson did not believe in having to rank his identities because he often took pride in being able to relate to many different kinds of people. While Tyson easily acknowledged the intersections of his identities, he also admitted to negotiating his identities with the strategy that he called, “playing to situational expectations” (p. 91), meaning that he would strategically perform the one-dimensional performance expectations others had for him. Doing so helped him move between his various groups with more fluidity. Similarly, Vaught (2004) offers another critical examination of a high achieving southern Black gay student named Jamarcus. In the case of Jamarcus, Vaught explains that racism and heterosexism circumscribed his very existence in school. Similar to Tyson, Jamarcus was able to create a buffer by excelling in his academic classes and by being a student leader. Misawa (2004) and Strayhorn, Blakewood and DeVita (2008) found this to be true among the gay college students of color they interviewed about their schooling experiences. Those gay college students of color remarked that academics afforded them a space and platform to be who they wanted and to feel included, in spite of the marginalization they may have felt while on their college campuses. However, Vaught explains that for Jamarcus, his teachers found it difficult to see the possibility that a Black student could also be gay. Being rendered invisible in this regard perpetuated a precarious vulnerability for Jamarcus as a student navigating school with multiple salient identities. Similar to Jamarcus, Strayhorn, Blakewood, and DeVita (2008) identified the African
American gay male undergraduates in their study as an “invisible” subpopulation (p. 92) because of the dramatic underrepresentation of these students in higher educational settings. These examples illustrate a more complicated take on queer youth lived experiences that illuminates the challenge of visibility—to be seen, unimagined, or dismissed. Many queer youth of color negotiate their visibility in quite savvy ways. More research is needed to uncover how they are aware of their in/visibility and what factors influence challenging it.

Similarly, McCready’s (2001; 2004) work on gender non-conforming and Black queer male youth theorizes about the influence the youth’s racial and ethnic identities had on peer relationships and navigating school space. David, a mixed (black and white) gender-non-conforming youth believed that part of his alienation from his Black male peers was due in part to his academic distance from the majority of the other Black students. David participated in a separate, gifted academic track—which he conceptualized as a white racialized space. He also described being policed by his peers for “acting white.” Juxtaposed to David (who was out and popular) is Jamal, who understood how to navigate the racial matrix of his school. McCready explains, “Jamal chose to deemphasize his sexuality and involved himself in extracurricular clubs and activities (such as student government) [...] legitimized] by Black students” (2001, p. 42). Though one could say that these youth choose one identity over another, the identity work they did and their ability to discern the racialization of space and place in school underscores an attention to safety in strategizing their presence. Jamal invested in celebrated Black spaces to gain social support from his peers. David differs from Jamal because he was both socially and academically distanced from his Black peers, giving him fewer opportunities to relate and interact with them outside
of his experiences of being bullied. McCready’s work suggests that these queer youth possessed complex understandings of race and racism as ever-present in their lives.

Misa (2001) draws attention to the intersection of race and sexuality in a study exploring identity conceptions among queer Latino college students. In explaining how some Latino students reconcile the intersections of their identities, Misa explains that Latino queer students negotiate identities as a process that takes the individual from one state of identity to a reconstructed identity that is capable of accommodating multiple identities (p. 69). For instance, Ramón, a college junior, described himself as a “Chicano joto” (joto roughly translates to faggot in English). In reimagining an identity where his racial identity intersected his queer identity, Ramón engaged a process of disidentification, by creating this hybrid term to refer to the intersection of his multiple identities. According to Muñoz (1999), disidentification is a process by which new imagined identities are “calibrated to discern a multiplicity of interlocking identity components and the ways in which they affect the social” (p. 8). One could look at the adoption of joto as self-deprecating. However, in re-appropriating the term, Ramón is also critiquing his Chicano culture’s homophobic discourse around queer sexualities. Joto is one way Ramón can reconcile his racial and sexual identities through engaged dialogue with culture and oppression. Though the Latino students in Misa’s study generated new takes on identities and labels available to them, Gabriella (Rodriguez, 2000) drew upon her experience of marginalization as a platform for critique. Upon attending a LGB community center speaker panel, she reflected:

I left feeling dejected. I’d been out to myself since I was 8, and didn’t feel my bisexuality was a stage. The anti-bisexual sentiment and the hostile attitudes I would encounter later formed my decision to identify as a ‘queer woman of color’ (p. 205).
Later on at the end of her undergraduate career, Gabriella was invited to speak about her experience in college. She also spoke about homophobia in communities of color, and about the racism and bi-phobia she witnessed within the white lesbian and gay community. She remarked, “I wanted [the freshman] to understand that they had a choice. They could try to fit into the boxes their communities had built for them, or they could create their own space” (p. 210).

Drawing attention to the intersection of gender, race, ethnicity and sexuality offers a new landscape for conceptualizing the lived experiences of queer youth. For example, many queer youth make use of racial-affinity communities as essential support mechanisms for navigating school and their academic careers (Loiacano, 1989). For a group of queer Asian Americans in Varney’s (2001) research study, organizing around a racial identity was essential for the group to imagine and affirm an Asian American queer identity. By affirming their “Asianness,” together they created a space to critique stereotypical assumptions about their place in U.S. society, while also examining the discourse of Asian sexuality. Thus, by affirming a supportive community, they were able to develop a culturally relevant support system that was responsive to their racial and cultural heritages (Varney, 2001). Though situated within a British context, the Asian and Afro-Caribbean young men in Mac An Ghail’s (1994) case study articulate their conception of school space and relationships in similar sexualized and racialized terms. Their understanding of school relationships provides additional insight on how some queer youth of color understand relationships of power present in their schools. Mac An Ghail elaborates:

For the young men in this study these processes of naturalization and objectification were most immediately experienced through the highly contradictory dominant systems of teacher racial and gender/sexual discourses which are ‘embedded in social relationships of structured domination and subordination (p. 158).
Queer youth are not passive; rather they are critical and conscious observers of society. What is more, queer youth of color are aptly aware of the marginalizing hierarchical culture in schools and the complex asymmetric relationships of power that mediate their experiences.

Although the lived experiences of queer youth of color often run counter to mainstream narratives about queer youth, queer youth of color have a major and historical stake in social justice. For example, while most accounts identify Project 10 as the first school based program to support queer youth (Campos, 2005; Hackford-Peer, 2010; Unks, 1995), research reveals that a group of Bronx queer youth of color formed a gay liberationist group in their high school as early as 1972 (Cohen, 2005; Johnson, 2007). These youth used the student group as a platform to critique the systematic marginalization they experienced in high school, which they saw as a “microcosm of society in general” (Johnson, 2007, p.382). There is a rich legacy of activism amongst queer youth of color. Prior to the activist work Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera did with Street Trans Action Revolutionaries (STAR) in the 1970s, or during the Stonewall riots in 1969, queer young people of color have made documented contributions to many of the earlier gay liberation movements—including the 1959 riot at Cooper’s Donuts in Los Angeles and the Compton’s Café riot in San Francisco in 1966 (Cohen, 2005; Stryker, 2008).

The efforts of the Bronx high school queer students offer one example of queer youth of color agency. The most recent research on queer youth of color offers a few other examples of autonomy. Quinn (2007) and Johnson (2008) examined the agentive practices Black lesbian high school students employed to advocate for themselves. The students in Quinn’s study did so by petitioning to start a gay-straight-alliance at their school. The
students challenged the school’s heteronormative policies and homophobic silencing of their identities as queer Black women by asserting their presence as “loud, Black and masculine”. Their choice of sartorial aesthetics operationalized a stud subjectivity (fitted caps, sneakers, baggy men’s jeans, men’s polos and jerseys) (p. 42) that could coalesce those assertive identities, and also debunk the impossibility of a queer Black woman. They also utilized the school yearbook to further assert their queer presence by organizing a “stud & femme” photo. The article examines the ways in which the school mediated their queer visibility and identity performance (by policing their language, attire, and assemblage). Quinn’s work is focused on the power relationship between the students and the larger school institution. The girls’ queerness conflicted with the school’s conception of what good Black girls should be and how good Black girls should look and act. Quinn explains, “A core group of teachers, all African American, continued to express disapproval of the GSA and, more generally, of the GSA members “being gay.” One of the members remembered her teacher saying: “I don’t think you’re really gay; you don’t look ‘that way’ to me” (p. 39). Quinn’s study locates the intersection of gender, race and sexuality as a source of contention between the girls and their school.

Johnson’s (2008) qualitative study offers a similar account in which she examined the strategies of an African American lesbian youth gang, Dykes Taking Over (DTO), attempting to negotiate homophobia and silence. In establishing their queer presence, the gang became infamous. The formation of DTO reflects the power of collective community as a protective strategy. DTO also used same sex harassment as a strategy to push back against the anti-queer bullying they were subjected to while in school. Although other students outside of DTO were also perpetrators of sexual harassment, DTO was singled out. Johnson introduces
a challenging idea to think of sexualized bullying of other students as an agentive strategy, and as a strategy to reassert their power and presence in school. These youth certainly were not passive victims, but were they activists? Before they asserted themselves, their claims of victimization and marginalization were not heard. The tactics of the gang may seem inappropriate, but the example of DTO’s struggle for power and agency certainly challenges and complicates the mainstream queer victim discourse.

In addition to utilizing community as a tool to mediate anti-queer marginalization, queer youth also use language as a tool to navigate school and public spaces. Blackburn (2005) provides a clear example of how Black queer youth in a Philadelphia LGBTQ youth center negotiate language to help them navigate heteronormative public space and heterosexual people. Blackburn describes how these youth developed insider/outsider language as a means to negotiate the tensions between their racial and queer identities. Blackburn refers to their cultivated languages as Gaybonics. Thunder, one of the youth participants explains, “[…] the gay vocabulary is like our way of defense in the straight community” (p. 101). Blackburn further elaborates, “[…] Gaybonics is a linguistic choice that is deeply embedded in feelings and situations of oppression. It has power that is significantly distinct from standard English or what some consider to be the “discourse of power” (Fordham, 1999). In fact, Fordham asserts that Gaybonic’s derivative, Ebonics, is a weapon for "guerilla warfare against racism and for the liberation of a people and reinforce[ment of] their Black identity” (p. 288) (p. 95). Similarly, Sausa (2005) highlighted the strategic uses of language and labels amongst transgender youth of color. In a qualitative study examining the schooling experiences of 24 transgender youth, Sausa found that transgender youth self-identify in many different ways and construct language about their
identities and experiences. Sausa also found that transgender youth identity labels were also influenced by a number of contexts including age, culture, socioeconomic status, and location. As a result, she concluded that transgender youths’ language use and labels were continually evolving. As illustrated in Blackburn’s and Sausa’s accounts, queer youth used gaybonics, among other constructions of language and labels, as strategic tools to navigate the homophobia, racism and ageism they experience in society. Moreover, these youth use language to protect and preserve their intersectional identities.

Grossman et al. (2009) and Sausa (2005) offer two of the few qualitative investigations of the schooling experiences of transgender students of color. For youth who are often defined as the most vulnerable adolescent population, they are severely underserved and under-researched (Sausa, 2005). The Grossman et al study examined school violence and queer youth of color’s perception of oppression. A large part of the study was dedicated to tragic stories of queer youth violence. And there was no clearly identified theoretical lens for analyzing these experiences, so the article simply tells the youths’ stories. This particular study includes the participants’ perceptions of agency and their suggestions for creating safe space for queer youth. Jocelyn, a transgender youth in the study described her analysis of potential threats: “The bashers are students, the bashers are outside. It could be the boys on the corner. It could be anybody, the police, anybody. I’m not going to be messed with. I’ll beat you right back” (p 38). Jocelyn’s quote illustrates the hostile climate that some queer youth of color experience, where they feel compelled to physically fight back. In McCready’s detailing of David’s social/academic experience, David actually approached the director of security to ask him to intervene in the physical harassment he was experiencing. Unfortunately, the director did not intervene and insisted that David was to blame by drawing
attention to himself by being publically out (p.139). Three Chicano queer participants in Misa’s article all described experiences of speaking out against racism and homophobia in their classroom, but being confronted with tension and alienation from professors and peers (p. 72). The literature suggests that queer youth often feel unsupported when they experience incidents of anti-queer victimization, and school officials fail or refuse to intervene (Cruz, 2012; Majied, 2010; Marquez & Brockenbrough, 2013; Mayo, 2007b; Misawa, 2004; 2009). Even so, some queer youth still fight and talk back.

Queer youth strategize their survival in school in a variety of ways, which include remaining silent, fighting back or talking back (Cruz, 2012). Cruz examined the power of testimonio conversations with her class consisting of at-risk and queer students. Testimonios, as Cruz explains, offered these youth a space to talk back to larger discourses of poverty and criminalization that confronted them. Cruz found that the process of bearing witness to their experiences of marginalization and victimization could be an agentive strategy and mediating tool for those youth. In the process of testifying their experiences, the class also honed their critical and analytic skills. Sharing their testimonios also offered them an opportunity to build coalitions and community. But not all queer youth have access to supportive communities. Some queer youth may decide to negotiate and navigate discrimination in schools by navigating out of the space or leaving school altogether. In an article outlining the operations of racial marginalization in a gay-straight-alliance, McCready (2004) explains that queer youth of color may navigate away from GSAs because they conceptualize GSAs as white spaces and unsupportive of other racial identities (p. 141). Those Black queer youth featured in the article did not see the GSA space as supportive of their Black and queer identities and presumed that their attendance would actually alienate them from their Black peers. David
and Antoine navigated out of spaces they felt were marginalizing. David left his school, and Antoine skipped his special education courses because he did not see them as celebrated Black spaces. “Navigating out” is another strategy that queer youth of color utilize to navigate and negotiate their survival in schools. However, according to the participants in Strayhorn, Blakewood and DeVita’s (2008) study, retention can be achieved through supportive relationships with peers and family (p.99). In addition to this, these students explained that they remained on campus in part because of their own self-determination and independence. They attributed their self-sufficiency as a primary contributing factor to their engagement on campus.

The barriers that queer youth of color experience are complex combination of multiple discriminations. The violent discrimination and marginalization they experience comes in multiple forms, from multiple areas, including peers, teachers, school officials, and school curricula. The strategies highlighted throughout this section offer some perspective of how queer youth of color navigate and negotiate the relationships of power in school. To review, some of the youth examined in these studies utilized language, peer networks, political action, silence, and absence to negotiate and navigate their marginalization in school. In addition to affirming the intersections of their racial identities, sexual orientation and gender identities, queer youth of color are forging strategic ways to survive anti-queer school cultures. It is up to educators, policy makers, researchers, and other stakeholders to further investigate those survival strategies and incorporate them into the support services available for queer youth communities.

**Addressing the Color Gap**

In advocating for the support of queer youth of color, Sears asserts:
As educators, we have an ethical and social responsibility to meet their needs as human beings in order for them to secure meaningful roles within our community. Persons of color who are gay or lesbian face enormous challenges (as do those adults who dare educate them). As educators, we can make an impact if we have the knowledge and courage to do so (1995, p. 150).

Though all queer youth are negatively impacted by homophobia, queer youth of color face a unique set of challenges. The literature examined within this section highlighted some of these challenges, including racial policing, queer of color marginalization, and the threat of violence. Anti-queer discrimination undermines queer youth of color’s academic attainment in ways that they cannot afford. Sears’ point emphasizes a present need for educators and researchers to generate culturally relevant practices and queer support systems that can accommodate a variety of intersections of identity.

One way to expand what we know about queer youth and their lives is to address this in our research methods. In an article exploring the use of quantitative research methods with ethnic minority communities, Padilla and Lindholm (1995) caution researchers to confront their positionality, including addressing assumptions that may potentially influence how the research is conducted and analyzed. Padilla and Lindholm explain that because much of quantitative research has been historically based on Eurocentric epistemologies and ontologies, quantitative researchers must challenge the assumption that assessment instruments are applicable across all groups. They advise quantitative researchers to question the reliability of instruments whenever conducting a study with ethnic subjects (p 141).

Moreover, it is important to the rigor of the research that sources of potential variance such as social class, language proficiency, or cultural orientation also be acknowledged. Bieschke, Eberz and Wilson (2000) corroborate Padilla and Lindholm’s critique within a thorough review of empirical investigations of gay, lesbian, and bisexual college students. They
encourage quantitative researchers to make space within their methods to fully describe the demographics of the sampled population (p. 42). By doing so, researchers can further contextualize the findings of their investigations and further ground claims.

With or without adults, queer youth of color are pushing boundaries and making their presence known. They are immersed in complicated negotiations and navigation of power, space and identity, with their academics often prioritized second to safety. Nevertheless, queer youth of color are contributing their own liberating initiatives and acts of resistance through multiple formats and aesthetics, such as grassroots organizing, narratives, music, performances, and revisions of family networks (Driver, 2008; Kumashiro, 2001). The schooling experiences of queer youth of color are both diverse and unique, which means that there is still much more to understand about the salience of multiple intersecting identities.

Again, this research study is concerned with how queer youth of color negotiate their identities while navigating formal school settings. Addressing the presence of race and ethnicity offers a better understanding of the needs of queer youth of color, and their survival. A well calibrated theoretical framework is essential for this purpose. The following chapter presents queer of color critique as the theoretical framework for this dissertation. In outlining queer of color critique, I also seek to draw upon theory to re-imagine queer youth of color at the center of inquiry.
CHAPTER THREE

Theoretical framework

Critical conversation and investigation amongst academics and the general public about the schooling experiences of queer youth of color have only permeated the mainstream within the last several decades (Elze, 2003). In Chapter One I identified the problem of these identities and experiences as being under researched. We know too little about how intersecting forms of oppression and domination undermine the academic careers of queer youth of color. In Chapter One I also explored and critiqued the prominent conceptual lens of the queer victim filtering our understanding of queer youth lived experiences. While this lens is seemingly noble in its attempt to draw emotional outrage for individual acts of anti-queer oppression, it also reifies an ageist and paternalistic hierarchy that undermines queer youth autonomy, and overshadows the unique needs and diversity of queer youth.

Recent literature attests to the many ways queer youth’s academic success in school is undermined by anti-queer discrimination and gender dominance. While queer youth of any color are susceptible to these educational inequalities, some scholars posit that systemic racism further exacerbates social marginalization of queer youth of color (Diaz & Kosciw, 2009; Holmes & Cahill, 2003). I believe the heteropatriarchal climate of formal schooling further marginalizes queer youth. Within this chapter, I will clarify the impact a heteropatriarchal school culture can have on queer youth absenteeism, truancy, drop-out, bullying, and missed opportunities for college access (Diaz & Kosciw, 2009; Elze, 2003; Grossman et al., 2009; Holmes & Cahill, 2003). I will also explore intersectionality—a theory of identity.
Given the current queer youth victimization frame, many scholars examining queer youths’ schooling experiences give analytic preference to established postmodern analytic lenses like queer theory. Scholars who utilize this lens place sexuality at the center of investigation. Queer theories tend to focus on the fluidity of identity and confrontations with systemic homophobia. Yet, much of queer theory only limitedly accommodates the salience of race and ethnicity (Ferguson, 2005; Hamas-García & Martínez, 2011, Jagose, 1996; Perez, 2005, Sullivan, 2003), which partly explains the present literature gap. Within this chapter, I offer two theoretical lenses because I believe they help clarify the contexts of the lived experiences of queer youth of color within formal schooling. These two theories emerged from the scholastic work of women of color feminism and queer of color critique. I have decidedly centered my theoretical framework on the work produced under the burgeoning genre *queer of color critique*, and not queer theory, which I will elaborate on in the following section. Within the remaining sections of this chapter I will explore how sexuality is constitutive of race and gender, which provides grounds for framing this project as a queer of color critique. I will then offer pithy articulations of the affordances of women of color feminism as an identified genealogy of queer of color critique. But before exploring the theoretical contributions of women of color feminism and queer of color critique, I will first articulate my theoretical preference for a queer of color critique and how it shapes the frame of this project.

**Queer Theory or a Queer of Color Critique**

It was difficult to negotiate how to frame this project in a way that would contribute to the intellectual discourse about the lived experiences of queer youth of color, but not alienate queer communities and scholars outside of that social location. In negotiating that
tension, I considered who might be the audience reading this work. I debated whether this project should be taken up by queer theory circles simply because its inclusion of the identity label *queer* locates it in the theoretical investigation of the ontological and epistemological implications of sexuality. But even when I made peace with accepting that queer theory does not necessarily speak to the intentions of this project, I struggled with how much of the tenets of queer theory I should explore because of its recognition and legitimacy in the academy.

Having immersed myself in scholarship produced by queers of color and works that place the lived experiences of queers of color at the center of investigation, I resolved that queer of color critique best accommodates the purpose of this research study in ways that queer theory is still warming up to.

Since the early 1990s, scholars utilizing queer theory have engaged in disrupting and interrogating state control and power over sexual identity (Eng, Halberstam & Muñoz, 2005; Glick, 2003). Queer theory has ties to post-structural and post-modern theory, meaning that it is invested in social constructionist theory that sees identity as a social construct. Utilizing the term queer has been a particularly strategic tool for critiquing relationships of power and theorizing about sexuality. Some queer theorists have done this work by “disarticulating” sexuality from other identity constructs like race and gender (Hames-García, 2011, p. 24). Queer theory conceptualizes the label queer as a strategic tool used to distinguish sexualities that transgress heteronormativity. Queer is thought to be fluid and ambiguous—particularly when juxtaposed to the presumed rigidity of cisgender heterosexuality. Muñoz (1999) wrote that the concept behind the word queer “can only be understood as connoting a mode of identification that is as relational as it is oblique” (p.127). His integrationist articulation of queer even offers the potential for queer theory to be the site to address multiple relations
among other social identifiers. Thus, some scholars praise the label *queer* for theoretically and intentionally resisting the normalization and naturalization of heterosexuality and dichotomous concepts of sexual orientation (Jagose, 1996; Sullivan, 2003). In practice, queer theory seeks to engage deconstructive inquiry of perpetuated norms and narratives. Deploying queer as an action—*queering*—is often described as the active process of critically analyzing power invested in social constructs. What is more, queer is also a resistance label. Once used as a pejorative slur, its reclamation reflects its channeling of resistance to social and political marginalization. It offers the possibility of gray as opposed to fixed categories and binaries of sexuality. To attempt to pin down its seemingly ambiguous purpose would be unproductive, for its use as a lens to read the world in queer terms is seen as its strength (Jagose, 1996; Hall, 2003; Sullivan, 2003).

In regards to sexual orientation and gender, queer is often considered an ambiguous, relational and seemingly essence-less identity. “There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers,” writes David Halperin (cited in Jagose, 1996). Queer theory privileges a definition of queer that is flexible and ambiguous. In keeping with this definition, queer theory’s strategic deployment attempts to disrupt institutional and categorical identities impressed upon communities through flexes of power, privilege, and oppression (Jagose, 1996; Hall, 2003; Sullivan, 2003).

Historically, queer theory has approached sexuality and race as independent entities (Hames-García, 2011), which has influenced essentializing (Sullivan, 2003) and sometimes dichotomizing (Cohen, 1997) manifestations of queer political projects. Hames-García (2011) identifies two dominant narratives of the queer theory canon: separatist and integrationist (p.21-26). While separatist accounts seek to distinguish sexuality as distinct
from gender, race, and class, integrationist accounts of queer theory see it as a way to address the relationships between race, gender, class, and sexuality by interrogating the concept of identity and writing instead of discourse and practices.

Although queer seems to coalesce a broad spectrum of identities and experiences, operationalization of queer and queer theory has not done well to accommodate intersectionality. Black feminist scholar Cathy Cohen (1997) expressed discontent with the term because of its narrow attention to intersectional identities. She also found queer to be a limiting identity due to the tendency of activists and scholars to employ the term in dichotomizing ways (e.g. “I Hate Straights”\textsuperscript{14}). Latino queer scholar Michael Hames-García grapples with the prevalent assumption of queer theory’s authority over theorizing about sexuality in the article \textit{Queer theory revisited} (2011). Hames-García deconstructs the deployment of queer theory and its assumptive claim that queer necessarily enables critique and transgression of boundaries and subjectivities. For starters, he critiques the emergence of queer theory’s canon. Although Eng, Halberstam, and Muñoz (2005), among other scholars, locate the emergence of queer theoretical articulations around 1990s, Hames-García counters that genealogy with an alternative canon that includes work for the likes of James Baldwin and Barbara Smith as early as the 1960s (p.26). Hames-García’s point is that scholars of color have explored the intersections of sexuality, gender and race across a variety of genres but their work is often marginalized within the traditional queer theory canon. Likewise, two-spirit scholar Qwo-Li Driskill (2010) maintains that many indigenous communities imagined and theorized about identity embodiments respective of the intersection of sexuality and

\textsuperscript{14} An anonymous manifesto distributed at gay pride parades in 1990 that declared oppressive discontinuity between queers and heterosexuals (Cohen, 1997).
gender expression lifetimes before queer theory—and certainly before colonialism. Queer theory has tended to skimp on acknowledging the salience of a racialized queer body—white or of color.

Much like mainstream gay media and the gay rights movement, many struggle with queer theory’s “ontological denial” (Hames-García, 2011) and its underutilized attention to intersections of race, gender, and sexuality (among other identities) (Driskill, 2010; Eng, Halberstam & Muñoz, 2005; Glick, 2003; Jagose, 1996; Johnson, 2007; Manalansan IV, 2006; Sullivan, 2003). Jagose insists that many lesbians and gays of color engaged in critiques of racism in the mainstream gay community because they were frustrated with the dismissive assumption that they had more in common with white lesbians and gay men (p. 63). However, what they resisted was not simply an assumptive and superficial commonality between white and queer communities of color, but the notion of a unitary gay identity that rendered their intersectional experiences with racism, gender oppression, and sexual marginalization silent and invisible. To this point, Manalansan IV (2006) proposed a revision of the term queer that goes beyond conceptualizing queer simply as an “anti-normative signifier” but also as a social category “produced through the intersectionality of identities, practices and institutions” (p. 225). Manalansan IV posits queer as a “political and theoretical perspective that suggest that sexuality is disciplined by social institutions and practices that normalize and naturalize heterosexuality and heterosexual practices including marriage, family and biological reproductions by marginalizing persons, institutions, or practices that deviate from these norms” (p.225).

This project draws from queer of color critique because it attempts to makes salient the blind spots of queer theory. As Ferguson (2005) defined it, queer of color critique seeks
to “intervene in queer studies” and address the marginalization queer scholars of color have experienced in academic communities and within mainstream gay liberation movements. Moreover, it seeks to illuminate the unique lived experiences of queer people of color and their communities by putting them at the center of exploration. These reasons explain why queer of color critique best fits the purpose of this investigation. In the following section I will explore the notion that sexuality is constitutive of race and gender, which I identify as a foundational tenant of queer of color critique.

**Intersections of Sexuality, Race and Gender**

Some scholars (Foucault, 1990/1978; Rubin, 1993) identify the nineteenth century as the point in which homosexuality was imbued with a particular social identity. It was during this time that U.S. society was invested in collective morality movements that campaigned for virtues like chastity and organized against practices like prostitution. These examples of morality campaigns were intended to regulate appropriate sexual expression (Rubin, 1993). Foucault draws attention to this particular period in time because of the emergence of the field of sexology. Sexology quickly assumed authority of scientifically defining normal and abnormal bodies where they were once defined by juridical discourse (Somerville, 2000). The emergence of the homosexual subject helped establish whole fields of study including sexology, psychiatry, and psychology, formed out of a compulsion to regulate sexual presence and construct notions of sexual deviance (Somerville, 2000). Consequently, these fields imposed a new hegemonic construction of the body and a far more pervasive disciplining system used to maintain normative bodies. Those who do not easily align with the hegemony of dominant identities (e.g. male, cisgender, heterosexual and white) become marked—even condemned—because of their difference.
As early as 1924, the U.S. saw its own version of the homophile movement that was already active in various parts of Europe (Jagose, 1996). The homophile movement sought to resist criminalization of same-sex acts, institutional persecution, and also advocate for the naturalization of homosexuality. By most indications, the homophile movement marked the social coming out of homosexuality in the U.S.; although Foucault cites the Westphal article of 1870 on ‘contrary sexual sensations’ as the birth of the homosexual. Foucault explains that homosexuality was “less by a type of sexual relations than by a certain quality of sexual sensibilities” (1990/1978 p. 43). According to Foucault, homosexuality became a form of sexuality when its discourse transcended beyond practice and became theorized ontologically (Foucault, 1990/1978). Furthermore, in *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault goes on to describe homosexuality as an embodiment:

The nineteenth-century homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood in addition to being a type of life, a life form, and a morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology. Nothing that went into his total composition was unaffected by his sexuality. It was everywhere present in him: at the root of all his actions because it was their insidious and indefinitely active principle; written immodestly on his face and body because it was a secret that always gave itself away. It was consubstantial with him, less as a habitual sin than as a singular nature. We must not forget that the psychological, psychiatric, medical category of homosexuality was constituted from the moment it was characterized— (p. 43).

This definition of the homosexual embodiment is limited. Foucault marks the homosexual body with an essence that seems to identify itself as different and as a person with a particular but elusive nature. Foucault’s conceptualization of the homosexual body suggests an essentialist definition of the body and behavior. It supposes that the body holds a definitive and inherent truth. Foucault does not, however, clearly identify the physical quality of this body. Foucault’s homosexual is raceless, but presumably white and male. Foucault’s homosexual is ontologically hidden and secret, condemned to silence, trapped within a
metaphorical closet. Though the homosexual is marked as sexually deviant, he still mirrors the racial normativity of whiteness (Ross, 2005). In contrast, Scholar Marlon Ross (2005) complicates Foucault’s explanation of the homosexual by pointing to the salience of race. Ross explains, “What happens when this discourse targets bodies beyond this locality, bodies already made visible as an altogether other ‘type’ with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology?” (p. 164). Foucault’s description of the homosexual seems to evade the existence of people of color and their sexual identities prior to U.S. colonization. Yet, prior to the nineteenth century, race had already become a primary marker for categorizing and controlling difference (Ross, 2005; Somerville, 2000). Hegemonic control of sexual orientation and gender identity and expression had been central to the oppression and marginalization of people of color. For example, through the institution of slavery, physical differences like phenotype and skin color were used as social markers to determine who to enslave and who to consider ‘free.’ Patricia Hill Collins (2005) reminds us that the oppression of chattel slavery relied upon an ideology that presumed the sexual deviance of Black African bodies (and Indigenous bodies), which, in turn supposed legitimate control and exploitation over their bodies (p.87). For this reason, the queer of color is marked as racially and sexually deviant, which supposes their exploitation or dismissal. The queer body of color is not allowed to be secretive, but is always under surveillance and regularly exploited.

Racism, in tandem with heterosexism, has generated an intricate system of oppression that subjugates and commodifies the sexualities and gender expression of people of color. These ideologies utilize a binary conceptualization of identity that situates people of color as definitively abnormal and deviant, juxtaposed to white-heterosexual normativity. Hill Collins explains, “Just as racial normality requires the stigmatization of the sexual practices of Black
people, heterosexual normality relies upon the stigmatization of the sexual practices of homosexuals. In both cases, installing white heteronormativity as normal, natural, and ideal requires stigmatizing alternate sexualities as abnormal, unnatural, and sinful” (p. 97). U.S. slavery relied on racist assumptions of Black and Brown inferiority and primitiveness that were further propagated through Western science and mediated by social science fields like sexology and psychiatry.

Similarly, Latino sexualities have also been subjected to regulatory policing made most pervasive during colonialism. Oppressive heteropatriarchy is one colonial imposition that permeates the organization of relationships, knowledge, and culture, and is often cloaked in an assumption of culturally legitimate machismo (Darder & Torres, 1998). Machismo ideology presumes that heterosexual men are naturally superior to women (and queers). Moreover, machismo limits Latino sexualities and gender expressions by discursively situating sexuality and gender expression within a power dichotomy of strong/weak, activol/pasivo, man/woman, and even as authentic Latino/traitor (Darder & Torres, 1998). Additionally, Christianity’s (particularly Catholicism’s) deep cultural embedding has contributed to the mediation of Latino sexualities and gender by structuring them within ideologies that privilege moral purity, gender hierarchy, and police deviants with condemnation (Stephen, 2002).

These discursive controls attributed Black and Brown inferiority to primitiveness (animal-like) as a means to legitimate their sexual exploitation, and mark Black and Brown bodies as sexually promiscuous and sexually deviant. The pervasive assumption of Black and Brown promiscuity has contributed to the systemic regulation and violent policing of Black and Brown sexualities and gender expressions. Through U.S. slavery and colonialism, Black
and Brown sexualities forcibly became conceptualized as hyper-sexualized and hyper-heterosexual. These limited conceptions continue to be mapped onto Black and Brown bodies today. Regulatory policing discourses and anti-queer discrimination mediate Black and Brown sexualities with violent control and marginalize them in society by limiting their access to safe and quality schools or to resources like comprehensive sexual education, employment, and housing.

**Women of Color Feminism**

Queer critiques of power and identity owe much of their critical foundation to the diverse activism of feminist movements and diverse feminist thought. For one, during the second wave of the U.S. feminist movement in the 1970s, activists and scholars asserted the revolutionary concept that the person is political (Kroloppke, & Sørensen, 2005; Villaverde, 2008). Feminist thinking had long sought to establish equity through an assertion of the epistemological affordances generated through a gendered analytic lens. Contrary to a general misconception that feminism is monolithic and addresses only the inequalities that women experience in patriarchal societies, there is a wide range of feminist theories. Villaverde (2008) explains that feminism is informed by “the intersections of history, theory, ideology, social movements, and individual acts of courage and agency” (p17). Women, men, gender-queers of all sexualities, racial and ethnic identities and class identities have contributed to the progress of feminist movements and knowledges. Villaverde further elaborates, “Feminist theories [afford a certain way of thinking that helps to frame the world] by exposing gender inequality, politics, and rights, helping us to rethink interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships of power” (p. 52). This dissertation draws specifically from women of color feminism (Anzaldúa, 1990; 1999; Chow Ngan-Ling, 1987; Flores, 2000;

Feminist scholars of color are concerned with disrupting the imposition of gender essentialism present in historic and contemporary feminist movements and feminist theories (Kroløkke, & Sørensen, 2005; Villaverde, 2008). They also seek to critique and illuminate the intersections of race, ethnicity, and gender in ways that are unique to their communities, languages, geographies, migration, religions, class, and sovereignty, for example. This study utilizes the concept of intersectionality as a theoretical strategy that can be utilized to address the main purpose of this study: how queer youth of color navigate school, negotiate their identities, and negotiate the purpose of formal schooling.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality is an analytic lens that allows investigators to understand the research subject from a multitude of dimensions and identities. Legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991) was one of the first to coin the term intersectionality, although other women including Sojourner Truth in 1851 (1992), the Black feminist Combahee River Collective in 1977 (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1983), and Lorde (1984/2007) have also discussed the concept of salient, multiple, interconnected identities. Through a rigorous analysis of legal cases of violence against women, Crenshaw demonstrated that Black women and other women of color have unique lived experiences that should be viewed at the intersection of race and gender; that is, that their identities are not simply additive. However, as articulated by Crenshaw, the U.S. justice system does not offer recourse to address multiple imbricate identities. Crenshaw, along with several other feminist scholars of color, asserted that race
and gender interact and intersect to create dynamic experiences for Black women (Grillo, 1995). Similarly, Black feminist scholar Patricia Hill Collins (1990) asserted the concept of an intersectional lens through her analysis of systematic oppression. Hill Collins posited, “Instead of starting with gender and then adding in other variables such as age, sexual orientation, race, social class, and religion, Black feminist thought sees these distinctive systems of oppression as being part of one overarching structure of domination” (p.222).

Feminist scholar, Kathy Davis (2008) offers another concise definition of intersectionality. She describes intersectionality as “the interaction between gender, race, and other categories of difference in individual lives, social practices, institutional arrangements, and cultural ideologies and the outcomes of these interactions in terms of power” (p. 68).

An intersectional theoretical approach is effective because it further contextualizes a research phenomenon, as well as the identities of participants. Feminist scholar, Jennifer Nash (2008) asserts that an intersectional analytic frame accounts for those voices often ignored (p. 3). Moreover, it allows for the site and participants to reveal what is salient (McCready, 2001; 2004; 2004b), while also affirming the interrelationship between multiple identities. An intersectional framework is ideal for examining the lived experiences of queer youth of color because it can affirm their dynamic presence within the classroom as queer of color, along with other salient identities that they claim.

Queer of Color Critique

Queer theory has tended to produce theory from a narrow, white, normative lens, which has historically alienated queers of color from academic critiques (Jagose, 1996). However, in response to this, many queer scholars of color have produced insightful social and theoretical critiques that embrace intersections of race, gender, and sexuality (Driskill,
2010; Driskill et al, 2011; Eng & Hom, 1998; Ferguson, 2004; 2005; Gopinath, 2005; Hames-García & Martínez, 2011; Hong & Ferguson, 2011; Johnson & Henderson, 2005; Kumashiro, 2001; La Fountain-Stokes, 2009; Manalansan IV, 2006; Martínez, 2013; Muñoz, 1999; Rodríguez, 2003). Moreover, scholars such as Moraga and Anzaldúa (1981/1983), Riggs (1991; 2008), and Boykin (1996), among others, have confronted queer theory’s racial alienation with thoughtful critiques on racial privilege and existing oppressions within mainstream gay communities. These critiques have contributed to destabilizing assumptions of a unitary gay identity.

Within this section of the dissertation, I will explore the use of a queer of color critique by drawing upon critical analysis identified as queer of color critiques. Such analysis comes from a variety of disciplines and texts, including documentary, poetry, and academic scholarship, to name a few. These texts put the lived experiences of queer people of color at the center of analysis. In addition to asserting the interlocking relationship between sexuality, race, and gender, a queer of color critique situates culture as the site for production of alternative ways to understand identity, difference, and relationships of power (Hong & Ferguson, 2011, p. 15).

Sociologist Roderick Ferguson (2004) first coined the name “queer of color” for the burgeoning theoretical lens. Ferguson explains that a queer of color critique works from an analytic understanding that the intersections of race, gender, sexuality, and class inform social practice (p.4). Through critiques of difference “between and within racialized, gendered, sexualized collectivities” (Hong & Ferguson, p. 9) coalition politics can be formed to address social inequalities experienced within those intersections. According to Hong and Ferguson (2011), queer of color critique emerged out of women of color feminism, rather
than gay and lesbian studies or queer theory. As explained in the introduction of this chapter, exploitive control of Black and Brown sexualities, and deficit-based discourses that position their bodies as primitive, have been central to the maintenance of the hegemonic racial, gender, and sexual hierarchies present today. Moreover, the two theoretical bodies of women of color feminism and queer of color critique overlap in their commitment to critique these kinds of “necropolitical” politics perpetrated by “nationalist and identitarian modes of political organization” which render particular populations, over and against others, disproportionately vulnerable to processes of death and devaluation (p.2).

A queer of color critique is concerned with identity practice, discourse and ontology. To that end, I draw upon a range of critical scholarship where those intersections are made salient, including those from queer indigenous studies (Driskill et al., 2011) and legal studies (Valdes, 1996) in order to explore the unique lived experiences of queer youth of color with depth and nuance. I draw upon these queer of color critiques in order to propose a reframing of anti-queer victimization. Anti-queer victimization is most often defined as result of homophobia (or heterosexism in more critical spaces). The term homophobia originated and was popularized in the 1970s as a term used to describe the “dread” and “repulsion” expressed toward homosexuals. Today, the term is commonly used to refer to the unreasonable fear, hatred and prejudice expressed against queer people (Campos, 2005). However, the term needs to be troubled, as it does not accurately capture the relationship of power present in anti-queer discrimination and victimization, nor does it accurately explain the experiences of queer youth of color. For one thing, the perpetrator’s responsibility gets lost within the term. The focus is placed on their unsubstantiated fear and the action they impose, but the term does little to critique the power system drawn upon that perpetuates
anti-queer discrimination. In the following section, I propose the use of the term, heteropatriarchy, in place of homophobia, which I believe is a more accurate conceptualization of the discriminatory experiences that queer communities face. In doing so, I seek to contribute this theoretical concept of anti-queer victimization to queer of color critique.

**Heteropatriarchy**

I propose conceptualizing anti-queer discrimination and victimization as a result of systemic heteropatriarchy. Heteropatriarchy is a theory that explains the structure of relationships of power. A heteropatriarchal power structure simultaneously privileges hegemonic masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005) and perpetuates a status quo that assumes cisgender expression, male domination, and heteronormativity. Consequently, identities that transgress this status quo (male, cisgender, heterosexual) are often marginalized and made vulnerable in society. Manalansan IV’s (2006) re-articulation of queer aligns with this analysis of power. Legal and LaCrit scholar Francisco Valdes (1996) defines heteropatriarchy as a preference for cross gender relationships, and a form of hierarchical control over the individual and society that privileges masculine heterosexual men and subordinates all others, limiting equality and autonomy (p.162, 169). He further elaborates that there are four tenets that construct the dominance of heteropatriarchy. Valdes explains:

To construct its hierarchies, the ideology of compulsory heteropatriarchy rests on four tenets: the bifurcation of personhood into “male” and “female” components under the active/passive paradigm; polarization of these male/female sex/gender ideals into mutually exclusive, or even opposing, identity composites, the penalization of gender atypicality or transitivity and the devaluation of persons who are feminized (p.170).
The concept of heteropatriarchy is also present in queer indigenous studies (Finley, 2011; Smith, 2006; Smith, 2011). Within this literature, scholars have illuminated the intersectional connection between gender oppression, anti-queer oppression and racism. Finley (2011) elaborates that disciplining biopowers (Foucault, 1990/1978) are realized in colonial discourse logic that justifies rape and other forms of violence, including sterilization, as a means to conquer and control native bodies considered inferior and other. In order to take over native land, colonial discourse marked native bodies as sexualized, racialized, and gendered. Colonial discourse imposed rigid self-interested hierarchies that reconstructed the native body as sexually deviant, racially inferior, and feminized, thus inferring their need to be controlled (Finley, 2011). Though Finley’s analysis has a native focus, Native American and other communities of color in the U.S. have historically been subjected to the heteropatriarchal discipline of their bodies. Indigenous scholar Andrea Smith (2006) asserts that within the three pillars of white supremacy, slavery and capitalism have historically imposed racial hierarchies that commodify, exploit, and dehumanize people of color. This conceptualization of anti-queer discrimination and victimization provides queer communities of color with a particular analytical affordance because it yields the potential to highlight the intersectional impact of racism, classism, ageism, anti-queer discrimination, and heterosexism that queer and other historically marginalized communities often experience as a result of their misalignment with dominant identity hierarchies.

This is a Queer of Color Critique

This project is dynamic and unique in that it seeks to examine and make sense of the lived experiences of queer youth of color who lay claim to multiple salient and overlapping identities. Throughout this chapter I have elaborated on the theories from women of color
feminism and queer of color critique. In drawing from these theoretical bodies, this dissertation is a queer of color critique that seeks to identify the strategies, practices and tools that queer youth of color use to navigate formal school settings and negotiate their multiple intersecting identities in them. From women of color feminism and queer of color critique, I draw upon multidimensional critiques of power, and thus conceptualize dominance and oppression as interlocking and systemic. Moreover, this study utilizes a systemic heteropatriarchal frame for understanding anti-queer discrimination and victimization. Identity is analyzed through an intersectional lens that sees identities as multiple and interconnected rather than additive. Finally, the analysis presented utilized queer of color critique in order to make sense of the differences between and within queer youth of color and generate new possibilities for supporting queer youth of color with their academic endeavors. In the subsequent chapter, I will outline the methodological approach for conducting the research.
CHAPTER FOUR

Methodology

This qualitative research study seeks to better understand how queer youth of color negotiate and navigate their way through formal school settings. This work grew out of implications from a previous research study that I conducted with my co-researcher, Dr. Ed Brockenbrough (Brockenbrough & Boatwright, 2013). We investigated the educational needs of queer youth of color attending the Midtown AIDS Center (MAC). I spent a lot of time building rapport with the young people at the MAC, attending regular programs and participating in the youth leadership group. Some of the youth adopted me as some sort of confidant and bestowed me with the honor of being their godmother or big sister. From that study I gained insight on how some queer youth of color identified themselves and thought about their multiple, intersecting identities. As you read in Chapter One, these youth were wise. In sharing their stories, as Binky did, they also revealed themselves to be deeply intellectual. I met many bright young people with varying experiences in school. Over the course of the study, youth told me all kinds of stories about school. School was hard for some of them. Some described teachers and school officials who gave them a hard time for being queer or transgender. For others, school was hard because of challenges they faced in their lives at home or in their community. Yet, while not all youth were enrolled in school, many of them were, and many of them were doing well. I learned that school life for many of these queer youth of color was complicated.

My prior research experience inspired this dissertation project. I was led by my intrigue of the stories MAC youth told me about school. And equally curious about how some of them managed to survive the often oppressive structure in school. So I reasoned that
the most appropriate way to collect stories from queer youth of color was to utilize a qualitative methodology. Qualitative research methods work particularly well with interpreting the meaning of lived experiences and the discourse, narrative and artifacts that contextualize those experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Denzin & Lincoln describe the qualitative researcher as a *briocoleur* or quilt-maker who patches together seemingly disparate pieces to form a realized new vision of representation (p. 5). Qualitative research attempts to piece together a variety of interactions, identities, discourses, and actions in order to create quilt-like “representations connecting parts to a whole” (p. 6) through the use of in-depth interviews and analysis (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Marshall & Rossman, 2011). I chose the qualitative methodology, narrative inquiry, to conduct my investigation. With this project, I seek to move beyond the discourse of the queer youth victim, and present a more complicated and critical analysis of queer youth lives and schooling that is drawn from stories narrated by queer youth of color.

My investigation was guided by the following research questions: 1. How do queer youth of color navigate school? 2. How do queer youth of color negotiate multiple intersecting identities? 3. And how do queer youth of color negotiate the purpose of education in their lives?

Within this chapter I will describe the research plan. In the following section I will elaborate on the research method chosen for this project.

**Narrative Inquiry**

Narrative inquiry is a qualitative methodology that has interdisciplinary appeal, including its use in social science research in education, sociology, anthropology and psychology (Casey, 1995; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Kramp, 2004). Narrative inquiry is
concerned with the study of stories, and subsequently how humans organize lived experiences to construct a perception of reality. It is grounded in the ontological posit that humans live and tell storied lives (Clandinin, 2006; Clandinin, Pushor & Orr, 2007; Dhunpath, 2000; Hones, 1998; Polkinghorne, 1988).

Narrative inquirers preference narrative as a way of knowing and as a way for conceptualizing human experience. The process of telling a story gives it meaning. As people experience the world, they represent their point of view in narrative form. What results in a storied experience is a way of knowing the world. In this way, narrative inquiry challenges positivist assumptions of inherent truths and essentialisms; rather, it preferences contextualism and interpretivism. Lived experiences are simultaneously shaped by the storyteller’s perception and also by “social, cultural and institutional narratives in which individuals are embedded” (Bach, 2007, p. 282). Narrative can connect ideas, events, and experiences and move them through time. Anthony Paul Kerby (1991; cited in Kramp, 2004) elaborates on the interconnection between the personal and society explaining that, “Narratives are primary embodiments of our understanding of the world, of experience and ultimately ourselves” (p. 3). Thus, narrative inquiry is a fitting methodology for this study as it can reveal the interconnectedness between a storyteller’s social location and bounds of culture and power.

A story is a type of narrative. For the analysis of the participants’ stories, I draw upon a broad definition of narrative as narrative is defined differently across narratological texts. A broad definition of narrative allows me to gather and compare a wide variety of stories that are not limited to one medium or logic. Narrative is often defined as a representation of a series or sequence of events (Rudrum, 2005) or constituted by the use of linguistic techniques
to document past events (Labov, 1997). This definition validates those narratives that have a more linear form. While I accommodate for linear stories, I did not want to limit participants to just that logic. After all, this project in invested in personalizing what we understand about queer youth. Thus, I also draw from Labov (1997) who clarifies that a narrative of personal experience is defined as having entered into the biography of the storyteller (p. 3). But I also sought to offer participants options to narrate their stories within an even broader definition and engagement of narrative that not only accommodated linear stories and personal narratives, but also those stories not necessarily bound by chronological time or physical reality. I also wanted to accommodate dreaming, imagining, and feeling. In addition to those mentioned definitions of narrative, I also draw upon Onega and Landa’s (1996) definition of narrative as a “semiotic representation of a series of events meaningfully connected in a temporal and causal way” (p.4).

As a research methodology, narrative inquiry offers qualitative researchers the capacity to explore and analyze a phenomenon or experience via a nuanced interpretation of the storyteller’s narrative construction. The objective is to understand, rather than explain. Thus, narrative inquiry is both a process and a product. The process is reflected in the way a narrator tells their story, and also in the way the researcher collects data. The narrative or story told, and the discourse of the data, characterize the products of narrative inquiry (Kramp, 2004). Moreover, within narratological scholarship, the terms narrative and story have a relationship. A story is a type of narrative in that it has an organized structure or plot. Researchers utilizing narrative inquiry apply methods that illuminate structure in the stories they are able to gather. In doing so, they pay particular attention to context—especially time and space, which situates plot and characters (Kramp, 2004). Clandinin and Connelly (2006,
cited in Clandinin, 2006) offer a metaphoric conceptualization of space to help researchers focus stories as part of a larger phenomenological whole. The three dimensions of the metaphoric narrative inquiry space are: sociality (interaction between the storyteller and society), continuity (the temporal bridge connecting the past, present and future), and place (situation or setting). Working within a three dimensional conceptualization of narrative space offers researchers a blueprint for seeing the construction of one’s point of view and the story as part of a grander phenomenon. Through the process of narrative inquiry, researchers illuminate the link between disparate ideas, events, and characters.

Again, this research study utilized qualitative research methods and narrative inquiry as its methodological framework in order to illuminate the embedded meanings and significances of the lived experiences of its queer youth of color participants. I chose narrative inquiry as the methodology for this project because I wanted to offer queer youth of color a platform to share stories about their unique social locations. With their stories, I hope to personalize and complicate the often depressing statistics we have come to know about queer youth.

I utilized narrative and visual narrative research methods to collect as many different kinds of stories that participants were willing to share. I did this to avoid confining the storyteller to one form of storytelling. Participants were able to tell their stories orally and visually. In addition to spoken stories, narrative inquiry research offers a variety of narrative expressions including photography (Bach, 2007), art (Bochner & Ellis, 2003) and drawing (Johnson, 2004). Bach (2007) defines visual narrative inquiry as “an intentional, reflective, active human process in which researchers and participants explore and make meaning of experiences both visually and narratively” (p. 281).
Finally, this project is invested in illuminating queer youth wisdom and clandestine youth knowledge by inviting them to share their T. For these reasons outlines in this section, narrative inquiry is a strong fit for exploring how queer youth of color experience school and the world.

The subsequent sections of this chapter will outline the selected methods and variables used for this research investigation.

**Study design: Field site**

MAC is a community-based HIV/AIDS prevention center located in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. It is one of two queer-focused organizations in its city. The center was first established in the late 1990s with a mission focused on addressing the profound impact of HIV/AIDS on communities of color. At that time, its target population was gay men of color and MSMs (men who have sex with men) of color. However, in recent years MAC has accommodated its programming and resources to also include queer and gender non-conforming youth, transgender women, transgender men, and lesbians. At the time of the study, MAC maintained an explicit commitment to the health and wellness of queer communities of color. Local queer youth of color identify MAC as one of the few safe and queer-supportive spaces in the city.

The majority of participants were local residents of Midtown, but two participants lived in nearby locations. I also traveled to Neartown and West City to interview participants. Midtown, Neartown, and West City are all pseudonyms used to honor the participants’ right to confidentiality.
Site Entry

I conducted a new research project that focused on the lived experiences of queer youth of color navigating formal school settings. MAC served as home-base for the project, where participants were recruited, and it was ultimately selected as the location for the focus group. MAC was selected as the project site because of my relationships with the center and attendees who utilize the space. Given my prior research experience, I garnered the trust and respect of the community and staff at MAC. The site was accessible and the staff were encouraging of the project and of its intentions. Queer issues are often political “hot buttons” for school boards and administrators, and because many schools perpetuate a culture of silence around queer identities and queer issues, it is particularly difficult to conduct this genre of education research within a public school (Mayo, 2007; 2009). To this end, conducting this research project in an accessible and safe space, like MAC, offered participants access to a space where they could openly engage in honest dialogue about their identities and lived experiences.

Participants

The project involved a participant sample of ten diverse, queer and/or transgender youth of color. Participants were invited to engage in critical dialogue and speak candidly about their identities and experiences navigating formal school settings. As indicated within the literature review of Chapter Two, qualitative research projects focused on queer youth of color can include a range of participants. Some investigations have focused on one participant (Harper, Wardell, McGuire, 2011), while other projects have included as many as 24 transgender youth participants (Sausa, 2005). The participant sample size for this study was limited to a small and manageable number in order to thoroughly invest in the analysis
of the participants’ lived experiences in school, while also preserving an intimate sense of trust between each participant and me. Narrative inquirer Kathleen DeMarrais (2004) suggests a small number of participants should be interviewed in great depth in order to generate the kinds of findings that qualitative researchers seek (p. 61).

I recruited participants who fit the proposed definition of queer youth of color described in Chapter One. Again, the identity term *queer youth of color* encompasses a wide range of youth gender and sexual identities, including same-gender-loving, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, queer, questioning, intersex, pansexual, two-spirit, and HIV+ (SGLLGBTQIP2SH). Participation eligibility in this study required that the youth identify as a queer youth of color (as defined within the identity labels above), 18 years old or older, with a queer sexual orientation (e.g. SGLLGBTQIP2SH) and/or a queer gender identity, but not a combined cisgender and heterosexual identity. Because this study is concerned with the schooling experiences of queer youth of color, eligibility for participation required that participants identify as being “of color”, meaning that they self-identify as either Black, Latino, Asian, Indigenous or mixed-raced. Additionally, this project sought involvement of transgender and female participants in order to address the present silence around those lived experiences (Ryan, 2002). Regarding age, this study sought youth participants between 18 and 24 years old. As described in Chapter One, this research study is informed by an anthropological conception of youth as defined with social categories and influenced by historical processes (Bucholtz, 2002; Lesko, 1996), rather than defined by chronological age. Moreover, youth is broadly defined as in transition to adulthood and as being part of a culture in which age mediates social, cultural, political, and economic interactions. This age range opens the investigation up to explore socio-cultural and political
issues that impact queer youth—some of which queer youth find themselves left to navigate on their own as young adults. Also, I selected this range in age in order to avoid any potential research review board complications that are likely to come up when exploring issues of sexuality with participants younger than 18 years old. Lastly, MAC serves youth and young adult communities between 13-24 years old, so the rationale for the proposed age range is also based on the demographics of MAC’s youth attendees.

Additionally, this study required that participants have had attended at least one year of high school. The student status of participants included those who were currently enrolled in formal schooling, had dropped out of high school, or were in transition. The available data on the schooling experiences of queer youth identify drop-out/push out and absenteeism as a prominent issue impacting queer youth (Diaz & Kosciw, 2009). This project included a diverse range of academic standing in order to gain a more complex understanding of queer students of color, and offered participants an opportunity to speak across different schooling experiences. Moreover, the extant research literature suggests that queer students confront issues of queer-phobic discrimination at all levels of schooling, including K-12 (Campos, 2005; Diaz & Kosciw, 2009; Grossman et al., 2009; Holmes & Cahill, 2003; Kumashiro, 2001; Russell & Truong, 2001), undergraduate (Harley et al., 2002; Wall & Washington,

---

15 Like many researchers seeking to study youth and sexuality, I strategically selected participants who were 18 years old and older in order to avoid potential obstacles within the research review process. Albeit necessary research, permission to study queer youth is notoriously difficult (Renn, 2010). While requiring parental consent can be a strategy for including participants under the age of 18, it can be potentially dangerous for queer youth participants and make them vulnerable to discrimination from their families. As a result, the anticipated and real hesitations to investigate the lived experiences and identities of queer youth yields limitations on valuable knowledge about youth and sexuality (Mustanski, 2011), yields gaps in education literature (particularly K-12), and it yields limited data on queer youth under the age of 18.
1991) and graduate studies (Misawa, 2009). In light of this, this study included college-enrolled and college-graduate participants in order to capture a broad set of experiences that illustrate the various approaches and strategies queer students of color use to navigate school and negotiate their identities within K-16 school settings.

The participants included Cat (23 years old), A.E. (24 years old), Angel (23 years old), Lyric (21 years old), Gogo Yubari (22 years old), Ronnie (23 years old), Sam (18 years old), Niqko (24 years old), Vinny (22 years old), and Archie (24 years old). The average age of the participants is 22 years old (18-24 years old). All 10 participants graduated high school, and all reported having some college experience.

Participants comprised an extremely diverse group. Seven of the participants identified as Black (Cat, A.E., Gogo Yubari, Ronnie, Sam, Niqko and Archie), five of these participants also identified as mixed-raced (Cat, A.E, Gogo Yubari, Sam and Niqko), with the addition of Lyric and Angel (seven participants identified as mixed-raced in total). Vinny self-identified as Chinese Asian. Vinny and Archie both had salient immigrant identities, as Vinny was a permanent U.S. resident, and Archie (who identified as Jamaican American) had immigrant parents from the U.K and Jamaica, and identified as first-generation American. In addition to racial and ethnic identity, the participants also possess diverse gender identities. Six of the participants identified as cisgender (A.E, Angel, Ronnie, Archie, Sam and Vinny). Niqko identified as a trans man. And three participants identified with gender-fluid identities. For example, Cat identified as genderqueer, Lyric identified as Two-spirit and Gogo Yubari identified as a “cunt” male.

Finally, there also existed sexual identity diversity among the participant group. Six (A.E., Cat, Angel, Ronnie, Archie and Vinny) of the participants self-identified as gay. Four
of the participants identified differently. Lyric identified as queer, Gogo Yubari identified as homo-flexible (acknowledging some attraction to the opposite sex), Sam identified as bisexual, and Niqko identified as heterosexual. This study acknowledged the variety of sexual diversity among the participants. These data reveal the importance for analytic lenses that can accommodate unique lived experiences concerning diverse sexuality and orientation.

A table listing of participant demographics is included in the appendices.

**Sampling Strategies**

This study utilized two types of sampling strategies to identify eligible participants for the study. Participant eligibility required that participants meet selective criteria relating to gender, sexual orientation, age, race and ethnicity, and academic status. Criterion sampling is useful for quality assurance (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 111). MAC is the most appropriate site because it could fully accommodate the sampling criteria. Additionally, the criteria for participant sampling are also based on addressing the prevailing gap in the literature that overlooks the lived experiences of queer youth of color. I intend for the findings drawn from this study to contribute epistemic and ontological posits by addressing the intersections of identity and knowledge, or what Anzaldúa calls “theory in the flesh”. Lastly, participation selection also utilized a snowball/chain sampling selection process in which consenting participants referred other potential participants.

As a means of honoring the participants’ involvement in the study, each received some financial compensation for participation. Participants received a $30 VISA gift card after completing three rounds of individual interviews.

Finally, there was no intended harm involved in the participants’ consented participation. The participants’ right to anonymity was respected. Thus, within this report,
participants are identified with pseudonyms of their choosing. Participant collaboration or co-construction of any analytic themes or implications is noted. Participants had an opportunity to inform the confirmability of data analysis during a focus group (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p.253).

**Data Collection Methods and Data Sources**

I used in-depth interviews as my primary data source. These interviews were one-on-one, audio-recorded, and lasted up to approximately 90 minutes. The structure of the interviews is consistent with Seidman’s three-interview phenomenological series, which allows the interviewer and participant to examine experiences and place them in context (Seidman, 2006, p. 16-17). Moreover, phenomenological interviewing allows for the researcher to explicitly focus on their personal experience “combined with those of the interview partners” (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 148). By utilizing the three-interview focus structure, the researcher can focus on the deeper meaning that the storyteller maps onto their lived experiences.

The first interview focused on life history and sought to explore the participant’s identity background, and intended to contextualize the participant’s lived experiences as a queer youth of color. In the first interview, the participant was asked to reflect on multiple identities and the impact identities may have had on the participant’s lived experiences. The second interview concentrated on the details of the participant’s lived experiences within formal school settings. The participant was asked to reflect on what they found challenging.

---

16 I am using gender neutral pronouns (they, them, their, theirs, themself) to reflect and honor the participants’ diverse gender identities (https://uwm.edu/lgbtrc/support/gender-pronouns/)
while in school. They were also asked to describe their experiences of success in school. Additionally, the participant was also asked to reflect on relationships with teachers and about resources utilized while in school. The participant was also asked to reflect on how their identities impacted their academic journey. Lastly, the third individual interview focused on the meaning of the lived experiences explored during interview one and interview two (Seidman, 2006, p.18). After having reflected on their identities and past academic experiences, the participant was asked to reflect on the meaning of their experiences. The third interview, as Seidman advises, focuses on making sense of the interaction of past factors that contributed to the storyteller’s present situation or location, and/or future (Seidman, 2006, p. 18). I invited the participant to respond to the third interview in a creative way. During this third interview, the participant was asked to construct and describe a life map (see appendices) reflecting their academic journey and the meanings of their reflections on identity and schooling experiences. The participant orated their response and also produced a visual narrative. In addition to clarifying how the participant’s conceptualization of schooling experiences, this third interview served as a member-checking session used to discuss and verify the confirmability of my analysis of the participant’s prior two individual interviews.

Through dialogue and reflection engagement, the participants’ realities are given life to exist outside of themselves—to be known, experienced, and felt. The in-depth interviews are essential for capturing the essence of the theories in the flesh. As mentioned previously, the in-depth interviews offered participants an opportunity to testify to their lived experiences. Cruz (2012) explains that a testimonio is a dialogical confrontation that elicits active reflection on the audience’s part, and positions those involved as both listeners and
witnesses (p. 263). Moreover, a testimonio involves radical listening which facilitates in-depth understanding of a particular social context, and sees collective sharing as a political project.

Conceptualizing the in-depth interview responses of the participants as testimonios allows the researcher to unearth the ontological layers internalized within the narrated lived experiences. In radically listening, I paid particular attention to the participants’ emotional responses. The in-depth interview questionnaire addressed this focus. Felten et al. (2006) write about the influence of lived experience and emotions in the production of knowledge. They draw upon theorists John Dewey and David Kolb in explaining that reflection serves as a bridge for conceptual understandings and lived experience (p. 38); therefore, emotions are a catalyst for intellectual thought. I believe it is useful to explore how queer youth of color feel about their experiences in formal school settings because the marginalizing culture of school not only undermines their academic careers but also threatens their physical, emotional and physical wellbeing.

A protocol of the in-depth interview questions is included in the appendices.

Artifacts

I also asked each participant to share relevant artifacts that reflected aspects of their academic experience. Participants were asked to submit these artifacts during their second interview, which aligns with the concentration of exploring details about the participant’s lived experience in formal school settings. These artifacts were submitted by the participant and analyzed by me. Examples of these include documents that exemplifies their perception of academic achievement or success including report cards, teacher notes, and graded work. Analysis of the relevant artifacts further contextualized the details of the participant’s lived
experiences. Moreover, the artifacts are useful data that can support the triangulating of codes and themes within the analytic process and add to the accuracy of specific knowledge claims (Marshall & Rosssman, p.42).

A table listing all of the data collected for each participant is included in the appendices.

**Life Map**

The participant was asked to construct a graphic life map creatively describing their academic journeys in the form of a drawn map. The participant described their individual life map during the third interview session, and was asked to reflect on the greater meaning of their identities and lived experiences in school, and their future. By utilizing the life map as the prompt for the third interview, the participant is encouraged to reflect on the intersection of their identities and their experiences within formal school settings, and make sense of the “big picture”.

A life map is both a historical record and a creative pedagogical tool for envisioning the future (educationalworld.com). A life map is akin to a graphic organizer and is a method that supports participants to think consciously and reflectively on their pasts and future possibilities. The benefit of a life map is that it enables the participant to visually narrate their lived experiences, and visually represent their journey “both outwardly traveled and inwardly lived” (Caldwell, 2005, p. 174). The use of the map also helps the researcher develop sensitizing themes (Nesbit & Adesope, 2006) from what the participant identifies as salient.

While life maps are often used as a teaching tool in the classroom or as a counseling tool, there are no examples of their utilization for education research specific to queer youth of color. This study is one of the first to use the pedagogical tool to provide the participant
with a creative method of narrating their lived experiences. The participant was asked to mark major landmarks (experiences, people, learning moments, etc.) that they identify as having a salient (noticeable or important) impact on their academic journeys. The life maps did not need to be linear, so the participant was free to present their map within their own conceptualizations and mark impacts and influences as they saw fit. An example of a life map and the protocol for the activity is included in the appendices.

**Focus Group Interview**

The focus group occurred after participants completed three rounds of individual interviews. Participation in the focus group was voluntary in case any participant felt uncomfortable speaking about their experiences with others. I facilitated one audio-recorded focus group in which volunteer participants and I discussed schooling experiences and dialogued about data-generated analytic themes. The focus group interview concentrated on the challenges that queer students experience in school, and the resources available to them. A focus group interview is a useful method for capturing new data and exploring issues or ideas unaddressed within the individual interviews (Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

**Timeline**

This dissertation study was designed to occur within the duration of nine months. While many queer youth of color oriented projects do not outline research timelines, McCready (2010) conducted participant interviews within a school semester (approximately three months) (p. 47), Blackburn’s (2005) research project occurred over five months (p. 92), and Quinn (2007) collected data for approximately eight months (November through June) (p. 33). I used a timeline similar to these examples. Data collection was allotted a six-
month timeframe for completion. Individual interviews were conducted within that six-month timeframe based on the participants’ availability. An additional three months was allotted for data analysis.

I posted participant recruitment flyers at the field site, and met with each potential participant to verify eligibility. During these recruitment meetings, I explained the purpose of the study and the eligibility criteria for participation. I also explained the life map activity and petitioned each participant to submit relevant artifacts that they believe to reflect their academic experience. Supplies such as colored markers and poster paper was given to each participant upon their enrollment in the study.

**Researcher Positionality**

The underlying goal of this study is to better understand how queer youth of color articulate the purpose of formal education, and how they navigate formal school settings while negotiating multiple imbricate identities. All too often, queer youth identities and lived experiences are overshadowed by an overemphasis on victimization. Given the unique social, political, health, and economic challenges that confront queer youth of color, how might queer youth of color describe their academic experiences? I approached this work from an *emic* point of view—as a queer millennial of color. I also approached this work as an activist, an insider, and as an outsider. As an activist, I positioned myself conducting this research out of a sense of responsibility to generate change in the conditions that impact queer students of color. Personally, I identify as a working-class, first generation American, first-generation college student, two-spirit, gender-fluid, queer, young person of color. I do not consider asserting these identities as a bias or limitation because my insider positioning grants me an
emic position that will nuance my interpretation of the lived experiences of queer youth of color and will contribute to the reflexive process. While it is not conventional, there are some examples of scholars who have made themselves present within their narrative research (Dillard, 2012; Kirkman, 1999; Misawa, 2009) and ethnographic research (Kanuha, 2000). I value my lived experiences as a person with historically marginalized roots who now possesses a unique opportunity to pursue a doctorate. Consequently, I feel that I am literate in the codes of power (Delpit, 1988; Vaught, 2004). My ability to translate and navigate dominant culture, codes, and relationships of power contributes to my analytical lens and has shaped my positionality as a researcher and scholar (hooks, 1994).

The unique combinations of the multiple identities I claim simultaneously render me an insider and outsider. I acknowledge that I am privileged and can be positioned as an outsider because of my academic standing. I have benefited from a number of academic interventions throughout my life. My academic career is privileged in comparison to many others who claim similar identities. As early as second grade I was identified as “gifted” and tracked into an accelerated education program. This label also saw me bussed out of my community and into the suburbs throughout primary and middle school. I was later awarded a prestigious scholarship to attend a private high school. After high school, I continued my undergraduate and graduate education at private and elite institutions.

My academic standing has provided me access to places, people, knowledge and opportunities that are relatively uncommon for members of my home community. I went to schools where physical violence was rare. For the majority of the day at school I could liberate myself from the woes of poverty and navigate access to food or financial aid because I was affirmed as a strong and capable student. It is not that I have not been impacted by
racism, classism, or heteropatriarchy, but that I have had many more options than others to buffer myself and navigate and negotiate support systems and resources. Additionally, I have had a supportive family network that truly affirms my humanity. Having access to affirming spaces (some which I have had to create) and affirming people has positively supported my academic career.

I also possess an affinity to the MAC community. Not only am I self-identified as a gender-fluid queer of color, but the MAC community has identified me as a trusted mentor. As an out, young professional, queer of color, I draw upon my experiential knowledge as a resource to support youth at MAC. I intend to support youth participants by collaborating with them and supporting their intellectual and professional growth. Additionally, my being a MAC mentor, “godmother” or “big sister” (as some of the youth have described me) has allowed me to become an insider member of the community and not simply a visitor in the space.

In an article on researcher positionality, Milner (2007) draws on Cornel West’s (1993) articulation of individual emancipation in regards to doing social justice work. Milner quotes West, explaining, “that it is difficult to work for emancipation on behalf of others (and to work to solve problems with and on behalf of others) until people (or in this case, researchers) are emancipated themselves” (p. 395). West’s statement is relevant to the work involved with this research investigation. It is a difficult process to free one’s self of the pain and guilt of heteropatriarchal oppression, because this process also requires a healing practice. Moreover, West’s words underscore a researcher’s need to develop a system of self-care and sustainability while engaging in work that hits close to home. For me, this specifically included maintaining a researcher journal and regular yoga practice to balance
my mind and body. Marshall and Rossman (2011) explain that “knowing how to anticipate the emotions of fieldwork is part of the research design” (p. 130). This also includes planning to thoughtfully end the work and transition relationships when the investigation is completed.

**Data Analysis**

The research study was conducted solely by me and analyzed in partial collaboration with volunteer participants during the focus group. I utilized narrative inquiry as my primary methodology and examined narrative as the unit of analysis. I applied an analysis of narrative (Hones, 1998) in which each participant story was analyzed individually in order generate common themes. Each participant had an opportunity to explain their life map and relevant artifacts during the member-checking third round interview. The findings generated from data seek to offer transferable findings about the lived experiences and identities of queer youth of color. Given that I utilized a phenomenological interview structure, I drew upon contexts that I experienced with the participant during data collection to guide my interpretation of the data. In addition to the interview, I shared many intimate engagements with each participant. For example, I shared a meal with eight of the ten participants every time an interview was conducted. I engaged in “breaking bread” (eating together) with the participant in order to hear their “T”. I also met and had conversations with mothers, sisters, friends and partners of some participants. I was welcomed into some of the living spaces of participants. Those intimate engagements offers insight and the participant’s and my co-creation of how the participant has lived/lives the phenomenon of being queer a youth of color.

I also employed a grounded theory analytic framework (Charmaz, 2006) to review data sources for emergent themes and generated and refined coding schemes. According to
Charmaz, “the hallmark of grounded theory studies consists of the researcher deriving into his or her analytic categories directly from the data, [rather than] from preconceived concepts or hypotheses” (2006b, p. 32). Themes were revealed from generated codes, themes, and categories during data analysis. Additionally, throughout the course of the investigation I utilized a researcher journal and documented potential emerging themes that I noticed. I also documented notes on my interactions with participants while collecting data. I expanded upon those notes within the write-up of data findings. Grounded theory felt relevant and useful to this investigation because the research purpose and inquiry are contextualized by the salience of multiple identities, culture, and history. Grounded theory yields the potential of effectively penetrating those layers and excavating meaning of how those enmeshed identities inform how queer youth navigate and negotiate formal school settings.

The coding process utilized an initial line by line coding strategy. This method is useful for detailed data sources in which themes can become discovered. Line by line coding is also helpful because it forces the researcher to constantly reflect upon the data with new eyes. This strategy helps organize categories and document the emergence of themes within the analytic process (Charmaz, 2006 p.51). After conducting the initial coding phase and having established strong analytic direction, I engaged in focused coding. Focused coding is an active process in which the researcher can “act upon the data” by looking for specific themes and comparing data. Reengaging the data analysis by focus coding supports the trustworthiness of the study by refining codes and knowledge claims (Charmaz, 2006, p. 60).

Additionally, I utilized the “word cloud” generating tool Wordle (Wordle.net) to help with the initial analysis of interview transcripts. Wordle is an internet technology that creates an image of the frequency of different words within a selected text. McNaught and Lam
(2010) point out that this analytic tool has been used for research in literary studies and recently in education research. I used this analytic tool to provide a visual representation of patterns within the interview transcript text.

Finally, I analyzed the life maps by reading the visual as a narrative and asking how it reflects the big picture (Keats, 2009). Riessman (2008) offers three readings for visual narrative analysis: reading for the story of the production of the image, reading the image itself, and reading for how the image can be read. I triangulated analysis of the life map with notes from my researcher journal where I documented the context of my relationship and interactions with participants throughout the interview process.

In the next section, I will further elaborate on the preemptive measures I took to assure the study’s trustworthiness.

**Triangulation and Trustworthiness**

In constructing a competent research study, the researcher must account for the trustworthiness or goodness of the qualitative study design. Marshall & Rossman (2011) outline a variety of methods researchers can employ to assure the conceptual soundness or validity of their investigations. Similarly, the goodness of qualitative research is concerned with the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the study design, ensuring that the interpretations will be strong and credible (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Credibility refers to the ability to accurately substantiate knowledge claims. My study accounts for credibility by its prolonged engagement. I have already conducted the informing research at the site for the length of a year, and conducted further research at the site. The prolonged engagement ensured that the generated themes were not rushed and were thoughtfully conceptualized. I also accounted for credibility with intentional member-
checking, by which I shared data and thematic interpretations with the participants to compare accuracy. On my own part, I maintained a researcher journal throughout the course of the study. I documented my positionality to the work, participants, and themes in the researcher journal. I also documented the analytic process, and accounted for the influence of my own positionality, experiences, and lenses in the researcher journal (Charmaz, 2006).

Similarly, Charmaz encourages consistent memo-writing as a means to process the data and discover ideas about the data (p. 73). Lastly, I addressed credibility by gathering a group of critical friends, in addition to the focus group, to discuss and critique findings, and assess if the themes were sound (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 40).

Transferability refers to clarity of the findings. Dependability refers to the consistency of the findings. I addressed these facets of trustworthiness by intentionally incorporating triangulation into my methods. I used thick descriptions to validate clear and accurate interpretations of my participants and their lived experiences (Geertz, 1973). My findings are consistent because I maintained a clear audit trail and transparency in how I managed the data. For example, I voice recorded all interviews and focus group, and had all interviews and focus group transcribed (Marshall & Rossman, p.40). These practices ensure the project’s confirmability and that my biases were mediated. Additionally, within my analysis I compared different data sources in order to triangulate thematic accuracy. Lastly, throughout the investigation and analysis I used my researcher journal to document that I sufficiently accounted for the goodness of the study.

Limitations

I identify three limitations of this research study. The first relates to my own researcher insider subjectivity and identity bias. This bias required that I consciously assess
my emotional involvement throughout this study. I used a researcher journal to document and critically reflect on these factors.

Additionally, this study possesses an additional identity bias because it will not address the formal schooling experiences of white queer students. This bias is intentional because it is grounded in two claims. 1. Queer youth of color are further marginalized because of their racial identities (Blackburn, M.V. & McCready, L.T; Driver, 2008; Kumashiro, 2001). 2. White privilege can mediate white queer academic experiences in ways that are not available to queer youth of color. To this point, white and queer youth of color have qualitatively different experiences of victimization (Russell & Truong, 2001).

The third limitation relates to data collection. This study asked participants to reflect on their lived experiences in formal school settings. A participant’s most recent schooling experience may have been in the distant past or was too difficult to accurately recall. Both Mayo (2007) and Savin-Williams (2001) warn that while research projects that require participants to recall past experiences in-depth interviews are widely used and informative, they also have the potential for participants to miss some important details.

Conclusion

This investigation sought to better understand the challenges that queer youth of color experience throughout their academic careers and to draw upon data findings and analytic themes to generate potential approaches to support the academic futures of queer youth of color and nurture their burgeoning intellects. This research study yields exciting potential to illuminate alternative strategies for collecting and analyzing stories of individuals from marginalized communities.
CHAPTER FIVE

Ten stories of savvy queer millennials of color navigating school and society

Queer youth of color have unique stories to tell, but they often lack platforms to share their stories. Mainstream gay culture is particularly entrenched in whiteness and cisgenderedness, and as a result, it often marginalizes the lived experiences, social reflections, and cultural analyses of queer youth of color. While there exists multiple, diverse queer communities throughout the U.S., queer stories tend to over-represent dominant identities. This has certainly impacted the breadth of research on this topic, as I outlined in Chapter two. We know too little about the ontologies of queer youth of color, or about how they navigate the world.

Queer youth of color have stories that need to be told, but they are often overlooked in favor of a dominant gay narrative. Even in a time of dramatic need, it seems as the representation of queers is biased. At the time this project was written, the social positioning of queers in the U.S. changed dramatically. During the summer of 2015, the Supreme Court case ruling of Obergefell v. Hodges decided that same-sex couples are constitutionally guaranteed the fundamental right to marry. Many queer and allied communities boasted the acquisition of marriage equality. There were tons of queers and straight allies sporting rainbow filtered profiles across social media sites. It would seem that everyone knew this story. Yet, in comparison, by the fall of 2015, 21 transgender citizens were murdered (Ennis, 2015; Truitt, 2015). Most of these victims were youth of color, and the vast majority of them were transgender women. Besides the persistent efforts of some transgender activists, advocates, and blogs, you would have been hard-pressed to find substantial media coverage
of this violent epidemic on network television. And instead of a discussion about a plan to address the epidemic, the conversation was hung up on getting the public to acknowledge that there was even a problem. Writer and trans activist Janet Mock generated the hashtag #saytheirnames (appropriated from a Black Lives Matter slogan), to draw attention to the systematic issue of transgender vulnerability. And still the victim’s and their suffering were quieted.

History shows a legacy of marginalization in mainstream gay society and gay activism. For example, the noted gay rights group, The Mattachine Society, routinely marginalized women and non-cisgender people (Jagose, 1996; Meeker, 2001; Sullivan, 2003). Some scholars have challenged the separatist politics of The Daughters of Bilitis (circa 1950) who were said to have marginalized butch and transgender women (Gallo, 2007; Jagose, 1996). This bias also permeates queer scholarship. Brockenbrough (2013) points out the struggle of scholars of color confronting “White gatekeepers” of queer scholarship who try to quiet critiques of white privilege. Moreover, the contemporary plea for the public to #saytheirnames further establishes historic bias embedded within the gay mainstream. But, with this chapter, I will do more than name queer youth of color. With their blessings, I will share (some of) their T, as it is out of necessary that we create platforms alternate to the gay assimilationist mainstream.

This chapter presents diverse queer youth stories. In alignment with queer of color critique’s intention to position queer of color identities at the center of research investigation (Ferguson, 2004), I seek to situate this chapter as a platform for queer youth of color stories and wisdom. This chapter offers an interpretation of artifacts, data findings, reflexive journal notes, interview experiences, and interview narratives. In narrative inquiry, there is an
interpretive quality involved in the construction of narratives (Clandinin & Connelly, 1998; Bach, 2007). Clandinin and Connelly (1998) note that narrative research involves restorying of event and the narrative structure (p. 4), as the goal of the narrative is to reflect an understanding of the lived experience, rather than deduce an explanation.

Drawn from the narrated stories told by participants, within this chapter I offer ten individual *queerlore* narratives. These queerlore narratives were constructed using interview excerpts as mosaic reflections of the individual, their wisdom, and also as reflections of queer of color culture. It is important to note that interpretive choices are made through the entire research process, including data analysis and the transcriptions of interview narratives (Mero-Jaffe, 2011). Scholars suggest that editing choices, including editing false starts or rearranging words, are dependent on the purpose of the project (Hubberd, 2010). The restructuring of interview narratives surfaces as an ethical issue that relates to the authenticity of the story, meaning how well the story reflects the storyteller and their intended meaning (Hubberd, 2010). While scholars maintain various opinions about editing transcript narrative, editing a transcript is permissible for the narrative’s clarity and readability (Hubberd, 2010, Wilmsen, 2001). Wilmsen (2001) advises that any editing of the raw transcript should remain consistent with the storyteller’s purpose.

Telling stories involves relationships of power and axiology. As outlined in the methodology section of this research study, I invited participants to share multiple stories, across multiple formats. Each participant shared a cache of stories as they responded to interview questions inquiring about their multiple, intersecting identities and academic experiences. Some participants even shared artifacts with me. Additionally, participants constructed visual narratives in the form of life maps.
I am interpreting these queer youth narratives as queerlore because these personal narratives reveal traditions and practices, as Manalansan IV (2006) puts it, “produced through the intersectionality of identities, practices and institutions” (p. 225). Moreover, as I am appropriating the story genre folklore, I align queerlore with the definition of folklore, as the transmission of tradition, culture and practices (Narayan & George, 2012), mediated by community knowledge and social context (Ben-Amos, 1971). Lore are those bodies of traditions, wisdoms, and practices that are passed on in storytelling. Folklorist agree that sharing personal narratives is an established form of oral narrating traditions among various groups (Stahl, 1977). Moreover, as you will notice in the participants’ stories, there is a moral and teaching inclination. I position these stories as lore because I believe participants sought to teach me something about queerness and the world. It would be impossible for me to duplicate the participant’s individual storytelling performance—embedded with unique ideas, tone, emotions, and logic—as the stories are filtered from their lips to my ears and then filtered again from the spoken to the written word through transcription (Wilmsen, 2001). Thus, in my retelling of stories told to me, these personal narratives become lore.

Many of the participants’ narratives transcended traditional linear methods, and parts of the “same” story were told to me at different moments throughout the interviews. So, I sought to present a unique interpretation of the stories told to me, and to illuminate the wisdom embedded within and across multiple narratives. The stories are the participant’s own words, but some of the narratives was rearranged in order to present a greater sense of cohesion and clarity of the big picture. Bucholtz (2000) and Wilmsen (2001) advise researchers to collaborate with the storyteller and implement member checking of any edited transcriptions. In an effort to maintain ethical standards, I implemented a member checking
method by contacting each participant and submitting to them a copy of their individual queerlore narrative. I encouraged them to contact me if they had an issue with the structure of their narrative.

With participants’ approval, I present ten unique queerlore stories that explore concepts of agency, simultaneity, spirituality, consciousness, discrimination, and purpose. At the end of each story I offer an interpretive read of the story’s big picture. As you read through these stories, be aware of how the storyteller reveals their negotiations of identity and society.
Cat: The Mythology of Cat

Figure 1: Cat’s Life Map

The baby represents just like birth and a new beginning. I’m in the center because I’m at the center of my world and around me are like just these really classic symbols of like femininity[: ] roses and stars, pink hearts—just like all thing girly. Things that symbolize love and affection—like warmth and comfort. But, then around me is a barrier, so nothing can get in and disrupt that.

Above me is a dirt road [and] a little patch of soil. I chose soil because soil is where things grow from and soil like cultivates—you know—absorbs and causes things to grow from that cultivation.
So the left side is a body of water with sharks in it. That represents like my school career from like kindergarten to like now. Well no; kindergarten to high school. Then there’s a forest and forests represent getting lost, but they also represent, like, finding your way. I also find trees to be, like, comforting. Like, you can have fun getting lost but you can also be like really scared getting lost. The black represents like, not like, not knowing or being shrouded or being confused or being confounded. The black—it’s like the unknown. And the yellow are like stars. The gray represents like the lesson in it. So, it’s not like a bad thing to be lost. Like things can be found through being lost.

The mountains represent, like, my climb. I’m, like, climbing to the top figuratively—climbing through struggle or internal battles. The mountains are gray again because uphill climbs aren’t always a bad thing. Like, it can be challenging but it can also be like a drill—like it can be a good challenge or a bad challenge, or it could turn into a good challenge or a bad challenge. The trees on the mountains are like those moments that I have during this uphill climb that, like, comfort me or like reassure me. And the trees don’t have any leaves because like you know, they’re supposed to be harrowing you know. Trees grow in soil so there’s soil on the mountain—like there’s growth in that uphill climb and they just comfort me.

The trees, or the forest, the body of water, the mountains, the cosmos all exist at the same time, so like they’re in their own space. I don’t think they’re intersecting ‘cause they’re all there at the same time. They’re always there. They have a function and like you know, it’s up to me, like if I go back to those places; but they all serve different purposes.

There’s a pink house. There’s a door at the end of the road of soil. I don’t know what’s in the house. No one knows what’s in the house, but you can see there’s two doors on
the house and this is supposed to represent, like, the cosmos. And then I’ll go in the house and then I will explore everything in the house. I will explore all these corridors. I will go up here and disappear from the world and leave all of the bitter evil negative people behind, and be complete and be on a new level of spirituality and never be bothered with the evil people in this world again. And I will watch over my loved ones until they die. The end. But, the goal is to like transcend and get into the house, and leave the house and go to space, the celestial bodies.

Up here is the cosmos. So, it’s like paradise. And there’s question marks. These yellow bodies of light represent like a higher power, like God or a God—like, not to save me but like to take me in like after I went through all of this. I don’t know what happens, Shangri-La which is like paradise, Nirvana, heaven, reincarnation. So, hopefully once I get here I will go back in the field where I’m from—my true self. I mean good things will be going on up there, but you don’t know what will happen. But, you just know that, like, you’re leveling up—passed the test.

**The read**

In Cat’s colorful life map, we are presented an omniscient view of Cat represented as a beautiful baby creature, alone, surrounded and protected by feminine symbols. The center of Cat’s world is her protected as her true self. Amidst these girly things, Cat appears to be cozy and fully conscious of the nearby environments. In this static picture of earthly and celestial elements, Cat describes a unique queer awareness of the outside environment. Cat’s keen awareness of these environments reflect her knowing of suffering transcendence. She is already privy to her (final) destination, the pink house, and her role as guardian of her loved ones. However, she is also aware that she is destined to encounter wisdom-producing
challenges. She understands the experiences that she confronts as necessary for her growth, and “leveling up”. With this insight, Cat offers a creative concept of queer life that is characterized by simultaneity and multidimensionality. The environments all exist at the same time, but “they all serve different purposes”. Cat, however, can exist in these environments at the same time.

The harrowing trees, the shark-infested waters, and the celestial body exists simultaneously. They are “worlds” or portions of society, as Lugones (1987) would describe them, that construct Cat in distinct ways. As she travels to them and between them, Cat is called to shift through the multi-dimensionality of her selves. Cat described to me her travels to those adventures, challenges, and experiences, and her making sense of traveling to worlds that she experiences as confrontational and “hostile” (Lugones, 1987, p. 3) to her, in comparison to the comfort of her beginning and more homelier world surrounded by femininity. “I think being gender queer, there’s a mythology, and not one that I created, or maybe I have inadvertently. But there’s a mythology around me and other people like me that people want to know who are you, where do you come from, because no one who is, who lives and presents outside the binary—who identifies and presents, not lives—identifies and presents outside of the binary are alike.” It is fascinating to travel with Cat, and hear that she frames her travels as part of a genderqueer mythology in which her agentive assertion of her gender queerness renders her intriguing but nevertheless a product of “arrogant perception” (Frye, 1983, cited in Lugones, 1987, p. 4). Thus, the necessity of her travels become eclipsed by the limits of the imagination of dominate ontological constructions that render her traveling as too fantastic, and nothing more than a unique myth.
When we think about queer youth lived experiences, queer youth often become locked into one singular experience. Adults, in particular, often fail to identify or travel with queer youth. Cat’s story challenges this narrow frame by insisting that she can simultaneously engage multiple experiences. Cat’s story invites us to think about the challenges that queer youth face not as singular events but as worlds existing in the youth’s multi-dimensional life. As Cat theorizes about her traveling between her experiences and identities, she also underscores a tension between how others construct queer youth lives in ways that often overlook the sacredness of queer youth “world”-traveling. If youth, like Cat, do not travel and are not afforded others to identify with their travels, they may give up on their creative coping tools and mythologies that help them travel. “So, sometimes I do find myself getting a little frustrated or trying to find myself trying to be comfortable in certain spaces that aren’t meant for me [...]. But it’s like, you know, just not having anything to work with, you sort of define things. You have to define things on your own and a lot of times you search for something that resonates with you and it never does because it doesn’t exist [...] It’s mostly cerebral, like the societal stuff is like you kind of know like this is the world that I live in and this is the way the world perceives, you know, well this is what the world thinks and says about gender, sexuality, and sexual orientation, all of that. So, you know, like okay, like I know why they don’t see it for me. I know why people are reacting this way but it’s more so finding a space for you; there is no space for you, so you have to create it.” Cat’s mythology demonstrates her ability to cope with social interactions in which the world and “evil people” arrogantly perceive her as something other than how she identifies. Although she can cope with the misalignment, she still finds it challenging to find comfortable space. Cat reconciles those challenging worlds as survival-productive because she is able to discern
them as tests. With surviving those tests, she reflects and learns about herself, and levels up towards returning to the self/home she’s originally from.

Based on Cat’s critical reflection, I offer an extension of Lugones’s world-traveling. Cat describes “challenging” as surviveable, (un)comfortable as (non)inclusive, and comforting as affirming. If queer youth of color were to be asked to describe the challenging, (un)comfortable and comforting worlds they travel to, what/where would they identify? According to Lugones (1987), world-traveling includes both conscious and unconscious movement as a means of survival. Queer youth advocates will do well to support queer youth of color by facilitating critical and thoughtful reflections on travel and worlds. I posit that Cat benefited from the construction of her mythology by reflecting on the internalizations of her travel, where she’s from (a comforting world), where she has traveled, and where she will travel (challenging and (un)comfortable worlds). Queer youth of color must be invited to reflect on their social location and on traveling to worlds they find challenging, (un)comfortable and comforting. By offering them invitations to explore their experiences of multi-dimensionality and the ways in which they reconcile and address suffering in their lives, they may recognize and illuminate their own agency and autonomy.
Like don’t limit yourself to, “oh, God, I want to get a job.” Why do you want to get a job? Why don’t you make a job? Why don’t you do what you want, and find a way for it to make money? Why don’t you? Or, live in a way that makes you just happy and call it a day.

I want my own TV network. I want to own a TV network. I want Black people to reach liberation. I want, to some degree, the destruction of capitalism and the structure that is America. Like, I want a lot of things and I have envisioned how.

I want us to just get back to the basics on a large scale, where we’re not overly dependent—like we have this sense of community, where everyone has a role [and] everyone feels included because everybody has a responsibility and held accountable.

I’m going to be honest, academia in an institutional sense has always felt like somewhat of a prison or an obligation that I never really wanted to pursue. It wasn’t like I wanted to go to college because I want to go to college. It’s what you do, right. Like you
know, this is the idea of the American dream. This is how you’re supposed to do it, like unless you’re in the circumstance that doesn’t allow you to do that, then you should be doing this. And if I knew then what I know now, I would have never went, probably. Cause I don’t need that necessarily to do my own research, to do my homework, to read, to get in certain things. I mean, it’s cool. It’s beneficial. In college and stuff, they teach you specific skills, but they also kind of condition you to believe certain things and it takes a while to get unconditioned. They put limits on what you’re able to do—that no matter what you want to do, you have to play by someone else’s rules; and I don’t like that.

They, the powers that be, the establishment. That’s the one thing that they don’t tell you, that, you know, you come in with all these cool ideas, youth of the future, but they don’t tell you that once you go into a job that there’s already a system that’s been set up for decades. You coming in there with all your little fresh cool ideas does not mean you’re about to topple that system. That system functions in a way. It requires a certain level. It requires a certain fuel and yeah, no. They are going to try to curtail that creativity. They’re going to try to put a cap on how much involvement you have. And they’re going to convince you that you have to do all this free work for them and kiss their ass in order to make it somewhere.

When, in general, it’s like, we, being the masses, who are not in power, have the power. And we need to be reminded of that.

**The read**

A.E.’s journey starts with him as a baby in a carriage seemingly birthing a pathway coiled around new awareness of places, identity and art, and eventually leading towards the future as represented with an empowered fist, equipped with an antenna. The fist is both illustrative of A.E.’s power and possessiveness of his own sacred journey. The fist holds on
firmly to his charted route—his birth and future linked together on the map as two ends of the same path, with the landmarks located about the path signifying his cultivated awareness.

A.E.’s life map illuminates a divinity of birth’s relationship to future. The relationship is reciprocal rather than fatalistic and linearity. As he reflected on his identity and journey, A.E. theorized about birth and future, and about nothing and creation, marking them as elemental in cultural productions of Black ontology. “I mean again their art, history, their music, their style of dress, and it’s, like, to say that I like to identify Black people and myself as that. We have a culture. It’s prevalent in just the ways in which we navigate life. So even if, I guess, our ability to take nothing and create something, which is just, that’s instinctively just Black in my mind. It’s innovative. It’s what happened with hip hop. It’s what happened with ballroom culture. It’s just, you have literally nothing and you create this whole entire world and this whole entire culture with rules, dynamics with rhythm and it’s like shit, like,” A.E. explained.

A.E. roots himself within a lineage of necessary Black futuristic innovation. His theoretic posit imbues what scholars and creatives have distinguished as afrofuturism. Yaszek (2006) defines afrofuturism as a method of speculative storytelling that explores African diasporic people’s navigation of life via cultural productions of future, technology and culture. A.E. also identifies himself as a storyteller, and most interested in those stories that “nobody talks about” within the dominant mainstream. His future in storytelling seems to be an epistemological inheritance. In confirming his role as storyteller, A.E. observed, “That’s essentially what it is and it’s funny because back in elementary school we had storytelling competitions and I used to always do them.” Since those early storytelling competitions in elementary school, A.E. eventually gravitated towards more technological
modes of sharing a story. “I had my first camera when I was 12 and I just always been filming this, that and the third. And all throughout college I filmed a whole bunch of crap and it’s just like I have all these pieces of history where they tell very different stories.”

Eventually, A.E. cultivated a collection of approaches for telling a story. At the time of the investigation, he had started a production company with three close friends he referred to as brothers. Their company specializes in high-quality audio and visual media, including, photography, graphic design, website design, videography, music production brand management, social media management, and event production. The mission, as he explained it, situates his company’s work as helping “the way the Black image is both perceived and received in the media.” Moreover, inspired by a history of Black futuristic innovation, A.E. recognized the potential of the absence of those stories nobody talks about as an opportunity to create and tell different stories across multimedia platforms.

The antenna griped by the black outlined fist situated prominently in the center of the map is representative of A.E’s future goal of creating more expansive media platforms to tell different stories about Black people. “And then this is my like, where I hope to end up with one—my own TV network, which is where the antennas are, and just everything that Black liberation represents.” The fist recalls the strength and resistance of the Black liberation movement, which A.E. draws upon to mark the production and media company as liberatory in contrast to the established status quo. A.E.’s life map is also a liberatory story in that it represents an afrofuturistic plan that is critical of the notion of the American dream. He challenges the audience to complicate the compulsory life path that sees individuals born, going to school, getting a job, and forfeiting creativity and self-determination.
A.E. stands to make a great impact on society. His story encourages deeper consideration of the necessity for queer youth of color to engage in regular future-planning that support them to dream and internalize their goals. Based on A.E.’s narrative, I offer these (5) generated reflections to guide queer youth advocates and queer youth to invest in planning for the future:

1. Describe your personal and professional plans, hopes, dreams and challenges for the future.
2. Identify a “nothing” or absence in which something can be created.
3. Identify your skills and passions, and explore ways to make those skills and passions stronger.
4. Identify folks who will help you reach your goals.
5. Dream and talk about your plan regularly.
I was very involved with school. Like, I was in a step team. I was on the swim team. Yeah, it was a high school, cause it had a pool. So, I mean, it wasn’t like, a big swim team, but, it was, it was something. It was cool, man. And then they, I was on the step team, for fourth grade and fifth grade. And then I stopped stepping. I think that’s where, everything started for me, because I like, just being picked on and being called faggot and gay, cause I wanted [to be on the] step team. I think that kind of got, to me, and I kind of let it, like, lower my confidence down. Cause, when I was on that step team, I, you couldn’t tell me nothing. I was hot shit.

You know what I mean? But it’s like people telling, like, like, calling me gay. “Oh, you’re gay cause you’re on the step team, with a bunch of girls” and blah blah blah. It’s like, I let all that get to me. It just didn’t, after that, I just became very, I just became very gullible, very, like I said. I didn’t believe things, like you could tell me something, I’m not gonna
believe it. Like if you told me I was ugly, I would believe it. If you told me I was dirty, I would believe it. If you told me, if you told me I was gay, I mean, I believed it. You know what I mean? Like, the, I hang with a bunch of girls. I don’t act [like] the rest of the guys, so, I must be gay, something. You know what I mean? So, I’m just, I think that’s where it starts, like fourth grade, fifth grade. That’s where my confidence started, keep going lower and lower, lower. Like my confidence as far as, like, being in front of an audience, and doing what I want to do. You know what I mean? When I stepped, just to hear that, the audience, because we would have, I would have solos all the time ‘cause I was always good. Me and, like me and some of the girls, would break out and just start doing whatever, and you could see the crowd, go AHHHHHHH, like, cause I’m the only boy.

Like, I like the energy you get out of it. You know, like dancing, I like the energy that, like you’re like performing—dancing.

I just like, like when, like when you do that one, you just got to do one thing. And you, AHHHHHHH, everybody just get loud. When it’s get louder, you already know you’re doing something right. And it’s just like, it just gives me more of that, umpf, to just go harder, you know, dancing wise, and dressing wise.

The read

Angel’s life map depicts his life in school as a rollercoaster, hitting highs and plummeting lows as he progressed through school. “Basically the map, the rollercoaster shows, how I, you know how the rollercoaster just, how I’m feeling is just up and down all the time. Like, it would just, I would feel myself going uphill, then I’d you know, then I’d just crash and come down. Then, I see myself coming back up. Then, I’d come down.”
Angel’s participation in school struggled as he tried to contend with negative experiences with peers. Campos (2005) explains that experiences of anti-queer harassment in school can significantly contribute to a decline in academic participation. While the education research highlights increased experiences of anti-queer harassment in middle school (Diaz & Kosciw, 2009), Angel experienced harassment from his peers in school much earlier. He makes note, “the bullying started” in 3rd/4th grade. On his life map, he marked his first fist fight (“with a Somalian girl”) during recess while in the 3rd/4th grade. He marked his second fist fight (“with a boy”) during this timeframe also. In describing his experiences of school violence, Angel also highlights the psychic and emotional toll it impressed upon him. He attributed feeling a loss of confidence to the harassment he endured. “The bullying lowered my self-confidence. Suicidal thoughts started pouring in. Felt no one cared. Invisible”. As a result of the harassment, Angel abandoned his talents while he was in school.

I mourn for the dancer or swimmer that Angel could have become had he not had to experience harassment at such an early time in his academic career. Fredricks and Eccles’ (2006) longitudinal research study on extracurricular activity indicates that students gain positive academic and psychological benefits from their participation in co-curricular activities. Angel’s story of school highlights important themes about queer youth in school. While reminding us about the potential talents we lose when queer youth endure violent harassment in school, he also underscores the value of social support. House, Umberson and Landis (1981) described social support as consisting of four types of behaviors, including “appraisal support” which comes in the form of positive reinforcement or affirmation. Further examinations of queer-support strategies will do well to take heed of Angel’s story and consider ways to resource “umph” or positive reinforcement.
Figure 4: Lyric’s Life Map

[T]here was a dramatic change in high school. I remember I went from here in this shy, well, kind of shy-in-finding-out-who-they-are person to high school. And throughout high school it was always [as] the attraction grew even stronger, the confusion set in even more. My biological mother was just hounding on me even more. The physical abuse got worse. [T]he verbal abuse kept going and didn’t stop. I always felt like I had to walk on egg shells cause my aesthetic or my demeanor was too feminine and too gay for her. So I was always a fag in her eyes, and she said it blatantly, always. She never really held back because to her she was doing it for the good of her deity. Her deity was going to take the wheel with me. Oh, yes. So, whatever fucking that means. It was interesting because that all kept compounding and compounding onto me as if this whole—the whole world literally sat on my shoulders.
Inevitably that was a turning point of my life. 16 was. I will never go back to 16. I was not at a good mental health state and that brings us to here.

So in the winter of my 16th going on 17th birthday, cause my birthday falls in the summer. So, I was turning 17. I was going to be turning 17. All of the weight became too much. The incessant abuse kept happening. The emotional turmoil that I felt certainly didn’t help. I believed that I was going to this fictitious place to burn forever just because she basically kept tell me that I never would amount to anything. She told me, “I would rather kill you than have a gay son.” None of this she apologizes for, still to this day. It’s fine to throw your child up against the wall, or to punch them or slap them. It’s fine because you know you’re doing it all for your deity. One day, something, some spiritual thing will, something will, come down and will somehow you will—the way that I put it and I’m not doing dramatic—beat the demons out of me, per se. All of that conspired to my incredible emotional turmoil of self-destruction. So, that was leading up to the moment. I went from school to the library to work on homework, ‘cause I just didn’t want to go home, or to that place where she was. So, it really wasn’t a thing anymore. It was, I was just kind of there doing my own thing, waiting for undergraduate years, still not knowing what the hell that meant. I remember that when I was going to the library I was going to the library for a purpose and it was to do homework; however, I had to cross over a bridge to get there.

It was calming going over it. A sense of calm came over me ‘cause I had accepted that I didn’t matter. I wasn’t substantial. My existence was just a joke and I might as well just start my damnation right now just because what’s the point? The pain and emotional torture that I put myself through—psychological torture I put myself through was intense and I never would even wish that upon my worst “enemy” because that’s worse than physical apparitions, or
physical, you know, in my opinion. So, because I had accepted my inevitable death I had come to a conclusion that it doesn’t matter anyway. She doesn’t love me and neither does this God. I’ve already fucked up many a times because I kept watching gay porn, so it wasn’t something that was anything.

Being at that bridge, still I don’t know to this day what, how I got off of the ledge. I just know that I did because when I woke up I was standing on the sidewalk. But I know that I was on the ledge and that the cars underneath were, well, a sea of serenity and waiting to envelop me. I thought that, well, I guess I’ll say that it was at that moment when I was standing on the sidewalk that I remembered something told me that that wasn’t what I was meant for—that wasn’t what was meant to happen—that I was meant for more, but I still didn’t understand it. I still didn’t understand it at all. It was confusing. But I was so peaceful and I was not angry.

The read

The focus of Lyric’s map starts in a clustered corner of the poster where there are black and white textboxes, thought-bubbles and a droopy frowning face. Lyric’s illustrated map invites the viewer to experience their internal dialogue and observations. Just above the despondent face balancing a bonded church symbol and primary school figure are the words, “hate”, “deception”, and “greed” wedged atop. Those words are also crammed into the corner next to the notes, “religious questions” and “why? Child”. Lyric marks those assessments of the tensions building up to the conflict with their mother. Continuing down the path, Lyric shows additional schooling milestones, 7th grade and 8th grade. Those middle school milestone markers are accentuated with Lyric’s focused attention on social interaction (“New social atmosphere”), and an increasingly greater awareness of their sexuality (“romantic”).
“same sex attraction”, “same sex attraction grow stronger”) and gender expression (“fashion-androgynous”).

Lyric’s mash of crowded text eventually leads to the bridge. The bridge could have symbolized the very real possibility of their death by suicide. Queer youth are at high risk of suicide and suicidal ideation (CDC.gov; Hetrick & Martin, 1987). However, the bridge symbolizes Lyric not dying, and their overcoming. Projecting out of the illustration of the bridge, Lyric depicts a memory in which their mother pushed them down a flight of stairs. This vision is punctuated with the word “trust” crossed out with bold red lines. Lyric abandons trust in their mother, and imagines the possibility of leaping from the bridge’s ledge. But Lyric does not jump. Lyric overcame and was carried over the bridge by an experience of spiritual epiphany. While on the other side of the bridge, Lyric’s unconsciousness gave way to a sense of peace, independence, and love. A burst of colors emerge in contrast to the ever so strict black and white texts once characterizing Lyric’s path. “That is significant because that, when you start seeing the color, that was when I started seeing the color.”

Figure 5: Lyric sees color
Although anti-queer violence and harassment are often described as an issue happening among peers, Lyric’s story highlights implications of belonging to an unsupportive family (Russell, 2002). There is some research (D’augelli, Grossman, & Starks, 2005; Ryan, Russell, Huebner & Diaz, 2010) that suggests queer youth become more vulnerable to victimization upon disclosure of their sexual identities. Lyric describes suffering physical abuse from their mother because of their gender identity and sexual identity conflicted with their mother’s religious convictions. However, research has only limitedly explored parenting of queer and transgender youth (Hom, 1994; Ngo & Kwon, 2015; Ryan, Russell, Huebner & Diaz, 2010).

As much as Lyric’s story details violent abuse and gender policing suffered by the hands of their mother, this account is also about Lyric’s spiritual journey towards transcendence, love and independence. Lyric’s story asks us to consider what support queer youth of color have accessible when they must cope with violence in the home; and subsequently, what is awaiting queer youth of color on the other side of the bridge. Lyric’s sense of spirituality became a source of care, while their mother’s imposition of anti-queer religious doctrine threatened to undermine Lyric’s physical, emotional and spiritual wellbeing. A discourse on the intersection of spirituality and queerness is just beginning to open up with thoughtful reflections on queer theology (Bardella, 2001), transcendence (Chávez, 2008), and integration (Beagan & Hattie, 2015). Bardella (2001) suggests that not until recently, and specifically with the HIV/AIDS crisis of the 1990s, did gay men look as prolifically for answers in the spirit realm. Yet, there is not much literature that explores the spiritual identities or spiritual lives of queer youth of color. Amador (2006) offers a discussion of an HIV organization’s approach towards building community amongst Latino
queer youth by inviting youth to reclaim culturally rooted religious symbols. Beyond this example, very little is known about queer youth spiritual practices or spiritual experiences similar to the spiritual epiphany Lyric had.

Advocates of queer youth of color are concerned with providing them with tools that will help them affirm their identities, even while coping with violence and discrimination. Queer youth of color have a right to live and see in color. Spirituality and spiritual consciousness may offer queer youth of color a useful, albeit overlooked, resource that can support their survival. Deeper examinations of this phenomenon is a must.
Gogo Yubari: What is the Machine?

What is the machine? That is the question.

I think education is important in my life because I just think it’s important. I think education is important in general, you know, even though formal education as I said is part of a machine. But I just feel like education is important for everyone because you should not walk around in life being ignorant or being unable to experience a lot of things because you
just either don’t want to or don’t care. I mean even taking an art class or taking a class in something, so to be able to learn something new is important. Like I said, I love learning so I like taking something I’ve never experienced and learning about it. It just makes you want to be like, want to learn more you know. Like, I’ve taken classes. I’ve thought about being a mathematician, you know. Like, my advisor asked me, cause I told him my goal was to go all the way up until like maybe calculus II or III, even though I don’t need that for my major. He was like, “why?” And I was like, “Well, I want to be really good at math.” You know, it’s more interesting to learn something new than to keep bashing something in your head that you pretty much understand already, because it’s not hard to understand anything in this world as long as you’re open minded. That’s like even when it comes to viewing multiple opinions. It’s like it’s not hard to learn something if you learn it with an open mind. You know, you take the information and you let it grow and you move on to something else.

I was in 10th grade. It was the beginning of 10th grade. Went by normally you know, the same way I went to school the last 10 or 11 years I was going. But then afterwards something just clicked. It was like okay, I’m learning the same things for three weeks. I don’t feel like three weeks is necessary for me to learn one thing cause I re-read the chapter in one night. And then we spend three weeks doing or relearning the same stuff over and over again just with different words and different numbers and stuff like that. And it’s just, it just became someone dancing. And then 11th grade, same thing except for I was still stuck in that mentality of that I figured out in 10th grade. Like, I show up for one day; I don’t need to show up every day this week because I’m going to come back and I’m going to pass the test. The people you’ve had in your classroom every day for the past two weeks, why are they getting F’s? I missed three or four days and I’m still perfectly fine and I’m still getting A’s on my
test. I’m doing everything that I have to do, like work is being turned in and stuff like that, but you know …

Yeah, that’s the biggest thing. I felt like I was not being challenged at all at school. School was not challenging for me and I don’t feel like the teachers were trying to make it challenging which, you know, that says a lot about when I was in high school. Especially now, that they have Common Core. Like, if I was to go to high school right now with Common Core I feel it would be like five times worse than what it was because teachers are more so focused on trying to get everybody to pass and appease students.

Then you know, that continued on all the way until my senior year and then like mid senior year it was just like, yeah I can’t do this. So, then I ended up leaving high school early to go to a college course that would help me finish the rest of my high school credits. But, I would be taking college classes, and the classes, I would say, I enjoyed that so much better. The classes were three months as opposed to ten months. [It], like put me a step ahead of everybody else—like I had college credits under my belt like before people even graduated high school. [Like], people took AP courses, but once again those stretched out 10 months as well. [And] I already knew what college was like and it just pushed me farther forward, and that challenged me. I enjoyed that.

School district cuts. They were cutting so much stuff and that was one of the things that got cut. And the thing is it was such a great program because there were other kids. Like, some kids, like they just couldn’t do high school. They may have been in a point that they just, you know [they] couldn’t dedicate six hours to school, where [as] they would be in this program from 9:00a to 12:00p. They’d be in a program from 12:00p to 4:00p. And, especially young mothers. [High] school is not for everybody. It’s just like college isn’t for
everybody. [In] order to learn, people have to figure out what works for them and high school just didn’t work for me. The structure was just too, it was too simple, you know. It’s like everybody was like a rat in the maze and we were just like, okay well while you guys are looking for cheese, I’m going to look for the exit because I’m ready to go, you know. You guys keep circling the maze. That’s fun, you know, you guys get better at navigating than me. I’ve figured it out and now I’m just trying to move on to bigger mazes and bigger things.

The read

Current literature exploring the schooling experiences of queer youth indicate that many schools perpetuate anti-queer environments (Diaz & Kosciw, 2009) and silence on queer issues and identities (Mayo, 2009). As a result, queer youth are often at risk for absenteeism and drop-out (Diaz & Kosciw, 2009; Grov et al., 2006; Hacker-Peer, 2010; Holmes & Cahill, 2003). But some queer youth may resist attending school because they question the structure of formal schooling. Gogo Yubari offers an alternative reason for why some queer youth may not continue to attend school.

His narrative begins with a reflection on the purpose of formal education. He explained, “My textbook definition of what the purpose of formal education is to put a person into a niche and make them good at that one thing so that way they can contribute to the bigger picture, or I wouldn’t even really say bigger picture, it’s so that they can keep, they can be part of a, they can keep a part of a well working machine going, you know, they’re just more so formed to be part of a machine.” Gogo Yubari is critical of the ulterior motives of formal school systems, as he believes formal education sorts students into niches, and teaches them to submit and perpetuate the status quo. Gogo Yubari ponders why one would attend formal school when the system ultimately undermines youth and student autonomy.
Gogo Yubari’s life map marks only two prominent schooling experiences in his life, pre-K and college, which indicates the beginning and end of his formal schooling experience. There are as many “detours” as there are mentions of school. Gogo Yubari was particularly interested in his learning outside of the constraints of formal education. His life map features landmarks that symbolize identity and awareness. For example, Gogo Yubari links his queerness (“welcome homo”) with “intelligence” and “opportunity”. By coming into a greater awareness of his identity, Gogo Yubari affirmed his commitment to be self-determined.

Gogo Yubari elaborated this notion of knowing what was best for his own education, "[T]he reason why I also did a rainbow on the ladder as well is because you know, 9th grade is when I figured out that I was queer and everything in high school was pretty much straightforward and I could, at the top of the ladder when we get to purple, I considered that 10th grade when I decided that learning was, I didn’t learn the same way everybody else did and I didn’t like the same school. I didn’t really enjoy school like that. I mean I liked school but it was boring and that’s kind of what that represents, so at the top of the ladder you kind of see it explode into something else and you don’t really know what it is cause I didn’t really know what it was either, I just didn’t enjoy school. I was smart, I was still learning but the whole process of going to school just was not for me. I drew some faces here as well. This pretty much signifies my boredom and my feelings of school. I enjoyed showing up every day, seeing my friends, being social, but then it was just so boring. It was annoying; it was just like why am I here. I feel like I’m wasting my time.”

Gogo Yubari complicates the notion that queer youth passively accept the current condition of school. Some queer youth avoid school because they find the structure boring
and out of sync with their academic and personal needs. Gogo Yubari found formal schooling to be boring and unchallenging, and he felt weighed down by the tedious learning process. Instead, he opted to leave the traditional classroom, and enroll in a college preparatory program geared towards teen mothers.

"Then you know, that continued on all the way until my senior year and then like mid senior year it was just like yeah I can’t do this and I was like, so, then I ended up leaving high school early to go to a college course that would help me finish the rest of my high school credits, but I would be taking college classes, and the classes I would say I enjoyed that so much better. The classes were three months as opposed to ten months and I got, not only did it like put me a step ahead of everybody else, like I had college credits under my belt like before people even graduated high school, cause like people took AP courses but once again those stretched out 10 months as well. So there’s just, and I already knew what college was like and it just pushed me farther forward and that challenged me, I enjoyed that."

As illustrated in Gogo Yubari’s narrative, the disproportionate rate of queer youth drop out, absenteeism may also indicate their disengagement with a learning process they feel is limited and outdated. Gogo Yubari was critical of the universal approach to learning, and was savvy enough and determined to take a more active role in his education. His experience gives reason to further explore additional alternative pathways some queer youth may take to satisfy their educational needs.
Ronnie: Ain’t nobody going to walk over me now and nobody is going to put a hand on me

I’m very driven, you know. Graduation is always something to look forward to. I really, I’m very driven. I have some setbacks I guess. I get distracted after a while because school can be a little overwhelming and you know, stuck at home and stuff like that. But I would say that very driven, very goal oriented and hardworking student. Like I always, because of my major and what I did in school, always found joy in doing. Even though I wasn’t a fan of group projects, but I made it work so … Yeah, driven, hardworking, focused student.

It’s so important, like I feel I wouldn’t be half the person I am now without education. I have been tested all those four years. I have you know, I’ve written a 20 page paper. Before that, I never thought I would do [that] in my life. I have been challenged, tested, pushed you know. I’ve been the lowest of low sometimes and it’s just, it really has helped me discover
who I am, and molded into this person who is not only isn’t well rounded, but to actually who I am, fun and everything else. But with the education portion, it’s just like, okay you know I know what I’m talking about. I know this because of this, and this is where I came from. Also too, like to set an example for people I guess. I know a couple people who didn’t graduate and want to go to school, and people who just never had a chance to or they wondered what it’s like, and you know just giving that insight and not be the person that it’s like school is school, shoulder to shoulder. It’s just, okay, well, this is what I went through. This is what I’m taking. This is how I surpassed this course. This is what I did that I never thought I would do. And like I said, I’m presenting at another conference in January. And it’s just like, what is that? I just know, but since I have presented in class, I have presented in front of other students. I have voiced my opinion and like with new professors. And what you thought and things like that and it’s just like you know, I’m going to school and it’s taught me things and utilize for the future. I have some things. I don’t know where I would be if I didn’t go to school. I don’t know.

I would say that it’s okay to kind of retreat and get yourself together but just don’t do it too long when you, I guess it sounds really bad, I guess I could say from my standpoint on, I agree that I really set back a lot. I could say you know, it’s okay to cry. It’s okay to grieve. It’s okay to set back for a little bit, but just don’t lose yourself entirely because, like I said, I was slipping away and I was losing myself and like that will do it. Like, I love to eat, you know, I love to be around people and socialize and things like that. I retreated from a lot of stuff that I love and that makes me who I am and you know. It’s okay for a while, but just don’t lose yourself. But what I really tapped into was this is not what they would want. This is not what you do. And this is not who you are, and these are unhealthy habits that you are
engaging in. Get yourself together. Do what you got to do. This is what they would want and you know, it’s okay to cry or set back for a second. Step back for a little bit and get yourself together, but just don’t stop and don’t lose yourself, because when you lose yourself, Lord knows what kind of challenges and just setbacks and just can happen.

I think people are put in certain situations to—I see it as a challenge if you can overcome it or not. A lot of people are pushed for certain reasons and I was put in certain situations to better myself and I feel like now the person who I am I will always [be]. I’m very smart minded, you know. I’ve been used to many situations at a young age and it’s really help build me who I am today. And, you know, just don’t look at it as oh my God I’m being bullied, blah, blah, blah. And it’s like, yes it’s that, but it’s like you’re being put in a situation because it’s going to come into play where you’re, you know I was this way before and now you know what? Ain’t nobody going to walk over me now and nobody is going to put a hand on me! Nobody is going to tell me this or whatever, and you’re standing up for yourself. I stand up for myself all the time now. I know that if I didn’t go, what I went through but what I went through. I’m very vocal; I’m not going to listen. I’m going to let you know. Instead of just sitting back and letting it happen. Those are my parting words.

The read

As illustrated with his map, Ronnie describes himself as driven and hardworking. His life map depicts a busy flow of movement between school to school and a number of co-curricular activities. Ronnie seems to have done it all. Each school milestones contain a list of the roles and activities he took on throughout his schooling. But what can be discerned from his narrative is that Ronnie is also a thoughtful and self-reflective student. When we encourage queer youth of color to share their stories, we allow them to offer insight and
wisdom. Ronnie’s stories illuminates purpose, motivation and perseverance. His story offers implications for necessary conversations about queer youth healing and self-care. In light of his success in school and strong academic ambitions, Ronnie admits to have had experienced “the lowest of lows” while in school. His stress was not necessarily a result of school, but was exacerbated from having to balance his life as a queer Black man with the demands of school.

While Ronnie and I shared a meal while discussing his formal academic experiences, he confided in me the details of a particular time in college when he felt overwhelmed and retreated into himself. He told me, “At that time I had a part time job, you know overloading on courses and I was going through I guess it was a breakup at that time. And then we used to hang out and stuff like that, and then like the next day he committed suicide. So you know, I really kind of like retreated from everything. I wasn’t really connecting with people. I wasn’t eating as much, stayed in my room, locked up in my room. I didn’t go to class and so I told my professor and she was a real witch. She was like in a similar type of class and she’s like I’m not taking this lightly and you know if someone close to you passed away or whatever, committed suicide just so abruptly in society it’s just like you wouldn’t either. So that happened the weekend I went to go to classes, and then my grandmother was in the hospital, then my grandmother passed away and that hit even harder because as soon as I got over something, something else happened, this was all in April. Since April/May is the crunch time.”

Current research is quite clear about the issues impacting queer youth. There is particular emphasis on death and dying, as queer communities are disproportionately impacted by HIV/AIDS, suicide and violence. So, how do advocates of queer youth support
them to cope with these events while maintaining balance in other parts of their lives? Even the most ambitious and successful student can be stopped in their tracks when tragedy arises. Educators will do well to teach with empathy and understanding. But for students coping with loss, Ronnie advises that it is okay to cry and “set back for a second.” Ronnie advocates for queer youth to have empathy for themselves when dealing with their own suffering. For Ronnie, giving himself time to feel and heal is also illustrative of him standing up for himself. Queer youth of color must know that they do not need to uphold the long-suffering, martyr image that adult often construct for them.
Sam: Finding Yourself While Breaking Stereotypes

Figure 8: Sam’s Life Map

[T]here’s brown blocks there’s symbolizing my school. So, it’s like elementary, middle, high school and college, currently. So, back track you follow my little footsteps even more and boom you get to like this little square. It’s like a rainbow path and that’s what I’m going to call middle school. Middle school, the reason why it has like a rainbow path in front of it, because that was a part of LGBT back then and there’s like little symbols, like symbols in it. There’s hearts. There’s a broken heart. There’s a happy face and there’s question marks. Heart, because I met—me and my brother still went to the same school, so I was like really happy. I made two new best friends and we were really cool. Broken Heart is because that’s where I was like bullied a lot, so from, like I said, earlier like 3rd to like mid 8th grade, freshman year I was bullied. And this was like the main facility because I been at this school for like six or seven years. So, broken heart because it wasn’t really the best type of times, but happy face because I remember a lot of the cool teachers that I liked there, and some of
the good memories I made. And question marks because I didn’t know why people bullied me, or like why people were really mean to me. So I was always questioning myself and there’s like a black scorch mark in the corner. And that kind of shows like some of my dark moods I had during those school, not to say I was depressed. I had like depressed moments but I wasn’t like the happiest person, like I was in elementary school. Where, middle school, you have to mature. You get, like, people grow up to get much more meaner or like nicer, and like everyone’s growing up around you. So my darkness, my dark little slash whatever, shows like I was like changing. And it was like kind of a iffy okay mode. Yeah, so you go follow more like marks and you get to high school. And this one has like the Bi Pride one flag I made. I thought it would be cool because I am bisexual.

High school has a lot more symbols than middle school, because I enjoyed my high school much much more than middle school. There’s three stick figures, two blonde ones and a black haired one. That shows three of my best friends, who are like, I’m still best friends with today. My friends Sam, Rachel and Amber. They’re the closest ones. There’s also a stick figure of me. It’s the one with the red hair and black hair. Don’t love it; it’s crappy, but that was me. And I mentioned before when I was like going into high school, I always thought that people had to go into cliques, so I thought I’d do like the gothic thing, just because I always wanted to know what it was like. At the end of freshman year it didn’t really work out, so it’s like screw it, that’s a lot of work. So I just dyed out my hair black and did my normal stuff, I guess. There’s like symbols. There’s like two blue fishes and a snake symbolizing aquatic ecology, which is my favorite thing about high school. There’s hearts in [it]. I loved it and loved some of the people I met. There’s like a orange book with a pen next to it symbolizing that I started writing poetry, about that time. Our freshman year I still
developed it. I touched in it in like middle school but freshman year I really developed it, and I’m still writing today. Smiley faces because I enjoyed high school a lot. There’s a broken heart because that’s where I had like my first girl crush and it didn’t really work out, so that’s a broken heart. In a corner above the snake there’s like a little angry sign because sophomore, junior, senior—no, sophomore and junior year was like really frustrating for me. Sophomore year because a lot of the seniors I knew graduated so I felt like alone. But then I had to realize that everyone graduated, so it’s okay. And junior year was everything kicked up, so there’s like a lot of exams. You got to take like AP courses. People are pressuring you, like you got to know what you’re going [to] do [in] college. So the college pressure came there, so it’s like a pressueable time, junior year. But senior year it kind of like relaxed a bit because I did apply to colleges. I did do some scholarships, but I didn’t have as many classes, so it kind of like mellowed out a bit.

So it was a good thing. Another black mark is in the corner of it because freshman year when I tried to dye my hair thing, I realized that I was trying to fit into like cliques. So you could say I was still trying to figure myself out, like okay; who am I as person? What do I want to do? How do I want to dress? Do I want to fit in with people? Do I want to fit into certain cliques? Do I want to be stereotypical? Like what exactly do I want to do with myself? And it took until like end of junior year senior year that I finally like figured myself out. Like what exactly I want to do, as in, I don’t want to like. I don’t want to like force myself to change to fit other people’s, like views of me. I don’t want to be like the lazy type, and just let everything go by. I don’t want to wait until the last minute to do stuff. I want to try to do college now. I want to try. I want to make friends that I know who are going to be there for me and I’ll be there for them. I’d be like a 100% relationship altogether, not just
half ass it. So it was kind of, I was kind of, like I said, finding myself. And so I didn’t know exactly who I wanted to be. And I’m kind of figuring it out still; so it’s developing.

I’m like a triple, quadruple minority technically. So, it’s kind of like really like being on campus here in Midtown, it’s like diverse, but once again I come from an inner city. I went to an inner city preschool, middle school, high school, so I was constantly surrounded by like fellow African Americans, you could say. So like, I knew I was a minority, but it’s like when you’re surrounded by everyone that’s like the same color as you, it’s like you don’t really know like, and it doesn’t really bother you. And I’m not going to say it bothered me here, it’s just that when I get here, it’s like, not that I feel alone, it’s just like you don’t really see a lot of African Americans. And the ones you do see, they’re in like sororities or fraternities, and they stick to like cliques.

So, I’m kind of on my own really. So, it’s like kind of weird but not really, because once again I’m the type of person who will like overly think something, so it’s kind of odd. And then I’m African American and then a girl and then part LBGT, and I’m weird, so it’s like all four things are working against me. But I have to live through it, you know, so it’s really not that bad. Like, it could be worse. For scholarships, that’s a positive, because minorities. For negative, it’s like first of all I’m a girl; girls automatically are not, not looked down upon but it’s like it’s always got that gender issue. Oh guys are here. Girls are here. Girls are here. Guys are here, like higher above. There’s like the whole equality thing and the feminism and the, like, woman’s rights. And it’s like, all this stuff goes into being a girl and then you have to look at the biological factors, and then, like you got the stereotypes that come with it, and then like the gender expectations for it. And then on top of that you got like, like African American. Automatically, oh, African Americans are so lazy or ratchet or
loud. I am loud. Or like uncivilized or unpleasant or like really annoying and juvenile and all of that, and it makes into this one. It’s like a whole blender, of just like, I’m not none of these things. And it’s like really weird, because like there’s stereotypes. Like, women of color, like oh yeah, women of color wear a weave, and they like to twerk and they like to do all this. They like to party; they’re always going to be like single mothers; they always want to get around a lot; they always like having multiple sexual partners. I’m just like, no we don’t. Stop, like people gendertize one like a population always by like a couple people they see. And I always think like you can’t really do that unless you meet like every single person of that nationality, to get like a clue of it. You’re getting like ideas from a 10 out of like a million, and that’s not really fair. So, like sometimes it works for me like I’m minority double standards. So, it’s like, oh yeah I can get scholarships. And yeah you might give me like, well mostly scholarships. Scholarships are really helpful for this school.

It’s like hearts, because I love the college like my teachers back home and friends back home. And my mom was like, oh you’re going to be like terrified of it. And it’s going to be kind of scary. It’s really going to be like serious. It’s going to like beat you up. And might be hard to swallow, and all these presumptions about college. And I get here, and I’m like, no, it’s not like that. Like its hard, but it’s like once you do the work, you pay attention, you have like this freedom, and its kind stressful, depending on the work you get. But it’s really fun, and I love it. And I might not be like involved in everything on campus and I can’t do a lot of things. But the things I do do, and the people I hang out with, and the people I see, the people I meet, and the people I talk to, it’s really fun. And I love it. And I always go home, and when people at home mention college, I always say I love it. And I love my roommates. I love what I do, like, I don’t have a specific major yet, but I love this college,
even though it’s expensive and all that. But I love like being here, because it’s my first college, so it’s like yea.

And then there’s like happy faces because I have like good memories. So far nothing to bad has happened. It’s only the first semester so I can’t like, put it all up there. So maybe sophomore, junior, senior year, whatever comes. But right now, I’m like really happy I’m here. Then there’s a lot of question marks, because college is like, figure out what you want to do. And what your major is going to be And career, your plans for the future, and all this other stuff. And I have no idea what I want to do yet. I’m still trying to figure out everything, just like I did back at high school and middle school. I’m trying to find myself, more not as a person, but as like academic, economically wise. It’s kind of hard, because I don’t know exactly what I want to do, and no particular thing I really like to study in. Like, I like, anime, but I don’t want [to] like draw anime. I like English, but I don’t want to major in it. I like people, so I’m thinking about psychology, so I don’t know exactly what I want to do. So there’s like a lot of question marks. But I have like a year and a half to figure it out. So I got some time before I start switching majors back and forth. And then there’s like after the college plot. There’s like more dots but it stops half way, because I haven’t graduated college yet. And it’s like it shows I’m still going places. And then all the way at the end there’s like a little red sign that says, “Under Construction”, because that like shows that I don’t know what path it takes. I don’t even know where I’m going yet. So there’s like a lot of question marks—under construction sign because I’m still trying to figure out where I’m going to go.

The read

Sam illustrated her life map depicting a maze marked with supportive friendships, romantic crushes, and opportunities to find herself. She found school to be an exciting and
enjoyable experience despite a long period of bullying. With the support of her teachers, friends, and family, Sam tells a story about school that finds her in a state of discovery and awareness. Despite receiving negative messages from peers and society about her identities and body, Sam resolved to stay committed to figuring herself out and developing an authentic sense of self. In keeping to this commitment, she relied on the supportive friend network she developed in high school and college.

Sam’s story is remarkable because of her consciousness of the simultaneity of her identities, and an understanding of how her identities are perceived by others in society. “I’m like a triple, quadruple minority technically. So, it’s kind of like really like being on campus here in Midtown, it’s like diverse, but once again I come from an inner city”. She adds, “And then I’m African American and then a girl and then part LBGT, and I’m weird, so it’s like all four things are working against me.” Sam illuminates four distinct dimensions of her identity: her race, gender, sexuality and class identity (as suggested by her inner city origins). Although Sam successfully navigated to college, she reflects deeply on feeling underestimated and stereotyped as she progresses through her academic life. According to Black Feminist Thought, the class disparity, racial stereotyping, gender discrimination and bisexual marginalization that Sam experienced as she navigated school is part of an overarching structure of domination, Collins (1990) reminds us to conceptualize oppression as interlocking, rather than as additive. Each system needs the others in order to function (p. 222). Sam’s narrative presents an inspiring example of queer youth consciousness. Queer youth demonstrate this keen sense of awareness by acknowledging their sexual orientations at early ages—some as young as ten years old (D’Augelli, Hershberger & Pilkington, 1998).
But as evidence in Sam’s story, some queer youth are capable of an even broader sense of critical awareness.
Niqko: You Have To Be Ready For It

Start when they’re ready, you know. Don’t, if like, a feeling can change, you know. So, I wouldn’t want someone to feel like, oh I feel like I’m a trans man; I’m going to do this. Don’t do it until you know you’re 100% sure that you want to do it because once you start there’s no turning back from it. So you have to really know. You have to really want it to really go through with this. So my main thing is like if you’re 100% sure that you want to go this route and this is who you want to be, and you’re willing to deal with the funny looks, not even funny looks, but you know, there’s a whole heap of things that’s going to come with your transition. So you just have to be ready for it. You can’t care about what everybody else says. So you have to be ready for it.

I stopped caring when my girl—like really I knew she had my back 100%. Then, that’s what really made me stop caring. When my family had my back, then that’s when I stopped caring. ‘Cause that’s who mainly people care about is like their family and the people around them—how they look at them. So, once I got the support from them I was cool. I was good.
Yeah, that’s all you really need, you know. Job-wise, I have managers who are 100% supportive of me. Like I haven’t had a lot of my stuff switched, like on my ID it says female, so when I went in to do my interview, on my applications I always put do not wish to provide, male or female. So, when I came he automatically thought I was male until he seen my ID he saw the F and he was like on here you’re a male, you look it; but on your ID it says female, would you like for me to consider you still as male? So once he said that, to me I knew I was safe with him, you know. It was okay to be honest with him. And that’s what a lot of people really need now is just open-minded friends, family, employers, things like that. So I can’t really say like I’ve really had a lot of bad experiences with it because I haven’t really had that bad of experience with transitioning yet. So it’s if someone is going to do it they just have to be ready. So like even though I haven’t had that bad experience, I’m always ready for it because I know what’s going to come from it. I have family members, I have FTM family members, you know, I have a very close cousin who is FTM, I mean MTF, so like I see what she deals with so it makes me, you know, I’m ready for it.

You’re going to have a couple ignorant people doing things like that so that’s why I just basically said look if you’re willing to transition you just have to be ready for the ignorance that’s going to happen.

Personally, I’m working my butt off to try to get some good insurance mean cause being FTM and still dealing with certain physical aspects of myself is hard. So I’m really trying to get some good insurance to have some, you know. I’m really trying to get my top surgery and whatnot, so that’s what I’m really stressing on right now, is trying to get some insurance that either one can help cover it or just even help with it a little bit. But professionally I can’t really, well I don’t know, honestly right now I don’t know cause right
now I’m just like really just going with the flow. I’m like, I had goals or whatever but right now I’m just trying to focus on the now and just trying to live and just get by right now. So when I feel like I’m ready to start pursuing those goals again maybe I will, but right now I’m just living in the now. Yeah.

The read

Niqko offers queer and trans youth advice about the lived experience of transitioning. His story is both a cautionary tale, and a vision of hope for anyone considering transitioning, or anyone supporting someone considering a transition. Drawing insight from his own transitioning experience, Niqko seeks to encourage other youth to consider initiating their transition when they know they are ready for what he describes as a “heap of things.” In doing so, Niqko describes transitioning as a dynamic and demanding commitment that requires a great deal of responsibility. Rather than reducing the experience to simply a physical transition, his advice focuses on economic, social and even bureaucratic implications. For example, Niqko was particularly concerned with the financial burden associated with transitioning. “I pay out of pocket for my testosterone. My, well my, Medicaid, it only covers like doctor visits, but other than that I pay for my own testosterone and stuff.” Niqko also cautioned the audience to consider the social challenges that transgender youth must expect to address. He suggests that queer and trans youth should anticipate the possibility of confronting social barriers and discrimination. Said barriers may come in a variety of forms, including “funny looks”, being mis-gendered at work, and difficulty securing a comprehensive health insurance plan that will cover gender-affirming surgeries.
Niqko’s wisdom is well aligned with the available and growing body of research (Brockenbrough & Boatwright, 2013; Singh & McKleroy, 2011; Singh, 2013) exploring the resiliency of trans youth of color. Singh (2012) defines resilience as the ability to “bounce back” from challenging experiences (p. 690). Additional examples of trans youth resilience includes maintaining strong kinship networks (Brockenbrough & Boatwright, 2013). According to Singh’s research (2013), strong relationships with friends and family help transgender youth of color affirm other identities like, gender and race. Moreover, access to healthcare and financial resources are also important demonstrations of transgender youth of color’s strategies for resilience (Singh & McKleroy, 2011).

Maintaining balance in life, while transitioning in a society that routinely marginalizes trans autonomy and agency is deeply challenging. Niqko stands out because he has been able to transition while balancing pressure and commitments to work, home and school. Niqko describes being able to survive the challenges in his life by preparing himself to think about his transness in more multidimensional terms. In addition to exhibiting extraordinary agency, Niqko utilizes his relationships to help him navigate the ups and downs of life as a mixed-race trans man. He identifies his girl (romantic partner), his family and other transgender folks as his main sources of love and support. Niqko’s positive adaptation for survival is illustrative of queer and trans youth of color savvy and resilience.
Vinny: Free as a Bird

The freedom, yeah I’m out of the cage, and now it’s this big blue bird.

I think I believe the first year when I moved to U.S. I was 17. I was very struggled. First, I’m missing home. I want to go home, and then but take a while, like time. I’ve taken some class and I do everything by myself and realized after, this country has some beautiful things that you ever, some people in China will never see that, like, different culture. The people are so unique and so unique because they have very unique and very precious; and I want to be a person like that. That’s I feel like that way I feel. I want to be better, like American.

Chinese is very traditional. So, Chinese, I think I still have some Chinese identity, like very humble, very peaceful person, and working very hard. I don’t think all Americans are working very hard. But, I still like Chinese working very hard. And then, Chinese being,
like, always follow the law and don’t break down something. But, I think I don’t have the most Chinese people identities. Right now, it’s new.

Being a Chinese gay is prohibited, like in China. People don’t talk about gay at all, and I just be ashamed to be a Chinese gay. You know, because as my nationality is still Chinese, people in China talking about gay or close the mouth, you feel disgusting. But, also being an American Chinese gay, I don’t think most American Chinese family they will be open minded to this topic too. And in very tradition, it’s still very limited in this group. Yeah.

In my family in China, gay is a topic, a thing they prohibit. Nobody won’t talk about this. And I think in western culture, in USA, I think it’s open minded. No one care about you being a gay. And I have to say it’s open war. It’s not like a war of like people talking about that would be turned away, or you know, it’s open mind. I feel still like it’s the best: different be—eastern culture and the western culture is open mind and closed mind.

The read

During the second interview, Vinny and I spoke at great length about him balancing his Chinese national identity with the American identity he has cultivated since moving to Midtown five year prior. Vinny flashed me a gleeful smile before describing to me that he was “made in China; produced in USA.”

Chinese Americans are one of the largest Asian American subgroups (Qin, Way, Rana, 2008). Vinny is among a great generation of Chinese immigrants enrolling in U.S. schools in increasingly large numbers. When I sat down and spoke with Vinny about his life and experiences in school, he came across as confident, playful, and intellectual. He still carried with him an accent, but it did not appear to limit his ability to participate and engage in school or in the local community. Yet, over the course of the three interviews conducted,
Vinny revealed some anxiety about fitting in and reconciling his Chinese American identity. Vinny does stand out among his peers. He is a gay Chinese American immigrant. An approximate 2% of documented immigrants identify as LGBT. 35% of documented immigrants identify as Asian or Pacific islanders (Gates, 2013). Although immigrant students are becoming increasingly more politicized and visible, queer immigrant students are often unnoticed or ignored in the classroom (Nelson, 2010).

Among the stories marginalized within research and mainstream gay discourse are stories about queer immigrants. For Vinny, living in the U.S. afforded him freedom to be himself—that is, as a gay, Chinese American male. From Vinny’s point of view, identifying in such a way was “prohibited” in China. Thus, prior to his move to the U.S, Vinny described himself as having lived in a cage. Now living in the U.S, he avowed, “I’m a person like out of the cage, like a blue bird.”

![Figure 11: Vinny's queer USA](image)

Vinny shared with me that he struggled with the pressure and expectations of what his move symbolized. “Like the emptiness of the future. My success, like you know, like, I have good family who has been there but still afraid. Like just something I want it, but I’m afraid not coming to me. But now I enjoy working hard for that, waiting for the coming you know. The fear is, people living in fear.” So as not to become entrapped by his fear, Vinny had to
reframe the pressure and draw upon it as motivation. “The fear makes me want to do better,” He resolved.

In addition to the fear of the unknown future, Vinny endured racial discrimination and stereotyping from peers and teachers. He often felt out of place while at his predominately white high school. “Because my high school is very mostly is white, and like I think 90% white and maybe 8% Black, the rest are like all races. So I’m treated as an alien. I feel like that way, the way they look at me—alien.” Vinny described feeling treated and gazed upon as an outsider or alien. This sentiment also extended to some of his teachers. Vinny believed his high school physics teacher had it out for him. He explained to me, “And also in high school in the USA, I consider my physics teacher a racist. He’s a real like, I don’t know. He just asks me weird questions. Like, oh can you say? Do you know what I mean? Like, ask you some random question; I know what that means. I don’t need you asking me, and then he always ask me like oh can you say it again. I don’t understand what you’re talking about. You know I have an accent and he’s picking on me. One time I wear a red jacket and he’s like oh are you ready for Christmas or Chinese New Year, and it was only November. Why you say that?”

There is need for deeper examinations of stories from queer immigrant youth. Their stories call us to (re)consider the American project as a symbol of hope and opportunity. Not only did Vinny immigrate to the U.S. to pursue his academic and professional aspirations, but he also moved so that he could pursue a more authentic sense of self. Queer immigrant youth stories, like Vinny’s, reveal important reflections on queer youth autonomy and the power of purpose.
I would say I’m a more calm, relaxed, easily distracted student. But I use a lot of tools that will help me to stay focused on one thing. So like I use my Google calendar and everything that organizes my day. So, I’m an organized, relaxed student. It’s important for me because I’m usually doing a lot of different activities when I’m in school and I get highly involved so I need to have some sense of, like, routine; when it comes down to it, so I’m relaxed, as I keep saying. But like at the same time I need to know what I need to do in this set moment in time in order to accomplish it.

Well, I’m just saying, like, if my grandma, mom, like, went to college, then why shouldn’t I? They went to school when it was ten times harder to go to school. So I feel like, also if I wanted to contribute to society, like in my own opinion, if I wanted to contribute to
society as a minority, I would have to go to college. So that was my big push to do it. So that’s why it’s important to me I guess.

I know I’ve completed goals in my life but the big goals were just completing college, completing dental school, starting a career, starting a family. Like I don’t really, I’m bad at making those short term like one month goals or one year goals or something like that. So …

Graduating college—and that’s just because my sister dropped out of college and my mom was really just banking on me to finish—and there’s pressure but I followed through. I needed it to get to my next stage in life. My research projects, they’ve both gotten me far, or got my foot in the door to more opportunities. And like, I believe my interviews at [Top Medical School] for dental school and [at] [Ivy League University] are only because I had the research background. So they’ve helped a lot. I guess, well this isn’t really academic, well yeah because you know [student tour guide ambassador], well that’s not, would you consider that an academic, like … Well I would say becoming a [student tour guide ambassador] really helped because I was tied with the Admissions office and that’s how I met and had lunch with President Obama. So that’s the connection. So that’s something I’m proud of.

And the friendships I made and the activities I’ve done, like being an RA shaped me, in a way it actually did really. Having the different jobs that I’ve had along the years. Just interacting with people and understanding their frame of mind has shaped my mind and the way that I want to be perceived or whatever.

Okay, so dentistry, just, that was the only thing I ever found passionate. Like, well, okay, so I’m passionate about dentistry because of public health. A lot of people don’t value their oral care and I’m going to change that learning set. In order to change it you really can’t
talk to adults you have to talk to kids. Well, you talk to their parents to change their kids. So that’s the best way to do it. So becoming a pediatric dentist just made sense to me to work with them and see them grow throughout like the 10 or 15 years until they’re like 18 and have them really appreciate their oral care. Then, research just because the field, every field changes with time and if you want to keep up to date, and so understanding. What’s new out there—whether it was like a new form of like a filling or something like that—like understanding the research behind it is something I’d like to continue to do. I think that’s my only, oh and then working in—I know that realistically dentists can’t have their only practice be in a low income area because we’ll never make money, so I would understand that I would need a private practice somewhere. But, then I still want to give back to the community in some way so maybe working at a hospital or working in a clinic that is in a low income area, not for free but like for a significant lower pay or whatever would be right for me a least. I don’t know that’s far down the road so I’ll think about that later on. But I’ll continue to help those that can’t help themselves.

The read

This is the life map of a future dentist. Archie’s life map shows a winding path through higher education and into a lucrative career. On both sides of this path are icons of experiences and opportunities that Archie identified as having helped him meet his goal of becoming a dentist. As it appears on his life map, Archie took advantage of a variety of experiential opportunities that he believed supported his success in the future.

Archie’s life map offer an exemplary blueprint for youth seeking to be successful within formal academic settings. He attended rigorous and prestigious schools where he excelled. Surely, part of Archie’s success is underscored by his access to quality education
and other academic opportunities. Archie also recognizes that he benefited from having supportive kindship networks that he could access for advice and inspiration. He explained that he was motivated to achieve because of the examples his mother and grandmother set for him. He shared that his mother and grandmother inspired his success because of their ability to succeed despite attending school during an era he believed to have been “ten times harder to go to school”, due to more structured racial discrimination. Archie is unique, in comparison to many other queer millennials of color, in that he was not necessarily burdened with the pressure of being the first in his family to attend college. His mother and grandmother were able to pass onto him insight and support for navigating formal schooling. Moreover, he realized that in order for him to achieve his goals, and contribute to society, he would have to go to college.

Archie’s life map demonstrates queer youth achievement, and challenges educators and advocates of queer youth to consider the ways in which queer youth want to contribute to society. Archie was able to move towards his goals because he could rely on the constancy of his grandmother and mother. He was also successful because he was supported to plan for the future. Similarly, queer youth of color will benefit from future planning that supports them to devise plans of action to achieve long-term goals.
CHAPTER SIX

Insights

Within this chapter I describe data findings drawn from multidimensional and intersectional analysis of the participants’ narrative interviews. As described within the methods section of this study, I sought out queer youth of color to tell me stories about their being, and how they survived school. I made conscious note to understand how heteropatriarchy manifested in the social experiences they described. I intended for the research study to offer participants an opportunity to critically reflect on their identities and the implications identity can have on navigating society—particularly its impact on navigating formal schooling. Thus, youth participants were positioned as experts of their own lived experiences and invited to offer wisdom drawn from their lived experiences in order to generate supportive strategies for other queer youth of color.

By the end of data collection, I conducted 29 interviews and 1 focus group. I collected 9 life maps and a variety of assorted artifacts, including illustrations, paintings and letters. Due to dealing with a series of tragic events, Nikqo was not able to complete a life map or the third interview. However, in place of the life map, I created a Wordle illustration based on his two interview narratives (see Chapter Four). The Wordle illustration reflects the most frequently occurring words from his narratives. This illustration offered an analysis of his personal narratives.

Not only did the 10 participants reveal what life can be like for queer students of color and their strategies for surviving school, but they also shared insights into how queer youth of color negotiate the transition of becoming a queer young adult of color. With deep concern, I express honor of these queer youth who have managed to survive school. I use the
word “survive” with the most faithful intention because queer youth of color disproportionately experience social, physical and economic challenges that are life threatening. Queer youth survival is a testament of queer youth savvy. With this dissertation I hope to have made clear some of the lived realities of queer youth of color.

In the beginning of this dissertation I focused the story on situating queer youth of color within the larger queer youth discourse. In Chapter One, I defined the identity marker, *queer youth of color*, which I used to coalesce gender, sexual, and racial minorities. In doing so, I also named specific challenges confronting queer youth of color members of the millennial generation. This segment of the millennial generation face serious educational inequality (Human Rights Campaign, 2013) and economic, social, and health challenges. Moreover, while queer youth of diverse racial and ethnic identities report experiencing harassment and violence in school, current research makes it clear that queer youth of color disproportionately experience violence and high severities of harrassment while as school (Diaz & Kosciw, 2009). As a result, queer students of color report lower GPAs and school engagement (Diaz & Kosciw, 2009). These vulnerabilities are further exacerbated by a systematic lack of access to culturally relevant pedagogies (Blackburn & McCready, 2009), queer-inclusive curricular resources (Diaz & Kosciw, 2009), and policies that acknowledge student queerness (Mayo, 2009). To boot, some states even legally forbid schools to discuss homosexuality in a positive light (Fernandez, 2013). By illuminating the nuances in the experiences and needs of queer students of color, I sought to make a case that these unique lived experiences warranted their own research focus.

In the previous chapter, I shared stories of the ten queer youth participants, and revealed some of their challenges, critical analytic commentaries, and unique ontological
posits. Moreover, the queerlore shared in Chapter Five adds to the growing body of work that will help educators and queer youth advocates understand queer youth and their need. Within this chapter, I offer further examination of queer youth lives and identities with data findings of common themes identified across participant narratives.

Findings

This study focused on school because school is often seen as a necessary stepping stone towards upward social and economic mobility. Progression in school is linked to an assortment of social, economic, cultural, and intellectual benefits (Amos, 2008). Moreover, schools are often microcosms of society. School policies and campus cultures often reflect the social norms outside of the classroom. These data findings reflect the stories of ten savvy, racially, gender, and sexually diverse, queer millennials who managed to survive school and society. The findings cannot be generalized to apply to all queer youth of color, but offer transferable and confirmable insights on the lived experiences of queer youth of color.

Over the course of 7 months, I interviewed 10 different and diverse young queer students of color about how they conceptualized their multiple intersecting identities. Most of the interviews were conducted in Midtown, but I also interviewed Lyric in NearTown and Ronnie in West City. Participants talked with me about race and ethnic identity, sexual orientation, gender identity, and class standings, and described to me the relationship each of those identifiers have on the others. We explored the social and cultural implications of identifying in particular ways, in particular places like home and school, and how they negotiated their identities in these places. These young queer millennials of color were invited to share stories about identity, schooling, and society. As a result, they trusted me
with stories that described unique ontological reflections, social practices, communities, relationships, challenges, and their hopes and dreams for the future.

The findings generated from data analysis describe how the participants negotiated their identities and elaborate on how they navigated school and society. Moreover, these data findings described within this chapter assume participants’ agency and autonomy. Two themes emerged from data analysis of participants’ schooling experiences: *queer of color discrimination* and *the purpose of schooling and education*. Participants told stories about a variety of identity-based discriminations they experienced in school. These stories support the current literature’s claim that the structure of school perpetuates queer youth victimization (Diaz & Kosciw, 2009; Hackford-Peer, 2010). With the first theme of queer of color discrimination, I seek to complicate the current discourse on queer youth victimization by further exploring the variety of discrimination participants experienced. Additionally, I explore the strategies these youth employed when confronted with discrimination. The second theme explored in this chapter relates to youth narratives on the purpose of schooling and education. With this theme I seek to affirm the student identity of queer youth that is often glossed over in education research. I present participant narratives that describe their analyses and critiques of the purpose of schooling and education. In addition to focusing on participants’ student identity, the narratives presented challenge an assumption that queer youth feel obliged to attend school despite the climate in school rendering them invisible, silent, and/or vulnerable.

Finally, based on the analysis of participant narratives, I offer two major themes regarding the social practices of queer youth of color. The first theme asserts that *identity matters* in how queer youth of color navigate and negotiate school, and how others perceive
them (Blackburn & McCready, 2009; Talburt, 2004). This theme confirms previous work’s advocacy for multidimensional analysis of queer youth identities and lived experiences (Cruz, 2012; Holmes & Cahill, 2003; Kumashiro, 2001; Marquez & Brockenbrough, 2013; McCready, 2004). I will add to this work by exploring youth-produced narratives about their identities and identity intersections. The additional theme that I present relates to the value of relationships. In addition to recognizing the cultivation of supportive relationships as a queer youth social practice, I will illuminate the particular salience of peer and familiar relationships.

I have reiterated throughout the dissertation that queer youth of color and their unique lived experiences are often eclipsed by the dominant discourse of queer youth victimization. These data resurface the complexities that is often lost in over-determined conceptualizations of queer youth.

**Queer Youth of Color Experiences of Discrimination and Policing**

Research on queer youth has tended to focus on their experiences of victimization, thus situating queer identity as a vulnerable and minority status. These studies have done well to broaden awareness of the ways queer youth are discriminated in school and in society. According to research, queer youth victimization and discrimination includes experiences of verbal harassment (e.g. anti-queer and transphobic name calling and threats) (Kosciw, Greytak, Palmer & Boesen, 2014). In a national climate survey of LGBT K-12 students, 74.1% of respondents reported experiences of verbal harassment based on their sexual orientation. 55.2% of respondents reported verbal harassment based on their gender identity. In addition to overt verbal harassment, Nadal et. al (2011) further explain that queer youth often experience sexual orientation microaggressions. Sexual orientation
microaggressions are covert forms of anti-queer discrimination in which queer individuals are marginalized by anti-queer or transphobic language, a perpetuation of heteronormativity and LGBT stereotyping (Nadal et al., 2011, p. 238). Moreover, queer youth victimization and discrimination also includes violence. In their study of LGBT perceptions of school violence, Grossman et al. (2009) explain that violence in school is a complex phenomenon. They draw upon a broad definition of violence put forth by The Amherst H. Wilder Foundation (cited in Campos, 2005, p. 68) and describe violence as words and actions that hurt people; when a person uses pain, fear, or hurt to make someone do something; using words to scare, bully, embarrass, call names, or put someone down; hurting a person’s body or the things a person cares about (Grossman et al. 2009, p. 27). These conceptualizations of queer youth discrimination are useful for further examination of this study’s participants’ narratives of the challenges that confront them.

Youth participants described experiences in which their identities were policed with violence and verbal harassment. I define policing as the combination of surveillance and regulation. Dwyer (2008) relates policing to scrutiny. She offers that the performance of “gayness” (or the transgression of heteronormative gender and sexual scripts) often makes youth vulnerable to scrutiny in school. As a result, the performance or embodiment of queerness is subject to denigration and violence in an attempt to police proper heteronormative behavior (Dwyer, 2008, p. 416). Lugg (2006) explains that those who fail to conform are at risk of dismissal or expulsion (p. 37). Consistent with the extant body of literature, participants reported many different kinds of experiences of discrimination while in school and home. Participants described experiences perpetrated by peers, teachers and
family members in which they felt vulnerable or singled out because of their different identities.

A.E. suggested that his teacher was suspicious of him because of his Black and cisgender male identity. To describe this, A.E. reflected on an experience in middle school in which he felt targeted by a teacher.

It’s dangerous. I first found out I was Black and Black man and what that meant in middle school. I had this teacher Ms. [N]. Again, me and my one friend—his name is Caleb; he was white. I was Black. We always do the same things, like you know, I started drawing, he started drawing, vice-versa. And we’re doodling in class, I wasn’t paying attention and she was, [A.E.], stop drawing. I’m like, okay lady. [A.E.] pay attention. Okay, lady. Then this girl gets up. I think it was Briana; she’s a Black girl. She’s like, Miss, why do you always call out [A.E.] when he’s doing something wrong and clearly Caleb, and so and so, are doing the same exact thing, but you only want to call him out. Miss, you’re racist.

A.E. sets up his story as setting the tone for how he understands the implications of his identities. This background is further contextualized with the juxtaposition of his identity as a Black man to the identity of his White friend, Caleb. A.E. recalls that although he and Caleb were not on task, his teacher singled him out for doodling. A.E. attempted to avoid confronting the teacher’s policing, but a fellow classmate intervenes in what A.E described as the danger of the intersection of his gender and racial identity. The danger is illustrated in his heightened visibility and vulnerability for being policed by authority figures, like his teacher, Ms. N. A.E.’s perception of his teacher is not unwarranted, as various studies have shown that teachers often hold biases and lower expectations of African American students (Diamond, Randolph, & Spillane, 2004). Tenenbaum and Ruck’s (2007) meta-analysis of teachers' expectations shows that the participant sample held more positive expectations for White students than ethnic minority students. In addition to shaping the relationship between teacher and student, racial bias also influences school discipline, with Black boys
disproportionately represented in school suspensions and expulsions (Noguera, 2003; U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights, 2014). In making meaning of this social interaction, A.E. related that the experience produced a sense of self-awareness and an analysis of the salience of his social location in school.

Like A.E., several participants described the impact of having to deal with identity stereotypes that others held and projected onto them, and the consequences of transgressing those stereotypes. Sam recalled experiences of verbal bullying as early as 3rd grade. She told me about her peers making fun of her because of her size and sense of style. Albeit superficial taunts, the critiques were deployed in an attempt to police her gender and sexuality. According to her narrative, Sam described herself as not acting like other girls at her school. As a result, she was bullied for her different identity presentation. She told me:

I from 3rd grade to like 7th grade I want to say, I wore nothing but sweat pants, because I thought, like, they were the most comfortable thing and they’re easy to put on. And a lot of people thought that was like really weird. And like, I always wore like baggy clothes, because I like comfortable stuff. And compared to like a lot of the girls in my class, I wasn’t as pretty, or stylish, or whatever kids do. And I’d get bullied for that because I was, one, I was bigger than everybody. So, automatically came like the fat jokes, and then I always wore like a certain style of clothing, so I looked really weird all the time. So there came those jokes. And then like I never hung out with other girls, or like flirted with the guys like all the girls did. So, that was like really weird. And then, I’d get made fun of because I was always loud, and like I wasn’t, not to say that the girls were quiet, but like, they held themselves up here and I was like, I don’t care. So, I was much more blunt, so there came that weird like, oh you’re so weird because you’re like this, and there’s that bullying. So, from 3rd until junior year I was bullied.

Sam’s experience of nuanced gender policing reflects her understanding of an established script she was expected to fulfill. Her peers expected that she be stylish, have a smaller physique, be quiet, and demonstrate her heteronormativity by flirting with guys. However, Sam’s chosen presentation was quite the opposite. She identified herself as being bigger in
size, blunt, loud, and having worn baggy clothes. Sam assessed that her bullying was the consequence of her transgression of the heteronormative script. She defines that transgression as being “weird” (“Oh you’re so weird because you’re like this, and there’s that bullying”). Her peers policed her weirdness with verbal bullying in order to regulate her gender and sexual expression to fit their prescription of heteronormative femininity. Sam’s analysis of her experienced discrimination is quite consistent with research. Messerschmidt’s (2011) review of bullying literature indicates that girls primarily bully other girls on the basis of shape, size, and sexuality, and more often with verbal and social forms (p. 204). Moreover, girls bully other girls in order to police the boundaries of acceptable heterofemininities that align with the normative contexts of heteromasculine power and privilege (Messerschmidt, 2011, p. 228).

As illustrated in A.E and Sam’s narratives, participants were acutely aware of the salience of their gender and the expectations other prescribed for them. A.E. assessed that the embodiment of his gender and race rendered him hyper-visible to authority figures. Likewise, Sam’s “weird” gender, sexual and body size presentation made her a target to her peers. In addition to these encounters with policing and discrimination, participants also described being held to racialized gender expectations. For example, Archie suggested that society holds very particular expectations for men, and that he struggled with the anxiety of having to live up to those expectations:

Well for me I think the most struggling, the biggest struggle I’ve had is just like knowing when to stand up, be a man like assert myself in a way that like is manly or be strong you know. I feel like society being a man there’s a lot of pressure to like always be like emotionless, or be less compassionate or don’t be too wishy, washy, stuff like that. I’m a very emotional guy so that’s where I feel like I don’t satisfy the whole be a man thing.
Archie explained that he was taught from friends and the social standards he observed that to be an acceptable man, he had to be less emotionally sensitive. He told me that he experienced this pressure to be an “acceptable man” from other Black friends. In being an acceptable man, these friends encouraged him to not show vulnerability. He explained, “I feel like they’re”—he clarified—“my Black straight friends. I’ll say it like that. They really are more like, you have to be tough, have to endure a lot and like not show your emotions when you like somebody or not show that you care too much about like, what’s the word I have, well, care too much”. Youth, like Archie, are increasingly aware of and vulnerable to culturally-contextualized gender expectations. Throughout boyhood, Black boys receive on-going messages about appropriate and inappropriate gender roles and performances from peers, family, adults and media (Howard, 2012; Patton, Hong, Williams & Allen-Meares, 2013). Howard elaborates, “These messages include, but are not limited to, the idea that a boy should be tough, a good fighter (or at least willing to fight), and should not cry nor display/embody feminine behaviors or characteristics” (p. 105). Male youth negotiate these scripts with the understanding that transgressing these gender expectations may impact their friendships, and/or put them at risk of social isolation, harassment and bulling from peers and adults (Howard, 2012).

Ronnie echoed a similar analysis of the unique positioning of Black men and being held to specific and exhausting heteronormative gender expectations.

I think that with race and gender, the African American, just being Black now, there’s a lot of expectations. There’s a lot of judgment. There’s a lot of stereotype, you know, you’re happy to be the male/female. You’re happy to be the strong man. You got to be this; you got to be that. You got to be the male figure. You’ve got to have two kids. You got to dress like this: you don’t wear your clothes tight but you don’t wear them baggy. And you know you just got to be a certain way and if you’re different you’re not being Black, and you know it’s just a lot.
Archie’s awareness and analysis of Black male gender performance underscores the influential role peers have on gender identity development. In comparison, what is interesting about Ronnie’s understanding of these scripts is his perception of how these expectations become embedded in a notion of racial authenticity. Archie and Ronnie’s narratives bring to light the keen social awareness queer youth of color employ while balancing and negotiating their identities, relationships, identity stereotypes, and social risk.

Participants’ stories about discrimination and policing were not limited to the imposition of heteropatriarchal identity stereotypes. Several participants told me stories about violence. These stories noted that violence was not necessarily a possibility, but was something to be expected in school. As previously cited, queer youth of color are disproportionately impacted by violence in society (Ahmed & Jindasurat, 2015) and in school (Diaz & Kosciw, 2009). In addition to risking their physical safety, violence threatens queer youth’s ability to participate in school and contribute to society. Similar to verbal harassment, I assert that violence functions as another method of regulating youth identities and expressions. Payne and Smith (2013) explain that bullying in school serves a “social purpose by reinforcing hierarchies of power and privilege and is a reflection of broader social inequity and prejudice” (p. 22). Moreover, Russell, Ryan, Toomey, Diaz, and Sanchez (2011) point out that victimization in school yields serious health implications for queer youth, including depression and maladaptive coping mechanisms. However, few research studies (Diaz & Kosciw, 2009; Grossman et al., 2009; Susa, 2005; Snapp, Hoenig, Fields & Russell, 2015) have explored how queer students of color address or cope with violence in their lives. The following stories related by queer youth of color participants illuminate an awareness of the presence and dynamics of violence in their lives.
Participants described to me the reality and struggle of having to strategize a plan to cope with violence in their lives. These strategies included having to decide whether or not they would fight in school, and if they did not, having to devise strategies to avoid violence at school. A.E. informed me, “I mean, in order to navigate high school you either get chewed up or you get spit back out. So like, you have to find a way to defend yourself if you’re not going to necessarily beat up everybody and fight everybody. I’m like, I don’t need a suspension on my record. In the back of my mind I’m still trying to get into college. I don’t need any of that crap”. A.E resolved not to fight because he feared it would interrupt this future academic plans. However, Cat described school in which violence seemed inescapable. Cat felt like she had to be able to physically fight back. “I mean, I was a scrappy girl,” she told me. “I would, you know, they knew like, if you hit her she’ll, people always said like, that one, cause it was me and one other student who is now trans, but they would say, that’s the one that will fight you back.” Cat fought in order to demonstrate to other students that she would not be a victim. Similarly, Grossman et. al. (2009) offers a similar example of a transgender youth, Jocelyn, who described coping with violence by fighting back (“I’ll beat you right back” p. 38). They define Jocelyn’s coping strategy and willingness to stand up for herself as illustrative of her agency. Snapp, Hoenig, Fields and Russell (2015) argue that some queer youth confront discrimination in their lives by responding with defensive violence or preemptive violence. Cat described fighting back as a defense mechanism used to fend off potential threats.

Although Cat’s strategy to fight back was successful in establishing her as a non-victim among her peers, she confessed to me that fighting included an emotional toll.

It was always the environment, you know, from fighting in my earlier part of school and then sort of like the anxiety that developed from that. That developed from sort of
like the fallout from the more physical stuff. Which the physical stuff didn’t really last too long. I kicked a few asses and after that it was like, okay we don’t mess with this one. But there’s a lot of, there was a lot of emotional kind of fallout from like learned violence, and learned violence was always a part of my schooling even in elementary school because it was always kids. I mean I went to city schools. I think I went to decent schools but kids fought, you know, and I never was, inherently I’m not a violent person although I learned that violence was a way to sort of get a point across. So it was just social challenges like you know your usual stuff that LGBT students go through, taunting, leering, jeering, you know.

Cat assesses the violence and social challenges that she endured in school as usual. Queer youth of color, as theorized by A.E., learn that violence is an accepted element of school and schooling. Nevertheless, Cat also acknowledged that resorting to defensive fighting accrues emotional costs. Psychological health outcomes of exposure to violence include posttraumatic stress disorder, depression, and anxiety (Jain, Buka, Subramanian & Molnar, 2012). Cat described those costs as fallout, which manifested in her life as anxiety.

In comparison, Angel offered a story about violence that is not often discussed. Current research primarily highlights interpersonal violence among peers, but some of the participants’ stories indicate that that is not always the case. Located at the bottom of his life map, Angel inscribed the following description of his early schooling experience:
Figure 13: Description of Angel's 1st grade experience

The image indicates that Angel suffered violence from his teacher. Upon discovering that his teacher used to "manhandle" and hit him, his mother intervened by moving him to a different school. Though it is difficult to locate research that situates the frequency of teacher violence against queer students of color, Pilkington and D'Augelli’s (1995; cited in Russell & Troung, 2001) research on lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth victimization indicated that lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth of color reported being hurt by a teacher 10% more often than White lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth (p. 117). While Angel did not attribute the teacher’s abuse to any particular form of discrimination, the experience remains one that is firmly etched into his collective experience of schooling and school.

Angels also described other experiences of verbal and physical discrimination he endured in school, due to his sexual identity. "Yeah, in that school, I got into two fights. But it was because the whole faggot thing. I don’t, don’t call me, and don’t call me that". Angel, like Cat, explained that he coped with the harassment by fighting back. Moreover, he
explained that resorted to taking matters into his own hands because school officials failed to intervene.

So, it’s like, after awhile, my own mother’s telling me like, you know what, the school’s not doing something about it, so you gotta do something about it. You know what I mean? Like, stand up for yourself, and if they call me, we, they, they can’t do nothing. If they call me, I’m gonna let them know, you guys aren’t doing nothing about it, so I told my son to fight back. You know, so after, I got into, what, two fights.

Queer students often perceive their teachers as failing to intervene in the
discrimination they experience at school (Diaz & Kosciw, 2009; Kosciw, Greytak, Palmer & Boesen, 2014). Snapp, Hoenig, Fields and Russell (2015) explain that schools often uphold zero-tolerance policies that, coupled with official silence (Mayo, 2009) on queer identities and issues, leads some queer youth to strategize for their own survival. Some queer youth may even develop coping strategies in which they stop relying on adults (Pritchard, 2013). Moreover, the adaption of defensive violence may also be influenced by experiences of violence outside of school. Angel also described to me experiencing a cycle of violence in which he was abused at home and at school. He told me that he suffered beatings from his older brother because his sibling suspected that he was gay. “I was, I told you, before, my brother used to beat the crap out of me when I was little, and I brought it [to] school and take it out on everybody at school.” Similarly, in a study examining disclosure of sexual orientation to family members, the (mostly white) participant sample of 194 lesbian, gay and bisexual youth respondents identified heterosexual brothers as the most physically threatening and the most common aggressor (D’augelli, Hershberger & Pilkington, 1998 p. 366). Little research is available that examines how queer youth of color negotiate their relationships with siblings, or violence at home, or how these dynamics impact their
experiences in school. However, Angel’s stories highlight some very important insights on queer youth victimization, and offer implications for future research.

These are some of the stories that participants shared with me about their personal experiences with discrimination and violence. They seem to align with some analyses of queer youth victimization, like that anti-queer bias is an ever present issue in the lives of queer youth. However, these queer youth of color stories also illustrate their agency and keen social awareness. Queer youth participants identified teacher-student interactions and perceptions, peer bullying, and violence as major challenges impacting their schooling experience. Their narratives reveal a social savvy necessary for surviving school. These stories also point to some thoughtful considerations for future research on queer youth of color and schooling. Moreover, participant stories illuminate a need for further exploration of how queer youth of color perceive the discourse of difference in school and how difference and identities are regulated in school by teachers and peers. Finally, within the stories shared in this section, queer youth participants identified girls and moms as effective interrupters of discrimination and violence. These findings offer implications for further research that contributes to queer youth supporters and advocates’ understanding of who queer youth of color identify within their roster of support, as well as their strategies for negotiating violence and discrimination in their lives.

The Purpose of Schooling and Education

In addition to examining how queer youth of color negotiate their identities and navigate formal school settings, I intended to explore queer youth of color’ conceptualizations of the purpose of education. These explorations index the affordance of queer of color critique in its capacity to illuminate queer of color agency (Brockenbrough,
2013) and autonomy by situating queer of color identity and lived experience at the center of this research investigation. With school increasingly described by queer youth as a hostile environment (Diaz & Kosciw, 2009; Elze, 2003; Grossman et al., 2009; Holmes & Cahill, 2003; Kosciw, Greytak, Palmer & Boesen, 2014; Payne & Smith, 2013; Sausa, 2005), and queer youth of color disproportionately impacted by violence in school (Diaz & Kosciw, 2009), one has to wonder how queer youth of color perceive the purpose of education and formal schooling in their lives.

There is not one inclusive definition of the purpose of education. Throughout the dissertation I have framed the purpose of education and schooling as necessary to prepare youth for their transition to adulthood, professional opportunity and upward socioeconomic mobility (Amos, 2008). Other analyses of the purpose of schooling have focused on education and schooling as a powerful institution. Lugg (2003) defines public schools as “governmental entities ruled by laws, regulations, and policies. The people who teach, lead, study, play, and otherwise live within a public school’s walls must conform to these dictates or face various legal sanctions including expulsion and job termination. These legal mandates are established through political processes that include court decisions at the state and federal levels” (p. 97). Dennis and Harlow (1986) point out that education is a vested interest of the state. Juridical logic emphasizes the right to education as the state’s primary resource for supporting citizens to realize their established rights. Thus, with the provision of an education, students agree to submit to the law and norms of school institutions. Furthermore, Noguera (2003) argues that schools have three primary functions: to sort students based on their ability; socialize students by teaching them the values and norms that are consistent with the status quo, and to operate as an institution of social control (p. 344). As a result,
students often come to accept the academic and professional trajectories prescribed for them, internalizing how they were sorted as definitive of what they deserve. These definitions of the purpose of education at hand offer some insight on the plights that challenge queer youth in school.

This second finding features analyses of the purpose of education and schooling narrated by queer youth of color. The stories offered complicate assumptions about why queer youth attend school in spite of experiences of overt and covert discrimination. Given their different student statuses and social locations, youth participants shared diverse reflections on the purpose of education and formal schooling. A.E. was a recent college graduate, and had no expressed plans to continue with further education. Niqko, Gogo Yubari, Angel and Cat all reported having attended community college for varying lengths of time. During the time of data collection, the four were not enrolled in school. Vinny, Sam and Lyric were active undergraduates. And Archie and Ronnie were both graduate students. (A table listing of participant demographics is included in the appendices.)

All queer youth of color participants were successful in school, as they all graduated from high school. Additionally, all of the participants reported having some college experience. Participants acknowledged the value in formal schooling, and described it as a compulsory youth experience. Additionally, several participants described school as a resource offering students opportunities to learn and to become more aware of the world around them. Angel shared this about the value of school, “That’s just to learn, cause I felt, like if you don’t go to school, you’re just gonna sit here like, dumbfounded for the rest of your life”. In this understanding, Angel asserts that school functions as a tool for students to gain awareness through learning. The awareness gain from learning, as Angel described, can
yield tangible outcomes. Vinny explained that for him school was necessary in helping him identify purpose and a future career. He told me, “Yeah, like recently I’m learning industrial design and realize I want to do something for helping people. If I didn’t go to college, I wouldn’t think about that”. For Vinny, school was a useful means to an end goal of selecting a future career. Had he not gone to college, Vinny was doubtful that he would have recognized that opportunity.

Additionally, many of the participants were also critical of the purpose of formal education, and were acutely aware of the sorting function and stratification practices embedded in schooling, as Noguera described above. Participant stories about school recognized school as important to society because of its capacity to socialize young people to adopt and adapt to particular social norms. A.E. articulated this concept of the function of schooling. He explained, “The purpose of formal education is really more of a conditioning system to kind of get everybody on the same page about what is expected of them and how they’re, what are their options in terms of contributing to society”. A.E. keenly highlights an important dimension of the schooling as a site for social and cultural reproduction. In addition to gained awareness and entre to a career path, A.E. and others identified the organization of school as enforcing the status quo through its socialization of students. Likewise, Cat corroborated the claim that school functions as a socialization center that can have a great impact on students’ futures.

I think formal education teaches you how, teaches you who society wants you to be. I think maybe if, and I don’t think formal education is inherently bad, but when I think about when I think about my life formal education has helped me but a lot of it is, a lot of it more so is getting out there and actually interacting and experiencing and kind of understanding like how things work.
The latter part of Cat’s assessment of school suggests that interaction and experiential learning may not necessarily be a featured component of schooling. Cat also recognized the value of having experiences that developed her awareness and understanding of “how things work” outside of school. Similarly, some participants challenged the notion that schools are the only viable learning sites. According to participants’ responses, everything can be educative. Niqko explained to me a much broader concept of education that transcended the traditional model of learning that assumes and emphasizes students’ need to acquire particular canons of knowledge. He told me:

Education is everywhere. It’s like even in the little places, like you for instance, like I’m educating you on what I’ve been through. I’m letting you know what I went through by just you can’t really, you’re not going to really know anything without learning something from someone else. Like education is, you know, it’s everywhere. It’s in instruction manuals. It’s in school; it’s in workplaces. It’s going to be everywhere around you. You’re not going to be able to get anywhere if you’re not so open to learning something new because that’s what I look at education as. It’s something that’s going to get you ready for basically everything around you. You can’t get anywhere without an education because that’s what it is, education is education.

Niqko posited that education could be conceptualized in much broader terms. In his conceptualization of education he described a pedagogy of collaborative learning: “you’re not going to really know anything without learning something from someone else”. Niqko positions inquiry and dialogue as methods for generating education. What Niqko discerns about the potentiality of education some scholars identify as testimony knowledge (Audi, 2013; Moran, 2013). Testimony is an important and common source of knowledge that involves sharing knowledge, positions knowledge as a communal asset (Moran, 2013), and requires learners to develop proficiency in assessing a testifier’s competency and sincerity and comparing the coherency of knowledge claims. Niqko’s analysis of an education complicates the supreme authority of the school as the primary site of education and learning.
Finally, in addition to challenging school’s over-determined student sorting function, and its ultimate authority on learning, participants were also critical of the oversights and relevance schools curricula held to their queer youth lives. In fact, Gogo Yubari described this sort of incompatibility in his story in Chapter Five. He found the traditional school format to be limiting of his time and intellectual needs. Gogo Yubari made the autonomous decision to drop out of his formal school and enroll in an alternative college preparatory program that featured a shortened school day. Guided by “intelligence”, he marks this departure from the formal school system as “opportunity.”

![Figure 14: Gogo Yubari's self-directed path towards opportunity](image)

Gogo Yubari was the only participant who chose an alternate educational route, but his frustration with school’s inconsistency with the reality of youth lives was echoed in many of the participants’ narratives. Cat critiqued what she saw as school’s curricular oversight, and offered thoughtful insight on potential alternatives that she believed to be more relevant to contemporary youth lives.

I think formal education teaches formal education right, but formal education doesn’t teach survival and I think there needs to be a lot of classes about budgeting right, about people skills, about talking to people, shit that you really do in life. Fuck giving kids babies to take home, to scare them. Give kids pretend bills, right. Give kids medical bills, right. Give kids $20 for the week and tell them that school lunches are $7 and tell them that they can’t eat for that whole week except for the money that you gave them.
Teach them motherfuckers how to budget, how to pinch a penny, how to stretch a dollar, you know. I think a lot of formal education is just theory and I think theory is amazing, but it’s not reality, right. In theory, anything is possible. In reality you have real life limitations.

What Cat was getting at when she offers that school should make available classes (or curricula) that develop students’ awareness and how to do “shit that you really do it life,” she confirms Lorde’s claim that survival is not an academic skill (Lorde, 1984/2007, p. 112). They illuminate a discordancy between the sorting function of school and survival of students. Moreover, Gogo Yubari, Cat, and Lorde challenge learners to reflect on the implications the absence of survival skills and survival knowledge has on the formal purpose of education and schooling, as well as the need for marginalized students, like queer youth of color, to consider more autonomous choices in their education and learning.

These findings have touched on the participants’ astute examinations of the purpose of schooling and education. Moreover, these findings are novel because queer youth of color are rarely asked to reflect and share their conceptualizations of the purpose of schooling, despite being heavily impacted by the structure and authority of school and school officials. To review, participants recognized the purpose of school as an institution guided by a task to socialize and track future adults. Nevertheless, participants offered creative and broad concepts of education that offer potential alternatives ways of learning and knowing. Lastly, these stories illustrate queer youth of color’s savvy, critical thinking skills, and autonomy. Furthermore, when thinking about school and the lived experiences of queer youth of color, rather than place overemphasis on bullying, notice the compelling potential of inquiring about queer youth theories of knowledge and learning, and its relationship to their survival.
Identity Matters

Identity matters in how queer youth of color participants navigate school and society. Identity also matters to queer youth of color participants because they perceived it mediating their relationships. Participants offered several examples of how they saw their identities impacting their lives and relationships. Many of them described the balance and conflict between how they saw themselves and how they are perceived by others.

As described in the previous findings section, queer youth participants were keenly aware of attempts to police their identities. Vinny revealed that he felt pressure regarding this identity as a Chinese male.

Being a Chinese male is mean traditionally it’s like Chinese male must carry family and must have family and then must have more responding to family. You have to earn more money and then when you’re parents retire and you had to pay money back from them, buy a house for them, do what’s best for them.

In describing the intersection between his race and gender identity, Vinny acknowledged the influence his identities had on shaping his future. As an adult, Vinny perceived his family expecting him to perform a heteronormative script, and become his family’s provider. Moreover, fulfilling these scripts, as Vinny explained, he would also demonstrate his racial and masculine authenticity.

Similarly, Black-identified participants were also aware of race and its intersection with other identities. Ronnie shared that he felt pressure and judgement from others because of the social location of his racial identity. He described to me that the combination of gender, race and sexuality yielded the biggest impact on how others perceived him.

I would say me being an African American gay male cause I feel that those two together are enough, very powerful. This is being Black in a world where it’s just like I said, you have to prove yourself or constantly see in the news that you know your justice system is failing you. And you know, I’m just, you know, people are constantly, oh my God, still looking for my culture and stuff like that. And then to
them gay male being questioned and being judged and people are saying stuff about you. It’s a lot.

Ronnie’s analysis of his experience navigating the world as an African American gay male reveals an interesting complexity about the messages that young people absorb. Ronnie described feeling pressure to “prove” himself, and demonstrate his abilities, talents, and skills to others who might underestimate him. His reference “in a world” suggests that he believes this underestimated view of Black identity to be a greater societal view. Ronnie compares this pressure to the vulnerability produced by the failing justice system, and then to being judged for being a gay male. Although he does not further explore how he manages these pressures, his narrative highlight his awareness of society’s racial and sexual biases.

Likewise, A.E. shared that identifying as Black and male has had a unique and profound impact on how others interact with him.

Black and male. I’m sorry, they don’t react the same to Black women. There’s something about being a Black man that is inherently scary, just scary. And that’s again why I say being secure in who you are is intimidating, particularly as a Black man because it’s like you’re always expected to play some sort of character. You’re always expected to appease someone, or for a lot of times Black men, and even I’ve done this, it’s like you spend so much time trying to not appear so aggressive or as threatening and it’s like, but I’m diminishing who you are. Diminishing who you are a little bit to try to gain a little bit of acceptance. But it’s like, really why is there this level of intimidation for a Black man? Why is it that if I’m walking somewhere you want to clutch your purse, or you want to lock your door; you want to get really scared?

A.E. discussed his frustration of having to contend with the stereotype of Black men as scary and intimidating. While he acknowledges how these kinds of stereotypes influences how others interact with him, his frustration also reveals a pressure to conform, and a pressure to sacrifice a part of this identity.
Finally, Angel described his experience of filtering through identity policing messages and trying to find a genuine sense of self. Angel explained, “Yeah, the biggest problem that I have is with the gay people. I’m considered a bad one because I sound, because I’m more, I’m more feminine than masculine. Why, because of how I dress. Or because of how I act sometimes.” Angel’s story points to the intersection of gender and sexuality, and illuminates femme-negativity that some queer youth must negotiated as they definite their identities. Prejudice towards feminine men is common outside and within gay communities. The message that being a femme gay man is bad is an example of femme-negativity. But that Angel was told that he was a “bad” gay person because of his expressed femininity is an example of femme phobic discrimination (Blair & Hoskin, 2014).

Queer youth of color receive many different complicated messages about their identities and who they should be. Nevertheless, I spoke with queer youth who were apt to live their lives authentically despite policing or attempts to minimize their identity. “I have realized that I am always who I am even if people do not know it,” Lyric asserted during the focus group. Other participants also thought about their identities in intersectional ways. When asked to describe the relationship between his race, gender and sexual orientation, Niqko’s response resisted any attempt to disaggregate them from the other, for his unique mix of identities simultaneously shape how he sees what he knows. “It pretty much goes together in a way, well from how I look at it, it pretty much goes together. Yeah, I don’t know anything else.” Similarly, Gogo Yubari described identity as “interworking”. He explained to me that each identity served a function, but was in contact with the other identities. There is an exchange of data between the identities.

I don’t that any one plays a bigger role than any. I think they’re interworking. Like the nerves in your body they’re all working at the same time and they’re all working as
one. Like, you know, even if your heart is beating, if your lungs aren’t breathing you know it’s just not working. I think it’s a system and it keeps each aspect of my identity, keeps the other aspects of my identity, working altogether cause I feel like as long as I’m alive and I’m breathing, that will always be my identity because as long as I’m alive and breathing all of those are going to be there. So and I don’t feel like, I feel like even if I face challenges collectively they are all challenging for me because it’s like I said, people don’t understand a lot of things that pertain to being a man of color and also being part of the LGBT community, so we already have that barrier and then they would have to first get past that initial barrier to even understand my breakdown of my identity that I mentioned earlier, so that would be the only challenge. But other than that, I would say interworking system and for me I feel as though it’s working perfectly fine.

An example of Gogo Yubari’s concept of identity interworking is illuminated in his explanation of why he identifies as a “cunt male” He told me, “Like I would say another term that applies to me, and this is based off of queer culture, is the word cunt. So, I would identify as cunt only because it’s part of the Black gay culture that I grew up with.” Blackburn (2008) explains “cunt” as a Black gaybonics term that describes a gay black man performing femininity (p. 89). However, cunt as described by Gogo Yubari’s implies more of a sentimental experience, an essence or a feeling. He elaborated:

I would say that at the core is pride because like you can’t even say it’s feminine or masculine or anything like that. It’s just really about who you are and what you represent and always representing that and always going out and being in that 100%. I would say that’s the core essence of what being cunt is, because when you go out there and you’re confident in life and you’re proud of what you’re doing, once again, just like having strong roots, it’s going to help you grow more. So I would say that is the essence of what being cunt is. And it can apply to everything. You don’t have to be in a certain type of lifestyle for it to apply. Some people call it something else, but you know, growing up with Black gay culture, that’s what that was for us.

Gogo Yubari’s description reveals how he thought about his gender identity as contextualized by his experiences navigating society and racial identity. For him, it was necessary to project a confident demeanor—one that seems to reject any sense of insecurity about his identities, in a world that regularly polices genderqueer identities. Moreover, Gogo
Yubari also makes particular note that his gender identity is nuanced by his racial identity. Racial identity, for Gogo Yubari, framed his perception of his lived experiences.

Identity continues to matter to the lives of queer youth of color, particularly because identities mediates their access and participation in social spaces. Participants were very aware about how others viewed and treated them because of their identities. Those supporting queer youth of color will do well to recognize that youth possess multidimensional and interworking identities. They should also recognize that they may feel burdened with negotiating identity stereotypes and expectations from others. As the participants revealed, identities are complex, interconnected, and produce one’s unique social location. As Niqko offered, “I don’t know anything else.” As queer youth work towards firmly situating themselves in the notion that they are as unique as their social location, queer youth will also filter through a lot of different messages about their identities and bodies. These findings suggest a need for queer youth to have access to people and conversations where they can critically examine and make meaning of those messages. Moreover, more research is need to further explore how queer youth of color make sense of the identity matters in their lives.

**Relationships as Valuable Resources**

Data findings validate that relationships are valuable resources to queer youth of color. Participants told stories about the relationships in their lives having helped them survive the marginalization and discrimination they faced at school and in society. Research on queer youth has tended to focus on the negative outcomes of queer youth relationships. Queer youth’s relationships with their families have often been assumed to be dangerous and negative. However, recent literature is beginning to reveal the positive benefits relationships
offer trans youth (Brockenbrough & Boatwright; 2013) and queer youth (Doty, Willoughby, Lindahl & Malik, 2010; Higa et. al., 2012; Jain, Buka, Subramanian & Molnar, 2012; Ryan, Russell, Huebner, Diaz & Sanchez, 2010; Snapp, Watson, Russell, Diaz & Ryan, 2015b).

These studies assert that positive relationships yield several positive emotional and psychological benefits for queer youth, including support for coping with experiences of violence (Jain, Buka, Subramanian & Molnar, 2012), increased self-esteem (Snapp, Watson, Russell, Diaz & Ryan, 2015b, social support and general health (Doty, Willoughby, Lindahl & Malik, 2010; Ryan, Huebner, Diaz & Sanchez, 2010). Studies that included analysis of transgender experiences were particularly limited within this body of work. In light of these insights, the queer youth participants shared stories of their relationships that add depth to how we may conceptualize queer youth support.

Among friends and family members, moms, were identified by participants as some of the most valuable relationships. Several participants described the importance of their relationships with their mothers. These relationships offered participants access to resources like housing, food and finances, in additional to emotional support. Sam shared with me the story of coming out as bisexual to her mother. “Actually she was like, well I will love you no matter what; and you’re my daughter. I just want you to be happy, you know. I raised you to accept and love whoever you want. I didn’t raise [you] to be like afraid of anything, so if you trust me enough to tell, I will accept you no matter what”. She added, “cause I have heard about mothers and fathers like, hh yeah my son can burn in hell. Or, my daughter—I don’t have a daughter. So, I was really afraid of that, like I got my friends but like, as long as I have my mother I knew like, whew, I was good”. Sam relates that her mother was supportive in reaffirming that her love and support was unconditional.
A supportive adult figure can make a profound impact in the life of a queer youth of color. Archie explained to me the different and important kinds of support that his mom gives him.

She’s willing to do anything to get me to where I need to be in life and I appreciate it. Half the time I don’t tell her stuff just because I’m still working it out and I don’t want to hear her mouth. So, that’s how I know that she matters because I don’t tell her stuff right away. She checks in all, like my friends—everybody, they check in. It’s not always, well for my mom, especially it’s helpful with the financing of stuff. She’s willing to spend, invest in my future and that’s what I love about it.

Archie’s mother demonstrated to him that she supports him by regularly checking-in and supporting him in more practical ways, like financially investing in his future endeavors.

Similarly, Angel shared that the relationships that help him deal with the ups and downs of being a mixed gay male are the relationships he has with his mom and sister. He explained that in addition to listening to him and caring for him, they also invest and support his growth. I explained that they demonstrated this by “just trying to push me out there. You know”.

Despite policing and judgement from the outside world, relationships offered participants a sense of acceptance and relief from the pressure of feeling alone. A.E. offered “I do feel supported in my friends and my parents because there’s a lot of things that, not terrible things, but like you know, stupid things that I’ve done that people have stood by me through. And I mean, that tells a lot when people stand by you with stupid stuff as opposed to just the good times. I feel supported in that sense.” Like Archie and Angel, A.E. described his parents and friends as sources of reliable emotional support, who accept him despite making mistakes.

Queer youth utilize support from a variety of relationships in lives theirs. Some queer youth of color do not have supportive relationships with their birth families. For this reason,
many of them adopt kinship networks with other queer people. Queer and transgender youth of color utilize kinship networks to help them recuperate shelter, economic and educational resources and emotional support that they may have missed from their biological families (Brockenbrough & Boatwright, 2013). Lyric reflected on the valuable impact their surrogate family had on their life. “Certain people, not necessarily groups but just certain people like my two best friends that I have. My surrogate grandfather and grandmother, [Pa] and [Ma], beautiful people who helped me realize that I can do more than how much I believe in myself”. In addition to peer support, Lyric relates that their family’s support was valuable because of their positive reinforcement and support of their autonomy.

While family acceptance of LGBT youth is associated with more positive well-being (Ryan, Russell, Huebner, Díaz & Sanchez, 2010), research suggests that queer youth may rely more on peers (Higa et al., 2012). Queer youth may feel less inclined to seek support from family members in addressing sexually-related issues (Doty, Willoughby, Lindahl & Malik, 2010). Moreover, some queer youth indicate that their support from family members may come with conditions, like having to hide queer expression (Higa et al., 2012). According to one study, queer youth of color, in particular, are less likely than white queer youth to “out” themselves to their parents (Russell & Truong, 2001).

Queer youth often have complicated relationships with their families. These complicated are influenced by anti-queer bias in the society. Archie revealed that his relationship with his mom is particularly valuable because she invests in his future. For this reason, it is understandable why he was cautious about how his queer identity might impact one of his biggest supporter. He confessed, “I don’t care if [family friends] find out but I don’t want it to affect my mom and her set of friends and her life that she has here in
[Midtown]”. Archie was concerned about how anti-queer bias might stigmatize his mother’s life.

Just as some participants were cautious about how expressive they were about their queer identities, some implied that they were as cautious about the issues that they brought to their families. Ronnie also relates that family relationships can be limited in their support.

I would say for all my duties tied together I would say my really core group of friends you know, they know who they are, I would say their names but you know they would know who they are. My mentor has always been there even for the personal things you know, some of the crazier things that I’ve been going through and went through. My family is really but I don’t relay a lot of the Black gay male issues on them because they don’t, they respect me but they don’t accept it, so I just don’t put the issues on them, that’s all I need from them and that’s that.

Cat described her relationships with friends and family as sacred, but was also able to recognize the limitations of some of her relationships. In describing the people who support and understand her, she explained the nuanced relationships she has access to.

My friendships, and I have mentors, I have girlfriends, I have gay family. I feel that my biological family loves me. I don’t feel very supported, but I don’t think that’s malicious. I think there are just a lot of things they don’t understand. But I think with my friendships, I’m a friendship oriented person. Like, some people are relationship oriented: I’m friendship oriented and I get a lot of my emotional needs and support from my friends. I have amazing friends. I always have had a really good group of friends. We wear each other out sometimes, but for the most part my friendships have been very important and sacred to me. That’s where I get most of my support.

As indicated by their narratives, queer youth of color rely on various kinds of relationships for emotional support, and for practical support, like shelter and finances. While relationships with peers were considered very valuable to participants, they also expressed a closeness and reliance on family members that is not often presented in research literature. Consistent with the available research, these relationships were complicated. Participants were conscious about limitations in their relationships. But, they offered thoughtful analyses
about why some of their relationships with family members were limited. These analyses included a lack of understanding of queer issues and anti-queer stigma. Further research seeking to explore the dynamics of supportive relationships of queer youth of color will do well to explore how these youth negotiate those limitations, and how family relationships may change over time.

These stories highlight the importance of relationships for queer youth survival. In mediating anti-queer discrimination, participants indicated that they utilized relationships to help them deal with the ups and downs of life as a queer youth of color. These data findings offer implications for deeper examinations of how broad concepts of family can be utilized to support queer youth’s survival in school.

Finally, the findings from this study suggest that reliable and supportive families are integral to a queer student of color’s success in formal school settings. All too often we hear the negative stories of parents forfeiting their responsibilities to their queer children because they are afraid of social stigma, or that parents are afraid of how the world will treat their queer child, so they give up on them. Families will do well to not burden queer child with society’s hang ups. The world is much more diverse than society may lead us to believe. And queer children are a testament of that diversity. However, family members of queer youth need more support in educating them about the vast capacity of gender and sexual difference. Their willingness to grow in these areas must be further explored in future research.
CHAPTER SEVEN

What’s the T

Across six chapters I have told stories about the unique lived experiences of queer youth of color. The stories told within this dissertation are brave accounts of identity, ontology, relationships, intellect, critical awareness and struggles for autonomy. In order to discern these stories it requires a calibrated lens able to recognize the intersections of age, race, gender, and sexuality. These stories, as Manalansan IV (2006) puts it, have been “produced through the intersectionality of identities, practices and institutions” (p. 225).

Additionally, in order to understand these stories, it is as important to recall the past from which these stories are contextualized. We do not often hear stories from and about queer youth of color due to a legacy of xenophobia in the U.S. Difference is often met with suspicion, discrimination and violence. This approach to difference is embedded in our social fabric, and is perpetuated in the stories that we continue to tell about difference and the status quo. The historical contexts of queer youth of color victimization have implications for how we understand their stories of survival in the present.

Historically, the social order of the U.S. has featured a heteropatriarchal hierarchy. Heteropatriarchy explains the structure of relationships of power and the regulation of identities existing outside of this order. A heteropatriarchal power structure simultaneously privileges hegemonic masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005) and perpetuates a status quo that assumes cisgender expression, male domination, and heteronormativity. This structure of power distribution simultaneously maps a matrix of domination (Collins, 1990) onto individuals who identify outside of dominate identities. For example, U.S. slavery and the systematic genocide of Native American peoples are two examples of the outcome of
heteropatriarchal power (Smith, 2006). As a result of the instituted structure of power, Native American indigeneity was positioned as other, and deemed in need of controlling (Finley, 2011). Similarly, blackness was marked as primitive. This discourse of the meaning of blackness was used to legitimize U.S. slavery. In addition to systemic disenfranchisement, Native Americans and African slaves (and their descendants) were stripped of their autonomy to self-determined sexual and gender identities (Finley, 2011; Smith, 2011; Collins, 2005). The sexualities and genders of these groups were commodified. In addition to commodifying the sexualities and genders of these people of color, heteropatriarchy has reared its influence in the justice system. Since colonialism, U.S. laws have attempted to regulate gender expression and sexuality. Anti cross-dressing (gender expression discrimination) laws have been present in the U.S. legal system as early as 1848 (Stryker, 2008b). Laws regulating sexual activity (anti-sodomy and anti-oral sex) were introduced in the US legal system as early as 1779 (Madeira, 2004). In light of these contexts, the system of heteropatriarchy seeks to maintain the status quo by strictly policing sexual and gender identities. This surveillance manifests itself in anti-queer discrimination and violence today. Subsequently, queer youth of color have become disproportionately impacted by anti-queer discrimination due to their misalignment with heteropatriarchy.

Due to society’s legacy of anti-queer regulation, it is no wonder why research on queer youth has routinely focused on queer youth oppression. Yet, queer youth of color have stories to share that illuminate more than their experiences of victimization. Throughout this research study, I have attempted to clarify the pieces of the story from the past and present that have mediated the lived experiences of queer youth of color. This dissertation offers new stories that contribute to our understanding of queer youth autonomy and diversity. The
findings described within this research project assert the savviness and critical consciousness of queer youth of color. Queer youth of color must know that they are much more capable than society or some adults may lead them to believe. Society was constructed with many barriers, so there may exist a lot of obstacles that get in the way of them fulfilling their purpose. And still, queer youth, like the participants in this study, are generating creative ways to navigate barriers. They are invested in community, their families, and friends. And above all, they are invested in their own claim to self-determination.

Again, this research study offers ten unique narratives of queer millennials of color who were successful in school and who will continue to make valuable contributions in society as members of a powerful generation. Placing the diversity of the millennial generation at the center of investigation challenges us to think about them more complexly, and troubles the assumption of the dominant white millennial voice. While many white millennials have benefited from past political and socially progressive movements, millennial minorities are often setback by a lack of support, access and discrimination. Moreover, millennial minorities have lived experiences, and professional and academic aspirations that are often misaligned with their support networks, like, friends and family. This study highlights challenges that millennials minorities continue to face, like access to quality education, poverty, violence, but also affirms their fierce resilience. This study is unique in its approach to emphasize the valuable contributions to society that millennial minorities have and will make, in spite of the odds. Finally, reflecting on the diversity of the millennial generation also encourages us to think critically about how to prepare students and future workers with the skills to live and work in an increasingly diverse society. Certainly, this focus warrants deeper analysis in future research investigations.
Implications for schooling

The findings also yield implications for culturally-relevant diversity training for educators, policy makers, family members and queer youth advocates. Many queer youth of color want to do well in school, but their identities are often used against them. Some queer youth find it challenging to fully participate in school, but are victimized and further marginalized by school’s official silence on queer identity and issues. More effort must be made to fully integrate these marginalized youth into school communities. Students need adult leaders to take the lead in showing them how to recognize the value of diversity and difference. Educators and policy-makers must also dedicate their energy towards changing the climate of schooling because it can be aggressive and violent towards difference. An investment in diversity and inclusion can include diversifying school curricula so that they reflect contemporary issues present in youth lives, and it also require that faculty possess socio-cultural competencies so that they are better prepared to support diverse students. Educators and policy-makers also can improve how queer youth are integrated into school communities by inviting faculty and students to collaborate and generate a diversity and inclusion mission for their unique school environment. School communities need clearer language for defining diversity, inclusion and how to engage difference on campus.

I offer three suggestions for educators, advocates and families working with diverse student populations:

1. Educators may not be fully aware of the challenges their students confront. And students may not always volunteer that information. In order to bridge this gap, students and teachers need to dialogue regularly about their lived experiences in school. Educators need to know of the ups and down that their students face, in
order to support their success. A great way to start that conversation is to have students generate a life map of their journey from the start of the school day to the end. Have them mark significant moments, people, and challenges along the way, and ask them to provide a written description. Have students submit their map as homework if the community norms have not been established to allow for a public presentation.

2. Generate a set of classroom norms (that is unique to the individual class) with students. Invite students to reflect and define “diversity”, “community”, and norms for negotiating difference in the classroom. Make this a living document that can be altered to accommodate the needs of the learning community. Make sure to refer to the document occasionally to confirm that the norms generated meet the needs of the class community members during your time together.

3. Students underprepared to engage a diverse society become adults unprepared to work in a diverse society. Beyond dialoguing about diversity, difference and inclusion, students, educators and school officials could benefit from diversity curriculum that offers comprehensive training and critical awareness.

**Implications for research**

Analysis from this research study offered four main findings drawn from multiple queer youth of color narratives. The first finding illuminated queer youth of color’s awareness of anti-queer discrimination, including verbal harassment and violence. The finding also contributes to a deeper understanding of the complex discriminations that challenge queer youth of color’s participation in school. Participants discussed being
victimized by their peers, and noted violence and harassment as expected elements of school culture and schooling. Data findings also recognized adults and teachers as perpetrators of violence and identity policing. This study is unique in that it calls attention to the issue of adultism. Participant stories drew a connection between queer youth of color victimization and adults’ use of violent regulatory actions, as well as adults’ declinations to intervene in anti-queer discrimination. This study offers implications for deeper investigations of the context of adultism as contributing to queer youth victimization.

The second finding explored how queer youth of color participants conceptualize the purpose of schooling and education in their lives. Participants described education as valuable for gaining awareness and knowledge about the world. However, the queer millennial of color informants were also critical of formal schooling systems and school curricula. Several participants articulated keen analyses of formal schooling purposely “conditioning” and seeking to socialize students’ identities and future contributions to society. Some participants also expressed criticisms of the usefulness of the knowledge they received in school. They described frustration with their school curricula’s failure to address the material, economic, social or emotional realities of their contemporary lives.

The third theme generated from data findings explored the ways in which identity matters to queer youth of color. Identity mattered to participants in its capacity to mediate their participation in school. Participants discussed the implications of their identities undermined by the identity-perceptions and stereotypes imposed on them by peers and teachers. Although identity is central to how participants understand and navigate the world, participants were not afforded productive conversations about identity while in school. On the other hand, participant narratives illuminated the multidimensional ways queer youth of
color are thinking about intersectionality and their own multiple intersecting identities. Participants shared ideas about identity as interworking and relational.

The final theme generated from data findings asserts that relationships are valuable resources to queer youth of color. Although participants recognized that their differences and identities were at times used against them, they described their relationships with others as deeply beneficial in helping them deal with the ups and downs of being a queer youth of color. Participants identified friends, mentors, and family (not necessarily genetically related) members as their primary sources of personal and professional support. Relationships with moms were identified by participants as some of the most valuable.

This research study is aligned with a growing body of literature focused on the lived experiences of diverse queer youth of color. It also yields implications for future research investigations and practice in the classroom. Queer of color critique has positively benefited new analysis of queer of color agency by emphasizing critical reflections on the production of knowledge, valuing intersectional identities and deemphasizing the politics of “outness” (Brockenbrough, 2015). The study was novel because it assumes the agency and autonomy of queer youth of color, rather than over-determine their victimization. This work offers a queer of color critique of the queer youth victim discourse, and extends the current discourse on queer youth agency by illuminating acts of queer youth of color survival. The work also contributes to the discourse of queer agency by drawing attention to queer youth of color theoretical articulations of identity, intersectionality and discrimination. Within this study, participant narratives offered insights and context of the challenges confronting queer youth of color, while also exploring their hopes, dreams and aspirations for the future. As a result,
participants’ acts of agency were contextualized with greater attention to their unique social location, social awareness and their critical reflections on past and future.

Among the ten stories shared within this dissertation project, there are still many more to be told. Based on the findings from this investigation, future research within this focus must continue to critically explore family relationships—particularly those between mothers and their queer children. Additional research focused on the queer of color youth demographic should also consider how this population negotiate purpose and future in their lives. The opportunity to generate new knowledge and insight within the era’s complex and queer contexts is exciting!
REFERENCES


Perez, H. (2005). You can have my brown body and eat it, too. Social Text 84/85, pp. 171-191.


## Appendix 1: Participant demographics

**Table 1: Participant demographics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>AGE</th>
<th>RESIDENCE</th>
<th>RACE/ETHNICITY</th>
<th>SEXUAL ORIENTATION</th>
<th>GENDER IDENTITY</th>
<th>ACADEMIC STANDING/DEGREE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CAT</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Midtown</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Gay</td>
<td>Gender queer</td>
<td>H.S diploma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Community college/not currently enrolled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A.E.</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Midtown</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Gay</td>
<td>CISmale</td>
<td>B.A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>College graduate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ronnie</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>West City</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Gay</td>
<td>CISmale</td>
<td>B.A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Graduate student working on M.A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gogo Yubari</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Midtown</td>
<td>Mixed Black Latino</td>
<td>Homo-flexible</td>
<td>Cunt Male</td>
<td>H.S diploma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Community college/not currently enrolled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Archie</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Midtown</td>
<td>Black Jamaican American</td>
<td>Gay</td>
<td>CISmale</td>
<td>B.S.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Doctoral student working on DDS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Race/Ethnicity</td>
<td>Sexual Orientation</td>
<td>Gender Identity</td>
<td>Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Niqko</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Midtown</td>
<td>Mixed Black Latino</td>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>Trans Man</td>
<td>H.S. diploma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Community college/ not currently enrolled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angel</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Midtown</td>
<td>Mixed Latino</td>
<td>Gay</td>
<td>CIS Male</td>
<td>H.S. diploma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Community college/ not currently enrolled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lyric</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Neartown</td>
<td>Mixed Latino</td>
<td>Queer</td>
<td>Queer</td>
<td>H.S diploma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Undergraduate working on B.A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vinny</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Midtown</td>
<td>Asian Chinese</td>
<td>Gay</td>
<td>CIS Male</td>
<td>H.S. diploma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Undergraduate working on B.A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAM</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>West City &amp; Midtown</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Bisexual</td>
<td>CIS Female</td>
<td>H.S. diploma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Undergraduate working on B.A.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 2: Data collected for each participant

Table 2: Data collected for each participant

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>INTERVIEWS</th>
<th>FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW</th>
<th>INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTIONS</th>
<th>LIFE MAP</th>
<th>MISCELLANEOUS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CAT</td>
<td>3 audio recorded interviews</td>
<td>1 audio recorded focus group interview</td>
<td>3 individual interview transcripts</td>
<td>1 life map</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A.E.</td>
<td>3 audio recorded interviews</td>
<td></td>
<td>3 individual interview transcripts</td>
<td>1 life map</td>
<td>“Burn Book” containing 52 cartoon illustrations of high school classmates and school officials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ronnie</td>
<td>3 audio recorded interviews</td>
<td></td>
<td>3 individual interview transcripts</td>
<td>1 life map</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gogo Yubari</td>
<td>3 audio recorded interviews</td>
<td></td>
<td>3 individual interview transcripts</td>
<td>1 life map</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Number of Audio Recorded Interviews</td>
<td>Number of Individual Interview Transcripts</td>
<td>Life Map</td>
<td>Extra Notes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Archie</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3 individual interview transcripts</td>
<td>1 life map</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Niqko</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2 individual interview transcripts</td>
<td>1 Wordle-generated “word cloud”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angel</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3 individual interview transcripts</td>
<td>1 life map</td>
<td>Life map notes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lyric</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1 audio recorded focus group interview</td>
<td>3 individual interview transcripts</td>
<td>1 life map</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lyric</td>
<td></td>
<td>1 group interview transcript</td>
<td></td>
<td>Friend-painted Portrait</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lyric</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Thank you letter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vinny</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3 individual interview transcripts</td>
<td>1 life map</td>
<td>15 abstract oil paintings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAM</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1 audio recorded focus group interview</td>
<td>3 individual interview transcripts</td>
<td>1 life map</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 group interview transcript</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 3: Participant interview questions

Protocol I

Identity background

1) What is your name? What pseudonym would you like to be assigned to you? If there is a particular meaning behind this name, can you please explain why you chose it?

2) How old are you?

3) Where are you from originally? Where do you currently live and with whom? How long have you lived in the Rochester area?

4) How do you identify racially/ethnically? Have you always identified yourself in this way? If not, when did you start to claim this identity, and why?
   a) What do you like or enjoy about being [insert racial identity]?
   b) What do you find challenging about being [insert racial identity]?

5) Repeat question #5 with gender identity.

6) Repeat question #5 with sexual orientation.

7) Are there any other identities that play a key role in defining who you are? If so, please describe.

8) Do any of the identities you’ve described play a bigger role than the others in how you define yourself? In how others define you?

9) How would you describe the relationship between your race and gender?
   A) Repeat question #10 with sexual orientation.
   B) How would you describe the relationship between your gender and sexual orientation?
   C) How would you describe the relationship between your race, gender and sexual orientation?

10) What are your plans, hopes, dreams for the future—personally and professionally?

11) In general, where do you feel supported as a young person who identifies as you do? In other words, what people, groups, places, etc. help you to deal with the ups and downs of being [insert identities]?
Appendix 3: Participant interview questions

Protocol II

Academic Experiences

1) What is the highest level of formal schooling that you’ve completed?

2) Are you currently in school? If so, where, and what type of degree are you pursuing? If not, can you explain why and what you are doing instead?

3) In general, how would you describe yourself as a student? How would you describe your experience in school? Is there anything you would change?

4) In which subjects did you excel? Describe

5) In which subjects did you experience the most difficulty? Describe

6) Based on your experience, what challenges, if any, have you faced in pursuit of your educational goals? Please describe. And how did you address those challenges?

7) When you needed academic help, to whom or what did you turn? Describe

8) In general, how would you describe your relationship with your teachers? Is there anything that you would change?

9) What are your educational goals? Why? Which goals have you met? Which goals are you still pursuing? Are there goals that you have given up?

10) Which academic accomplishments are you most proud? Why?

11) Based on your experience, who has been supportive of your educational goals? How have they demonstrated this?

12) What is the purpose of formal education? How would you describe the importance of education in your life?

13) How have the identities you described impacted your journey through school?

14) How have the identities you described benefitted you while in pursuit of your educational goals?
Appendix 3: Participant interview questions

Life Map Activity - Interview protocol III

Figure 15: Life Map Example

ACTIVITY: Think about your time in school from your very first day to the present. If you
drew a roadmap of your life in school, what would it look like? In this activity you will be
asked to mark major landmarks (experiences, people, learning moments, etc.) that you
identify as having a salient (noticeable or important) impact on your journey in school. The
life map does not need to be linear, so your map can look however you choose. Please
represent each landmark with a symbol of your choosing and include a legend or list describing the meaning of each symbol.

Appendix 3: Participant interview questions

1) What does your life map journey represent? What is the big picture?
2) What does your life map say about how queer youth of color experience school?
3) Describe how you see your future.
Appendix 4: Focus group interview protocol

Challenges and resources for queer students of color

1) Please describe what it is like to identify as queer of color in school

2) In general, how do teachers interact with queer students of color?

3) Based on your experience in school, what challenges do queer students of color face while pursuing their education?

4) When academic help is needed, to whom or what can queer students of color turn? Describe

5) Who and/or what can help queer students of color make it through school? Describe

6) In what ways might identifying as a queer student of color impacted educational goals?

7) In what ways might identifying as a queer student of color benefit educational goals?

8) What is the purpose of formal education? How would you describe the importance of education in your life?

9) What advice or suggestions would you offer younger queer students of color trying to make it through formal school settings? What can adults do to help? What can students do to support each other?