RADICALLY LOVING TRANS PEOPLE OF COLOR: RESISTING EASY EXPLANATIONS OF IDENTITY IN EDUCATION

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A thesis submitted to the

Faculty of the Graduate School of the

University of Colorado in partial fulfillment

of the requirement for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

School of Education

2024

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Dissertation co-chaired by Professor Elizabeth J. Meyer and Associate Professor Bethy Leonardi

This study is intended as a queeruption (McCready, 2019) in the way trans lives are considered in education research, policy, and practice. Queeruptions are required by a status quo that drives hundreds of pieces of legislation targeting the rights of transgender people alongside concerted efforts to restrict dialogue about race in the classroom. As queeruptive, this study is queer, not in terms of identity categories but rather in its focus on process, blurring binaries, and moving beyond the traditional contexts associated with US schooling. The study is eruptive in its focus on building and transforming. The qualitative methods employed in this study, such as ride-along interviews, embraced process and mutuality. Rather than pain, institutional welfare, or (in)accessible medical transition (common themes in the ways trans life is understood in empirical research), the focus of this study is love. Owing to lineages of scholars, teachers, activists and transcestors who have insisted that the lives of trans people of color are sacred, this dissertation study also centers the epistemologies of five trans people of color. In exploring how racialization and transness influence the way a group of trans people of color in the Southeastern United States has come to know and practice love, this study carries practical and scholarly implications for identity studies in education and understanding new pathways for approaching coalition building and trusting process.

Acknowledgments

This dissertation project and my progress toward a doctoral degree in education were only possible because of the connections that sustain me. I would like to thank the following people for holding me with love, alongside my ancestors and my commitments as I pursued this project.

My four brothers, Stephen, Christian, William and Brett. When you tell me you're proud of me, it means the most.

My godson and cousin, Rhett. While the grief we have endured together these past years has no precedent, the process has no doubt cemented my trust that we've got each other. All ways.

My father James for teaching me how to fish; my stepmother Nita for teaching me how to read; my stepfather Jeff for teaching me the value of telling the truth; and my Mama Chel, for showing me early on that God is love. It's made all the difference.

My aunties--Beloved Godmother, Lisa and "Aunt G from Detroit," you no doubt helped raise me and encouraged my connection to the mystery. And Aunt Kath, your spirit keeps me wild and awed. Not much beats our bond forged under the shelter of umbrella trees, hunting for dinosaur eggs and finding God in the small.

My grandparents, Phil and Sandra. Your unwavering faith and democratic morals are fixtures of aspiration within me. Thank you for consistently valuing the continued learning of your six grandkids.

To my co-advisors at the University of Colorado, Boulder, Elizabeth J. Meyer and Bethy Leonardi. Without you, there would be no me at CU. Thank you for your unwavering support of my ideas, especially in their emergent and ephemeral quality and for your influence on the growing appreciation for queer and trans life in education research and practice.

To my committee members Cindy Cruz, Nishant Upadhyay, and Emily Gleason. Thank you for your tireless labor on behalf of the dignity of students; of people; *all* people. It is an honor to be on the long road with you.

To my chosen family, my comrades in love and freedom. Particularly, but in no particular order, in service of this project, Lau, dena, Leah, Dr. Tiera Tanksley, Dr. Ebony McGee, Drewsilla, Tasha, Monét, Lindsey, Justin, Sergio, Sara, Serena, and Ian.

Lastly, I offer the deepest, most cosmic gratitude to my main squeeze on this Earth walk. My partner in paradox, play, poetics and the pursuit of feeling more, Kachine Suzanne Kulick.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my late Aunt Colleen. Queer before it was cool, spiritual without defense; while on Earth, Co lived an ethic of radical love and freedom.

And to my collaborators, of course, Ezekial, Saffron, Alex, Star, and Juston. Through showing me your love, you have bolstered my commitment to waging it.

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Chapter 1. Inhalation: Introducing the Study

> We can call into their offices, we can oppose bills, we can organize protests, we can vote as much as we want, but at the end of the day our bodies are political whether or not we want them to be.
>
> –Saffron, collaborator

Introduction

During February 2024, at the time of this writing another trans person of color died. A non-binary, 16-year-old Choctaw kid. The cops claim it's not because they were beaten up in a bathroom at school the day before. Coverage across news outlets immediately highlighted how Oklahoma, where this death occurred, "leads the nation in anti-LGBTQ bills" (Yurcaba, 2024). Everyone and no one to blame kind of thing. When I read studies about transgender people and I listen to talking points which frame our identities lines as "issues," so often our physicality is the presumed focus, in life and death. Three main points of attention in recent anti-trans legislative actions nationwide: bathrooms, healthcare, and athletics, are all institutionally bound to our physicality or our material flesh. Flesh as a site of theorization, as a site of breath, of expansion, a site where we, in Marquis Bey's (2019) words, get "outside of things" (p. 141), is different from these accounts wherein flesh is determinant, flesh is epidermis, flesh is the prime container for our being. Like the radical women of color who brought us *This Bridge Called My Back,* more and more I am inspired to join the "refusal of the *easy* explanation to the conditions we live in" (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1981, p. 23), particularly the refusal made possible through seeing flesh differently, as fuse for "a politic born out of necessity" (p. 23). As this collective of writers asserted, there is nothing easy about histories of oppression and exploitation. We cannot *easily* describe the conditions that resulted in the death of the 16-year-old, indigenous, two spirit, Nex Benedict without gravely misrepresenting the US socio-political culture

that mediated it. As featured in the epigraph to this chapter, one of my collaborators for this study Saffron reminds, "our bodies are political whether or not we want them to be."

I am inspired by theorists, scholars and activists who direct our attention to the embodied and internal dimensions of power structures and the struggles beyond and within attention to policy and confrontations with state entities. I am inspired by the radical notion that any policy in education intended to protect or prohibit maintains a paradigm of relationality in which some bodies are more normal and furthermore deserving (Spade, 2011) than others. It is perhaps easier to see the adverse impact of dominant culture and normativity on the queer and trans bodies most directly harmed. Yet, ways of knowing and relating that reinforce ideas of "right" ways to be and systems of reward and punishment affect *everyone*; these conditions create and shape the "cops in our heads and hearts" (Rojas, 2007, p. 197). My dissertation comes from what lives in my heart and head from years of working alongside queer and trans young people in the Southeastern United States. This study comes from within my body as a trans person of color, according to metrics of being in the United States. My dissertation comes from my seemingly risky desire to move trans from a category of being protected or missed in political platforms and, instead, in the spirit of radical transfeminism, move trans into an "indeterminate affirmation" (van der Drift & Raha, 2020, p. 21). What might trans offer as a modality to "ensure the support and nourishment of bodily life?" (p.21). All bodily life, not just that deemed impossibly normal and valuable by our current power structures and paradigms of relationality rooted in superiority and subsequent subordination?

Context: The Chokehold of Whiteness

Critical education scholars have long recognized the ways in which schools and other education contexts reflect the value systems of the larger socio-political climates in which they are contained (McLaren, 1989; Delpit, 1995; Bale & Knopp, 2012). The values of what bell hooks described as the "imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy" (2012, p. 4) and "the chokehold

of racial gendered ableist capitalism" (Gumbs, 2020, p. 2). The values that preserve whiteness, which is not to say White people, are the entrenched socio-political cultural paradigms of the United States which perpetuate the perceived superiority of bodies proximal to dominant culture in complexion, behavior, and value systems. My dissertation involves six trans people—me and five participant collaborators. Four are Black, two of us are Latine. Yet, I fear none of what I set out to do, what I found, and what continues to emerge will matter unless I am clear about this whiteness piece. Without it, my work may recycle boxes and buzzwords, or merely hit some harmful quota for talking about trans people of color. That is not it. Out of the gate, I want to make clear that I desire to blow that identity stuff up. I am interested in launching identity, negotiating, shifting, destabilizing, and flexing identity in collaboration with and based in the epistemologies of the expert theorists on identity—those doing the identifying. To understand identifications in such way, always informed by and in relationship to systems of power and domination, we need to get clear on whiteness. For this, I draw on Marquis Bey's (2019) incisive articulation from their collection of essays *Them Goon Rules*. Bey (2019) spells out,

> Whiteness is a kind of ideology, a violent way of inhabiting oneself racially, and it is whiteness that operates pervasively as one of dominative power's ligaments…A whiteness that feels so threatened by references to the white supremacist legacy of the country or to whiteness's detrimental and fatal effect on bodies of Color crafts new stories of identity, stories that depict itself as patriotic, unmarred by bias, self-sufficient, Christian and godlike, and the sole cultural force that founded this country…And it can afflict anyone. We are all of us susceptible to its allure, as it, in James Baldwin's terms, is not racial identity per se but a metaphor for power. Power entices all of us and beckons for us to agree with its reality, a reality to the detriment of those who refuse power's oppression, power's malice, power's normativity (p. 18).

Whiteness is the chokehold (Gumbs, 2020) and Bey's articulation helps make the point that it is whiteness and its inherent fragility, its composition as a glass house from which so many stones are wielded, that makes the continued onslaught of violence against all that threatens it possible. In his 1963 address "A Talk to Teachers," James Baldwin explains how those conspiring in the production and maintenance of whiteness, or the culture of power, are "really the victims of this conspiracy to make Negroes believe they are less than human" (p. 3). He continues, "if I am not what I've been told I am, then it means that you're not what you thought you were either! And that is the crisis" (p. 3). The crisis he names, is the crisis imbuing Bey's description, the crisis of identity established upon status and subordination, the allure of the understanding of power as *power over*.

For me to name normativity is not sufficient. Around the time I began my study, 250 anti-LGBTQ bills had been proposed, with 104 of these bills directly impacting trans young people (Ronan, 2021). Now as I write in early 2024, there are a total of 496 active bills across 41 states in the US actively targeting transgender people (Trans Legislation Tracker, 2024). Underneath these legislative efforts to control, constrain and determine where, when and how transgender people can live are concerted efforts to preserve whiteness. The "stories that depict [the US] as patriotic, unmarred by bias" that Bey (2019) names, is the story of the United States that critical race theory in classrooms might demystify, the moral values the forty-four states who acted to restrict how teachers can discuss matters of race, gender, and sexism in the classroom in 2021 went to bat for (Schwartz, 2021). In this chokehold, histories of violence and the disproportionate disciplinary treatment of queer and trans students of color in schools (Burdge, Licona, & Hyemingway, 2014) are echoed on the street, where trans life, especially the lives of trans femme people of color, continues to be at literal risk of extermination (Wood, Carillo, & Monk-Turner, 2019). Reforming these structures or shifting the guards is insufficient.

Alexis Pauline Gumbs (2020) describes how while living in the chokehold of white supremacy, "*we* are still undrowning." She says not only "people like myself whose ancestors specifically survived the middle passage, because the scale of our breathing is planetary, at the very least" (p. 2). Gumbs' articulation of the connection of our breath across ancestry and space is inherent to the intention that I bring to this study and reflective of my understanding of the implications of both trans and Black feminism as projects of collective transformation, not limited to trans or Black people. These implications can be felt in the 1971 declaration of political strategist and freedom worker Fannie Lou Hamer, "Nobody's free until everybody's free" (Brooks & Houck, 2010). We are as confined by an exploitative imbalanced economic structure (a common critique from Hamer) as we are by ontological paradigms about the nature of being, or what we think we "know" about what it means to be each other, including but not limited to assumptions about what it means to be (or more commonly not be) transgender. What kinds of bodies are made negotiable when we consider Hamer's charge? What would it mean for every *body* to be free? The Black feminism theoretical underpinnings of my study illuminate the connection between "the struggle for Black liberation to the struggle for a liberated United States and, ultimately, the world" (Taylor, 2017, p. 11). Taking these lines of reasoning (and interconnectedness) seriously means that those of us committed to social justice in education, especially justice for trans students of color, need not fear what it means to be doing this work as White people, or light-skinned people, or people like me who have found the grip of whiteness cozy. Kai M. Green and Marquis Bey (2017) generously remind us,

> Black feminism and trans feminism can be taken up by anyone willing to commit to the necessary work they demand... Black and trans feminisms do the really hard stuff of imagining what we must become, and what we must give up, in order for the beings who have not yet been allowed to emerge to do so (p. 448).

While we should not fear, we are being called over and over to step up, without stepping upon (including stepping on or putting ourselves down). Because I am not a Black person, I have been afraid to center Blackness, or Black feminism in my work. If I am open to what Black feminism as a project demands, and I trust the "planetary scale of our breathing, at the very least," as Gumbs (2020, p. 2) intuits, this centering in my research feels less like a choice among many and more like a strongly encouraged political strategy and spiritual commitment. This centering feels like leaning into the "really hard stuff of imagining what we must become" (Green & Bey 2017, p. 448).

Study Purpose: Breathing

> We be making ways out of no way, rising as the phoenix do and bowing knees prayin' like granny too.
>
> —CeCe McDonald, Kai M. Green & Treva C. Ellison, "Trans Multitudes and Death Reality: A Coda"

The "chokehold" of white supremacy, or the culture of whiteness, is not a new phenomenon, nor are my claims that we cannot talk about homophobia, transphobia, or ableism, for example, without talking about racism. It is all interconnected, as is our breathing and demand for life. The purpose of my dissertation is to elevate and home in on the "un" piece, of Gumbs' assertion that we are all "undrowning." The purpose is to home in on the way trans people, especially those of us who have been racialized as people of color in the United States, and even more especially Black trans people, as Cece, Kai, and Treva announce, "make ways out of no way" (2017, para. 7). Gumbs implicates us *all* as collective participants. In describing "undrowning," Gumbs (2020) illuminates a level of personal agency often foreclosed by attention to material conditions and social circumstances alone. In Gumbs' description, we are a collective of selves engaging in processes of un-doing, of undrowning, rather than waiting hostage in varying impending

states of suffocation. For me, attending to and valuing our processes and practices of undrowning, of making ways out of no way, is a form of resisting easy explanations of identity in education.

Largely inspired by my professional work in the state of Tennessee, overseeing after school programs for queer and trans young people at a not-for-profit, wrap-around youth services community-based organization (CBO), I entered this study curious about the role of educational research in affecting the life chances of trans young people of color. While at Apex[1], the CBO, I became privy to many reflections of the ways in which whiteness impedes upon young peoples' freedom to be, and additionally on adults like me positioned in a service role with these communities. The young people accessing the programs I led all identified as LGBTQ+ in some capacity; yet given the wrap-around nature of the agency, I bore witness to obstacles for young people beyond marginalization based on gender and sexuality. Most young people who accessed services at Apex at large (outside of my programs) were people of color, and yet, over the course of the five years I worked there, the racial demographics of the programs designed for queer and trans young communities under my purview remained predominantly White. I saw many reflections of the picture education research paints about queer and trans young people of color.

Stories shared with me by some of the few trans and queer young people of color engaged in programming echo the ways in which LGBTQ-based supports have been unresponsive to the lived experiences of students of color within these communities (Brockenbrough, 2015; Darling-Hammond, 2019; McCready, 2004, 2013; Misa, 2001). For example, while White students and their families frequently praised the program for their new-found sense of belonging and ease, students of color shared with me feelings of exclusion, distrust, and tokenization (to name a few). These experiences were shared against a backdrop of mission statements that named commitments to anti-

[1] Unless noted otherwise, all names are pseudonyms including the names of agencies, programs, and cities. With the exception of Star, my participant collaborators each chose their own pseudonym. A table of programmatic pseudonyms is provided in chapter 5 for reference alongside findings relevant to these venues.

racism, and ally-ship to *all* students, indicated by an extensive list of enumerated identity categories including but not limited to race, ethnicity, language of origin, and ability. The majority of queer and trans young people of color who accessed Apex as an agency were *not* coming to hang with other queer and trans young folks at my programs but were instead getting their needs met at the street outreach emergency shelter. While I worked there, and still today, an estimated forty percent of all young people experiencing homelessness in the US identify as LGBTQ+, and within this demographic, those who are trans and of color experience the most challenges (Shelton & Bond, 2017). To break it down, although there are always exceptions and nuance, while I was working at Apex, I found White trans and non-binary young people found refuge in the queer and trans-focused programming I coordinated, while trans people of color found refuge in the emergency shelter. Herein is a snapshot of the differential and racialized impact of community and educational supports and some of the tensions that led me to this study.

The varying degrees and nature of support, motivation, and sense of belonging (among other needs) experienced by White queer and trans young people as compared to the queer and trans young people of color who frequented Apex are symptoms of what scholars have referred to as the non-profit industrial complex (NPIC) (Rodriguez, 2007; Spade, 2015). Rooted in the same critique as the prison industrial complex (PIC), the NPIC refers to the cyclical pitfalls of not-for-profit organizations in the United States, based on an infrastructure established on preserving the status quo and economic stratification of the United States. As defined by Rodriguez (2007), "The NPIC is the set of symbiotic relationships that link together political and financial technologies of state and owning-class proctorship and surveillance over public political intercourse, including and especially emergent progressive and leftist social movements, since about the mid-1970's" (p. 22). I consistently felt these constraints of the NPIC in full effect as I wrestled with how to unsettle these dynamics. Our foundation and grant-funded work made tangible impacts in the lives of some young

people, yet the oppressive systems that drove the work remained intact. The NPIC neatly mirrors the conditions constraining K-12 environments, in which policy efforts on behalf of protecting trans students distract change efforts from disturbing the larger value systems determining ideas of threat and safety (Farley & Leonardi, 2021; Leonardi et al., 2021; Marx et al., 2017). For, as Munshi and Willse (2007) note "The non-profit and the school are two key sites in which neoliberal social and economic reforms are both constituted and contested" (p. xiv).

My dissertation study is motivated by my desire to disturb, trouble, and better understand what can be done about the cycles maintaining the non-profit industrial complex, the contours of the culture of whiteness, the Co2 we all breathe in addition to oxygen, to borrow Beverly Tatum's (1997) metaphor. Disturbing the chokehold of these value systems, of "racial gendered ableist capitalism" (Gumbs, 2020) requires an orientation to liberation in which the life chances of the White, able-bodied, trans boy at the school's LGBTQ affinity space matter just as much as the life of the Black non-binary queen in the outreach shelter. In fact, his liberation requires theirs.

While I started this project curious about what education research can do to affect the life chances of trans young people of color, what surfaced is a commitment to exploring what trans of color life can offer education research, spaces, and lines of reasoning. When I read about the lives of trans people in my home discipline of education, I rarely learn about the ways in which the trans people I know and love from my time at Apex and beyond have learned and insisted on breathing any way. How they "[make] ways out of no way." What about young adults who are not in college? What about trans people who don't want to be associated with the label of trans? And, importantly, beyond resistance, resilience, trouble and pain, what about love?

Queeruptive Trans Radical Love

In the spring of 2022, I set out to learn about love in the lives of five trans young people with whom I have lasting relationships. Five people who are all in their early twenties and have been

racialized as people of color within the context of the United States. I considered our shared affective, personal understanding of the damage-centered (Tuck, 2009; Fine, 2017) research that informs public understandings of our communities. I considered the impact of experiences at axes of race, gender, class, ability, age, and education on their perceptions of self-worth, capacity for self-determination, and engagement in politics. I considered how there is something special, sacred even about trans people growing together in service of liberation, the t4t (trans for trans) love politics Jo Hsu (2022) writes about, the same politics that has imbued my capacity to keep going, trying, believing, hoping for the liberating potential of education spaces, formal and otherwise. I thought about the work of educator researchers in the special issue of *Equity and Excellence in Education* edited by Lance McCready (2019) and was inspired by what became possible through centering the epistemologies of Black and Brown queer and trans young people.

The approaches featured in this issue are referred to as queeruptive, borrowing from the name of early alternative radical festivals for queer people (Brown, 2007). For these education troublers, queeruptive work illustrates, "elements of a FUBU (for us by us) sensibility; application of mutuality, collectivity, and activism as community practices; critical consciousness; and disruptive modes of self-assertion and refusal that promote relief, pleasure and healing" (Darling-Hammond, 2019, p. 425). I knew that my dissertation needed to be queeruptive, in method and implication. I am not interested in teaching what trans is, nor better understanding the factors that support or curtail matriculation for trans students in higher education, nor what kind of curriculum might feel the most inclusive. There are brilliant scholars doing that already. I wanted to, in the spirit of the first queeruptions, erupt education research, and queerly. Darling-Hammond (2019) asserts, and I follow,

> In order for schools, at any level, to become sites of possibility for QTPOC [(queer and trans people of color)], they have to be designed to not only mitigate (dismantle) the

> oppressive dimensions of society, but also to encourage (acknowledge, amplify) the practices that queer people of color have been crafting and performing outside of schools for generations (p. 433).

Although not specific to trans people, Darling-Hammond invites me to remember the importance of shifting reference points. Beyond the reference point of mitigating the bad, the wrong, the problem, she reminds me that our reference points can, and perhaps should be, the young people who are practicing, pushing, crafting, breathing or "undrowning" any way. I wondered what attention to love in both method and inquiry, rooted in our relationships might open up in qualitative research that has been previously foreclosed. I wondered how a methodological approach and analysis, imbued with interdisciplinary lenses that forefront relationality, lived experience, and love such as Black feminism (McGuire, Edwards, & Dancy, 2022) might contribute to the animation of a trans of color future. Such a future is collectively liberating.

My dissertation study is rooted in this spirit, this project, which is the spirit of the Combahee River Collective (Combahee River Collective, 1977) and at the heart of intersectionality as a project, not a buzzword, the Fannie Lou Hamer spirit that nobody is free until everybody is free. none of What started as a theoretical framework to approach my research questions, continues to emerge as a conceptual affect, lens, and orientation to the practice of teaching and cultivating learning spaces in service of shifting power dynamics and embracing change. Trans Radical Love is the lens I used to approach my methods queeruptively, rooted in the practices and ways of knowing of the trans people of color in my study, and is also the framework that my participant collaborators have helped me build in sharing their always-partial stories of selfhood and community with me.

In this study, I learned about and amplify strategies of resistance, healing, worldmaking and breathing, not in spite of the social structures that threaten and choke trans of color life (and human dignity in general, really), but somehow, alongside, against and through them. Black feminist

tradition offers us this vision of collective liberation, established on lineages of analysis of the compounded impact of socio-political systems of domination. Black feminist tradition also offers a socially transformative solution and ethic, independent of a reliance on structures or experts, upon which this dissertation study is based: love.

Research Questions

Through Trans Radical Love, as an affect, a politic, an analytical tool and more, over the course of six months, I conducted a three-phase, qualitative study in response to the following research questions:

1) How do lived experiences with racialization and transness serve as mediators of love in the lives of trans young adults of color?
    a) How do participant collaborators talk about love as it relates to their identities and lived experiences specifically? What stories do they tell?
    b) What life-affirming, and survival-rich (Cruz, 2013; Lugones, 2003) practices do collaborators engage with that exemplify love?
2) What are the implications of centering the loving practices of trans young adults of color in approaches to education research and practice as a liberation project?

Project Map: Dissertation Structure

I structured my dissertation as seven chapters. Chapter two, the literature review, offers a broad view of education research at large including but not limited to K-12 learning environments to highlight three key pitfalls that have contributed to my motivation for my study. These pitfalls or perhaps feedback loops that animate my interest in elevating trans of color life as key to enacting transformative education spaces and research are 1) trans people have been subsumed within research on LGBTQ young people at large; 2), this research has remained centered on White students as the presumed norm and furthermore, race and other contributing factors to students'

navigation of identity and education are elided or made peripheral; and, 3) for the most part, this research has been framed from a defensive position. This defense usually centers around trans students' rights to access the systems of normativity just like everyone else, without directly troubling (Kumashiro, 2002), disturbing, or moving toward the expertise or daily theorizing of trans students this research is purported to support and/or protect.

Chapter three is all about theory. I introduce the sociocultural, theoretical underpinnings of Trans Radical Love and my process of developing this framework that I intend to continue developing beyond the purposes of my study. I describe why these theories have been important and instrumental in my research and what this framework can offer the discipline and field at large along the lines of how we see and value each other and approach education spaces accordingly. During the time I was ruminating upon and conducting this research, Marquis Bey was publishing radical permissions for scholars, thinkers, dreamers and troublers to take up trans and Black feminism together. In fact, Marquis Bey and Kai M. Green had been inviting us to understand that the two are already interwoven (Bey, 2021; Green & Bey, 2017). The same goes for C. Riley Snorton (2017) with his extensive research for the development of the groundbreaking text in trans studies, *Black on Both Sides: A Racial History of Trans Identity*. Marquis Bey is not trans according to the paradigms profligate in education research, and they do well to humbly articulate both the fears and tensions of encouraging trans as an analytical, Black feminist lens from this position. I am not Black. Yet, in Bey's work and mine lies a radical permission to care about and listen to what such lenses demand and offer to all of us, especially those of us with the privilege to serve in such a capacious arena as education and classrooms. Bey's (2022) *Black Trans Feminism* helped me shape my conceptual framework of Trans Radical Love and permitted me to acknowledge and celebrate my loyalty to the most radical liberation project I have ever encountered, Black feminism.

Chapter four describes what I am calling queeruptive crystallization, the overarching methodology of my study. I explain how relationality, tenets of queeruptive education praxis and the theoretical foci of Trans Radical Love were key in my approach to all phases of data collection and analysis. Within chapter four, I also explain how my methods assisted my attunement to practices and forms of loving concealed by or often overlooked in research because of our reliance on institutional metrics, including the unexamined norm of whiteness.

Chapters five and six are more akin to a traditional dissertation structure, in which I present my key findings and implications of this study. However, as crystallization in qualitative research encourages (Ellingson, 2009) and Trans Radical Love demands, these are findings and insights that I attempt to keep in motion and open to new discovery as I design for and continue to cultivate learning spaces in service of liberation. Chapter five is organized around findings I drew from analysis considering my collaborators as individuals and our time together one on one. I share findings that have encouraged me to continue reimagining the limits and contours of identity (Anzaldúa, 2015) and how this reimagining, or re-working, is a form of a loving practice for *all* students, not just those who have been the most stifled by the identity politics underneath contemporary diversity and inclusion efforts. Chapter six is organized around what happened when I came together with collaborators in a group, collective space. I share one of the approaches to data analysis I employed, poetic inquiry, in order to develop a shared text for this session. I showcase findings that were determined as a collective through shared annotation and sense-making such as the importance of self-care and having our basic needs met when it comes to radically loving. In this chapter I then also describe patterns of participation I noticed that added complexity and nuance to how I conceive of the role of witnessing in group spaces, particularly along the lines of fostering self-love.

Lastly, chapter seven concludes my dissertation. I provide a synthesis of the ground woven and traversed throughout my study and this document, paying mind to the larger implications of this study, particularly now. I then return to my framework of Trans Radical Love to explain its current and emergent state as the unexpected grounded theoretical outcome of my study. I describe how while I returned to my conceptual framework throughout my study, my findings started to sharpen and direct specific questions we can ask of ourselves and material circumstances, across contexts, from an ethic of Trans Radical Love. This chapter brings my dissertation home to the discipline of education. Education is hardly a home, but rather a launchpad, a locale for what bell hooks calls the practice of freedom (1994, p. 4). With hope, in the last chapter of my dissertation, lies inspiration for people to take up Trans Radical Love, exactly and wherever they are positioned in the chokehold of White supremacy; transed, raced, and potentially willing to refuse.

Chapter 2 Literature Review: Locating Trans Possibility

> Research methodology functions as a kind of pedagogy. That is, the *way* that scholars study a topic shapes how people understand it.
>
> —Harper Keenan (2022, p. 308)

> More research is needed: more oral histories, personal narratives, focus groups, ethnographies. The voices of gay, lesbian, and trans students of color must be part of academic theorizing, especially where education is concerned.
>
> —Nova Gutierrez (2004, p. 78)

With this review of literature, I paint a broad picture of empirical research that directly considers young trans people of color in education. As implied by the two epigraphs to this chapter, the way scholars have studied trans lives in education has shaped how people understand these lives and played a part in Gutierrez's (2004) call for more. These limitations in methodology and scope inform the necessity for both the broad approach I take in this literature review and for the interdisciplinary nature of my study in the service of education as a discipline. As critical trans studies scholars Nicolazzo, Marine, and Galarte (2015) make clear, as cited in Nicolazzo (2016) "While there is in general unprecedented social awareness of trans* identities, (particular) trans* people, and trans* issues, there has yet to be a serious concentrated effort to explore trans* subjectivities, identities, and experiences in educational contexts" (p. 367). Although there has been an insurgence of trans-focused educational research over the past thirty years (Regan & Meyer, 2021), opportunities for intersectional analysis and the polyvocality of trans communities (Nicolazzo, 2017; Salas-Santacruz, 2023) have been largely missed (Mayo & Blackburn, 2020). I looked to the social sciences, such as psychology and sociology and education research to locate possibilities in research, specifically possibilities for research with and on behalf of trans young people who have been racialized as people of color in the United States and the methodologies that

both foreclose and encourage such possibility. I wondered about the questions researchers have asked and for what purposes.

This broad search of literature, paired with my prior practical experience working with queer and trans young people in the Southeastern United States led me to identify three key constraints limiting the scope and venue of trans based education research. These constraints characterize the empirical research about gender and sexual diversity (GSD) in schools over time and illuminate some of the reasons for the lack of intersectional analysis into the lives of trans young people (Gutierrez, 2004; Mayo & Blackburn, 2020). The three constraints of GSD educational research historically that I use to frame this review and subsequent rationale for my study are 1) that, trans young people have been subsumed under research about LGBTQ+ students broadly, 2) that, GSD research has lacked intersectional foci, and further trans students have been presumed to be White; and 3) that, the research comes from a defensive position. Taken seriously, these constraints of empirical research help explain why the lived experiences of trans people of color have been scarcely considered. The obligatory defense researchers have to play in the midst of our US socio-political climate speaks to why beyond being thorough, I am broad in order to situate my study on behalf of the theorizing and agentive practices engaged by young people every day, transcendent of any specific classroom arrangement, learning context, or student body. A socio-political climate that necessitates such fierce and consistent defensiveness means we need to highlight students' theorizing and agency occurring alongside the researchers and scholars writing and advocating for policy to support them.

Structure

I organize this review beginning with a rationale for the relevance of my study to education research and practice. Then, I further explain the three constraints I have enumerated as the starting place for the web of empirical research I weave to justify the interdisciplinary theoretical frameworks

that comprise my developing conceptual framework of Trans Radical Love. This web begins with an overview of the persisting paradigms in research about trans young people in K-12 settings. In order to locate research specific to trans students of color, I then draw from research focused on queer young people of color, as it's within this body of scholarship where we find examples of scholars exploring the compounding nature of marginality based on intersections of race, gender, and sexuality in students' lives and opportunities for expansion specific to transness. Next, I describe what directions have been named for deeper criticality in research concerning trans lives, particularly in shifting the reference point from the individual trans student as the problem to trans students' relationships to larger systems in which they are expected to learn. This criticality lends an understanding of the invaluable role of informal and out-of-school education spaces for trans young people of color, which I take up in the second to last section of this review. Finally, this literature review concludes with a few examples of empirical research from critical trans scholars in higher education as on one hand, higher education most directly considers my participants' age group of emerging adulthood and on the other, higher education has offered some of the few examples of theoretically rich, empirical research that specifically attends to racialized trans experiences, among other vectors of nuance. This web of literature is comprehensive to the extent that it should clarify my study design choices and ultimately help fortify why my study matters for education, especially right now.

Constraints of Historical Gender and Sexual Diversity Education Research

The experiences and needs of transgender students have historically been subsumed in literature about LGBTQ+ students generally (Toomey et al., 2018; McBride, 2020; Kelley et al., 2022). This approach, in which trans students are considered as an add-on to students who are queer (according to sexuality) otherwise inhibits opportunities to understand trans student experiences more deeply and is reflected in both the title and intention of Leonardi, Farley, Gonzalez, &

Drager's (2021) article "Unpacking the T: Sharing the Diverse Experiences of Trans Students Navigating Schools." Second, not only have transgender students been understood as a monolithic group within the larger LGBTQ+ student population, but because GSD research has also lacked intersectional analyses, the racialized experiences of these students for the most part have been missed (Mayo & Blackburn, 2020). Subsequently, like their lesbian, gay, and bisexual peers, trans students have historically been understood according to the needs and experiences of White students (Travers, 2018). This tendency provoked Christina Misa's (2001) decades-old question, "Where have all the queer students of color gone?" (p. 67) and the other collections of inquiries accompanying it in the groundbreaking volume *Troubling Intersections of Race and Sexuality: Queer Students of Color and Anti-Oppressive Education,* edited by Kevin Kumashiro. Further, trans students have been understood as White, and beyond elisions of compounded experiences of marginality, for the most part "trans" is understood as a certain way of being transgender based on Euro-centric and medicalized definitions of trans. This is typically limited to embodiment? and some kind of dissonance of identification between what one was assigned as at birth and their emergent, understood sense of self.

The third characteristic of empirical research on GSD in schools that helps to explain the elusiveness of trans young people of color, simply stated, is that we are still playing defense. The obligatory defense we have had to play politically in the face of legislation restricting trans lives and restricting teachers' freedom to teach about topics that support trans life, particularly trans of color life, filter into a form of obligatory defense for researchers too. Although classrooms have shifted significantly since the establishment of GLSEN in 1990, findings from the organization's 2019 National Climate Survey still seem to be more reflective of the current push to ban queer and trans topics in schools. In their executive summary of the most recent National School Climate Survey (Kosciw, Clark & Menard, 2022), GLSEN researchers reported that of the 22, 298 LGBTQ+

students between 13 and 21 included in their study, 7.6% reported "missing school 6 or more days in the past month because of feeling unsafe or uncomfortable" (p. 5). This sole statistic, one of many in their report, exemplifies how queer and trans students are still being pushed out of school.

This pushout is exacerbated for queer and trans students of color, contributing another layer to the school to prison pipeline (Burdge et al., 2014). In their final report on discipline disparities and school pushout, Burdge et al. (2014) attended to the experiences of queer and trans students of color with an analysis of the compounded impact of racist, and specifically anti-Black disciplinary practices in schools. This attention alone is indicative of the need for consistent and additional expanisve lines of inquiry and intersectional analyses. It's telling that one of the few reports we have available about the lived experiences of queer and trans young people of color is about the disproportionate discipline they experience, as compared to their White peers. This illustrates the extent of the interconnected symptoms of Gumbs' (2020) "chokehold of white supremacy" (p. 2) or bell hooks' "imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy" (hooks, 2004, p. 17).

Given this context, the absence of deep theorizing in education research along the lines of transness and racialization becomes more reasonable when still, after more than twenty years of GLSEN National School Climate Surveys, some queer and trans kids prefer risking expulsion due to truancy over showing up at school. The high stakes paradoxically seem to be the reason why we need deeper, intersectional theorizing about transness in schools, and at the same time, these high stakes may also be the reason why these research directions have been delayed. It can be challenging to reconcile the desire for more expansive ways of thinking about students' navigation of identity categories, when the legitimacy of some of these identities (e.g., bans on access to gender affirming healthcare) are still denied. Researchers, I imagine, have had to reconcile a desire for more intersectional trans-specific methodologies with the persistent reality that queer and trans kids' right to a quality education is still negotiable, that their lives are still negotiable. I don't know how one

could miss that message when schools are still coming up as "hostile places for LGBTQ students" (Kosciw, Clark, & Menard, 2022, p. xiv).

Relevance to Education

I situate my study in education research, based on my enduring commitment to the discipline as a channel for personal and collective transformation. While my study has interdisciplinary implications by design, both my study and I, as a nascent scholar, belong in education. I am foremost a teacher, and although schools may be working very well to sort, shift, and shape humans according to norms and logics outside of our inherent dignity (Patel, 2016), I maintain bell hooks' (1994) understanding of the classroom as "the most radical space of possibility in the academy" (p. 12). It was in classrooms where I first felt the dissonance between my vision of education as a vehicle for engaged, transformative democracy and its disproportionate realization. In education spaces too is where through witnessing young queer and trans people, I found the permission to trust and hear the truth of my own transness and heed its call. Harper Keenan (2022) reminds us that "the practice of education is a fundamentally relational one" (p. 311). I see this relationality as core to the transformative utility of both education as practiced and as a research discipline. Education is a practice of ideas coming into conversation with other ideas, bodies conversing and relating to other bodies. Furthermore, identity is inherently relevant to education in theory and practice. The ultimate charge of education to enrich our relationship with each other and our worlds, and the capaciousness of education settings, both formal and informal, for raising critical consciousness animate the field's fertility for cultivating the implications of my study in material ways.

My study invites us to think expansively about how trans identity is already raced and classed in the United States and destabilize the ways in which identity politics can distort and distract sustainable coalition and movement-building (Cohen & Jackson, 2016; Green & Bey, 2017; Nash,

2019). Identity politics is the language the Combahee River Collective used to describe their Black feminist project, rooted in the lived experiences of Black women at intersections of race, gender, sexuality, class, ability, and language among other components (Taylor, 2017). It's ironic then to consider how the very same language of "identity politics" are what's potentially derailing the politically transformative potential of identity-based equity work. These same identity politics, which I will describe in more detail in what follows, anchor so much of what we know about transness in education, across early childhood through K-12 and out-of-school spaces. The implications of this study include new epistemological commitments for considering how we relate to one another, especially along identity lines. According to bell hooks (1994), this type of expansion, transformation, "movement against and beyond boundaries [is that] which makes education the practice of freedom" (p. 12). From my perspective, this "movement against and beyond boundaries" should underlie the practice of education research too. The trends, misses, and promising methodologies I identify in the sections that follow have helped me recognize sociocultural contexts, recommendations for better research practice, and the mechanisms by which opportunities for intersectional methodology and analysis have either opened up, or more commonly, been foreclosed.

Persistent (and shifting) Paradigms in K-12 Research

Trans students in educational research have been largely conceptualized as vulnerable to adverse experiences based on hostile social climates, such as school (Greytak et al., 2009; 2013; Grossman & D'Augelli, 2006; Martín-Castillo et. al, 2020); in need of enumerated policies and structural support (Leonardi & Staley, 2018; Loutzenheiser, 2015; Meyer & Keenan, 2018; Kaiser et al., 2014) and largely benefiting from the role of supportive caregivers including teachers and parents (Harper & Singh, 2014; Hill & Menvielle, 2009; Johnson et al., 2020; Payne & Smith, 2014; Ullman, 2017; Case & Meier, 2014). Regardless of varying support systems and access, trans students are also

understood to be resilient (Singh, 2013; Singh & McKleroy, 2014; DiFulvio, 2015; Zeeman et al., 2017). In fact, in a systematic literature review of education and social science research that directly considers trans minors (up until eighteen years old) in school settings, I found that the majority of articles begin with a paragraph that echoes my start to this one (Regan & Meyer, 2021). The opening paragraph story arc mirrors the persistent paradigms characterizing this body of scholarship. The realities students endure has indeed fueled defensiveness in researchers, policy makers, parents, and teachers. Resonant in these realities is the call for stakeholders to pay attention, to move and change minds based on the harshness. Tuck (2009) points to this trend as characteristic of theories of change purported to be about justice, but in effect reify power structures. Relying on stakeholders to become activated toward change on behalf of the pain narratives of those harmed by the systems these stakeholders work for, reinscribes marginalized communities as dependent and at a loss. The story goes something like this: First, we learn that trans students have a rough go of school because society is oppressive, then, we are warned to be wary of progress, or at least cautious, as increased trans visibility should not be confused for improved life chances, and then, depending on the context, discipline, and researchers' commitments, we are offered a new angle for considering the layers of hostility that impact the life of trans students. Frankly, as a trans educator, student, and researcher, learning about our communities through this body of scholarship can be disparaging. While I provide examples of researchers and educators who have taken different turns, in general pain and damage-centered narratives (Tuck, 2009; Tuck & Yang, 2014) persist. The way trans topics and lives are introduced in research specific to school-aged lives alone animates the persistent paradigms about trans people and the lines of inquiry recycled in order to better understand our communities.

Institutions as the Measuring Stick

Exploration of trans students and their lived experiences becomes measured by the way institutions have failed them, or about how they are faring in such institutions which is largely reflected in the questions asked across studies. This scope reifies the prioritization of centering adversity or in Greytak et. al's (2009) report title the "harsh realities" of trans students. For example, asking students how often they hear transphobic language at school (Greytak et al., 2009; 2013; McGuire et al., 2010), or how often students witness teachers or other students intervening on behalf of trans students (Wernick et al., 2014) provides invaluable information in terms of making visible the way schools have failed trans students; however, these inquiries also maintain the centrality of trans students being at-risk and in need of "protection" (Roberts & Marx, 2018). Singh (2011; 2013) is a scholar whose research engages trans students of color specifically. Singh has attended to the perspectives of trans students themselves, offering complexity and an intersectional approach to this research. Yet, the questions posed to participants still rely on "their ability to 'bounce back,'" or ways they have "bounced back" (Singh & McKleroy, 2011, p. 36) from trauma. Questions about when or where students have felt support (Allen, Watson & VanMattson, 2020) operationalize risk as the metric too.

It is no wonder then, when research such as this leads the conversation, narratives of trans students as "at-risk" of violent school climates and structures pervade social perceptions of trans people and communities. These frames offer little capaciousness for understanding the diversity of trans identities and experiences, let alone our deep strategies of resistance, and subsequently contribute to the persistent myth that trans people comprise a monolithic group (Jourian, 2017a; Catalano, 2015). What is additionally damaging about flattening the diversity of trans experiences, particularly through a reliance on measuring livelihood according to institutional welfare, is that far

too often the trans young people most adversely affected begin to believe it's their fault for coming up short, otherwise known as internalization.

Myths of Normativity Internalized

The at-risk and monolithic narratives about trans people popular in education research (and across major media outlets and news sources) become internalized by young people, not only trans ones. Grossman & D'Augelli (2006) found that based on "inconsistent caring" trans young people have to "constantly fight feelings of shame and unworthiness" (p. 124). These feelings of shame and unworthiness come from the various messaging students (and teachers) begin to believe about themselves. Internalized oppression is an outcome of systems of domination and what we begin to believe about ourselves (Spade, 2015). This socialization and the subsequent impact on a young person's sense of self, and importantly worth, has been theorized under different terms with comparable impacts. For instance, Marx & Roberts (2018) drew from a Foucauldian analysis of biopower and disciplinary power to describe how policies intended to protect trans students, really do more to preserve the institutional value systems determining conditions of protection in the first place. In the authors' words, these modern forms of power, "do not engender power through juridical justifications or centralized control, but rather through normalization and regulation" (p. 4). Through this perspective on power, the authors implicate systems of normativity and complex social arrangements in understanding impact of policy on the complex social arrangements of schools, specifically for trans students. According to the authors again, this analysis of power is important for schools because of "[Schools'] function as sites of both the policing and instilling of norms and of the establishment of population level control and surveillance" (p. 4). Another example is Harper Keenan's (2017) use of "unscripting" to describe the pedagogical possibilities of recognizing the myriad scripts children learn about gender in order to disrupt the harmful impact of taking these

scripts as merely the way things are. Scripts (Gagnon & Simon, 1973), disciplinary power and biopower (Foucault, 1977) are just two examples of ways to describe the social systems of normativity that pervade educational institutions and filter our perceptions of the world, including but not limited to what it means to be gendered.

Within K-12 trans-focused research, the social standards of normativity informing our understanding of gender have been described as cisgenderism (Lennon & Mistler, 2016) and cisnormativity (Bauer et. al, 2016; Frohard-Dourlent, 2016). Bauer, Hammond, Travers, et al. (2009) define cisnormativity as the unspoken assumption that "those assigned male at birth always grow up to be men and those assigned female at birth always grow up to be women" (p. 356). These normative ideas of gender have filtered into contemporary understandings of trans identities and subsequent pressures of how to be trans, described by Pullen Sansfaçon, Gelly, Gravel, & Planchat (2023) as a new "normative influence" under the term "transnormativity" (p. 12). According to these researchers and as experienced in media representations of trans identity, transnormativity presumes that transness includes an underlying certainty about gender, realizable through medical transition. Not only does this contribute to a limited understanding of gender diversity generally, but it adds to the fomenting social fear of "detransition" (p. 12). Nonconformity along gender lines amounts to a deprecation of social worth and signals a threat to the system. Furthermore, education scholars have encouraged us to shift the metric from assessing individual students against institutions, and to understand instead more critically the complex and interlocking oppressive contours of the school climates and structures determining who gets called a problem (Martino, Kassen, & Omercajic, 2022). Analysis of oppression and identity with attention to systems of power and ways of knowing is characteristic of the theories I bring to bear on my study, as I describe in the next chapter.

I was surprised to learn that even within a youth participatory action research (YPAR) study (Wernick et al., 2014) wherein young people involved in a community-based organization focused on LGBTQ advocacy created and administered *their own* climate survey gauging the realities of trans students, the tendency to focus on trauma or victimization still pervaded. Within this study, GLSEN survey structures were used as models upon which students established their own survey questions. The central components of their survey questions such as touchpoints of discriminatory language, harassment, and frequency of intervention, miss the theorizing and intricacies enacted within the daily practices of transgender young people. To reiterate, this emphasis on victimhood reflects a tension in research about and with trans young people in which pain is leveraged to garner public attention and support at the expense of curtailing the dreaming and future-building of young trans communities beyond current systems. The methods used to approach transgender topics in education have thus been pedagogical (Keenan, 2022), in both the ways these methods have informed paradigms about who trans people are, and also in terms of how trans young people may learn to perceive themselves and their needs. As one of my collaborators Juston said to me in our interview, "Every experience isn't sad. I promise you."

Shifts Toward Criticality and Policy

I generalize shifts toward critical methodologies and away from the individual trans student as the problem through two reviews of empirical research literature in education. These reviews encourage focusing instead on the relationship between trans students and systems and importantly helped me synthesize key points of departure and possibility. The first of these reviews is Ruari-Santiago McBride's (2020) systematic review of 83 articles identified as directly concerned with trans students in secondary school settings. The other is Kathleen J. Reed's (2022) scoping review of what they describe as "good methodological practices in research involving transgender, non-binary, and two-spirit youth" (p. 1). McBride's (2020) review offers useful criteria to delineate which empirical

studies might function to shift the persistent paradigms pervading this body of scholarship through critical foci and methodologies. These studies are critical in the capacity to, in McBride's (2020) words, "Elucidate how the educational disadvantage trans youth experience is not individualized, but structural and systemic" (p. 19). This criticality is necessary for repairing the tendency to frame issues within individual trans people or communities and instead, as Travers (2018) insists, helps us locate the problem "squarely within the socio-cultural realms of wealth inequality, racialized sex-typing and gender categorization" (p. 77).

McBride (2020) and Reed (2022) provide analyses of the limitations of framing that illustrate tenets of Dean Spade's (2015) critical trans politics and underly what many scholars across disciplines have referred to as a myth of progress (Simms, Nicolazzo, & Jones, 2021). Critical trans politics invites us to interrogate the roots of structures that determine which lives matter and who is "deserving" (Spade, 2015, p. 86) of access to resources and protections under the law. Critical trans politics is a critique of common associations between social progress and institutional legibility. A fairly accessible and often circulated example is matrimony and military participation. These are institutions rooted in heteronormativity (Warner, 1993). Further, their reformation to include LGBTQ persons is hardly a queering of formerly oppressive institutions and more so an assimilation. While marriage and military participation are voluntary institutions though, school remains compulsory. Subsequently, critiques of mattering (Love, 2019) in education contexts feels imperative as animated by Marx & Roberts (2018). Persisting paradigms in empirical research about trans young people do little to account for trans experiences-in-difference of the presumed reference point: a White, trans subject. Muñoz (1999), expanding from the scholarship and ethos of women of color feminisms describes implicit assumptions about normative subjects e.g. "normative accounts of woman that always imply a White feminist subject and equally normatizing accounts of blackness that assume maleness" as "normatizing protocols" (p. 8). These protocols, messages about what it

means to be say woman or Black, as Muñoz (1999) describes, amount to another edge of the tragedy of internalization I have described. Muñoz warns, "These normatizing protocols keep subjects from accessing identities" (p. 8).

Rigid ideas about what transness is (or more often, is not), and measuring trans livelihood according to how well one fits in a current structure, does more than inform internalized messages of personal deficiency, but also contributes to a form of disconnection from one's internal sense of identity or self, based on the absence of social options. Without attention to these protocols of normativity and their influence on students' navigation of institutions along multiple identity lines, empirical research will recycle metrics of rights, access, and visibility as determinants of progress. This progress narrative cements flattened subject positions, and recirculates the values of White, documented, and cisgender queer people as *the* people. Dean Spade (2015; 2020), Paul Kivel (2007); and Dylan Rodríguez (2007) are examples of interdisciplinary scholars who agitate normative accounts of LGBTQ progress, including but not limited to educational institutions and the implications for trans individuals and communities. These accounts and critical approaches have no doubt helped inform my theoretical decisions and my approach to love, as practiced, in this study.

The analysis of protocols of normativity I described helps explain why policies intended to support and protect trans young people in schools often fall short of disrupting the structures and cultures that demand such protection in the first place (Roberts & Marx, 2018; Walton, 2010). These policies tend to "distract" us from possibilities for transformative change (Farley, Leonardi, & Donner, 2021, p. 164). While a critical approach to considering trans students in research might not offer simple solutions, such an approach can help us to better understand the interconnectedness of systems of marginality and how normative understandings of gender roles and expectations for

expression impact students who may not necessarily identify with queer or transness (Airton et al., 2019; Shelton & Lester, 2018). Insight such as this furthers my understanding that critical lenses such as those required by trans studies, for instance, are beneficial for *all* students as indeed, normative structures impede on self-determination and expression beyond those who embody marginalized gender identities.

Toward Methodology and Relationality

Reed's (2022) review of literature offers criteria for implementing critical, trans studies-conscious approaches in education research via methodologies. They describe "good" rather than "best" methodologies for research involving trans young people out of their understanding that a "one size fits all" approach is impossible based on the contextual and circumstantial realities of schools (p. 17). The methodological considerations Reed outlines have served as a point of reference for my study decisions around ethics and integrity. These practices include but are not limited to respecting and compensating the expertise of trans people; thoroughly considering decisions about what personal information is valuable to report such as sex assigned at birth; consistently reflecting on whether the research "tangibly contributes to the lives" of trans communities; and expanding layers of attention within an intersectional framework (Reed, 2022, p. 16). These less considered axes might include, "indigeneity, citizenship, food security, and housing stability" (Travers, 2018; Travers et al., 2020 as cited in Reed, 2022, p. 16). Because so often identity is framed and taken up as additive, it seems like the only way for researchers to employ the depth of intersectional analyses required by thinking of identity complexly is to embody a level of relationality in research (Tachine & Nicolazzo, 2022; Keenan, 2022).

Relationality informs every element of my dissertation study, including this review of literature. For example, I noticed an internal sense of connection with Reed's (2022) scoping review

of methodologies once I learned of their shared identity with mine as a non-binary, educator researcher. Dr. Elizabeth Meyer and I presented our own systematic review of literature involving trans students in K-12 settings at the 2021 American Education Research Association (Regan & Meyer, 2021) and we noticed that Reed's (2022) subject position, and decision to name themselves was rare in our trace of the scholars behind the body of scholarship that is trans topics in K-12. Rarely do scholars name personally identifying as trans or non-binary in positionality statements or related details. As my own embodied identities and lived experiences imbue my theoretical and design choices in my study, as I reviewed the literature, I gravitated toward other scholars who share these identities, in line with a FUBU (for us, by us) politics, or who explicitly name their positionality and how this affects their work.

The embodiment of a trans identity and the application of this ontological knowledge is a significant factor in researcher's decision making around the questions asked of trans people in research and ongoing awareness of possibility for transformation in research approach and learning contexts (miller, 2016, 2018; Keenan, 2017; Kean, 2020). I do not believe that researchers must be trans in order to do just research concerning trans young people. Such a mindset would upend my adoption of Black feminism in this study and would undermine my belief in the necessity for coalitions *and* affinity spaces. Such a position also contributes to the identitarian identity politics that my conceptual framework Trans Radical Love attempts to expand and trouble (Kumashiro, 2002). Rather, with my study I seek to contribute to the conversation with scholars who lead with critical humility (Mayo & Blackburn, 2020) and are answerable (Patel, 2016) to the lives of the people most impacted by systems of oppression, in my case, trans people of color.

In a pivotal special issue of *Education Researcher,* taking up the promise of trans studies in education research, Meyer (2022) writes, "I call on education researchers to engage *with* transgender

theory and epistemologies to help add nuance, depth, criticality, and humanizing lenses to their own research on school climate, learning, diversity, equity, and youth development" (p. 320). And, in the same issue, Keenan (2022) asks, "What has education research done to engage with knowledge produced by those who live across, between, and beyond the historically racialized borders of legal gender?" (p. 312). These important inquiries bring me to the historical body of education research where we have been able to find qualitative inquiry into and across these borders of identity lines for trans students of color: the pool of research taking up the experiences of trans and queer students of color.

Queer and Trans Students of Color- The Additive Trap

I cannot describe the empirical foundations for my study without an acknowledgment of the ways in which the history of racism in schools interlocks with histories of cisgenderism and heterosexism. My reliance on empirical research about queer and trans students of color in order to explore how trans people of color have been understood in research undergirds this acknowledgment and points to a certain additive trap of identity-focused research (Bowleg, 2008; Patton, 2002). Beyond the exclusion of trans-specific inquiries, research about LGBTQ young people has historically also elided considerations of race and other components of identity that shape and often restrict students' navigation of life in educational institutions (Parks, Hughes, & Matthews, 2004).

According to Toomey et al. (2018), empirical research focused on queer youth of color tends to focus on "sexual risk, substance use, and mental health problems rather than on normative developmental processes or positive youth development" (p. 18). Trans students of color are considered within this larger queer or LGBTQ grouping, and the persisting at-risk paradigms of K-12 research on trans students thus persists. Boatwright (2019), Darling-Hammond (2019), Moradi,

Wiseman, DeBlaereMoradi et al. (2010) and Meyer (2010) discuss how although people of color have played and continue to play an integral role in movements for queer liberation, stereotypes and misconceptions have portrayed queer people of color as an outsider group with little in common with mainstream (presumed-to-be-White) LGBTQ persons. McCready (2013) describes the dynamics responsible for this miss, noting how the scholarly community in education, "struggles to understand the relevance of such [queer of color] knowledge" (p. 518). Although these trends still linger, particularly in psychology and health research, scholarship within educational research focused in and outside of traditional school spaces is expanding to center and amplify the narratives and agency of queer and trans youth of color (McCready, 2019).

Primary scholars in education responsible for this expansion have included Kevin Kumashiro (2001); Lance McCready (2004; 2013); Ed Brockenbrough (2014; 2015); Cindy Cruz (2001; 2013); and Mollie Blackburn (2013). Much of this research focuses on the impact of out-of-school support for queer young people of color, particularly through community-based organizations (CBO's). As far as location, urban or metropolitan areas have served as key research sites. Brockenbrough (2014) describes the reason for this writing, "Converging sets of social, political, and economic forces have produced concentrations of queers and people of color in the nation's cities, consequently making them central sites for queer of color community formations and experiential narratives" (p. 5). Blackburn & McCready (2009) also point to the promise of urban areas for research in collaboration with these communities based on similar reasoning around access and proximity. I can thank one such community-based organization, Apex, for the relationships I have with my collaborators in this study. I take up the invaluable role of these sites, as documented in research, in the final portion of this review.

Theoretical Possibility: Queer of Color Critique

McCready (2001; 2004), among other scholars, demonstrates in his research the richness and importance of recognizing the nuanced and complex experiences of queer young people of color and highlights the utility that *of color* frameworks provide. At Project 10, a high school-based GSA that originated as a program to prevent school drop-out, McCready (2001; 2004) observed that the composition of the club did not reflect the composition of the school, where 60% of students were non-White. The club was in fact composed of predominantly White female students. McCready's (2004) interaction with one student in particular revealed that for this student, "His [biracial] skin color combined with his gender nonconformity, seemed to position him outside the boundaries of Blackness in the eyes of his Black peers" (p. 139). The illegibility (Gill-Peterson, 2018; Snorton, 2017) experienced by this student based on race *and* gender expression is an example of the utility of trans of color critique in my study, described in detail in chapter three.

Infrapolitical Sites of Resistance and Paradoxes of Visibility

Studies about queer and trans young people of color, teach me about the socio-cultural climates that inform the unique experiences of trans people of color, and the challenges involved with policies, support systems, and research methodologies aimed at elevating these experiences. Next to unique challenges, this body of scholarship also reveals the importance of place, in terms of region and access to resources, but importantly in terms of which sites are prioritized as valid sites of knowledge production. Scholars such as Cindy Cruz (2011) provide examples of the need to redirect our foci, particularly toward both practices, and, the unlikely sites of resistance so often concealed by our attention to monolithic or linear understandings of identity, including but not limited to gender and race. Cruz draws attention to what she calls the "offstage" (p. 1) practices engaged by queer and trans young people of color, examples of infrapolitical forms of resistance (Scott, 1991). The

infrapolitical nature of these forms of resistance lends itself to the analysis of the paradox of visibility existing for young trans people of color.

If communities are engaging strategies of political resistance in backstage, transformative ways, putting the backstage on blast may actually curtail these pockets of strategizing. While feeling recognized and seen in one's authenticity contributes to a sense of self-worth and dignity, coming out of the closet is still hyped up for a reason. It is also true that being seen or too-visible has consequences, which are both raced and gendered. As Brockenbrough (2015) writes, "The casting of coming out as a liberatory act reflects a White middle-class epistemological bias that does not necessarily resonate for queer subjects marked by racial difference" (p. 37). Brockenbrough describes a reclaimed form of invisibility, where such invisibility "emerges as an agentive practice for queers of color who prioritize connectedness with families and racial communities over coming out" (p. 37). Impacting visibility too is the fact that, as I have mentioned, the queer and gender non-conforming expression of young people of color is policed and punished disproportionately (Dwyer, 2011; Quinn & Meiners, 2019; Nicolazzo, 2017) to their White peers. McCready (2004) found visibility factored into the choice of certain Black gay males in his experience working with Project 10, where one student in particular was reluctant to attend the GSA out of fear that it may compromise his gender or race-based reputation. Misa (2001) describes the process of queer young people of color strategically navigating different pieces of identity at different times as identity negotiation, in a similar vein, as a survival or resilience method. Misa's (2001) finding is reflective of the negotiations of identity that comprise epistemologies of the brown body as articulated by Cruz (2001). Moradi et al. (2010) describe such strategic practices as "flexing" (p. 402) whereby queer young people of color determine when to "flex" racial or ethnic identity and when, at other times, to "flex" queer identity. As practice, this flexing aligns with the interfacing Anzaldúa (2009) theorizes in her conceptualization of *hacienda caras* or making faces. Such flexing may also be symptomatic of

"race melancholia" (Muñoz, 1999, p. 51) underlying the myriad ways queer communities of color practice disidentifying (Muñoz, 1999), particularly in performance. has described as the disidentifying practices of queer communities of color, particularly in performance. Simms, Nicolazzo, & Jones (2021) reference "racial melancholy" (p. 7) to describe the painful reality in which queer or trans students of color may lose their racial group membership depending on the extent to which they embrace their queerness. Brockenbrough's (2015) claims about the negotiation process involved in the decision for queer young people of color to come speaks to this potential loss. Marquez (2019), speaking specifically to Latinx youth, writes, "The ways Latina/o(x) queer youth experience and understand their gender identity and sexuality is often shaped by how their racial identity is understood in a particular space and/or context" (p. 406). This flexing seems to map on to disidentifying, survival-rich (Cruz, 2001) practices employed by and offered to trans people of color that I point to in my theoretical framework within trans of color critique.

Taking politics of visibility seriously, with consideration of the complexity of navigating multiple identities at once, means that empirical research in pursuit of the liberating potential of education must consider different sites of knowledge production and forms of resistance and thriving (Darling-Hammond, 2022). The literature I have reviewed and my experience working with young people leads me to believe we need to think about where and how we're looking at people and what they're doing. Not measured against an institution, but observed within dynamic, relational experiences in which identity is pushed on, rubbed up against, mobilized, and reimagined. These glimpses at the paradoxes and complexities of visibility for queer young people of color reveals the importance of multidimensional and intersectional approaches to research. Trans young people have experiences whereby any developmental needs cannot be assessed according to one axis of identity or according to a ruler in which White students are the unexamined reference point.

Additionally, as I consider how research can make a difference in the lives of trans people of color, I remember Cruz's (2013) insight into how "resistances in the form of traditional politics, such as mobilizing for public action and civic engagement in formal organizations, do not often work for LGBTQ street youth" (p. 12). Although experiences being unhoused are not central to my study, because trans communities of color are disproportionately impacted by economic insecurity (Shelton & Lester, 2018), I hold the shortcomings of traditional forms of resistance close in my study design, the questions I ask, and the ways that I understand the data that I collect. This orientation aligns with Dean Spade's (2015) description of "trickle up politics," resemblant of the original calls in the pages of the Combahee River Collective statement (1977), and the demands of the Black queer feminist politic attributed to Cathy Cohen (1997) and echoed in Charlene A. Carruthers (2018) *Unapologetic: A Black Queer, and Feminist Mandate for Radical Movements.* Simply, these politics elevate those most impacted by social conditions and structures as the architects with the true expertise necessary to enact a more just society. These politics imbue the often heard, rarely adopted wisdom from Audre Lorde that "I am not free while any woman is unfree, even when her shackles are very different from my own" (Lorde, 2007, p. 131). These politics are the roots of intersectionality as a justice project, yet rarely realizable in education research given the emphasis on identity as stable, normative, or dependent on external metrics of legibility and validity. Within higher education, I found a few studies who have inspired my own methodologies and inquiries, in pursuit of intersectional qualitative research as the justice project it can be.

Theoretical Possibilities from Higher Education

Within higher education lies examples of research that brings interdisciplinary theoretical frameworks to bear on education as an institution, rooted in the experiences of people within the same emerging adulthood age group as my study collaborators. Relevant to my own thinking and approach are studies such as Simms, Nicolazzo, & Jones (2021) and T.J. Jourian's (2017a; 2017b)

extensive work exploring and co-constructing knowledges with trans masculine college students. Jourian's work has been encouraging in my own pursuits based on his personal commitment to education spaces as sites for liberation and the way he has honored the expertise of his research participants through highlighting the complex ways in which trans identity is mobilized across and in spite of institutional contexts. Jourian (2017a) offers rich examples of the way trans masculine college students shape and mobilize masculinity as channels for self-determination, not merely to pass according to normative metrics of maleness. Of particular relevance to my own work, Jourian points to the absence of "trans* masculine students of color" from our "literature and our consciousness" due to the "reif[ication of] the gender binary, hegemonic masculinity, and singular non-intersectional narratives" (2017a p. 123). Jourian makes salient the way the multiple and intersecting identities of the college students in his study inform and influence their masculinities and understanding of trans identity. Jourian's work illuminates how gender identity cannot be separated from racial identity and in fact these components of us not only intersect but shape and are simultaneously negotiated in the context of various power structures including but not limited to racism and cisgenderism. Jourian's focus on "pathways to masculinity" via his phenomenological study did not highlight a hierarchy of correct pathways but instead creates space to understand the "limitless paths or possibilities of (trans*) masculinities that students take on, and which exist within the contexts of hegemony and dominance" (p. 129). In a separate piece, Jourian (2017b) invites us to consider trans* as methodology (Jourian, 2017b), semblant of Kai M. Green's (2016) utilization of trans* as an analytic. From these perspectives, trans is freed from the bounds of transgender as category and body or alignment-dependent and instead is offered as a capacious avenue for thinking about not only identity but methodologies in pursuit of identity knowledge differently—key to the implications of my study.

Relatedly, Simms, Nicolazzo & Jones's (2021) offer an example of looking to the practices of trans people themselves as expert theorists, negotiating identity within power structures. These researchers noticed that in spite of growing numbers of openly trans college students on campuses and national efforts in student affairs on behalf of supporting LGBTQ students, trans and non-binary collegians of color were not engaging with these support centers. Rather than centering the factors inhibiting these students from accessing these campus resources, these scholars instead were intrigued by where and how else these students may be forging community and creating alternate worlds for themselves via the internet. Through queer of color critique, Simms, Nicolazzo & Jones (2021) could illuminate the deep theorizing already enacted in the lives of these students, particularly through the ways they disidentify. These scholars' elevation of students' live enactment of alternate realities speaks to the inherent value they place on the agency of trans communities and individuals. Simms, Nicolazzo & Jones (2021) do not necessarily offer a solution or answer, as much as they point to the "prismatic possibilities" (p. 5) offered by trans of color life and online spaces. Rather than a script, these authors point to the pitfalls of measures for inclusion and belonging in "safe spaces" (p. 3) don't account for potential violence incurred by recognition as being queer or trans. They encourage researchers and educators committed to the livability of trans life to deploy approaches that begin from the lived practices of trans people of color. I should also mention, Simms, Nicolazzo & Jones (2021) decision to center the worlds students make via their digital practices did not foreclose findings about why trans college students of color chose not to participate in student affairs, but rather wove these realities into the picture of the worlds these students forge any way.

In addition to focusing on trans students' practices through theoretically rich lenses, the researchers in the studies I have highlighted from higher education also leverage their own positionality as core to their approach to data analysis and methodological commitments, particularly

as trans people. While this positionality does not guarantee any form of trans justice, as we know who someone is along various identity lines is not a linear path to their politics or orientations, it is clear to me that it informed the questions they asked, which are strikingly different from those circulated in K-12 research about trans lives. In the last piece of this literature review, I describe the ways in which community-based organizations (CBO's) have been taken up in education research in regard to trans young people. As I mentioned prior, CBO's have operated as a key site in research with and on behalf of queer and trans young people of color and given the community based organization Apex is where I first worked with my collaborators, this literature also helped inform my study approach and design.

Informal Learning Contexts and Community-Based Organizations

Informal and out-of-school settings such as CBO's provide an important refuge for trans students of color that is not possible in schools. Fish, Moody, Grossman & Russell (2019) explain, "Unlike school-based clubs or programs, the majority of community-based organizations exist as part of non-profit organizations and thus are not constrained by the policies and contingencies that restrict schools" (Fish, Moody, Grossman, & Russell, 2019, p. 2420). These scholars provide a review of LGBTQ youth-serving CBO's in the United States to illustrate how these places have, in their words, "filled a void in the lives of sexual and gender minority young people…that may not be available to them at home or through school programs" (p. 2420). When it comes to the role of informal education spaces for trans people specifically, the 2019 article "I'm totally transariffic": Exploring how Transgender and Gender-expansive Youth and Young Adults Make Sense of their Challenges and Successes" (Wagaman et al., 2019) is a guidepost in the literature, or more accurately, the absence of literature. In this study, these scholars documented the experiences of 85 "TGE (transgender or gender-expansive)" (p. 43) young people, aged 13-24 who participated in community-based programming. The authors reported that these young people "described change

making, at the individual and environmental levels, as processes by which they could find some stability amidst destabilizing environmental factors" (p. 56). Additionally, participants appreciated having a place where "they could come out of their shell" (p. 56) in addition to learning "practical tools and skills that they could apply to their lives and in their communities" (p. 56). These experiences, in the case of this study, were identified as contributing to young peoples' resilience.

Wagaman, Shelton, Carter, Stewart, & Cavaliere's (2019) article offers perspectives from trans young people themselves, youth and young adults (YAA), and although the focus is resilience, they did so without reifying a victim or less-than-as-trans narrative. Both of these elements warrant this study as an important, interdisciplinary contribution given the absence of these foci in the literature broadly. Their study serves as a guidepost for these reasons, and also because of the way their sample context mirrors the program through which I first became acquainted with my participants, while they were in high school. My study aims to be in conversation with this piece, particularly in the fact that my study surfaces some of the ways in which adulthood and a fleeting sense of community, particularly as mediated by race and gender, can interfere with the long-term application of practical tools. I remain curious about the interrelationship among K-12 environments, CBO's and personal circumstances, especially as mediated by racism in the ways young adults who participate in these programs come to know and practice love.

So often, these less-formal education spaces are described as separate from K-12 yet given the simultaneity of students' participation across education settings; this divide isn't helpful in formulating holistic understandings of points of departure and possibility in education as a whole. One of the overarching lines of inquiry from the 2019 special issue of *Equity and Excellence in Education* on queeruptions in education in fact, is how we can leverage the possibilities of informal education spaces in schools, since historically it is in these places where scholars and researchers

have had the freedom and access to center and work alongside queer and trans people of color. Darling-Hammond (2019) reminds us, "Because so many of these spaces are not only not in schools, but also the kinds of spaces schools don't provide, we are invited to do imaginative work about how to apply this learning to K-16 contexts" (p. 429). So, on one hand, I learned from the literature that we cannot talk about trans people of color in schools without drawing from what has been learned outside of schools, given this resource in the lives of queer and trans people of color (Brockenbrough & Boatwright, 2013). I also learned that although community-based organizations such as Apex are invaluable in the lives of LGBTQ+ young people in general (Herdt and Boxer, 1996, Shilo et al., 2015; Fish, Moody, Grossman & Russell), we still have scant research about the role of these supports for trans young people specifically, not to mention trans people of color (Wagaman et al., 2019). Additionally, while CBO's may offer more freedom than traditional classrooms, given these educational sites are so often not-for-profit organizations, they are not immune from the pressures of an institutionalized, normative status quo. The systems-level critical analysis I found to be encouraged from education research regarding K-12 and higher educational contexts was absent from the literature about out of school sites, and indeed would benefit holistic perspectives on approaches to enacting and realizing education as the practice of freedom.

Conclusion

Within this literature review, I traced three constraints of empirical research in education that have limited our understanding of trans of color life, both content-wise and in terms of methodology. These constraints are that trans young people have been subsumed in literature on LGBTQ+ students broadly; that these students have been presumed to be White; and that the literature takes up a defensive stance holding trans young people in a victim or at-risk position. I highlighted the need for deeper theorizing and utilization of intersectional analyses, particularly toward shifting our understanding of trans students away from measuring livelihood period, but

especially against institutions as the measuring stick. These constraints required me to then turn to literature on queer and trans students of color, where I described how trans young people of color have been understood and/or missed in empirical research. I pointed out how this body of research animates the importance of community-based organizations in these students' lives, and highlights ways in which young people who embody multiply marginalized subject positions navigate and negotiate identity across space and contexts. I then offered examples from higher education to show the ways in which interdisciplinary theory and focusing on the lived practices of trans people offers a different perspective, a perspective my study heeds and aims to expand. I concluded the literature review through again naming the import of CBO's in trans young peoples' lives, in order to make salient the important interrelationship of K-12 settings, higher education, and CBO's in not only trans peoples' lives and supports, but as the sites from which we learn how to think about trans life.

From this review of literature, I paint the picture of why my study particularly attends to the practices of my collaborators and how, through this focus, I am able to take up intersectionality as a justice project, always concerned with power, rather than a description of how identity is complex and/or fixed at various axes. In making known how pain, hostile climates, and resilience remain dominant paradigms, I have built the case for some of my inquiries in this study. I was curious about what opens up when I ask trans young people about love and loving practices-- especially as mediated by transness and race. My study remains relevant to education as the compulsory institution it is and one of the few disciplines where practitioners have the privilege of consistent relationality with other bodies and ways of knowing. My study is of course concerned with identity, however, more broadly I am inviting new epistemological commitments in how we understand and show up for trans young people. In the next chapter, I introduce the theoretical frameworks that support this effort, as informed by the constraints, pitfalls and possibilities I uncovered in this literature review.

Chapter 3 Conceptual Framework: Theory into Trans Radical Love

> Theory is not inherently healing, liberatory, or revolutionary. It fulfills this function only when we ask that it do so and direct our theorizing towards this end.
>
> –bell hooks (1991, p. 2)

Trans Radical Love is the conceptual framework I developed for and through this study. While the form and purpose of a conceptual framework in qualitative research evades neat or consistent definitions, my use of Trans Radical Love is both a product and a process, an affect and an analytical tool used to surface this affect from my data. My understanding derives from the guidelines set forth by education qualitative researchers Ravitch and Riggan (2011) who succinctly describe a conceptual framework "as a guide and ballast in research, while at the same time evolving as the research develops" (p. 13). Aligned with the characteristics of a conceptual framework introduced by Maxwell (2012), Trans Radical Love is informed by key concepts deriving from the theoretical foundations of my study which assisted my design and data analysis in pursuit of answering my overarching research questions. My study, however, was not merely to fulfill the requirements requisite for a doctoral degree in education, my study was to help me figure out how I could harness the lineages of wisdom and insight from radical thinkers across disciplines in order to do something different about difference in education spaces, both formal and otherwise. By difference, I mean bodies, spirits, essence which troubles, counters, transgresses, leaks through White, heterosexual, able-bodied, cisgender, etc. etc. normativity. As will become clear if not already in my study, I mean Blackness and transness, perhaps what leaks through most. Trans Radical Love in this pursuit, is a framework, a pedagogical lens, and a political affect. It attempts to offer "a certain affective reanimation" José Esteban Muñoz (2009, p. 9) hoped we'd transpire. Trans Radical Love is a way of feeling, of seeing, of opening with intellectual and heart curiosity to what emerges

from the cracks in institutions, fissures in structures never intended to serve or protect peoples', *all* peoples' inherent dignity.

Trans Radical love is an affect for paying mind to the *recovecos*, Spanish for nooks and crannies, where critical trans and performance studies scholar Lau Malavar (2023) locates the time and space-transcendent quality of trans of color embodiment. It is a framework to help me articulate the infrapolitical (Scott, 1990) forms of resistance and pleasure communities of all kinds of people enact in our everyday practices, while breaking bread or ruminating about what the talking heads on television might be distracting us from. Trans Radical Love orients us toward offstage or tight spaces (Cruz, 2011). It is a lens that honors spills and spillage (Gumbs, 2016) as sacred matter and bodily excess (Roberts & Labuski, 2023), fugitive flesh uncontainable (Bey, 2019) by the heteropatriarchal white supremacist matrix of a machine. Trans Radical Love is how I am directing my theorizing toward liberation and revolution, as bell hooks (1991) charges in the epigraph beginning this chapter. Revolution for liberation, as INCITE! (2007) tells us, will not be funded. The revolution, as Gil Scott-Heron (1971) prophetically sang, will not be televised. The revolution, as spiritual thinker and mystic Joshua Michael Schrei (2023) spins, will not be psychologized. In order to be truly liberating, I have learned from philosophers, activists, poets, and theorists, the revolution must be Trans, it must be Radical (and furthermore, Black), and it must be rooted in a Love politic. Healing, liberation, and revolution in service of the potential of education spaces is no exception. Krishnakumar & Menon (2022) remind us, indeed, "Our revolutions cannot exist in neat academic frameworks" (p. 492). Trans Radical Love, as conceptual frameworks are intended according to Ravitch and Riggan (2011) is ever evolving, aligned with the emergence adrienne maree brown (2022) demands of movement building and contemporary liberation politics.

Trans Radical Love is affective because, simply put, it involves considerations of how we feel toward one another. Acknowledging this affective sphere is core to our potential for creating and

building outside systems of power and domination. Detailing affect theory is beyond the scope of my work here; however, I am interested in what opens up when felt worlds are honored by the same validity as intellectual articulation and analysis. Affect theory, according to Jennifer Nash (2019) has provided an "invitation to consider how structures of domination feel, and to suggest that simply naming structures fails to do justice to how they move against (and inside of) our bodies" (p. 30). Nash (2019; 2013) also points to the role of queer theory, particularly the work of Ann Cvetkovich (2003) in the academic "recent investment in affect" (2019, p. 30). Of interest to me, and further grounds for my description of Trans Radical Love as affective, is the way affect theory attends to the political nature of every day, mundane interactions and encounters. This attention grounds Nash's (2019) connection between affect and queer studies, which have made it possible to, in her words, "document and revalue non-normative ways of being" (2019, p. 30). It is scholars including but not limited to Cvetkovich (2003) and E. Patrick Johnson (2001; 2008; 2019) within queer studies who have attuned to the felt dimensions of these ways of being. I particularly highlight Johnson's work who animates these livelihoods from the geographies of the Southern United States, the same terrain from which my love for my collaborators and this study grew. When mattering relies on institutional legibility and frames of existence deriving from systems of domination, felt experiences in the everyday offer examples of trans and queer living otherwise.

In the following chapter, I trace the interdisciplinary theoretical underpinnings of Trans Radical Love and then proceed to describe its utility for my study and subsequently for education research and practice broadly. In the spirit of queerness, which inherently defies linearity and mechanized, colonial understandings of time (Muñoz, 2009), I have begun this theory chapter with my development of Trans Radical Love. Rather than leading with the turns and departures that have created this arrival, which too will move, as laconically as possible I start with a disambiguation of Trans Radical Love. I'll then unpack the theories that imbue this conceptual framework, which are

the theories that keep me coming back to my commitment to Black feminism as the underlying project in my study, as the project I've come to believe wields the power to help us *all* get free. I hope this chapter illuminates what theory might do for us, as people when we ask of it.

Trans Radical Love

Trans Radical Love brings theory in the flesh (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1981; Johnson, 2001; Bey, 2019), trans of color critique (Ware, 2010; Salas-Santacruz, 2021; 2023) and love as a Black feminist ethic (hooks, 2001), imbued by Black feminist love politics (Nash, 2019) together in order to recognize love as known and practiced within structures that determine systems of marginality and legibility based on race and gender, among other vectors of experience. Undergirded by my ultimate research questions, Trans Radical Love relies on the following premises: identity is socially situated and embodied (theory in the flesh); gender legibility, and subsequently trans legibility relies on Eurocentric, biomedical knowledge systems, rendering trans of color experiences as partial (trans of color critique); human beings are inherently valuable and dignified (Black feminist love ethic), and our becoming requires becoming undone (Black feminist love politic). Disambiguated, the constitutive elements of Trans Radical Love are as follows.

Trans

The trans in Trans Radical Love, as not *just* or *only* transgender according to bio medical standards associating gender with body parts and a seemingly universalizing disconnection. Trans, instead and additionally, as transcendent, as beyond, as analytic. Trans in the tradition of the exciting movement Riley C. Snorton (2017), Kai M. Green (2016), Marquis Bey (2022) among others, are circulating. Trans as in multi, as in poly, as advocated by Omi Salas-Santacruz (2023) and Z Nicolazzo (2017). Trans as a politics of transitivity as Jack Halberstam (2018) invites. Trans as transformative potential, trans as power. I draw from Kai Marhsall Green's (2016) mobilization of trans as an analytic, and as a method, as an orientation. Green, in his dreamy, published conversation

with Marquis Bey about the possibilities of Black and Trans and Feminism (Green & Bey, 2017) writes, "trans*, like blackness, can be embodied, but it actually marks a certain kind of orientation in the world. It is not fixed though always precarious" (p. 444). Trans in this study, honors Nael Bhanji's articulation of the prefix trans, which "does not just signify movement across or beyond a schism. Instead, it is also evocative of the transgressions, transmogrifications, and transmutations of established norms" (Bhanji, as cited in Green & Bey, 2017, p. 446). I deploy, embrace, take up, and flex trans in this study as in trans of radical transfeminism (van der Drift & Raha, 2020), as "anti-static," (p. 15), beyond "encapsulation" (p. 15), and in its loving potential. Trans to bring forth "new forms of affective solidarity and commitment, the changing of orientations to ensure the support and nourishment of bodily life" (p. 21). Lastly, trans in Trans Radical Love, and as an accomplice in my approach and analysis in my study is "an itch that things are not enough, a project of undoing, be it gender, institutions, the fabric of the social world; trans is a project that cannot be haunted because it never tries to build a house" (Bey, 2022, p. 3).

Radical

Radical as in the revolutionary stance of freedom fighter, political organizer and scholar Angela Davis. Who told us in 1989, as often cited, that "Indeed, if we wish to be radical in our quest for change--then we must get to the root of our oppression. After, all, *radical* simply means 'grasping things at the root'" (Davis, 1989, p. 14). Radical as in the impression of the words of my research collaborators, like Juston who thinks of radical as "rad" or Alex, who thinks of radical as "weird, strange." These versions too. Importantly, the radical in Trans Radical Love is about shifting power and ways of knowing that recycle identity labels and ideas of the ground as stable; of structures and status quos as fixed. Radical, directly to praxes of education, like the form of listening, Kress and Frazer-Booth (2016) advocate for. A kind of listening, that as radical, "echoes an important praxis of being and becoming that must be revisited repeatedly over time" (p. 99). The radical in Trans

Radical Love honors the radicality of what Frierian dialogic pedagogy demands, a "radicalness," according to Douglas & Nganga (2015) which Freire (1997) said, "does not fear change when it is needed" (p. 83, as cited on p. 277). Radical in this study, in the aim of Trans Radical Love, heeds Marquis Bey's (2022) description, in which,

> Radicality refuses to reduce its aim to static templates of what is only possible in the current discourse. Thinking of radicality as a departure rather than a return shifts the line of thought toward a fundamental dismantling of the current order of things. To be radical is not to wish to go back; to be radical is not to want to go back to a prelapsarian image of perfection, but rather to seek that which can be possible—or maybe even to seek that which is *im*possible (p. 26).

Love

The love within Trans Radical Love, is not, "the kind of love that we will be forced to celebrate or escape on Valentine's Day" as adrienne maree brown (2019) writes, for that love, as they say, "is too small" (p. 60). The love within Trans Radical Love is akin to the love brown (2019) maintains we need, "a radical, global love that grows from deep within us to encompass all life" (p. 60 & 61). The love within Trans Radical Love is a politic, it is an ethic, it is source and it is not easy. Of the components of Trans Radical Love, the love piece most seamlessly aligns with this study's home discipline of education with critically liberatory aims. For within Paulo Freire's (1968), formative and unfortunately timeless *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* he writes, "No matter where the oppressed are found the act of love is commitment to their cause—the cause of liberation. And this commitment, because it is loving, is dialogical" (p. 89). Disciples of Freire have taken up his conceptions of love at the heart of the practice of dialogic education describing it as radical. Darder (2002) writes, "Paulo Freire's vision of radical love is rooted in a committed willingness to struggle persistently with purpose in our life…to be intimately connected to what it means to be human" (p.

34). Love in this study, is love as animated by Freire. He wrote, "The distortion imposed on the word "love" by the capitalist world cannot prevent the revolution from being essentially loving in character nor can it prevent the revolutionaries from affirming their love of life" (p. 89). Love as in The Love within Trans Radical Love is radical love, the radical love of critical, Freirian dialogic pedagogy and the radical love of Black feminist tradition. As Moore (2018) writes, "iterations of the Black freedom movement have always been grounded in radical love and the desire for collective care…This is what Black radical love at the heart of the movement looked like yesterday and looks like today" (p. 327).

A part of my desire to center love in my study and the imperative for this kind of love at the core of my conceptual framework, is because, as Moore continues, "for some reason, relationship formation, collective care, and love continue to be unacknowledged, under-theorized, and understood as less than radical potentials" (2018, p. 327-328). This love disturbs identity politics in service of the agentive power inherent in *all* beings, unbridled by shifting language, verbiage or socio-political structures of captivity. This love cannot be contained, commodified or promulgated from a place of without or scarcity. This love, as theorized and championed by Black feminist reimaginer Jennifer Nash (2013; 2018) needs to be read as "a kind of affective politics that transcends the pitfalls of visibility, inclusion, and liberalism associated with intersectionality" (2011, p. 13). Nash (2013) roots this politics in the hearts of invaluable Black feminist scholar activist poets, Alice Walker, Audre Lorde and June Jordan. She names, "What Walker, Lorde and Jordan share is a fundamental conception that love is a labor of actively reorienting the self, pushing the self to be configured in new ways that might be challenging or difficult" (p. 11). Love as both the underbelly and fist of Trans Radical Love is Chaudhry's Trans/Coalitional Love-Politics (2019) too, "a critical orientation that grapples with the complicated relationship between blackness and transness" (p.

523), a politics that has the potential to, in their words, "harness the radical potential of trans studies and organizing" (p. 521).

Combined

Trans Radical Love as my conceptual framework, has strength as a politic that enacts Black trans feminism (Bey, 2021) as education praxis. In other words, Trans Radical Love derives from and creates the conditions for Black trans feminism as a justice project in education. My conceptual framework honors and abides by Bey's (2021) undertaking and illuminates the agentive capacity of any being, educator, scholar, student, to engage this lens beginning with their heart. Trans Radical Love is to teaching and learning praxis what Bey (2021) makes possible with Black trans feminism in critical theory and what Muñoz (1999; 2009) made possible with queer theory in performance studies. Trans Radical Love addresses what I am studying, the loving practices of a group of people and how I am studying it, through attending to the ways in which these peoples' identities as predominantly Black and trans, offer a troubling, disruptive, fugitive and ultimately revolutionary praxis of loving. Trans Radical Love must be rooted in Black trans feminism, because intersectionality as historically taken up in practice, in classrooms, equity and diversity trainings and infographics does not *do* enough. I follow Bey's logic and desire, when they say, "I wanna know what's going on in the sewers, how hot it is out here, and what they're yelling from the window. Focus on the intersections does not cover this breadth. But Blackness does" (Bey, 2019, p 66). Trans Radical Love did not start in Blackness though, even though indeed most of my collaborators are unapologetically Black. Blackness, as I have learned through this study, is not Black as in racial identity or description of epidermal composition, Blackness in the sense of "a critical existence, a disobedient world-making an eruption upon the norm that crisisizes the scene so we can reimagine the terms and meanings of the world in which we live" (Bey, 2019, p. 29).

In the following sections, I trace the theoretical grounds, the philosophizing, the riffing, the multitudes of notas, that brought me to this conceptual framework Trans Radical Love. First, I introduce the three key frameworks that inform Trans Radical Love and then describe two subsequent lenses, disidentification and infrapolitics. These lenses assisted my application of Trans Radical Love in their capacity to locate and elevate collaborators' practices as key sights of knowledge production. Within the conclusion to my dissertation, chapter seven, I further describe Trans Radical Love in its current iteration, as informed by what unfolded during my study and processes of analysis and writing.

Theoretical Frame(werq)

The theoretical frameworks I use in this study account for the relationship among socio-political contexts and peoples' practices of identification. These theories provide lenses for understanding how racialization and gender shape and are shaped by the stories my collaborators told me about love, and about my experience loving them and remaining open to their undoing and becoming. I describe this theoretical backdrop as frame(werq) rather than frameworks to emphasize the shifting, expansive, and active role of these theories in my study design and approach to analysis. I have not come across werqing, or werking in empirical research, but anyone who has seen at least one runway on Ru Paul's Drag Race is familiar with this term, at least spoken. Treva Ellison paints a useful picture of werq as historicized and as contemporarily enacted. Ellison (2016) writes,

> Werqing it and having that werq seen felt or heard is a power-generating praxis, a force displacement in and over time, that arises from Black queer and Black trans culture, performance and politics and through the re/production of Black trans social life…to werq is to exercise power through the position of being rendered excessive to the project of the human and its dis/organizing social categories: race, gender, sexuality, and class. Werqing it

> deforms, denatures, and reforms the very categories in which werqers can find no stable home (p. 1).

I draw from and deploy interdisciplinary theoretical frameworks in pursuit of both werqing within educational research and attuning to the werq of my participant collaborators. My use of the theoretical traditions within this study is a response to the demands of current, empirical research in education on the experiences of trans individuals who have been racialized as people of color in the United States. The literature review that preceded this section animates the need for deeper theorizing in education research, rooted in the epistemologies of trans people of color. The empirical research, particularly that which centers the experiences of racialized trans people is limited to experiences within or against formal education institutions, such as college. Further, the frameworks I use in this study, werqed together, help me understand and encourage trans beyond a gender identification and the affective, political potential of love, as advanced by theory.

While places of convergence and contention exist within and across the schools of theoretical thought within this study, the specific frameworks I use speak to generative places of coalescence. Trans Radical Love derives from three primary theoretical frameworks: trans of color critique (Ware, 2010; Salas-Santacruz, 2021; 2023; Gill-Peterson, 2018); theory in the flesh (Moraga, 1981; Moya, 2000; Bey, 2019); and love as a Black feminist ethic (Nash, 2013; 2019). Trans of color critique illuminates the ways in which transness makes white supremacy visible across all normative institutional systems and the impact of these systems on the way trans people of color are read by and read the world. Theory in the flesh elevates material, affective, and embodied experiences as significant sites of knowledge production and a locus for understanding the politics of necessity trans communities of color engage and wield. Finally, love as a Black feminist ethic, when adopted alongside trans of color critique and theory in the flesh, offers my conceptual framework its building potential, beyond critique. Understood as a political ethic (Nash, 2013; Chaudhry, 2019) love

illuminates the radical and transformational qualities of ordinary care practices. Trans of color critique helps us locate the cracks in knowledge production about transness, while theorizing in the flesh, as a Black feminist practice, offers futurity, worldmaking, and building. These frameworks assist me in my analysis and inquiry into the influence of racialization and transness on the ways in which the collaborators in my study experience and know love. Additionally, as deployed together, these frameworks illustrate the imperative for affective interventions and ways of seeing and knowing. As the ground for my development of Trans Radical Love, these theories illustrate what such an affect offers and demands in order to be taken up for liberatory ends and processes across spaces of education practice and research.

Trans of Color Critique

In his 2010 master's thesis, Syrus Marcus Ware conceptualized a trans of color critique as a theoretical framework to examine the historical privileging of White trans voices in trans scholarship and policy development. Based in a post-secondary education context, Ware developed this framework to attempt, in his words, "to connect the experiences of racism and transphobia that affect trans students of colour" (2010, p. 13). Ware's theorization was inspired by Ferguson's (2004) queer of color critique and is the first record I have found of a scholar bringing trans of color theory to bear on education research. Now an influential visual artist, activist and educator, Ware's work directly implicates the role of schools and education research in the continued marginalization of trans students of color. Marcus Ware's enduring, visionary work highlights the inseparability between theory intended for liberatory purposes and embodied knowledge born of navigating systems of domination.

Outside of education, my understanding of trans of color critique derives from the work of critical trans scholars such as Riley C. Snorton (2017) and Jules Gill-Peterson (2018). In her

formative *Trans Studies Quarterly* article "Trans of Color Critique Before Transsexuality" Gill-Peterson (2018) explains how this framework,

> Exposes how the whiteness of transsexuality actively interferes with the intelligibility and material viability of black, brown, indigenous, and other trans of color and nonbinary lives, making them more invisible, marginal, or exceptional than they otherwise would be in the field of transgender studies (p. 615).

Applying Gill-Peterson's line of reasoning to education research serves as a filter for understanding how considerations of race are often neglected in research about trans people, and subsequently how trans students are presumed to be White, unless otherwise noted (Meyer & Quantz, 2020). Trans of color theorizing by Snorton (2017) and Gill-Peterson (2018) is rooted in a critical analysis of medical histories that pathologize and violate the Black and Brown trans body, and subsequently deny the personhood and very real, diverse, embodied experiences of transgender people of color. This erasure and dehumanization are systematically replicated and reflected in schools and education research, as described in my review of literature. Therefore, I found it important to take up trans of color critique as an optic in my study for exploring one of my core research questions about the ways racialization and transness mediate the relationships trans emerging adults of color have with love. Coming back to education, Omi Salas-Santacruz (2020; 2023) has been formative in centering trans of color critique. In the same spirit as Ware's (2010) framework development, Omi Salas-Santacruz (2020) identifies trans of color critique as necessary for trans justice in education. They offer,

> Trans*[2] of color critique in education research makes trans* justice possible by disrupting white-centric approaches to transgender inclusion that may fall short in the

[2] Language is imperfect and naming risks compromising the essence of experiences and reifying structures of domination. In this study, I have settled for the term trans as it has been the most commonly used term in community

> conceptualization of trans* justice and what makes a trans* livable life for queer and trans people of color (p. 5).

Here, Salas-Santacruz links trans justice with an authentic understanding of what constitutes a "livable life for queer and trans people of color" (p. 5). Trans of color critique, then, offers a departure from the tendency for traditional research to focus on conditions and circumstances, without the possibility for increasing the "life chances" (Spade, 2015, p. 6) of transgender people. What are the life-affirming praxes (Alexander, 2005) of transgender emerging adults of color, the rich-with-survival (Cruz, 2013; Lugones, 2003) daily practices engaged against and within the systematic, institutional denial of our existence, and state sanctioned murder? Salas-Santacruz (2023) importantly reminds me and holds me accountable to the task of intersectional analyses, imbuing trans of color critique. They write, "Trans* of color critique is a shift toward a grounding in the decoloniality of knowledge and being, not just as a BIPOC version of trans identity. It is a theoretical posturing grounded in subaltern people's knowledge, concepts, and epistemes (2023, para. 13). From this angle, trans of color critique helps me avoid the tendency in research and scholarship for oppression (and identity) to be understood in terms of a single axis. Critical qualitative researchers Esposito & Evans-Winters (2022) describe, "these single-axis methods position racism, sexism, and classism as parallel instead of as intersecting" (p. 37). My awareness of this tendency is traceable in my review of the additive trappings of empirical literature about trans lives in education research, further advancing the need for trans of color critique and frameworks to build with and from the epistemology of people of color whose genders and bodies have been raced

with my collaborators. I acknowledge the expansive use of the asterisk for example in the work of Francisco J. Galarte (2014) and Kai M. Green (2016), yet in my experience this usage has been primarily theoretical and/or limited to individuals well-versed in trans culture and theory. In this dissertation, I only adopt the asterisk when quoting scholars directly.

and made trans in the chokehold of the white supremacist, Protestant value systems of the US socio-political climate in which we live.

Theory in the Flesh

In this study, I draw on theory in the flesh as rooted in Chicanx feminism. Theory in the flesh illuminates the way that identity politics are not liberatory or capable of social transformation if separated from in-the-flesh, embodied experiences. Introduced in the seminal text *This Bridge Called my Back,* Cherríe Moraga (1981) writes, "A theory in the flesh means one where the physical realities of our lives--our skin color, the land or concrete we grew up on, our sexual longings--all fuse to create a politic born out of necessity" (Anzaldúa & Moraga, 1981, p. 23). Part of what makes *Bridge* so formative is the latter part of this definition, when Moraga asserts, "We attempt to bridge the contradictions in our experience... by naming our selves [sic] and by telling our stories in our own words" (p. 23). To expand on Moraga's short description in *Bridge*, I turned to the scholarship of Paula Moya (2000). Moya frames Moraga's work through a realist theory of identity, honoring identity as both embodied and socially constructed, while also considering the contradictions inherent in various approaches to thinking about difference.

Moya (2000) asserts that "different identity claims cannot be examined, tested, and judged without reference to existing social and economic structures" (p. 6). Moya is pushing back on post-structuralist theories of identity, characteristic of several approaches to identity employed by queer theorists, in which identity is characterized as a social construction, and subsequently may be cast as free of the nuance and complexity of materiality. Moya describes how we need to both recognize, like poststructuralists, how histories of violence and racism and transphobia inform constructions of identity and warrant visibility; however, that an understanding of lived experience and the material ways these structures land on and within the body is fundamental. Moya contends that, "a politics of discourse that does not provide for some sort of bodily or concrete action outside the realm of the

academic text will forever be inadequate to change the difficult 'reality' of our lives" (2000, p. 79). I see this politics of discourse connecting directly to new directions in trans-based education research for example in Leonardi et al.'s (2020) piece "Unpacking the T…". These scholars encourage us to understand "gender as socially constructed and as lived—in bodies that often bump up against/exceed expectations related to gender normativity" (p. 6). This understanding is characteristic of trans of color critique, which inherently attends to the ways in which lived experiences are conditioned by and understood through interlocking (Collins, 1986) or intermeshing (Lugones, 2003) systems of oppression and colonial epistemologies (Salas-Santacruz, 2023; Patel, 2016).

Given the over-emphasis of trans studies and trans legislation on the relegation of bodies, theorizing in the flesh is both exciting and paradoxical. My adoption of theory in the flesh is not to delimit trans experience to the realm of fixed materiality but rather to illuminate the body as a site of knowledge production and wisdom, consistently shaped by material circumstances. E. Patrick Johnson's (2001) application of theory in the flesh in his formative article "'Quare' Studies, or (Almost) Everything I Know About Queer Studies I Learned from My Grandmother" has been a beacon in this endeavor. According to Johnson (2001), "Theories in the flesh emphasize the diversity within and among gays, bisexuals, lesbians, and transgendered people of color while simultaneously accounting for how racism and classism affect how we experience and theorize the world" (p. 3). Ultimately, in the footsteps of Johnson, the werq of the theoretical frameworks that inform Trans Radical Love "quare" how we understand trans life in education. Rather than a theory requiring its own section, quaring stands as an overarching example of what centering lived Black and Brown queer and trans experiences in the Southeastern United States does to queer and trans studies. I see this utility of theorizing in the flesh, particularly in its application as an epistemology and liberation project in Marquis Bey's (2019) essay "Flesh Werq."

Among others, Bey builds from the work of the "inimitable Hortense Spillers" (p. 141), a scholar whose ventures in flesh and ungendering bodies via disabling the meanings prescribed on captive flesh could warrant an entire dissertation on their own (see Spillers 1987). Bey describes "flesh werq" as that which "refuses the body" (p. 142). This is a teaser, perhaps to what I found out about love through my collaborators' practices of refusal. Theorizing in the flesh is not to limit my theorizing to the body but rather to understand the agentive power of beings in communion with land, with each other, through, outside of and alongside the materializations placed upon bodies, the active subjectivity (Lugones, 2003) we engender when we see beyond what we have been told or structured to see our bodies as. Bey points to love as a force making these nuances, this impossibility realizable. According to Bey (2019),

> The only language we have here is one of love, the point of crisis that bursts with and as multiple avenues of shared escape. Somewhere, where we live with flesh, is where we un-be who they said we were (supposed to be). We are not what they said; we are more, so, so much more (p. 144).

Theorizing in the flesh, in this study, means attending to my collaborators' practices. It means writing and thinking in ways that, to cite Bey again, "def[y] the demand to categorize" (2019, p. 149). Theorizing in the flesh, characteristic of Johnson's quaring, "moves beyond simply theorizing subjectivity and agency as discursively mediated to theorizing how that mediation may propel material bodies into action" (Johnson, 2001, p. 10). Furthermore, theorizing in the flesh imbues Trans Radical Love to point to collaborators' lived experiences as not only sites of knowledge production but as sacred windows into living otherwise.

Love as a Black Feminist Ethic

bell hooks, in *all about love,* speaks to the power of love for radical change and posits that it is this transformative potential of love that enables the widespread fear of it. For hooks (2001), "To

bring a love ethic to every dimension of our lives, our society would need to embrace change" (p. 87). This framing positions love as a counter-hegemonic force, feared for its disruptive power. To name love as an ethic locates love inclusive of and expansive beyond emotionality and affect; love as active and radical. This ethic is inherent in early Black feminism as discernable within the Combahee River Collective Statement (Taylor, 2017). Part two of the statement, "What We Believe" reads, "Our politics evolve from a healthy love for ourselves, our sisters and our community which allows us to continue our struggle and work" (p. 18). Love as ethic frames love as a political mechanism for sustainability. Love stemming from within the self, particularly the Black, Brown, trans, or otherwise queer self, the self-deemed undeserving (Spade, 2015), is radical. I think of Audre Lorde's essay on the power of the erotic, a power within the self that is "distorted" and when embraced, "gives us the energy to pursue genuine change within our world" (Lorde, 2007, p. 53).

The theory of love as a Black feminist ethic moves me beyond affect and into the daily practices of the trans emerging adults of color in my study. I see this use in Jennifer Nash's (2013) description of a Black feminist love politic. In distinguishing Black feminist love-politics as a non-identitarian political tradition, she writes, "black feminist love-politics stakes out a radical conception of the public sphere [and] black feminist love-politics maintains a new relationship to temporality generally, and to futurity specifically" (pp. 12-13). Here I see some of the political implications of a Black feminist love ethic broadly and in terms of the implications of this study. Centering love, my hope is that this research project serves the co-creation and realization of trans of color epistemologies and insights toward living into a trans future.

Drawing on Black feminisms, Chaudhry (2019) introduces "trans/coalitional love-politics" which further grounds my use of love as an ethic, particularly in its relevance to the lives of trans emerging adults of color. Chaudhry describes how this politics creates possibilities for racialized gender justice and attends to the impossibility of Black transness within a cis/trans binary. This

introduction, aligned with Black feminism and the Black, queer women of the Combahee River Collective elevate love as ethic and politic in its role in the pursuit and practice of freedom. For, as Dillard (2014) writes, "Activist praxis on behalf of freedom, and with particular regard for education and research, is not a luxury from an African worldview: It is essential" (p. 4). Viewing praxes of freedom as essential, connects a theory in the flesh with love as an ethic, in that both unveil love as radical, or in Moraga's words, a "politic borne of necessity" (1981, p. 23). Operationalized together, theory in the flesh, trans of color critique, and love as a Black feminist ethic help me center liminal, in-between, and/or temporary spaces as an important site of knowledge production, theorizing, and future building. Useful constructs or lenses for elevating and naming practices that occur in these discrete spaces, materially and on the level of consciousness are disidentification and infrapolitics. In this next section, I describe the utility of these lenses to locate these sites.

Sites of Knowledge Production

The theoretical frameworks that informed my approach to this study encourage an attunement to everyday experiences, practices, and ways of knowing as valuable sites of knowledge production often obscured or missed within the dominant paradigms of empirical research. These sites are overlooked because wellbeing is often measured according to institutional welfare, and institutions were never intended for the livelihood and loving of racialized transgender people, as animated in my review of literature in chapter two. From my years in relationship my collaborators, I have been privy to their strategies of resistance and resilience, and I have loved them as I've witnessed their loving. In my application of theory for liberatory ends, I have been inspired by theoretical frames that attend to places outside of schools, outside of institutions, and importantly, within and across practices as key sites of knowledge production and wisdom. Furthermore, to assist my application of theory, I rely on lenses or constructs that attend to liminality (Lugones, 2006) and the in-between and borderlands of knowing and being (Anzaldúa, 1999; 2015). The specific

constructs I use that give language to these sites of attention for knowledge production are disidentification (Muñoz, 1999) and infrapolitics (Scott, 1990).

As taken up by trans and queer scholars in and outside of education, disidentification (Jourian, 2017; Simms, Nicolazzo & Jones, 2021) and infrapolitics (Cruz, 2013; Malatino, 2020) elevate and make visible the political nature of everyday movement and practices. Attunement to the politicality of the everyday and alternative sites of knowledge production aligns with intersectionality as a reimagined justice project (Nash, 2019; Harris & Patton, 2019) because of the capacity of this attunement to recognize and make visible "our shared marginal relationship[s] to dominant power" (Cohen, 1997, p. 458). For as Hil Malatino (2020) maintains, "everyday acts of personal recognition are the crucible through which assemblages come into (il)legibility" (p. 39). From Malatino's position, everyday practices are not only sites of resistance and windows into how power structures feel and compound but are core to our capacity to being seen or unseen, as intuited by "(il)legibility." Key to my adoption of the theoretical frameworks in this study and my advancement of Trans Radical Love is a shift in where we place our attention. This shift serves my intention to build from places of critique, including trans of color criticism in education.

Collaborators' individual practices and epistemologies are sites of theorization and knowledge production around identity. Through adopting infrapolitics (Scott, 1990) and disidentification (Muñoz, 1999) as lenses for attunement, as lenses to shift the locus of knowledge sources, including but not limited to the body as a determinant of gender, I am able to bestow, validate, amplify and center each collaborator as an active player in identity negotiation and subsequent claiming. Through my use of crystallization (Ellingson, 2009) in my data analysis, I was able to identify theorization and knowledge production beyond what might be read as anecdotal. These constructs helped me attune to the theorization occurring via what Kia Darling-Hammond (2019) describes as the "practices that queer people of color have been crafting and performing

outside of schools for generations" (p. 433). These lenses are how I am able to nurture a direction offered by Anzaldúa (2015). They charged,

> Let's look toward our nepantleras (poetas, artistas, queer, youth, and differently abled) who have a tolerance for ambiguity and difference, la facultad to maintain numerous conflicting positions and affinity with those unlike themselves" (p. 94).

For me, paying mind and heart to the disidentifying practices of collaborators, in their descriptions of love and negotiations of identity, and the infrapolitical nature of the everyday supports illuminating the nepantleras, the collaborators of my study, as accomplices in the long game of education research and practice for liberatory ends. Crystallizing what I notice about the ways in which my collaborators negotiate and mobilize identity through analysis across data sources, through my theoretical lenses helps me enact these practices as sites of knowledge production, rather than fodder for anecdotes.

Infrapolitics

The Yale-based anarchist, political scientist James C. Scott (1990) used the term infrapolitics in an attempt to make known the subtle and invisibilized (to external groups and power structures) forms of resistance enacted by subordinated groups of people. Hence the use of infra, as in the "beyond the visible end of the spectrum" quality of infrared rays (p. 183). Infrapolitics are, "forms of disguised, low profile, undisclosed resistance" (198). In his description of how infrapolitics serve to resist status domination, Scott gives the following examples of practices: "Disguised discourse of dignity e.g., rituals of aggression; tales of revenge; use of carnival symbolism; gossip; rumor; [and the] creation of autonomous social space for assertion of dignity" (p. 198). Histories of the resistance and community building of trans people of color reveals the longstanding reliance on creating our own spaces, out of the public eye. This creation of space and worldmaking includes loving practices unique to trans people of color such as kinship networks, nontraditional and

expansive familial structures as seen in the formation of houses and the mothers characteristic of, but not limited to ballroom culture. In my study, I draw upon the applications of infrapolitics that Cindy Cruz (2013) and Hil Malatino (2020) bring to the daily practices of queer and trans young people.

Cruz (2013) applies Scott's framework to honor and make-known the daily acts of resistance enacted by LGBT street youth. Hil Malatino introduced infrapolitical ethics of care (2020) as a cornerstone of the way trans communities extend and cultivate care for each other; how we sustain ourselves counter to heteronormative understandings of care and domesticity. The concept of infrapolitics has been useful for my study because on one hand this framework elevates the life-affirming and survivor-rich practices enacted at the borderlands of identity and place (Anzaldúa, 1987, 2007; Lee, 2018). By the same token, it brings attention to the way that the daily practices of my collaborators, in their politicized material circumstances as racialized trans people, are an optic for ways of knowing and being in these communities. Both Cruz and Malatino elevate practices in their work and identifying the infrapolitical gives name to and explicates upon these practices as sites of theorizing and knowledge production. Attention to infrapolitics, makes known what Jagger (2014) refers to as "epistemological privilege" (p. 387), or what Cruz (2001) refers to as the "epistemology of a brown body," grounded in "an epistemology of Chicana thought and culture" (p. 659) and a strategy toward "an epistemology of the borderlands" (p. 660). Through respecting and humbly recognizing the theorizing inherent in material, daily practices of trans people of color, I endeavor to join these scholars in shifting the dominant narratives told about racialized trans people and participate in knowledge production and research in collaboration with the people participating in my study. For example, in *Trans Care,* Hil Malatino (2020) describes a "t4t [trans4trans] praxis of love" as

> An ideal, a promise, an identifier, a way of flagging an ethic of being. It is antiutopian, guiding a praxis of solidarity in the interregnum; it is about small acts guided by a commitment to trans love, small acts that make life more livable in and through difficult circumstances (p. 44).

Malatino's offering of trans care, as an ethic and an extension of "infrapolitical care" (2020) and as a praxis of love, informs my development of the affect Trans Radical Love. Here, Malatino speaks to the revelation of this praxis in 'small acts' in the infrapolitical practices of trans communities, "infra" as in subtle and perhaps indistinguishable for outsiders, and political in that the personal and everyday is always political, particularly when embodying identities subjected to systemic violence and insubordination. I appreciate Malatino's attention to "solidarity in the interregnum," solidarity in what's suspended, perhaps in what María Lugones describes as "inhabiting the limen" (p. 79, 2006). The additional construct or lens I use in this study to illuminate practices as praxis and a site of knowledge production is disidentification.

Disidentification

Deriving from queer performance studies, disidentification as theorized by the late scholar José Esteban Muñoz is an example of a survival-rich practice, discernible through trans of color critique and characteristic of theorization in the flesh. According to Muñoz (1999),

> Disidentification neither opts to assimilate within such a structure [of dominant ideology] nor strictly opposes it; rather, disidentification is a strategy that works on and against dominant ideology...the disidentified subject tactically and simultaneously works on, with, and against a cultural form (p. 11-12).

Muñoz suggests that this disidentification is less of a conscious picking or choosing which components of identity a person (the "disidentified subject") agrees to adopt and is rather "an acceptance of the necessary interjection that has occurred in such situations" (p. 12). An example

Muñoz offers is in holding both the truths of a queer person of color abandoning "a desire for a white beauty ideal" as such is deemed too "self-compromising" while at the same time desiring the white ideal "with a difference" (p. 15). Understanding the way trans people of color disidentify as a survival strategy means recognizing an agency trans people have across various subject positions, obscured by neat understandings or interpretations of identity. T.J. Jourian (2017) observed the disidentifying practices of the trans college students in his study as forms of resistance. He explains that these students are able to disidentify as a "political act of resistance that creates new truths rather than either adopting the dominant reality or opposing it entirely" (p. 125). Disidentification was useful in my study as a lens through which I could understand the protocols of normativity operating in the practices of identity negotiation I bore witness to. Disidentification helps elevate the theorizing embodied in the orientation my collaborators have to their worlds. Disidentification elevates the liminal or in-between, the "interregnum" as Malatino (2020) notes, as a fertile site of knowledge production.

Through this lens, I am able to more deeply understand how experiences at the social axes of identity, filtered through racialization and transness play a significant role in the way trans people of color navigate and understand love. This is also connected to Anzaldúa's *hacienda caras*/making faces, embedded in theories in the flesh. The interfacing or "making faces" enacted and made necessary by queer Chicanx existence can be seen as a disidentifying practice. Anzaldúa (2009) posits,

> Between the masks we've internalized, one on top of another, are our interfaces. The masks are already steeped with self-hatred and other internalized oppressions. However, it is the place--the interface--between the masks that provides the space from which we can thrust out and crack the masks (p. 125).

Disidentification is survival-rich and also, characteristic of Muñoz, serves as a means to enacting a queer (and trans) future- a future in which we can "thrust out and crack the masks." Theorizing in the flesh, from the politicized material realities of my collaborator participants attends to the liminal spaces where disidentifying occurs.

Conclusion

> We can have new legislation. We can put cameras on cops. But it's going to be heart to heart that we expose these wounds. We've all been wounded. We've all been wounded by structural racism, but some of us got the more insidious version of it.
>
> –Reverend angel Kyodo Williams, *Radical Dharma*

To conclude this chapter on the theoretical underpinnings comprising my conceptual framework Trans Radical Love, I explain my choice in its visual depiction. This depiction illustrates 1), the interrelationship of these threads of theory and 2), how this conceptual framework functions as both an analytical tool I used for data analysis and an emergent politic, pedagogy and affect for approaching learning and collaborating with people, especially young people. I chose to visually depict my framework using the image of a human heart in order to represent the dynamic of strengthening something as it's being used. I drew on the metaphor of breath in my introduction to situate my study in the larger socio-political climate of the United States and its "unbreathable" (Gumbs, 2020, p. 2) circumstances. Young peoples' capacity for ease or breath, both literally and figuratively is greatly influenced by their proximity to power. I appreciate what breath offers discussions of power. The locus shifts to individuals' freedom to access life, literal air, rather than the freedom to participate in the current power structure. My focus on breath also directs our attention to individual practices that imbue interpersonal connections and networks, a site of knowledge production foreclosed by prolonged attention to the systems and structures purported to manufacture and control the air. Breath brings attention to the respiratory system and offers us the

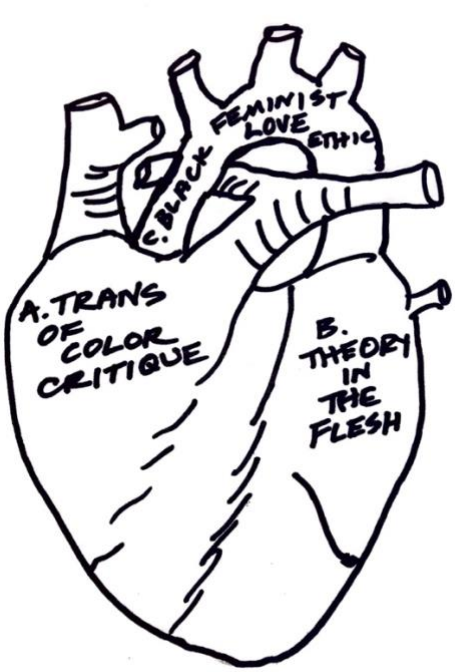
capacity to reframe these systems as brilliant interfaces through which we actively navigate and negotiate the material world. The onus is then on individuals' capacities to filter, shift, and determine how to make sense of the air, while simultaneously holding the structures determining these dynamics and relationships to our life force suspect. Through the metaphor of breath, I can engage systemic and structural analysis in my intersectional, qualitative study, while maintaining my focus on the ways of knowing and being of my collaborators as sacred material and co-designers of keys (Bey, 2019) for our collective liberation. Breath and blood are deeply intertwined, the matter of the lungs and heart.

According to medical descriptions, a core function of the heart is "receiving deoxygenated blood and carrying metabolic waste products from the body and pumping it to the lungs for oxygenation" (Allarakha, Uttekar, & Divya, n.d.). Taking the chokehold of white supremacy seriously, reminds me that each of us, regardless of social location, principles, personalities or political ideologies consistently undergoes processes of engaging life amidst a system dependent on domination and convincing us to doubt our inherent dignity or worth. Furthermore, as I take up theory in the flesh and emphasize flesh as a site of fugitivity (Bey, 2019), the human heart in its function to turn waste into oxygen is an apt metaphor. Trans of color critique and Black feminist politics add to the dynamics and shape. Ultimately, my aim is for Trans Radical Love to operate as a lens through which we can approach research and working with young people, especially young people who occupy and represent multiply marginalized subject positions or social identities. Trans Radical Love invokes a pedagogical stance, a political affect, and in the case of my research project, a tool of analysis to crystallize my multiple data sources in response to my overarching research questions. This conceptual framework helped me to make sense of the ways the trans people of color in my study have come to know and practice love, comparable to the filtering capacities of the human heart, in service of being an accomplice to trans of color futures, which is also in service of

our right to breath. Trans Radical Love potentially can operate as both the map and the mechanism for lung or life function.

The confluence of trans of color critique, love as a Black feminist ethic, and theory in the flesh inform Trans Radical Love is an affective, "politic borne out of necessity" (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1981, p. 23). The lenses of disidentification and infrapolitics have assisted me in acknowledging and recognizing the survival rich and life-affirming characteristics of practices enacted by my collaborators, active theorizing from the flesh. Trans Radical Love, through these lenses helps me locate love in in these practices, a love for self and a love that has the potential to extend into collective care. Such love holds sacredness in its potentiality for making lives livable and amplifying a trans of color future.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework Trans Radical Love



Chapter 4 Methodology: Queeruptive Crystallization

Ezekial: I would get a duck if I could.

Page: Oh my gosh, their little legs.

Ezekial: They just be floatin. That must be so nice.

Ezekial, interview excerpt

I entered this study curious about the ways in which five trans people, who were born and bred in the Southeastern United States, racialized as people of color, have come to know and practice love. My approach is imbued with my prior history of working with these five collaborators while they were in high school. I intended for each phase of data collection to be meaningful to them with potential for mutuality. Subsequently, across each phase, my methodology contributed to a feeling of "hanging out" (Lugones, 2003, p. 209) with collaborators. Lugones reveres hanging out as a "streetwalker's practice," a practice that "permits one to learn, to listen, to transmit information, to participate in communicative creations, to gauge possibilities" (p. 209). For my interviews, we talked through my protocol sitting down, but also on the move, in the spirit of go-along interviews (Kusenbach, 2003; Stiegler, 2019). Talking to my collaborators while driving or walking afforded the kind of exchange this chapter opens with. While walking through a nature preserve with Ezekial, some ducks on a pond caught our attention. Ezekial's remark about the duck "floatin" is resonant with descriptions of ease that I found many of my collaborators longed for. "That must be so nice," he said.

Different entryways for meaning making and reflection were built into my interactions with collaborators as my methods were not contained to one interview, or venue. Sharing a meal, driving in the car, walking in the woods, and thinking through photographs as modes of data collection, amounted to being "highly permeable" (Lugones, 2003, p. 209), like hangouts, where collaborators could share with me and I could make sense of their experiences without a level of attachment to a

particular set of answers or a setting such as a classroom or community based organization, mired by "enclosure" (Lugones, 2003, p. 209). Hanging out with collaborators on purpose was queeruptive (Darling-Hammond, 2019) in this permeability and in the attempted mutuality it afforded. My study's rootedness in the epistemologies of queer and trans people of color, myself and the five collaborators also lends to its queeruptive quality. The multiplicity of entry points and theories I drew upon to make meaning of the data collected throughout these hangouts afforded learning reflective of a process of crystallization (Ellingson, 2009), rather than triangulation or a linear, systematic approach. Two threads weaving the methodological decisions I made in this study are 1) my commitment to honoring the relationality I share and have cultivated with my collaborators; and 2), my orientation to education research and the contexts it affects as sites of radical resistance (Cruz, 2011). This chapter describes my methodology and the methods I employed in my study aligned with these commitments. I first describe what I mean by my application of queeruptive and crystallization, particularly in service of research as resistance. Relatedly, I then introduce my five participant collaborators through brief sketches of the material conditions of their lives, specifically as understood through our history of working together. This section paints positionality, both mine and in relationship to these collaborators as a method on its own in this study. These sketches are followed by an explanation of my approach to recruitment and ethics. An overview of the three phases of data collection follows, and I conclude this chapter with a description of my processes of data analysis and additional choices I made on behalf of mutuality.

Queeruptive Education Praxis

I see my study as queeruptive (McCready, 2019; Darling-Hammond, 2019) as operationalized by education researchers, rooted in the history of alternative queer festivals under the same name. My attention to relationality in this study alone requires a certain openness to emergence and a willingness to recognize how power and knowledge move and flow in non-linear, multi-directional

and compounded ways characteristic of queer theory (Leonardi & Staley, 2018; Kumashiro, 2002). In the 2019 special issue of *Equity and Excellence in Education,* edited by Lance McCready, education researchers provided examples of learning experiences, projects, and possibilities working alongside queer and trans students of color imbued with elements they identified as queeruptive. Characteristic of original queeruption folk festivals, these elements are woven by an ethic of queer beyond an identity category and involve eruption or transformation beyond critique or deconstruction (Darling-Hammond, 2019; Brown, 2007). In her conclusion to this special issue, Kia Darling-Hammond (2019) enumerated eight tenets or features of queeruptions in education. I attempted for each of the phases of my study, and my approach to analysis to be anchored in these tenets. They include a for us, by us (FUBU) sensibility; collectivity; promotion of relief, pleasure, and healing; application of mutuality; activism as community practices; disruptive modes of self-assertion and refusal; critical consciousness; and rooted in queer and trans of color epistemologies.

Reflecting on his experiences conducting ethnographic research at queeruption folk festivals in London, anthropologist Brown (2007) shared the following reflection. He said,

> The creation of these spaces is infused with a spirit of autonomy, a practical and political attempt to create alternative forms of sociality and mutual support in the here and now…Ultimately, I believe it is these processes as much as (if not more than) the end product that is important (p. 2697).

In the same vein, I found the processes of data collection and engagement involved in my study were meaningful to me and my collaborators on their own, prior to any forms of analysis for larger claims or findings. Several times in our interviews, collaborators would mention the phase one questionnaire and in our group session, people talked about our conversations during their interview. For example, describing the video featuring Sonya Renee Taylor that served as a text in the preliminary questionnaire, Ezekial said, "I don't remember exactly what I said, but I remember

what she said." Or, when during the phase three group session when Saffron shared, "Like I discussed with Page, I always viewed myself as a person that was Black on the outside, and like actually White for a lot of internalized racism reasons." Both of these examples contribute to my understanding that the process of collaborators participating in multiple phases of data collection and sharing was as meaningful, if not more meaningful than the outcome of any one of the phases, similar to what Brown (2007) found to be happening among those alternative queers at the queeruptions in London.

The task of resistant researchers, as invited by Cindy Cruz (2011) involves embracing and learning from the often hidden (by design), infrapolitical socialities of communities of people. In my data collection, while temporary, I was able to engage in alternative socialities with my collaborators as they described to me the multiple and varying socialities they inhabit. My inquiries moved beyond "what has been achieved despite challenges [toward] what can be imagined beyond and outside of them" (Darling-Hammond, 2019, p. 433). I additionally frame my study as queeruptive based on my understanding that resistant research must "unsettle" (Dillard, 2000, p. 661) ideologies and historical approaches to empirical inquiry, particularly with consideration of trans lives. In my methods, I attempted to offer and cultivate space with my collaborators for "necessary un-structuring and unstructured being" (Darling-Hammond, 2019, p. 427). Lenses that animate this potentiality of research include Cynthia Dillard's (2000) endarkened feminist epistemology and Cindy Cruz's (2001) epistemology of a brown body. These lenses sanctify the wisdom enacted at borders of place and identity that is concealed by and nullified in historically positivist research methods. These lenses when applied as approaches to knowledge-production in research, derive from a recognition of the important and socially transformative role of subjugated knowledge, in my case the theorizing enacted daily by trans people of color.

Dillard's approach comes from Black feminism, while Cruz's is rooted in lineages of women of color feminisms. These examples of disruptive epistemologies illuminate a throughline across disciplines and the theories that inspire this research, for instance theory in the flesh and a Black feminist love ethic. As I considered frames and approaches to data analysis that aligned with my queeruptive and resistant intentions, I found crystallization (Ellingson, 2009).

Crystallization in Qualitative Research

Crystallization in qualitative research that is intersectional by design involves the exploration of certain phenomena through a lens that holds power suspect and offers pathways to social transformation through subjugated epistemologies (Esposito & Evans-Winters, 2022, p. 154-155). Crystallization is a frame through which the multiple dimensions and components of my study can be understood as an enhancement and advantage. Crystallization (Richardson, 1994; Ellingson, 2009) has been described as a postmodern alternative to triangulation (Esposito and Evans-Winters, 2022) moving beyond three to the multiple faces of a crystal. Crystallization as a methodology describes the multiple theories I bring to bear on my study, the multiple phases and forms of data collection involved, and multiple approaches to data analysis. For me, crystallization feels both queer and trans in the emphasis of this qualitative research framework on disrupting positivist research traditions and acknowledging the partial and always-situated nature of knowledge and furthermore research. Expanding upon Richardson's (1994) original adoption of crystallization, Ellingson (2009) offers the following detailed definition:

> Crystallization combines multiple forms of analysis and multiple genres of representation into a coherent text or series of related texts, building a rich and openly partial account of a phenomenon that problematizes its own construction, highlights researchers' vulnerabilities and positionality, makes claims about socially constructed meanings, and reveals the indeterminacy of knowledge claims even as it makes them (p. 4).

The theoretical lenses that comprise my conceptual framework hold power suspect, the queeruptive quality of my methods and process implicate creation and building, and crystallization permits me to recognize it as all belonging to the larger picture of my dissertation and my sense making.

I employed methods in which collaborators were invited to think through ideas with me, to familiarize themselves with some of my inquiries and ideas while also valuing their current circumstances and worlds. I was interested in understanding the epistemologies trans people leverage and forge in their own lives, particularly in regard to the relationship between racialized, gendered, material circumstance and love as love practiced. Crystallization provided a framework for me to employ multiple ethnographic methods including interviews, participant observation, and fieldnotes in my exploration of a phenomenon as practiced and understood by my collaborators. These methods all afford dynamics characteristic of "hanging out" (Lugones, 2003), and furthermore honor our relationality and the emergent and situated nature of meaning. These methods were important given my attention to collaborators as expert theorists on their lives and the practices that reflect it.

Positionality as Method: Relationality Enfleshed

My positionality and the positionality of my collaborators in relationship to me, to each other, and the worlds they inhabit imbues this study. Who we are along the lines of race and gender, is not only written into my research questions, but has mediated the relationships we have sustained over the years in complex ways. Identity matters in this study, but as I have stated earlier, identity matters as a window into practices, strategies and ways of knowing engaged in order to survive and with hope, thrive. The section of *This Bridge Called my Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* that inspired my appreciation for theories in the flesh is entitled, "Entering the Lives of Others." Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga (1981) describe the theme of this section as "Our refusal of the *easy* explanation to the conditions we live in" (p. 23). The entries I have had into the lives of the five

people in this study, and their entries into mine constitute the fabric of our trusting relationship upon which my methods and research approach hinge. While I share identity categories as a person of color and trans with all five of the people I recruited for this study, this affinity is not the reason we have sustained a relationship beyond our work together at Apex. Furthermore, in the spirit of *Bridge,* I introduce my participant collaborators and the contours of our relationality through a co-theorization in the flesh. This is a co-theorization not in the sense of my participants' co-authorship, but rather in the ways I sketch the material conditions that shape their lives, sometimes in their own words from questionnaire and interview data, in order to enflesh our relationship and the ways in which the contradictions between us and within their own lives anchor my research commitments. These introductions attempt to make visible what is concealed by stock categorizations in demographic tables. My intimate understanding of pieces of collaborators' lives outside of this study, rooted in our evolving relationship to each other, is a window into the sociohistorical situatedness of the stories they tell me about love. The storying that follows serves as an act of naming and contextualizing the "selves" and material conditions in which participants love and the ways I have been subsequently shaped as a "faithful witness" (Lugones, 2003, p. 7; Cruz, 2011, p. 549).

I begin with witnessing Ezekial, who I have known the longest and proceed in chronological order. While the structure of these intros varies, each one is situated in the collaborator's relationship to Apex, the community-based organization where our connection to activism began and the ground from which this study grew. I share a few moments from our histories working together from the "interregnum" (Malatino, 2019, p. 44; Bey, 2019, p. 124) and liminal (Lugones, 2003) spaces off script from formal meeting agendas, during car rides home, and between decisions at city actions. These moments highlight pieces of the people in this study and hopefully glimpses of a sort of relationality required of coalition, but often obscured by easy explanations about identity and building trust.

Ezekial

At twenty-six, Ezekial is the eldest of my collaborators. He took his father's middle name, which in his words, "confirms [him] as the seventh son." He is a proud uncle, a visual artist, and calls himself a silly dreamer. Of his parent's seven sons, Ezekial is one of two who has never known what it's like to be incarcerated. He grew up in the Northwest part of Nashville, mostly in the home where his mother currently resides. I've enjoyed driving through the groves of trees lining the route to his home from the main road. Verdant and lush around the corner from landmarks associated with depletion: quick loan, predatory lender buildings, and over-priced convenience store groceries as the closest food supplier. A resident of the area since 1969 told local news reporter Raymond Wade (2020), "When African American families bought houses and settled in this area, the idea was to stay in these homes forever and eventually leave the houses and properties to our kids." These days the neighborhood where Ezekial grew up lies in a portion of the city designated as a food desert (Larson et. al., 2013). It's hard to reconcile this scarcity with the abundance symbolized in the foliage that holds his childhood home and the aspirations of prosperity for Black families imbuing the area's past.

Among Ezekial's family, I'm White. While my story differs from the stories of the White people Ezekial's parents wanted him to know through church and through extra curriculars when he was younger (as he shared with me during our interviews), the lightness of my skin sends the same message. There's a safety provided by my presence, an access to privilege symbolized by our bond. I'll never forget the remarks of one of his more gregarious older cousins at the party commemorating Ezekial's graduation from high school. The cousin remarked, "Ah, you got White folks coming and everything, girl!" Ezekial was never a girl then or before this moment, but his cousin's miss didn't register, or was not of consequence in the moment. What was important was a celebration of Ezekial's graduation from high school and the diversity of his fans, symbolized by my

presence. In our interview, Ezekial made this clear when he shared, "Obviously my mom and them, they're not with it [laughs] but they do love me…It is vital to me because if I didn't have love and I didn't have friends, I wouldn't be here." The trade-off exposed to me in this share from Ezekial alone sheds light on the ways in which love and family acceptance, particularly for trans people of color is more complex than the binary of accepting or rejecting.

Ezekial was one of the teenagers present at the very first after school session I ever facilitated. He was also a member of the first Stones youth leadership team I coordinated. I recall a Stones session in which we had just learned of the murder of Gizzy Fowler, a local Black trans woman. My agenda had us working on some kind of project, perhaps practicing for a dialogue we'd have with future doctors at an esteemed local medical school. During this session, instead, we circled up and we talked. Ezekial started sharing how news sources skirted the larger issue, how Fowler was one of 21 trans women killed that year. Another team member, a trans woman herself yelled for the first time at a session and then cried. During this session, this young person and Ezekial were two of the ten who taught me first how sometimes these out of school spaces are the only places where we can talk about these pains, express the anger, and mourn. Experiencing the loss of community members from fear-based violence over and over again quickly teaches us about the absence of spaces to feel grief and mourn collectively.

During the following week, our energy was still low and there was work to do. Now I'm remembering with different appreciation the way Ezekial burst into that room, took a look around and said, "Fuck it, let's play musical chairs." We did. And it was healing. That grief never goes away and that wasn't the point. Ezekial reminded us that our affective worlds and experiences were shiftable, moveable, without denying their weight and impact.

Saffron

Saffron has fiery energy. Reflected in the pseudonym they chose for this study, their wardrobe and the speed by which words exit their mouth, Saffron has a heat about him. When I think of Saffron, I think of queer haircuts playing with his natural texture and clippers. I think of his unapologetic appreciation for kink culture and his love of turtles. I also think of the way he has been tortured by his process of negotiating his racial identity within White spaces, the only spaces he has associated with home.

While nebulous for most of my collaborators, Saffron's involvement with Apex is directly connected to their formal schooling. In our interview, I learned about the ways in which Apex offered Saffron a place to explore and claim pieces of himself. He came to Apex based on gender and sexuality but disclosed that the queer drop-in space, referred to in this study as the Couch, was where they first faced their identity as a Black person. This was all mediated through their high school. He shared, "When I was going through my gender identity and my sexual orientation, I was like, this is very bad, this is okay, I gotta find these type of people, and then you came to my school." I appreciate Saffron's framing of these pieces of identity as processes to go "through" on their own. He didn't say when I was going through my process of coming out or transition, he named identity as "always in process" (Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 69). I don't remember the particular school visit he referred to, but he must have been present during one of my routine visits to his high school's gay straight alliance (GSA).

I was present as a community member, representing this community and Saffron remembers it as a formative moment in their identity "journey," to borrow one of their interview descriptions. After earning a position on the Stones team, Saffron started to take the bus from his school to our facility downtown, sometimes up to a 45 min commute, depending on traffic. He then proceeded to attend the two other queer and trans-focused groups I coordinated, sometimes making the trip three

times a week. The impact of these spaces on Saffron is felt in the following excerpt from our interview. In describing their experiences with their racial identity in high school, Saffron said,

> I didn't have anything in common with them. So, I was like completely set aside from them in my brain. And I wasn't anything like them, so probably until [The Couch] really, I didn't start unpacking that, that's not so good. I am Black, and I need to, I need to do something.

For Saffron, The Couch offered a space where they were invited to consider their (dis)connection from their Black identity and begin these processes of critical introspection shared in this snippet. Apex provided him with some of the few experiences they have ever known of BIPOC queer and trans community. Within a homeostasis of whiteness, for Saffron, Stones, the Couch, and Apex at large were a refuge and places to reconcile and reclaim.

Juston

"Strong, Proud and Powerful. This means representing my ethnicity and race in a powerful way. As well as making me feel great about where I come from." This is how Juston described their racial and ethnic identity in their questionnaire response. Juston is also a graduate student, an elementary classroom teacher, and a fan of both all things drag and all things K-pop. In fact, I can thank their love of drag for several young queer peoples' first life encounter with a drag show. Around 2014, during an annual "lock-in" sleepover for the Couch program, Juston took the stage in the talent show. Juston and I did not meet through programming or culture connected to our queerness or the LGBTQ community, though- we met in a coalitional-by-design space. We met at summer camp

They were fourteen; I was twenty-six. We got to witness each other growing into ourselves at a place we both call home. Not just any summer camp, Camp Nowhere is by young people for young people. Now defunct due to a lack of sustainable funding, for at least a decade this camp drew in high school students from across the city to engage in intentional community building and

education around bias and bigotry. No one is ever a camper twice, as students who return to camp serve in the role of advisors their second year and following. This is the camp that another one of my collaborators, Star, credited as the place where they "learned basic things of how activism works and how intersectionality works." I met Juston in the context of peers, community, and family. I don't remember if they performed in the camp talent show their first year, but no one can forget their last. They captivate a room. Their walk. Their split.

Since we met when they were 14, Juston has wanted to be a teacher. In-between and during semesters as a student in teacher education, Juston served as a mentor in their university's student affairs office. Teaching and supporting peoples' learning does it for them. They graduated from an internship, project-based charter high school in the metro school district. For their culminating, final project, they adapted two activities from Camp Nowhere and engaged the entire school, including faculty and staff in experiential learning about power and privilege. I know this because they invited me to help co-facilitate. On the day-of, Juston's inherent pedagogue permitted me to engage and learn as a proud participant.

As far as their family system, Juston is mom's only child. In the way Juston talks about the relationship with their mom, I can trace it as both their anchor and impetus for forging chosen family. Talking about mom, Juston told me,

> Our love was just for each other. And it started coming up a lot recently how I struggled with not having a family I guess and so I think I've been thinking a lot about like that in my chosen family. And how I surround myself with my chosen family.

I see both Juston's appreciation of drag performance and their active role in surrounding themself with chosen family as practices imbued with survival-richness (Cruz, 2013). While these characteristics may come with and from pain and reconciliation, they reveal a choosing of Juston's

self, transcendent of what might be perceived from describing them as Black, non-binary, or trans femme alone.

Star

To me, Star has always been a little other-worldly, beyond their persona as a paid, weekend fairy at the Renaissance Fair. From my perspective, Star is transformative in their seemingly innate capacity to shift paradigms in their decision to live in excess of such paradigms. Star and all of my collaborators in their own ways demonstrated and reminded me of the way trans of color life offers a form of world creation, a capacity to build and create from cracks, from fissures, and from places not yet here. Star's proclivity for this capacity is the most obvious to me of the five. Intellectually, they repeatedly push me (and others) to think in more expansive, nuanced, and radical ways. The push is often unconscious, as in my experience, it comes from earnest curiosity and the questions they ask in response to situations or insights that challenge their line of thinking and right to self-determine.

This radical, intellectual edge is evident in their thoughts about adrienne maree brown's liberation strategies (2019). In the questionnaire for this study, in response to the video I shared featuring brown's ethic behind her text *Pleasure Activism*, Star wrote, "I'm honestly having complicated thoughts about this one that I can't articulate well." In our interview, Star followed up about *Pleasure Activism* and brown, or in their words "the second video," without provocation. The following excerpt, in terms of what compelled Star to reference the video and their thinking about it evidences some of their edge. When I asked Star what trans folks of color need to love themselves, to grow, cultivate, call in, Star shared with me,

> It's a lot to unpack when it's dealing with people of color. Outside of being queer, you have to deal with the fact that you are a person of color, and you feel like you can't say certain things or do certain things or even exist without being hate-crimed. Then you add a whole

> 'nother layer on top of that. That's why the second video struggled with me so bad because they were like, 'Oh, you were always free.' And I was like were we though? Like, on a spiritual level? Yes, for sure. Physically existing in a society like that…I see what you're trying to say. But I really don't fuck with it.

Star proceeded to tell me they looked up additional videos of adrienne maree brown, seeking clarity. Still, Star chose not to embrace brown's notion of personal freedom given its distance from Star's lived understanding of the real and violent entrapment of racism.

Star was an active member of the Stones team for two consecutive years. In 2014, when Star and Ezekial were on the same Stones team, I remember a moment at the city's annual MLK Day rally when supporting them required me to risk my allegiance to our shared community-based organization. This was the year of Ferguson. The year that the police killed 18 year-old Michael Brown. When it came time for our Stones group to march in the city's rally in honor of progress and the legacy of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Star and Ezekial asked if they could instead join the Black Lives Matter (BLM) die-in in order to protest the march. Star, Ezekial and local BLM organizers did not want to celebrate progress while the state continued to celebrate and sanction Black death. I now wonder about the larger implications of defer to these young people in this moment. Was I making them overly or inappropriately responsible? I let the young people choose that day. Star and Ezekial participated in the die-in alongside their comrades in BLM while I walked with other team members in the city march. Alongside Ezekial, Star's understanding of justice and commitment to truth troubled and bolstered my own commitments. If given that choice today, I would choose otherwise.

Alex

Alex feels like a little brother to me. He has traveled across the country twice to visit me since I moved away from my post at Apex and his mother has my number in her phone. He first

came to Apex to find support based on his trans identity. On many levels, Alex's narrative fits the script for the value of positive youth development-based, after school spaces for minoritized young people, including but not limited to queer and trans people (Iwasaki, 2016). Alex first came to Apex based on the encouragement of a teacher. This teacher was the advisor for the Latino Achiever's club at Alex's high school and he happened to be a good friend of mine. Because of our friendship, which to be clear, was more so based on gossip, queer culture and relationship tensions than any critical or responsive pedagogical praxis perse, he knew about the after-school programs I coordinated for queer young people, including trans young people like Alex. On Alex's first night, he did not say much and mostly observed.

I remember finding him standing alone in the parking lot after that session. I don't remember what I said, but how nervous I was to approach him and say it. Years later, Alex told me that it was me checking in on him, making sure he had a ride home and that he had an okay time with the others that made him know I cared. I'd like to believe it was because we were both trans and maybe the only Mexican Americans in the space, but it was my attention. At Alex's family gatherings and parties, the partiality I've felt in my racial identity throughout my life is salient, I'm not welcomed because of our shared roots in Mexico, or because I, like Alex have gone through a gender transition, but because I love their son.

While nuanced, and while I run the risk of oversimplification, I believe the reason the community-based organization worked so well for Alex, why he stuck around and continued to come back, is because these organizations are established around providing people with access to a cultural norm, and inclusion into a social structure from which the stratification creates the need for additional supports in the first place. Of my five collaborators, Alex is the one who is not Black and across his shares, he frequently referenced his orientation to cultural norms absent from other collaborators' shares. Norms such as standards for masculinity, and the conflation between

monetary access and happiness. Alex indeed came to Apex for social and emotional support at first; however, Alex's drive for success according to United States' social metrics kept him connected. For example, in his interview, Alex spoke to the whiteness that pushed Star out of Apex (as I describe in my next chapter) as a sort of training for his own future. Referring to his experience as one of few people of color, he told me,

> I still felt those things, like the negative feelings, I guess of isolation but you know, you got to do it. Or at least, I got to do what I got to do. Use it for my benefit, you know, take those opportunities…You just gotta like, basically put yourself out there, that's what Apex did for me…I guess my career field is just like I'm always gonna be in an uncomfortable position with these like White folks and stuff. So it's like, kind of helps me in that way. For me, it was just like whatever, fuck it. Imma go. I'm not gonna like give up an opportunity just because I feel awkward.

The very normativity that pushed Star out of the programming I coordinated for queer and trans young people, anchored some of Alex's diligence to sticking it out. Alex engaged in the agency's services beyond the programs designated for queer and trans young people I coordinated. When I asked Alex what trans people of color need to experience love, he said, "We just have to be seen like everybody else. That's the only difference." I can't help but consider the way anti-Blackness facilitates a certain permission for Alex to stand out, while craving a desire for his transness to be "seen like everybody else."

When I think about Muñoz's (1999) theorization of disidentification, and the disidentifying practices I observed in my collaborators' stories and experiences, Alex is an example of how these practices do not necessarily amount to a subversive or explicitly resistant sociality. Alex's disidentifying includes his practices of refusing queerness as a young, trans, Latino adult. Once Alex joined Stones, one of his most consistent talking points with community stakeholders was

emphasizing how important it is not to assume that transgender people proudly identify with all things LGBTQ, or with the queer community at all. I remember a time when Alex made an announcement at a Couch session amidst a dialogue about re-writing group agreements and expectations. He remarked, "Can we take it easy on the gay jokes? Some of us are straight." Muñoz (1999) shares, "Minoritarian subjects need to interface with different subcultural fields to activate their own senses of self" (p. 5). Although Alex's gender identity neatly aligns with biomedical understandings of transgender maleness, his cultural and embodied sense of self did not align with the community outcome of this model.

Theory in the flesh reframes materiality and ontology as components of our lives that can be shape shifted, evidence of Anzaldúa's "haciendo caras," or making faces (Anzaldúa, 2009). Examples of how we are the shapers of our flesh and our soul. The introduction to my collaborators and my reflections based on my framework make salient for me larger implications of my time with these people and how I think about the role of identity in the creation of education and support spaces, and generally. Political identities are not as pre-determined by ontological characteristics such as genitalia and the epidermis, but seemingly nourished and harvested, identities for, toward, and with as opposed to identities *as*.

Recruitment and Ethics

In my approach to this study, I wanted to learn *with* these five people who have shaped the way I think about movement building and education settings, both formal and informal. I not only wanted to learn *with,* but I also wanted to learn from what they are already engaging with, the theorizing in their daily practices often made opaque by systems of devaluation. In the vein of theories from flesh, Marquis Bey writes, "We don't capture the flesh; it gives us the life we sought." (Bey, 2019, p. 149). I thought of the trans young people I had worked with who I have enough of a relationship with where my self-serving research requests and activities, as much as possible, wouldn't feel exploitative.

I thought of those who have been racialized as people of color in the United States. Ultimately, the inclusion criteria for participation in my study, as approved by the institutional review board (IRB) are trans-identified individuals, between the ages of 20 and 25, who also identify as people of color. As articulated in my introductions to the collaborators that I ultimately recruited, their understanding and negotiation of transness varies, yet each person I recruited had, during our tenure at the CBO identified their gender to extend beyond the sex they were assigned at birth and subsequent expectations. For some, this was more neatly aligned to contemporary, transnormative (Pullen Sansfaçon, et al., 2023) understandings of trans. Alex and Ezekial, for example, in many spaces identify as trans men, but for others, the trans designation is more fluid and purposefully unstable. Person of color is also broad intentionally. I did not reach out to every trans person of color I had worked with at Apex for this study.

I reached out to seven people with whom I have maintained a relationship, the nature and frequency of connection and communication varying. I utilized purposive sampling (Patton, 2002) and reached out to seven people with whom I have maintained a relationship, with varying frequency and forms of connection. Put simply, purposive sampling involves the selection of "information-rich cases for study in depth" (Patton, 2002, p. 230). Within Patton's framework, "What would be 'bias' in statistical sampling, and therefore a weakness, becomes an intended focus in qualitative sampling, and therefore a strength" (p. 230). Patton's description speaks to how purposive sampling for the case of my study is a recruitment method in which the relationality I have nurtured with my collaborators is a strength.

The particular closeness I have with the people I recruited, within my methodology is intentional. This move toward relationality in research is characteristic of decolonizing efforts in educational research. Brayboy & Deyhle (2000) push back on traditional adherence to objectivity and distance between researchers and informants. For Brayboy & Deyhle (2000) and as I've learned

in my study, "it is this *lack* of distance that has enhanced our own research" (Brayboy & Deyhle, 2000, p. 165). Valuing the closeness I have to the people I recruited for my study does not lesson my commitment to protecting them from potential research harms. In fact, the relationality that imbues my study requires more transparency around boundaries, protections, and expectations as I am in solidarity with these people. My research commitments are such that to the best of my ability, protecting the wellbeing of my collaborators is protecting my own integrity, not only as a researcher and educator but steward of the Earth. This commitment is not bound to this study and my continuing presence in my collaborator's life, consistently revisited is testament to such.

The protections I put in place, as described to my collaborators included deidentifying what they shared with me in interviews and other phases in transcripts and my notes; deidentifying the name of the CBO and related programming; and being transparent about potential risks and my goals. In addition to learning about my interest in practices of love, from my consent form, collaborators read that ultimately, "this study is an effort to center the practices and knowledge of trans people of color in research." While more than one collaborator was willing to be identified, I chose to keep their names confidential because of the ways institutions, including schools, have made this specific demographic vulnerable and due to the continued political attacks on racial and gender-based justice. While it was unlikely that anything I shared in my study would be damaging on the individual level, it was not a risk that would benefit our collective wellbeing, freedom, or my larger research objectives.

All seven of the people I initially recruited have been racialized as people of color according to constructions of race and ethnicity in the United States. The specific ethnic and racial designations of recruits include Mexican (White and Hispanic), Black, and Biracial (Black and White). Their age range falls into the category of "emerging adulthood," approximately between 18 and 25 years old as described in youth engagement and development literature (Arnett, 2000). This

age range of young adults is reflected in empirical research from studies in higher education and subsequently, individuals and communities within this age range have largely been understood according to experiences in college or university settings. A component of my motivation behind recruiting the people I did is to contribute wisdom and knowledge from this age group outside of these formal institutions. These three criteria had to be met to participate in my study. An implicit criterion was connection to the Southeastern United States. All five collaborators were born and bred in Nashville, TN where Apex is located.

My connection with the people I recruited for this study bolsters my intention to learn from and alongside and aligns with the intersectional, theoretical frameworks I used. Researcher Lisa Bowleg (2008) maintains, "intersectionality research demands that researchers who employ an intersectional perspective broaden their analytical scope beyond the collected data to become intimately acquainted, if they are not already, with the sociohistorical realities of historically oppressed groups" (p. 318). My relationships with the people I recruited are woven by my growing understanding of these sociohistorical realities, nurtured through understanding pieces of their generational wisdom and trauma, histories of neighborhoods and schools, and the education for critical consciousness we endeavored together while engaged in community advocacy work. When I worked with the young people I recruited, our program was one of the few places they could access where critical consciousness was encouraged and bolstered. While the hostility of Southeastern states toward racial and trans justice is characteristic of stereotypes of the South, less circulated is the deep, grassroots organizing also characterizing the region. Still today, I have never known sustainable organizing like that I encountered in this state. I recently learned that at one point a graphic novel created by the Highlander Center on community advocacy was translated into Arabic for use in Egypt in the seventies (T. Reagon-Fletcher, personal communication, July 15, 2023). The South literally taught the world how to organize.

After my initial outreach on Facebook messenger with follow-up via phone text, five of the seven people I reached out to were interested and available to be a part of the study. Following this initial contact, I followed up through email about logistics, sought their informed consent, and the study commenced. IRB approval, recruitment language and my consent form can be found in the appendix. For reference, collaborators' pseudonyms, demographic information, and interview location are provided in Table 1. I generated this table using collaborators' own words to describe their gender and racial identities in addition to my description of their employment at the time of the study. I add this employment information given their age as emerging adults and the relationship between income and basic needs being met. As I explore in chapter six, a theme my collaborators identified is the necessity for trans people of color to have their basic needs met. Next, I describe my methods of data collection for each phase of the study.

Table 1. Collaborator Demographics

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Race	Employment
Ezekial	26	trans man/ trans masculine. I identify as a guy. You could consider me as a culturally identified man	Black and that's really about it	Support personnel for health services lab
Saffron	22	Bad bitch of varying genders; Genderqueer, Non-binary	I'm Black; simple and to the point.	Freelance model; factory worker
Juston	23	Bold, Intuitive, and Experimental	Strong, Proud, and Powerful.	First year K-12 teacher; college graduate student
Star	22	Non-binary. I feel like my identity exceeds the binary.	Black, even though I have different ethnicities.	Barista; recently hired by the local aquarium
Alex	21	trans, transgender, transgender man/guy.	Hispanic, Latino, Latinx, Mexican, American.	College student;

Study Design: Three Phases for Data Collection

As established by Ellingson (2009), "Crystallization provides another way of achieving depth, through the compilation not only of many details but also of different forms of representing, organizing, and analyzing those details" (p. 10). My study involved three separate phases of data collection and communing with my collaborators and amounted to different forms of representing what I found, as presented in the findings chapters that follow. As aforementioned, each phase was designed to provide me with multiple forms of data and entryways for analysis, but importantly I wanted the process itself to be meaningful to my collaborators as a queeruptive, pedagogical strategy.

Phase 1a: Preliminary Questionnaire

The first phase of my study included a preliminary questionnaire followed by an in-person interview. I created the survey through Google forms in order to reacquaint myself with my collaborators and introduce them to some of my key inquiries. The questionnaire included a series of questions inviting collaborators to identify themselves along gender and racial lines in their own words. The questionnaire, and other protocols used across phases are provided in the appendix. Additionally, I provided links to three videos featuring artist activists whose work and message illuminates some of my early ideas about radical love. These artists each identify as queer and/or trans and are also Black. I featured adrienne maree brown (Laura Flanders & Friends, 2019) talking about her book and ethic *Pleasure Activism,* Sonya Renee Taylor (TEDx Talks, 2017) speaking to bodies as resistance, and Syrus Marcus Ware (CBC Arts, 2017) talking about art as a form of activism. The inclusion of these video texts was pedagogical in my attempt to offer an avenue for my collaborators to return to their designation as young activists during our time together through these potential mirrors. These videos did not tell collaborators what or how to think about love, but

rather offered different entryways to thinking about the self, the body, and alternative forms of resistance, particularly affective ones. Questionnaire responses were my first source of data for analysis and also informed pieces of my interview protocol. Star, Ezekial and Saffron each referenced the questionnaire and the ways in which the questions inspired critical analysis, for Star, and (re)membering (Yoon & Chen, 2022, p. 84) for Saffron.

Phase 1b: Go-Along Interviews

The second component of phase one of my study involved one on one interviews with each collaborator. These interviews (protocol included in the appendix) varied in place and format and four out of five occurred in-motion, reflective of the go-along interview (Kusenbach, 2003; Stiegler, 2019) method. Places were chosen based on proximity to the collaborator's residence and their preferences. Because of my focus on everyday practices and our prior relationship, I wanted our interviews to be as close to hanging out (Lugones, 2003) as possible. In her description of go-along interviews, ethnographic sociologist Margarethe Kusenbach (2003) explains, "Go-alongs are a more modest, but also a more systematic and outcome-oriented version of 'hanging out' with key informants" (p. 463). She continues, in go-alongs, "ethnographers are able to observe their informants' spatial practices *in situ* while accessing their experiences and interpretations at the same time" (p. 463). My interviews blended the traditional, sit down one on one interview (Seidman, 2013) with the go-along method as our conversations spanned driving-along, walking-along, and sitting together in restaurants, or in the case of Saffron, an ice cream shop. My decision to record while collaborators and I went along together amounted to harvesting the esteemed benefits of the go-along method in that I was able to learn about collaborators' relationships to place as they organically shared observations with me.

These observations were filtered by experiences with race and access, key to my understanding of their social locations and material circumstances. As Sam Steigler (2019) observed

in his go-along interviews with one trans person and one queer person experiencing homelessness in NYC, mobile interviews support our intentions to illuminate sites of knowledge production and theorization often concealed or devalued in empirical research. Go-along style interviews have the capacity to reveal "everyday moments that often go unnoticed by academic and educational inquiry" (Steigler, 2019, p. 373). A piece of these everyday moments is individuals' relationship to place, as filtered through their personal histories, background, and social positions along race, class, gender, and ability.

While driving to the ice cream shop with Saffron, for example, I learned about how challenging it is for him to get around living in a rural area without a car, and I learned about some of his experiences with racialization. In passing by an unassuming building for instance, Saffron shared, "I heard they hold KKK meetings there." When we sat down to continue our conversation over lemon sorbet and pistachio ice cream, he shared that upon moving there he told his mother, "This place is racist af, obviously you weren't thinking about your two Black sons." His comment, inspired by seeing this building and what it reflects about the culture of where he lives has a much different effect than merely telling me about the racist vibes of Woodville sitting down. I was able to perceive the affective impact of place on his world, felt pieces of racism that compounded what he shared about his first impressions and chats with his mother.

The go-along interview method is imbued by the theories that guide this study in the attention of this method to the liminal or in-between. In addition to conversation while driving together, the go-along practice included walking-along in a forest with Ezekial. In the transcript, the sounds of insects, birds, and twigs under our feet intersplice stories of love, longing, family and romance. A pond stimulated Ezekial's reflections on the comfort of bodies of water. We had to monitor our pace as Ezekial and recently undergone top surgery, and this attention prompted conversation about trans community care in practice (Malatino, 2020). My interview with Juston was

more traditional as we chatted for ninety minutes over hot wings and tacos at the same restaurant where we would once close out our weeklong, social justice summer boot camp. Go-along practices offered a level of realness and ease to the interview process, that I feared might be foreclosed by more formal interview structures, especially given the ways in which we know each other.

Within my interviews, I asked collaborators questions about what transness means to them. I asked about community. I asked what first comes to mind when they think about love, what stories have they been told? Additionally, I also asked for input on the second and third phases of the study in which they would take and share photos with me and then participate in a group processing session. These questions were designed to be open-ended, relatively vague, focusing on messaging around love, and invitations to talk about identity, in their words, as invited by the theories that guide this study. Particularly the valuation of people as expert arbiters on their own experience and how this experience is always raced, gendered, and classed among other symptoms of the US socio-political value system. I also asked each person what conditions would support a generative group processing session for phase three. Three of the five inquired about the other collaborators as a prerequisite for the conditions of their participation. I predicted that who was in the room would make a difference in peoples' comfort and willingness to engage and in fact I made the decision not to recruit someone else for this study based on my awareness of a past tenuous interpersonal relationship with another collaborator. The forms of transparency I exhibited with collaborators about my goals for phase three of the study aligns with my methodological commitments in terms of co-constructing knowledge and conducting research alongside the communities the research is intended to support. This process is reflective of collaborative research methodologies (Jourian & Nicolazzo, 2017) in which Ezekial, Star, Saffron, Alex and Juston were invited to interrogate and help form my research methods.

Interviews each lasted between one and three hours in length. I recorded these interviews using two devices, my iPhone and an old handheld digital recorder in preparation for possible background noise and inconsistent sound quality. For transcription, I first used the automated software Otter and then went back through to edit and correct the transcript for accuracy. My final interview transcripts were compiled using data collected across both recording devices.

Phase 2: Photo-Elicitation

Collaborators took photographs for the second phase of my study. Following our interview together, I invited each person to take up to three photographs that illustrate love in their lives. The only limitation being no one else could be identified in their photos and if they identified themselves, it meant they were comfortable with me and others seeing their likeness in our group session and my research reporting. Rather than artifacts for independent analysis, the photographs served as the anchor text for our group processing session, to elicit dialogue and sharing, as characteristic of photo-elicitation interviews (Torre & Murphy, 2015), based in the field of visual sociology. The invitation for this component of the study sounded like the following excerpt from my interview with Saffron:

> I want to invite you to send me at least three photos. You can use whatever camera you want. Your phone, whatever. And I want you to take pictures of things that you think represent love. And that can be things that perhaps are representative of a place love could be but isn't, like perhaps you take a picture that's actually the absence of love in order to reflect love. You can take a picture of whatever you want. If you're in it, and I can tell it's you, that means you're comfortable with your likeness being shared.

Saffron and all other people in my study were aware of the photo component of the study prior to any involvement as outlined in my consent form. I used the same conversational approach that I

took with Saffron when I explained this next phase to all collaborators. To this invitation, Saffron responded, "Yeah. And one is going to involve me because...obviously…." I then continued,

> Do it up. You can also make something, write something, if you wanted to create and then snap a shot of that, that works too. And I want you to keep in mind, so love, sure. But, if possible, consider ways in which your transness and racialization impact the way you see and know love. Does that make sense?

Saffron replied, "I'm thinking, I'm already thinking about what I'm gonna do."

I share this exchange with Saffron to on one hand describe my methods, but also to animate a level of mutuality that threaded my approach to data collection. The variety of methods I employed reflects my intention to choose research engagements that would be desirous to collaborators, a component of the appeal of crystallization. The choice of the people in my study to participate beyond wanting to do something 'for' me but instead wanting to do something because they wanted to do something was important. The implications of my study may not have as much of a direct impact on the lives of communities of trans people of color as I would like, and further, I wanted the research process itself to be impactful for collaborators on its own, as I have mentioned. Saffron said "obviously" in regard to submitting a photo that included their own likeness. This response signifies interest on his behalf, and also signifies that Saffron trusts I know him, at least enough for me to sense his humor. As though, to know Saffron, is to know that "obviously" he would share a photo of himself. There's evidence of relationality that is not necessarily dependent on the history of our relationship as much as a relational quality to our conversation and presence together. His mentioning already thinking about what to do is also reflective of some mutuality in that there is desire on his behalf to engage in the second phase of the study. Although I used photography for the sake of elicitation in the final processing session, collaborators' involvement in the process was a form of data more than the photos themselves. My attention to the research

process itself as a form of data and also intervention is also felt in the final group processing phase of my study.

Phase 3: Group Processing

The theories undergirding this study: theory in the flesh, trans of color critique, and Black feminist love ethics each illuminate the importance of context when making sense of identity. Similarly, my relationship with my five collaborators cannot be described outside of our connection to Apex and the city where our political work together was born. Furthermore, aligned with my methodology of queeruptive bricolage, in my final phase of data collection I chose to employ a group-oriented method in which my collaborators could make sense of their stories *with* me and importantly with and as witnessed by each other. Witnessing is a central tenet of Black feminist love politics as described by Jennifer Nash (2013; 2019) and encouraged for research to be a form of resistance (Cruz, 2011). My method of creating a final, group processing session offered a space where collaborators could be witnessed in coalition with others and where they could also share alongside people who share a history of working with me at Apex but also share embodied histories along identity lines.

I am deliberately referring to the method I used in the final phase as a group processing session rather than a focus group in its attention to process and collaborative thinking without pressure for answers or an outcome (group structure and protocol are provided in the appendix). The purpose of my group session was focused on the process itself and the underlying commitment my theories have to the collective and coalition-building. While I could draw inferences toward the collective from what collaborators shared with me through our interviews and the photos as individuals, coming together in an intentional container helped me more immediately explore my second, overarching research question because of the live group dynamics at play. In this question, I

ask, What are the implications of centering the loving practices of trans young adults of color in approaches to education research and practice as a liberation project?

I employed arts-based research in this final phase via operationalizing the photographs collaborators shared with me in phase two as a shared text, in addition to a series of poetics I created through the analytical process of poetic inquiry. My approach to the final, group processing session and points of consideration from our time together is explored in detail in chapter 6.

Data Management and Approach to Analysis

I used the AI software Otter for the first transcription of my interviews and then listened and re-transcribed portions for accuracy. All data collected were stored electronically in password protected files on my personal computer, backed up to the university's hard drive as outlined by the ethics for data storage outlined in my IRB requirements. My first rounds of data analysis for each phase included re-reading collaborator responses and our conversations and annotating according to first thoughts, wonderings, notes of connection and surprise. This first round was primarily to get a feel for what collaborators were saying. I read questionnaire responses from phase 1a multiple times prior to engaging in phase 1b interviews with collaborators. Similar to the questionnaire responses, in my first pass reading the transcripts after ensuring accuracy, I made annotations in the margins. After each transcript I wrote research memos (cite). Between June 2022 and December 2023, my document "dissertation notas and research memos" grew to exceed over sixty single-spaced pages of text, including screen shots of follow-up text messages with collaborators, posts they shared on social media, and my general sense-making about my data in response to questions such as "what are their comments making me think about? What are the connections between my relationship to them? What am I finding interesting and why? What's bringing me pause? What does the theory tell me?" Where do contradictions exist?" These questions are characteristic of Ellingson's (2009) invitation for wondering as an important component of the preparation process in using the

crystallization method of data analysis in qualitative research. I became so familiar with my data that I can articulate direct quotations from collaborators without referencing interview transcripts. I know where in the interview each person said what, based on the times I re-listened to our interviews while walking, driving, and even cooking. By the time we met for our phase three group session in October, I feel as though I had been talking with each of them every day, outside of our usual off and on text messaging and communication. I share this to highlight that for me, key to what I found from this study was my deep familiarity with my data, particularly what was shared with me in our interviews across various places.

Data Analysis

To crystallize key findings and points of reflection from over the course of the three phases of data collection, I used multiple techniques of data analysis. Both my analysis and my representation of data characterize the multi-faceted quality of crystallization in research, "producing knowledge across multiple points of the qualitative continuum" (Ellingson, 2009, p. 8). This included more traditional approaches and representation such as building from codes into interpretive prose and artistic approaches such as poetic inquiry. I came to my decisions on which findings were most salient holistically, over time and several approaches. The findings I present from my study are informed by my processes of systematic analysis, and importantly the time and process I permitted, sometimes with frustration to sit with, wonder, and importantly feel the data. This approach animates the role of attunement in my analysis, particularly attunement to hauntings (Yoon & Chen, 2022) throughout all phases of the study and currently as I write these lines. Irene Yoon and Grace Chen refer to hauntings as "a research process, shaping our dreams, epistemologies, coding, purpose and engagement" (20022, p. 76). These scholars invoke ghosts as the spirit of "something to be done," (p. 77) as haunting us to "change belief, though a person might not act as if this change is happening" (p. 82). They ask, "What kinds of truths do ghosts plant in our minds and

hearts that cannot be covered up? What do we do with knowledge construction when knowledge isn't stable?" (p. 82). I have become attuned to these ghosts, inklings or insights that did not come from identifying and coding common and conflicting themes, but rather from my understanding of these people and the stakes informed by the socio-political climate in which we're all trying to find our breath. Haunting is how I describe how common themes on their own were not enough.

In acknowledging and animating these approaches to data analysis, I hope to highlight my attempt at answering to my collaborators' worlds and ways of knowing beyond what was available in the preliminary questionnaire, transcripts, photographs, and our group processing session. This attunement is not a backdrop or inadvertent component of my approach but central, as encouraged and intimated by the demands of in-relations methodological practice (Tachine & Nicolazzo, 2022). Heeding what haunts me aligns with what I understand to be necessary in efforts away from colonial histories and tendencies in education research and furthermore as inherently queeruptive. In order to heed what haunted me throughout the study, I was required to pause (Patel, 2016) and ferret out, in Patel's words, "what structures, what inequitable structures, [might be] enlivened by narratives, even and perhaps especially the progressive narratives" (p. 88). Through coding-based analysis alone, I might have fallen prey to merely filling gaps in knowledge about trans people of color in education research, painted in equity or justice. I might have contributed easy explanations of what my collaborators shared with me. Sure, these stories might merit a contribution to the discipline, but without heeding the hauntings that inspired this research project from the onset, the settler colonial logics of this discipline (Salas-Santacruz, 2023; Patel, 2016) would be mentioned at best, reified at worst. The pauses across my data analysis, the multiple entry points for meaning making are how I was able to heed the ghosts that still haunt me in my relationships with the five people in this study, and with hope, "remain answerable to [my] constant desire for material transformation, repatriation, and rectification" (Patel, 2016, p. 72) in the lives of my collaborators and in education as a liberation

project. Attunement to what has haunted me helps me keep in mind the reality of how, as Patel (2016) writes, "for a researcher, coordinates are always shifting…nothing is completely fixed; far from it" (p. 72). Crystallized, my data analysis amounted to me naming and honoring what is alive across the phases of my study, in response to and a responsibility to the ghosts that have haunted me throughout the process. This approach is queeruptive and ultimately, according to my orientations and radical conceptualizations of it, ever trans.

Thematic Analysis

Hauntings sharpened, connected, and nuanced what I gleaned from processes of systematic data analysis. Based on my conceptual framework, particularly with attention to a Black feminist love ethic, I developed four main deductive codes: movement between self and the collective; vulnerability; community; and truth-telling. These ended up being place holders or guideposts, however, and I did not proceed to elaborate. With these ideas in mind, I returned to my research questions and coded interview transcripts and questionnaire responses according to three categories: mentions of transness, including mentions of gender and being gendered; racial identity or ethnicity; and love, broadly speaking. I looked for these categories with direct attention to my research questions. Within these categories, I organized the table according to each collaborator, pulling direct excerpts related to these categories. I looked for patterns across excerpts to develop themes. Within love, I found consistent mentions of self-love, familial love, and romance. Within race, I took note of mentions of racial identity as discussed as a presumed identity based on how one is read or perceived and mentions of racial identity as self-determined. In addition to this table, I created a document for each collaborator in which I wrote a stream-of-consciousness style memo taking note of my own feelings, reactions and pauses in response to their questionnaire responses and interview transcripts.

I printed off paper copies of all interviews and went back to each, multiple times. I shared excerpts and ideas with mentors and colleagues and wrote myriad memos. Because my conceptual framework and research questions are based on practices, as informed by the material conditions of collaborators' lives (theory in the flesh), where trans identity is complicated or obscured by racialization (trans of color critique), and theorizations of love as a politic and practice (Black feminist love ethics), in my second round of analysis, for each collaborator I highlighted instances where they mentioned specific practices. Attention to the interregnum (Bey, 2019; Malatino, 2020), through a lens scanning for what might appear or remain hidden as infrapolitical (Scott, 1990) helped me delineate collaborators' practices within and sometimes as competing with what they told me verbally. This informed my third round of analysis in which I used poetic inquiry to inform the third phase of my study. Across these approaches to data analysis, I listened to interviews multiple times, printed out hard copies of transcripts and questionnaires and highlighted by hand and additionally creating sticky notes of patterns and codes. Healing and humor, for example are two codes that I wrote after noticing patterns. Ultimately, I identified codes, subcodes, and in-vivo (Saldaña, 2013) codes deriving from my framework, however, none of the themes I found from this process of coding, particularly when squared with the feelings and stories haunting me in between analysis sessions.

Crystallization, similar to methods of bricolage (Berry, 2006; Kincheloe, 2004) encourages the use of multiple theories, data and approaches to analysis. My data analysis was iterative, drawing from and building upon my conceptual framework. I read for codes and patterns as informed by my framework and then returned to the framework to ask pointed questions of my preliminary findings. These questions were directly informed by the theories guiding this study which helped me attune to larger findings, salient across the data. These findings come from my attunement to collaborators'

lives, the affective experience of my time with the data, and the theories that guided and guide how I approached and made sense of the data.

My key findings from this study derive from my rounds of data analysis; however, I maintain that it is the ghosts of my time working in Nashville where this study took place, hauntings from my role as the coordinator for the CBO programs through which I met my collaborators that insisted upon what I chose to surface. I could have written about the pithy comments shared about love, or about the strength of family for my collaborators. While differing in nature and dynamics, it is true that each of the five talked in depth about family members and their understanding of love through family. The importance of family and kinship networks is well-documented for queer communities of color (Gonzalez, Connaughton-Espino & Reese, 2022). That was not it though. Yoon and Chen (2022) remind me, "ghosts left unacknowledged will repeat and repeat; they have time to remember. That is, hauntings are the result of unsuccessful attempts at silencing" (p. 81). When thinking about Trans Radical Love and operationalizing it as a tool for data analysis, but also as a heart I aspire to embody and encourage in how I see myself, others, and the extensions of such in education practice, I tried to remain attuned to the "somethings to be done" (Yoon & Chen, p. 83). They write, "each of us, complicit in oppressive systems, has interdependent somethings-to-be-done" (p. 83). For these scholars and in my overarching intentions these somethings forge other futures, ways of thinking otherwise, as trans and Black beyond category invites (Bey, 2021).

Some of these hauntings included asking myself what my responsibility was to learn less-than-comfortable truths about collaborators' experiences at the CBO where we worked, while keeping my respect for the agency intact. The process included my willingness to let whatever assumptions I had about their experiences and my projections about what they should or could do become undone, as encouraged by Black feminist love politics (Nash, 2019) and women of color feminism (Lugones, 2003). Undoing also feels inherent to any queer or trans project, without saying,

for to queer or to trans simplified involves some kind of undoing of metrics of normal, of meaning, of being. My process of analysis also encouraged and required that I shift my assumption (and hope) that I could "find" ways that trans of color life offers a form of radical love. I still maintain this, however, through my analysis instead I learned about how through embracing and believing what my collaborators shared with me about identity, about love, and about their daily practices, I might arrive at a framework or lens for how we can think about identity and about bodies generally. This lens warrants some of the unexpected, grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006) involved in this study. Trans Radical Love, which I describe in more detail in my conclusion to this dissertation, chapter 7. Trans Radical Love is indeed informed by and rooted in the epistemologies of the trans people of color in my study, but rather than something emanating from our flesh, as I first intended or conspired, it's an invitation for considering and valuing flesh in general, regardless of identity lines or contexts. My conceptual framework was the heart of this study, interconnected with my own heart and gut space as interdependent, key tools of analysis, crystallizing patterns and themes, and informing my decisions to surface what I found.

Mutuality: Compensation and Flexibility

All five people who consented to this study volunteered their time and attention for three distinct phases. Each person understood their right to cease participation at any time. I secured two university-based grants for this dissertation in order to cover the cost of my travel to their current locations and in order to provide each person with cash compensation for each phase of the study. I stand by my conviction that paying people directly is a form of mutual aid (Spade, 2020) and social action, especially Black and transgender people. Transgender people in the United States experience high rates of unemployment, poverty, and inhibited education attainment (Carpenter & Gonzalez, 2020). According to 2022 US census data, Black or African American individuals comprised 13.5% of the total population, yet up to 20.1% of the total population living in poverty (Shrider, 2023).

Although one collaborator did not participate in all three phases, they all received a total of $150, $50/phase. My efforts did not go without roadblocks. Even after all checks were secured through the university, two of my collaborators were denied when they tried to cash the check at their local grocery store. I share this to emphasize how challenging it can be to pay people directly when working from within an institution. In my case, I did not have to navigate gatekeeping or eligibility requirements, and yet, because collaborators did not bank with large banking institutions, they ran into issues.

During the time I spent with collaborators, we shared a meal together at a restaurant of their choice. I budgeted some of the grant monies to take Ezekial grocery shopping to fill his freezer and pantry for the week and to buy Juston extra wings to take home with them after our lunch. I feel like if conducting research with people whose brilliance has been made vulnerable by institutions of education, filling their bellies and wallets as much as possible can function as a baseline requirement of research framed under justice or transformation. One could argue this qualifier applies to any person who has experienced formal schooling. If my collaborators banked with large banks, most of which are directly connected to exploitative industries such as fossil fuel and private prisons, or if I elected to offer them gift cards to large corporations that rely on exploitative labor, such as Amazon, we would not have run into many of the issues we did. The challenges I encountered are but another example of the institutionalization of the status quo and reflections of the chokehold of whiteness, of the industrial complex. In the next chapter, I highlight key findings from my time with collaborators as individuals, drawn from these processes of data collection and analyses.

Chapter 5: Identity Reimagined, Refusal as Self-Love

During our time hanging out (Lugones, 2003) together in our interviews, when I asked my collaborators "What comes to mind when you think about love? What stories have you been told about love?" No one started their stories with the cultural associations between love and romance or sex. They told me about family, they told me about an understanding of love from its absence and each of them both in direct response to my questions and throughout our follow-up conversations, indicated how important self-love is for any kind of radical love to be possible. In this chapter, I present key findings related to self-love from the first phase of my study in which participants responded to an introductory questionnaire and engaged in one-on-one interviews with me. These interviews, as described in my methods chapter, included multiple sittings, some in-motion as go-along interviews while driving from their residence to a restaurant or ice cream shop, or while walking along a nature trail in the case of Ezekial. My data collection and analysis were guided by my first core research questions:

1. How do lived experiences with racialization and transness serve as mediators of love in the lives of trans emerging adults of color?
    a. How do participant collaborators talk about love as it relates to their identities and lived experiences specifically? What stories do they tell?
    b. What life-affirming, and survival-rich (Cruz, 2013; Lugones, 2003) practices do collaborators engage with that exemplify love?

My developing framework Trans Radical Love, among many things, demands that I take into consideration the reliance of gender legibility on whiteness (Gill-Peterson, 2018; Salas-Santacruz, 2023); survival-rich (Cruz, 2013; Lugones, 2003), everyday practices; and subsequent forms of care reflective of a Black feminist love ethic (Nash, 2013). With these foci always at play, in my processes data analysis, I found that at the intersection of navigating transness and racialization in the

Southeastern United States lies fodder for practices of self-love that keep my collaborators alive in a political context growing exceedingly unlivable for trans people of color. In this chapter, I highlight self-love, not from the words collaborators used to describe its importance, but rather as a politic of refusal inherent in practices I picked up on across their stories. As trans people of color, as Juston says in the epigraph to this chapter, these are practices that seem to involve "more self-love than they would think." This chapter is organized around two practices of refusal I found in my data that led me to arrive at this claim. Within these refusals, my collaborators demonstrated an active choosing of themselves, a form of self-love revealed to me at places of contradiction and partiality informed by race and gender. The findings presented here contribute to my claim that the politics of refusal animated by my collaborators are a self-loving praxis, a trans radical one at that. I organize the chapter according to the following related findings, both of which I interpret as politics of refusal,

1. Collaborators leave people and situations that no longer serve them.
2. Collaborators actively negotiate identity.

I conclude with the implications of these findings which extend into the next chapter, in which I describe the final data collection phase of my study, our group processing session. For ease of understanding the locations and programs I reference throughout this chapter. I have included a demographic table below.

Table 2: Program Pseudonyms

CBO and Program Pseudonyms

Pseudonym	Eligibility	Purpose	Age Range
Apex	Varying	Wrap-around youth services not for profit, CBO	11-24 middle grades through early, emerging adulthood
The Couch	Drop-in. LGBTQ+ identified	LGBTQ+ youth positive youth development	14-18 high school
Stones	Application-based; LGBTQ+ identified and allies	LGBTQ+ youth leadership and activism	15-18 high school (excluding freshman)

Note: All collaborators participated in each program, but not concurrently.

Leaving Social Circles: Self-Preservation

When I asked about community, Star and Saffron both told me stories about former social circles they chose to leave. Within these stories, I saw examples of the ways identity factors into their experiences in (and at odds with) community and the subsequent choices they make for self-preservation. When I asked Star about their community and friends in the context of their job at the local renaissance faire, they told me they recently stopped hanging out with that circle of people. Star said, "I'm the only person of color and I'm the only like enby person there. It's nothing new." I am reminded of the times from working with Star when they were the only non-binary identified person present in a learning space, and more often when they were one of a few people of color. Validating Star, I responded, "That stinks, I know that brought you a lot of joy." In what follows, I saw Star connecting to and prioritizing themself in this decision to change, or at least take a pause on their friend circle. Star replied, "Well yeah. And then it stopped giving me joy. So, I stopped doing it." There is a connection here between the failure of the Ren Faire community to bring Star joy and their experience as "the only" along the lines of race and gender identity. Star shares that being "the

only" is "nothing new," as to say that isolation based on race and gender might be predictable and other qualities could make it tolerable. A turn in which this isolation prevented joy indicates an added, affective component that Star is connected to and honors in their decision to leave. In choosing to "stop doing it," Star is refusing to be a part of a social circle that is not aligned with their affective world. They refuse a formerly meaningful context and choose themselves. In Star's words, "Life is way too short for me to tolerate people that I don't want to fucking tolerate. If it does not bring me joy, it will leave." I saw a similar refusal in a story Saffron told me about the way he left a living situation.

During our interview, Saffron brought me up to speed on the couple years that had passed since we last saw each other. He lit up telling me about a six-month period living on his own in New Hampshire. Saffron told me he met the people he moved there with on an online gaming server. He explained, "I wouldn't want to live with anybody that was not queer. So, everybody in the house was queer one way or the other. Kai and Van were trans asterisk. And then there was Donna who is pan, asterisk." While in New Hampshire, he had a steady job at Dunkin Donuts and enjoyed spending time at coffee shops and watching shows on his phone. Saffron had positive stories about this time and feeling independent. He left this independence to return to rural Tennessee. Recounting the experience, Saffron said "[My housemates] were just like, yeah, this isn't working out. And I said, 'okay.' They gave me a month. And I was out in two weeks, because I wanted to be out of there so bad." I emphasize how Saffron's time brought meaning to him prior to sharing how he "wanted to be out of there so bad" in order to illuminate a tradeoff involved with his decision to leave. Getting out of there so badly involved a connection and ability to listen to a desire in himself for more-fulfilling forms of connection, even though it meant leaving the context of New Hampshire he enjoyed.

Looking at these shares through my framework, I see both Saffron and Star's decisions to leave spaces that previously brought joy (for Star) and housing (for Saffron) as self-loving practices

in their undercurrent of self-preservation, as informed by experiences with race and gender. For Star, being the only non-binary person and the only person of color in their Ren Faire circle took a toll on their joy and so they left. For Saffron, a social circle shared his identity, knowledge and experiences in terms of queerness, but he was eager to get out. Star and Saffron's decision to leave social circles is an example of their "willingness to be open to myriad forms of being known *and* potential alienation" (Nash, 2019, p. 116). This willingness, for Nash (2019), constitutes part of the potentiality of Black feminist love politics, and helped me see a choosing of themselves, reflected in Saffron and Star's choices to leave, choices that I see as politics of refusal. They were open to the "potential alienation," and connected to their desire and needs.

This self I see Saffron connected to in his refusal of this living situation is echoed in lines from him like, "My company was very often better than anyone else's company. And that's not bad because I love me." Or, "I've got to just try things out and if they sit right, if they feel good within me, then that's it. That's for me." Even in the way he described his confidence about work, "I'm an asset, any place would be lucky to have me." It is one thing to say these things about oneself, but in Saffron's decision to leave a living situation, on his terms, regardless of shared queer community because it wasn't serving him is evidence of a way he lives it. Similarly, too, as they were reflecting on their decision to leave the Stones team in their second year, another example of leaving I found in my analysis, Star shared,

> I think that was like such a like, that was such a power move. Being able to be like, oh man, like this is this place gave me the resources, but I also don't have to deal with this shit and I'm gonna leave.

To be clear, Star saw their commitment to Stones through in spite of the harm they were experiencing, and we had many conversations throughout the process. The "shit" they speak of includes being asked by agency staff to "tone down the PDA" with their significant other while other displays of affection

between queer young people remained free of scrutiny, free of much attention at all, really. The "shit" includes their experiences with having to explain or prove their use of they/them pronouns based on common assumptions that their feminine appearance and expression somehow invalidated their non-binary relationship to gender.

Star recalled the shit in another part of the interview, describing Apex as a whole. They said, "This is supposed to be a community where I was supposed to feel loved and accepted. And you guys are doing this bullshit?" When we happened to drive by Apex during part of our interview, as the agency is intentionally on a main through road of the city, Star stopped what they were saying to remark, "gross, I hate it there." In their perspective on their decision to leave Stones and their current opinion on the agency, I see another example of leaving as a politic of refusal and a form of self-loving.

More on this leaving, Star described how on the Stones team, "It got to the point where I was, like, violently angry at that person. And I was like, I'm not about to give these White people the satisfaction of beating this person's ass so I'm just gonna leave." Star is talking about White people on the Stones team, one of whom they were "violently angry at," but in the context of their overall Apex experience, I see the White people in this excerpt as the culture of whiteness imbuing Apex that Star was keenly aware of. Star is conscious about the impact of their actions in relationship to this culture. What feels like a compromise, in which Star would seemingly not have minded "beat[ing] this person's ass," is an active move of self-preservation. In their refusal of Apex and their refusal to acquiesce to the presumed expected reaction of aggression, albeit one they may have wanted to take, they choose themselves.

Their awareness of what was not working for them, ignited by microaggressions and assumptions compelled them to leave, in their words, "a power move." Bettina Love (2019) writes that "A politics of refusal is one of the necessary components of activism vital to dark folx' survival"

(p. 43). Within Saffron and Star's connection to their own needs as a source of "power" for Star and being "it" for Saffron, reflected in the stories they told me about leaving, I saw this vital politics of refusal. They refuse contexts that do not serve them at the expense of company and potentially unpleasant and risky implications. I found a politics of refusal, born of tensions of racialization and place in Ezekial's reasoning for leaving Nashville.

Leaving Nashville: Whiteness

Ezekial was the only one of my collaborators who I did not meet in Tennessee for our interview. I drove down to Atlanta, Georgia where he resided in an apartment at the time of our interview. In describing some of his experiences along the lines of sexuality with me, both Ezekial's reasoning for leaving Nashville surfaced, as did the impact of whiteness on his negotiations of seeking what he desires. I asked Ezekial about romance and how much of his racial identity and trans identity influenced his dating relationships. He told me,

> I feel like it influences it a lot. I don't usually date people who aren't of color. I feel like that sounds terrible…It doesn't make sense to everybody. Say I was to date a white trans person, obviously they're trans too, but like we have two different worldviews.

In Ezekial's candor alone, I felt a practice of refusal. Although there were complicated feelings coming up surrounding what he knew to be true of himself, he stayed with this truth. For Ezekial to feel like "that sounds terrible," and to mention an "everybody" for whom his desire and needs do not make sense, gives me the impression he has had to overcome internalized resistance to claiming this desire. Ezekial then told me, "That's part of the reason I moved here. It was hard for me to find romantic partners there especially because at the time I was looking for masculine people and most all of them were white in Nashville." There were other factors informing Ezekial's decision to move away from Nashville, encouraged by his father's blessing, offered on his deathbed for Ezekial to move on and leave home. In this example though, I saw Ezekial choosing himself in ways directly informed by

racialization and transness, necessitating a practice of refusal, his leaving Nashville for himself. Here too, I witnessed the ways in which Ezekial's process of coming into his transness opened him to different shapes of his sexuality, previously foreclosed. I had only known Ezekial to be interested in women and feminine presenting people, prior to this comment. When I asked him about this contradiction in what I knew of his sexual orientation, he explained how transition helped actualize a fluidity in sexuality he was not able to access before.

Ezekial explained,

> I think because I didn't want to date men or be seen as what I'm already seen as, back then, you know. But once I transitioned and stuff I think it really helped me figure out it was just that I wasn't as comfortable with myself.

Ezekial's transness assisted his process of discerning his desires which contributed to his decision to literally move his body to the far-more unapologetically Black Southeastern city where he resided at the time of my study**.** Telling me about his process of seeking masculine presenting people to date, revealed the whiteness of not only Nashville, but of the pool of possible queer dates in Nashville. Claiming and owning his desire of what he wanted, masculine-presenting, people of color to date, as one part of his motivation to leave Nashville is not only a practice of refusal, but a politics of it. In choosing himself and leaving Nashville, Ezekial refuses to acquiesce to a status quo of queer as White, or sexuality as static or fixed. In this potential, and the undercurrent of Ezekial foremost deferring to his desire, this politics of refusal exemplifies a self-loving praxis shaped by experiences with racialization and transness.

Actively Negotiating Identity: Contradictions & Mobilizations

The second key finding of this chapter, related to my finding about how collaborators left spaces, is that collaborators actively negotiate identity. These negotiations illuminated places of contradiction and partiality in collaborators' lives informed by race, class, and gender. I interpreted

these negotiations as politics of refusal embedded in ways they resisted identity labels and as loving in their capacity for honoring themselves and also forging connection. In their stories of identity, at places of transness and racialization I found examples of contradictions and negotiations of identity required of them. The practices offer evidence of my collaborators orienting to something outside of and in excess of systems of domination and legibility. While the influence of these systems on their lives is inevitable, their practices of negotiating identity at the contradictions informed by these circumstances show a choosing of themselves otherwise, an existing otherwise that I see as self-loving. I found these politics in the relationship Juston and Alex have to trans as an identity label and the subsequent ways they negotiate their understandings of who they are.

Trans

When I asked Alex "if you were to describe what transness is to you, or maybe what it isn't. What do you think about?" Alex said,

> I just think of it as like a word that, you know, a word that gives you an identity…it's like a placement holder, I guess to call people something. A way to identify with language, that's really all I see it as, I don't see it as anything offensive or anything.

While Alex seems to maintain that transness is "a word" or "a placeholder" and "a way to identify with language" as "all [he] see[s] it as" he also says that it is "a word that gives you an identity." Alex's response points to some of the key tenets of trans studies historically, particularly that gender identity is far more complex than biological sex and that categories associated with gender have material consequences in peoples' lives (Keenan, 2022). At places of contradiction, Alex negotiates what transness means for himself. There's a contradiction between Alex as a trans person and his understanding of trans as a label. Trans, in his words "to call *people* something," not trans as in a word that describes himself. This contradiction is animated too in Alex's addition, without provocation, "that's really all I see it as, I don't see it as anything offensive or anything." This line registers a story

Alex knows about trans from elsewhere, from a place outside of his experience with a negative connotation.

Alex's elaboration about his identity and the language he chooses further demonstrates this point. He shared,

> I'm just like a regular Latino man, I guess in that area. Like, [being trans] is not something like I just tell people. Like, if it gets brought up in the conversation or something, then yeah, you know, it might get brought up that I'm trans, but it's not really something I put myself, or put out there, I guess. I just don't do it.

For Alex, being trans falls outside of his self-definition as a "regular Latino man." His self-defined social identity lies at the confluence of his racial and cultural identity as a Latino person and his gender identity, not as trans, but as a man. In at least two ways, this excerpt references Alex's transness as something he is removed from or distant from. First, in sharing that "it" isn't something he tells people and is shared only if it, as his transness, "gets brought up" tells me that trans is relevant to who Alex is, as far as his public-facing identity, only as far as its relevant to people who may "bring it up." In another way, his self-definition as "a regular Latino man," in the context of discussing what transness means to him, reflects a contradiction or juxtaposition for Alex between being trans and being "just a regular Latino man." I see an active refusal in Alex's line "I just don't do it" and a claim to a certain category of being that exceeds or is threatened by what trans means to him.

I found similarities in my conversation with Juston about transness as they articulated tensions between who they know themselves to be and larger social narratives about transness. When I asked Juston the same question as Alex, about what trans means or doesn't mean to them, they told me "I have to realize, as a non-binary person, I'm trans in a way," and went on to explain that embracing this label for themselves has been fraught based on how they are perceived. They said,

> If somebody looks at me, they don't go, 'oh, you must be trans or non-binary.' So at least I get that like rep, that privilege, I guess of being masc-presenting. You know, I recognize that at least. I think that's what also used to kinda, made me step back a little bit and go, hmmm, am I trans? Because I don't have that, I don't get the same treatment as other trans people do.

Juston's understanding of what it means to be trans has amounted to seeing their own transness as partial or to themselves as "trans in a way", followed with an intuited, "but" that helps illustrate the necessity for trans of color critique and comparable frameworks that help disentangle metrics of realness or legibility from paradigms informed by whiteness. One such paradigm is the association of transness with precarity (Salas-Santacruz, 2023). They discount their right to claim trans because they have not experienced the treatment as "other trans people." In other words, Juston is saying they haven't had it bad enough to claim trans. Interestingly, Juston also told me, as I quoted in my literature review, "every experience isn't sad. I promise you." Here there is a place of contradiction, regardless of their consciousness that trans does not equal precarity or death, that all of our experiences are not sad, trans still falls short of describing Juston's personal manifestation of transness, on Juston's terms. A practice of refusal, informed by their connection to self, a mobile self-evading neat categories or definitions of experience.

For both Alex and Juston, transness signals something outside of themselves. For Alex it's framed as both a "placeholder" and something that "gives you an identity" with potentially "offensive" connotations and for Juston an experience of struggle they have been able to forgo, based on their "being masc-presenting." In both Alex and Juston's accounts, their relationship to masculinity, as perceived or embodied, seems to belie or at least complicate their identification with the trans community, or at least with trans as a socially prescribed category. Juston names "being masc-presenting" as what led them to assess, or in their words "step back a little bit" and question whether they belong to the category of trans. Juston tells me they are "trans in a way," and go on to describe

privilege in a way that interferes with transness. Juston suggests the more privileged one is, the less trans, or the less their gender in this social and cultural context will be made trans. For Alex, the privileged masculinity is desired, expressed in his focus on being a "regular Latino man" and in his emulation of Chris Brown that we discussed in another part of our hang. Alex refuses trans to preserve his masculinity, while Juston refuses trans in solidarity with trans people because of their masculinity. For Juston, the privilege of being masc-presenting and from their perspective, not being visibly "trans or non-binary" leads them to wonder if their freedom from the kind of treatment other trans people get might preclude or at least complicate their identification as trans. Juston's description "I don't get the same treatment as other trans people do" and Alex's unprovoked qualifier, "I don't see it as anything offensive" signal an association between transness and oppression.

Juston and Alex's articulation of their measure of transness illustrates a certain movement or liminality offered by trans identity that is often foreclosed by binary and fixed claims about what it means to be gendered. I am reminded of Anzaldúa's theorization of nepantla identity. Anzaldúa tells us, "Identity, as consciously and unconsciously created, is always in process—self interacting with different communities and worlds" (2015, p. 69). How Juston and Alex articulate their relationship to trans identity contributes a layer of complexity to what's known about the internalization of public feelings or prescriptions of transhood. In other words, both Juston and Alex negotiate their identification with trans as category based on their interactions with pieces of their worlds, beyond a clear or static either trans or cis and both beyond and inclusive of their physicality. Within the examples of Juston and Alex, as I attended to their practices in identification, particularly their affective reasoning for their relationship to transness, disidentification helped me make sense of these negotiations in their survival-rich (Cruz, 2013) quality. Disidentification (Muñoz, 1999) describes both identifying with and resisting normative ways of being and knowing by necessity. Star shared examples with me of their own disidentifying practices of refusal and the nature of these practices, for survival

or otherwise, as radically self-loving. In Star's tenuous relationship with the label trans, I also found practices of mobilization and refusal.

Trans continued, non-binary

Star resists the label trans purposefully, from experienced failure in being seen and recognized. It's a conscious resistance and emphasizes the Anzaldúan (2015) in-process component of identity, but also the way this refusal (and that of Alex and Juston) is a form of a self-loving practice. In the ways collaborators resist the label trans and refuse categories of identity, I saw examples of collaborators rejecting pieces of normativity, while remaining beholden or legible according to other parts of it. In this vein, I saw transness informing practices of disidentification in collaborators lives. Because these disidentifications included a resistance of trans based on outside understandings and meanings of transness and based on assumptions made on or about them, they are also politics of refusal. Over enchiladas and salsa, when I asked Star if they use the term trans to describe themselves, they told me,

> I use that term solely out of avoidance. Because I don't want to talk with cis people about it. I don't want to talk to trans people about it. Because I am very femme presenting, it can very much be like, just shit that I haven't processed from when I had first come out and dealt with a lot of shit.

Comparable to Juston and Alex, Star's identification with trans is informed by others' perceptions of their expression. Star doesn't want to talk to anyone about their gender identity because of the way they have been questioned and expected to prove their non-binary identification, "because [they] are very femme presenting. I know this because I was a witness for the "lot of shit" Star's referring to. I witnessed people questioning Star about their identity or claim to they/them pronouns, both cis and heterosxual-identified adult stakeholders in community education sessions and trans peers in groups at Apex. For Star, they use trans as an identifier to avoid conversations with people, "out of

avoidance." Furthermore, factors outside of Star's own understanding of who they are along gender lines have determined for them where and when they can mobilize this part of themself. This is a contradiction in their experience that their practice of refusing trans, for themselves.

The refusal, and embedded self-love, is illustrated in a follow-up share they offered me. Star continued:

> But no, I don't use trans at all. I use non-binary, I use like enby, but like me identifying as enby is more personal at this point. Like it helps me be more comfortable with myself and I no longer feel the need to, like, showcase that.

Resonant with Alex's line in regard to sharing his trans identity, "I just don't do it," Star doesn't feel the need to "showcase" their identification along gender lines. Their point, "identifying as enby is more personal…help[ing them] be more comfortable with [themselves]," illuminates a radically loving quality to this refusal-based self-determination. In describing Black feminist love politics, Jennifer Nash (2013) posits, "love is a labor of actively reorienting the self, pushing the self to be configured in new ways that might be challenging or difficult" (p. 11). She continues that this "fundamental investment in love as a practice of self-work" (p. 12) is what makes this work so radical. From Star's account, I see this radicality in the form of an underlying sentiment, that it really does not matter if other people see or validate their enby identity, but what matters is the comfort it brings them. This is an act of refusing identity labels and configurations along the lines of institutional legibility and rather embracing what offers them relief, on their terms. Star mentioning all the "shit" they "dealt with" illuminates the challenge and difficulty of this kind of refusal. The contradiction in collaborator lives are created by systems of legibility outside of themselves. This is reflected in the way outside meanings and assumptions influence their choices to refuse labels and situations that do not serve or reflect their understanding of self.

Negotiation toward Mobilization

Participants negotiate identity due to outside meanings and associations, as I just described and also negotiate identity as a means of forging connection. There's a refusal in both the identifying occurring and practices I saw them engage with at places of identity negotiations. I saw these negotiations as examples of a certain movement quality or mobilization of identity in practice. The motivation for connection or change beyond themselves led me to interpret these mobilizations as care practices and furthermore as additional evidence of refusal as self-loving. At a place of contradiction in Saffron's stories about their gender identity and transness, I saw them mobilizing identity for connection. Keeping the attention on Saffron for now, I saw this kind of loving at a place of contradiction when he was telling me about forging friendships at work. Regarding a co-worker, he told me,

> I also know that I'm read as a cis girl a lot of times. So, I think it's important for like, girls to support girls. So, if she thinks that I am a girl supporting her, then that's the type of reality I like to breed.

In this excerpt, the "reality [he] like[s] to breed" seems counter to the realities about his racial and gender identity he described in his questionnaire responses and our interview. He called himself a Black man, referred to himself in the third person as one of his mother's Black sons, and used the words "genderqueer and nonbinary" to describe his gender identity in his questionnaire. In this excerpt, he embraces and subsequently enacts an identity as a "cis girl" as a bridge for connection and to create a reality of support for someone else. There's an ease and comfort with being read as a "cis girl" if it means offering support, is not accessible to him regarding his racial identity. For example, he said, "it's always jumbling in my brain. The Blackness, because I'm far settled with my, my queer identity, right? I just be fucking right. I just like to fuck attractive people. And then I move on with my life. My life is very simple. Until I started thinking about racial identity and what that means to me.

And then I'm like, fuck. I feel like I'm gonna be on this journey forever." Saffron used the word journey frequently enough in our conversations that I made it an in-vivo code (Saldaña, 2009) in my analysis. On gender, under the same code, Saffron told me, "I'm comfortable where I'm at now, but depending on how far I make it in life, that could change a bunch of times." Saffron's story about wanting to breed a reality of support, even if that means being read as a cis-girl, helped me see these contradictions imbuing his negotiations of identity. At places of contradiction, I saw the survivor-rich (Cruz, 2013; Lugones, 2003) quality of Saffron's mobilization of identity, a loving practice when seen as embracing fluidity and navigation based on choosing himself and forging connection. This practice involved him refusing a static self, although tempting at times. Again, I think of him saying if it feels good it's right and I saw this in his navigation of racial identity, although even more complicated and rife with contradiction.

There's a disequilibrium spurred by experiences being racialized and uncertain of himself along racial identity absent from his experiences with uncertainty from his transness. Saffron is eager to, in his words, come into his Blackness, but there's a persistent uncertainty involved. This struggle came through when he told me about language he uses to describe himself. Saffron said,

> It's still hard for me to refer to myself as Black, even though I very much am...It's like the stupid part of my brain. It's like 'you don't experience things Black people experience.'...I have to combat with, I am Black, and I am experiencing things as a Black person. I'm not experiencing things as a White person because I'm not White.

In this excerpt, Saffron lets me witness some of his active struggle with his racial identity, a consistent theme of our time together. When it comes to race in this study, no collaborator talked about racial identity as much as Saffron did. Saffron also had the most to say about gender, especially from an analytical and theoretical standpoint. For example, his repeated, "gender is fake and not real" and him reminding me about how in high school it was he who taught all his friends about all the possible ways

to be queer and trans, all the reasoning behind asterisks in the LGBTQ+ alphabet of things. Saffron's stories showed me how relational identity can be. Of my collaborators, Saffron spoke of race the most, could articulate the deepest socio-political analysis gender and sexuality, and not coincidentally is also the only collaborator to have been raised in and to currently reside with such close proximity to White people while navigating the culture of whiteness, frequently on the Internet. I think about Muñoz's (1999) analysis of minoritized subjects needing access to a cultural form in order to forge an identity. Saffron's stories about their processes of negotiating their racial identity made this so clear to me, particularly of the impact of this cultural form being bound to media, messaging or representations versus relationships and community.

The following excerpt from Saffron is difficult to share but this point demands that I do. Perhaps the difficulty itself is reflective too of the realness of the socio-political culture of whiteness of which this excerpt is a symptom. Saffron told me about how much he longs to experience community, particularly Black queer community. He fondly recollected an experience on Stones in which he found himself surrounded by Black queer and trans people. Saffron then told me,

> While I was reaching into my memories, I was like, how, where could I possibly achieve that type of thing? Because I feel like it's impossible. And that's why I feel like community is one of those things I haven't experienced a lot, or ever. I want to feel like a n*****.

This excerpt is hard to write, and it was hard to hear. Saffron's descriptions of the ways he is attempting to come into his Blackness, also examples of identity negotiations all rely on stereotypes, generalizations, and cultural messages about Black people. He acknowledged this telling me that he, "does what White people do and I cherry pick." He has tried different hair styles. He started listening to different music. He told me that he frequently processes his journey with his "wife," a close friend of his who is also White. I asked Saffron more about his decision to refer to himself using the n-word. I asked him if it felt clunky and what that word offers that other words do not. I did not want to

invalidate this process for him, for several reasons, and at the same time, I needed to follow up. Saffron told me, "I'm trying to make myself more present in the fact that I am Black cause I don't experience a lot of Black community. So calling myself a n***a feels good for my Black self." He then reiterated, as he did in his questionnaire response, "If you look at me, you're not gonna think I'm a White person."

In these practices of negotiating and mobilizing his identity in ways to come into his Blackness, Saffron refuses ways he has internalized anti-Blackness, however he remains reliant on anti-Blackness for a sense of "Black community." This is an example of a mobilization of identity that I find to be self-loving. Saffron is shaping and shifting and leaning into manifestations of identity for him, as a means of finding community, furthermore a care practice. Ironically, this negotiating to come into his Blackness relies on anti-Blackness. What is missing from Saffron's attempts toward Black community is other Black people. In collaborators' stories, I also saw ways that identity was mobilized for social change.

Mobilizing for Change

In collaborators' stories of leaving situations and places that no longer served them, and in their negotiations of identity I found examples of self-preservation, choosing the self, and mobilizing identity for connection. Another example of a mobilization that I found to be self-loving comes from its direct implications for shifting attitudes within a certain context; mobilization for change, which is inherently loving. I found perhaps some of the most seamless examples of this in Juston's stories. First in their description of a pedagogical move as a teacher, and secondly while driving and giving performances for free. In these practices, I saw refusal as a site for potential social change, rooted in a care for Juston's self and also care for others. At the time of my study, Juston had just accepted their first full time teaching position at a local elementary school. In our interview, they frequently drew on the classroom in their stories about gender, socialization, and transness. One of Juston's anecdotes

about the ways they invite young people into the fluidity and expansiveness of gender demonstrates ways they negotiate and mobilize identity, as a care practice, and also as a reflection of how gender is already raced. Speaking of a time with elementary students in the classroom, Juston shared,

> A guy will pick up a My Little Pony and they would play with it, and I would be like, "Oh my gosh, like, I want to play with My Little Pony too!" and they'll look at me, as I guess a masc-presenting person playing with it. Especially for these Black boys. They are getting reinforced by another, I guess Black masc-presenting person that it is fun to play with that.

The way Juston speaks about their own gender expression using "I guess," connotes a not-quite quality to how they're perceived and how they're experiencing their gender; however, there is also an acknowledgement of the larger implications of gender and the implications of a Black, masc-presenting authority figure offering their own experience as a form of radical permission for these younger Black boys to enjoy playing with a toy that was not manufactured for boys. In my developing Trans Radical Love framework, the heart function imbued by trans of color critique asks of this situation, how I can, how we can, think about gender beyond gender identity, particularly with attention to other factors such as race, class, and location that inform gendered practices? In this example, I see the way gender is mobilized *for,* in relationship to other humans, rather than limiting my analysis to gender *as*. Juston's practice demonstrates theorizing in the flesh, a care practice that extends from their own lived, material conditions as raced, as gendered, as positioned in an authority stance in relationship to these students. They "work [their] flesh" (Bey, 2019, p. 104), in as much as they intentionally disrupt gendered assumptions about toys and play, particularly young Black boys who have arguably experienced some of the most harmful impact of the social construction of gender. They work their positionality for social change, refusing any kind of neatness to their gender or expression in the moment, in connection and relationship with these young people. Furthermore, I see this pedagogical move, this identity negotiation and mobilization as self-loving, with immediate

implications for social change. I saw another example of a self-loving politics of refusal in Juston's mobilization of identity in a story they told me about driving.

Juston loves drag. They told me that they, "feel the most confident on stage" and although at the time of our interview they rarely perform, Juston told me lip synching and voguing still play a part in their life. One venue is driving in the car. Juston told me, "Even when I'm driving, I'm giving people who are passing by a performance. I suck at caring now. I don't think about what people are gonna say? I'm giving it. This is for free, y'all." In this example, I see the ways in which performance is a channel for Juston to honor themselves as inherently valuable. They refuse caring about potential judgment or what "people are going to say." Not only that, but in this practice of refusing both fear of judgment but also codes of where and how lip synching should take place. Juston "giving it" for "free" reminds me of the liberating power of the presence of drag queens, anywhere. Juston channels their inner queen regardless of wearing makeup or being on a stage, mobilizing this piece of themselves as a practice of self-love with loving, disruptive potential.

Conclusion

Across collaborators' decisions to leave spaces that did not serve them and their negotiations of identity, I found a self-loving politics of refusal. These refusals were loving, not necessarily in a "feel good" way, but in an insisting-on-the-self way. At places of racialization and transness, I found contradictions and experiences of partiality that informed processes of negotiation involving trade-offs for self-preservation and actualization. Viewing these places of contradiction as a site of knowledge production, helps me see the unique experiences of collaborators and their identity choices as grounds for reimagining identity, rather than the social contexts that shape and give name, not to mention value, to these identity claims and metrics. My findings about the complexity of identity, along the lines of gender and race help me locate the individuals as key actors in this process, which helps disrupt recycled and flattening outside-in, top-down, approaches to understanding identity.

These findings illuminate places of partiality and contradiction in their lives, conditions of experiences with racialization and transness in the socio-political context of the United States. When I looked at their experiences as individuals, taking into considerations these contradictions and practices of negotiating identity and exiting, I found nuance and complexity obscured by easy descriptions of them as trans people of color. This nuance is important to recognize and value in any pursuit of a theory of identity or accounting for identity in the pursuit of just approaches to education research and practice.

Chapter 6: Coming Together, Apart

> Without community there is no liberation, only the most vulnerable and temporary armistice between an individual and her oppression.
>
> -Audre Lorde

> I think it's definitely time that I need to be a menace again, and actually care about myself.
>
> -Star, collaborator

In the previous chapter, I presented findings from my analysis of stories collaborators told me from their lives as individuals. In this chapter, I highlight findings from what happened when we came together for the final group processing phase of my study. I approached this session with specific components of queeruptive education practice in mind. These included a for us, by us (FUBU) sensibility, collectivity, modes of self-assertion, and centering the epistemologies of queer and trans people of color (Darling-Hammond, 2019). In this session, I was curious about what might happen in the process of coming together. As an extension of the crystallization component of my queeruptive methodology, I approached this group session using arts-based research. I situated our time together in a sample of images collected from collaborators' phase two photo submissions and poetry I created from interview transcripts and questionnaire responses. Although this session and various components of my study seem to have been an example of research as intervention (Romm, 2020), I am hesitant to describe any of it as an intervention given the assumption of a problem intervention connotes. There was no fixing, straightening, or intervening in my study. There were more opportunities to listen to friction, to contradiction, and to embrace possibility often foreclosed by easy explanations of experiences with oppression or an adherence to outcomes. Furthermore, my study proved to be more of an example of research as queeruption, especially from what I uncovered during the final session. The findings I highlight in this chapter

characterize these peoples' lives in relationship to their experiences with love, as informed by race and gender. From my analysis of the session audio transcript, video recording, and live-annotated document we co-developed, these are themes my collaborators surfaced on their own, as they reflected upon and analyzed their words and photographs. These themes are reflected in the following findings, explored in this chapter,

1. Basic needs have to be met in order to radically love.
2. Self-care is part of radically loving.
3. Community is challenging.

Prior to these findings, I first explain the method of poetic inquiry (Faulkner, 2019) I employed in preparation for this phase. I additionally provide sample data in the form of poetics and photos leveraged as the anchoring texts and points of inquiry in this session. I conclude this chapter through drawing on components of the group session in terms of these findings and the methods used in response to my second core research question of this study,

2) What are the implications of centering the loving practices of trans young adults of color in approaches to education research and practice as a liberation project?

The group processing phase of my study also functioned as a site for member checking as I shared some of my preliminary thinking and analysis with collaborators. In this phase, via using their words in the form of found poetry, I could also see and feel into how collaborators responded to their remarks, months later. Using their words, and additionally as I proceeded to ask them some of my larger research questions and to workshop my working definition of radical love at the time with me are ways this session and hopefully my larger study reflected a FUBU sensibility. I maintain my perception of the people who participated in my study as my research collaborators because I cannot disentangle the implications of my study in general from its implications on my relationships with them. Of all the phases though, this final group phase was the most collaborative as they engaged in

a process of analysis alongside me, in response to my questions, as we took in the poetics I created from excerpts of our interviews and their questionnaire responses. In addition to the findings of basic needs, self-care, and complicated community that I describe in this chapter, another important finding from this phase of my study, and perhaps its most queeruptive element, is what I learned from the process itself. Just like geographer Gavin Brown (2007) concluded, after conducting ethnographic research at queeruption folk festivals in the early 2000's, the processes of my collaborators and I coming together, in an "alternative for[m]of sociality", was as important if not more so, than "the end product" (p. 2697). This process was invaluable in that I learned as much about the complexities of coming together from participation dynamics and patterns, as I did from my collaborators' direct shares.

These complexities imbue the larger theme of the absence of community shared by collaborators in our group session. There were elements of our ninety minutes together in this online space that lead me to believe that indeed, although ephemeral, the six of us have established a sense of community and of a loving politic among each other. What we talked about though, and how they participated in talking about it, as reflected in their individual stories in our interviews and in this group session, indicates that community is difficult for all of us, even in identifying with our small community of six.

Poetic Inquiry and Session Structure

Poetry emanates from key thinkers that inspire the theory and my approach in this study. The radical queer women of color responsible for *This Bridge Called my Back*. The hearts comprising the Combahee River Collective. The hearts of the formative Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press such as Audre Lorde's. Trans writers in pursuit of different worlds (Tolbert & Peterson, 2013) —All of these bodies illuminate the power of poetry as a heuristic for understanding relationality and envisioning radical futures. I wondered, what would my development of Trans Radical Love be,

informed by the theories it is, without poetry? Within qualitative research, Richardson (2003) describes the capacity of using poetry as an interview analytic to minimize the distance between the "researcher self and the lived self" (p. 198). To inform a collective experience beyond making sense of words spoken by individuals, I used a form of found poetry (Faulkner, 2019) to create an anchor text for my final group session. As a part of the poetic inquiry, Esposito & Evans-Winters (2022) write, "the researcher will read and reread the transcripts to develop poetry that captures the feel of the experience" (p. 67). Across my data, as I attended to my research questions in my analysis, I was struck by all five collaborators' mentions of the self, traceable in comments such as "I am," and their understanding of, or more commonly the absence of an understanding of a shared marginality, struggle, or connection to a collective *we*. This shifting and complex relationship between the self of my collaborators and a larger collective became a focal point of inquiry throughout my study as seen in my attention to practices of refusal as a form of self-love in the last chapter and my attention in this chapter to what happened when these five individuals came together with me, in an intentionally queeruptive space.

As I engaged with the non-linear process of creating poems from interview transcripts and questionnaire responses, I came back to tensions surrounding the relationship between the individual and the community, and mention of practices, as asked by my research questions, informed by the theoretical frameworks that guide this study. This dynamic is captured in Jennifer Nash's (2019) analysis of June Jordan's poetry in her articulation of Black feminist love politics. In reference to Jordan's piece, "Poem about My Rights," Nash writes,

> It is this movement between 'I' and 'we' that marks the kinds of vulnerability that are at the heart of [B]lack feminist love-practice, an insistence that the recognition that 'I can do what I want' depends on an analysis of how "we are the wrong people of the wrong skin on the wrong continent (p. 118).

With attention to this relationship between the self and the collective as a component of vulnerability at the heart of Black feminist love-practice in addition to my focus on collaborators' practices, I decided to organize found excerpts according to mentions of love as a concept, a feeling, a notion, or frame under the title "love is," then, mentions of the individual, using the title "I am," and lastly mentions of the collective, either in terms of others or in reference to a larger, understood community, using the title, "we are." Nash's connection between what I take as a level of critical consciousness, "an analysis of how we are the wrong people of the wrong skin" and an insistence that "I can do what I want" is relevant to my study beyond the way I structured the excerpts I wove into poetics. This connection is relevant because the relationship I have with these collaborators is based on our work together engaging in learning explicitly focused on critical consciousness and sociopolitical development. Experiences they shared with me in between then and now add nuance and complexity to the relationship between being able to read the world, Freire's critical consciousness, and a connection to one's inherent mattering (Love, 2019). Some of this nuance was made clear in our group processing session together.

Weaving excerpts from questionnaires and interviews resulted in five, three-part poetics for each of my collaborators. My collaborators' stories, woven through poetics, were both the curriculum and talking piece of our group session. Rather than sharing each piece, one by one, which would have kept the focus on individuals, I created three new poetics: "Love is," "I am," and, "We are," representative of the 5 collaborators' storying as revealed through the phase one questionnaire and interviewing. I structured our remote, group session with a slide deck which featured a collection of the photographs they submitted for phase two, in addition to these poetics. For reference, these images were taken (and created), in response to the prompt, "Take pictures of things that you think represent love…if possible, consider ways in which your transness and racialization impact the way you see and know love." All three poetics in their full form, as used in

our session in addition to all of the images submitted during phase 2 can be found in Appendix E and F.

During the session, everyone was also provided a link to a shared document with the poetics and prompts. They were encouraged to annotate this document live, in response to questions I asked and feelings that came up as they listened to their words read aloud in the form of the poetics I wove together. I describe the final selections as poetics, rather than poems, in the spirit of Abi-Karam & Gabriel's (2020) collection *We Want it All: An Anthology of Radical Trans Poetics*. Abi-Karam & Gabriel write, "We invoke poetics as a category that can combine aesthetics and politics at once, and transform the two into the formalization of a project" (p. 4). The excerpts I wove together are not poems because they are indeed merely fragments from questionnaires and interviews strung together. Their poetic promise lies in the capacity of these lines to reflect both the aesthetic and politics of the lives of my five collaborators, in my choice to weave them together under "Love is," "I am," and "We are" for the project of collective theorizing about what it means to love radically. Especially as a trans person. Especially as a trans person of color. Abi-Karam & Gabriel (2020) ask, "How does trans poetics refute the singularity of so many private narratives and work towards forms of collective language?" (p. 4). In the spirit of theorizing and creating "collective language" or at least shared meaning, collaborators heard me read their collected words aloud and were invited to annotate in response to the following prompts: What do these images and words tell you about love? What do these words and images tell you about race and gender? And, what do you want to capture that was missed?

The love poetics I created through weaving the words of my collaborators indeed "refute singularity", and in our process of making sense together, I attempted for us to "refuse easy explanation" (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1981, p. 23) of our lives. Through using poetics as a phenomenological method (Kimoto and Willett, 2019) I could more deeply understand

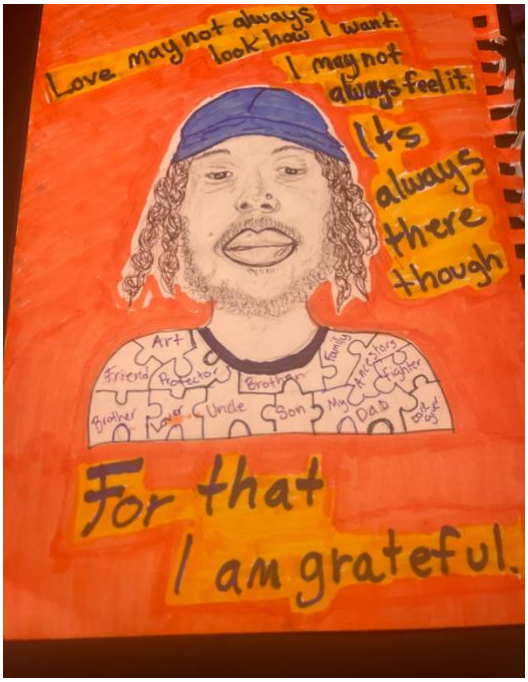
collaborators' articulations and experiences of love through a lens of its radical potential alongside them. Beyond the group session, these poetics helped illuminate a larger project we are connected to, by way of our shared breath, beyond identity lines and working history. I hope the findings I highlight in this chapter related to community, co-determined alongside collaborators in our group session, help animate some of the complexities and promise of this project, the project I see as liberation, which is ultimately collective if it's truly about getting free.

Sample Photographs and Poetics

Most photos collaborators shared with me were of themselves or artifacts and symbols that represent their connection to love, as informed by race or gender. Alex gave me a photo of carnitas with a giant foam cup that I suspect was a horchata. He also submitted a photo of the Nashville skyline at dusk and a picture of a silver medallion I gifted him with St. Valentine on it, the namesake for both of our chosen middle names. Juston submitted six photos of themselves, three involving their graduation from college, and two including pets. Saffron included a photo of his forearm, showcasing a scorpion tattoo in the colors of the pansexual flag, yellow, blue, and pink, inked directly over a scar, depicted in figure 2. In addition to the two drawings, Ezekial also gave me a photograph of himself, fresh out of the hospital, maybe one week before we met for our interview. He's smiling with drains from his top surgery visible from each of his sides, depicted in figure 3. For my dissertation, I decided to use these images as a shared text for our group session rather than a form of data for my independent analysis. All images can be found in appendix F.

Figure 2 Saffron's Scorpion

Figure 3 Ezekial's Self-Portrait



The poetics I read to collaborators, as I have described, featured excerpts in which they speak to their negotiations of identity at axes of race, gender, and (mis)understanding. These poetics feature ways collaborators forge and discuss community, and additionally are woven by the politics of refusal I pulled from their practices of choosing self and cultivating care. As a sampling, below are two to three lines from each of the three poetics that I read to collaborators as they followed along on our shared document for annotation.

Sample Poetics

Love Is

My mom's only a single mother and I'm an only child. So our love was just for each other.

I can't have my chosen family crumble, like how can I like keep the love in here and reiterating how much I care for them because they've been there every major, major experience.

I am

Having his middle name solidifies me as the 7th son

I'm proud to be Black. It connects me to my ancestors, my community, my life experience, and my future in a sense.

I respect that experience and honor/embrace the part of me that lived through it to be who I am today.

We Are

You have to learn your own body. You have to learn and be able to indulge in that shit without feeling like you've ruined yourself.

We bonded over the fact that we were all deeply traumatized.

Healing is not fun. But it's necessary, I guess.

Patterns of Participation

Over the course of our group session together, collaborators identified themes of self-care, basic needs, and community, but ultimately the group session taught me about an added dimension of witnessing, in the context of community that I had not considered. While I initially thought the group processing session would offer a space for us to come together in community, share ideas and collectively theorize a working definition of radical love, I did not realize how impactful the process of witnessing was on collaborators' self-concept, nor did I realize how obvious our perceived separateness would be. Nash (2019) describes black feminist love-politics "[a]s undergirded by a dual commitment to mutual vulnerability and witnessing" (p. 116). After the session ended, initially my mind gravitated to the delightful illustrations of how we engaged in this dual commitment together during our 90 minutes, online group session. In witnessing and sharing with one another, as mutually vulnerable, I surmised collaborators were able to feel a sense of community that all described longing for in their interviews, with the exception of Alex. At least I thought. My analysis, however, revealed that although these five people and I share a history and identity lines, the togetherness of our session was not a given. In fact, peoples' participation revealed what I perceived as illusions or ideas of separateness, particularly from Saffron, Alex, and Juston. Rather than witnessing and sharing as a means of community and togetherness, in my group session, I noticed more along the lines of people coming into and becoming re-inspired by themselves as individuals.

As I have mentioned before, all of my collaborators expressed that self-love is important. Self-love matters when we talk about love in general, and self-love surfaced in a few of their stories as a prerequisite for engaging in activism. After reading the poetics aloud and observing their live annotations in our shared document, I asked, "What do these words and images tell us about love? What are you noticing?" Alex and Saffron shared they noticed a lot of differences among the "love

is," section and similarities among the "I am" and "We are" poetics. When I asked for specification, Saffron responded,

> We're all like, loving yourself is great. It's hot. It's popping. It's dope. But we also realize that it's super fucking hard. And then also realizing that even if you don't love yourself, there are ways to give love to yourself and experience your own calm and just try to make yourself feel content in the body that you have, even if it's not in the life that you have. It's like in that moment, or in those moments.

In Saffron's response, I see him acknowledging "ways to give love to yourself" that he picked up on across the five peoples' stories comprising the poetics they read. Here I see him articulating in his own words pieces of the self-love I found in practices of refusing neat identity labels. As trans of color critique encourages, I saw him articulating an understanding of transness that can be born of a coming-into his body rather than against it, measurable according to his ways of knowing, rather than a particular manifestation of trans identity. As far as participation dynamics, this is one of multiple times in the session where I observed Saffron taking somewhat of a facilitator role and facilitating meaning and take-aways from others' experiences rather than his own. I appreciated this form of participation, as Saffron's conclusion about the challenges of self-love and its availability in subtle, daily practices as a throughline for this study was right on and opened space for generative discussion. I saw an example of this kind of dynamic in some of the ways Juston participated too. I initially was tempted to call it a reflection of a separateness, but instead I see it as a reflection of the complexity of group dynamics, regardless of prior shared history or identity categories. What I mean by complexity is that the presumed 'we' of this group session remained fairly elusive.

In describing key themes they noticed and what came up for them, Juston remarked,

"It kind of felt like there was, I guess, some more consensus, like the community, not being as tightly formed as it could be, which I thought was kind of interesting, because I kind of felt the same." Continuing discussion of community, Saffron responded to Juston,

> We were expressing notions about how the community could be better, and how we could be closer and like how we could support each other, and the shit that some people are doing is fucked up, and they got to stop that because we got to come together because this is fucked up.

Instead of responding to what Saffron just said, Juston continued with another observation from reading and hearing others' words. They remarked,

> They also talk about intersectionality. Queer people being a person of color. I don't think anybody talked about like disabled people of color or anything like that. But just intersectionality in general, which is really interesting to see. I was glad that it was talked about in here more than I would have thought to see. I saw it more often than I thought I would see it.

Within this exchange, Saffron names "the shit that some people are doing" and "this is fucked up," without explicitly naming any particular community dynamic or qualifying the "this" that is fucked up. Instead of adding or expanding on Saffron's commentary, Juston instead describes how they were surprised to see intersectionality coming through the poetics. In repeating, "I saw it more often than I thought," Juston acknowledges an assumption that was disrupted, either an assumption about the group as a whole, about me as the compiler of the poetics, or an assumption about others in the group. Juston seems to engage in a form of intersectional analyses across collaborator stories, which feels different from the summary Saffron provided of community problems that preceded this analysis. Saffron's "we got to come together" signals a different orientation to the group, than Juston's language, "they also talk about…" Different not necessarily as bad or good, or a positive or

negative form of participation (recall, queeruptive thinking includes blurring binaries), but notable nonetheless as I considered the implications of what and how collaborators told me about love in the context of designing learning spaces in service of freedom.

Basic Needs

As collaborators were commenting on observations and noticings from their poetics, the challenges involved with self-love, particularly in relationship to activism and community came up. As Saffron and Star commiserate about feeling exhausted trying to take care of themselves, Juston shared, "I guess that's one good thing about being a teacher is because burnout is so real with teachers, a lot of people are like take care of you." They continued to describe lessons of self-care they've learned to take seriously and tell their students, captured by the airplane, oxygen mask metaphor. They shared, "You got to put your mask on first…I've got to protect myself first, like if I'm gonna come in here mad every day like that's not gonna do anything for us." This insight is coming from someone who, at the start of our session checked in with, "My low is, I hate my job. I'm miserable every day." In checking in about themselves at the introduction to our session, Juston hates their job, and later, when the topic of self-care and community comes up, Juston participates with advice from the field, almost as a veteran teacher.

This example is not to apply a value judgment to Juston's modes of participation, but rather to highlight some of the unspoken complexities of thinking about coming together in community, even in a small group with people who know each other. The challenge of community was a through line of our group session. This was a throughline collaborators identified as a theme across stories, but also in terms of how peoples' participation shifted from an assumed "we" to a knowledgeable, "I". The very movement traceable in Black feminist love politics between the individual and her connection to a larger collective, and the messiness of this movement was reflected in participation dynamics alone. Coming together was meaningful in many ways, including the relatability and "me

too" effect offered by witnessing. In the excerpt I shared above from Juston, they found it interesting that there was a consensus about community not being "as tightly formed as it could be" because they "kind of felt the same." Similarly, when asked what was coming up for him, Ezekial offered,

> From what you gathered from everyone, we all feel like there's a lot of work to be done in community and like from the other parts, we all have our chosen family and our friends. But I think it's kind of interesting that for all of us, community is a big issue. I thought that was interesting because I thought it was just me.

There's a feeling of solidarity from "community [being] a big issue". Saffron says it directly, he responded,

> It's always nice to get that validation from solidarity. That's what I was trying to emphasize when I was saying we have similar thoughts is like we seem to feel similar things about similar things, and I think that's pretty spicy.

There's a shared experience occurring concerning the "similar thoughts" about community being hard among other topics. At these places of connection though, I also saw examples of collaborators' ideas of feeling separate. Ezekial "thought it was just me." Juston found it interesting they "kind of felt the same" as what others were voicing about the community not being so tightly knit. Both Saffron and Star described feeling like they were too tired or burnt out to do anything about "community." Star commented,

> It also kind of makes me feel bad because I'm just like, oh, man, I know that there's problems in this community. But like I kind of don't give a fuck anymore, like I'm tired. I don't have it in me to put in the work to make this community a better place…I don't have it in me. I'm drained of gas. Prices are high. Rent is due. I don't have time.

Saffron jumps in, and the following exchange occurs:

Saffron: Sometimes I find myself getting really down because I'm like, 'why, don't I have the same spirit I had when I was in Stones or I was at Apex, because I didn't have to worry about things. I was depressed, and I had school, and that was it. And now I…

Star: Right…

Saffron: have to focus on working on myself and going to therapy, and making sure I'm medicated, and taking care of my dogs and paying my bills, I don't have time for all of that other shit. It would be nice to have the time and the energy for it.

In response to this exchange, Alex draws on some of this Apex education and remarks, "I think this reminds me of the Apex stuff that we used to do. We would see that pyramid of self-actualization or something like that. And at the bottom you gotta like meet all your basic needs first." In what seems like a bid for connection, to which Star responds, "the hierarchy of needs?" Alex then suggests, (albeit potentially unintentional), how via this framework, he sees his circumstances as different from the rest of the group.

His "ah ha" moment, seeing connections to Maslow's Hierarchy of Basic Needs is a revelation about what he has that permits him to show up for community in ways Star and Saffron can't. Indeed, all five collaborators learned about this hierarchy, as a component of their political education at Apex while serving on the Stones team. Admittedly, I wish I knew then what I know now about several things, including the fact that Maslow gathered the fodder for his invaluable framework in psychology from his time spent in community with the Blackfoot nation, immersed in indigenous ways of knowing (Blackstock, 2011). Regarding his basic needs being met, Alex told the group,

Luckily, you know, I'm a college student, and you know my parents help me out so like I don't really have to worry about like paying rent, you know, right now to give back to my community and to try to bring it closer together, I'm the president of the Latin American

> student organization…I'm able to do that because of the help I have, I'm blessed to not have to worry about certain things like others do, like y'all selves.

On a surface level, Alex is validating Star and Saffron's experience about the importance of basic needs being met as a precursor to working to bring a community together. More deeply though, Alex is assuming that his basic needs are met in ways that Star, Saffron, and "y'all selves" are not. Here too, Alex describes a community separate from the rest of the collaborators' communities, again reflecting my observation that collaborators' sense of belonging to a "we" within this group was nebulous.

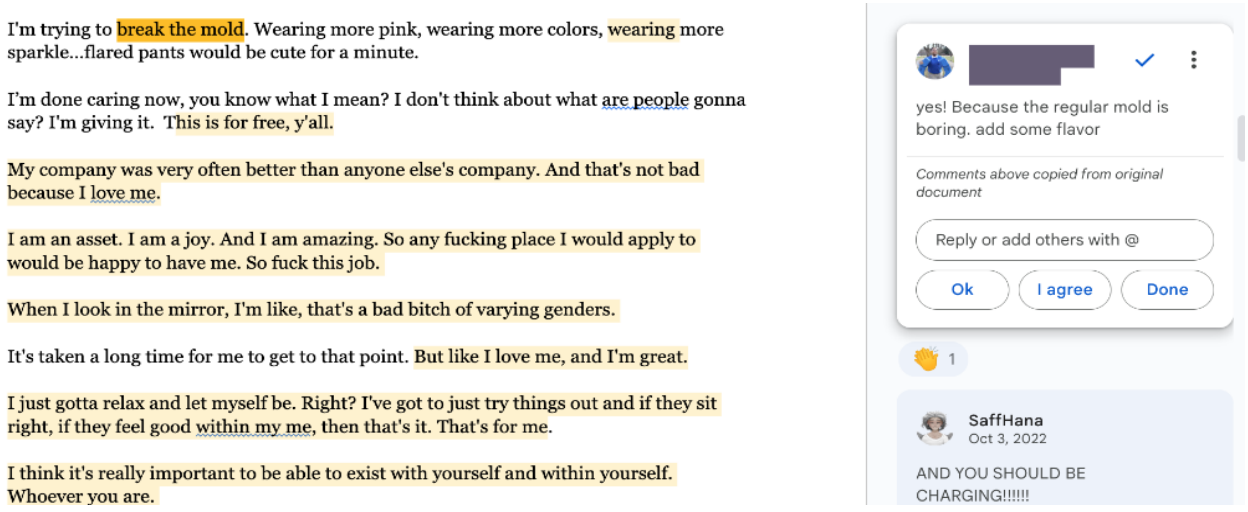
While it was agreed that people expressed challenges in finding and experiencing community in general, the specific community named as a community, the Latin American community, is one that only two of us identify with, Alex and myself. Otherwise, this "community" we spoke of remained nebulous. Speaking of Juston's intersectional analysis, within this example too lies evidence of some of the contradictions inherent to the inspiration for theories in the flesh. Beyond our relationship, Alex was selected for this study because of his identity as trans and as a person of color. Yet within this example, I see that when community comes to mind for Alex, it is the Latin American community, not a trans community, a community of people racialized as people of color according to the instruments of whiteness, or a trans of color community. In this example, two threads signaled a potentially shaky ground of solidarity for Alex. 1) That, he identified his access to help from his parents and financial support as what gives him the capacity to give back, in ways Star and Saffron are too exhausted to; and 2) he operationalizes community along the lines of his ethnicity alone, a vector of experience unique from the other four collaborators.

Mirrors for Each Other, Mirrors for Self

Although the group session did not give me clear examples of the six of us rising to the occasion of a collective liberation struggle, imbued by our shared experiences at axes of gender and

race, it did show me how meaningful it was for collaborators as individuals to see and engage with their own words and insights as witnessed by others. Simplified, while I was confident in the power of witnessing for relatability or "me too," forms of engagement, the group session proved to be as, if not more aligned with remembering one's personal values and experiences. The group session offered collaborators mirrors among themselves for relatability and also offered an invaluable reflexive mirror for collaborators to see themselves in their own words, as witnessed. I first noticed this in the shared tendency for collaborators to first comment on their own words within the poetics, without knowing necessarily that it was their words they were commenting on. Next to their politics of refusal, this engagement also reflected a form of potentially unconscious self-love. They resonate with their utterings, their truths and declarations. Across excerpts, often the first comment or reaction in the shared document was by the original speaker. In the following screenshot, figure 4, for example, the comment box on the right is from Juston, commenting "Yes! Because the regular mold is boring. Add some flavor" on a line from this section of poetics that they originally said.

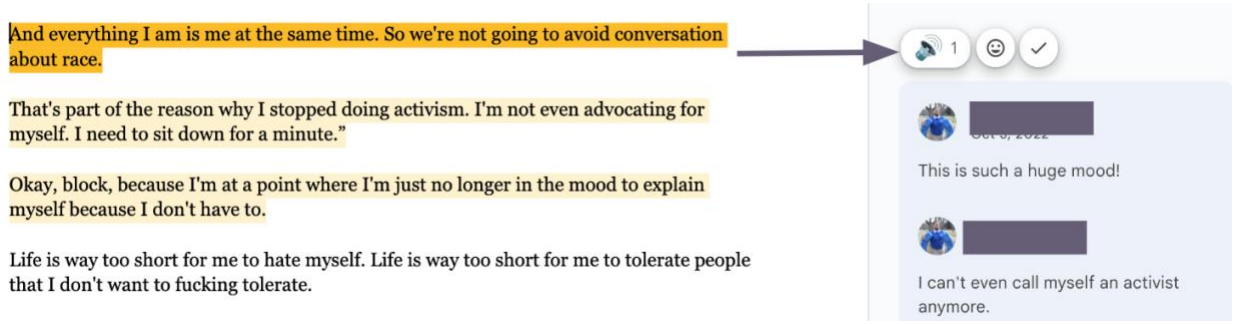
Figure 4 Group Session Screenshot 1



In this screenshot is also an example of some of the mirroring for each other taking place as Saffron adds, "And you should be charging!" in all capital letters with multiple exclamation points in response to a line, also from Juston, "This is for free, y'all." Another example of collaborators

functioning as mirrors for themselves as individuals and for each other can be seen in another screen shot from the session, figure 5.

Figure 5. Group Session Screenshot 2



In this screenshot, the arrow is pointing from an excerpt Saffron shared in his interview to his "high volume" emoji reaction to it in our session. Additionally, the comment box is from Juston, relating through commenting to the poetics excerpt about no longer doing activism. They share that they "can't even call [themselves] an activist anymore." During this part of the group session, I observed the potential of the container for solidarity and also some of the participation dynamics that conveyed nuance. When Star said they felt bad about not giving back to the community because they only have enough energy to take care of themselves, Saffron responded, "taking care of yourself is also for the community." Later, on the topic of self-love and care, Saffron launched into more advice,

> Every single day you got to post that shit on your mirror. I'm a bad bitch of all genders of one gender of many genders. No one can take that from me. I'm gonna go cry and still be a bad bitch. I'm a bad bitch that cries.

As they receive this message, Star is smiling and responds, "I love it." Alex has been relatively quiet up until this moment and then remarks, "What you just recorded. What they said that was so good, it sounded so good. I could re-watch this to be honest." And Star, "That was beautiful."

Saffron's advice must have been partially inspired by seeing and hearing his line in the "I am" poetics section, "When I look in the mirror, I'm like that's a bad bitch of varying genders." The advice he shares with the group directly comes from a practice of self-affirmation I identified as survivor-rich (Cruz, 2013; Lugones, 2003). I'm a "bad bitch of all genders…I'm a bad bitch that cries" resonates with self-acceptance, not according to external metrics of meaning and legibility, but according to the internal experience he's having, that, "no one can take [from him]." This awareness and insight could be "re-warch[ed]" by Alex and was "beautiful" for Star. Another group session example of some synapses born of connection and witnessing each other, particularly in the capacity of the container for self-actualization or at least more inspiration is illustrated in the following. Upon reflection on what they're noticing in the poetics and about love, or what's coming up, Star begins the exchange.

> Star: I think it's just me reflecting as a person. I was looking at the quotes, and I was like, I feel like I said this, and if I did bitch, what happened? Because, like i'm reflecting over like how I've been for the past couple of months, and I'm like, 'Well, I was talking all that shit. Yet here I am not taking care of myself, not putting myself first. Not, you know, kicking people out who should be gone, and it's like damn.
>
> Saffron: You're so right. I was thinking the same thing also. I mean It's...Please go ahead, Ezekial.
>
> Ezekial: I was just agreeing that I thought this, or if I didn't say it, I was like, hmm, I needed that, you know?

In exchange, Star is attending to their articulation of some of their practices that I found to be evidence of politics of refusal. I found these practices to be self-loving in their implication of Star's choosing of themselves. For example, another line from the "I am" poetics is Star's quote, "Okay block, because I'm at a point where I'm just no longer in the mood to explain myself because I don't

have to." Star does not deny valuing the importance of this position of refusal, in fact their comment shows they appreciate it, and in the communal space, they could reflect on feeling disconnected from the declamatory nature of these refusals in their interview in relation to their daily practices. Saffron's "you're so right," and Ezekial's "I needed that," illuminate the capacity of the shared space for collaborators to inspire each other, especially through their own words. Additionally, these opportunities for self-reflection and remembering themselves in the group session indicated a potential benefit to collecting data over multiple phases. The passing of time in between data collection, and the opportunity to return to their words, opinions and feelings encourages an iterative approach to qualitative research and designing opportunities for people to come together. Perhaps evidence of the limitations of one off interactions or learning experiences.

Following the moment in the session when Saffron encourages the group toward the practice of appreciating themselves when they walk past a mirror, as I mentioned, Star responded, "that was beautiful." Then, and where I see the inspiration-toward self-actualization effect of the session is in their next line. Star said, "I think it's definitely time that I need to be a menace again, and actually care about myself because I feel like I've been, it's been really hard." Star proceeds to share that taking care of a family member as he transitioned on top of other life stressors have made taking care of themselves challenging. In the group setting, re-exposed to their words and practices, Star decides it's not just time, but "definitely" time they "care about themselves" and importantly, they qualify this caring as "be[ing] a menace again." To care for the self then, for Star, is aligned to resistance and disruption. This was reflected in their earlier share when they connected exhaustion and focusing on themselves as the reason they no longer were involved with activism or how, in their words, "I don't have it in me to put in the work to make this community a better place." Star's recognition of the type of self-care or sustenance required of activism, as reflected by others in the group and affirmed, helped me crystallize the finding that collaborators agree, our basic needs have

to be met as a prerequisite for community engagement, as a prerequisite for being able to sustainably, radically love. Juston used the words in their comment on the live document, "I can't even call myself an activist anymore," but the discussion involved ideas of what's required to mend or attend to community problems, not activism specifically.

Toward the end of the session, I invited collaborators to help me think through my working definition of radical love. Their feedback opened a discussion about basic needs and self-care that highlighted some of the tensions of the relationship between these people as individuals and identification with a collective, or shared struggle. The working definition I shared is,

> Based in Black feminist traditions and women of color feminism, radical love emerges as: A political practice; a movement between the "I" and the "we"; a love that begins with care for the self, and through a conscious understanding of shared social struggle, extends into the collective for the co-creation of alternative worlds.

I shared with the group that according to theory and our experiences, "this self-love can extend into the collective to co-create alternate worlds. Part of that might be a trans of color future." As Alex had already told us he was reminded of Maslow's Hierarchy of Basic Needs, I offered the group, "Maybe everyone deserves their basic needs to be met? I mean, Ezekial, that was your answer when I asked you, what do we need for a trans of color future? And you said people need their needs met." The response that followed illustrated a point of solidarity but also another potential gap in our connection to a shared struggle as a group.

> Ezekial: Yeah. Because if [our basic needs were met], we would…
>
> Saffron: You're fucking right bitch and you should say it loud, louder,
>
> Ezekial: [Laughs.] We would be able to do so much.
>
> Star: I love how that's like the age-old question, with the simplest answer. Like people have been asking that for such a long time. It's like, bro just give us rights.

Saffron: Like they're called basic needs, not basic wants like we need housing. We need food. We need clothing. Like, give us the base level here, and then we can work up from there we can actually build: a society that means something.

Star: Right

From this exchange, Star, Ezekial and Saffron articulate the basis of the Blackfoot wisdom imbuing Maslow's Hierarchy. They articulate what I take Maria Lugones (2003) to intuit in her encouragement of "a horizontal practice of resistance" (p. 80) and what Dean Spade suggests in his advocacy of trickle up politics (Spade, 2015). Simply, this wisdom resists top-down perceptions of power, and for Lugones, love, and instead suggests that when people experiencing the most marginalization have their needs met, the whole benefits. Collaborators connected to Ezekial's declaration that foremost a trans color of future requires that our basic needs are met, resonant in Saffron's "You're fucking right bitch, say it louder." There's agreement and enthusiasm, and Star and Saffron seem to share the understanding that basic needs are the same as "our rights." Star says, "Bro just give us our rights," and Saffron continues, "not basic wants, like we need housing, we need food, we need clothing, like give us the base level here." There's a shared understanding that in order to dream, in order to build, we need to be able to care for ourselves and have our needs met. There also seems to be an understanding that there's an external force responsible for and capable of this giving. I wonder, for my collaborators, who "Bro" is a euphemism for, who's responsible for "giv[ing] us the base level here?" The final data I'll share from our group session involves more exploration of participation dynamics and some of the nuance and complexity I observed related to mutual vulnerability and witnessing. Nash (2019) articulates mutual vulnerability and witnessing as both characterizing and required of Black feminist love politics. This data also helps illustrate some of the factors influencing the practices of identity negotiation Star enacts, practices I describe as self-loving in chapter 5.

Throughout the following exchange, between Star and Saffron, I observed some of the larger tensions of self-love, particularly as a trans person of color, and additionally came to new questions about what mutual vulnerability demands or entails. On describing why caring for themself is so challenging for Star, they shared with the group,

> As someone who is raised and socialized as a Black woman, it's hard, because you grow up with this idea of resilience, and you are not allowed to take care of yourself. You have to literally put the entire community on your back and support it. I feel like growing up the ideas of what a Black, femme person was just support. So that's why I feel like very adamant about taking care of yourself first, especially as a person of color like it's just necessary, because no one else is going to give a fuck about you except for your community.

First, I am struck by Star's ease in declaring that "no one else is going to give a fuck about you," paired with the previous examples I gave of collaborators' insisting someone gives us our basic needs. I am thinking that these examples say less about the specifics of the group's politics, and more about the importance of sharing *with* each other. Regardless of whether Star thinks we are the only ones we have, or if there is a "bro" to give us our rights, the opportunities for these ideas to connect with other ideas and be shared supported a shared politic of struggle, a shared need.

In this excerpt as Star unpacks profound reflections on double standards they've experienced being raised as a Black woman, Saffron tells the group,

> That is one thing I feel like that's something that I would invite everyone to break down, regardless of how much you've explored your gender identity is that it's important to break down your own ideas of what masculine and feminine mean specifically like within your race.

Because of my relationship with Saffron and our interview conversations, I know he is daily engaged in a struggle of reconciliation among his gender and racial identities. I know Saffron can relate to

struggles involving identity, particularly at odds with how he's perceived, however, he has never identified with being raised as a Black woman. For Saffron, from our interviews, his process of reconciliation has taken the form of remembering, with pride, that he is not White. I am left wondering if his decision to then share in the form of offering advice to others comes from a place of protecting his own vulnerable processes of identification while making it known that he understands the struggle. On this struggle, Star continued,

> Oh, man, I hate talking about this kind of, but when I first was exploring my gender I felt like I immediately had to appear androgynous, but it was already like, in order for me to up here as an androgynous person, I would have to lean into that like not stereotype, but lean into those jokes that I've already been receiving before anything…The need to feel like you have to change your appearance, and you can't be AFAB, and still present as feminine, or your transness is null and void.

Star again breaks down an experience reflective of a feeling of partiality born of being measured against ideas of legibility outside of themselves, particularly their transness or non-binary identity being measured, socially and internally, against notions of androgynous expression.

After Star shared these experiences that they "hate talking about," Saffron reflected back for them,

> You're brought up as a Black woman, you have to be strong and possess certain traits that only men are supposed to possess. But you also have to be feminine to still show that you're a woman, so you can't be too feminine, because then you're too soft, and you're too weak.
>
> But you can't be too masculine, because then you're like a dude, and you're trying too hard.

In response, Star right away says, "That fucking part, that part. Like the whole thing, it's hard. I don't know how it is with other races and other cultures. But like that shit right there is so fucking, annoying." Star confirms that Saffron effectively captured the experience of a double bind Black

women are subjected to, yet Saffron's next comment clued me into a feeling of relatability and understanding on a cognitive level, but not embodied. Breaking the mold of advice-giver or relater, Saffron then started to share from the material conditions of his own world. He said,

> It's very important to me that you brought up like being raised as a Black woman, because I never view things like that. And, like I discussed with Page, I always viewed myself as a person that was Black on the outside, and like actually White for a lot of internalized racism reasons. So I never thought about myself as Black…my skin just doesn't, something's not adding up here, and it's a lot of just the fuckery. Gender is not real. But society insists that it is, and it fucks us all over.

Throughout our interviews and core to this excerpt are deep-seated, painful experiences with feeling inadequate or partial in his Blackness. Even though Saffron described the experience of being brought up as a Black woman to Star with some accuracy, queued by Star's "that part," he openly describes how this understanding is not from being able to relate on an embodied level and furthermore, derives from his own processes of social analysis along the lines of race and gender. I made the decision to share this exchange in full because for me, it is resonant with some of the unknowns and complexities of shared space, community, and witnessing.

The mutual vulnerability and witnessing Nash (2019) describes involves a radical belonging to a larger human race. She writes, "This perspective recognizes that my survival and thriving depend on yours. If our survivals are mutually dependent, we are, then, mutually vulnerable, as our thriving requires our coexistence" (p. 116). I wonder about vulnerability in the group space and how to know if collaborators were vulnerable from understanding ourselves as connected to something bigger than this space, to a struggle, or otherwise? Something happens between Star and Saffron, in the group setting where Saffron is able to relate and give words to Star's experience, while only experiencing parts of it or the absence of it in his own world. I learned then that it was not the

specific of the relating or capacity to relate on an embodied level, but the opportunity to relate in terms of being listened to and sharing. Saffron tells Star it was important to him that they brought up their experience of "being raised as a Black woman, because I never view things like that." And although he never views things like that and has struggled to see himself as the Black person he is, he was able to articulate the double standard to Star in a way that resonated, again, signaled by Star's response "that fucking part."

As I thanked the group for ninety minutes of their time, Saffron kindly reflected, "I know that's common with a lot of people, but I struggle with [vulnerability], and I hate it, but Page makes it easy for me." Star then responded, "Yeah I would literally rather die, but it's easy to do it here." It is not possible to know how to cultivate or hold space with people in a way that guarantees this ease. I think there are many workbooks on coalition building and approaches to justice, equity, diversity and inclusion (JEDI) work that might try to convince us otherwise. However, drawing from what I learned about identity from the ways in which my collaborators mobilize it *for* specific purposes, when it comes to designing group spaces, especially based on identity such as affinity or coalitional spaces, paradoxically the only guarantee is change and emergence. Furthermore, rather than trying to figure out how to build for identity, instead perhaps we should consider how to build for emergence, change, unknowing and undoing.

Coming together revealed tensions of community experienced by group members but didn't necessarily remedy or mitigate them for everyone on its own. For Star and Saffron, the mirroring of the space and the container offered safety associated with community, but I'm not convinced it's the kind of community feeling so many people shared is lacking in their lives. Coming together in a group space on its own was not sufficient for me to describe it as a "community space" for the sake of connection to a shared struggle, but maybe a community space in which people can see themselves as witnessed by others, an ideal for experiencing relationality in the world in general. I

wonder what conditions cultivate a sustainable connection to a struggle, to humanity? What could I have done differently during my time at Apex so that Stones was more than something Saffron could do because he just had depression and school to worry about at the time? What translates after school activism work into a sustainable connection to something larger than oneself? What conditions would support my collaborators' understanding that the "community" that is so hard to keep close knit is the community of humanity, not the Black trans community, the Latin American community, or the community of queer people of color, to use language that emerged in the group session?

Chapter 7 Implications for Loving

The questions I closed the last chapter with are but a few of the myriad inquiries that continue to inspire, perplex, and haunt me as I consider the larger implications of my study and the next iterations of this research project. As I stated early on, while I started this project curious about what education research can do to affect the life chances of trans young people of color, I end this iteration committed to honoring and listening to what trans of color life can offer education research, spaces, and lines of reasoning. In its conception and throughout the process, I imagined my dissertation study as a queeruption. I wanted to enact queer beyond identity category, I wanted to intentionally blur binaries, and for my study to reflect queer as, "a relational process" (Brown, 2007). I wanted my study and the experiences it generated with my collaborators to erupt something, to transform beyond troubling or disrupting systems of normativity or traditional research methods, to make and/or surface creative blasts (either subtle or loud).

Within this study, I have been eager to expand, complicate and nuance the larger conversation about transness and race in education. This eagerness is in response to the three constraints I identified from empirical literature about trans people in education, 1) that trans people have been subsumed by literature about LGBT people generally; 2), that trans people have been understood according to normative ideas rooted in the values and experiences of White students; and 3), that researchers, teachers, and advocates have been required to play defense in support of our right to life, with little bandwidth in the field to explore, create and build from the practices and daily theorizations of the people in these communities. What I found out about love, as informed by my collaborators' experiences with racialization and transness within the socio-political climate of the US, continues to emerge, on purpose. Rather than coming to succinct conclusions, my dissertation project has encouraged me, as answerable to the stories of my collaborators to develop a

lens for reimagining identity, rooted in radical practices of care. Expanding Trans Radical Love beyond its initial purpose as my conceptual framework is this theorization. Beyond insights and shared experiences over the course of data collection phases, I view Trans Radical Love as the ultimate eruption from this study. I am developing this framework in pursuit of reimagining identity, building coalition, and living into a more loving, trans of color future. Trans Radical Love is the ever-growing amalgamation of what I learned from paying attention to my collaborators' theorizing from flesh. Along the lines of the rationale behind my study, to learn about love, as informed by experiences with identity at axes of marginalization, this framework worked well. Along the lines of methodology, this framework also supported my decision to approach my methods queeruptively, particularly given the underlying foci of each of the three theoretical strands toward disrupting the status quo of whiteness. In this chapter, I review the key findings and themes from my study in terms of how they played a part in this emerging offering and implication Trans Radical Love. I trace how what started as my conceptual framework, reflective of both the reason and rigor (Ravitch & Riggan, 2011) behind this study translated into a lens for relating to ourselves and others.

Complicating Care

During this study, I noticed examples of how the affective dimensions of trans life have been manufactured, configured, packaged, and internalized as individualized endeavors. This reduction of the affective to the individual animates the complexity of my exploration into how my collaborators love in the tension between the individual subject and larger collective society. Indeed, my study and Black feminist love politics do start and rely on the individual, but are made sustainable and actualized with others, with hope in service of collective freedom. In the same vein that critiques of self-care (Michaeli, 2017) and healing narratives (Chopra, 2024) locate the preservation of whiteness, trans of color critique identifies the interrelationship between the gender system and white

supremacy. Furthermore, in taking what I learned from collaborator's stories toward the development of a radical theory of love, I considered what questions or guiding principles might inform more nuanced, complex ideas of care and of identity without reifying individualization or identity's reliance on neat or stable definition.

Trans Radical Love points to theories in the flesh, or embodied experiences, as inherently destabilizing of these constructs, as feminist scholars point to individual transformation as momentum for collective power. My collaborators' politics of refusal lean us toward, in Virgina Grise's (2018) words, "a politic of collective self-defense instead of individualized self-care" (p. 19). The political merits of my collaborators' practices, come together in this idea of "collective self-defense" (Grise, p. 19), because of who my collaborators are in terms of their material, socio-political realities, and in the way their practices are not privatized. Michaeli (2017) describes how populistic configurations of self-care privatize responsibility. In such configurations, she writes, "One's well-being [is] perceived as her own responsibility, rather than the collective responsibility of society to create structures enabling and facilitating one's well-being" (Michaeli, 2017, p. 53). This critique reminds me of my collaborators' shared reasoning in our group session that as a baseline, trans people of color need our basic needs to be met. Additionally, this critique connects to some of my larger questions in relation to our group session about what conditions facilitate collectivity versus individuation.

In chapter five, I traced a form of self-loving praxis in my collaborators' politics of refusal. In chapter six, I describe how during our group session, I noticed that when collaborators returned to their words, stories and opinions, as witnessed after some time had passed, this witnessing supported and bolstered this self-loving praxis. I recall when Star said it was "definitely time [they] start being a menace again and take care of [themselves]?" This declaration was inspired by the organic opportunity to remember who they are, after seeing their words again, their values, as seen.

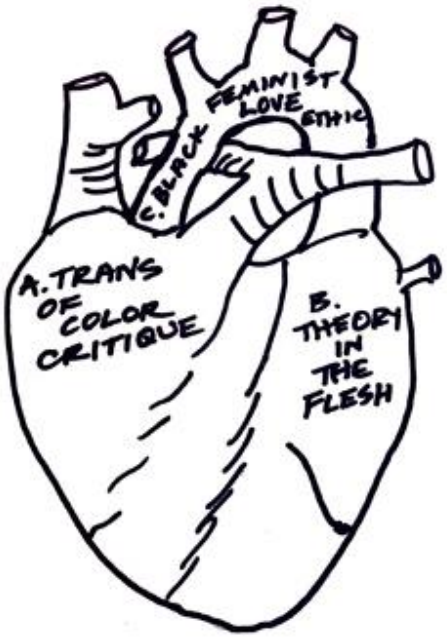
My dissertation research reminds me how the "easy explanation[s] of the conditions we live in" (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1981, p.23) are why me and so many of us have, to use Sylvia Wynter's (2006) words, "mistook the map for the territory." How much of our radically loving potential is obscured, denied, suppressed from a reliance on identity labels, configurations and conditions rather than our inherent capacity to connect and relate to each other? Too much. So, again, in order to try to do better, I offer Trans Radical Love.

Trans Radical Love

In its current conception, Trans Radical Love is a framework and loving lens offered by trans of color life but not reliant on it. Although ambitious, my goal is that Trans Radical Love contributes to approaches to viewing trans in its gerund form (Lugones, 2003), as in trasnsing; approaches to pedagogies of abolition and freedom (Love, 2019); and relating to each other as complex, living beings. As I analyzed my data and identified what I've shared in these chapters so far through the lenses of theory in the flesh; trans of color critique; and a Black feminist love ethic, I also began to formulate larger questions this framework might ask generally, in order to honor and encourage trans radical loving. In other words, I generated questions that could help arrive at the complexity I observed in the stories of my collaborators related to their relationship to self, and ultimately larger collectives. These questions and this framework help me bring what I found about identity negotiation and self-love full circle in support of my claim that racialization and transness necessitate a self-loving praxis of refusal. This self-loving praxis is a form of Trans Radical Love, revealed through attending to the contours of experience often obscured by identity politics and what Marquis Bey calls the "hubris of cohesion" (2019, p. 142).

In keeping with its original representation in the shape of a human heart, I considered the functions of this muscle alongside the functions or foci of the theories comprising it. This graphic is provided below for reference in Figure 4.

Figure 4 Trans Radical Love



Right Atrium and Right Ventricle: Trans of Color Critique

The right ventricle and atrium of the human heart are responsible for receiving, detoxifying and transferring deoxygenated blood to the lungs. I justify trans of color critique, as the right atrium and ventricle function of my Trans Radical Love framework, because this lens is focused on the interrelationship between race and gender in the production of ways of thinking and by extension controlling bodies. When thinking about love and the roots of shared, collective dignity supporting Black feminism, my framework had to implicate ways of knowing that filter ideas of which bodies matter. As anti-Blackness weaves the racist history of social value systems about gender, manufactured and propelled in medicine, popular culture, school, business etc., I attend to trans via trans of color critique, as an offering to always see race and gender as intermeshed (Lugones, 2003), and an avenue for building more expansive perspectives of legibility. Collaborator practices of refusal helped me to generate questions that trans of color critique asks of identity, particularly questions that honor identity as mobilized, identity *for* specific purposes, rather than identity *as*

monocausal or containable. As the right ventricle component of Trans Radical Love, trans of color critique detoxifies the colonizing limits of Eurocentric thought upon which trans legibility has been dependent (Ellison et al., 2017; Gill-Peterson, 2018; Salas-Santacruz; 2021; Galarte, 2014). This function asks, How is gender legibility reliant on whiteness? How can we understand gender more complexly by "placing its complexity outside gender identity?" (Salas-Santacruz, 2020, p. 5).

Left Ventricle: Theory in the Flesh

Noticing my collaborators practicing active negotiations and mobilizations of identity, particularly as politics of refusal catalyzed a process of my own re-imagining of identity. This in turn informed the underlying attention to identity within Trans Radical Love and my insistence that we continue to resist easy explanations of trans life in education. The left ventricle of the heart receives oxygen rich blood from the lungs. It is a core pumping chamber, processing and transforming in order to sustain the body. Within my framework, I articulate the left ventricle as representative of the function of theory in the flesh. As the left ventricle of the heart of Trans Radical Love, theory in the flesh is by necessity, a survivor-rich (Cruz, 2013; Lugones, 2003) pumping chamber that sustains the personal system through carrying what is actively transferred, processed, and transformed through lived experience into oxygen that can fuel a love ethic. This is the part that goes to work when, "the body is curtailed by oppressive power" (Bey, 2019, p. 104). This function asks: What are the radical and political implications of the everyday and mundane practices of the "interregnum" (Malatino, 2020, p. 44)? How do these practices reveal identity as both socially situated and embodied?

Aorta- Black Feminist Love Ethic

As the aorta operates as the largest artery, carrying oxygenated blood from the heart to the rest of the body, this part represents a Black feminist love ethic. Seeing the ways in which my collaborators transmuted their own enfleshed experiences into a life force, invites me to see this

function of the framework as the confluence of the detoxifying function of trans of color critique with the actualizing function of theory in the flesh. When collaborators refused externalized and assumptions-based understandings of who they are along identity lines, they engaged in choosing themselves beyond these limits. In these practices I also saw ways that shifting and mobilizing identity for some functioned as a practice of connection and care. For example, when Saffron told me that if being read as a cis girl means a cis girl at work feels supported, he leans into it. Relatedly, the function of the aorta, the Black feminist love ethic within Trans Radical Love asks, Where and what kind of care practices constitute radical self-transcendence? What conditions support our undoing (Nash, 2019) required of becoming?

As an Orientation

When invoked as the *heart* of the researcher, teacher, writer, Earthling, or matter, the trans within Trans Radical Love invites one to consider identity as movement, as mobilized; as beyond cohesion and neat situatedness. The radical within Trans Radical Love requires one to remain rooted in the constant struggle for freedom. Lastly love, within Trans Radical Love is understood as inherent human power, born of individualized practices and awareness, yet actualized in connection with others.

Closing/Opening

Key findings from this study have bolstered my confidence in Trans Radical Love as an emergent and queeruptive framework for reimagining identity in pursuit of our radically loving potential. Trans Radical Love is a way of approaching ourselves and others that honors our inherent relationality, rooted in our heart space, individually and shared.

These findings again include:

1) Self-loving praxis can look like practices of refusal, animated by leaving situations and active negotiations of identity.

2) Salient themes about gender, race, and love as determined by collaborators as a collective,
    a) Basic needs need to be met as a prerequisite.
    b) Self-care is vital.
    c) Community is tough.
3) Opportunities to encounter ourselves, as witnessed by others, support self-love.

As basic needs, self-care, and politics of refusal are fresh in my mind, I see the ways in which my collaborators for this study echo the residents of the Street Transvestite Action Revolutionary (STAR) house such as Sylvia Rivera and Bebe Scarpi who chose life any way, showed up to relish and release at the Stonewall Inn, anyway. These are the people we elevate when we consider the launch into LGBTQ political activism. "The immediate concerns of life—food, housing, money, safety – were central to all of STAR's projects" (Nothing, p. 9, 2013). The politic of necessity, as theories in the flesh are characterized by Anzaldúa and Moraga (1981) comes from the relationship between life chances and identity categories, the conditions of our lives require that we get our basic needs met—The underlying attention to liberation, freedom and justice echoed in the story telling and narratives of trans warriors and activists.

My collaborators each told me about places where they get to dream. Where they find ease and freedom. They didn't frame it this way, but the feeling was palpable. On the way home to his mom's house, Saffron pointed out, "This is the pond that I like to look at turtles. There's one now, because I love turtles. In a similar yet separate breath, Ezekial told me, "Damn near every morning, every day. I'd go sit by the lake. It was my thinking spot." I could visualize Alex's spot when he told me, "I just want to live life, look out my balcony, smoke, and drink some beers and look at some planes flying by." For Juston, there's spectacle. They told me, "Every day, I watch [Ru Paul's Drag Race] I'm like, 'Oh my gosh, I want to perform, I want to dance. I want to lip sync…I lip sync in my room now more than I ever did before." Star's was more nebulous, alluded to when they described

trans field day for me and the vibe, or what ren faire provided before it got too White and toxic. I opened this dissertation with a quote from Saffron that he shared with me in his questionnaire in response to a video from Sonya Renee Taylor. I share it again here, in full. Saffron declared,

> We can call into their offices, we can oppose bills, we can organize protests, we can vote as much as we want but at the end of the day our bodies are political whether or not we want them to be. So, we can use them, in SRT's words, to call truce with our own bodies and interrogate our beliefs and biases we have about other bodies.

For Saffron, Star, Ezekial, Juston and Alex to lean into this "truce calling", they need spaces where their experiences are not merely validated but where they can be witnessed and shared. Spaces where the ease and freedom they feel in solitude, on their own terms, is felt in connection to something larger than themselves. This has involved some of my own undoing and unbecoming. It has required me to listen to what has haunted me about the constraints of the spaces I organized for our communing for years and the ways in which I missed them.

I dream of worlds where the immediate concerns of each human's life, these fundamental needs, according to indigenous wisdom are a given. I dream of worlds where each human having their basic needs met is not a radical idea or agenda. I believe that classrooms and informal spaces of learning offer the spaciousness and invite the presence necessary for us to encourage and witness these worlds in each student, in each other, in ourselves. Trans Radical Love continues to emerge as one avenue. This frame asks me to listen to my feelings, what my body is telling me, when encountering other people. It tells me to be weary of shiny or easy frameworks and assumptions about experience that keep me comfortable. It requires me to have faith in truth, especially the truth that comes from peoples' experiences and is susceptible to change. Importantly, it teaches me that love is about freedom and feedback loops. It teaches me to have the courage to trans spaces by

choosing love. And love requires that to trans a space is to orient toward activity and action as preparations for imminent and infinite sacred change.

Perhaps as an echo of the pomp and circumstance accompanying graduations, the ending of my dissertation signifies the commencement of its next iteration. After making my final decisions about findings, reaching contentment about what kinds of questions Trans Radical Love asks, and re-reading the poetics collaborators and I read and reflected upon during our group session, I returned to poetic inquiry and created a final poem. This poem is comprised entirely of the words of my collaborators. I created this poem in an effort to pull together what cannot be contained; to animate the affective experiences breathing throughout the process. With attention to the self-loving praxes of my collaborators, their politics of refusal informed by the material circumstances of their lives, their navigations of identity and the magic of witnessing, I offer this poem. May it live as a theory in the flesh.

"but that shit really be f*ing love?" A poem about trans radical love**

When somebody loves themselves, that's the least complicated one,
but it's the hardest one to achieve.
You gotta love yourself before you can love others
or whatever people say.

He said, "Well, my mom would hate me if I did that, and I was like,
"Well, my mom loves these nails."
I want to perform, I want to dance. I want to lip sync.
I'm trying to break the mold. Wearing more pink, wearing more colors,
wearing more sparkle.
When I look in the mirror, I'm like, "That's a bad bitch of varying genders".
I'm giving it. This is for free, y'all.
It feels so good to be Black and queer and trans all at the same time.
There's no way to be fake Black.
I am an asset. I am a joy. And I am amazing.

I'm done caring now, you know what I mean?
If it does not bring me joy, it will leave.
I'm over hating myself. That shit is for the birds.
I'm tired of sugarcoating and abiding to white fragility.
They were like, "Oh, you were always free." And I was like, "Were we though?"

I'm always gonna be in an uncomfortable position with these white folks and stuff.
They're tired. I'm f***ing tired. I'm alive and that's okay.
I do the bare f***ing minimum and that's okay.
Mundane things mean a lot to me right now.
Again, I'm not trying to be a hero or nothing. I'm just being me.
That love that I have for people, I'm putting into myself.
The key is being real on your side.

To be trans, especially as a person of color,
that takes a whole lot of damn self-love.
Just by the mind, or just by the soul, and the body, and the feel of being a trans person; that takes a lot of guts.
I think that it's more self-love than they would think.

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Appendix

A: Recruitment Language

"Hi, [first name]! Bear with me, this is a long message…As you know, since our time working together, I have been pursuing a PhD in education back in Colorado. I'm excited to reach out to you to invite you to work with me again, in a new capacity. I have been deep-in the research about trans people of color in and outside of traditional school settings and, as you can probably guess, the narratives told about our communities highlight hardship, how schools have failed you, and often leave out discussions about the important role of race in all of it. I have decided to base my dissertation study on what's been missed in the research, and I think the best way to do this will come from your wisdom and your own stories. The angle I'm taking is thinking about love and life-affirming practices for trans folks of color.

In short…this study will occur over a few months. To participate, you'll complete a questionnaire; we'll schedule a one-on-one interview in which we'll talk and hangout; I'll invite you to take a few photos to add to what you share with me; and lastly, universe-willing, you'll join me and other folks I am inviting in a group-processing session, in-person, in Nashville. I will be travelling to Nashville and adjacent areas for our interview in-person. You will get paid for each phase of this process that you choose to participate in, beginning with our interview. You will get at least $50, per component, totaling $150. So…are you interested? Do you have questions? Let me know here and then please provide me with a good email address so I can send you more information about consent and the consent forms. I hope you're as good as you can be. It's been too long."

Follow Up #1 Language via Facebook Messenger or Text:
For no interest:
No worries! Thank you for considering. I hope you're well. Take care out there.

For interest with questions:
Glad you're interested! What's the best email address for you? I'll send you the details and my consent procedure and we can go from there. You'll see in my email that if you feel more comfortable talking to someone else about the study before deciding, I have provided my advisor Bethy's information. She's good people.

Follow Up #2 Email Correspondence Language w Consent Procedure:

[Participant's name]. Thanks for your interest in participating in my study. I am using the software and website DocuSign to make the consent process as simple and accessible as possible. You will receive a separate email from DocuSign asking you to sign the consent form. Prior to opening this email, please carefully review the following information which includes everything you need to know about the study in order to make an informed decision about participating. Please keep this email to reference throughout the study as a reminder of rights throughout the study, especially in terms of your ability to withdraw at any point. The following information is copied from the consent form in DocuSign. Contact information is provided for myself and my advisor Bethy Leonardi if any questions or concerns arise as you consider participating. If you feel pressure that you are uncomfortable speaking with me about, I encourage you to reach out to Bethy.

To the very best of my control, your decision to participate will not impact our relationship or the way I feel about you. I will respect your decision and not question your motive for declining.

CONSENT FORM for careful review:

[USE IRB-APPROVED CONSENT FORM FROM eRA]

Follow Up #3 Reminder

[Participant name] I am checking in to see if you have made a decision about participating in my study. Please let me know if you have any questions or want to discuss the details and commitment further. If you do not want to participate, please let me know. Here is the DocuSign link again [LINK]. Thank you.

Follow Up #4 Questionnaire
[Participant's name] I am excited to work with you again and learn from and with you in my study. Here is a link to phase one, the questionnaire [LINK]. Please set aside at least 40-60 minutes to complete this survey. You have the option to save it and return to it at another time, but I ask that you please submit it within one week.

Follow Up #5 Post-Questionnaire
[Participant's name] Thank you for completing the survey. The next phase is our "go-along" interview together. Let's plan on 60-90 minutes. A go-along interview involves us taking a walk together or taking a drive or both in a place that's familiar to you and your everyday life. This could be a neighborhood, a park, a section of the city, your choice. Please let me know a day that works for you between May 16th and 23rd and an idea or two of where you would like to hang out and go-along together.

Follow Up. #7 Focus Group Planning

[Participant's name] The final phase of the study is a group processing session which will occur either July ____ or August _____. Please let me know if you would still like to participate in this session which will take place in Nashville and last 90 minutes and which date works with your schedule. I can provide you with money to assist with transportation costs if needed.

B: Consent Form

Title of research study: ***Radically Loving Trans People of Color: Flesh, Society and (Dis)Identifications in Praxis***
IRB Protocol Number: 22-0150
Investigator: ***Page Valentine Regan***

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to learn more about how trans people of color love. This study is based on an exploration of the ways race, gender, and other elements of experience influence the practices of trans people of color related to care, community and being.

You are being asked to participate in this study because of our prior relationship working together on community-based activism.

This is an exploratory study that responds to the absence of deep considerations of lived experience in education research about trans people. This study is an effort to center the practices and knowledge of trans people of color in research.

I expect that you will be in this study up to six months, in the form of three different phases of participation, each between 30 and 90 minutes in length.

I expect about 7 people will be in this research study. Because you and other participants may withdraw from the study at any time, the number of people present in the final group processing session may vary from the number of people who initially participate. With the exception of the final group session, the only person you will be in contact with during this study is me.

Explanation of Procedures

Part 1: You will complete a questionnaire that includes two parts. Part 1 is a series of questions about you and your current world(s) and part 2 includes a series of questions based on 3 short videos. Each of these videos features an activist that speaks to forms of loving and care as disruptive and radical. All of the questions serve as a 'warm up' of sorts for part 2, which is a one-on-one interview. You will receive the questionnaire over email in the form of a Google survey and will have one week to complete it. This questionnaire will take between 40 and 60 minutes of your time.

Part 2: You will participate in a one-on-one, go-along interview with me, in a convenient place of your choice that is familiar and that you frequent or pass by in your everyday life. This will be a place where we will take a walk together and where you feel comfortable sharing with me. Rather than a specific venue, this will be a park, a neighborhood, a section of the city or a similar place. Go-along interviews can take many forms. For ours, we will do a “walk-along” and/or a “ride along”. Our interaction in full, from first seeing each other until the end will be used as data for analysis in this study. During the entirety of this time together, I may record “jottings” or brief notes which will be expanded upon in memos I write after our encounter. I will ask you questions based on a semi-structured protocol that invites you to consider your experiences with community, friendship, love, kinfolk, (among other themes) and your responses to the initial questionnaire. I will audio record our time together including casual conversation and the more formal interview questions. This go-along interaction will last between 60 and 90 minutes. I will come to you, as long as you are located proximal to Nashville (not further than a 4 hour drive by car). We can meet in the location of your choice to then walk around, or if you need transportation I can pick you up. Again, all components of our interaction will be used as data analysis including my observations of our interaction.

Part 3: You will take up to 3 photographs that represent how you experience (see, hear, smell, notice) love in your life, and/or that represent places where love could or should be experienced. This is vague on purpose. If other people are included in your photographs, make sure they are not identifiable i.e., do not take photographs of their faces or other identifiable pieces of their likeness. These photographs serve as artifacts in my study. If you choose to photograph yourself and remain identifiable, you are giving me permission to include your likeness in my dissertation and possible publications that follow. You may also take photographs of artwork you create in response to this prompt such as an illustration or piece of writing. You will submit these photos to me, either through text or email within three weeks following our interview together.

Part 4: You will participate in a group session with other study participants in which I will share common themes I have identified across interviews and together we will experience and reflect on the photographs taken. In an informal, semi-structured group sharing process, you will have time to collect your thoughts individually. Then, you will take turns sharing reflections with others in response to a series of prompts I will provide based on the themes I have identified. This is a 90-minute session, in-person, food and beverages are provided. At maximum, eight people will be present during this session including me, the moderator. This group session will take place in late July or early August, in Nashville. This session will be audio recorded and the transcript will be used as data for analysis.

Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal

Whether or not you take part in this research is your choice. You can leave the research at any time, and I promise it will not be held against you, nor change the way I think about you.

If you leave this study before it is finished, there will be no penalty to you. If you decide to withdraw, please let me know. I will not ask you to explain your reasoning for withdrawing. I will follow up with you via phone or email in order to determine if you are comfortable with me using any component of your participation, such as the transcript from our interview or the photographs you capture in my data analysis. I will not ask you to explain your reasoning for withdraw. If you are uncomfortable sharing this decision with me, you are encouraged to inform the additional point of contact, Bethy Leonardi whose information is provided at the end of this form.

Risks and Discomforts

The interview and group processing session may evoke discomfort as you are asked to share about your personal experiences and reflections with me and then in a group setting with other people. What you share in this study is voluntary. Aside from this potential discomfort, I do not anticipate that your participation in this study will cause you any risk.

Alternatives

Instead of being a part of all 4 phases of this research study, as an alternative you can choose not to participate in the final group processing session. In line with the voluntary nature of this study, you are free to make this decision at any time and do not need to disclose your reasoning.

Confidentiality

All elements of this study that include the fieldnotes I write, your words, narratives, and photographs will only be accessible to me, saved to a password protected server through the University of Colorado. All information you share with me via email or text will also be confidential and only seen by me. These pieces of your story and our exchanges will be disidentified upon being saved. In other words, rather than saving what you share with me using your name, I will reference this information through the use of a pseudonym. Information shared will thus be identifiable only through referencing my code sheet in which I assign your name to the pseudonym used throughout the study. An exception to this is what you share during focus groups and potentially what you share in our interviews if others are in ear-shot. When we select our interview location, please consider the risk of others hearing what you share with me if we are in a public context.

My transcription of the audio recording of the group session and my notes are only accessible by me and the university when necessary, but because you will be sharing your insights and reflections with others, it is impossible to guarantee others will not share what has been said. This being said, I will do my best to create a space where people honor and agree to the norm, “what’s said here, stays here, what’s learned here, leaves here.”

Information obtained about you for this study will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by law. Research information that identifies you may be shared with the University of Colorado Boulder Institutional Review Board (IRB) and others who are responsible for ensuring compliance with laws and regulations related to research,

including people on behalf of the Office for Human Research Protections. The information from this research may be published for scientific purposes; however, your identity will not be given out.

There are some things that you might tell me that I CANNOT promise to keep confidential, as I am required to report information like:
Child abuse or neglect
A crime you or others plan to commit
Harm that may come to you or others

Payment for Participation

If you agree to take part in all phases of this research study, you will receive $150 for your time and effort. You will receive $50 for part 1 and 2 (your questionnaire responses and participation an interview); $50 for part 3 (sharing up to 3 photographs with me); and $50 for part 4 (participating in a group processing session. You will receive this compensation in the form of a personal check delivered in the timeliest method possible, either in person or via the mail. If you leave the study early, you will only be compensated for the parts you complete. Your compensation for this study is taxable income.

Questions

If you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or think the research has hurt you, you can reach me at any point during the process by email at page.regan@colorado.edu or by phone 970-903-1303. If you would be more comfortable speaking with someone else who you do not know but can trust, you may reach out to Bethy Leonardi at bethy.leonardi@colorado.edu or by phone at 720-939-4713.

This research has been reviewed and approved by an IRB. You may talk to them at (303) 735-3702 or irbadmin@colorado.edu if:
Your questions, concerns, or complaints are not being answered by the research team.
You cannot reach the research team.
You want to talk to someone besides the research team.
You have questions about your rights as a research subject.
You want to get information or provide input about this research.

Signatures

Your signature documents your permission to take part in this research.

_____
Signature of subject Date

_____
Printed name of subject

_____
Signature of person obtaining consent Date

Page Valentine Regan

C. IRB Protocol- Approved April 14, 2022

University of Colorado Boulder

TITLE: Radically Loving Trans People of Color: Flesh, Society and (Dis)identifications in Praxis

PROTOCOL VERSION DATE: 14 April 2022
VERSION: 1.1
PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR (PI):
Name: Page Valentine Regan
Telephone: 970-903-1303
Email: page.regan@colorado.edu

KEY PERSONNEL
Name: Dr. Elizabeth J. Meyer
Role in project: Faculty Co-Advisor

Name: Dr. Bethy Leonardi
Role in project: Faculty Co-Advisor

GENERAL RESEARCH STAFF
N/A
OBJECTIVES
As documented in education research and as reflected in the political context of the States, the rights and well-being of transgender people are consistently at stake. Transgender students in k-12 settings and higher education experience adversity based on discrimination and social cultures that establish cisgender identity and stereotypical gender expression as the norm. For transgender students of color, these experiences are exacerbated based on historical and persisting racism. Education research concerning transgender students does well to account for both institutional inequity and survival (Greytak, 2009; McBride, 2020); yet, less attention is paid to these communities' healing practices and embodied experience.

This study responds to the need for more intersectional research in education that expands current narratives in order to elevate and honor the life-affirming practices of transgender people beyond attention to trauma and hardship.

The specific focus and purpose for this dissertation study is to explore how trans emerging adults of color (ages 18 to 25) navigate and love in their daily practices. My guiding research questions are:
How do lived experiences with racialization, transness, and community serve as mediators of love in the lives of trans emerging adults of color?

How do participants talk about love as it relates to their identities and lived experiences specifically? What stories do they tell?
What everyday, life-affirming practices do participants engage with?
2) How can leveraging the experiences of trans emerging adults of color with love inform approaches to building community and transformation within and outside of traditional educational contexts?

Furthermore, a secondary and subsequent purpose of this study is to contribute new possibilities to research and education approaches in terms of how we understand transgender people. This contribution is grounded in interdisciplinary theoretical lenses and emergent transgender epistemologies, or in other words, through the lived experiences of transgender people of color.

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

Trans people of color engage resiliency practices (Singh, 2013; Singh & McKleroy, 2001; Nicolazzo, 2017) made necessary by their navigation of school environments. Schools are reflective of larger sociopolitical contexts in which gender norms and expectations for being and expressing are filtered through whiteness (Wernick et al., 2014; Travers, 2018) and other related normative structures that dictate who is "deserving" (Spade 2011; 2015) according to ability and class among other vectors of experience. Copious education research (McBride, 2020; Simons, Grant & Rodas, 2021; Greytak et al., 2009) documents the adverse experiences of these communities and highlights the importance of support systems inside and outside of school. Characteristic of interdisciplinary trends in which gender diversity is taken up without attention to racialization (Namaste, 2000; Stryker & Aizura, 2013), the centrality of adversity in education research concerning trans students has foreclosed intersectional considerations along the axes of both gender and racial identity and deeper theorizing that illuminates the complexity of trans life. Without attention to this complexity, the conditions and epistemologies about trans people are kept in place.

Almost twenty years ago, Nova Gutierrez (2004) charged: "More research is needed: more oral histories, personal narratives, focus groups, ethnographies. The voices of gay, lesbian, and trans students of color must be part of academic theorizing, especially where education is concerned" (Gutierrez, 2004, p. 78). This call for the voices and narratives of trans students of color is echoed across education research today, with scholars encouraging theoretically grounded studies that elevate the complexity of trans life as it is embodied in and outside of traditional learning environments (Leonardi, et. al, 2020; Salas-Santacruz, 2020; Jourian, 2017; Martino & Cumming-Potvin, 2018). This dissertation study responds to these calls and the current socio-political climate of the United States grounds the significance of its implications.

The year 2020 generated the largest number of anti-transgender legislation proposed in U.S. history, including measures to restrict transgender students' participation in school sports, and bills that penalize parents and healthcare providers for seeking and providing gender and life-affirming care (Ronan, W. 2021). Out of 250 anti-LGBTQ bills proposed in 2021, 104 of these bills directly impact transgender young people (Ronan, W. 2021). As of May, 2021, 9 of these bills were passed, including 7 bills prohibiting transgender students from participating in school sports. Additionally, since January 2021, 14 states have signed bills or taken other state-level action to restrict the way racism and sexism are discussed in schools, predominantly framed as the prohibition of critical race theory (CRT) ("Map", 2022). State-sanctioned attacks on trans

students and restrictions on teaching students about racial histories and counter storytelling (embedded in the key tenets of CRT) (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; 2006) illuminate the compounded importance of education research that elevates the dignity and world-making of trans people of color.

As a trans scholar of color, I am directly implicated in this study, and it remains rooted in my own personal and professional lived experiences. I know the impact of internalized shame and self-disrespect that comes from socio-political contexts that hold the validity and dignity of transgender people of color suspect. Professionally, over the course of years working alongside and on behalf of transgender students across age ranges and locales, I have become aware of the way young trans people share the emotional and material burdens of these social and political contexts. More importantly, I honor and have been privileged to bear witness to the brilliant, "survivor-rich" (Cruz, 2013, p. 212) and life-affirming practices enacted within these communities which, as previously highlighted, is often concealed by or missed in education research.

My own experiences in relation to what I continue to learn from and with trans people of color demonstrates Leonardi et al.'s (2020) understanding of "gender as socially constructed and as lived—in bodies that often bump up against/exceed expectations related to gender normativity" (p. 6). Furthermore, I see great promise in my research that will engage and elevate the practices of trans emerging adults of color, in an exploration of love. Exploring love is grounded in my provisional conceptualization of love as radical, rooted in Black feminist, queer, and Chinanx feminisms. This love is a love that begins in the self, a self socially-deemed, and often internalized as unworthy, and translates into communities and collective care (Malatino, 2020) as a means of social transformation and resistance. This framing of love as a source for change and future-making is what makes this love radical (Taylor, 2018). I have chosen to focus here in order to respond to the need for deeper theorizing about embodied trans of color experiences and the socio-political climates that mediate these realities and our relationships to society and others.

PRELIMINARY STUDIES

N/A

RESEARCH STUDY DESIGN

This is a qualitative study in which I will employ go-along interviews; photo elicitation, and focus groups as the primary methods for exploring the way trans people of color experience and consider love in their lives. Data for analysis includes jottings recorded during interviews and focus groups and subsequent expansions in the form of memos recorded immediately following interviews and the focus group. Additional data includes interview audio recordings and subsequent transcriptions; photographs taken and submitted by participants; audio recording of the focus group and subsequent transcripts; and reflexive memos recorded throughout the process. This data will be analyzed through identifying themes relevant to my research questions.

This study, from initial recruitment to final data collection will occur over the duration of six months from April 2022 through September 2022.

My study is divided into three primary phases. I present the descriptions below.

Research Question	Method

RQ1: How do lived experiences with racism, transphobia, and community serve as mediators of love in the lives of trans emerging adults of color?	**Phase I-III**
RQ1a: How do participants talk about love as it relates to their identities and lived experiences specifically? What stories do they tell? ***RQ1b:*** What everyday, life-affirming practices do participants engage in?	**Phase 1a: Preliminary Questionnaire** -consenting participants will complete a questionnaire including questions about self and about a select number of excerpts that illuminate political orientations to love from activists. -Survey responses will be used for data analysis **Phase 1b: One on One "Go-along" Interviews** -Collecting individual narratives -Collecting observations of individual subject as they inhabit and describe place during the "walk along" and/or "ride along. -Discussing past/present experiences with racialization, gender, relationships -Reflecting upon love as it is dreamed of, experienced, and practiced -Drawing upon questionnaire responses **Phase II: Photo Elicitation** -Participants take up to 3 photos of places (physically or temporarily where love exists in their lives (or, where it could exist) -All people in photographs, including self, must be unidentifiable to someone uninvolved with the study. No faces or identifying information can be included. -Photos will be shared with the PI and stored in a protected folder. -Photos will be used for data analysis as artifacts and will serve as an anchor for the focus group.
RQ2: How can leveraging the experiences of trans emerging adults of color with love inform approaches to building community and transformation within and outside of traditional educational contexts?	**Phase I-III** Data analysis of questionnaire responses, one on one interviews, and photos will inform considerations for thinking about education spaces from the experiences of trans emerging adults of color. **Phase III: Focus Groups** -Group witnessing and photo exhibition -Semi-structured format -Collective reflections and sharing -Open invitations to consider what conditions encourage love and loving practices in the lives of trans emerging adults of color and how we can collectively bring this insight to bear on education contexts.

Phase I: a. Preliminary Questionnaire, b. One on One Interviews and Field Observation

The initial phase of my study involves a questionnaire (see appendix 2) with questions related to self and video texts that illustrate love as active and political, beyond conventional ideas of love bound to romance and affect. This questionnaire will inspire participants' thinking and reflecting on the central inquiries of this study and additionally will provide data for analysis in the form of responses.

One on one, "go-along" interviews used in this study will include mixed approaches in the form of "walk-alongs" and "ride-alongs" in which I will ask participants questions while we move together across places familiar to them. I will invite participants to choose an area that they commonly frequent. This will be a park, a neighborhood, a section of the city, etc. While sitting may occur, movement together across the space is a component of this method. If walking through the area is not possible, I will pick the participant up and we will drive around. The "drive along" and "walk along" may be combined in the circumstance where I need to provide transportation to the participant. The interview is semi-structured using a protocol while also being open to conversation that emerges organically based on the setting. All observation occurring within these interviews are of the individual subject. Interactions with other people, if they occur, are components of public behavior and non-participants will not be included in the study.

Unless driving, I will record jottings throughout these interviews which will be expanded into memos as soon as possible following our interaction. The information collected about individuals includes their attire, accessories, and other observations on their appearance. It also includes noting personal belongings they bring with them when we interact on the day of the interview. The location of the interview and our interaction will vary based on participants' location and preference.

Go-along interviews will last between 60 and 90 minutes. These interviews will be recorded using an iphone.

Phase II: Photo Elicitation

Each participant will be invited to take one to three photos in response to a prompt at the close of their interview (See appendix 3). The prompt asks them to *capture in photo form places in their life where they experience (see, feel, hear, sense) or want to experience love*. They are welcome to use any camera they see fit in addition to editing or augmenting the photos. The photos may also be of a piece of artwork or writing they create in response to this prompt. If other people are in the photographs, they must be unidentifiable for example, no faces of other people may be included. Participants may only capture their own likeness in the photographs or other identifiable information if they are comfortable with the artifacts being traceable to them and recognizable by others, including other participants in the focus group. Participants will have up to three weeks following our interview to share their photos with me. These photos are a source of data and will also serve as an anchor for the focus group. I will arrange the photos in an exhibitable format.

Phase III: Focus Group

Participants will attend an in-person group session in which I will display their photos. First, we will look at all of the photos together, without attention to the source or photographer. Together

we will collectively respond to questions based on a protocol that asks what stories these photos say about love and trans people of color (see appendix 3). I will audio record this session and the recording and subsequent transcription are data sources for analysis of reoccurring and emergent themes based on what participants share with other people like themselves in a group setting.

An additional data source in this study is an ongoing reflexive journal I will keep that documents my initial assumptions, feelings, reactions, and conjectures. This journal will be transcribed from written text to a digital document and be analyzed based on my research questions and emerging themes from each phase of the study in line with the importance of researcher reflexivity when conducting phenomenological research.

Name of procedure/instrument/tool	Purpose (i.e., what data is being collected?)
Questionnaire	Data about personal question responses and reflections on three video texts.
Interviews	Reflections and storytelling based on semi-structured, go-along interview. Audio recordings for transcription. Memos and jottings taken during and immediately following interviews.
Photo Voice Elicitation	Photo artifacts.
Focus Group	Verbal excanges between participants in response to semi-structured prompts. Audio recordings.
Reflexive Journal	Ongoing journal documentation of reflections prior during and following each phase of the study. Reflecting upon assumptions and frames.

FUNDING
This research is funded by the Beverly Sears Graduate Student Grant and additionally with support from the Karen Raforth Scholarship in LGBTQIA Studies. The Beverly Sears grant is awarded to support the research, scholarship and creative work of graduate students. The Karen Raforth scholarship is awarded to students whose academic pursuits demonstrate leadership and involvement with LGBTQIA issues. Both of these awards are made possible through the University of Colorado, Boulder. The total amount from these two sources is $2500 which will be distributed across: compensation of participants; travel expenses; food and beverage provisions during the interviews and in-person focus group; and transcription services.

ABOUT THE SUBJECTS

7 subjects will be enrolled in this study. The age of each of these people is between 20 and 25 at the time of enrollment. This period falls into the positive youth development frame of "emerging adulthood." Each person identifies within the trans umbrella of identity, meaning that their gender identity does not neatly align with the sex they were assigned at birth. Each person is a person of color and the specific racial and ethnic makeup of participants includes: Mexican, Black, Biracial (Black and White), and Chinese. In order for people to be included in this study, all three of these criteria must be met: Between 20 and 25 years old; trans; and a person of color. There are no exclusion criteria outside of these requirements for legibility.

Subject Population(s)	Number to be enrolled in each group

Trans individuals, between 20 and 25, also identifying as people of color.	7

VULNERABLE POPULATIONS

The people recruited for this study represent populations marginalized based on race and gender. Transgender people of color are vulnerable based on social disadvantage. Additionally, I know all participants based on my former capacity as the coordinator for an afterschool program in which they were members for at least one year. Each person is now an adult, at least 4 years removed from the program and I no longer serve in a mentoring capacity. Undue influence and coercion will be avoided through allocating sufficient time to communicate a thorough explanation of the study and the detailed consent process and through giving participants adequate time to consider the information and ask questions before making a decision on participating. Detailed in the consent procedure and initial contact language will be an explanation of how participation in this study is completely voluntary and the choice to participate does not influence our current relationship. An additional point of contact is listed in the consent form that participants can reach out to if they feel pressured or have additional questions.

RECRUITMENT METHODS

Subjects will be drawn from a select pool of people with whom I previously worked at a non-profit agency. All of these subjects meet my inclusion criteria, and we have a pre-existing relationship based on my former role as the coordinator and mentor for a program in which they participated. The frequency of current contact with participants varies, yet they are all adults and I no longer serve as a mentor. Recruitment will begin with an invitation to each individual through written, digital formats, namely Facebook messenger and text messaging. (See supplemental materials Appendix 1 recruitment language). Once I determine which of the 7 people are interested, I will procure their personal email address and send more detailed information including my consent procedures.

List recruitment methods/materials and attach a copy of each in eRA
Initial invitation (through Facebook messenger, text, email)
Recruitment through follow-up email based on interest with consent forms.
Follow up with reminders if necessary

COMPENSATION

Participants will be compensated $50 per session; $150 total for the whole study. If participants choose to withdraw at any point in the study, they will be compensated based on the number of components they engaged with.

This payment is taxable income and will come in the form of a personal check delivered in the timeliest fashion either in person or by mail following each study phase.

INFORMED CONSENT

Consent for this study will be presented via email and obtained using the secure online platform DocuSign.

To minimize the possibility of coercion or undue influence, I will make clear in my consent process that this study is completely voluntary, and I remain open to questions and pushback

along the way. I will promise to remain accountable to the comfort level expressed by consenting participants.

PROCEDURES

The following activities for data collection will take place throughout the six months allotted for this study.

Participants will complete a questionnaire in the form of a Google survey. This survey will take participants between 40 and 60 minutes to complete and they will have the option to save their progress and complete it in multiple sittings. Participants will have one week to complete this survey. Participants will answer 9 questions total and watch three short videos. The first six questions relate to their personal experiences and the latter three are in response to the videos (see supplemental materials appendix 2).

Participants will choose a location that is familiar to them and which they frequent in their daily life for a go-along interview. Participants will either meet me at this location or we will arrange for me to pick them up. The entire duration of our time together, walking around the chosen location and/or driving to, from and around it will serve as a data source. What is shared with me verbally and my observations of the individual subject will be fodder for jottings and memos to follow. majority of this go-along will be audio recorded. During our go-along, participants will respond to semi-structured questions (see appendix 3). Audio recording is mandatory for participation.

For phase II of the study, participants will think about reflections of love, based on their experiences, in their everyday life (see appendix 3). They will take up to three photographs of where they think love is reflected and submit the photographs to me either through text message or email. Participants are able to create a piece of art or writing as a photo subject. If participants are photographing other people, their faces and identifiable features must not be present. If participants' own likeness is reflected in the photographs, they are consenting to their identity being visible to others in the focus group and additionally to others who read my dissertation and possible future publications that include these artifacts as described in the consent form. My access to these photographs is mandatory for their participation in this segment. Photographs serve as artifacts for analysis in this study and, as implied, may be used in my dissertation and later publications.

I will record jottings during the one-on-one ride-along interviews and in the focus group. These jottings will be expanded upon in ongoing memoing throughout the study. These jottings will include my observations of participant body language, initial inquiries and thoughts about stories and reflections shared, elements I notice perhaps obscured or not captured in the recording and other observations of the individual subject. These notes will be written by hand and then transcribed in a digital document. Participants will be identifiable in jottings and hand-written memos and then dis-identified using pseudonyms within digital transcriptions.

For phase III, participants will join others form the study in an in-person focus group in Nashville, TN. The specific location is yet to be determined but will be selected based on the maximum level of privacy possible. For a total of 90 minutes, participants will silently reflect on a slide show of their photo artifacts. Then, participants will take turns responding to a series of prompts in which they engage in discussion with one another and share reflections based on their observations of each other's photographs. Prominent themes that emerge from my analysis of the go-along interviews and the collection of artifacts will also be shared as fodder for discussion. (See appendix 3)

Visit #	Procedures/Tools	Location	How much time the visit will take
1. Preliminary Questionnaire	Google survey shared via email.	Online and asynchronous	Varied completion time. 40-60 minutes
2. One-on-one, go-along interviews	Iphone for audio recording; walk and/or drive through	a place familiar to participant e.g. a park, section of the city, or neighborhood.	60-90minutes total
3. Photo-Elicitation	Participant take up to three photographs in response to the prompt "where do you experience (e.g., see, hear, feel, smell?) love, or where do you want to experience it?" Camera with digital sharing capacity. Photos are shared digitally via phone or drive share.	Online sharing; location of photography varies by participant	Time varies based on participant approach. Upload within 2-3 weeks following interview.
4. Focus Group	Participants will meet at a given venue in order to witness each other's photographs and share takeaways based on their own process with the study, their photography, and what they're seeing and experiencing in others' shares. Semi-structured protocol. Iphone for audio recording.	Accessible venue in Nashville, TN with projector capacity and maximum privacy. Potential option: reserved conference room at The Youth Opportunity Center;	90 minutes

SPECIMEN MANAGEMENT

N/A

DATA MANAGEMENT

All data will only be accessible through me, through my computer files, password protected. All photos shared via phone will be immediately transferred to my computer and then deleted from my cellular device. All transcripts will be printed and kept in a locked office. All documents and transcripts which include participants names or people they talk about will be immediately de-identified using pseudonyms. All audio recordings from interviews and the focus group will be kept on my computer, only accessible to me by password. Whenever possible, electronic files will be saved on the CUB server and accessed only through VPN or a password-protected website.

Loss or theft may be possible. I will ensure that any data on my computer is encoded so as not to be identifiable to anyone with my computer in their possession. If loss or theft is to occur, any incidents will be reported to IRB. Data coded by me with a master list of participants will be both secured and kept separately. Data will be stored for ten years following the completion of this study as it may amount to follow-up studies.

As participants might be emailing me or texting me their photos and communications related to this study, I will be clear in my consent forms that this information will be dis-identified.

PROVISIONS TO PROTECT THE PRIVACY INTERESTS OF PARTICIPANTS

Participants will be aware of the content and nature of the conversation we will have during our interview. When selecting a location for our go-along, in-person interview, they will be reminded of the possibility of being overheard in a public place. There is a risk of outside observation both during our interviews and the following focus group. I cannot promise the complete privacy and confidentiality of participation in the focus group due to the possibility that sensitive issues may be discussed in this setting and group members may disclose information discussed outside of the research context which breaches confidentiality. To minimize this risk and reiterate the possibility, within the focus group we will name and discuss the reasoning behind the norm, "what is said here stays here, what is learned here, leaves here."

WITHDRAWAL OF PARTICIPANTS

The only circumstances under which participants would be withdrawn without their consent is if they cannot follow study procedures or miss an excessive number of sessions. Subjects first would be notified about observed inabilities to participate, such as excessive cancellations, refusals to complete protocols after obtaining consent and after clarifying discussions. Participants can request their data be withdrawn from analysis at any time. They are able to relay this information to me, the PI or to the additional contact listed in the consent form, co-advisor Dr. Bethy Leonardi.

RISKS TO PARTICIPANTS

The only foreseen risk to participants is the potential discomfort created by personal reflection and sharing personal experiences and reflections in an interview and focus group setting. To mitigate this discomfort, interview questions and focus group prompts are not focused on pain or the disclosure of traumatic memories but remain focused on loving practices, healing, and life-affirmation.

MANAGEMENT OF RISKS

Participants will be provided with various community resources for networking and mental health support during the study for more sustained long-term connection and support.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS

Participants will likely receive no direct benefit from participation in this study. However, participants will be made aware that their participation could provide benefit to the field of interdisciplinary research and education overall. And, given the absence of regular opportunities for transgender people of color to share in and experience intentional affinity spaces, this may also serve as a benefit

PROVISIONS TO MONITOR THE DATA FOR THE SAFETY OF PARTICIPANTS

MEDICAL CARE AND COMPENSATION FOR INJURY

N/A

COST TO PARTICIPANTS

Potential costs related to travel will be paid for by the PI using funding allocated for this study. When these costs arise, the PI will make arrangements ahead of time so that the subject will have no costs to participate.

DRUG ADMINISTRATION

N/A

INVESTIGATIONAL DEVICES
N/A
COLLABORATIVE STUDIES
N/A
SHARING OF RESULTS WITH PARTICIPANTS

As this study aims to be centered on a humanizing approach to research, the semi-structured protocol I will use in the focus groups will include an explanation of themes from my own analysis. Co-analysis will not be a part of this research. Prior to my final write up of findings, I will share any pieces of analysis that include direct quotes or reflections from participants in order to ensure they feel as though they are being reflected accurately and respectfully. They will have the option to omit anything if they do not want it in my final dissertation.

References

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D. Data Collection Protocols

Preliminary Questionnaire

Study Phase 1a:
Questionnaire distributed through Google forms. Each question is asked in the 'paragraph response' style unless noted otherwise.

Form description:

Thank you for participating in my study. The first phase is the following questionnaire. You have the option to save your progress and return to it later. I imagine these questions will take you between 40 and 60 minutes to complete. Please reserve some time for thoughtful reflection as a piece of this questionnaire is viewing 3 videos, each between 6 and 9 minutes long.

These videos come from Black artist activists. I also provided a link to a document with few excerpts you might enjoy for further thought at the end of the questionnaire. I am the only one who will see your responses. This is an invitation, there are no 'right' answers. If you prefer, you can also send me a video or audio recording of yourself talking through these and share it with me via text or email.

Part I:

1. What name(s) do you go by?
2. What does being "a person of color people of color" mean to you? What does this language or other language you use mean to you?
3. What does being trans mean to you, or if not trans, what terms do you use to describe your gender and what does this language mean to you?
4. As far as gender expression goes, how do you "feel yourself" most? In other words, instead of the usual masc/femme/andro, tell me about something that makes you feel most you. Could be an article of clothing, makeup, shoes, etc.
5. Where are you these days? (Could be where you stay, what you're up to, your headspace, etc.)
6. List 2 activities you practice or think of that make you feel each of the following. Joy, ease, love, community. For example, 2 activities that bring you joy. 2 activities that bring you ease, etc.

Part II (again, feel free to send me an audio recording if that feels better). If the questions don't resonate with you, you're welcome to offer other reflections):

7. Watch video 1/3: Sonya Renee Taylor *Bodies as Resistance* TedxMarin https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MWI9AZkuPVg (8:50)
    a. What do you notice?
    b. How does SRT's message make you feel? What are you responding to?
    c. What does SRT's message make you reconsider? Either about yourself, the world, etc.
    d. Do you have pushback?

8. Watch video 2/3: adrienne marie brown on *Pleasure Activism* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ISKEnvcRmMs (6:58)
    a. What do you notice?
    b. How does amb's message make you feel? What are you responding to?
    c. What does ambs message make you reconsider? Either about yourself, the world, etc.
    d. Do you have pushback?

9. Video 3/3: Syrus Marcus Ware *(Queer) Self Portraits* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MMsr6ukWKBA (3:42)
    a. What do you notice?
    b. How does 's SMW's message make you feel? What are you responding to?
    c. What does SMW's message make you reconsider? Either about yourself, the world, etc.
    d. Do you have pushback?

Thanks for engaging in this questionnaire. Which of the following days of the week/weeks would be best for you to spend a couple hours together for an interview? Mark all that apply, or if none of these times work for you, in the question, let me know a time that would be better. Ideally interviews will take place in May and the ultimate group session will occur in August.

Week of May 9th
Week of May 16th
Week of May 23rd

Other reflections and/or weeks for an interview:

Interview Protocol
Study Phase 1b:
Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

Intro script: Before we begin our go-along time together, I want to remind you of the consent form you signed and ensure you are comfortable with me recording this interview. May I have your permission to record? Also, we can stop the interview at any time, no questions asked and throughout the interview you can choose not to answer any of my questions. These questions are an opportunity for me to learn more about your experiences and follow up on the questionnaire you filled out. Do you have any questions before we begin?

1. Tell me about this location you chose. What does it mean to you? Why is it familiar?

2. Tell me about what you have been up to these days? How's your family? Are you working? Going to school? What's new?

3. In the questionnaire, I asked you about the language you may or may not use to identify yourself. Can you tell me about places in your day-to-day where you think about your social identities the most, for example gender, race, ability, etc.?

4. As you know folks in this study identify as trans or at least did so when we worked together. Can you tell me about what transness means to you? Or, what it doesn't mean to you?

5. What comes to mind when you think about love?

6. What stories have you been told about love?

7. Sonya Renee Taylor talks about how self-love is radical. Is self-love radical? What about for the trans person or person of color? Why?

8. Tell me about practices or activities that you engage with that make you feel seen, and respected? Where does radical love fit?

9. Tell me more about what you meant in your questionnaire response to the question, "how do you feel yourself?"

10. What does community mean to you? How do you find community?

11. Who are your people? How do you know?

12. Tell me about friends these days and networks. How do you make friends and keep friends? What makes a good friend?

13. What conditions are necessary for a future where trans people of color are loved and invited to love radically, the self and others?

14. What conditions would invite you to participate in a group processing session with other people in this study?

15. Anything else you want to share with me or reflections that have come up since the questionnaire?

Photo-Elicitation Prompt

Study Phase 2

Thank you for participating in the interview with me and for your thoughtful questionnaire responses. The next step in this study is an invitation for you to take photographs that for you, represent love. This can be places or moments in your life or day where you experience (see, taste, smell, hear) love or perhaps places or moments where you think it's possible, but might not quite be there. You are also welcome to create a piece of art, a drawing, a sculpture, anything that calls to you and take a picture of that. Choose up to three photos and send them to me, either through email or text. Your photos must be anonymous and cannot include your face or the faces

of others. Upon receiving your photos, I'll save them to a password protected folder on the university server and will delete them from my device.

Semi-Structured Focus Group

Study Phase 3:

- Check-In's, for old time's sake, name/pronouns/one high and one low and what is the most meaningful part of being trans and a person of color.
- Show a slide show of photographs without reference to the photographers
- What's coming up for you? What are you noticing in these photographs?
- What do these pictures tell us about how each of us might experience love and community?
- Are there any elements that speak to trans of color experience?
- What does love demand of us, as trans people of color?
- How do we create education spaces, both in and outside of schools, where love for trans people of color is possible and cultivated?
- Flip chart activity. There are three flip charts around the room. On each flip chart, add post it notes in response to the prompts:
    - 1) Loving practices for trans people of color
    - 2) Who are our people?
    - 3) A trans of color future looks like:
- Closing reflections:
    - What did you observe while adding post-it notes?
    - How did this activity make you feel?
    - What do these reflections make you consider about yourself and about loving?

E: Love Poetics

I: Love Is

I think about love in so many ways.
Recently I've been thinking about the love that I've had for my mom and my chosen family and the people in my circle.
My mom's only a single mother and I'm an only child. So our love was just for each other.
I can't have my chosen family crumble, like how can I like keep the love in here and reiterating how much I care for them because they've been there every major, major experience.
I still have not found romantic love yet. I'm still like, well where else can I get it?
Now I'm finding to get it from myself and that's what's been good…I've been so content with being alone. And it just took 20 years.
Love definitely complicates things because it really fucks with your morals. It tests you.
I really love love. I love seeing people in love. I love watching people do things that they love and then I'm just like, but that shit really be fucking love?
I hate it. But I love it. It's weird.
That love that I have for people I'm putting into myself.

It's a slow-ass process. When somebody loves themselves, that's the least complicated one. But it's the hardest one to achieve.
I can't do this anymore. I can't keep loving for other people. I was living for other people not myself. It was so hard.
To be trans, especially as a person of color, that takes a whole lot of damn self-love, because you are in a world and in a country that continuously mocks your every existence.
Even if it's just by the mind, or just by the soul and the body and the feel of being a trans person. That takes a lot of guts. And, I think that it's more self-love than they would think.
Love does conquer all I guess.
Yo, but what about a platonic soul mate? Cuz, romantic love is not the only thing in life, and it's not the only thing that's gonna give you fulfilling relationships.
I just like to fuck attractive people. And I don't do romantic things.
I see people get heartbroken all the time.
It's not that it's not real, it means differently to different people.
Love is just like this whole weird complex thing. Nobody really knows. Everyone loves differently. Everyone knows what love looks like or what they need in love.
It may not like be perfect, but it is vital if that makes sense. Like whether it be like family or you know friends or a lover
The people that I love make it easy
I know what it's like to not have it.
It made it easy to neglect my self-love because I was, you know, focusing on them.
"You want to come get a little power before you go see the people?!" And I was like, "oh, bet. Bet"

II: I am

"Well, my mom would hate me if I did that." And I'd be like, "Well, my mom loves these nails."
I want to perform, I want to dance. I want to lip sync.

I'm trying to break the mold. Wearing more pink, wearing more colors, wearing more sparkle…flared pants would be cute for a minute.
I'm done caring now, you know what I mean? I don't think about what are people gonna say? I'm giving it. This is for free, y'all.
My company was very often better than anyone else's company. And that's not bad because I love me.
I am an asset. I am a joy. And I am amazing. So any fucking place I would apply to would be happy to have me. So fuck this job.
When I look in the mirror, I'm like, that's a bad bitch of varying genders.
It's taken a long time for me to get to that point. But like I love me, and I'm great.
I just gotta relax and let myself be. Right? I've got to just try things out and if they sit right, if they feel good within my me, then that's it. That's for me.
I think it's really important to be able to exist with yourself and within yourself. Whoever you are. Not doing things because other people like it of me. I'm not just following this spectrum or these roles or anything, more like I'm just doing it because I actually like it.
You gotta love yourself before you can love others or whatever people say…I don't believe it! But it's whatever people say. Whatever makes the crowd happy.
Look out on my balcony, smoke, drink some beers and look at some planes flying by.
I love myself, regardless. I feel like that's what you need to do anyways, for anyone, for whoever you are, or what you are, you don't just have to be trans.

How I love myself is wake up, have my priority if it's school, my health, take care of myself mentally, spiritually, whatever way you want to do it.
I've learned if you're gonna stand out, you might as well stand out.
So me right now, as being trans, it's not in my highest priority of community to help or be involved in right now.
Again, I'm not trying to be a hero or nothing. I'm just being me.
My name means " victory of the people
I strive to be the best me so I can be an example for my family and help them and my community.
Having his middle name solidifies me as the 7th son
I'm proud to be Black. It connects me to my ancestors, my community, my life experience, and my future in a sense.
I respect that experience and honor/embrace the part of me that lived through it to be who I am today.
I thought "Damn, maybe it was gonna get better as I grew older," but it is not. But you know, whatever. Perseverance is a hell of a thing. It's a hell of a thing. It's really tiring.
I'd go sit by the lake. It was my thinking spot
And everything I am is me at the same time. So we're not going to avoid conversation about race.
That's part of the reason why I stopped doing activism. I'm not even advocating for myself. I need to sit down for a minute."
Okay, block, because I'm at a point where I'm just no longer in the mood to explain myself because I don't have to.
Life is way too short for me to hate myself. Life is way too short for me to tolerate people that I don't want to fucking tolerate.
I do the bare fucking minimum and that's okay.
I'm gonna give a fuck about myself first.
Mundane things mean a lot to me right now.
I'm just fucking I'm over hating myself. That shit is for the birds. I'm not doing that shit anymore.
If it does not bring me joy, it will leave."

III: We Are

This is supposed to be a community where I was supposed to feel loved and accepted. And you guys are doing this bullshit?"
I've seen myself gravitate towards people who understand the struggle.
The key is being real on your side. It doesn't even have to be trauma bonding, I guess it can just be like, I struggle too.
We need somebody on the other side and kind of like, "you get that side, I got this side" we gotta pull it out.
I think that's how, you know, it was rough. We weren't even saying anything,
My life is very simple. Until I started thinking about racial identity and what that means to me. And then I'm like, fuck, I feel like I'm gonna be on this journey forever.
I want to see the community get closer. And in order for them to get closer they gotta feel welcome.
You can just feel people's energy. That's when I feel comfortable.
We just need to have our privileges. We just have to be seen like everybody else. That's the only difference.
I'm always gonna be in an uncomfortable position with these, like white folks and stuff. So it's like, kind of helps me in that way.
Make sure your health is fine. Make sure you have money

Be rich and give back to the community.
You have to learn your own body. You have to learn and be able to indulge in that shit without feeling like you've ruined yourself.
We bonded over the fact that we were all deeply traumatized.
Healing is not fun. But it's necessary, I guess.
I just don't have time for that shit. They're tired. I'm fucking tired. I'm alive and that's okay."
If I find myself in a place or in a group of people to where I don't feel comfortable saying that, then I'm not gonna be in that group…If I say that and someone gets uncomfortable, it's not my responsibility.
"I'm tired of sugarcoating and abiding to white fragility.
They were like, "oh, you were always free." And I was like, were we though?
It feels so good, to be Black and queer and trans all at the same time with people I don't fucking know. And we're just all feeling strong emotions. And were all just here and present.
I just existed in that space.
I want that feeling for me and also her.
There's no way to be fake Black. And I'm just existing as a Black person.
If I didn't have love and if I didn't have the friends that I have, I wouldn't be here
She was one of the first Black trans people I got really cool with. So meeting her definitely changed a lot for me.
When I meet people for the first time and we just click or just all the time are getting along that's a very telling thing for me. And obviously if you're Black and queer, or trans, you know, I love it even more.
I have my other friends, but they're not trans
I feel like just inherently for most trans people of color, if they had everything that they needed…
It's not that I don't like white people, it's just at the end of the day it's like, they can't, like, obviously, be able to get it. They don't have the lived experience as I do, say I was to date a white trans person, obviously they're trans too, but…

F: Photo Submissions, Phase 2

Figure 5 Ezekial's Photos

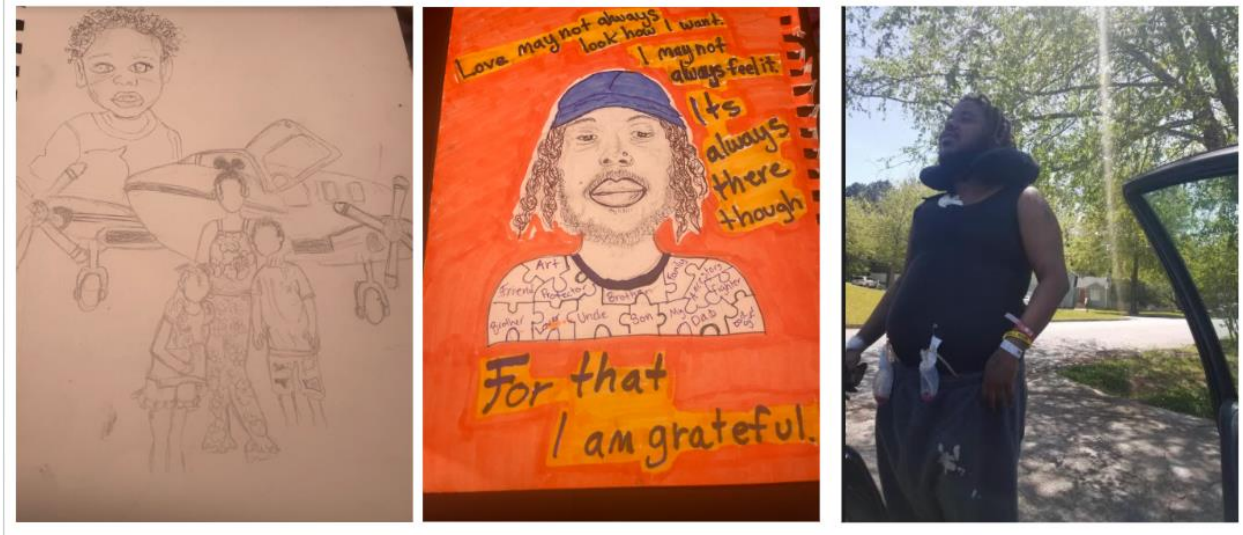

Figure 6 Saffron's Photos

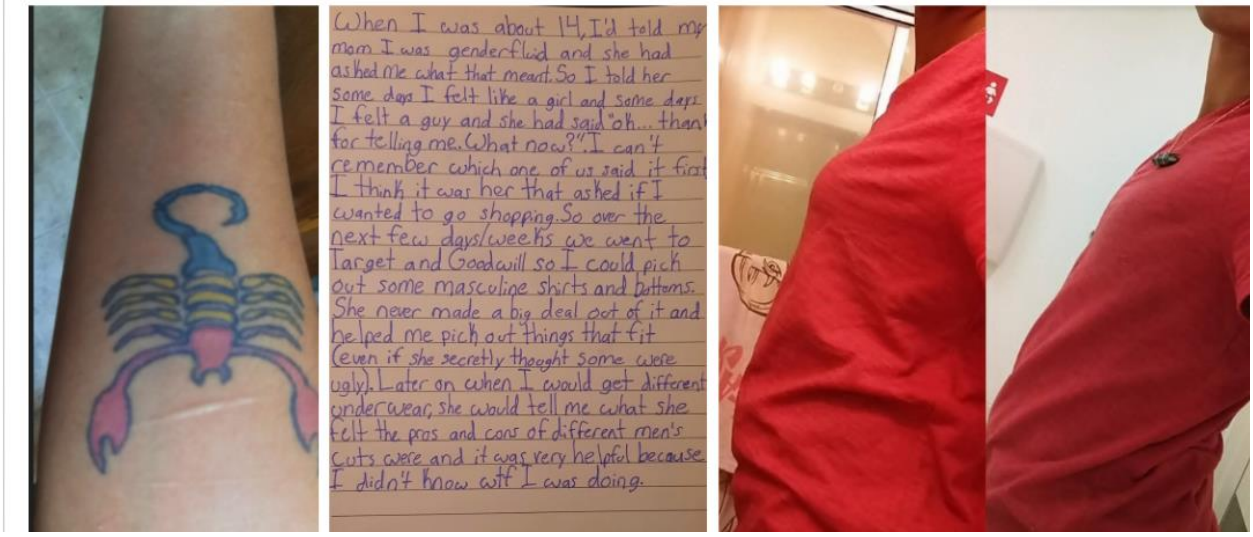

Figure 7 Juston's Photos

Figure 8 Alex's Photos

G: Sample Analysis Tables

Trans

	A	B	C	D	E
	Phase 1 Data	Trans: Mentions of gender and/or transness under larger theme of identity. Responds to ways transness influences how participants know and practice love. Organiz			
	Star	It doesn't feel a certain way to me because I use that term solely out of like, avoidance. Because I don't want to talk with cis people about it. I don't want to talk to trans people about it. Because I am very femme presenting, I was born female so it's like. It can very much be like, just shit that I haven't processed from when I had first came out and dealt with a lot of shit. But no, I don't use trans at all. I use non-binary, I use like enby, but like.	It's like other peoples' perception of transness. That's my problem. That's always been the problem.	it's like me identifying as enby is more personal at this point. Like it helps me be more comfortable with myself and I no longer feel the need to, like, showcase that. -IDENTITY for Star, and Star alone	I don't know if it's just burn out from like, doing activism work so early, and then getting like fucked over, or if it's like, I don't even like fuck with that shit any more. So, it's, but....[finishes bite] The only person who like I really interact with and like whose events I'll go to is my frend Rome. He's organizing like a trans day of play, where it's just like, all these trans folks and enby folks come together. And they like just have like, basically, uh what'd they used to call it in fucking elementary school? P- Field day? A- Yeah, it's jsut trans field day. And I love it!
	Saffron	And then there was Bethany who is pan, asterisk. That's a whole different. That's a different thing. I have some suspicions about her. P Asterisks are so helpful. F They really are trans asterisk.	I think in a broad sense, I think of myself as non-binary. And trans I feel like can also be used as an umbrella but like a smaller umbrella. So trans asterisk, it doesn't have to mean. I mean, you know, just transition, transitioning from whatever you were before to something else.	And maybe and again. And again, I think about that often. I'm like, you know, I'm comfortable where I'm at now, but depending on how far I make it in life, that could change a bunch of times. I was I remember coming out to my mom is gender fluid. And then it was trans man, and then now it's like, trans masc, non binary type of business. Gender queer is one I used for a while I liked that a lot, but I'm comfortable with non binary, it's very neutral. [laughs] And I'm feelin neutral, you know? Not Not anything in particular. It's kind of interesting	There is some nuance. I first and foremost, I feel like I gotta do and wear things that make me confident and make me comfortable. Like when I look in the mirror I'm like, that's a bad bitch of varying genders. So, maybe that's makeup one day, and maybe that's makeup and binding one day. Usually I just got my titties out. I don't wear bras or binders. I've just like you know, there's no point I'm just comfortable having my titties out. And, I know one other thing I mentioned in the survey is something I think about a lot is my leg hair. I don't have a lot of options. Because I fucking hate wearing pants. I hate wearing pants so much. So whenever I have the chance to show off my like leg hair, I'm just like I'm feeling it's not even like sick or dark.
	Juston	And like, I have to realize, like, as a non-binary person, I'm like, I am trans in a way.	because if somebody looks at me, they don't go, "oh you must be trans or non-binary". So at least I get that like, rep, like that privilege, I guess of being masc, presenting, um, you know, and I at least, I recognize that at least	I start to use it more just because I think of trans as like someone who goes from like, their assigned gender at birth, and you forget about all those X chromosomes. [Page laughs]. And they kind of like transition into this other gender. And that doesn't have to be male or female, or man or woman, when they start to, like, represent themselves as that new gender. And they have like, like, it doesn't care if they bought like, you know, did it with like biology or if they changed it altogether, it's about the mentality if they've like transitioned mentally	I have friends now who have finally gone they.

Struggle

Struggle/oppression/understanding of social circumstances responsible for oppression and marginalization						
	Intersectional analysis	**Trauma**	**Transphobia**	**at odds**	**awareness of police presence**	
	Star: "queer people of color. Like outside of being queer, you have to deal with the fact that you are a person of color, and you feel like you can't say certain things or do certain things or even exist without being hate crimed. So then you add a whole nother layer on top of that, and it's just like, we that's what that's why the videos like that's why the second video struggled with me so bad because they were like, Oh, you were always free. And I was like, were we though? Like, on a spiritual level? Yes, for sure. Physically existing in a society like that video fucked me up because I was like, I see what you're trying to say. But I really don't fuck with it." (p. 26).	as component of love- Ezekial- "I guess since I have you know, obviously been through so much I know what it's like to not have it" (1).	Star: Black woman mortality rates p. 11; Poe's death- another trans person murdered stat p15; (trans + anti-Blackness) ; quotes Angela Davis "changing the things I can't accept" p. 16	"As you know, I thought Damn, maybe it was gonna get better as I grew older, [laughs] but it is not. But you know, whatever. Perseverance is a hell of a thing. It's a hell of a thing. It's really tiring. Ezekial. 16	Ezekial: "They be either right there or right here over in this cliff and I know because I'd be watching because I don't have a license. Or like over there, right there. They love being over there."	
	Ezekial: "I mean inherently the world is obviously stacked up against me and all my you know, like intersectionality, so like she said me being who I am, and like using it and comfortable with myself like definitely, it's like, my own, damn what's the word?"			"We can call into their offices, we can oppose bills, we can organizwe protests, we can vote as much as weant but at the end of the day our bodies are political whether or not we want them to be" (Saffron questionnaire).		