

ABSTRACT

MEANS, DARRIS R. *Demonized No More: The Spiritual Journeys and Spaces of Black Gay Male College Students at Predominantly White Institutions.* (Under the direction of Audrey J. Jaeger, Ph.D.).

Spirituality plays a significant role in the lives of college students (Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, 2011; Bryant, Choi, & Yasuno, 2003; Chickering, 2006; Parks, 2000). However, Black gay males are uniquely positioned with regards to spirituality given how race, gender, and sexual orientation are generally perceived and experienced in the U.S. society.

Unfortunately, current research has overall excluded the spiritual experiences of Black gay male college students. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the spiritual journeys and spaces of Black gay male college students who attend predominantly White institutions. This study used Abes' (2009, 2012) "theoretical borderlands" concept as a framework for this study by employing two theoretical frameworks—constructivism and quare theory—to design the study, collect data, and analyze the data. Data collection involved interviews, field observations, and photovoice. Data were analyzed by first utilizing a constructivism lens, specifically self-authorship. Data were next analyzed by using a quare theory lens. The two theoretical frameworks were then applied to one case study to understand how the two frameworks worked together to inform the spiritual journey and spaces of one Black gay male college student. Major findings included: (a) the students perceived spirituality to be connected with their own religion but also connected to nature, science, and music; (b) the students experienced a spiritual trajectory along epistemological, intrapersonal, and interpersonal dimensions as they became authors of their own spirituality; (c) the students experience homophobia, racism, sexism, and classism during their spiritual journeys and in spiritual spaces; and (d) several students were able to resist the oppression

during their spiritual journey by resisting homophobia and racism in dominant spaces and creating spiritual counterspaces. The significance of the findings have implications for practice, policy, theory, and future research.

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Demonized No More: The Spiritual Journeys and Spaces of Black Gay Male College
Students at Predominantly White Institutions

by
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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother whose dying wish was for me to pursue higher education. Mom, I hope I have made you proud and exceeded your expectations. I could not have done it with you in my heart every step of the way. This dissertation is also dedicated to my grandfather who left school in first grade and never learned to read or write. He taught me the lesson of working hard to accomplish small and major goals. Finally, this dissertation is dedicated to my grandmother Josephine; younger brothers, Brandon and Calvin; aunts; uncles; cousins; mentors; and friends who have encouraged me to dream big, while always remembering my roots in Spartanburg, South Carolina.

On a final note, this dissertation is for LGBT youth, especially LGBT youth of color, who have ever been told they don't belong or ostracized for who they are as individuals. Resist these messages, stand proud, and love yourself.

BIOGRAPHY

Darris Roshawn Means is a native of Spartanburg, South Carolina where he attended K-12 public schools in Spartanburg County's District Six. He became a first-generation college student when he attended Elon University, and he graduated magna cum laude from Elon University in 2005 with a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Political Science and Sociology. Upon graduation, he was selected as the Elon University Youth Trustee on the Board of Trustees for a two-year term.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES	xi
LIST OF FIGURES	xii
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	1
Background	1
Religion and Spirituality	6
LGB Spirituality	9
African American Spirituality	11
African American LGB Spirituality	13
Purpose	15
CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE	19
Oppression and the Complexity of Identity in Higher Education	19
Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Students at PWIs	22
Black Students at PWIs	27
The Juxtaposition of Black and Male Identities at PWIs	31
Black, Gay, and Male Identities in Higher Education	34
Black Gay Men at PWIs	38
Spirituality in Higher Education	40
Spirituality and LGB College Students	45
Spirituality and Black College Students	46
Spirituality and Black Gay Male College Students	48
Spaces and Places	49
Critical Geography, Oppression, and Resistance	51
Spiritual and Religious Spaces	52
Spaces and Places and Higher Education	54
Conceptual Framework	55
Constructivism	57
Critical Theory	60
Quare Theory	63
Theoretical Borderlands: Constructivism and Quare Theory	69
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY	72
Introduction	72
Research Paradigm	73
Constructivism and Narrative	75
Counterstories and Quare Theory	76
Research Site and Sample Selection	78
Data Collection	79
Data Analysis	84
Analysis of Interviews and Photovoice	84
Analysis of the Interview Using a Constructivism Lens	85

Analysis of the Quare Interview	86
Analysis of Fieldnotes.....	87
Subjectivity Statement	88
Trustworthiness.....	91
Trustworthiness and Constructivism.....	91
Trustworthiness and Quare Theory.....	93
Methodology Summary	94
Organization of Findings	95
CHAPTER FOUR: INTERLUDE ONE.....	96
Developing Self-Authorship: The Spiritual Journeys and Spaces of.....	96
Black Gay Male College Students	96
Review of Literature	98
Spiritual Engagement of College Students	98
Spirituality and LGB College Students.....	101
Spirituality and Black College Students	102
Spirituality and Black Gay Male College Students.....	104
Theoretical Framework: Towards Self-Authorship.....	105
Methods.....	107
Narrative Approach.....	108
Research Sites and Participants.....	109
Data Collection.....	112
Data Analysis	113
Subjectivity Statement	115
Limitations	116
Trustworthiness	117
Participant Profiles.....	119
Alexander	119
Dante	119
Dez	120
Eric	121
John	121
Luke.....	122
Mark.....	123
S.....	123
Theogriote	124
Findings.....	125
One Term, Many Interpretations: Defining Spirituality	125
Towards Spiritual Self-Authorship	128
Epistemological dimension: Developing my own “guidelines.”	129
Intrapersonal dimension: towards reconciliation.	134
Interpersonal dimension: Exploration of spirituality with others.	138
Discussion.....	143

Implications.....	147
CHAPTER FIVE: INTERLUDE TWO.....	150
“Quaring” Spirituality: The Counterstories and Counterspaces of Black Gay Male College Students	150
Review of Literature	154
Black, Gay, and Male Identities in Higher Education	154
Black Gay Men and Spirituality.....	157
Quare Theory	159
Methodology.....	163
Research Site and Sample Selection	163
Data Collection.....	165
Data Analysis	167
Subjectivity Statement	168
Limitations	169
Trustworthiness.....	169
Findings.....	171
Quare Disconnections: Bullying, Coming Out, and Experiences of Oppression	172
Quare Connections: Finding Inner Strength and External Support	177
“Pray the Gay Away”: The Tragedy of Oppression on the Spiritual Lives of	
Quares	182
Resisting Demonization: Soul Force.....	190
Re-Claiming the soul through creative soul force.....	191
Re-Claiming the soul through resistant soul force in dominant settings.	193
Spiritual counterspaces.....	196
Discussion.....	200
Implications for Higher Education.....	204
CHAPTER SIX: INTERLUDE THREE	208
Spiritual Borderlands: A Black Gay Male College Student’s’ Spiritual Journey.....	208
Black Gay Men in Higher Education.....	209
Theoretical Borderlands.....	213
Methodology	215
Procedures.....	217
Data Analysis	217
My Spirituality is like a “Freight Train”: Narratives of Spirituality.....	218
Station 1: Spiritual Narratives of Life Before Coming Out	219
Station 2: Spiritual Narratives of Reconciliation	221
Station 3: Spiritual Narratives in College	223
Constructivism Perspective.....	226
Quare Theory Perspective	227
Discussion.....	228
Implications.....	229

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSIONS 231
REFERENCES 233
APPENDICES 268
 APPENDIX A: FIRST INTERVIEW PROTOCOL..... 269
 APPENDIX B: SECOND INTERVIEW PROTOCOL* 272

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Student Participants 110
Table 1: Student Participants 164

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Photovoice Pictures that Reflect Spiritual Journeys and Spaces 134
Figure 1: Photovoice Pictures that Reflect Spiritual Journeys and Spaces 200

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

“Yet the struggle of identities continues, the struggle of borders is our reality still. One day the inner struggle will cease and a true integration take place” (Anzaldúa, 1999, p. 85).

Background

The above quote from Gloria Anzaldúa (1999) reflects the struggle individuals have to integrate their identities to find peace in their lives. Inner peace is about striving for humanization and feeling like one can be fully recognized. Unfortunately, humanization is under constant threat by exploitation, injustice, and oppression (Freire, 1970/1993). There is a constant battle to resist demonization or dehumanization from internalized oppression, other individuals, as well as social structures and institutions. This resistance to demonization and dehumanization is particularly a struggle for marginalized individuals who are often made to be the “poster children” of corruption, demonization, and societal problems and whose bodies are seen as problematic during moral panics. Cohen (1972/2002) understood moral panics to be a period of moral unrest incited by the mainstream mass media or society to create fear or anxiety around an issue or a group of people. These moral panics often lead to a subgroup being demonized by society; these subgroups are considered “folk devils” (Cohen, 1972/2002; Griffiths, 2010).

However, there is an opportunity for one to resist this demonization and restore humanity for the oppressed and the oppressors. Freire (1970/1993) stated, “In order for this struggle to have meaning, the oppressed must not, in seeking to regain their humanity (which is a way to create it), become in turn oppressors of the oppressors, but rather restorers of the

humanity of both” (p. 44). By striving to restore humanity, the oppressed and oppressors can be liberated and establish a new order for humanity in society.

Black¹ gay male college students are a group of individuals who have been oppressed by society (Poynter & Washington, 2005; Washington & Wall, 2010). They find themselves straddling identities, specifically Black and gay, which are demonized and silenced in the United States (U.S.) (Collins, 2005; Rome, 2004; Rubin, 1993; Shallenberger, 1998; Sweasey, 1997). Black men in U.S. society are oftentimes viewed as dangerous, troubled, uneducated, poor, imprisoned, oversexed, disengaged, and responsible for the spread of HIV/AIDS (Boykin, 2005; Carbado, 2002, 2005; Celious & Oyserman, 2001; Collins, 2005; Jenkins, 2006; Noguera, 2003; Rome, 2004; Strayhorn, 2009b; Washington & Wall, 2010).

These portrayals of Black men are strongly embedded in the U.S. social systems of education, criminal justice, politics, media, and economics (Collins, 2005; Jenkins, 2006; Rome, 2004). In higher education, these portrayals often lead to Black college males being underserved and unappreciated (Strayhorn, 2009b). For example, Black men who attend predominantly White institutions (PWIs) report being under constant surveillance (Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007); feeling unwelcomed (Smith et al., 2007); being accused of gaining admission because of affirmative action policies (Harper & Griffin, 2010-2011); being feared by other students (Smith et al., 2007); feeling like outsiders (Smith et al., 2007); and being stereotyped as incapable of being educated (Strayhorn, 2009b). These feelings lead to

¹ African Americans, Black, and Black Americans are used interchangeably throughout this paper, but the terms are used to reflect an ethnic and cultural population who identify as being a part of the U.S. society.

fatigue, anger, and sometimes hopelessness (Smith et al., 2007). However, scholars have noted how Black men on college and university campuses have resisted these portrayals to be academically engaged campus leaders (Harper, 2006, 2008, 2009; Harper & Quayle, 2007; Strayhorn, 2009a). These Black male college student achievers often experience racism, but they resist being stereotyped through positive representation and confronting racist behavior or remarks (Harper, 2009).

Lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB²) individuals face similar demonization accusations as Black men in the U.S. society (Carbado, 2002; Rhoads, 1994; Rubin, 1993). LGB individuals are often viewed as being unnatural or deviant by society, especially in the medical profession (Rhoads, 1994; Rubin, 1993); legal system (Rubin, 1993); media (Carbado, 2002); and among religious and spiritual leaders (Carbado, 2002; Lake, 1999; Rubin, 1993; Shallenberger, 1998; Sweasey, 1997). LGB people are also blamed for HIV/AIDS (Carbado, 2002); the breakdown of the “traditional” family (Rubin, 1993); and child molestation (Carbado, 2002; Rubin, 1993). In higher education, LGB students often struggle to find a space free from discrimination on college campuses and a place where they can be themselves and potentially circumvent challenges and barriers (Rhoads, 1994). For example, LGB college students report harassment (Evans, 2001); invisibility (Evans, 2001;

² As the primary researcher of this study, I have decided to focus on lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals instead of transgender individuals. This division between LGB and T also demonstrates the importance of separating LGB as dealing with sexual orientation while transgender deals with gender identity (Renn, 2010).

Love, 1997; Rhoads, 1994); and physical violence (Rhoads, 1994) on college campuses because of their sexual orientation.

Similar to Black male college students, LGB college students have found ways to resist demonization. For instance, Stevens (2004) found that many gay men navigated internalized homophobia, fear, anxiety, isolation, and invisibility at their institutions, but they were successful in learning how to resist internal homophobia and embrace their sexual orientation identity to become advocates for gay rights. Furthermore, studies have recognized that there are many barriers for LGB students, but LGB students brought many of their strengths to higher education (Longerbeam, Inkelas, Johnson, & Lee, 2007). For example, Longerbeam et al. (2007) found that lesbian and gay students were more likely than their heterosexual peers to be involved in politics, social activism, and discussions about social issues.

Unfortunately, Black gay male college students have not only been demonized and silenced by dominant groups but also by their Black peers and White LGB peers. Many LGB students of color are ignored in higher education (Misawa, 2010; Renn, 2010; Stevens, 2004). The intersection of identities for Black gay male college students often clashes at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs), and they feel forced to choose between being gay or being Black (Poynter & Washington, 2005; Washington & Wall, 2010). Black gay men often feel like they lose their support network of peers in the Black community who can assist them with dealing with issues of racism and discrimination on college and university campuses (Goode-Cross & Good, 2009); they also often feel like they do not fit in with the

dominant White LGBT community on their campus (Goode-Cross & Good, 2009; Rhoads, 1994; Stevens, 2004). Additionally, Black LGBT students also report issues of racism within the dominant White LGBT community (Goode-Cross & Good, 2009; Poynter & Washington, 2005; Rhoads, 1994; Stevens, 2004).

Furthermore, the larger White gay community has made it taboo to discuss religion unless it is in the context of criticizing religion, particularly Christianity, for its hindrance of LGB rights (Poynter & Washington, 2005; Stevens, 2004; Sweasey, 1997; Washington & Wall, 2010). This taboo regarding religion can be problematic for Black Americans who often see religion and spirituality as the same (Dennis, Hicks, Banerjee, & Dennis, 2005; Martin & Martin, 2002) and who often seek religion and spirituality as a source of resilience and freedom (Herndon, 2010; Martin & Martin, 2002; Newlin, Knafl, & Melkus, 2002; Stewart, 1999; Washington & Wall, 2010; Watson, 2006).

The role of religion and spirituality in the African American culture makes it challenging for Black LGB college students to reject a critical part of their culture. First, religion and spirituality have played major roles in the development and sustainability of African American family and culture (Martin & Martin, 2002; Stewart, 1999; Walker & Dixon, 2002). Second, spirituality has been a source of strength for Blacks throughout history (Martin & Martin, 2002; Stewart, 1999; Watson, 2006). Newlin, Knafl, and Melkus (2002) illustrated this concept by stating that “specially, among African Americans, spirituality appears to serve as a potent source of liberation, guidance, healing, coping, peace, comfort, and protection, especially when confronted with life’s challenges or struggles” (pp.

65-66). Spirituality has been shown to be a source of resiliency for heterosexual Black males as well and has been shown to be a way to help Black males cope with the stress that is sometimes brought on by being a part of an underrepresented population at PWIs (Herndon, 2010). Furthermore, Strayhorn, Blakewood, and DeVita (2008) found Black gay male college students at PWIs “perceived themselves as self-determined, motivated, and independent, which in their view, affected their ability to succeed in college” (p. 99), but current research has not explored how spirituality impacts the experiences of Black gay male college students at PWIs.

Religion and Spirituality

The terms religion and spirituality are often used interchangeably (Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, 2011; Dyson, Cobb, & Fordman, 1997). Both terms involve a search process and may have a connection to the sacred (Hill, Pargament, Hood, Swyers, Larson, & Zinnbauer, 2000; Parks, 2000). Hill et al. (2000) describe religion and spirituality as referring “to a divine being, divine object, Ultimate Reality, or Ultimate Truth as perceived by the individual” (p. 66). While the two terms differ, religion and spirituality often overlap in one’s search for the sacred (Dyson et al., 1997; Hill et al., 2000; Tisdell, 2003).

Religion is viewed as a social institution along with the education, legal, and economic systems that have had a role in the socialization of people in the U.S. society (Bates, 2005; Lake, 1999). Munt (2010) states that “religion, understood sociologically, usually operating through the prism of theism or approved deities, proscribes morality and a way of life, imposes cultural norms and traditions and even ethnic identity” (p. 9). An

individual who is religious may seek the support of identifiable people who view the Ultimate Truth as the same based on their religious doctrine (Hill et al., 2000). Munt (2010) further discusses religion as the “outward, organised expression of an inner spirituality” (p. 9).

Unlike religion, spirituality is not always related to adopting a doctrine to determine how to have a connection to God or higher power (Hill et al., 2000). Furthermore, scholars have agreed that spirituality is about a journey, search, or active process (Astin et al., 2011; Conrad, DeBerg, & Porterfield, 2001; Hill et al., 2000; Martin & Martin, 2002; Munt, 2010; Stewart, 1999; Tanyi, 2002) and that religion and spirituality can overlap (Bryant, Choi, & Yasuno, 2003; Dyson et al., 1997; Hill et al., 2000; Tisdell, 2003). However, scholars vary on the connection that spirituality has to the sacred, to higher powers, or to other people. On one hand, some scholars have discussed how spirituality must be tied to the sacred based on self-chosen pursuits (Hill et al., 2000). Thus, an activity, lifestyle, event, or object cannot be spiritual unless it is tied to the sacred (Hill et al., 2000). For example, someone’s spirituality could not be gardening, drinking wine, or watching college sports unless it is tied to the sacred. On the other hand, several scholars have stated that spirituality is about giving meaning to life, and they have not emphasized the need for spirituality to be connected to the sacred (Astin et al., 2011; Tanyi, 2002). Tanyi (2002) proposed the following definition for spirituality:

Spirituality is a personal search for meaning and purpose in life, which may or may not be related to religion. It entails connection to self-chosen and or religious beliefs,

values, and practices that give meaning to life, thereby inspiring and motivating individuals to achieve their optimal being. This connection brings faith, hope, peace, and empowerment. The results are joy, forgiveness of oneself and others, awareness and acceptance of hardship and mortality, a heightened sense of physical and emotional well-being, and the ability to transcend beyond the infirmities of existence. (p. 506)

Tanyi (2002) mentions the idea of faith in her definition of spirituality. A central component of faith is one's belief in a religion, organization, or person(s) that connects them to others and provides greater meaning and purpose in life.

Scholars have noted the close relationship between faith and spirituality (Brandenberger & Bowman, 2013; Parks, 2000; Tisdell, 2003). Faith, on one hand, has ties to religious contexts (Brandenberger & Bowman, 2013; Fowler, 1981). Conversely, it is also seen as a concept about giving personal meaning and purpose to our lives in connection with others that is beyond religious traditions (Brandenberger & Bowman, 2013; Fowler, 1981; Parks, 2000). For instance, Parks (2000) explains how faith is about trust, connection, and belonging. Higher education scholars have often turned to Fowler's (1981) work on faith to apply it to the spiritual, faith, and religious development of college students. Fowler describes faith in this way: "Faith is an orientation of the total person, giving purpose and goal to one's hopes and strivings, thoughts and actions" (p. 14).

Building upon the work of Jean Piaget, Erik Erikson, and Lawrence Kohlberg, Fowler discusses seven stages of faith development that span one's lifetime. Faith relates to the

ideas of trust, connectedness, and meaning making which are central tenets of spirituality (Fowler, 1981; Parks, 2000; Tisdell, 2003). However, Fowler's stages of faith development have been criticized for being too restrictive and linear (Tisdell, 2003). Whereas Fowler presents faith as something you continuously reach as you age, spirituality is seen as a lifelong journey and a dynamic process (Hill et al., 2000; Tisdell, 2003). As the researcher, I have chosen to focus on spirituality for this study due to the lifelong journey and inclusion of both religion and faith that the definitions of spirituality allow.

In addition to defining spirituality, scholars have discussed spirituality in the context of marginalized groups, such as LGB individuals and Black Americans (Browne, 2010; Buchanan, Dzelme, Harris, & Hecker, 2001; Dennis et al., 2005; Love, Bock, Jannarone, & Richardson, 2005; Martin & Martin, 2002; Munt, 2010; Shallenberger, 1998; Stewart, 1999; Sweasey, 1997; Watson, 2006). The next sections provide an overview of spirituality for distinct groups.

LGB Spirituality

Many people see the LGB and spiritual or religious identities as opposed to one another (Browne, 2010; Buchanan et al., 2001; Love et al., 2005; Munt, 2010; Sweasey, 1997). Thus, LGB people seek spirituality through multiple avenues: (a) natural experiences, including being a part of nature; (b) internal guiding experiences that can be found through meditation or a religion that allows for inward reflection, like Buddhism; and (c) external guiding experiences through a religious institution, like Christianity or Judaism (Sweasey, 1997). However, in several cases, LGB people are cited as the cause for many world issues

or ostracized by some religious leaders or institutions (Rubin, 1993; Shallenberger, 1998; Sweasey, 1997). As a result, some LGB people often reject religious institutions after coming out (Rubin, 1993; Shallenberger, 1998; Sweasey, 1997). For example, in recent research, LGB college students were less likely to have a religious affiliation than their college counterparts (Longerbeam et al., 2007). Furthermore, demonization of LGB people by religious leaders sometimes leads LGBT people to become hostile towards religious institutions (Shallenberger, 1998; Sweasey, 1997). Although an increased number of religious denominations are becoming welcoming and affirming to LGB people, some in the LGB community see identifying as both LGB and religious as internalized homophobia or being naïve about the oppression caused by religious institutions (Shallenberger, 1998; Sweasey, 1997).

Nevertheless, some LGB individuals find ways to integrate their spiritual, religious and sexual orientation identities and overcome challenges not faced by their heterosexual counterparts (Buchanan et al., 2001; Love et al., 2005; Shallenberger, 1998). Many LGB people seek alternative spiritual spaces to integrate their multiple identities (O’Riordan & White, 2010; Yip & Khalid, 2010). Yip and Khalid (2010) state that “a spiritual space could be amorphous, transcending physical boundary, and often personalized space where one was able to have a spiritual experience or moment” (p. 104). Some LGB people can find spiritual space within themselves (Yip & Khalid, 2010), traditional places of worship (Yip & Khalid, 2010), or even the Internet (O’Riordan & White, 2010). Unfortunately, there continues to be a lack of research regarding LGB spirituality among Blacks in the U.S.

African American Spirituality

African Americans have a history of social, racial, political, and physical enslavement in the U.S., and they have often turned to African American spirituality to find freedom, joy, and strength (Martin & Martin, 2002; Stewart, 1999). Martin and Martin (2002) illustrated this point by stating, “Black spirituality is the sense of the sacred and divine that inspires, motivates, and uplifts Black people and endows them with dignity, self-worth, meaning, purpose, and hope as they seek to transcend and transform soul-destroying, life-threatening systems” (p. 11). However, religion and spirituality are often not seen as distinct in the African American culture (Dennis et al., 2005; Martin & Martin, 2002; Watson, 2006).

Martin and Martin (2002) explain further:

If Black people made any distinction between religiosity and spirituality, they often associated religion with a religious institution or denomination (such as the Black church) and associated spirituality with one’s personal and communal ties to an invisible supernatural realm (whether one belonged to a religious institution or not).
(p. 4)

Spirituality has shaped African American consciousness in the U.S. (Martin & Martin, 2002; Stewart, 1999). African Americans have traditionally used spirituality to re-center themselves during the toughest times in history (Stewart, 1999).

Stewart (1999) further discusses two essential elements of African American spirituality—creative soul force and resistant soul force:

Creative soul force has to do with those elements of spirituality that create cultural mechanisms that enable African Americans to adapt, transform, and transcend reality through the creative construction of black culture. Resistant soul force is the power to create, transform, and transcend those barriers and constraints that enforce complete domestication to those values, processes, behaviors, and beliefs that reinforce human devaluation and oppression. (p. 2)

Stewart (1999) further argues that there are five functional dynamics of African American spirituality: 1) formation of Black consciousness, 2) unification of African Americans, 3) legitimization of African-Americans as people, 4) the strength to challenge stereotypes, and 5) an instrument of personal and social transformation for African Americans. Watson (2006), building on Stewart's framework, states:

Spirituality and the notion of freedom are tightly intertwined for African Americans. This expression of freedom is evident through their efforts to create practices that pressure the inner spiritual self and to cultivate imagination and creativity as idioms of survival—an important dimension of African ideas of freedom. (p. 114)

Stewart also stated that the Black church is “the primary institution preserving the creation, perpetuation, and practice of black spirituality thus has engendered the development of spiritual practices that invariably insulate blacks from complete subjugation and dehumanization by the larger culture” (p. 121). African American spirituality was expressed by attending church, praying, reading scriptures, singing, reflecting, and dancing (Herndon, 2010; Martin & Martin, 2002), but spirituality more generally was expressed through an

active search process to be more connected to the divine while resisting demonization (Stewart, 1999). Historically, Black people have often turned to their spirituality to find space for freedom no matter how severe the circumstances (Martin & Martin, 2002; Newlin et al., 2002; Stewart, 1999; Watson, 2006).

Unfortunately, African American LGB people have a history of being demonized within the overall African American community (Harris-Lacewell, 2004). Although the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) has recently supported same-sex marriage, some predominantly African American churches and organizations continued (i.e. the Coalition of African American Pastors) to protest same-sex marriage and gay rights (Anonymous, 2012; Dickson, 2012; Snyder, 2012; Wolf, 2013), and public opinion polls continue to show that African Americans are less likely than White Americans to support same-sex marriage (Kearney, 2012; Pew, 2013).

African American LGB Spirituality

Studies found that Black gays and lesbians were very religious and spiritual like the overall Black population in the U.S. (Bates, 2005), but Black gays in church often did not express their sexual orientation identity (Icard, 1996; Johnson, 2000; Johnson, 2005). Many Black gay men and lesbians were silenced in the church, and some Black churches have been a major force in ostracizing and demonizing Black LGB individuals (Griffin, 2000; Harris-Lacewell, 2004; Johnson, 2005). Black religious leaders who attempt to create inclusive churches for gays are sometimes ostracized by their church membership and forced to step down or adopt anti-gay attitudes that exclude African American gays and lesbians (Griffin,

2000; Harris-Lacewell, 2004; hooks, 2000; Hutchinson, 2000). Hutchinson (2000) asserted that gay men are considered the modern-day bogeymen for Americans because they threaten the notion of masculinity, and Black gay men play the role of bogeyman within the Black community. However, hooks (2000) warned against this perception of Blacks being more homophobic than White Americans. In reality, she argued, White individuals still hold more power than Blacks to oppress individuals. Furthermore, it is important to recognize that “Black liberation and gay liberation are both undermined when these divisions are promoted and encouraged” (hooks, 2000, p. 72).

Nevertheless, Black gay men are sometimes rejected by the Black community because of their sexual orientation and the LGB community because of their race (Hutchinson, 2000). Black gay men seek alternative communities where their sexual orientation, racial, and spiritual identities are not just tolerated but embraced (Harris-Lacewell, 2004; Johnson, 2000). For example, Johnson (2000) provides a personal anecdote about how Black gay men find opportunities to bridge their sexual orientation, racial, and spiritual identities at a predominantly Black gay nightclub when the disc jockey stops the hip-hop music to play gospel music and testify to the crowd. This instance served as a spiritual moment for the gay men in the nightclub to become closer to each other and to a higher power. Despite this anecdote, the topic of spiritual spaces for Black gay male college students has not been empirically explored in the literature.

Purpose

Research has shown that college students who have engaged in spiritual exploration benefit academically, socially, and psychologically (Astin et al., 2011; Herndon, 2010; Love et al., 2005; Walker & Dixon, 2002; Watson, 2006). Scholars have even recognized that the research on spiritual struggles and journeys of marginalized students were often left out (Chae, Kelly, Brown, & Bolden, 2004; Dennis et al., 2005; Herndon, 2010; Love et al., 2005; Park & Millora, 2010; Walker & Dixon, 2002; Watson, 2006). Scholars have explored the spiritual explorations and struggles of lesbian and gay college students (Love et al., 2005; Rockenbach, Walker, & Luzader, 2012), students of color (Chae et al., 2004; Dennis et al., 2005; Park & Millora, 2010; Walker & Dixon, 2002), and Black college males (Herndon, 2010; Watson, 2006; Wood & Hilton, 2012).

There is little research on the spiritual narratives and spiritual exploration experiences of college students with multiple marginalized identities at PWIs. For example, scholars have discussed how spirituality can be a source of resiliency and freedom for Black male college students (Herndon, 2010; Watson, 2006; Wood & Hilton, 2012), but current research has not explored how spirituality may impact the experiences of Black gay male college students. Furthermore, scholars have discussed how Black gay male students struggle with fitting in with the Black community and LGB communities at PWIs (Goode-Cross & Good, 2009; Washington & Wall, 2010), but research has not explored to what extent the spiritual journeys and spiritual spaces of Black gay male college students impact their challenges. Also, given the academic, psychological, social and other benefits of spiritual exploration, it

is important to develop a body of research that begins to understand the benefits (and challenges) of spirituality for Black gay male college students.

This study explored the spiritual narratives and spaces of Black gay male college students as they navigate their spiritual journeys. This study also explored their counterstories and counterspaces of spirituality as they resisted demonization, dehumanization, and silence by dominant and other marginalized groups. Counterstories are the stories told by marginalized individuals that resist master narratives or mainstream discourse about what it means to be a part of a marginalized group (Bell, 2003; Carney, 2004; Yosso, 2006), while counterspaces are sites where marginalized people can resist master narratives and can create and participate in a positive, self-enhancing and affirming space for their identities (Case & Hunter, 2012; Nuñez, 2011; Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000).

In this study, I used narratives and counterstories to explore the following questions:

- (1) How do Black gay male undergraduate college students navigate their spiritual journey?
- (2) How do Black male undergraduate college students find and create their own spiritual space?

As the researcher of this study, I did not define spirituality for participants. Since this study is an exploratory study into the spirituality of Black gay and bisexual male students in higher education, I believed it was important to acknowledge the various ways that the participants may define spirituality for themselves. However, this study used Yip's and

Khalid's (2010) definition of spiritual space: "A spiritual space could be amorphous, transcending physical boundary, and often personalized space where one was able to have a spiritual experience or moment" (p. 104). I believe this definition allows participants to transcend the "traditional" definitions of spiritual space where they may have at times been demonized or silenced, such as churches, synagogues, or mosques; this flexible definition allows participants to feel empowered to identify their spiritual space whether that is a religious space or not.

This study uses Abes' (2009, 2012) "theoretical borderlands" concept as a framework. Abes argued that "all theoretical frameworks that guide research are incomplete" (p. 141) and argued for using multiple theoretical frameworks to better understand the experiences of college students. This study uses a borderland theoretical framework approach to better understand the meaning-making, successes, and barriers of Black gay men in higher education as they navigate their spiritual journeys and locate spiritual spaces. This study will employ constructivism and quare theory. Constructivism is concerned with how individuals make meaning (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), while quare theory is concerned with interrogating racism and heterosexism in social structures and institutions, specifically how these "isms" impact LGB individuals of color (Johnson, 2005).

Constructivism and quare theory complement each other. While constructivism focuses on the micro-level and meaning-making processes (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), quare theory focuses on interrogating the system of oppression for LGB individuals of color (Johnson, 2005). Both were selected to better frame the understanding of the spiritual

journeys and spaces of Black gay male college students at PWIs. While constructivism explores the spiritual narratives and spaces of Black gay male college students who attend PWIs, quare theory explores the spiritual counterstories and counterspaces of Black gay male college students who attend PWIs. Together, constructivism and quare theory explore the borderlands for Black gay men. These two perspectives guided the methodology of the study, including the research approach, data collection, data analysis, validity, reliability, and the presentation of findings. This study challenges the master narrative on what it means to be spiritual, gay, Black, and male by exploring the voices, experiences, stories, successes, and struggles of Black gay men at PWIs during their spiritual journey. Furthermore, this study deepens the current knowledge on spirituality by exploring an overlooked population of college students—Black gay male college students.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This literature review examines oppression and the complexity of identity in higher education. The literature review specifically looks at the experiences of LGB and Black students and then moves to looking at the literature on the intersection of identities and the collegiate experiences of Black males and Black gay males in higher education. This section also examines work on spirituality in order to place the collegiate experiences of Black gay males in the context of spirituality in higher education. The literature review then examines work on geography, specifically the notions of space and place in society and in higher education. Finally, this chapter concludes with a review of literature on the conceptual framework for this study.

Oppression and the Complexity of Identity in Higher Education

Chesler, Lewis, and Crowfoot (2005) discuss institutional racism and how it is promoted and sustained through organizational factors in higher education such as culture, power, climate, membership, and social relations. Institutional racism at PWIs can be extended to institutional homophobia to understand the organizational factors in higher education that promote and sustain homophobia. Institutional racism and institutional homophobia in higher education shape the experiences and perspectives of students, faculty, and staff in marginalized and dominant groups. Institutional racism and homophobia particularly impact those individuals with multiple marginalized identities, such as Black and gay. Thus, an intersectionality framework is useful for higher education researchers and

practitioners to consider when analyzing the experiences of students with multiple marginalized identities.

The intersectionality framework, a framework that emerged from the critique of overlooked voices of Black women, emphasizes the importance of understanding the intersection of identities (Crenshaw, 1994; Hancock, 2007; Ken, 2008; McCall, 2005; Tester, 2008). This intersection can and does shape one's experiences and how one is viewed in society (Crenshaw, 1994; Hancock, 2007; Ken, 2008; McCall, 2005; Tester, 2008). Individuals can have both dominant and marginalized identities (Tatum, 2010; Kirk & Okazawa-Rey, 2010). This intersection of an individual's dominant and marginalized identities is their social location, "a way of expressing the core of a person's existence in the social and political world" (Kirk & Okazawa-Rey, 2010, p. 14). Kirk and Okazawa-Rey further explained social location:

Because social location is where all the aspects of one's identity meet, our experience of our own complex identities is sometimes contradictory, conflictual, and paradoxical. We live with multiple identities that can be both enriching and contradictory and that push us to confront questions of loyalty to individuals and groups. (p. 14)

Higher education scholars have used intersectionality approaches to understand the complexity of identity in higher education and the impact of social location on how students navigate their collegiate experiences (Abes, 2012; Abes & Jones, 2004; Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007; Abes & Kasch, 2007; Harper, Wardell, & McGuire, 2011; Jones &

McEwen, 2000; Jones, Kim, & Skendall, 2012). For example, Jones and McEwen (2000) introduced the Model of Multiple Dimension of Identity (MMDI) to understand how a student's core self and categorical differences of identity impact their development within various contexts. Harper et al. (2011) applied MMDI to demonstrate the complexity of identities for college men. Higher education researchers have demonstrated how these multiple identities can clash (Abes et al., 2007) and how individuals with multiple marginalized identities can find the management of these identities to be exhausting and stressful (Goode-Cross & Good, 2008, 2009; Harris, 2003).

However, as Abes and Jones (2004) found, college students are not always aware of how multiple identities can impact their development; they found that students were not self-aware of how the expectations and norms of their racial and sexual orientation identities impacted their coming out processes. Scholars have demonstrated how multiple, marginalized, intersecting identities can have not only a negative impact on college students, but also a positive impact (Strayhorn et al., 2008).

Much of higher education research has used a deficiency lens to demonstrate the barriers to success for marginalized students. Some higher education researchers have provided counterstories to present the challenges and also the successes of marginalized students (Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007; Harper, 2006, 2008, 2009; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Strayhorn, 2009a). Counterstories are the stories told by people, particularly marginalized people, to offer a counter voice to the majoritarian voices that often rely on stereotypes to describe the lives of marginalized people (Bell, 2003; Misawa, 2010; Yosso, 2006).

Counterstories add a critical layer of information to the public discourse that allows people to begin to truly understand the experiences of marginalized groups (Bell, 2003; Carney, 2004; Harper, 2009; Misawa, 2010; Yosso, 2006). This literature review of marginalized students in higher education highlights strengths as well as barriers, first focusing on one-dimensional identities to understand the challenges and opportunities for LGB and Black students at PWIs, and then focusing on the experiences of Black male students and Black gay male students at PWIs.

Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Students at PWIs

College and university campuses have not been isolated from heterosexism and homophobia, and these institutions have a history of restricting the activities and identities of LGB students (Dilley, 2002, 2005; Love, 1999; Rhoads, 1994). Prior to the late 1960s, LGB college students were often punished for their identities (Dilley, 2002; Marine, 2011). They were expelled, referred to mental health facilities to get “cured,” or made to feel ashamed (Dilley, 2002; Marine, 2011). Many colleges and universities even developed their own “treatment” programs to attempt to rid students of their homosexuality (Dilley, 2002). College and university administrators often partnered with local law enforcement to try to catch students in the act of same-sex sexual behavior (Dilley). Students felt pressured to remain silent about their sexual orientation identities to avoid expulsion, suspension, legal trouble, or being referred to on-campus and off-campus mental health facilities (Dilley, 2002, 2005; Marine, 2011). Students had to create an underground culture to meet people who also

identified as LGB, but it still remained challenging for LGB students to connect with each other, thereby leading students to feel isolated and invisible (Dilley, 2002; Marine, 2011).

The 1960s were an optimal time for a gay rights movement. There were protests around civil rights for African Americans, the Vietnam War, and other social issues. The pinnacle of the gay rights movement happened with Stonewall in New York City in the summer of 1969 when LGB individuals and their allies began protesting against law enforcement's raids of LGB establishments and their brutality and oppression towards LGBT individuals (Cawthon & Guthrie, 2011; Marine, 2011). While the gay movement of the 1960s was occurring, LGB students were trying to form communities on college campuses that were heavily resisted by the administration (Dilley, 2002, 2005; Marine, 2011). Students organized activities, lectures, and protests; many of their tactics were borrowed from Black students' activism during the Civil Rights Movement (Marine, 2011). Due to restricted activities, LGB students entered into legal battles with colleges and universities, and LGB students won many battles on the grounds of freedom of speech yet lost some battles on the grounds of sodomy laws (Dilley, 2002, 2005). Marine (2011) explains a key victory for LGB students: "[A]s the breakthrough moment for the BGLT³ resistance movement neared, the first chapter of the Student Homophile League (or SHL, later called 'Gay People at

³ BGLT (bisexual, gay, lesbian, and transgender) reflects the acronym used by Marine (2011). The author uses LGB to reflect that lesbian, gay, and bisexual has to do with sexual orientation, while transgender has to do with gender.

Columbia-Barnard') was founded at Columbia University in 1967 by an openly bisexual student named Stephen Donaldson, aka Robert Martin" (p. 21).

Demonstrations and protests for LGB rights also occurred on several college and university campuses across the country throughout the late twentieth century (Marine, 2011). LGB students and their allies demanded queer studies and LGB centers on their campuses, and their movement had great success (Marine, 2011). For example:

As the result of an important congruence of events, Penn State's bucolic campus became the site of a small but meaningful student protest in 1992, when approximately thirty members of the lesbian, gay, and bisexual student alliance joined together to declare pride in their identities as part of National Coming Out Day. (Marine, 2011, p. 25)

There has also been an increase of LGB student organizations since the 1960s (Cawthon & Guthrie, 2011). LGB students and their allies involved in these efforts played a critical role in transforming their campuses into a more welcoming environment for non-heterosexual students, faculty, and staff (Marine, 2011).

Nevertheless, LGB students continue to struggle for space and support on their campus today (Dilley, 2002; Fine, 2012). Current studies have explored LGB students' navigation of homophobia on their respective campuses and their perception of campus climate (Brown, Clark, Gortmaker, & Robinson-Keilig, 2004; D'Augelli, 1992; Evans, 2001; Rhoads, 1994; Tomlinson & Fassinger, 2003), support systems available that impact a

students' success (Dilley, 2005; Evans & Herriott, 2004; Renn, 2007; Stevens, 2004), and how students label their sexual orientation identity (Dilley, 2005).

First, studies have explored the discrimination, harassment, verbal insults, and violence experienced by LGB students on their college and university campuses (D'Augelli, 1992; Evans, 2001; Rhoads, 1994) and perception of campus climate (Brown et al., 2004; Tomlinson & Fassinger, 2003). LGB students reported a more negative campus climate (Brown et al., 2004). This negative perception of campus climate may be due to research that has found gay and lesbian students endured verbal insults, property damage, and fear of potential harassment (D'Augelli, 1992). Furthermore, LGB students had to navigate expectations and barriers from dominant culture and sometimes other LGB students (Abes, 2012; Love, 1999; Stevens, 2004). For instance, Stevens (2004) found that gay men navigated internalized homophobia, fear, anxiety, isolation, and invisibility at their institutions, but they were successful in learning how to resist internal homophobia and embrace their sexual orientation identity to become advocates for gay rights. Furthermore, studies have recognized that there are many barriers for LGB students, but LGB students brought a lot of strengths to higher education (Longerbeam et al., 2007). For example, Longerbeam et al. found that lesbian and gay students were more likely than their heterosexual peers to be involved in politics, social activism, and discussions about social issues.

Second, studies have explored the support networks available to LGB students through LGB student organizations (Dilley, 2005; Evans & Herriott, 2004; Renn, 2007);

faculty and staff (Renn, 2007); peers (Renn, 2007); allies (Stevens, 2004); other LGB students (Stevens, 2004); and family members (Renn, 2007). Evans and Herriott (2004) found that LGB student organizations helped first-year LGB students feel more comfortable and connected on their college campus. Another study found that involvement and leadership in a LBGT student organization increased a student's awareness of career plans, social issues, and of themselves as an activist (Renn, 2007).

Third, Dilley (2005) discussed the challenge of labeling non-heterosexual identities since many students did not necessarily identify with the labels "gay" or "queer." Dilley's (2005) study of gay male college student typologies concluded with the following male non-heterosexual identities: gay, queer, closeted, "normal," and parallel. The gay identity was used to describe male college students who were thinking about the gay identity as a social identity. Dilley also described gay students as individuals who demanded to have opportunities that mirrored the ones available to heterosexual students, such as student organizations and activities. Queer was used to describe students who were often politically active in moving LGBT rights forward (Dilley, 2005; Rhoads, 1994). Unlike students who identified as gay, queer students did not seek acceptance from their heterosexual peers but challenged the norms of society about sexual orientation identity (Dilley, 2005). Closeted male college students acknowledged attraction and feelings towards men, but they avoided social contexts that would reveal these attractions and feelings (Dilley, 2005). "Normal" male college students engaged in sexual activity with men, but they did not allow it to define their overall identity; they still considered themselves to be heterosexual (Dilley, 2005).

Parallel male college students compartmentalized their lives and identified as “straight” or non-heterosexual depending on the social setting (Dilley, 2005). Dilley suggests higher education researchers and practitioners rethink how they label students to be more inclusive of all non-heterosexual students (Dilley, 2005).

Black Students at PWIs

The history of higher education is one that is dominated by the exclusion of Blacks (Flowers & Shuford, 2011; Harper, Patton, & Wooden, 2009). As Flowers and Shuford noted, “The dream of achieving a higher education for African Americans prior to the Civil War was suppressed by a social system that could only succeed if slaves were kept in ignorance and a state of submissiveness” (p. 145). The first opportunity to attend postsecondary education for many Blacks after the Civil War was through Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) (Jackson & Nunn, 2003; Palmer & Gasman, 2008; Sissoko & Shiau, 2005).

HBCUs were established to provide Black Americans access to higher education in the United States when other institutions denied their rights to a postsecondary education (Jackson & Nunn, 2003; Palmer & Gasman, 2008; Sissoko & Shiau, 2005). From the mid-1800s until the late 1960s, a majority of Blacks were educated at HBCUs; however, the enrollment rates at HBCUs have undergone changes due to a shift in the political and social climate in the United States since the 1960s (Kim, 2002; Palmer & Gasman, 2008). Today, HBCUs no longer educate the majority of Black students in the United States; instead, PWIs have taken that role (Harper et al., 2009; Kim & Conrad, 2006; Kimbrough & Harper, 2006;

Sissoko & Shiau, 2005). The landmark Supreme Court case *Brown v. Board of Education*, the court decision that made segregation in education unconstitutional in the United States, and the Higher Education Act of 1964, legislation that restricted federal funding from institutions that practice racial discrimination, led to an increase in Black students who attend PWIs (Palmer & Gasman, 2008; Sissoko & Shiau, 2005). Research on Black students has mostly documented the challenges and barriers, but research is now beginning to focus on the successes and strengths of Black students.

In terms of the barriers and challenges for Black students at PWIs, research has shown Black students tend to be less academically prepared for college and have lower college GPAs compared to their White peers (Fischer, 2007; Leppel, 2002). These academic challenges have led Black students to have a lower college persistence rate than their peers (Berger & Milem, 1999). Black students at PWIs have reported navigating institutional racism, which likely creates the barriers and challenges faced by them (Fischer, 2007; Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002). Studies have noted that PWIs have less supportive environments than HBCUs for Black students (Berger & Milem, 1999; Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002; Harris, 2003; Jackson & Nunn, 2003; Kimbrough & Harper, 2006; Palmer & Gasman, 2008). Black students at PWIs have a lack of opportunities to engage with faculty members (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002; Harper, Carini, Bridges, & Hayek, 2004; Kim & Conrad, 2006; Palmer & Gasman, 2008) and limited access to positive, Black role models (Palmer & Gasman, 2008). Campus activities at PWIs are often geared towards White students (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002). Black students at PWIs have limited supportive peer groups (Fries-Britt & Turner,

2002; Palmer & Gasman, 2008) and often felt lonely (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002). Black students reported that when included, they were asked to represent or speak on behalf of the Black population (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002).

Several studies have debunked the anti-intelligent stereotypes of Black students by discussing factors that contribute to academic success (Cole, 2011) and the experiences of high-achieving Black students (Davis, Dias-Bowie, Greenberg, & Klukken, 2004; Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007; Guiffrida, 2005). First, Cole (2011) debunked this idea of anti-intellectualism in his study and found participants benefited in their intellectual self-concept through studying with groups and receiving support and encouragement from faculty. Second, studies on high-achieving Black students at PWIs have found that they had many negative experiences including overt forms of racism (Davis et al., 2004), unfair treatment by White faculty, staff, and students (Davis et al., 2004), isolation (Davis et al., 2004), the need to prove themselves academically to faculty and White students (Davis et al., 2004; Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007), the expectation to speak on behalf of all Black individuals (Davis et al., 2004; Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007), and invisibility (Davis et al., 2004). However, high-achieving Black students resisted these negative experiences (Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007). Fries-Britt and Griffin conducted a study on high-achieving Black students in an honors program at a PWI, and they found that students resisted these negative experiences by demonstrating incongruent behavior of Black stereotypes and by confronting racism.

Studies have also explored factors that could help Black students with success in college (Guiffrida, 2003; Love, 2008; Museus, 2008; Museus, Nichols, & Lambert, 2008;

Patton, 2006; Strayhorn, 2011). Studies have shown the following as helping students with success in college: involvement in predominantly Black student organizations (Guiffrida, 2003; Museus, 2008; Strayhorn, 2011); faculty support (Fischer, 2007; Guiffrida, 2003, 2005; Lundberg, 2012; Museus et al., 2008); family support (Love, 2008); positive perception of campus racial climate (Museus et al., 2008); and presence of Black Culture Centers (Patton, 2006).

First, Black students find support through Black student organizations (Guiffrida, 2003; Strayhorn, 2011). Guiffrida's study found that Black student organizations helped students with their social integration on campus by giving them access to faculty members, an opportunity to contribute on and off campus, a safe space where they would feel comfortable, and avenues for meaningful connections with other Black students. Museus (2008) also found that student organizations could serve as venues for expressing their identity, educating others, and advocating for change at their university. Second, Black students at PWIs found support through faculty members (Guiffrida, 2003). For instance, Guiffrida's (2005) study on high-achieving African American students found that faculty members, primarily Black faculty members who were "student centered" and willing to help students with challenges and opportunities outside of the classroom, were seen as assets. Third, Love (2008) found that family members could create psychological distress for students, but family members who provided warmth and care could help students successfully navigate their college experience. Fourth, Museus et al. (2008) found that greater satisfaction with campus racial climate was associated with students utilizing study

groups and speaking with faculty outside of the classroom, which led to a greater likelihood of degree attainment. Fifth, Black Culture Centers were shown to support Black students at PWIs, especially first-year students as they transitioned to college (Patton, 2006). These support mechanisms helped Black college students navigate their collegiate experiences, but research has shown the gender imbalance between Black females and males is a challenge that needs to be addressed (Cuyjet, 2006; Palmer, Davis, Moore, & Hilton, 2010).

The Juxtaposition of Black and Male Identities at PWIs

Research on Black male college students has explored the strengths, successes, challenges, and barriers at PWIs (Bonner & Bailey, 2006; Brown, 2006; Cuyjet, 2006; Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007; Harper, 2006, 2008, 2009; Harper & Harris, 2006; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Harper, Davis, Jones, McGowan, Ingram, & Platt, 2011; Leppel, 2002; McClure, 2006; Palmer et al., 2010; Smith et al., 2007; Strayhorn, 2008, 2009a; Watkins, Green, Goodson, Guidry, & Stanley, 2007; Zell, 2011). This section explores these challenges and successes.

Black male students have lower college enrollment, persistence, and college graduation rates than many of their same-aged peers (Bowen, Chingos, & McPherson, 2009; Cuyjet, 2006; Leppel, 2002; Palmer et al., 2010). In addition, the African American gender imbalance at PWIs has women dramatically outnumbering their male counterparts in college enrollment statistics (Cuyjet, 2006; Palmer et al., 2010). This problem becomes even more glaring when considering the intersection of other historically marginalized identities. For example, only 4% of low-income Black males finish a college degree in their 20's (Carey, 2008). Unfortunately, higher education leaders and researchers have used the above statistics

to describe all Black men in crisis as if they are a monolithic group (Cuyjet, 2006; Harper, 2009).

Furthermore, there are negative stereotypes about Black male students because of the ways they are represented in the media and perceived by overall society (Brown, 2006; Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007; Harper et al., 2011). Black men at PWIs reported being under constant surveillance (Smith et al., 2007); feeling unwelcomed (Smith et al., 2007); feeling like they did not belong (Brown, 2006; Smith et al., 2007); being accused of gaining admission because of affirmative action policies (Harper & Griffin, 2010-2011); being feared by other students (Smith et al., 2007); feeling like outsiders (McClure, 2006; Smith et al., 2007); being assumed to be a college athlete (Brown, 2006; Cuyjet, 2006); being expected to know everything about Black culture (Harper et al., 2011); having a lack of Black faculty and staff who supported them (Harper et al., 2011); and being stereotyped as incapable of being educated (Strayhorn, 2008). These feelings and experiences lead to fatigue, anger, hopelessness, and psychological distress (Smith et al., 2007; Watkins et al., 2007). For example, Smith et al. (2007) reported that Black men at PWIs dealt with anger, frustration, and hopelessness as they navigated White dominated spaces on and off campus that questioned their legitimate presence at their universities. These stereotypes and feelings often led Black male college students to question their own academic ability (Bonner & Bailey, 2006; Strayhorn, 2009a) and feel a need to work twice as hard as their White peers (Harper et al., 2011; Strayhorn, 2009a).

Researchers have recognized these barriers and challenges, yet others have also highlighted the support systems, strengths, and successes of Black male undergraduate students (Bonner & Bailey, 2006; Harper, 2006, 2008, 2009; Harper & Harris, 2006; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Harper et al., 2011; McClure, 2006; Strayhorn, 2008, 2009a, 2009b; Zell, 2011). Black male college students found support through their same-race peers (Bonner & Bailey, 2006; Harper, 2006, 2008); Black faculty and staff members (Harper et al., 2011); campus administrators (Harper, 2008); family (Bonner & Bailey, 2006; Harper, 2006); a higher power (God) (Harper, 2006); and themselves (Harper, 2006).

Researchers have also highlighted the positive experiences of Black male undergraduate students who are involved in campus organizations, such as predominantly Black student organizations and historically Black fraternities (Bonner & Bailey, 2006; Harper, 2006, 2008; Harper & Harris, 2006; Harper & Quaye, 2007; McClure, 2006; Zell, 2011). Campus involvement in predominantly Black and White student organizations helped Black male college students develop critical skills such as cross-cultural communication and to build connections that had the potential to help them in the future (Harper, 2008; Harper & Quaye, 2007).

Black male college students' involvement in student organization also related to their interest in uplifting the African American community (Harper & Quaye, 2007; McClure, 2006). For instance, McClure (2006) found in a qualitative study on the experiences of Black men in a historically Black fraternity at a PWI that they felt a need to reach out to other Black students and to provide support for them as they navigated a predominantly

White space. Campus involvement seemed to help students feel more connected which led them to stay at their colleges and universities (Harper, 2008; Harper & Quaye, 2007; McClure, 2006). However, Black male college student leaders at PWIs often felt like they were tokenized by being asked to serve on committees to represent the “voice” of all Black students on their campuses (Harper & Quaye, 2007). Nevertheless, the Black male student leaders at PWIs found this tokenism to be an opportunity to develop a platform to advocate for the needs of students of color (Harper & Quaye, 2007).

Higher education researchers have also noted that there is an overlooked population of academically-engaged campus leaders on college and university campuses who are Black men (Harper, 2006, 2008, 2009; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Strayhorn, 2009a). These Black male college student achievers often experience racism, but they resist being “niggered” (Harper, 2009, p. 699) through positive representation and confronting racist behavior or remarks. These high-achieving Black men also felt like they had positive connections with high-ranking campus administrators who made their collegiate experiences more meaningful (Harper, 2008); they also often had access to social capital that provided them with internship, job, fellowship, and scholarship opportunities not available to other students (Harper, 2008).

Black, Gay, and Male Identities in Higher Education

There continues to be a lack of research on the experiences of LGB students of color (Misawa, 2010; Renn, 2010; Stevens, 2004). The research on Black gay male college students’ strengths, successes, and resiliency is almost non-existent in higher education.

Social worker researchers Akerlund and Cheung (2000) emphasized the need for more research on how LGB people of color utilize strengths and strategies to be successful. The current research on Black gay male college students is focused mostly on challenges related to how they deal with a variety of barriers, including the lack of a supportive network of faculty and peers, difficulties with psychological and personal challenges, as well as struggling as a double minority at PWIs (Goode-Cross & Good, 2008, 2009; Harris, 2003; Henry, Richards, & Fuerth, 2011; Patton, 2011; Strayhorn & Mullins, 2012; Washington & Wall, 2010).

Black male college students have found it difficult to identify a support network of Black male faculty, staff, and administrators due to a lack of available Black male mentors (Washington & Wall, 2010). The intersection of racial and sexual orientation identities has made it even more challenging for Black gay men in college to find faculty, staff, and administrators on their campuses who also identify as Black and gay (Washington & Wall, 2010). Washington & Wall (2010) noted that Black gay men in higher education had to rely on White gay and bisexual men to serve as mentors.

While research has supported the fact that any type of faculty/staff to student mentoring is helpful, there are perceivable differences between the experiences of Black gay men and White gay men in higher education (Goode-Cross & Good, 2009; Rhoads, 1994; Washington & Wall, 2010). For example, many institutions of higher education, specifically PWIs, have had and continue to have practices that promote racial exclusion, racial subordination, and forced racial assimilation in their admission policies, mission statements,

institutional visions, academic experiences, and general student life experiences (Chesler & Crowfoot, 1989; Chesler et al., 2005). White gay men, unlike Black gay men, do not have to navigate this system of racism that favors Whiteness in higher education (Chesler et al., 2005; Poynter & Washington, 2005; Rhoads, 1994; Stevens, 2004).

Black gay male college students also struggle with identifying a peer support network on their college campuses (Goode-Cross & Good, 2009; Stevens, 2004). Research has shown that “out” Black gay male college students are sometimes ostracized by the Black community and therefore struggle to identify a support network of peers who can potentially assist them in dealing with issues of racism and discrimination on college and university campuses (Goode-Cross & Good, 2009; Stevens, 2004). Furthermore, Black gay men approach potential friendships based on how they believe people will respond to their sexual orientation identity (Goode-Cross & Good, 2008). Patton (2011) showed that Black gay male college students feared being involved with LGBT student organizations because of the fear of being “outed,” which could lead to eliminating another social support network, LGBT students. Ultimately, Goode-Cross and Good’s (2008) study, Black gay men turned to each other for support, but these support circles were oftentimes small. Unfortunately, Black gay male college students have found it difficult to locate safe spaces on campus that have accepted both their racial-ethnic and sexual orientation identities (Goode-Cross & Good, 2008).

Black gay men must deal with psychological ramifications for identifying as gay or bisexual (Crawford et al., 2002; Goode-Cross & Good, 2008, 2009; Means & Jaeger, 2013;

Patton, 2011). Black gay men are often stereotyped as being flamboyant, feminine and weak, and some Black gay men fear being stereotyped or tokenized as the same as all Black gay men (Harris, 2003; Patton, 2011). They often take extra measures to hide their sexual orientation identity to avoid being stereotyped by others (Patton, 2011), and these measures are exhausting for these students. Black gay men who had not integrated their racial and sexual orientation identities had lower levels of life satisfaction, more psychological distress, and more issues with loneliness or isolation (Crawford et al., 2002). In addition, Black gay men often rejected being labeled gay or queer because of the negative ramifications associated with the terms and their ties to White, middle class America (Goode-Cross & Good, 2009; Patton, 2011; Washington & Wall, 2010). For example, Patton (2011) found the gay and bisexual labels were too limiting for students at one historically Black university; Black gay men sometimes preferred the terms like “same-gender loving men” to resist the negative implications associated with the label “gay” or “queer” (Goode-Cross & Good, 2009).

Black gay men often experienced personal ramifications for identifying as gay or bisexual (Goode-Cross & Good, 2008, 2009; Patton, 2011). They feared identifying as gay or bisexual would have ramifications for future careers, so they felt a need to demonstrate their ability to do excellent work before coming out (Patton, 2011). Black gay men felt like this allowed others to get to know them for their work and not to judge them based on their sexual identity (Patton, 2011).

Black Gay Men at PWIs

In the college selection process, Black gay men often took into consideration a college or university where they would be able to explore their gay identity (Strayhorn et al., 2008). Strayhorn et al. (2008) found that Black gay male college students often chose a PWI over an HBCU because of the perceived homophobia in the Black community. However, Black gay male college students at PWIs also experienced homophobia, racism, and social challenges (Goode-Cross & Good, 2009; Harris, 2003; Strayhorn & Mullins, 2012). Strayhorn and Mullins (2012) found that Black gay men had to navigate homophobia at PWIs and discussed how Black gay men at PWIs “reported relatively frequent encounters with homophobia and gay oppression when interacting with their same-race peers living in RHs (residence halls)” (p. 151). Black gay men experienced avoidance, verbal harassment, and physical assault from their same-race, same-gender peers (Strayhorn & Mullins, 2012). This prevented Black gay men from “interacting with other Black, presumably heterosexual, male residents in meaningful ways” (Strayhorn & Mullins, 2012, p. 151).

Black gay men often reported that race was the most salient identity that impacted daily interaction with faculty, staff, and other students (Goode-Cross & Good, 2008, 2009). Black gay male students experienced racism due to their racial identity (Goode-Cross & Good, 2009; Harris, 2003; Poynter & Washington, 2005; Rhoads, 1994; Stevens, 2004; Strayhorn & Mullins, 2012). For example, Strayhorn and Mullins (2012) found that “derogatory remarks were the most common form of racism, with incidents ranging from joking, name-calling, and graffiti to signs and posters on RH (residence hall) walls” (p. 150).

In addition, the gay community at PWIs is often racially segregated and focuses primarily on the experiences of White LGBT students; Black gay male college students often found themselves uncomfortable in the White-centered LGBT communities on their campuses (Goode-Cross & Good, 2009; Poynter & Washington, 2005; Rhoads, 1994; Stevens, 2004). The predominantly White LGBT community at PWIs value being out, but Black gay male college students were often not out, nor did they have a desire to be out on their college and university campuses (Goode-Cross & Good, 2009).

Black gay men often felt unsafe on and off campus and struggled socially (Goode-Cross & Good, 2008); they also often sought safe spaces at PWIs through romantic relationships and peer relationships as well as friendships to combat social challenges, which helped with Black gay males' success in college (Goode-Cross & Good, 2008; Strayhorn et al., 2008). First, Black gay men at PWIs found it challenging to find romantic partners because of the small number of available partners, and they found men who were more interested in sexual activity than romantic relationships (Goode-Cross & Good, 2008). Furthermore, Black gay men often felt like they did not fit the White aesthetic ideal that is present in the gay community (Stevens, 2004). Black gay men turned to each other for romantic relationships, but this led to challenges because of the small number (Goode-Cross & Good, 2008). Those who were in a romantic relationship often stated that the college experience at a PWI was less isolating, but they continued to face social challenges (Goode-Cross & Good, 2008). Also, Black gay male college students relied on friendships to navigate the social and academic challenges of college (Strayhorn et al., 2008). They formed

supportive friendships through White gay male students, other Black gay male students, and heterosexual Black female students (Strayhorn et al., 2008).

Strayhorn et al. (2008) found that interracial peers played a critical role in their success in higher education, but others have found that it was difficult for Black gay male students to develop interracial friendships because of racism present in the White-dominated LGB community, relying instead on other Black gay men for friendships (Goode-Cross & Good, 2009; Washington & Wall, 2010). Although most of the literature on Black gay male students is focused on their barriers, Strayhorn et al. (2008) found Black gay male college students “perceived themselves as self-determined, motivated, and independent, which in their view, affected their ability to succeed in college” (p. 99). Harper et al. (2011) also provided a case study of one student and how the student reconciled multiple identities to be successful in college. Additional research is needed to truly understand the strengths, success, and resiliency of Black gay male college students.

Spirituality in Higher Education

The holistic development of college students is not a new topic of conversation in higher education; in fact, research has examined the holistic development of college students for many decades (Evans, Forney & Guido-DiBrito, 1998). Many mission statements of colleges and universities discuss the importance of addressing the holistic needs of students (Astin et al., 2011; Stewart, Kocet, & Lobdell, 2011). For example, Stewart et al. (2011) asserted the following: “Institutions of higher education in this county were founded nearly four centuries ago with the recognition that the connection between mind and spirit was

fundamental to education” (p. 10). Today, scholars have noted that colleges and universities have placed less emphasis on spirituality and the inner lives of students (Astin et al., 2011; Chickering, 2006; Hindman, 2002; Lindholm, 2007; Stewart et al., 2011; Ward, Trautvetter, & Braskamp, 2005). However, college students have a high interest in spiritual development to facilitate finding meaning in their lives (Astin et al., 2011; Brandenberger & Bowman, 2013; Bryant et al., 2003; Chickering, 2006; Hindman, 2002; Lindholm, 2007; Parks, 2000; Ward et al., 2005). For example, a significant number of college students “report that they are actively engaged in a spiritual quest; nearly half indicate that they consider it ‘essential’ or ‘very important’ to seek opportunities to help themselves grow spiritually” (Lindholm, 2007, p. 12).

College students expect their college or university to play a major role in the facilitation of their spiritual development (Lindholm, 2007), but this is not the case on many college and university campuses (Astin et al., 2011; Bryant, 2011c; Chickering, 2006; Goodman, 2013; Hindman, 2002; Lindholm, 2007; Magolda, 2013; Talbot & Anderson, 2013; Ward, Trautvetter, & Braskamp, 2005). College students, particularly students at public and nonsectarian institutions, also have less access to opportunities to explore their spiritual and religious identities (Bryant, 2011c). Part of the problem related to the lack of attention to student spiritual development may be that some higher education leaders often view conversations around spirituality to be crossing a personal line with students (Astin et al., 2011). Students at some institutions also recognize this line because they felt the need to be cautious in openly discussing their spiritual and religious selves due to fear of retaliation,

disrespect, and/or rejection (Lindholm, 2007; Talbot & Anderson, 2013; Wood & Hilton, 2012). Furthermore, some colleges and universities are apathetic in their approach to religious and spiritual development of students and rarely encourage or challenge students to consider various religious and spiritual beliefs, let alone their own spiritual dimensions (Stewart et al., 2012). This fragmentation among the spiritual, academic, emotional, and social selves often leads to college students feeling stressed and lost (Astin et al., 2011), and some students embark on a search to find meaning in their lives to end this fragmentation (Astin et al., 2011; Chickering, 2006; Hindman, 2002).

Given the imperative for higher education professionals to attend to students' holistic development, there has been a rise in scholarship on the spirituality of college students. Current literature has explored the benefits of spiritual exploration, spiritual struggles of college students, and spirituality of marginalized students on college and university campuses (Astin et al., 2011; Bowman & Small, 2010; Bryant, 2011a; Bryant, 2011c; Bryant & Astin, 2008; Chae et al., 2004; Herndon, 2010; Johnson & Hayes, 2003; Lindholm, 2007; Love et al., 2005; Mayhew, 2012; Rockenbach et al., 2012; Strayhorn, 2011; Walker & Dixon, 2002; Watson, 2006; Wood & Hilton, 2012).

There were several benefits shown for students engaged in spiritual exploration. First, students engaged in spiritual exploration typically performed better academically (Astin et al., 2011; Walker & Dixon, 2002). Walker and Dixon (2002) found a correlation between White students' overall grade point average and spiritual beliefs, and White and Black students with stronger spiritual beliefs had fewer challenges with academic

suspensions and probations. Second, students engaged in spiritual exploration are more engaged outside of the classroom (Astin et al., 2011). Astin et al. found that spiritual development was aligned with traditional college outcomes like leadership engagement. Third, spirituality was crucial to identity development and gave meaning to students' lives (Lindholm, 2007). For example, research has shown that almost “two-thirds [of students in a study] feel that their spiritual beliefs have helped them develop their identity and that these beliefs give meaning and purpose to their life” (Lindholm, 2007, p. 12). Students who identified as being highly spiritual were more likely than their less-spiritual peers to have higher levels of equanimity (Lindholm, 2007), a concept that measured the extent to which a student “feels at peace or is centered, is able to find meaning in times of hardship, sees each day as a gift, and feels good about the direction of her/his life” (Astin et al., 2011, p. 20). Students who are highly spiritual are also more likely to be engaged in charitable activities (Brandenberger & Bowman, 2013; Lindholm, 2007). In addition, students who were highly spiritual or who explored religious or spiritual matters in co-curricular experiences were more likely to develop an ecumenical worldview (Bowman & Small, 2010; Bryant, 2011a; Bryant, 2011c; Lindholm, 2007; Mayhew, 2012), a concept that measured the extent to which a student is “interested in different religious traditions, seeks to understand other countries and cultures, feels a strong connection to all humanity, believes in the goodness of all people, accepts others as they are, and believes that all life is interconnected” (Astin et al., 2011, p. 21). For example, Mayhew (2012) found that college students “who participated in co-curricular opportunities to learn about religious and spiritual matters were significantly

more likely to report ecumenical worldview gains than their peers not participating in these opportunities” (p. 299). Finally, students engaged in spiritual exploration may be better off in terms psychological well-being than their peers (Astin et al., 2011; Herndon, 2010; Love et al., 2005). For instance, Astin et al. (2011) found that students engaged in spiritual exploration have a higher self-esteem.

Although there are many benefits of spiritual exploration, studies have also shown that college students face spiritual and religious struggles, which scholars have described as an experience or multiple experiences that challenge beliefs or create an internal conflict among multiple beliefs to the point of disorientation (Astin et al., 2011; Bryant, 2011c; Bryant & Astin, 2008; Faigin, 2013; Johnson & Hayes, 2003; Mayhew, 2012; Rockenbach et al., 2012). Spiritual and religious struggles have been shown to be associated with changing religious traditions, experiencing the death of a close friend or family member, and encountering situations that challenge students to question their beliefs (Astin et al., 2011; Bryant & Astin, 2008).

Spiritual struggles have the potential to transform students, but they have also been documented to have negative implications for psychological and physical well-being if students are unable to work through the struggle (Bryant & Astin, 2008; Johnson & Hayes, 2003; Love et al., 2005; Mayhew, 2012). For example, students who have faced spiritual or religious struggles were more likely to report suicidal thoughts and feelings (Johnson & Hayes, 2003) and increased use of alcohol and tobacco (Faigin, 2013). Studies have shown that particular marginalized groups were more likely to face spiritual struggles (Bryant &

Astin, 2008; Love et al., 2005; Rockenbach et al., 2012). Religious minorities (Bryant & Astin, 2008), women (Bryant, 2011a; Bryant & Astin, 2008), and gay and lesbian students (Love et al., 2002; Rockenbach et al., 2012) all encountered more spiritual struggles than their college peers. On the other hand, studies have shown how Black college students have turned to spirituality as a source of resiliency (Herndon, 2010; Strayhorn, 2011; Watson, 2006; Wood & Hilton, 2012).

Spirituality and LGB College Students

Lesbian and gay students faced a particular set of challenges in higher education, as they were often concurrently struggling with both their spiritual and sexual orientation identities (Love et al., 2005). Scholars have intentionally included the voices of lesbian and gay students and their spiritual exploration in studies (Love et al., 2005; Rockenbach et al., 2012). For example, Rockenbach et al. (2012) included lesbian and gay students in their study although sexual orientation was not the primary focus; the study noted that lesbian and gay students often struggle to integrate their spiritual and sexual orientation identities. One groundbreaking study specifically explored the spiritual experiences of lesbian and gay students (Love et al., 2005). The authors found that gay and lesbian students could be categorized into three groups in regards to their sexual orientation spiritual identity development: (a) reconciliation, (b) nonreconciliation, and (c) undeveloped.

Reconciled students were able to integrate their spiritual and sexual orientation identities for the following reason:

[The students] described having a direct and personal relationship with God (or a higher power), not mediated through a church, the Bible, or other structures or dogma, though they may have (but not necessarily) belonged to a church or religion and participated in religious or spiritual practice. (Love et al., 2005, p. 199)

Non-reconciled students either compartmentalized their sexual orientation and spirituality identities or did not, leading to a struggle with their identities. Undeveloped students did not have a strong commitment to their sexual orientation or spiritual identities (Love et al., 2005). Unfortunately, this study was one of only a few that have primarily focused on the spiritual journeys and experiences of lesbian and gay college students (Love et al., 2005).

Spirituality and Black College Students

Similar to the overall U.S. African American population, African American college students were shown to be more spiritual (Chae et al., 2004; Dennis et al., 2005; Gehrke, 2013; Walker & Dixon, 2005) and have higher religious participation (Walker & Dixon, 2005) than their White peers. For instance, Gehrke (2013) found Black students had a higher spiritual identification than their White, Asian, and Latino peers, and this spiritual identification for Black students continues to increase during their tenure in college. In addition, Gehrke found that Black college students identified with a spiritual quest more than Latino and White students during their time in college. Black students often pointed to spirituality as being a salient identity (Stewart, 2009). For example, Stewart found in her qualitative study that Black students described themselves having a spiritual core that shaped how they make meaning of their multiple identities. This spiritual core was found in Black

students whether they identified as Christian, Muslim, or non-religious. Furthermore, Strayhorn (2011) demonstrated how many Black college students utilized the campus Gospel Choir as a venue for spiritual expression and a source of resiliency.

Spirituality has also been shown to be a source of resilience for heterosexual African American male college students (Herndon, 2010; Watson, 2006; Wood & Hilton, 2012). For example, research has documented spirituality as helping African American male college students cope with the stress that is sometimes brought on by being a part of an underrepresented population at a PWI (Herndon, 2010). For instance, Wood and Hilton (2012) found that Black males at a community college turned to their spirituality during challenges and successes by having dialogues with a God. Spirituality also helped African American male college students find focus and purpose in their lives (Herndon, 2010; Watson, 2006; Wood & Hilton, 2012). African American male college students often turned to religious institutions to find spiritual support (Herndon, 2010; Watson, 2006); those African American male college students who received spiritual support and who sought out spirituality were more likely to succeed academically and socially in college (Herndon, 2010; Wood & Hilton, 2012). For example, spirituality helped Black male college students remain focused by helping them avoid relationships and friendships that were not beneficial for their success, such as relationships and friendships centered on drugs and alcohol (Wood & Hilton, 2012). Unfortunately, Black male college students did not always find their higher education institutions as welcoming places for students to openly discuss their religious and spiritual identities (Wood & Hilton, 2012).

Spirituality and Black Gay Male College Students

The White gay community on college and university campuses often does not allow space to explore or discuss religious and spiritual development; however, religion and spirituality have played a large role in the Black community (Goode-Cross & Good, 2009; Washington & Wall, 2010). Scholars have noted that LGBT individuals who embraced religion or a particular faith were often seen as “naïve” due to the hostility LGBT individuals have faced from religious institutions (Poynter & Washington, 2005; Washington & Wall, 2010). Furthermore, Black gay male college students were often raised hearing messages from the Black church that homosexuality was a sin (Washington & Wall, 2010). While many denominations and faiths have become more welcoming to the LGBT community, scholars have noted they exist largely in the predominantly White religious communities (Washington & Wall, 2010).

Literature on the spiritual journeys of Black gay men at PWIs is almost non-existent. Two studies have touched on the spirituality of Black gay male college students at PWIs (Harper et al., 2011; Strayhorn, 2011). First, Strayhorn demonstrated how one participant in his study on Black students in a campus Gospel Choir was not out to his fellow choir members and felt isolated at times, but his faith and participation in the choir increased his confidence and resiliency. Second, Harper et al. discussed the dimensions and complexity of multiple identities for male college students. The authors presented a case of how one biracial (African American and White) gay male college student integrated his multiple identities, including his spiritual identity, to find success. The student in the case study

discussed that he did not attend churches near his college because of their negative views on homosexuality, but he continued to express his spirituality through prayer and considered spirituality to be a critical identity.

These two studies provide a foundation for understanding the spiritual journeys and spaces of Black gay male college students at PWIs, but current research has overall excluded the spiritual experiences of Black gay male college students. As a researcher, I believe there is an opportunity to expand on this work to provide an in-depth understanding of spirituality for Black gay male college students. It is clear that spiritual development is particularly important for the success and well-being of African American men in college (Herndon, 2010; Watson, 2006; Wood & Hilton, 2012). Researchers cannot assume that this is the case for all Black male college students, and as such, it is important to investigate the role of spirituality in the lives of Black gay male college students. Given the academic, psychological, social and other benefits of spiritual exploration as noted in this review of literature, developing a body of research that begins to understand the benefits (and challenges) of spirituality for Black gay male college students is needed.

Spaces and Places

Many geographers have studied the terms “space” and “place” (Holloway & Hubbard, 2001; Hubbard, Kitchin, & Valentine, 2004; Johnston & Longhurst, 2010; Kobayashi & Peake, 2008; Tuan, 1974; 1979, challenging the idea that “space” and “place” are synonymous terms. Spaces are seen as non-bounded, complex and changeable, and places make up spaces (Johnston, Gregory, Pratt, & Watts, 2000; Johnston & Longhurst,

2010). Places are seen as specific, “bounded settings in which social relations and identity are constituted” (Johnston, Gregory, Pratt, & Watts, 2000, p. 582). For example, a spiritual “space” does not refer to a specific location but to a “place” such as a spiritual life center on a specific campus. Holloway and Hubbard (2001) argued that you cannot understand an individual independently from a place: “Consequently, people and places derive their identities from each other to a significant extent” (Holloway & Hubbard, 2001, p. 7). However, the relationship between individuals and places is always changing (Holloway & Hubbard, 2001). In addition, individuals attach meanings to places:

This attachment of meaning can be thought of as a way of bringing places into the ambit of human understanding—making a place meaningful makes it belong to us in some way. Simultaneously, meaningful places become part of who we are, the way we understand ourselves and, literally, our place in the world. In other words, our meaningful relationships play an important part in the formation of our identities. (Holloway & Hubbard, 2001, p. 71)

Individuals have an emotional need to positively identify with specific places, a phenomenon that is referred to as topophilia, “the affective bond between people and place” (Tuan, 1974, p. 4). However, studies using a critical geography framework have demonstrated that individuals and groups may have a complex relationship with topophilia based on their identities (Holloway & Hubbard, 2001; Johnston & Longhurst, 2010; Johnston, Gregory, Pratt, & Watts, 2000; Tuan, 1979).

Critical Geography, Oppression, and Resistance

Critical geographers “emphasize the roles played by social relations of domination and resistance in the production and reproduction of place, space, and landscape” (Johnston et al., 2000, p. 126). Critical geographers interrogate racism, homophobia, sexism, and other oppressions in spaces and places (Johnston et al., 2000; Johnston & Longhurst, 2010; Kobayashi & Peake, 2008). They believe there are places of belongingness and places of exclusion for individuals depending on their bodies and identities (Holloway & Hubbard, 2001; Johnston & Longhurst, 2010). Furthermore, individuals experience spaces and places differently based on their race, sexual orientation, and gender (Holloway & Hubbard, 2001). Spaces and places, in fact, often view White, heterosexual, gender-conforming, male bodies as normal while other identities and bodies are often seen as problematic entities that must be controlled by laws and politics (Holloway & Hubbard, 2001; Johnston & Longhurst, 2010; Kobayashi & Peake, 2008). These “problematic” bodies that are not seen as normal can, at times, be forced into hiding (i.e. destitute and poor communities) to appease the majoritarian culture (Johnston & Longhurst, 2010). For example, gentrification of communities often bring in middle class individuals in return for displacement of marginalized individuals who can no longer afford housing costs and are pushed out of their homes and communities due to lack of economic capital (Bryson, 2013; DeSena & Ansalone, 2009).

Individuals can develop a fear of spaces or topophobia:

People are our greatest source of security, but also the most common cause of our fear. They can be indifferent to our needs, betray our trust, or actively seek to do us

harm. They are ghosts, witches, murderers, burglars, muggers, strangers, and ill-wishers, who haunt our landscapes, transforming the countryside, the city streets, and the school yard—themselves designed to nurture the human enterprise—into places of dread. (Tuan, 1979, p. 8)

Tuan, in particular, noted the need to understand these fears from the perspectives of individuals and groups and to realize these fears of spaces are dynamic and can change due to critical moments. In this case, marginalized individuals can develop topophobia of spaces related to university campuses and spiritual spaces. However, individuals can resist this oppression and fear in two ways. First, individuals can resist oppression and fear by publically demonstrating bodily performances of resistance in dominant spaces that challenge racism, sexism, and homophobia, which can lead to social justice and transformation of spaces and places (Holloway & Hubbard, 2001). Second, individuals can create counterspaces where they can resist master narratives and can create and participate in a positive, self-enhancing and affirming space for their identities (Case & Hunter, 2012; Nuñez, 2011; Solorzano et al., 2000). Critical geography is of importance for this study as I explore how Black gay men find and create spiritual spaces for themselves.

Spiritual and Religious Spaces

The connection between spirituality/religion and space has been studied to understand how and why individuals attach meaning to spiritual and religious spaces (Stump, 2008). However, groups of people such as LGB individuals have sometimes struggled in spiritual and religious spaces (Rubin, 1993; Shallenberger, 1998; Sweasey, 1997). For example, LGB

people are cited as the cause for many world issues or ostracized by some religious leaders or institutions (Rubin, 1993; Shallenberger, 1998; Sweasey, 1997). As a result, some LGB people often reject religious institutions and spaces after coming out (Rubin, 1993; Shallenberger, 1998; Sweasey, 1997). For Black people, spirituality often plays a more unique role than it does for other racial and ethnic groups. Black people often turn to their spirituality to find space for freedom no matter how severe the circumstances (Martin & Martin, 2002; Newlin et al., 2002; Stewart, 1999; Watson, 2006). Black churches are the primary spaces for Blacks and African Americans in the United States. Unfortunately, Black gays and lesbians often cannot express their sexual orientation identity in church (Icard, 1996; Johnson, 2000; Johnson, 2005). In fact, many Black gay men and lesbians are silenced in the church, and some Black churches have been a major force in ostracizing and demonizing Black LGB individuals (Griffin, 2000; Harris-Lacewell, 2004; Johnson, 2005). Black religious leaders who attempt to create inclusive churches for gays are sometimes ostracized by their church membership and forced to step down or adopt anti-gay attitudes that ultimately exclude African American gays and lesbians (Griffin, 2000; Harris-Lacewell, 2004; hooks, 2000; Hutchinson, 2000). Black LGB individuals often have to seek out alternative spaces and places where their sexual orientation, racial, and spiritual identities are not just tolerated but embraced (Harris-Lacewell, 2004; Johnson, 2000). These spiritual spaces and places for Black LGB individuals are understudied, especially spaces and places for Black, LGB college students.

Spaces and Places and Higher Education

Colleges and universities are becoming increasingly diverse and must find ways to support a more diverse student body through campus design (Kenney, Dumont, & Kenney, 2005). However, colleges and universities at times struggle to provide safe space for diverse and underrepresented students such as Muslim students and LGB students (Fine, 2012; Nasir & Al-Amin, 2010). Thus, marginalized college students have to find and create their own counterspaces (Nuñez, 2011; Solorzano et al., 2000). In addition, colleges and universities have struggled to provide opportunity and space for students to reflect on their spirituality and inner lives (Astin et al., 2011; Chickering, 2006; Dalton, 2006; Hindman, 2002; Lindholm, 2007; Stewart et al., 2011; Ward, Trautvetter, & Braskamp, 2005). Dalton (2006) discusses the need for students to find a spiritual home on their college and university campuses to help them develop a greater purpose and to provide an opportunity for reflection. Spaces and places on college and university campuses such as spiritual and religious spaces have been shown to impact the campus community, student learning, and student engagement (Kenney, Dumont, Kenney, 2005). Thus, it is important to consider the role of spaces and places on (and off) college and university campuses, specifically spiritual and religious spaces and places as universities try to provide more support for underrepresented students. This study adds to the literature by addressing the topic of spiritual spaces and places of Black gay male college students as they embody their racial, sexual orientation, gender, and spiritual identities at PWIs.

Conceptual Framework

Black gay men often find themselves at an intersection of cultures, identities, and value systems that collide and conflict called a “borderland” (Anzaldúa, 1999; Villenas, 2005). This borderland for Black gay men is an internal struggle filled with contradictions and ambiguity about what it means to be Black, male, and gay. This clash of identities can be stressful for individuals (Anzaldúa 1999, 2010); specifically, “the ambivalence from the clash of voices results in mental and emotional states of perplexity. Internal strife results in insecurity and indecisiveness” (Anzaldúa, 2010, p. 94). This borderland for Black gay men is promoted and sustained in social spaces created and maintained by White and heterosexual dominant groups such as PWIs that silence, ostracize, and demonize them. In this environment, individuals such as Black gay men receive conflicting messages about who they ought to be in order to be successful in a society embedded in racism, sexism, and homophobia (Anzaldúa, 1999). Strayhorn et al. (2008) provides an example by discussing the borderland experiences of Black gay male undergraduate students:

Some attributed their ability to “stand out alone” to a sense of “between-ness” that they experience as a Black gay male at a PWI—that is, not fully compatible with Black peers and cultural spaces (e.g., Black cultural centers) and not fully “at home” among White peers. (pp. 99-100)

However, Black gay men and other marginalized individuals can resist this silence and demonization to find an inner peace where they can integrate their multiple identities (Anzaldúa, 1999; Villenas, 2005). This inner peace is a consciousness or “*la mestiza*” where

marginalized individuals accept and embrace the contradictions and ambiguity of their multiple identities and end the internal war of identity conflict (Anzaldúa, 1999, 2010).

Abes (2009, 2012) applied the idea of borderlands to theoretical frameworks, arguing that “all theoretical frameworks that guide research are incomplete” (Abes, 2009, p. 141). Higher education research often uses one theoretical framework that does injustice to college students, specifically marginalized college students, as their experiences are inadequately explained (Abes, 2009, 2012). Abes (2009) argues for using multiple theoretical frameworks called “theoretical borderlands” that better lead researchers to understand the experiences of college students:

The less traditional answer is that the research should consider experimenting with the choice and application of theoretical perspectives, bringing together multiple and even seemingly conflicting theoretical perspectives to uncover new ways of understanding the data. Rather than being paralyzed by theoretical limitations or confined by rigid ideological allegiances, interdisciplinary experimentation of this nature can lead to rich new research results and possibilities. (p. 141)

Using theoretical borderlands allows researchers to better understand the essence of Black gay male undergraduate students’ experiences in higher education. Black gay men are not one-dimensional “characters,” and theoretical borderlands allows researchers such as me to approach our research on Black gay men with a level of sophistication that better speaks to the complexity that exists in the system of oppression. This study uses a borderland theoretical framework approach to allow the researcher to better understand and convey the

meaning-making, successes, and barriers of Black gay men in higher education as they navigate their spiritual journeys and locate spiritual spaces. I employ constructivism to understand the spiritual narratives and spaces of Black gay and bisexual men in higher education; I also employ critical theory—specifically queer theory—to understand the counterstories and counterspaces of Black gay and bisexual men in higher education. I believe bridging these two frameworks together will help scholars better understand the complexity of the spiritual journeys and spaces of Black gay male college students at PWIs.

Constructivism

Constructivism, which has its roots with several philosophers, such as Jean Piaget (von Glasserfeld, 2005) and John Dewey (Reich, 2009), is the first lens used in the theoretical borderland approach. Constructivism developed out of a critique of positivism/post-positivism paradigms that seek one truth and takes an objective stance (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Unlike positivism/post-positivism paradigms, constructivism is not concerned with generalizations but instead focuses on how individuals make meaning on a micro-level (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; von Glasserfeld, 2005). The ontological stance of constructivism assumes there are multiple realities that can conflict with each other and change (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998a; Guba & Lincoln, 1998; Lincoln, 1990; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Pitman & Maxwell, 1992), and these realities can only be understood holistically (Lincoln, 1990; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The epistemological stance of constructivism assumes reality, knowledge, truth, and meaning are constructed by individuals (Ernest, 1995; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Pitman &

Maxwell, 1992; Reich, 2009; Richards, 1995; Schwandt, 1998). For constructivism, “the aim of inquiry is understanding and reconstruction of the constructions that people (including the inquirer) initially hold, aiming toward consensus but still open to new interpretations as information and sophistication improve” (Guba & Lincoln, 1998, p. 212). Therefore, the epistemology of constructivism assumes that this construction of meaning is linked between the researcher and participant (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998b; Guba & Lincoln, 1998; Lincoln, 1990; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Methodologically, constructivism research has several characteristics: it is done in a natural setting (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998a; Lincoln, 1990; Lincoln & Guba, 1985); the researcher serves as the instrument for data collection (Lincoln & Guba, 1985); the researcher aims to develop a holistic understanding of how an individual creates meaning (Lincoln, 1990); and the design is emergent and responds to issues and new ideas during the data collection process (Lincoln, 1990). They also believe:

that theory must arise from the data rather than preceding them; and that the method must be hermeneutic and dialectic, focusing on the social processes of construction, reconstruction, and elaboration, and must be concerned with conflict as well as consensus. (Lincoln, 1990, p. 78)

Constructivism’s axiological stance assumes inquiry is value-laden from the development of the research problem to the analysis of the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This axiological stance provides an opportunity for researchers to truly see and understand the lived

experiences of Black gay men instead of forcing them to take an objective stance that refuses to acknowledge how Black gay men making meaning of their spiritual journeys and spaces.

In higher education, several scholars and researchers have used a constructivism paradigm to understand how college students make meaning (Abes, 2009, 2012; Baxter Magolda, 2004; Baxter Magolda, King, Taylor, & Wakefield, 2012). For example, Abes (2012) used a theoretical borderland approach and integrated an intersectionality lens with a constructivism lens to better understand the experience of one student who identified as female, first-generation, low-income, and gay. Her article demonstrates the importance of understanding the lived experiences and meaning-making processes of marginalized students by using multiple lenses. In this study, constructivism facilitates my exploration of lived experiences around spiritual journeys and spaces for Black gay male college students by focusing on how this population makes meaning.

This study specifically utilizes a self-authorship perspective to explore the spiritual journeys of Black gay male college students. Self-authorship is focused on “the capacity to internally generate belief systems, intrapersonal states, and interpersonal loyalties” (Baxter Magolda et al., 2012). Building off of Kegan’s (1982, 1994) theory of meaning making, Baxter Magolda (2001) completed a longitudinal study to explore how young adults make meaning of their lives and move towards self-authorship; the study demonstrated how individuals moved from prescribing to external definitions of self (following formulas) to questioning these definitions (crossroads) to a self-definition in context of external forces (becoming the author of one’s life). The trajectory of the model leads to an internal self-

definition (internal foundation). Baxter Magolda explores this trajectory along three dimensions: the epistemological dimension (How do I know?); the intrapersonal dimension (Who am I?); and the interpersonal dimension (What relationships do I want with others?). Baxter Magolda noted that these trajectories were often complex and not as smooth as presented, which is the case for most theories and models.

In higher education, scholars have studied how individuals make meaning by applying the self-authorship model (Barber, King, & Baxter Magolda, 2013; Bryant, 2011b; Hernandez, 2012; Jehangir, Williams, & Pete, 2011; Pizzolato, 2003; Torres & Hernandez, 2007; Wawrzynski & Pizzolato, 2006). Specifically, self-authorship has been applied to understand the collegiate experiences of underrepresented college students, such students of color and first-generation college students (Hernandez, 2012; Jehangir et al., 2011; Torres & Hernandez, 2007). However, there are no known studies that applied the self-authorship model to the spiritual journeys of Black gay men.

Critical Theory

Critical theory is the second lens that contributes to this study's borderland approach. Critical theory finds its origins with German philosophers (Welton, 1993) and comes from the same school of thought as postmodernism and poststructuralism (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998a, 1998b). Critical theory rejects traditional research paradigms such as positivist and post-positivist paradigms because of the paradigms' objective stance that often silences the voices of marginalized people (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998a, 1998b). For critical theory, "the aim of inquiry is the critique and transformation of the social, political, cultural, economic,

ethnic, and gender structures that constrain and exploit humankind, by engagement in confrontation, even conflict” (Guba & Lincoln, 1998, p. 211). Critical theory also aims to empower individuals on the margins of mainstream society to take political action and challenge ignorance, arguing that such stands could lead to cultural transformation in society (Guba & Lincoln, 1998; Kincheloe & McLaren, 1998).

Similar to constructivism, the ontological stance of critical theory assumes that there are multiple realities (Guba & Lincoln, 1998). Unlike constructivism, critical theory assumes these multiple realities depend on one’s social location (Guba & Lincoln, 1998). Reality is “fundamentally mediated by power relations that are social and historically constituted” (Kincheloe & McLaren, 1998). Therefore, reality is “shaped by social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and gender values” and embedded in structures and systems (Guba & Lincoln, 1998, p. 203). Critical theory is interested in emancipatory knowledge (Welton, 1993), which “seek[s] to produce transformations in the social order, producing knowledge that is historical and structural, judged by its degree of historical situatedness and its ability to produce praxis, or action” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998b, p. 186). Similar to the epistemological stance of constructivism, the researcher and participant are linked to (re)construct reality (Guba & Lincoln, 1998). Unlike constructivism, critical theory “challenges the traditional distinction between ontology and epistemology; what can be known is inextricably intertwined with the interaction between a particular investigator and a particular object or group” (Guba & Lincoln, 1998, p. 206). For example, the researcher’s

and participant's ontology may be different based on their social location; these differences will influence the knowledge (re)constructed in the research process.

Similar to the methodology of constructivism, a critical theory paradigm assumes that research is done in a natural setting (Carspecken & Apple, 1992; Denzin & Lincoln, 1998a; Lincoln, 1990). However, the primary focuses for critical theory is on power relationships and the system of oppression (Carspecken & Apple, 1992; Denzin & Lincoln, 1998b; Guba & Lincoln, 1998; Kincheloe & McLaren, 1998; Welton, 1993). Furthermore, Guba and Lincoln (1998) assert this idea about the methodology of critical theory:

The transactional nature of inquiry requires a dialogue between the investigator and the subjects of the inquiry; that dialogue must be dialectical in nature to transform ignorance and misapprehensions (accepting historically mediated structures as immutable) into more informed consciousness (seeing how the structures might be changed and comprehending the actions required to effect change. (p. 206)

The critical theory methodological approach informs its axiological stance. Similar to constructivism, critical theory assumes the values of the investigator and the participant influence the inquiry process from the development of the research problem to the data analysis to presentation of findings (Guba & Lincoln, 1998). This methodological approach further allow me as the researcher to reject the objective stance popular to positivism and post-positivism studies so that I may better understand the spiritual journeys and spaces of Black gay male college students through a critical lens.

In higher education, scholars and researchers have used various forms of the critical theory perspective to understand the experiences of marginalized college students (Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007; Harper, 2009; Harper et al., 2011). For example, the study by Harper et al. (2011) focused on emancipatory knowledge by unveiling the blatant and structural racism that Black male resident assistants experienced at their predominantly White university. The critical lens for this study will interrogate the privileges of Whiteness and heterosexuality to understand the spiritual journeys and spaces of Black gay male college students.

Quare Theory

Quare theory (Johnson, 2005; Johnson & Henderson, 2005), Black queer studies (Johnson & Henderson, 2005), Queer of Color Critique (QCC) (Ferguson, 2004), and Black Lesbian Feminism (Lorde, 1984, 1988) all are connected critical theories that provide a comprehensive framework for understanding the experiences of LGB individuals of color due to the frameworks' ability to make race, sexual orientation, gender, and class visible identities. For this study, I use Johnson's (2005) term "quare theory" to encompass specifically QCC and Black queer studies. The term "quare" for Johnson has roots with his Black, southern grandmother who pronounced queer as "quare." Johnson (2005) uses the term "quare" to describe a LGB person of color and uses quare theory as a way to discuss theory that makes identity visible to interrogate issues of race, gender, sexual orientation, and class in society.

Similar to Johnson, I also use quare and quare theory for my specific research interest in Black LGB individuals. Quare theory as a framework has connections to Critical Race

Theory (CRT), queer theory, and Black Studies, but these three frameworks have shortcomings in eliciting an understanding of the experiences and voices of LGB individuals of color; this concern is what made quare theory the most appropriate theoretical framework in addition to constructivism to use for this study.

First, quare theory is connected to CRT. Similar to quare theory, CRT examines how racism is embedded in the social institutions education, legal, economic structures in the U.S. (Bell, 1995; Creswell, 2007; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Johnson, 2002; Valdes, Culp, & Harris, 2002). Like quare theory, CRT also rejects the following long-held beliefs: that “color blindness” as a way to rid society of racism; that racism is caused by individuals and not systems; and that one can only focus on racism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Valdes et al., 2002). Unfortunately, CRT sometimes fails to only see people of color or brown and black bodies and fails to recognize the experiences of LGB individuals or LGB bodies of color (Ortiz & Elrod, 2002). Thus, the voices of LGB individuals of color are overlooked, silenced, or excluded in CRT.

Second, quare theory has strong connections to queer theory. Queer theory seeks to disrupt binarism and normalcy in social institutions and structures—education, legal, economic, religious, and medical (Butler, 2004; Johnson & Henderson, 2005; Johnson, 2005; Luhmann, 1998; Meiners, 1998; Tierney & Dilley, 1998). However, this deconstruction at the same time can make salient identities such as race, gender, and class invisible (Cohen, 2005; Johnson, 2005; Johnson & Henderson, 2005). Also, queer is often associated with class, race, and gender privilege, a privilege that is often unavailable to Black gay men and

other LGB people of color who are socially located on the margins of society (Cohen, 2005; Johnson, 2005).

Third, quare theory has connections to Black studies. Black studies examine the social, cultural, political, and economic role of race, specifically Blackness, as a way to challenge and deconstruct the racism embedded in social institutions and structures (Johnson & Henderson, 2005). Unfortunately, scholarship and research in Black studies have often failed to recognize the intersection of sexual orientation in academic discourse (Harper, 2005; Johnson & Henderson, 2005).

Quare theory scholars recognize the importance of understanding how race, class, gender, and sexual orientation intersect to inform an individual's social location (Cohen, 2005; Eng, Halberstam, & Muñoz, 2005; Ferguson, 2004, 2005; Harper, 2005; Johnson, 2005; Johnson & Henderson, 2005; Misawa, 2010; Muñoz, 2010). Quare theory also recognizes the racism that exists in the LGB community and the importance of interrogating the privilege of Whiteness (Cohen, 2005; Ferguson, 2005; Harper, 2005; Johnson, 2005; Muñoz, 2005). For example, LGB individuals who do not adopt the White, western philosophy of liberation and come out of the "closet" are seen as paranoid, outdated, and culturally lagging (Ferguson, 2005; Ross, 2005). This philosophy of liberation does not recognize or understand the implications of "coming out of the closet" for individuals of color who have to negotiate racism, individuals with limited income who may risk financial security for coming out, and individuals in parts of the world who could face death for claiming their LGB identities. Therefore, quare theory scholars recognize the importance of

including the “silenced” or “overlooked” voices of LGB people of color (Harper, 2005; Misawa, 2010; Muñoz, 2005; Muñoz, 2010; Ross, 2005).

Quare theory rejects the idea that we can understand class, gender, race, and sexual orientation as separate formations; instead they intersect to shape a person’s reality (Ferguson, 2004; Johnson, 2005). Thus, quare theory is in line with critical theory’s ontological stance that reality is shaped by an individual’s location. Furthermore, quare theory “interrogates social formations at the intersections of race, gender, sexuality, and class, with particular interests in how those formations correspond with and diverge from nationalist ideals and practices” (Ferguson, 2004, p. 149). Epistemologically, quare theory “offers a way to critique stable notions of identity and, at the same time, to locate racialized and class knowledges” (Johnson, 2005, p. 127). Johnson (2005) further explains the epistemological stance:

Quare studies can narrow that gap to the extent that it pursues an epistemology rooted in the body. As a “theory in the flesh,” quare necessarily engenders a kind of identity politics, one that acknowledges difference within and between particular groups. Thus, identity politics does not necessarily mean the reduction of multiple identities into a monolithic identity or narrow cultural nationalism. Rather, quare studies moves beyond simply theorizing subjectivity and agency as discursively mediated to theorizing how that mediation may propel material bodies into action. (p. 135)

Quare theory’s axiological stance is in line with critical theory. Thus, the values of the investigator and the participant influence the inquiry process from the development of the

research problem to the data analysis to presentation of findings (Guba & Lincoln, 1998).

Methodologically, quare theory is also in line with critical theory. Thus, quare theory assumes that research is done in a natural setting (Carspecken & Apple, 1992) and focuses on power relationships and the system of oppression (Carspecken & Apple, 1992; Denzin & Lincoln, 1998b; Guba & Lincoln, 1998; Kincheloe & McLaren, 1998; Welton, 1993).

Furthermore, Guba and Lincoln (1998) explain the methodology:

the transactional nature of inquiry requires a dialogue between the investigator and the subjects of the inquiry; that dialogue must be dialectical in nature to transform ignorance and misapprehensions (accepting historically mediated structures as immutable) into more informed consciousness (seeing how the structures might be changed and comprehending the actions required to effect change). (p. 206)

An essential component of quare theory is how it is grounded in performance theory (Johnson, 2005): “Performance theory not only highlights the discursive effects of acts, it also points to how these acts are historically situated” (p. 136). Johnson (2005) uses José Esteban Muñoz’s idea of disidentification to understand the performance of Black LGB individuals. Muñoz (1999) describes marginalized individuals, specifically LGB people of color, using disidentification as “a survival strategy that works within and outside the dominant sphere simultaneously” (p. 5). Muñoz (1999) explains further:

Instead of buckling under the pressures of dominant identity (identification, assimilation) or attempting to break of its inescapable sphere (counteridentification, utopianism), this “working on and against” is a strategy that tries to transform a

cultural logic from within, always laboring to enact permanent structural change while at the same time valuing the importance of local or everyday struggles of resistance. (pp. 11-12)

This disidentification strategy has been used by African Americans and quares of color (Johnson, 2005). For example, African Americans use disidentification by turning to spirituality, specifically creative and resistance soul force, to resist oppression and demonization in society (Johnson, 2005; Stewart, 1999). Johnson (2005) also points to the ability of RuPaul, a popular Black drag queen, to demonstrate “the resourcefulness of quares of color to reinvent themselves in ways that transform their material conditions” (p. 140). Performances go beyond the stage to everyday spaces, including residence halls, college classrooms and spiritual spaces to resist assimilation, demonization, and oppression (Johnson, 2005): “Moreover, quare theory focuses attention on the social consequences of those performances” (pp. 140-141).

The literature has demonstrated how the Black LGB body has social implications and consequences (Griffin, 2000; Harris-Lacewell, 2004; Icard, 1996; Johnson, 2000; Johnson, 2005). The very presence of the Black gay male body is seen as problematic in many predominantly Black religious, spiritual, and secular spaces (Griffin, 2000; Harris-Lacewell, 2004; Icard, 1996; Johnson, 2000; Johnson, 2005). For instance, the Black male body is sometimes seen as the cause of HIV/AIDS in the African American community and leads to religious leaders’ demonizing gay men in spiritual spaces and in the media (Boykin, 2005). Unfortunately, the Black male body is also sometimes seen problematic in the White LGB

community (Green, 2007). For example, the Black gay male body is sometimes met with racism in the White LGB community and rejected for being “less beautiful” than the White LGB body (Green). Green discusses how this can lead Black gay men to feel torn because of their identities as gay and Black. Thus, the problematic views of the Black gay male body and the challenge to integrate an individual’s multiple identities lead the researcher to consider two key questions: What are the social implications/consequences for claiming one’s blackness and quareness (publically or internally)? What role does spirituality play as Black gay men claim their identities?

This study explores not only the spiritual journeys of Black gay men, but also the spiritual spaces of Black gay men where they have the potential to escape White queer gaze and “straight” Black gaze.

Theoretical Borderlands: Constructivism and Quare Theory

While constructivism focuses on the micro-level and meaning-making process, quare theory focuses on social location and interrogates the system of oppression. Thus, constructivism and quare theory complement each other, and both were used to better understand the spiritual journeys and spaces of Black gay male college students at PWIs. The constructivism lens was applied to understand meaning-making process related to the spiritual narratives and spaces of Black gay and bisexual men in higher education on a micro-level. Quare theory was applied to understand the counterstories and counterspaces related to spirituality as Black gay and bisexual male students navigated oppression, homophobia, and racism. Methodologically, both constructivism and critical theories, including quare theory,

are “aimed at the reconstruction of previously held constructions” (Guba & Lincoln, 1998, p. 209). The axiological stance of both assumes that the researcher’s values inform the research process from the formation of the research problem to data collection to data analysis.

The ontological stance for constructivism and quare theory is where their paradigms are the most divergent. The ontological stance of constructivism assumes there are multiple realities that can conflict with each other and change (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998a; Guba & Lincoln, 1998; Lincoln, 1990; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Pitman & Maxwell, 1992), and these realities can only be understood holistically (Lincoln, 1990; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Unlike constructivism, quare theory is in line with critical theory’s ontological stance that reality is shaped by one’s location. For critical theories like quare theory, reality is “fundamentally mediated by power relations that are social and historically constituted” (Kincheloe & McLaren, 1998, p. 263). The very nature of critical theories demands a close link between the ontological and epistemological stances (Guba & Lincoln, 1998). Therefore, critical theories like quare theory and constructivism differentiate in their epistemological stances.

Both quare theory and constructivism assume that knowledge is created in partnership between the researcher and the participant, but there are slight differences in this reconstruction of reality. The example given earlier is that for quare and critical research, the researcher and participant may have different social locations that will lead to a different ontological view; these differences will shape the epistemological understanding of the phenomenon. As the researcher, I have acknowledged and recognized the different social

locations as I considered the realities of Black gay male college students and their spiritual journeys and spaces.

Constructivism and queer theory both explore the borderlands for Black gay men. I use these two perspectives to better understand the spiritual journeys and spaces for Black gay male undergraduate students. These two perspectives guided the methodology of the study, including the research approach, data collection, data analysis, validity, reliability, and the presentation of findings.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Human beings strive for humanization, but exploitation, injustice, and oppression can lead to the demonization and dehumanization of individuals (Freire, 1970/1993). This demonization and dehumanization is specifically a challenge for Black gay men whose bodies and very presence can be seen as problematic in the U.S. society. Freire discussed how the oppressed can restore humanity for the oppressed and the oppressors through liberation. This liberation has been seen throughout U.S. history. For example, many African Americans and allies turned to their spirituality during the Civil Rights Movement to guide the movement and seek liberation from injustice (Stewart, 1999).

In addition to liberation, higher education researchers have discussed the benefits of spiritual exploration for college students including the academic, social, and psychological benefits (Astin et al., 2011; Herndon, 2010; Love et al., 2005; Walker & Dixon, 2002; Watson, 2006). For example, spirituality helps Black male college students remain focused by avoiding relationships and friendships that are not beneficial for their success, such as relationships and friendships centered on drugs and alcohol (Wood & Hilton, 2012). Unfortunately, Black male college students do not always find their higher education institutions as welcoming places to openly discuss their religious and spiritual identities (Wood & Hilton, 2012).

Current research has not explored the spiritual journeys and spaces of Black gay male college students in higher education. Given the opportunities for liberation and the collegiate

benefits of spiritual exploration and spaces, I will explore the following research questions utilizing a theoretical borderland approach to understand the dynamic spiritual journeys and spaces of Black gay male college students at PWIs:

- (1) How do Black gay male undergraduate college students navigate their spiritual journey?
- (2) How do Black male undergraduate college students find and create their own spiritual space?

Research Paradigm

This study contained and utilized several distinct features of qualitative research, specifically constructivism and quare theory, to investigate the topic of inquiry. I assumed participants would articulate multiple realities, meaning that there is no single truth to define the experiences of participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998a; Guba & Lincoln, 1998; Lincoln, 1990; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Pitman & Maxwell, 1992). This qualitative research study aimed to better understand the essence and meaning of human experience rather than to pursue more popular goals of quantitative studies, such as correlation and causation (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998a; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Stake, 1995; von Glasserfeld, 2005). The research was conducted in natural settings, in this case, spiritual spaces, which allowed me to develop a more authentic understanding of participants (Carspecken & Apple, 1992; Creswell, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 1998a; Hamel, Dufour, & Fortin, 1993; Lincoln, 1990; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Stake, 1995; Wolcott, 2010).

My epistemological and axiological stances in this study reflect the nature of qualitative research. My epistemological stance assumes that knowledge is created and constructed in partnership between the researcher and the participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998a; Guba & Lincoln, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Lincoln, 1990). In addition, my axiological stance assumes that the values of the researcher and participants would shape the study from research questions to data collection to data analysis (Guba & Lincoln, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The nature of qualitative research requires the researcher to utilize an emergent design and respond to issues and new ideas during the data collection process (Lincoln, 1990). Furthermore, the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and interpretation (Creswell, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Mertens, 2010; Stake, 1995). Stake (1995) furthered explains the implications for the researcher in this role: “Standard qualitative designs call for the persons most responsible for the interpretation to be in the field, making observations, exercising subjective judgment, analyzing and synthesizing, all the while realizing their own consciousness” (p. 41).

In the remainder of chapter three, I integrate the discussion of quare theory and constructivism as I explain the research site, sample selection, and data collection. I point out the unique differences between constructivism and quare theory as I explain the data analysis procedures and how I established trustworthiness for this study.

Constructivism and Narrative

This study used a narrative research approach to reflect the constructivism lens. Narrative research grew out of the fields of literature, history, and the social sciences (Creswell, 2007; Polkinghorne, 2007). Josselson (2011) notes the importance of narratives:

The stories that people tell about their lives represent their meaning making; how they connect and integrate the chaos of internal and momentary experience and how they select what to tell and how they link bits of their experience are all aspects of how they structure the flow of experience and understand their lives. (p. 224)

Narrative research is grounded in the idea of multiple realities and multi-voiced individuals whose multiple perspectives may conflict at times (Josselson, 2011). The complexity of multiple realities undergirds that narrative research is not about getting to a “truth” but rather about attempting to understand the multiple voices of individuals (Josselson, 2011). Narrative research is about the stories told by individuals with a focus on understanding of the meaning around a phenomenon in chronological order (Creswell, 2007; Josselson, 2011; Mertens, 2010; Polkinghorne, 2007). Narrative data are typically drawn from interviews and written documents (Creswell, 2007; Polkinghorne, 2007).

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) further understand narrative through three elements: (a) interaction, (b) continuity, and (c) situation. The element of interaction focuses on the personal (inward) and social (outward). Clandinin and Connelly describe the inward as internal conditions—feelings and hopes—and the outward as focused on thoughts and feelings about the external environment—school and community. Clandinin and Connelly

described the element of continuity as going backward and forward to the past, present, and future. They believed that as humans, we “tell remembered stories of ourselves from earlier times as well as more current stories. All of these stories offer possible plotlines for our futures” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 60). Situation is focused on the physical space; all stories are based in a place such as a residence hall, a spiritual space, or a classroom (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This study explored the multiple voices of Black gay male students through a constructivism lens while integrating the elements presented by Clandinin and Connelly to understand the how this population makes meaning of their spiritual journeys and spaces on a micro-level.

Counterstories and Quare Theory

In addition to utilizing constructivism to understand how students make meaning, this study used form of narrative called a counterstory approach (Bell, 2003; Yosso; 2006) to understand how Black gay male college students at PWIs resist, transform, and transcend boundaries and barriers during their spiritual journey as well as how they find and create spiritual spaces. People who have dominant identities typically have different stories from people who are members of marginalized identity groups (Bell, 2003; Polletta, 2006). Bell (2003) studied the views of race and racism from the perspective of White people and people of color. She argued that those in privileged positions understand the public discourse created by the dominant group in society, but they are not often exposed to the counterstories of people who are socially positioned as minorities. Counterstories are the stories told by people, particularly marginalized people, to offer a counter voice to the majoritarian voices

that often rely on stereotypes to describe the lives of marginalized people (Bell, 2003; Misawa, 2010; Yosso, 2006). Counterstories add a critical layer of information to the public discourse that allows people to begin to truly understand the experiences of marginalized groups (Bell, 2003; Carney, 2004; Harper, 2009; Misawa, 2010; Yosso, 2006). Yosso (2006) stated that “recognizing these stories and knowledge as valid and valuable data, counterstorytellers challenge majoritarian stories that omit and distort the histories and realities of oppressed communities” (p. 10).

An example of a counterstory study that is pertinent to the current study is Harper’s (2009) examination of Black male college students’ resistance to “niggering” by telling their counterstories of academic achievements in higher education. Counterstories can explore personal stories, other people’s stories, or composite stories; composite stories rely on both personal stories and other people’s stories to demonstrate the complexities of oppression in society (Yosso, 2006). Composite counterstories rely on existing research and stories from marginalized populations (Harper, 2009; Yosso, 2006).

This study explores spiritual counterstories of Black gay men at PWIs and relies on existing research and stories from Black gay male college students while also recognizing the researcher’s personal experience with this topic. As the researcher, I believe it is critical to give voice to Black gay male undergraduate college students who are often rendered silent or invisible; their voices and stories will highlight and challenge the racism, sexism, and heterosexism present in U.S. society.

Research Site and Sample Selection

Given the psychological and personal ramifications for Black gay men to claim their queerness, researchers have found it difficult to recruit participants for studies on the collegiate experiences of Black gay men (Means & Jaeger, 2013; Patton, 2011). Therefore, I selected three predominantly White, public institutions to explore the guiding research questions. Researchers have noted that “gay” has been seen as limiting term for Black students (Goode-Cross & Good, 2009; Patton, 2011; Washington & Wall, 2010), so I included men who consider themselves gay, bisexual, non-heterosexual, queer, or same gender loving to be inclusive of these queer spiritual counterstories. A total of nine male students who attend these three institutions chose to participate in the study. They ranged from first year college students to college seniors, and they identified as gay, bisexual, and non-heterosexual. Details about each participant are included in Chapter 4.

Participants for the study were recruited through the email listservs of the research sites’ LGBT student organizations, campus ministry center (if one was present on the campus), student religious organizations, places of worship (churches, synagogues, etc.), the LGBT Centers (if one was present on the campus), community LGBT Centers, and the Multicultural Centers. I also presented an overview of the research study at student organization meetings (i.e. LGB student organizations and other multicultural organizations) to recruit participants. In addition, flyers were placed around the research sites. The emails, presentations, and flyers provided an opportunity to recruit students who were and who were not affiliated with traditional campus spaces for Black and LGB students.

I used a criterion sampling to recruit, identify, and select participants (Mertens, 2010). In criterion sampling, “the researcher must set up a criterion and then identify cases that meet that criterion” (Mertens, 2010, p. 322). For example, Harper (2009) used a criterion sampling approach to recruit and select participants who met criteria he wanted to study in his research. I did the same to better understand a specific population that is often overlooked on college and university campuses—Black gay men. The goal of this study was not to generalize but to explore the rich experiences regarding spiritual journeys and spaces of Black gay men. Criterion sampling allowed me to concentrate on a small number of participants while gaining a better understanding of their spiritual journeys and spaces. I established the following criteria for participants: (a) identify as African American or Black; (b) identify as bisexual, gay, non-heterosexual, queer, same gender loving; and (c) be an undergraduate student at a PWI. The participants were asked to choose a pseudonym to increase confidentiality. These criteria were set to be inclusive of Black gay men while maximizing the opportunity for me to learn about the spiritual journeys and spaces of Black gay men at two higher education institutions. Study participants received a \$25 gift card for each interview in which they participated for a total of \$50.

Data Collection

Qualitative researchers often “deploy a wide range of interconnected methods, hoping always to get a better fix on the subject matter at hand” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998a, p. 3). Therefore, I gathered data through three interconnected methods: (a) semi-structured, face-to-face, one-on-one interviews; (b) photovoice; and (c) field observations. All data were stored

on NVivo®, a qualitative data management program. Students participated in two 60- to 90-minute semi-structured, one-on-one interviews (see Appendices A and B for interview protocols). The interview questions were developed after reading the literature and reflecting on the gaps in the literature. Interviews were beneficial because they allowed me to gather information on internal thoughts and past experiences that could not be gathered through field observations (Weiss, 1994). The semi-structured interviews allowed me to have a general guide for the interviews but allowed the flexibility for participants to guide the direction of the interview (Knox & Burkard, 2009). Face-to-face interviews allowed me to pick up on social cues and nonverbal communication, and these elements provided deeper insights the participants' experiences (Opdenakker, 2006). The one-on-one interviews provided participants with confidentiality versus a focus group that would have required participants to disclose their sexual orientation identity to individuals they may not know. I chose to conduct two interviews to allow the time to discuss a wide range of topics, build stronger rapport with the participants, and have the ability to ask follow-up questions if needed.

Prior to the first interview, I reviewed the consent form and answer/clarify any questions or concerns. The first interview explored the participants' spiritual journeys, how they resist demonization, and where they found their space to explore their spirituality. The second interview further explored their spiritual spaces and journeys after I conducted the field observation and considered the photographs have been taken for this study; the second interview also focused on the photographs taken by the participant. The interviews took

place on the participants' campus or another public space (coffee shops, restaurants, parks) if the participant did not feel comfortable being interviewed on campus.

Photovoice is a qualitative method that provides research participants who often may feel voiceless in society the opportunity to reflect on their experiences and stories through photography (Strack, Magill, & McDonagh, 2004; Wang & Pies, 2008). After the first interview, each participant was given a disposable camera and asked to spend at least one day taking 10-12 pictures that reflect their spiritual journey and spiritual spaces. The participants were directed not to take pictures of individuals under the age of 18 to protect vulnerable populations and to receive a consent form for anyone 18 and older who appeared in any pictures. Participants were asked to not take any pictures that were sexual in nature nor that documented them participating in illegal activity. Pictures that did not meet these guidelines were destroyed by me. During the second interview, I asked follow-up questions about each picture that met the guidelines.

I used field observations to better understand the spaces where African American gay men at PWIs go to explore their spirituality. Field observations allow researchers to develop a more authentic understanding of participants' daily experiences through first-hand accounts in natural settings (Hamel et al., 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Mertens, 2010; Wolcott, 2010). Field observations were conducted in two separate phases. I conducted field observations early in the study to begin to better understand various spiritual spaces of Black gay men. I chose spiritual spaces for LGB individuals and Black gay men that were

identified in the literature review such as churches, mosques, synagogues, outdoor settings in nature, and college and university religious/spiritual centers.

I could not have developed an authentic understanding of the spiritual journeys and spaces of Black gay male college students without being a part of their spiritual spaces if they identified one. Therefore, I gained a better understanding of the spiritual spaces and places of Black gay male students through one of the following options: a) observed and experienced the spiritual place with the participant; b) observed and experienced the spiritual space without the participant; and c) asked the participant to take photographs of their spiritual spaces and places. I used Yip's and Khalid's (2010) definition of spiritual space to help students understand a spiritual space: "a spiritual space could be amorphous, transcending physical boundary, and often personalized space where one was able to have a spiritual experience or moment" (p. 104). This definition allowed participants to transcend the "traditional" definitions of spiritual space where they may have at times been demonized or silenced such as churches, synagogues, or mosques. This flexibility in definition allowed participants to feel empowered to identify their spiritual space whether that was a religious space or not.

There are various types of observation: (a) complete observation; (b) observer-as-participant; (c) participant-as-observer; and (d) complete participant (Mertens, 2010). I used the participant-as-observer method, which allows researchers to participate in the setting while still observing the setting (Mertens, 2010). I recognized that participants or people in particular spiritual places may change their behavior due to my presence, and I believe the

participant-as-observer method allowed me to blend in with other people in that place while maximizing the comfort level for everyone present. I gained access to public spaces without needing to seek permission such as churches, synagogues, mosques, on-campus spiritual spaces open to the public, select spaces where I had an affiliation or connection, and outdoor spaces. However, I did send an email to notify leaders of these public spaces about my intentions to be present; I also asked for etiquette guidelines for each spiritual place. I sought permission from an authority figure (advisor, campus administrator, group leader) to access private spaces such as on-campus spaces. I followed guidelines agreed upon with the authority figure in these private spaces.

I observed the environment, activities and behavior of the participant (if applicable), and the activities and behavior of others in this space (if applicable) and then documented these observations in field notes in these spiritual spaces. According to Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (1995), “Fieldnotes are accounts describing experiences and observations the researcher has made while participating in an intense and involved manner” (pp. 4-5). Fieldnotes capture physical settings, activities, events, behavior, interaction of people, nonverbal communication, things that do not happen, and the researcher’s reactions (Creswell, 2007; Emerson et al., 1995; Mertens, 2010; Stake, 1995).

Condensed fieldnotes were taken during each field observation and then developed into expanded fieldnotes immediately after I left the location. I used the following steps suggested by Emerson et al. (1995) to develop extensive fieldnotes: (a) spent a large block of uninterrupted time developing the extended fieldnotes; (b) concentrated on the remembered

scene and did not worry about the words; (c) quickly reread and filled in details and included the expression of the field researcher's sense of meaning.

Data Analysis

Analysis of Interviews and Photovoice

DeCuir-Gunby, Marshall, and McCulloch (2011) described analyzing interviewing data as “a multistep ‘sense-making’ endeavor” (p. 137). Since photovoice is integrated into the interview, I analyzed photovoice and interview data together. However, I also noted the type of pictures taken by participants to include in my analysis. Specifically, I tallied the type of pictures taken of places of worship, places in natural settings, etc. This provided a stronger context for understanding the type of spiritual spaces and places for Black gay male college students. The interviews were transcribed by an outside source which allowed me to spend more time on the data collection and analysis process.

After transcription, I started by reading each interview transcript multiple times to get a sense of each participant. I then read the interview transcripts and took notes in the margins while focusing on how participants articulated their stories and what they articulated in their stories until I had a better understanding of the participant and their stories. From the multiple readings, I developed in-depth participant profiles to have a better understanding of who they are as individuals separate from the aggregate.

After transcribing and reflecting on the two sets of interviews, I proceeded with an open coding process. This led to 217 potential codes. I then placed codes either under constructivism or quare theory. I also collapsed codes that were very similar. I then coded

the data using first a constructivism lens and then a quare lens to capture the theoretical borderlands of Black gay male students and their spiritual journeys and spaces. There were two separate codebooks for the constructivism lens and quare lens. The codebooks included “a set of codes, definitions, and examples used as a guide to help analyze interview data” (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2011, p. 138). The next sections describe the constructivism and quare approaches to analyzing the data.

Analysis of the Interview Using a Constructivism Lens

The ontological stance of constructivism assumes there are multiple realities that can conflict with each other and change (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998a; Guba & Lincoln, 1998; Lincoln, 1990; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Pitman & Maxwell, 1992), and these realities can only be understood holistically (Lincoln, 1990; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To understand these realities, constructivism inquiry prefers inductive data analysis for its ability to uncover multiple realities and to fully describe the experiences and settings of the participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Thus, I used an inductive data analysis process in this study to answer the research questions. There are two ways to inductively analyze narrative data: (a) holistic analysis and (b) categorical analysis (Josselson, 2011). The holistic analysis approach requires researchers to understand the text in whole for each participant rather than looking at similarities and differences across cases (Josselson, 2011). Categorical analysis “abstracts sections or words belonging to a category, using coding strategies, and compares these to similar texts from other narratives” (Josselson, 2011, p. 226). I used a mixture of the two and integrated the

findings in the end, first using holistic analysis by developing an in-depth profile for each participant.

I used the categorical analysis approach by using a combination of open coding: “Open coding allows for exploration of the ideas and meaning that are contained in raw data. While engaging in open coding, the researcher creates codes or concepts” (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2011, pp. 138-139). I used NVivo to assist me with the open coding process, and I then developed codes and a codebook from the raw data. During the coding process, I recognized other theoretical frameworks that would shed further light on the data, so I began to use a combination of open coding and a priori coding. I then used axial coding; this “higher level of coding enables researchers to identify any connections that may exist between codes” (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2011, p. 139). Finally, I developed themes from the axial coding process to develop spiritual narratives of Black gay men from a constructivism lens; the focus was on how they make meaning of their spiritual journeys and spaces on a micro-level.

Analysis of the Quare Interview

Unlike constructivism, quare theory is in line with critical theory’s ontological stance that reality is shaped by an individual’s social location. For critical theories like quare theory, reality is “fundamentally mediated by power relations that are social and historically constituted” (Kincheloe & McLaren, 1998). Furthermore, critical theory is interested in emancipatory knowledge: “Emancipatory knowledge derives from humankind’s desire to achieve emancipation from domination, whether domination of nature over human life or the domination of individuals or groups over others” (Welton, 1993, p. 83). Unlike

constructivism, quare theory aims to critique social structures and institutions and help further a critical consciousness (Carspecken & Apple, 1992; Schwandt, 1990). Quare theory interrogates the privilege of Whiteness and heterosexuality, while understanding the notions of performativity of Black gay male students at PWIs (Johnson, 2005; Muñoz, 1999).

The theoretical borderland approach in this study calls for the interview data to be analyzed utilizing constructivism and quare theory to understand the complexity of the spiritual journeys and spaces of Black gay men. To adhere to the theoretical borderland approach (Abes, 2009, 2012; Abes & Kasch, 2007), I analyzed the same interview data to create a quare spiritual counterstory. As before, I used NVivo to help me keep the data organized during the analysis process, and I used open coding (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2011) with a quare lens and then did a cross-case analysis to understand similarities and differences across participants. Axial coding allowed for making connections among codes (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2011). Developed themes from the axial coding process were identified to construct the themes around the spiritual counterstories and spaces of Black gay men.

Analysis of Fieldnotes

Fieldnotes require a description but also an interpretation about the meaning of people's actions through the researcher's perspective; however, researchers must be mindful not to be ethnocentric or to make assumptions about the participants (Emerson et al., 1995). Empathetic immersion was used to analyze the field notes (Emerson et al., 1995). Emerson et al. (1995) suggested two formats—end point or play-by-play—for writing the final field notes.

The end point format focuses on the overall experience and the play-by-play format focuses on the chronology of the experience (Emerson et al., 1995). In this study, I used an end point format to capture the overall experience. The end point format allows researchers to write up observations based on everything they know instead of minute-by-minute accounts (Emerson et al., 1995); I believe the former was the most conducive for writing up these experiences. Similar to the analysis process for the interviews, I read the fieldnotes multiple times to get a sense of the experience from a constructivism and then a quare theory lens. These fieldnotes were then analyzed for codes and themes related to the research questions using a constructivism and quare lens. In the end, the fieldnotes were integrated into the overall interpretation of the spiritual narratives and spaces and the spiritual counterstories and counterspaces for Black gay male college students.

Subjectivity Statement

The qualitative researcher serves as an instrument for data collection (Creswell, 2007; Harper & Gasman, 2008; Mertens, 2010). Therefore, it is important for the researcher to reveal any background information that shaped this study (Harper & Gasman, 2008). I am a Black gay male who identifies as Christian. I also consider myself to be on a spiritual journey. I do consider religion to be a major factor in my personal spiritual journey. I come from a large, southern family that mostly identifies as Christian. Throughout elementary school and middle school, I went to a predominantly Black Southern Baptist Church off and on until the age of thirteen. Beginning in high school, I began to consistently attend that same Southern Baptist Church. I came out as gay at the age of 17, but I remained a member

of that same church. My church experience as a youth was very positive, and I felt connected to the members and the pastor of the church. I was always afraid to disclose my identity as a Black gay man, so I always felt the connection with the members and pastor was never a fully authentic one.

I went to college three hours away from my hometown, and I rarely attended church during this period in my life. During college, my personal meaning of spirituality began to expand to include transformative experiences outside of church that connected me to others and a higher power, such as significant service and advocacy experiences. For example, I spent almost three months traveling across the United States with 32 fraternity brothers doing service and advocacy work on behalf of people with disabilities. This experience transformed my outlook on life, connected me to others in a meaningful way, and helped me feel more connected to a higher power.

Since graduating from college, I have continued to stay involved in work and service opportunities that have maintained my connections to others and to a higher power. I have also searched for a “church home” off and on for the past four years. I have attended a predominantly Black non-Baptist church, a predominantly White Southern Baptist Church, and a predominantly White “open and affirming” church. In fact, I became a member of the predominantly White Southern Baptist Church, but I eventually stop attending the church because I felt a “between-ness” described by Strayhorn et al. (2008); I have never felt fully at “home” at this church or at the other two churches.

My researcher's worldview also shapes this study. I believe research using an advocacy/participatory lens has the potential to transform the researcher's life, the lives of the participants, and social institutions. I also believe in a partnership between the participant and researcher to unveil voices of marginalized populations and new ideas and possibilities. I approached this study with that framework. I believe it is important for this study to address the needs and concerns of gay male students of color. I approached this study as an opportunity to partner with participants and allow them the space in the interview to express their ideas and opinions. I discussed with the participants the best mediums to present the data. My goal was not only to meet the requirements of a dissertation study, to present conference papers, and to publish papers, but also to determine with the participants the best audiences to share the information with so it can improve the spiritual journeys and spaces for Black gay men who attend PWIs.

Reflecting the composite counterstory approach, I recognize that I am unable to remove myself from these identities as I conduct this study, but I believe my identities better informed the study. I believe sharing similar identities with the research participants built rapport and made them feel more at ease as they shared their experiences as Black gay male college students. It also gave me a deeper level of understanding which, in turn, allowed me to drill down deeper, make more meaning of the data, and deliver a richer, thicker description. I recognize that each person has a different experience, and I was careful not to assume my experiences are the same as the participants. I implemented many strategies

discussed in the trustworthiness section to ensure I complete the study with the highest integrity.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness and Constructivism

For constructivism, qualitative researchers should aim to produce quality studies by addressing credibility, transferability, and dependability/confirmability (Guba & Lincoln, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe credibility in the following way: “Credibility is a trustworthiness criterion that is satisfied when source respondents agree to honor the reconstructions” (p. 329).

I used three techniques to establish credibility. Triangulation, which involves seeking evidence from more than one source or method to ensure consistency of the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2002; Mertens, 2010; Stake, 1995; Wolcott, 2010), was used to establish trustworthiness. Three data collection techniques were used—interviewing, field observations, and photovoice—to understand the spiritual narratives of Black gay male undergraduate college students. Peer debriefing was also used to establish credibility; this practice involves consulting with other researchers to confirm consistency between the data and findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2002; Mertens, 2010). My dissertation committee and other scholars in the field were utilized to debrief my findings. Finally, I used member checking to establish credibility. Member checking involves asking participants for feedback on the accuracy of the researcher’s interpretation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2002; Mertens, 2010; Stake, 1995). A summary of my interpretations were sent to the

participants after all data had been collected to receive feedback on its accuracy. However, Stake (1995) discussed that it is not required or necessary for a researcher to accept all suggested changes. I consulted with my peer debriefing group before making any changes suggested by the participants.

Transferability is a strategy concerned with readers' ability to make applications from a study to their own contexts and settings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The goal of this study was not for readers to be able to generalize the stories of the student participants to the lives of all Black gay male college students; rather, the goal was to provide an in-depth understanding of the lives of the nine research participants. I established transferability by gathering rich, thick data descriptions of the lives of the research participants. Rich, thick data descriptions transcended superficial as well as surface level accounts and provide a deeper understanding of the population (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2002; Wolcott, 2010).

This study attempts to establish dependability and confirmability, both terms of which are terms that reflect the reliability of findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985): "Reliability refers to the extent to which research findings can be replicated" (Merriam, 2002, p. 27). I maintained a researcher's log to keep track of my assumptions, questions, and thoughts as I carried out the research study; the log also included major decisions I made about the study, including development of codes and analysis process (Merriam, 2002).

Trustworthiness and Quare Theory

In addition to the constructivism trustworthiness strategies, two strategies that adhere to critical and quare theory were employed. Critical theories, like quare theory, reject the notion of internal validity and research's ability to portray reality accurately (Kincheloe & McLaren, 1998). However, critical and quare theories have their own criteria when considering the credibility of a study:

[Critical theorists] award credibility only when the constructions are plausible to those who constructed them, and even then there may be disagreement, for the researcher may see the effects of oppression in the constructs of those researched—effects that those researched may not see. Thus it becomes extremely difficult to measure the trustworthiness of critical research; no TQ (trustworthiness quotient can be developed). (Kincheloe & McLaren, 1998, p. 288)

Although I and individual participants may have had disagreements about the construction, I used member checks described in the constructivism section to attempt to establish the plausibility of the counterstory construction.

Quare and critical theories reject the notion of external validity and generalization (Kincheloe & McLaren, 1998). Instead, critical researchers establish trustworthiness through “catalytic validity,” which “points to the degree to which research moves those it studies to understand the world and the way it is shaped in order for them to transform it” (Kincheloe & McLaren, 1998, p. 289). Critical research is judged by its ability to encourage people to take political and social action and then to transform social structures and institutions (Denzin &

Lincoln, 1998a; Guba & Lincoln, 1998; Kincheloe & McLaren, 1998). Quare theorist E. Patrick Johnson (2005) emphasizes the need for social action:

If social change is to occur, gays, bisexuals, transgendered people, and lesbians of color cannot afford to be armchair theorists. Some of us need to be in the streets, in the trenches, enacting the quare theories that we construct in the “safety” of the academy. (p. 147)

To that end, I partnered with the student participants to determine the best outlets to present the data to create positive change for the collegiate and spiritual experiences of Black gay men in higher education. Possible options included reports to senior administrators at participants’ respective universities, a display of photographs from photovoice, a theatrical performance of the data, and presentations to spiritual and religious leaders.

Methodology Summary

This study utilized narrative inquiry and the counterstory approach to understand the spiritual journeys and spaces of Black gay male undergraduate students at PWIs. Criterion sampling was used to recruit nine participants through Multicultural Centers, LGBT Centers, and LGBT student organizations. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, photovoice, and field observations; data were analyzed utilizing a borderland theoretical approach, specifically a constructivism lens and quare theory lens. Many constructivism and quare strategies were employed to increase trustworthiness. This study adds rich knowledge to the field of higher education and gay, spiritual, and racial identity development theories by

exploring the voices, experiences, stories, successes, and struggles of Black gay men at PWIs during their spiritual journey and as they search and find spiritual spaces and places.

Organization of Findings

The findings are presented as journal article-ready chapters that explore the spiritual journeys and spaces of Black gay male college students through first a constructivism lens and specifically self-authorship (Chapter 4), then a quare theory lens (Chapter 5), and finally a theoretical borderland lens (Chapter 6). The dissertation structure provides an in-depth exploration of spirituality from three different angles which complement each other.

Throughout this study, music resonated with many of the participants as they discussed their own spiritual lives. Thus, the findings' chapters are presented as "interludes." Each interlude provides a literature review, methodology section, findings, discussion, and a conclusion. Each chapter is a rich and authentic interlude as the spiritual lives of Black gay male college students are told through their own voices. Together, this "composition" challenges structural oppression in the spiritual lives of Black gay male college students, while getting to the essence of lived spiritual experiences.

CHAPTER FOUR: INTERLUDE ONE

Developing Self-Authorship: The Spiritual Journeys and Spaces of Black Gay Male College Students

Colleges and universities do not often place emphasis on spirituality and the inner lives of students (Astin et al., 2011; Chickering, 2006; Hindman, 2002; Lindholm, 2007; Stewart et al., 2011; Ward, Trautvetter, & Braskamp, 2005). However, college students have a high interest in spiritual development to facilitate finding meaning in their lives (Astin et al., 2011; Brandenberger & Bowman, 2013; Bryant et al., 2003; Chickering, 2006; Hindman, 2002; Lindholm, 2007; Parks, 2000; Ward et al., 2005). Many college students expect their college or university to play a major role in the facilitation of their spiritual development (Lindholm, 2007), but this is often not the case (Astin et al., 2011; Bryant, 2011c; Chickering, 2006; Goodman, 2013; Hindman, 2002; Lindholm, 2007; Magolda, 2013; Talbot & Anderson, 2013; Ward, Trautvetter, & Braskamp, 2005).

Part of the problem may be that some higher education leaders often view conversations around spirituality to be crossing a personal line with students (Astin et al., 2011). Students at some institutions also recognize this line because they felt the need to be cautious in openly discussing their spiritual and religious selves due to fear of retaliation, disrespect, and/or rejection (Lindholm, 2007; Talbot & Anderson, 2013; Wood & Hilton, 2012). Furthermore, some colleges and universities are apathetic in their approach to students' religious and spiritual development and rarely encourage or challenge students to consider various religious and spiritual beliefs, let alone their own spiritual dimensions

(Stewart et al., 2012). This fragmentation among the spiritual, academic, emotional, and social selves often leads to college students feeling stressed and lost (Astin et al., 2011), and some students embark on a search to find meaning in their lives to end this fragmentation (Astin et al., 2011; Chickering, 2006; Hindman, 2002).

Given the imperative for higher education professionals to attend to students' holistic development, there has been a rise in scholarship on college students' spirituality, including such topics as the benefits of spiritual exploration, spiritual struggles of college students, and spirituality of marginalized students on college and university campuses (Astin et al., 2011; Bowman & Small, 2010; Bryant, 2011a; Bryant, 2011c; Bryant & Astin, 2008; Chae et al., 2004; Herndon, 2010; Johnson & Hayes, 2003; Lindholm, 2007; Love et al., 2005; Mayhew, 2012; Rockenbach et al., 2012; Strayhorn, 2011; Walker & Dixon, 2002; Watson, 2006; Wood & Hilton, 2012). Studies have shown there are several benefits for students to be engaged in spiritual exploration, including fewer challenges with academic suspensions and probationations (Walker & Dixon, 2012); they have better psychological well-being (Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, 2011; Park & Millora, 2010); are more resilient (Astin et al., 2011; Herndon, 2010); and are more willing to address the complex problems facing the global society (Astin et al., 2011).

Unfortunately, there is little research on the spiritual narratives and spiritual exploration experiences of college students with multiple marginalized identities at predominantly White Institutions (PWIs). For example, scholars have discussed how spirituality can be a source of resiliency for Black male college students (Herndon, 2010;

Watson, 2006; Wood & Hilton, 2012), but current research has not explored how spirituality may impact the experiences of Black gay male college students. Furthermore, scholars have discussed how Black gay male students struggle with fitting in with the Black community and LGB communities at PWIs (Goode-Cross & Good, 2009; Washington & Wall, 2010), but research has not explored to what extent the spiritual journeys and spiritual spaces of Black gay male college students impact their challenges and successes.

This study explored the spiritual narratives and spaces of Black gay male college students as they navigate their spiritual journeys. The guiding research questions were:

(a) How do Black gay male undergraduate college students navigate their spiritual journey?

(b) How do Black male undergraduate college students find and create their own spiritual space? The research questions are explored through constructivism, and specifically self-authorship.

Review of Literature

Spiritual Engagement of College Students

Research has shown that there are several benefits for students engaged in spiritual exploration. First, students engaged in spiritual exploration typically perform better academically (Astin et al., 2011; Walker & Dixon, 2002). Walker and Dixon (2002) found a correlation between White students' overall grade point average and spiritual beliefs, and White and Black students with stronger spiritual beliefs had fewer challenges with academic suspensions and probations. In addition, students engaged in spiritual exploration have been shown to be more engaged outside of the classroom (Astin et al., 2011). Astin et al. (2011)

found that spiritual development was aligned with traditional college outcomes like leadership engagement. Lindholm (2007) found that spirituality was crucial to identity development and gave meaning to students' lives, stating that almost "two-thirds [of students in a study] feel that their spiritual beliefs have helped them develop their identity and that these beliefs give meaning and purpose to their life" (p. 12). Students who identified as being highly spiritual were more likely than their less spiritual peers to have higher levels of equanimity (Lindholm, 2007), a concept that measured the extent to which a student "feels at peace or is centered, is able to find meaning in times of hardship, sees each day as a gift, and feels good about the direction of her/his life" (Astin et al., 2011, p. 20). Students who are highly spiritual are also more likely to be engaged in charitable activities (Brandenberger & Bowman, 2013; Lindholm, 2007). Overall, students who are highly spiritual or who explore religious or spiritual matters in co-curricular experiences are more likely to develop an ecumenical worldview (Bowman & Small, 2010; Bryant, 2011a; Bryant, 2011c; Lindholm, 2007; Mayhew, 2012), a concept that measures the extent to which a student is "interested in different religious traditions, seeks to understand other countries and cultures, feels a strong connection to all humanity, believes in the goodness of all people, accepts others as they are, and believes that all life is interconnected" (Astin et al., 2011, p. 21). For example, Mayhew (2012) found that college students "who participated in co-curricular opportunities to learn about religious and spiritual matters were significantly more likely to report ecumenical worldview gains than their peers not participating in these opportunities" (p. 299). Finally, students engaged in spiritual exploration may be better off in terms psychological well-being

compared to their peers (Astin et al., 2011; Herndon, 2010; Love et al., 2005). For instance, Astin et al. (2011) found that students engaged in spiritual exploration have a higher self-esteem, which signifies psychological well-being.

Although there are many benefits of spiritual exploration, studies have also shown that college students face spiritual and religious struggles, which scholars have described as experiences that challenge beliefs or create an internal conflict among multiple beliefs to the point of disorientation (Astin et al., 2011; Bryant, 2011c; Bryant & Astin, 2008; Faigin, 2013; Johnson & Hayes, 2003; Mayhew, 2012; Rockenbach et al., 2012). Spiritual and religious struggles have been shown to be associated with changing religious traditions, experiencing the death of a close friend or family member, and encountering situations that challenge students to question their beliefs (Astin et al., 2011; Bryant & Astin, 2008). Spiritual struggles had the potential to transform students, but they have also been documented to have negative implications for psychological and physical well-being if students are unable to work through the struggle (Bryant & Astin, 2008; Johnson & Hayes, 2003; Love et al., 2005; Mayhew, 2012). For example, studies have shown that students who faced spiritual or religious struggles were more likely to report suicidal thoughts and feelings and increased use of alcohol and tobacco (Faigin, 2013; Johnson & Hayes, 2003).

Studies have shown that particular marginalized groups were more likely to face spiritual struggles (Bryant & Astin, 2008; Love et al., 2005; Rockenbach et al., 2012). Religious minorities (Bryant & Astin, 2008), women (Bryant, 2011a; Bryant & Astin, 2008) as well as gay and lesbian students (Love et al., 2002; Rockenbach et al., 2012) all

encountered more spiritual struggles than their college peers. On the other hand, studies have shown how Black college students have turned to spirituality as a source of resiliency (Herndon, 2010; Strayhorn, 2011; Watson, 2006; Wood & Hilton, 2012).

Spirituality and LGB College Students

Many people see the LGB and spiritual or religious identities as opposed to one another, including some LGB individuals (Browne, 2010; Buchanan et al., 2001; Love et al., 2005; Munt, 2010; Sweasey, 1997). Such conflict often inspires LGB people to seek spirituality through multiple avenues: (a) natural experiences, including being a part of nature; (b) internal guiding experiences that can be found through meditation or a religion that allows for inward reflection, like Buddhism; and (c) external guiding experiences through religious institutions, like Christianity or Judaism (Sweasey, 1997). In higher education, LGB students face a particular set of challenges as they are often concurrently struggling with both their spiritual and sexual orientation identities (Love et al., 2005). Scholars have intentionally included the voices of lesbian and gay students and their spiritual exploration in studies (Love et al., 2005; Rockenbach et al., 2012). For example, although sexual orientation was not the primary focus, Rockenbach et al. (2012) included lesbian and gay students in their study, who noted that they often struggle to integrate their spiritual and sexual orientation identities.

One groundbreaking study by Love et al. (2005) specifically explored the spiritual experiences of lesbian and gay students; they found that gay and lesbian students could be categorized into three groups in regards to their sexual orientation spiritual identity

development: (a) reconciliation, (b) nonreconciliation, and (c) undeveloped. Reconciled students were able to integrate their spiritual and sexual orientation identities for the following reason:

[The students] described having a direct and personal relationship with God (or a higher power), not mediated through a church, the Bible, or other structures or dogma, though they may have (but not necessarily) belonged to a church or religion and participated in religious or spiritual practice. (p. 199)

Non-reconciled students either compartmentalized their sexual orientation and spirituality identities or did not and struggled with identities. Undeveloped students did not have a strong commitment to their sexual orientation or spiritual identities (Love et al., 2005). This study was one of few that primarily focused on the spiritual journeys and experiences of lesbian and gay college students (Love et al., 2005).

Spirituality and Black College Students

Religion and spirituality have played major roles in the development and sustainability of African American family and culture (Martin & Martin, 2002; Stewart, 1999; Walker & Dixon, 2002). Furthermore, religion and spirituality are often not seen as distinct in the African American culture (Dennis et al., 2005; Martin & Martin, 2002; Watson, 2006). In higher education, African American college students are more spiritual (Chae et al., 2004; Dennis et al., 2005; Gehrke, 2013; Walker & Dixon, 2005) and have higher religious participation (Walker & Dixon, 2005) than their White peers. For instance, Gehrke (2013) found Black students in the study had a higher spiritual identification than

their White, Asian, and Latino peers, and this spiritual identification for Black students continued to increase during their tenure in college. In addition, Gehrke (2013) found that Black college students identified with a spiritual quest more than Latino and White students during their time in college. Black students often pointed to spirituality as being a salient identity, according to Stewart (2009), who found in her qualitative study that Black students described themselves having a spiritual core that shaped how they make meaning of their multiple identities. This spiritual core was found in Black students whether they identified as Christian, Muslim, or non-religious, which indicates the important role of spirituality in the Black and African American community. Furthermore, Strayhorn (2011) demonstrated how Black college students utilized the campus gospel choir as a venue for spiritual expression and a source of resiliency.

Spirituality has also been shown to be a source of resiliency for heterosexual African American male college students (Herndon, 2010; Watson, 2006; Wood & Hilton, 2012). Research has documented spirituality as helping African American male college students cope with the stress that is sometimes brought on by being a part of an underrepresented population at a PWI (Herndon, 2010). For instance, Wood and Hilton (2012) found that Black males at a community college turned to their spirituality during challenges and successes by having dialogues with a God. Several studies have found that spirituality also helps African American male college students find focus and purpose in their lives (Herndon, 2010; Watson, 2006; Wood & Hilton, 2012), and they often turn to religious institutions to find spiritual support (Herndon, 2010; Watson, 2006). African American male college

students who received spiritual support and who sought out spirituality were more likely to succeed academically and socially in college (Herndon, 2010; Wood & Hilton, 2012). For example, Wood and Hilton (2012) showed that spirituality helped Black male college students remain focused by avoiding relationships and friendships that were not beneficial for their success, such as relationships and friendships centered on drugs and alcohol. (Unfortunately, Black male college students did not always find their higher education institutions as welcoming places for students to openly discuss their religious and spiritual identities (Wood & Hilton, 2012).

Spirituality and Black Gay Male College Students

The White gay community on college and university campuses often does not allow space to explore or discuss religious and spiritual development; however, religion and spirituality have played a large role in the Black community (Goode-Cross & Good, 2009; Washington & Wall, 2010). Scholars have noted that LGBT individuals who embraced religion or a particular faith were often received resistance due to the hostility LGBT individuals have faced from religious institutions (Poynter & Washington, 2005). Furthermore, Black gay male college students are often raised hearing messages from the Black church that homosexuality is a sin (Washington & Wall, 2010). While many denominations and faiths have become more welcoming to the LGBT community, such places of worship exist largely in the predominantly White religious communities (Washington & Wall, 2010).

Literature on the spiritual journeys of Black gay men at PWIs is almost non-existent. Two studies have touched on the spirituality of Black gay male college students at PWIs (Harper et al., 2011; Strayhorn, 2011). First, Strayhorn (2011) discussed how one participant in his study on Black students in a campus gospel choir was not “out” to his fellow choir members and had feelings of isolation at times; however, his faith and participation in the choir led to resiliency. Second, Harper et al. (2011) discussed the dimensions and complexity of multiple identities for male college students, including a case of one biracial (African American and White), gay, male college student who reconciled his multiple identities, including his spiritual identity, to find success.

These two studies provide a foundation for understanding the spiritual journeys and spaces of Black gay male college students at PWIs. However, current research has mostly excluded the spiritual experiences and journeys of Black gay male college students. It is clear that spiritual development is particularly important for the success and well-being of African American men in college (Herndon, 2010; Watson, 2006; Wood & Hilton, 2012). Given the academic, psychological, social and other proven benefits of spiritual exploration as noted in this review of literature, developing a body of research that begins to understand the benefits (and challenges) of spirituality for Black gay male college students is needed.

Theoretical Framework: Towards Self-Authorship

Constructivism developed out of a critique of positivism/ post-positivism paradigms that seek one truth and take an objective stance (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Unlike positivism/postpositivism paradigms, constructivism is not concerned with generalizations

but instead how individuals make meaning on a micro level (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; von Glasserfeld, 2005). Constructivism assumes there are multiple realities that can conflict with each other and change (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998a; Guba & Lincoln, 1998; Lincoln, 1990; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Pitman & Maxwell, 1992), and these realities can only be understood holistically (Lincoln, 1990; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Constructivism assumes reality, knowledge, truth, and meaning are constructed by individuals (Ernest, 1995; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Pitman & Maxwell, 1992; Reich, 2009; Richards, 1995; Schwandt, 1998).

In higher education, scholars and researchers have used a constructivism paradigm to understand how college students make meaning (Abes, 2009, 2012; Baxter Magolda, 2004; Baxter Magolda, King, Taylor, & Wakefield, 2012). Some scholars have studied how individuals make meaning by examining models of self-authorship, which emerged out of constructivism (Baxter Magolda, 2001). Self-authorship is focused on “the capacity to internally generate belief systems, intrapersonal states, and interpersonal loyalties” (Baxter Magolda et al., 2012). Building off of Kegan’s (1982, 1994) theory of meaning making, Baxter Magolda (2001) completed a longitudinal study to explore how young adults make meaning of their lives and move towards self-authorship; the study demonstrated how individuals moved from prescribing to external definitions of self (following formulas) to questioning these definitions (crossroads) to a self-definition in context of external forces (becoming the author of one’s life). The trajectory of the model leads to an internal self-definition (internal foundation). Baxter Magolda explores this trajectory along three dimensions: the epistemological dimension (How do I know?); the intrapersonal dimension

(Who am I?); and the interpersonal dimension (What relationships do I want with others?).

Baxter Magolda noted that these trajectories were often complex and not as smooth as presented, which is the case for most theories and models. In higher education, scholars have studied how individuals make meaning by applying self-authorship (Barber et al., 2013; Bryant, 2011b; Hernandez, 2012; Jehangir et al., 2011; Pizzolato, 2003; Torres & Hernandez, 2007; Wawrzynski & Pizzolato, 2006). Specifically, self-authorship has been applied to understand the collegiate experiences of underrepresented college students, such students of color and first-generation college students (Hernandez, 2012; Jehangir et al., 2011; Torres & Hernandez, 2007).

I chose to use self-authorship as a theoretical framework instead of faith development theoretical frameworks due to self-authorship's ability to capture the narratives of Black gay male college students who do not currently consider themselves as spiritual or religious individuals but as individuals on a journey to make meaning of the world around them. Furthermore, the model of moving towards self-authorship still provides an opportunity to explore the lived experiences around spirituality and spaces for Black gay male college students who have various connections to spirituality by focusing on how this population makes meaning of their lives.

Methods

This study contained and utilized several distinct features of qualitative research. I assumed participants would articulate multiple realities, meaning that I expected there to emerge no single truth to define the participants' experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998a;

Guba & Lincoln, 1998; Lincoln, 1990; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Pitman & Maxwell, 1992).

This qualitative research study aimed to better understand the essence and meaning of human experience rather than to pursue more popular goals of quantitative studies such as correlation and causation (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998a; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Stake, 1995; von Glasserfeld, 2005). The research was conducted in natural settings—in this case, spiritual spaces—which allowed me to develop a more authentic understanding of the study participants (Carspecken & Apple, 1992; Creswell, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 1998a; Hamel, Dufour, & Fortin, 1993; Lincoln, 1990; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Stake, 1995; Wolcott, 2010).

Narrative Approach

I used a narrative research approach, which grew out of the fields of literature, history, and the social sciences (Creswell, 2007; Polkinghorne, 2007). Josselon (2011) noted the importance of narratives:

The stories that people tell about their lives represent their meaning making; how they connect and integrate the chaos of internal and momentary experience and how they select what to tell and how they link bits of their experience are all aspects of how they structure the flow of experience and understand their lives. (p. 224)

Narrative research is grounded in the idea of multiple realities and multi-voiced individuals whose multiple perspectives may conflict at times (Josselon, 2011). The complexity of multiple realities undergirds that narrative research is not about getting to a “truth” but rather is about attempting to understand individuals’ multiple voices (Josselon, 2011). Narrative

research is about the stories told by individuals with a focus on understanding of the meaning around a phenomenon (Creswell, 2007; Josselson, 2011; Mertens, 2010; Polkinghorne, 2007).

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) further clarify the narrative approach through three elements: (a) interaction, (b) continuity, and (c) situation. The element of interaction focuses on the personal (inward) and social (outward; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The inward focuses on internal conditions—feelings and hopes—while the outward is focused on thoughts and feelings about the external environment—school and community. Clandinin and Connelly describe the element of continuity as going backward and forward to the past, present, and future. They believe that as humans, we “tell remembered stories of ourselves from earlier times as well as more current stories. All of these stories offer possible plotlines for our futures” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 60). Situation is focused on the physical space; all stories are based in a place, such as a residence hall, a spiritual space, or a classroom (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This study explored the multiple voices of Black gay male students while acknowledging and analyzing the elements presented by Clandinin and Connelly in my participants’ stories to understand the phenomenon of their spiritual journeys and meanings of their spaces and places on a micro-level.

Research Sites and Participants

I selected three predominantly White, public institutions to explore the guiding research questions. Researchers have noted that “gay” has been seen as limiting term for Black students (Goode-Cross & Good, 2009; Patton, 2011; Washington & Wall, 2010), so I included men who consider themselves gay, bisexual, non-heterosexual, queer, or same-

gender-loving. A total of nine male students who attended these three institutions chose to participate in the study (See Table 1). They ranged from first-year college students to college seniors, and they identified as gay, bisexual, and “being in a homosexual relationship.”

Table 1
Student Participants

Name	Major	Sexual Orientation	Spirituality Identity	Institution	Academic Classification
Alexander	Music	Gay	Christian with music influence/Preacher Kid	East State University	Senior
Dante	Undecided	“Homosexual Feelings”	Christian	Mid-State University	Freshman
Dez	Music	Gay	Christian with science and music influence/Preacher Kid	Mid-State University	Senior
Eric	Music	Gay	Christian with music influence	Mid-State University	Freshman
John	Political Science	Gay	Nothing	West State University	Senior
Luke	Music	Gay	Christian with music and Eastern Philosophy influence	Mid-State University	Junior
Mark	Film	Gay	Nothing but something is there	West State University	Senior
S	Agriculture	Bisexual	Christian	West State University	Sophomore
Theogriote	Biology	Bisexual	Christian with science influence	West State University	Senior

I strategically built partnerships with LGBT centers, multicultural centers, and campus ministers prior to the start of my study by meeting with the staff members affiliated with these offices in person or via phone; many of these staff members became my gatekeepers as I worked to recruit participants. The nine students were recruited through the email listservs of their universities' LGBT student organizations, campus ministry centers, student religious organizations, LGBT centers, and multicultural centers. I also attended LGBT and multicultural student organization meetings to recruit participants. In addition, I placed flyers around these three campuses.

I used a criterion sampling to recruit, identify, and select participants (Mertens, 2010). The goal of this study was not to generalize but to explore the rich experiences regarding spiritual journeys and spaces of Black gay men. Criterion sampling allowed me to concentrate on a small number of participants while gaining a better understanding of their spiritual journeys and spaces. I established the following criteria for participants: (a) identify as African American or Black; (b) identify as bisexual, gay, non-heterosexual, queer, same-gender-loving; and (c) be an undergraduate student at a PWI. The participants were asked to choose a pseudonym to increase confidentiality. In addition, I did not define spirituality for the participants. Since this study is an exploratory study into the spirituality of Black gay and bisexual male students in higher education, I believed it was important to acknowledge the various ways that the participants may define spirituality for themselves.

Data Collection

I gathered data through three interconnected methods: (a) semi-structured, face-to-face, one-on-one interviews; (b) photovoice; and (c) field observations. All data were stored in NVivo, a qualitative data management program. Students participated in two 60- to 90-minute semi-structured, one-on-one interviews. Interviews were beneficial because they allowed me to gather information on internal thoughts and past experiences that cannot be gathered through field observations (Weiss, 1994). The semi-structured interviews allowed me to have a general guide for the interviews but allowed the flexibility for participants to guide the direction of the interview (Knox & Burkard, 2009). Face-to-face interviews allowed me to pick up on social cues and nonverbal communication, both of which can provide deeper insights the participants' experiences (Opdenakker, 2006). The one-on-one interviews provided participants with confidentiality versus the alternative of a focus group that would have required participants to disclose their sexual orientation identity to individuals they may not know. I chose to conduct two interviews to allow enough time to build stronger rapport with the participants, discuss a wide range of topics, and have the ability to ask follow-up questions if needed.

Prior to the first interview, I reviewed the consent form and answered any questions or concerns. The first interview explored the participants' life stories, spiritual journeys, and where they find their space to explore their spirituality. The second interview further explored their spiritual spaces and journeys as well as focused on the photographs taken by the participant for the photovoice data. Photovoice is a qualitative method that provides

research participants, who often may feel voiceless in society, the opportunity to reflect on their experiences and stories through photography (Strack, Magill, & McDonagh, 2004; Wang & Pies, 2008). Each participant was given a disposable camera and asked to at least one day taking 10-12 pictures that reflect their spiritual journey and spiritual spaces after the first interview. I asked follow-up questions about each picture.

I used field observations to better understand the spaces where African American gay men at PWIs go to explore their spirituality. Field observations allow researchers to develop a more authentic understanding of participants' daily experiences through first-hand accounts in natural settings (Hamel et al., 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Mertens, 2010; Wolcott, 2010). Field observations were conducted in two separate phases. In the first phase, I conducted field observations early in the study to begin to better understand various spiritual spaces of Black gay men. I chose spiritual spaces for LGB individuals and Black gay men that were identified in the literature review, such as churches, mosques, synagogues, outdoor settings in nature, and college and university religious/spiritual centers. In the second phase, I gained a better understanding of the spiritual spaces and places of Black gay male students through one of the following options: a) observed and experienced the spiritual place with the participant; b) observed and experienced the spiritual space without the participant; and c) asked the participant to take photographs of their spiritual spaces and places.

Data Analysis

There are two ways to inductively analyze narrative data: (a) holistic analysis and (b) categorical analysis (Josselson, 2011). The holistic analysis approach requires researchers to

understand the text in whole for each participant rather than looking at similarities and differences across cases (Josselon, 2011). Categorical analysis “abstracts sections or words belonging to a category, using coding strategies, and compares these to similar texts from other narratives” (Josselon, 2011, p. 226). I used a mixture of the two analytic approaches and integrated the findings in the end. I first used holistic analysis by developing a profile for each participant and then used categorical analysis to understand the spiritual journeys of Black gay men across participants.

I used the categorical analysis approach by using open coding, which “allows for exploration of the ideas and meaning that are contained in raw data. While engaging in open coding, the researcher creates codes or concepts” (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2011, pp. 138-139). I used NVivo to assist me with the open coding process; I then developed codes and a code book from the raw data. During the open coding process, I recognized other theoretical frameworks that would shed further light on the data, so I began to use a combination of open coding and a priori coding. I then used axial coding; this “higher level of coding enables researchers to identify any connections that may exist between codes” (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2011, p. 139). Finally, I developed themes from the axial coding process to develop spiritual narratives of Black gay men from a constructivism lens; the focus was on how they make meaning of their spiritual journeys and spaces on a micro-level.

I read the fieldnotes multiple times to get a sense of the experience from a constructivism lens. These fieldnotes were then analyzed for codes and themes related to the

research questions. In the end, the fieldnotes were integrated into the overall interpretation of the spiritual narratives and spaces for Black gay male college students.

Subjectivity Statement

The qualitative researcher serves as an instrument for data collection (Creswell, 2007; Harper & Gasman, 2008; Mertens, 2010). Therefore, it is important for the researcher to reveal any background information that shaped this study (Harper & Gasman, 2008). I identify as a Black gay male on my own spiritual journey. I do consider religion to be a major factor in my personal spiritual journey. I come from a large, Southern family that mostly identifies as Christian. Throughout elementary school and middle school, I went to a predominantly Black Southern Baptist Church off and on until the age of thirteen. Beginning in high school, I began to consistently attend that same Southern Baptist Church. I came out as gay at the age of 17, but I remained a member of that same church. My church experience as a youth was very positive, and I felt connected to the members and the pastor of the church. I was always afraid to disclose my identity as a Black gay man, so I always felt the connection with the members and pastor was never a fully authentic one.

I went to college three hours away from my hometown, and I rarely attended church during this period in my life. During college, my personal meaning of spirituality began to expand to include transformative experiences outside of church that connected me to others and a higher power, such as significant service and advocacy experiences. For example, I spent almost three months traveling across the United States with 32 fraternity brothers doing service and advocacy work on behalf of people with disabilities. This experience

transformed my outlook on life, connected me to others in a meaningful way, and helped me feel more connected to a higher power.

Since graduating from college, I have continued to stay involved in work and service opportunities that have maintained my connections to others and to a higher power. I have also searched for a “church home” off and on for the past four years. I have attended a predominantly Black non-Baptist church, a predominantly White Southern Baptist Church, and a predominantly White “open and affirming” church. In fact, I became a member of the predominantly White Southern Baptist Church, but I eventually stop attending the church because I felt a “between-ness” described by Strayhorn et al. (2008); I have never felt fully at “home” at this church or at the other two churches.

Limitations

The nine participants for this study came from three different institutions (four from Mid-State, four from West State, and one from East State), which are all located in the Southeast region of the United States. Thus, the students’ narratives do not adequately account for the experiences of Black gay men outside of these three institutions, and more specifically, not at private colleges and universities, which are more likely to explore spirituality with students than their public institution counterparts. Furthermore, these narratives cannot adequately reflect the experiences of Black gay male college students who are attending institutions in other regions of the United States. Nevertheless, the findings of this study provide a foundation for better understanding the spiritual journeys and spaces of Black gay men in higher education.

The majority of the students in this study identified with Christianity. The two students who did not identify as Christian had extensive experience with Christianity. The voices of students who are from other religious faith and non-religious spirituality backgrounds are missing in this study. Thus, this study is limited in its exploration of the spiritual journeys and spaces of Black gay men.

Self-authorship as a theoretical framework, like other theoretical frameworks, can be restrictive at times and cannot fully account for the complexity of the narratives presented by the men in this study. Nevertheless, the model sheds light on the challenges and successes that Black gay male college students experience during their spiritual journey.

Trustworthiness

Qualitative researchers aim to produce quality studies by addressing credibility, transferability, and dependability/confirmability (Guba & Lincoln, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe credibility the following way: “Credibility is a trustworthiness criterion that is satisfied when source respondents agree to honor the reconstructions” (p. 329). I used three techniques to establish credibility. Triangulation, which involves seeking evidence from more than one source or method to ensure consistency of the data, was used to establish trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2002; Mertens, 2010; Stake, 1995; Wolcott, 2010). Three data collection techniques were used—interviewing, field observations, and photovoice—to understand the spiritual narratives of Black gay male undergraduate college students.

Peer debriefing was also used to establish credibility. Peer debriefing involves consulting with other researchers to confirm consistency between the data and findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2002; Mertens, 2010). I utilized six scholars in the field of education to debrief my findings. These scholars' interests aligned with the research study, and they were able to offer insights on students of color and gay students as well as help with methodological approaches and overall findings. Finally, I used member checking to establish credibility. Member checking involves asking participants for feedback on the accuracy of the researcher's interpretation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2002; Mertens, 2010; Stake, 1995). A summary of my interpretations were sent to the participants after all data had been collected to receive feedback on its accuracy. Stake (1995) discussed that it is not required or necessary for a researcher to accept all suggested changes. I consulted with my peer debriefing group before making any changes suggested by the participants.

Transferability is a strategy concerned with readers' ability to make applications from a study to their own contexts and settings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The goal of this study was not for readers to be able to generalize the stories of the student participants to the lives of all Black gay male college students; rather, the goal was to provide an in-depth understanding of the lives of the nine research participants. I established transferability by gathering rich, thick data descriptions of the lives of the research participants. Rich, thick data descriptions transcended superficial and surface level accounts and provide a deeper understanding of the population (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2002; Wolcott, 2010).

This study attempted to establish dependability and confirmability, both of which relate to the findings' reliability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985): "Reliability refers to the extent to which research findings can be replicated" (Merriam, 2002, p. 27). I maintained a researcher's log to keep track of my assumptions, questions, and thoughts as I carried out the research study; the log also include major decisions I made about the study, including development of codes and analysis process (Merriam, 2002).

Participant Profiles

Alexander

Alexander, a senior at East State University, describes himself as being Christian and being raised in a religious family. He has always been interested in the arts, including singing, dancing, and acting. He got involved with music in the church at an early age, and throughout his life music seemed to speak to him more in his spiritual space than did the sermons. Throughout the interviews, Alexander discussed incidents where people believed he could not be a Christian and gay, but he felt like he has been able to do so by developing a personal relationship with God.

Dante

Dante, a first-year college student at Mid-State University, describes his spirituality being tied to his religion, Christianity. He has been interested in church since a young age when he would go with his grandmother. He never saw this as a chore or a requirement; it was something he had enjoyed doing in his life. He describes himself as being in a homosexual relationship with a man, but he plans to marry a woman later in life. He felt like

he had to be rid of these “homosexual feelings” if he plans to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. On the other hand, he discussed how he believes God loves him the way he is and that there is a lot of discrimination and hypocrisy within Christianity. He views spirituality as a personal and private relationship with a higher being.

Dez

Dez, a student at Mid-State University, grew up in a conservative religious denomination with a father who was the pastor of his church. Dez was also the pianist in this church. When he told his parents that he was gay, they responded that it was just “the devil.” Based on their response, he decided to go back into the closet. He discussed struggles with accepting his sexual orientation. He finally broke down and contacted a friend who had a brother who was gay and had committed suicide. Turning to this friend allowed him to confide in someone for the first time. He later came out to his brother who was involved with church and from whom he found support. He continued to struggle with this identity in the church as the pianist while he was hearing negative messages from his father about LGBT topics often in the church. He decided one day move to out of his family’s home while he was in college and to no longer be the church pianist. This decision caused great tension in the family, but he began a journey to find his own spirituality. He believes that there is a God, but that God is hands-off. His spirituality is very much influenced by science and even music.

Eric

Eric, a first-year student at Mid-State University, came out to his parents when he was in seventh grade. He was told that he was going to hell. That response led him to take a walk while listening to music as he processed his parents' response. During this walk, he realized that nature and music could be a spiritual space. Eric was able to find support in his friends and a teacher in his high school. Eric has developed a personal relationship with a higher being and thus has resisted and rejected this notion that he was going to hell or could not be gay and a Christian. He described the people in his residence hall as his family, and he feels like he can talk about anything with them. However, he seemed to struggle with the idea of discussing spirituality with them. He felt like he would offend someone or feel like he is pushing his spirituality onto them if he told them.

John

John, a student at West State University, described his parents as being religious, but he has always questioned religion as he was growing up. He was never satisfied with the answers from his parents or his church. During his first year of college, he talked about religion a lot with his friends in the residence hall, even when he was questioning his identity as a Christian. During his sophomore year, he would only talk about religion and spirituality if he was drunk because he was nervous that if he began to question his identity, that it would lead him to question everything that he has ever known. The critical incident that pushed him over the edge and away from religion was his father having to get his foot amputated for medical reasons. His parents' church informed his father that he should not have his foot

amputated and should instead use faith-based healing. John has since moved to atheism and has begun to develop his own guidelines based on things that he sees in the media, things that he finds online, Eastern philosophy, and the things that Jesus said directly.

Luke

Luke, a student at Mid-State University, is the son of a full-time pastor. He discussed how he always felt like people had expectations of him because he was a son of a pastor, and he did not like these expectations. He also came out in high school to a friend, and he found his boarding school to be a safe space. However, the space threw him into culture shock when he left. He described coming out to a friend not associated with the boarding school and being told that he was wrong. That situation made him decide not to tell anyone else outside of the boarding school. He was “outed” to his father after his sister read his diary. He thought his father would approach the situation from a biblical lens and not be accepting, but his father did not do that. Instead, his father told him to be careful who found out who knew he was gay, especially since he is interested in pursuing a career in education. He did notice that his father was supportive over the years, and he even used gender neutral language when asking about significant others. His father also encouraged him to explore various religions when he was younger and protected him against people who would question his spiritual identity within the church. Since going to college, he identifies spiritually as Christian but he has also brought in eastern philosophy/religions into his spiritual identity. His spiritual identity is also very much encompassed in music.

Mark

Mark, a student at West State University, described his experiences going to church with his great-grandmother when his family lived in a city located in the northeast, but that only happened during special occasions after he and his family moved to a city in the southeast. He described finding church interesting when he was younger because he got to spend time with people his age. As he got older, he found it to be boring. However, he did enjoy the music in church and he also went to a YMCA summer camp and did daily devotionals. He enjoyed the daily devotionals because they connected directly to his life. He came out to his mom when he was in middle school, and she took him to therapy. The first therapist believed it okay for people to be gay, so his mom pulled him out and took him to a religious-based counselor. He described trying to “tune out” the therapist during the sessions. Mark really wrestled with this idea of spirituality and religion. He mentioned several cases of encountering extremists, but, on the other hand, also encountering religious and spiritual people who surprised him by how open they were about LGBT topics. During the course of the two interviews, it was interesting to see Mark go from a perspective that thinks spirituality is nothing to one that sees spirituality is something.

S

S, a student at West State University, was raised by his grandmothers. He described being bullied in middle school, and he turned to his a counselor and a friend who is bisexual for support. He also identified as bisexual. Once he got to high school, he had accepted his identity as bisexual. He described himself as being Christian and described how he stopped

going to church at one point because he switched households. He described going to various churches while in college. He mainly reads his Bible, and he described reading his Bible whenever he felt stressed socially or academically. He also described challenges with being one of a few people of color involved in the LGBT student organization. He described an incident where he was told that a White guy had a crush on him, but then he heard the guy actually did not like Black guys. He also described an incident where he was called queer and the “N” word on campus by three White male students.

Theogriote

Theogriote, a student at West State University, was raised by his mom, grandmother, and aunt. He described getting bullied while in middle school. He also described going through a dark phase as he realized that he was bisexual. Until 11th grade he would “pray the gay away.” He also was terrorized by the several students up until 11th grade. One day he heard God speak to him and tell him that it was okay for him to be bisexual. He also shared that God showed him that he has a gift for intelligence and described having a gift for being “quick on his feet.” He resisted the bullying and stopped allowing these same bullies from copying his homework. He also became quick with jokes, but he then realized that people were beginning to use him as entertainment, so he stopped using his jokes as much.

Throughout our conversation he talked about how God loved everyone and loved him the way he is as a bisexual man. Theogriote has tried various churches, including a church that shut down, a church where he learned people were talking about him behind his back, and an open and affirming church; he now he attends a predominantly Black church that is not open

and affirming. He described enjoying the experience there even though he is at times fearful of disclosing his sexual orientation after learning a gay person got physically harassed in a church parking lot at a church back in his hometown after that person identified as gay.

Findings

One Term, Many Interpretations: Defining Spirituality

The participants in this study defined spirituality in various ways. Some defined spirituality as “nothing.” Others defined spirituality based on their religion, which was Christianity for the majority of the participants. For example, Theogriote reflected on his spiritual identity: “I am a Christian. I believe in the Holy Trinity: Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. I believe that there is a God. There is a heaven. There is a hell.” Others defined spirituality as a connection to a higher power or ritualistic behavior:

I guess before I said believing in a higher being or I don't even know if I said [that]; I guess having some sort of ritualistic behavior. So I guess believing in a higher being and/or having some sort of ritualistic behavior. (Mark)

Alexander, Luke, Eric, and Dez all described their spirituality in the context of music. Luke reflected, “My spirituality is like music.” Eric also reflected on how his spirituality was not only grounded in music but also in nature:

Nature and music; they just go hand in hand with my spirituality because for me it's beauty. I know I'm religiously a non-denominational Christian and that connects me in the religious spiritual world as well. I really believe that God provided us nature and music to get our minds off of things, to relax because they've been there forever;

they've been there since the beginning of time. There's not one instance where there was no music or no nature. (Eric)

Alexander reflected how he would go outside and sit underneath the same tree on campus on a regular basis in order to connect to his spirituality. Dante described the connection between spirituality and nature: "I enjoy nature and how thought-provoking nature is because nature is a creation of God." Both Dez's and Theogriote's spirituality were grounded in science. According to Dez, "I feel like my spirituality is really based in the way that I think about science and how it impacts our lives. I think that there's something very spiritual about science." Theogriote explains further:

And I believe [that] science and religion are the same. Science and faith are the same. It's just a difference of explaining things. So I believe that God is the originator. The Great Scientist. And he did all of this stuff. He did everything. The Greatest Scientist. The Greatest.

For several participants, their spirituality played a role in their collegiate lives. Theogriote commented on how his spirituality played a role in helping him decide on a college, saying, "I felt like God was calling me down here. And I applied and I got in. And that was just confirmation." Dante's spirituality encouraged him to resist using drugs. He explains, "I make decisions not to do drugs because of it destroying the body and you know this is what He gave us." For Alexander, his spirituality shaped his career goals:

God intended for me to do was to sing. While there had been discrepancies about what type of music I wanted to sing, I knew that I was going to sing because that's

what makes me happy more than anything. I'm at home. [It's] what just completes me with a smile, what I'm passionate about is singing. So I definitely will be singing for the rest of my life.

For several students, spirituality was a form of motivation to help them continue to work towards their goals. Alexander explained, "I have gone through so many times where I just want to quit everything and then I pray about it. And then I'll come back stronger; I'm more determined than ever to make what I want happen." Eric said, "I would say that [attending East State University] really strengthened my spirituality and allowed me to have that determination and that will to keep going on and keep pressing on." Luke expressed, "And this is kind of weird, because music not only is a source of spirituality for me but it's also a source of understanding how you work, effort, struggle, and payoff." Through their various ways of defining spirituality, spirituality served a source to "keep pressing on" no matter the circumstances.

For Dante and Theogriote, their spirituality went beyond their collegiate experiences. Dante described how he turned to his spirituality to rebuke demons:

The water came on by itself and so I sat there and I thought, "I know that the devil is not coming to turn on no water and stuff." And so I just started praying and rebuking the devil and praying to God, you know, having the spirit there and then I didn't get up and turn the water off or nothing because I was like if I see him I might be a little scared if I actually see a demon.

Theogriote believed that he was anointed with spiritual gifts:

I was able to perceive demons and spirits as a child. And I still have that perceptual gift, but it's more ... I know what's going on now. As a child, you know, people would think it was hallucinations or whatever, but things would come to me, call my name and I would just hear my name, you know, when nobody else was there. Or I would see things that nobody else would see. Just in broad daylight.

Dante also believed that God was working little miracles on a daily basis. He pointed to several incidents where he knew his higher power was providing for his needs and wants. He remembered being home alone and hungry as a child, and a neighbor unexpectedly brought him food from a fast-food restaurant. He also described wanting a set of headphones, and two weeks later his roommate gave him a set of headphones. As a whole, the students not only defined spirituality in various ways during their spiritual journeys, but they also were able to point to the multiple ways that spirituality played a role in their lives.

Towards Spiritual Self-Authorship

The nine students in this study described a spiritual trajectory along the epistemological, intrapersonal, and interpersonal dimensions. These journeys were complex, and most men did not reflect having reached an internal foundation of spirituality. The students moved back and forth along the trajectory depending on life experiences and settings (family, school, spiritual space). The students also demonstrated that they were further along in developing self-authorship in the epistemological and intrapersonal dimensions than they were in the interpersonal dimension. These narratives of moving towards spiritual self-authorship are presented as a collection of reflections from across

participants to explore the spiritual journeys and spaces of Black gay male students in higher education. I decided to separate out each dimension to shed light on the complexity within each dimension and how they shape the spiritual self-authorship narratives for Black gay male college students.

Epistemological dimension: Developing my own “guidelines.”

Participants’ knowledge and understanding of their own spirituality often was derived from external formulas, including those provided by their family members and spiritual text. Many participants grew up in religious families based in Christianity. John reflected, “My parents were extremely religious so we went to a church a lot.” Eric, Luke, Alexander, and Dez also reflected on how their knowledge about spirituality during their youth stemmed from family members. Dante’s spirituality arrived from believing that a spiritual text provided “guidelines” that would lead to a better life. Dante believed, “If I read the Bible and I follow the guidelines, I have a better life. When I don’t, I don’t have a better life.” John reflected on how he, at times, questioned the knowledge relayed to him from his family, his church, and spiritual text, but he was always told he should “pray about it” when he did not receive satisfying responses.

Due to responses like the one John received, many participants were at “crossroads” with their own spirituality. They saw a need to explore other spiritual traditions that differed from their families’. Luke remembered exploring other religions through the encouragement of his father who is a pastor in a predominantly African American church, “So [my dad] understood that I should explore and figure out things. So around [the age of] thirteen, he

just helped look at other religions.” Others began to not only question their family members’ spiritual beliefs, but they also began to explore these questions for themselves. Dez was inspired to begin asking questions when he considered the connections among his existence, the theory of evolution, and Christianity in a middle school science class. Dez explained what he thought, “I should investigate, that I should maybe question, and I didn’t really get around to it until my freshman year in college.” Dez recognized this connection with his past experience, but he did not start really exploring these connections until college.

Others also encountered a “crossroads” in college when reflecting on their understanding and knowledge related to spirituality. For example, Mark understood spirituality as a connection to faith, but he had a negative perception of Christians as individuals who disliked LGB people. However, that perception was challenged several times in college when he encountered college students including his own boyfriend who were Christians yet embraced LGB individuals. During Mark’s first interview, he reflected that his spirituality was “nothing,” yet after the photovoice project, he came back believing there was “something” there:

Some people will turn to religion for history, [a] situation, or even something smaller that they might ask for prayers to help them out in their situations or they might pray themselves or they might blame the situation on a higher being and they might also thank their higher being for something good. You know, thinking about my mindset and trying to figure out where do I go in my head when something happens to me.

Like if I have a bad situation where am I going in my head? And what is that? Is that kind of like spirituality in a sense?

Mark did not have clear answers, but he was sparked to think about his spirituality as he reflected on an apartment fire last academic year that destroyed all of his belongings and could have potentially ended his life if he had been in his apartment at the time.

Not only did the students in this study begin to question and explore their spirituality, but they began to recognize and point to the double standards that were present in the spiritual traditions of their family members. Eric shared a vivid memory of such a time when this realization came to him:

And I just remembered sitting there one Sunday morning and my pastor was talking about unconditional love. I paid attention to the entire sermon because I was just like, “Oh, if we’re supposed to have unconditional love as Christians and how is it that I can go home and be ostracized for my sexual orientation?”

Theogriote explained his interpretation of the double standard:

“Throw it up, throw it up! Pour it up.” And you go down, “Turn it up!” And you come home, go to sleep, wake up, get yourself all nice and pretty, or you go up and you’re all up on the girls, or whatever you’re doing in the club, and then you wake up that morning, you go to Church and have your worship experiences. It’s the same way that I could be the person that I am and have my worship experience... You’re cussing people out, and holding grudges against people. If you think [being non-heterosexual is] a sin, that’s the same thing. But, me personally, I just don’t, and

that's where I usually get people saying, "How do you not think it's a sin, it's in there! It's in the Bible." I'm like, "Well, let's read the Bible. Do you eat sea food?" This questioning and examination of double standards made several students' spiritual lives more complicated. John shared the story of his difficult decision:

I didn't want to come to the conclusion that I made last year that I was an atheist. I didn't want to because I knew that if that was true then I sort of had to remake my concept of what the world is because I didn't have the Bible to create those guidelines for me. I guess that was like the one thing that went throughout my life. If I kept on hating that, if I thought about this too long, and then I was afraid that I would stop believing it. So, I'd ask questions but I wouldn't spend too much time on my own just thinking about it because I felt like I would arrive at that conclusion.

John and other students started a move towards self-authorship when they began to question spiritual guidelines that they adopted from their families.

Several students began to adopt their own spiritual guidelines and became the authors of their own understanding and knowledge of spirituality in the context of external forces, which allowed them to no longer live in fear. Dez expressed this idea of self-authorship:

They have their own choices. I'm going to allow them to make their own choices, and I don't feel, like, the necessity to worry about what's going to happen after this life. If there is Hell after this life, I don't think that I should live my life in fear of it.

(Dez)

John explained:

There are a lot of rules that have to go with being like a Christian, and I guess understanding what the Bible says about a bunch of different things. But when you stop believing in that, you sort are able to create your own guidelines for what you believe.

Several students developed an epistemological understanding of their own spirituality through an internal foundation. This epistemological understanding of spirituality was grounded in music for Alexander, Dez, Eric, and Luke. Luke described a connection between “mind and body” when playing music that allowed him to be connected to his own spirituality. The students reflected on using practice rooms and recital halls as spiritual spaces where they could develop their own understanding of their spirituality.

Other students like Dez and Theogriote built an internal foundation of their spiritual beliefs by integrating Christianity and science. Theogriote shared, “Biology and science is an important part of my life. It’s not more important than my faith, but it’s something that I use to rationalize things that I may not be able to rationalize with biblical interpretation.” Eric, among others, bridged ideas from Christianity and nature to help him develop a new understanding of his own spirituality. The photovoice project (See Figure 1) reflected Eric’s understanding of the connection between spirituality and nature; a majority of his pictures were taken in nature. In addition to nature, other students took pictures in music spaces and residence halls. Interestingly, the photovoice project led to no pictures of churches or other formal religious spaces.

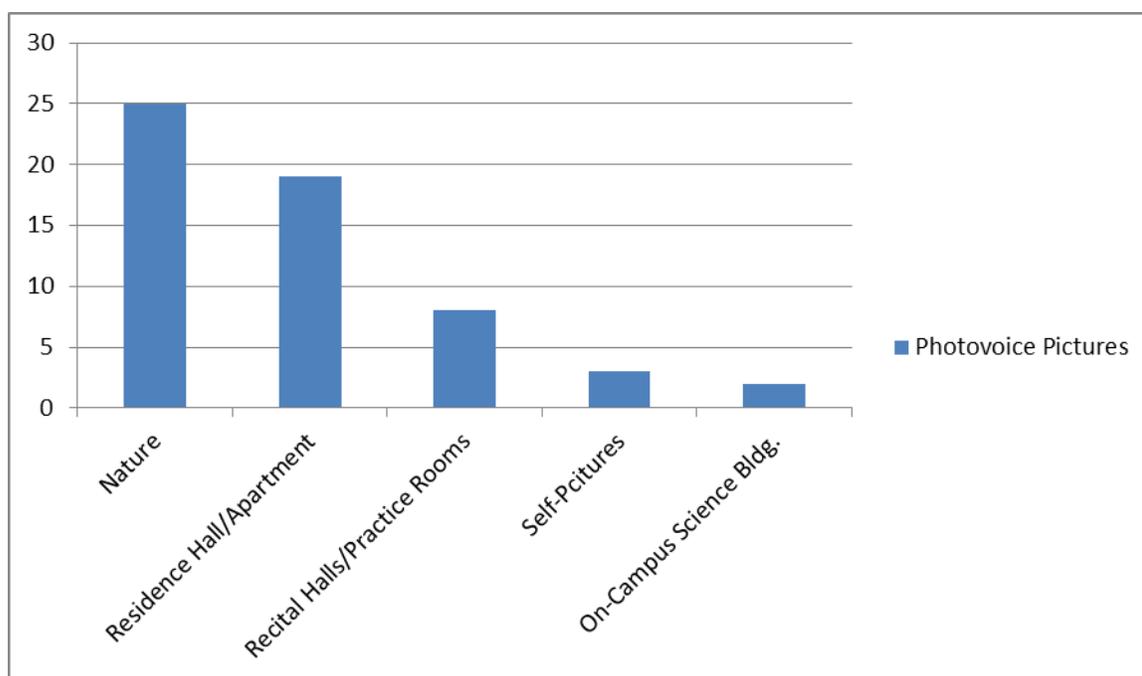


Figure 1
Photovoice Pictures that Reflect Spiritual Journeys and Spaces

Intrapersonal dimension: towards reconciliation.

The intrapersonal dimension related to spirituality followed a move from understanding one's self or others through spiritual text to understanding one's self by having a coherent sense of self that is not defined by others. Dez, S, and Theogriote had defined their sense of self earlier in their lives through spiritual text and religion, which led them to develop a sense of hatred for their sexual orientation. S explained, "I was like, I don't know if I should be this way and maybe God hates the like real me and I should change and everything. It was like, it was just tragic." Theogriote shared a similar story:

From seventh grade to eleventh grade, I [went through] this dark depression. I was just like, “God, why don't you come and take this? Why won't you take this away? Why won't you help me, you know? I'm coming to you every day. I don't want this.” And it really ... it really became something I wasn't looking for.

These students struggled with their identity because they had developed an understanding of their non-heterosexual identity being wrong because of spiritual text and people whom they encountered in religious spaces.

Several participants discussed entering a “crossroad” regarding their spirituality when they felt the presence of a higher power to help them understand that it was fine for them to be non-heterosexual. S remembered, “I felt like a presence that told me, you're not alone. You don't have to listen to people.” S believed a higher power had told him to resist these homophobia messages he heard from others. In addition, Theogriote reflected on hearing a message from a higher power:

“It's okay. I don't have a problem with it.” And it was like a light came over the darkness of my depression and I was able to see that I've been praying for four or five years and God hasn't relinquished this quote/unquote “curse” from me yet. And he was like, “I don't have a problem with it.” and I was like, “okay.”

Dez described after praying to a higher power to get rid of his gay identity, but he had come to a critical moment where he realized that he had to reach out to a friend whose gay brother had committed suicide to get support:

Yeah, that was probably one of the lowest places, and I just remember telling him...I texted him over the phone. I was like, "Look, I kind of need to talk to you about something. Can I call you right now?", and so I called him and I told him everything. This friendship provided him with someone to "confide in" during his struggles to accept his sexual orientation.

Dante discussed how he believes his higher power wants him to love himself. Yet, he also reflected on intentions to not be with a man for the rest of his life:

My intention is not to be with a man for the rest of my life; however, I have had relationships with men ... it's really opened my eyes to a Christian way and increased my faith to you know according to the Christian faith it is a sin. But I've also learned not to judge and, you know, to understand it better...understand myself better and my God better that he loves us all and he doesn't want us to judge others. He just wants us to share in the word of the Bible and to try to follow these guidelines. Everybody is going to mess up and it's like a father child relationship.

Dante reflected that his romantic relationships with men "isn't going to be a permanent thing" and he looked forward to the day when he would marry a woman. Dante's contradictory reflections about his sexual orientation identity and spiritual identity demonstrated the struggles of non-reconciled identities in developing an internal sense of self.

Nevertheless, many students in this study began to reconcile their spiritual and sexual orientation identities in order to become authors of their own identity. S pondered the intersection of his spiritual and sexual orientation identities:

Well if that's true, then I'm not a mistake. That [God] made me exactly who I am. So I'm like, why should I change when God doesn't want me to change; [God] made me perfectly who I am, so I'm OK, so that's my argument.

Several participants reconciled their identities to develop a coherent sense of self. Alexander described himself, "I'm a proud gay, Black Christian." Alexander and Eric further reflected on their multiple identities. Alexander explained:

I don't believe that it is up to anyone, any human, to tell someone else that they can't believe in God. When they say God is, you know, for everyone like come to church. He is for you, but then you say "Wait, wait, you can't come unless you change something about yourself." You know what I mean? It's almost like a contradiction to me that conservative Christians want people to be religious, but then the minute they see someone that is religious and then they're gay, "Wait, no you're not." I don't get it. It's confusing to me.

Eric expressed pride in his identity:

I am an African-American gay male, and I've just been to the point where I've just accepted myself and have been open with who I am and not have been ashamed of who I am after like all the different responses after coming out and stuff like that. So

it's just I, I do find myself as a free-spirited individual and I'm just currently living my life for me.

Both Eric and Alexander had reached a point where they no longer believed there a contradiction with their identities. Instead, they embraced the multiple identities they embodied on their spiritual journey.

Interpersonal dimension: Exploration of spirituality with others.

The interpersonal dimension of spirituality presented more challenges for the students as they moved toward being self-authors of their spirituality. Many participants were able to move toward self-authorship as they considered the epistemological and intrapersonal dimensions of their spiritual journeys, but the interpersonal dimension left many participants unable to express and explore their spirituality with others. Dez described how he does not “really talk to people very much” about his spirituality because he believed most people would not understand his spirituality that was not only grounded in Christianity but also in science and music. Several participants described the fear of offending others if they spoke about spirituality. Mark reflected on why he avoided conversations around spirituality with others:

I just try to stay away from it because I feel like it will ... the people that I have had conversations with have been more so very spiritual, and I would rather not offend anyone with the way that I view things, even though I don't feel like it should offend other people, if that makes sense.

Eric also described not only wanting to offend other students but also not wanting to spark an argument with his father:

I just worked extra hours to avoid [a conversation about spirituality and my sexual orientation] so that way I didn't have to worry about sparking up an argument because [my father] is a short-fused man and can easily get into an argument and I don't like conflict at all.

This fear of offending others became problematic when students like Eric began to conceal their spiritual identity in order to maintain positive relationships with others. Eric described not telling several of his college friends that he was interested in a Christian student organization because he did not know how they would respond to his interest. For Eric, he did not want to be spiritually/religiously “outed.”

Several students entered a crossroad when they realized they wanted to have conversations with others about spirituality. Dez and John began to explore conversations with others, but they relied on alcohol. Dez reflected on how the use of alcohol allowed him not to be concerned about the thoughts of others when he expressed his spiritual identity grounded in Christianity, science, and music:

I'm in an intoxicated state like when I've had like two shots of some sort of liquor or something like that... And you know, start talking about exact... because I mean, I guess in that point, I just don't care. Saying, you know, honest things.

John grew up as a Christian, but he slowly shifted to atheism during his time in college. When he was still a Christian and questioning his beliefs, he would explore the questions with others through the use of alcohol:

I think it's because something difficult that you don't really want to talk about and when you're drunk you're able to talk about things you wouldn't normally talk about...I mean, sometimes I like, I used to do this more when I was a Christian but I used to get drunk and talk to people about things that bothered me.

John would get drunk and talk to others about his identity as a Christian, but he was often afraid to talk about these things when he was sober because he realized that questioning may lead to atheism. While in college, John's father had to have his foot amputated. Yet, John's parents' church leadership believed in faith-based healing and challenged John's father when he decided to have the surgery to amputate the foot. For John, this was the moment when he decided to move to atheism: "I couldn't really continue to believe or partially believe in what they were saying." John could no longer believe in a religion that had followers who believed his father was wrong for seeking medical treatment.

Students saw a need to bring themselves into spiritual relationships and to become authors of their own spiritual journeys. John challenged his relationships with his mother:

I pretty blatantly explained to my mom that I just didn't care anymore and she's since then tried to like move me back to Jesus and I just haven't cared. My dad is more reticent to trust things that come out of church. They still go to the same church. I guess my brothers also are sort of more reticent too.

Dez remembered making the decision to move out of his parent's home during his junior year and to stop attending church due to their negative opinions about LGBT topics.

In addition, Eric and Theogriote discussed how they try not to begin the conversations about spirituality, but they will bring themselves into the conversation if asked about their spiritual beliefs. Eric explained:

I don't really talk spirituality that much because I'm... I believe that we all have our different views on spirituality, and I don't want to like shove anything down anyone's throat and be that individual because I think that's just stupid. You can't force someone to be in religion that you're not. And honestly, if you ask me, like if, if they ask me how I feel, I'll tell them how I feel.

Theogriote explained how conversations about spirituality arise:

I may not necessarily start the conversation unless it's something where they mention you know, "Christians are this and Christians that." And I say, "Well wait, hold on ... I'm one of those Christians you're talking about and you seem to like me pretty well." So I mean it's not like I may start a conversation outright.

Nevertheless, there were times when students were surprised by how well conversations about spirituality went with others. Theogriote remembered an event at the LGBT Center at his institution:

When the [LGBT Center] actually had the gay versus Christian events, maybe like a year or two ago, that was something that was really interesting because I'd made, I was able to go and see various people who I knew and didn't know on both sides of

the spectrum actually sit down and have a conversation about religion, about faith, and about you know spirituality...I thought all hell was going to break loose. That's the first thing I thought. Because I said, "They done got the gays and the Christians together, people are going to be dead...But I really thought like as soon as people got in the room and they closed that door it was just going to be guns ablazed. Bullets and holy water and all just flying and people dying. I thought it was going to be a mess. But it turned out not to.

Students began to see that it was possible to bring themselves fully into conversations with others about spirituality.

A few students, not many, were able to develop interpersonal spiritual relationships grounded in mutuality. Dante explained his experience:

My friends in my dorm like everybody, it's a big group, and we all hang out. We just talk about different religions because we all come from different religious backgrounds. We all come from different ways of experiencing some of the same religions and so it becomes an interesting conversation in that we are all kind of the same in looking at it in a nonbiased way. We all talk to each other in a nonbiased way without having to force each other's religion on the other. We all come to agreements and then within each other's religion we all come to conclusions and it is really a learning process and as far as my social interaction and how I deal with other people I treat other people as I want to be treated as the Bible says and as they tell us

all of our lives to do and it really works and that's what I said and it has always worked.

During the photovoice project, Alexander took a picture of the kitchen in his apartment and reflected on the weekly meal he hosts for two other students who are interns with him at a local church:

When I provide meals for friends and family, I always do it because I want to bring the fellowship through food. That's how Jesus, you know, spent times with his closest disciples. I mean the Last Supper is one of the most, if not, the most important parts of the Bible and that's how most Christians bond and reflect and share each other's spiritual journeys through food and that's why I took the picture of the kitchen... [The other interns and I] almost had every Sunday a dinner or luncheon at my apartment... I felt amazing and blessed to be able to cook for my friends and they appreciate it and then laugh, talk, pray and then go into the week ready to do it all again next Sunday. Definitely happy.

Most students did not reach the point of mutuality in their spiritual relationships with others, but it is clear this mutuality allowed opportunities for learning, exploration, and happiness.

Discussion

Scholars have described how students making meaning of their experiences by applying self-authorship. This study adds to the literature on self-authorship by applying the concept to spirituality with a focus on Black gay male college students. This study demonstrated how Black gay male college students moved from following external formulas

for their spiritual lives to how some students moved to a model of spiritual self-authorship. This study further demonstrated how students could be more developed on some dimensions (epistemological, intrapersonal, and interpersonal) and less on other dimensions. The journey towards spiritual self-authorship was embedded in context (spiritual spaces, educational spaces, and family structures) and identity as Black gay men. This study, in particular, highlighted the challenges and successes on their spiritual journeys in new ways by exploring how the students perceived and defined spirituality, reconciled their multiple identities, and experienced relationships with others during spiritual exploration.

This study extends the knowledge on perceptions of spirituality by connecting the gap in literature regarding spirituality for LGB individuals and spirituality for African Americans. Literature on spirituality and LGB individuals found LGB individuals often connected to their own spirituality through the following ways: natural experiences, such as being a part of nature; internal guiding experiences, such as meditation or Buddhism; and external guiding experiences through religious institutions such as Christianity and Judaism (Sweasey, 1997). Literature on spirituality of African Americans revealed that overall they perceived little distinction between spirituality and religion (Dennis et al., 2005; Martin & Martin, 2002; Watson, 2006). Several students' own epistemological understanding of their spirituality initially derived from their families, religious leaders, or a spiritual text; however, as students moved towards becoming authors of their own spiritual lives, many continued to define spirituality based on what they learned from their families, religious leaders, and spirituality text, which was a connection with Christianity. However, the students also described the

connection between spirituality and nature, spirituality and music, and spirituality and science. This finding suggests that other LGB African American students may define and understand their own spirituality inside the notion of religion, but, like the students in the study, they may expand the notion of spirituality to incorporate concepts and spaces that allow them to rethink the connection among religion, spirituality, and other guiding sources that are important to them.

Prior literature has shown how spirituality has been a source of resiliency for African American male college students and also helped students find focus and purpose in their lives (Herndon, 2010; Watson, 2006; Wood & Hilton, 2012). This study extends the literature on the role of spirituality in students' collegiate lives by exploring the intersection of identities—Black, gay, and male. The students in this study provided examples of how they turned to spirituality for decisions such as college choice, career, and social behavior. Students also utilized their spirituality as a form of motivation and determination. This signifies that as for heterosexual men, spirituality can and does play an important role in the collegiate lives of non-heterosexual African American males. However, the students in the study not only had to navigate challenges brought on by racial identity but also challenges brought on by sexual orientation identity.

This study adds to the body of literature on the nexus of spirituality and higher education by exploring the spiritual journeys and spaces of a group of students often marginalized on their college and university campuses—Black gay men. Studies have shown that particular marginalized groups were more likely to face spiritual struggles than their

peers (Bryant & Astin, 2008; Love et al., 2005; Rockenbach et al., 2012). The participants in this study experienced spiritual struggle as they navigated spiritual disconnections in spaces because of their racial and/or sexual orientation identities. For example, several participants discussed how their spirituality became a source of pain and struggle as they grew up in spiritual spaces that did not embrace their sexual orientation identity. Several men discussed how they were able to reconcile their spiritual, sexual orientation, and racial identities by developing a personal relationship with a higher power and seeking out spaces in nature, residence halls, and music spaces (practice rooms, recital halls) that allowed them to integrate all their identities.

Prior research has revealed that students felt the need to be cautious in openly discussing their spiritual and religious selves due to fear of retaliation, disrespect, and/or rejection (Lindholm, 2007; Talbot & Anderson, 2013; Wood & Hilton, 2012). For the Black gay men in this study who have already experienced disrespect and rejection based on their racial and sexual orientation identities, it became a real concern as well for them to be rejected because of their spiritual identities. Several students in this study described interpersonal challenges with regards to their spirituality. The students felt like they could not express or explore their spirituality with others. For example, students discussed the fear of offending others, so they kept their spiritual beliefs to themselves. This became a real issue when two students had to use alcohol in order to get to the state of being to be able to express their spirituality with others in the context of their racial, sexual orientation, and spiritual/religious identities, which has several implications for higher education.

Implications

This study has implications for practice/policy, theory, and research. The conversations around spirituality remain isolated to religious student organizations and campus ministers; however, this study revealed the need to move spiritual conversations from places of isolation to central conversations on college and university campuses. Spiritual identity, like racial, sexual orientation, and gender identities, can and does play a major role in the lives of college students, so colleges and universities have an opportunity to honor the spiritual lives of students by focusing on their spiritual development. Spiritual development can be done in an inclusive way if college and university leaders expand the meaning of spirituality by acknowledging that spirituality goes far beyond religion for some college and university students, yet religion and spirituality can be tightly connected for some students. By allowing the intellectual and developmental space for students to not only explore their spiritual identity but also consider the various ways to define spirituality, college and university leaders can help create an atmosphere that does not force students to conceal their spiritual identities for fear of rejection or retaliation. Furthermore, colleges and universities leaders must not only allow space for students to explore their spirituality but also space for intersecting identities to be embraced in these spaces. This study has revealed that gay, Black students may have a different relationship to spirituality than their White LGB peers and Black heterosexual peers. Campus administrators must understand and recognize this if true integration of racial, spiritual and sexual orientation identities is to take place on college and university campuses. Nevertheless, these conversations must begin with

college and university presidents and senior student affairs administrators. Relevant professionals need to initiate these spaces and invite these conversations by working closely with individuals across campus to rethink the role of higher education institutions in the spiritual development of students. Given the academic, psychological, social and other benefits of spiritual exploration, spiritual development of college and university students is imperative for higher education.

This study has theoretical implications. The model of self-authorship was useful in understanding the spiritual journeys of Black, non-heterosexual male college students, but the model, at times, ignored the larger problem with oppression in society. The model did not accurately reflect the experiences of homophobia and racism for Black gay male college students as they moved towards spiritual self-authorship. Although Critical Race Theory, Queer Theory, intersectionality, and feminist theoretical frameworks provide opportunities to explore the greater issue of power and privilege in society, there are no exemplary models that allow a direct connection between exploration of oppression and spiritual self-authorship.

This study leads to future studies in higher education. First, future research should explore the spiritual journeys and spaces of Black gay male undergraduate students at different institutional types, including community colleges, historically Black colleges and universities, and predominantly White, private colleges and universities. The contexts of these institutions are very different from public, predominantly White institutions on various levels, including governance, finance, and even student characteristics. Thus, the spiritual

journeys and spaces of the students who attend these institutions may also be very different. In addition, the spiritual journeys and spaces of students who attend colleges and universities outside of the South should be explored in the future. Like institutional types, various regions in the United States may have different environmental factors that allow Black gay male college students to integrate their identities more easily or it may be more challenging to integrate their spiritual, racial, and sexual orientation identities. Second, this study reveals the need to explore the spiritual journeys and spaces of Jewish and Muslim students and students from other religious traditions. The students in this study primarily came from Christian traditions, and the spiritual journeys and spaces of students from other religious traditions may reveal a more complex understanding of the spiritual journeys and spaces of Black gay men. Finally, future research should further explore oppression in society that may impact the spiritual journeys and spaces of Black gay male college students. This would further illuminate the relationship between spiritual identity development of marginalized college students and systems of oppression.

CHAPTER FIVE: INTERLUDE TWO

“Quaring” Spirituality: The Counterstories and Counterspaces of Black Gay Male College Students

Black gay male college students are a group of individuals who have been oppressed by society (Poynter & Washington, 2005; Washington & Wall, 2010). They find themselves straddling identities, specifically Black and gay, which are demonized and silenced in the United States (U.S.; Collins, 2005; Rome, 2004; Rubin, 1993; Shallenberger, 1998; Sweasey, 1997). Black men in the U.S. society are oftentimes viewed as dangerous, troubled, uneducated, poor, imprisoned, oversexed, disengaged, and responsible for the spread of HIV/AIDS (Boykin, 2005; Carbado, 2002, 2005; Celious & Oyserman, 2001; Collins, 2005; Jenkins, 2006; Noguera, 2003; Rome, 2004; Strayhorn, 2009b; Washington & Wall, 2010). These portrayals of Black men are strongly embedded in the U.S. social systems of education, criminal justice, politics, media, and economics (Collins, 2005; Jenkins, 2006; Rome, 2004).

In higher education, these portrayals often lead to Black college males being underserved and unappreciated (Strayhorn, 2009b). For example, Black men who attend predominantly White institutions (PWIs) report being under constant surveillance (Smith et al., 2007); feeling unwelcomed (Smith et al., 2007); being accused of gaining admission because of affirmative action policies (Harper & Griffin, 2010-2011); being feared by other students (Smith et al., 2007); feeling like outsiders (Smith et al., 2007); and being stereotyped as incapable of being educated (Strayhorn, 2009b). These feelings lead to fatigue, anger, and

sometimes hopelessness (Smith et al., 2007), yet scholars have noted how Black men on college and university campuses have resisted these portrayals and are academically engaged campus leaders (Harper, 2006, 2008, 2009; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Strayhorn, 2009a). These Black male college student achievers often experience racism, but they resisted being stereotyped through confronting racist behavior or remarks (Harper, 2009).

Lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) individuals face similar demonization accusations as Black men in the U.S. society (Carbado, 2002; Rhoads, 1994; Rubin, 1993). LGB individuals are often viewed as being unnatural or deviant by society, especially in the medical profession (Rhoads, 1994; Rubin, 1993); legal system (Rubin, 1993); media (Carbado, 2002); and among religious and spiritual leaders (Carbado, 2002; Lake, 1999; Rubin, 1993; Shallenberger, 1998; Sweasey, 1997). LGB people are also blamed for HIV/AIDS (Carbado, 2002); the breakdown of the “traditional” family (Rubin, 1993); and child molestation (Carbado, 2002; Rubin, 1993). In higher education, LGB students often struggle to find a space free from discrimination on college campuses and a place where they can be themselves and potentially circumvent challenges and barriers (Rhoads, 1994). For example, LGB college students report harassment (Evans, 2001); invisibility (Evans, 2001; Love, 1997; Rhoads, 1994); and physical violence (Rhoads, 1994) on college campuses because of their sexual orientation.

Similar to Black male college students, LGB college students have found ways to resist demonization. For instance, Stevens (2004) found that gay men navigated internalized homophobia, fear, anxiety, isolation, and invisibility at their institutions, but they were

successful in learning how to resist internal homophobia and embrace their sexual orientation identity to become advocates for gay rights. Furthermore, studies have recognized that there are many barriers for LGB students, but LGB students brought much strength to higher education (Longerbeam et al., 2007). For example, Longerbeam et al. (2007) found that lesbian and gay students were more likely than their heterosexual peers to be involved in politics, social activism, and discussions about social issues.

Unfortunately, Black gay male college students have not only been demonized and silenced by dominant groups but also by their Black peers and White LGB peers. Many LGB students of color are ignored in higher education (Misawa, 2010; Renn, 2010; Stevens, 2004). The intersection of identities for Black gay male college students often clashes at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs), and they feel forced to choose between being gay or being Black (Poynter & Washington, 2005; Washington & Wall, 2010). Black gay men often feel like they lose their support network of peers in the Black community who can assist them with dealing with issues of racism and discrimination on college and university campuses (Goode-Cross & Good, 2009). Black gay male college students often feel like they do not fit in with the dominant White LGBT community on their campus (Goode-Cross & Good, 2009; Rhoads, 1994; Stevens, 2004). Black LGBT students also report issues of racism within the dominant White LGBT community (Goode-Cross & Good, 2009; Poynter & Washington, 2005; Rhoads, 1994; Stevens, 2004).

Furthermore, the larger White gay community has made it taboo to discuss religion unless it is in the context of criticizing it, particularly Christianity, for its hindrance of LGB

rights (Poynter & Washington, 2005; Sweasey, 1997; Washington & Wall, 2010). This taboo regarding religion can be problematic for Black Americans who often see religion and spirituality as the same (Dennis, Hicks, Banerjee, & Dennis, 2005; Martin & Martin, 2002) and who often seek religion and spirituality as a source of resilience and freedom (Herndon, 2010; Martin & Martin, 2002; Newlin, Knafl, & Melkus, 2002; Stewart, 1999; Watson, 2006).

The role of religion and spirituality in the African American culture makes it challenging for Black LGB college students to reject a critical part of their culture. First, religion and spirituality have played major roles in the development and sustainability of African American family and culture (Martin & Martin, 2002; Stewart, 1999; Walker & Dixon, 2002). Second, spirituality has been a source of strength for Blacks throughout history (Martin & Martin, 2002; Stewart, 1999; Watson, 2006). Stewart (1999) discussed two essential elements of African American spirituality—creative soul force and resistant soul force:

Creative soul force has to do with those elements of spirituality that create cultural mechanisms that enable African Americans to adapt, transform, and transcend reality through the creative construction of black culture. Resistant soul force is the power to create, transform, and transcend those barriers and constraints that enforce complete domestication to those values, processes, behaviors, and beliefs that reinforce human devaluation and oppression. (p. 2)

These notions of creative and resistant soul force have played a role in the spirituality experiences of Black college students. For example, spirituality has been shown to be a source of resiliency for heterosexual Black males as well, and has been shown to be a way to help Black males cope with the stress that is sometimes brought on by being a part of an underrepresented population at PWIs (Herndon, 2010). Yet, Black gay males are uniquely positioned with regards to spirituality given how race, gender, and sexual orientation are generally perceived and experienced in the U.S. society. Unfortunately, current research has excluded the spiritual experiences of Black gay male college students.

This study explored the spiritual journeys of Black gay male college students at PWIs as they faced dehumanization and silence by dominant and other marginalized groups. These narratives were explored as counterstories. These counterstories were guided by two primary research questions: (a) How do Black gay male undergraduate college students navigate their spiritual journey? (b) How do Black male undergraduate college students find and create their own spiritual space?

Review of Literature

Black, Gay, and Male Identities in Higher Education

Black gay male college students at PWIs experienced homophobia, racism, and social challenges (Goode-Cross & Good, 2009; Harris, 2003; Strayhorn & Mullins, 2012).

Strayhorn and Mullins (2012) found that Black gay men had to navigate homophobia at PWIs and discussed how they “reported relatively frequent encounters with homophobia and gay oppression when interacting with their same-race peers living in RHs [residence halls]”

(p. 151). They also experienced avoidance, verbal harassment, and physical assault from their same-race, same-gender peers (Strayhorn & Mullins, 2012). This prevented Black gay men from “interacting with other Black, presumably heterosexual, male residents in meaningful ways” (Strayhorn & Mullins, 2012, p. 151).

Black gay men often reported that race was the most salient identity that impacted daily interaction with faculty, staff, and other students (Goode-Cross & Good, 2008, 2009). Black gay male students experienced racism (Goode-Cross & Good, 2009; Harris, 2003; Poynter & Washington, 2005; Rhoads, 1994; Stevens, 2004; Strayhorn & Mullins, 2012). Strayhorn and Mullins (2012) found that “derogatory remarks were the most common form of racism, with incidents ranging from joking, name-calling, and graffiti to signs and posters on RH walls” (p. 150). In addition, the gay community at PWIs is often racially segregated and focuses primarily on the experiences of White LGBT students; Black gay male college students often found themselves uncomfortable in the White-centered LGBT communities on their campuses (Goode-Cross & Good, 2009; Poynter & Washington, 2005; Rhoads, 1994; Stevens, 2004). The predominantly White LGBT community at PWIs value being out, but Black gay male college students were often not out, nor did they have a desire to be out, on their college and university campuses (Goode-Cross & Good, 2009).

Black gay men often felt unsafe on and off campus and struggled socially (Goode-Cross & Good, 2008); they often sought safe spaces at PWIs through romantic relationships and peer relationships as well as friendships to combat social challenges, which helped with Black gay males’ success in college (Goode-Cross & Good, 2008; Strayhorn et al., 2008).

These same men found it challenging to find romantic partners because of the small number of available partners, and they found men who were more interested in sexual activity than romantic relationships (Goode-Cross & Good, 2008). Furthermore, Black gay men often felt like they did not fit the White aesthetic ideal that is present in the gay community (Stevens, 2004). Black gay men turned to each other for romantic relationships, but this led to challenges because of the small populations on their PWI campuses (Goode-Cross & Good, 2008). Those who were in a romantic relationship often stated that the college experience at a PWI was less isolating, but they continued to face social challenges (Goode-Cross & Good, 2008).

Black gay male college students also relied on friendships to navigate their social and academic challenges (Strayhorn et al., 2008). They formed supportive friendships with White gay male students, other Black gay male students, and heterosexual Black female students (Strayhorn et al., 2008). Strayhorn et al. (2008) found that interracial peers played a critical role in their success in higher education, but others have found that it was difficult for Black gay male students to develop interracial friendships because of racism present in the White dominated LGB community, and they relied on other Black gay men for friendships (Goode-Cross & Good, 2009; Washington & Wall, 2010). Although most of the literature on Black gay male students is focused on their barriers, Strayhorn et al. (2008) found Black gay male college students “perceived themselves as self-determined, motivated, and independent, which in their view, affected their ability to succeed in college” (p. 99). Perhaps one way Black gay men stay motivated is through spirituality.

Black Gay Men and Spirituality

Many people see the LGB and spiritual or religious identities as opposed to one another (Browne, 2010; Buchanan et al., 2001; Love et al., 2005; Munt, 2010; Sweasey, 1997). Yet in several cases, LGB people are cited as the cause for many world issues or ostracized by some religious leaders or institutions (Rubin, 1993; Shallenberger, 1998; Sweasey, 1997). As a result, some LGB people often reject religious institutions after coming out (Rubin, 1993; Shallenberger, 1998; Sweasey, 1997). For example, in recent research, LGB college students were found to be less likely to have a religious affiliation than their college counterparts (Longerbeam et al., 2007). The White gay community on college and university campuses often does not allow space to explore or discuss religious and spiritual development; however, religion and spirituality have always played a large role in the Black community (Goode-Cross & Good, 2009; Washington & Wall, 2010). Scholars have noted that LGBT individuals who embraced religion or a particular faith were often seen as “naïve” due to the hostility LGBT individuals have faced from religious institutions (Poynter & Washington, 2005; Washington & Wall, 2010). Furthermore, Black gay male college students were often raised hearing messages from the Black church that homosexuality is a sin (Washington & Wall, 2010). While many denominations and faiths have become more welcoming to the LGB community, scholars have noted they exist largely in the predominantly White religious communities (Washington & Wall, 2010).

Critical geographers have discussed how individuals can resist oppression and fear by publically demonstrating bodily performances of resistance in dominant spaces that challenge

racism, sexism, and homophobia; such challenges can lead to social justice and transformation of spaces and places (Holloway & Hubbard, 2001). Individuals can also create counterspaces where they can resist master narratives and can create and participate in a positive, self-enhancing and affirming space for their identities (Case & Hunter, 2012; Nuñez, 2011; Solorzano et al., 2000). For example, Black gay men seek alternative communities where their sexual orientation, racial, and spiritual identities are not just tolerated but embraced (Harris-Lacewell, 2004; Johnson, 2000). Johnson (2000) provided a personal anecdote about how Black gay men found opportunities to bridge their sexual orientation, racial, and spiritual identities at a predominantly Black gay nightclub when the disc jockey stopped the hip-hop music to play gospel music and testify to the crowd. This instance was a spiritual moment for the gay men in the nightclub to become closer other Black gay men and to a higher power.

Despite this anecdote, literature on the spiritual journeys of Black gay men at PWIs is almost non-existent. Two studies have touched on the spirituality of Black gay male college students at PWIs (Harper et al., 2011; Strayhorn, 2011). First, Strayhorn (2011) demonstrated how one participant in his study on Black students in a campus gospel choir was not out to his fellow choir members and felt isolated at times, but his faith and participation in the choir increased his confidence and resiliency. Second, Harper et al. (2011) discussed the dimensions and complexity of multiple identities for male college students. The authors presented a case of how one biracial (African American and White) gay male college student integrated his multiple identities, including his spiritual identity, to

find success. The student in the case study discussed that he did not attend churches near his college because of their negative views on homosexuality, but he continued to express his spirituality through prayer and considered spirituality to be a critical part of his identity.

These two studies provide a foundation for understanding the spiritual journeys and spaces of Black gay male college students at PWIs, but current research has overall excluded the spiritual experiences of Black gay male college students. There is an opportunity to expand on this work to provide an in-depth understanding of spirituality for Black gay male college students. It is clear that spiritual development is particularly important for the success and well-being of African American men in college (Herndon, 2010; Watson, 2006; Wood & Hilton, 2012). Researchers cannot assume that this is the case for all Black male college students, and as such, it is important to investigate the role of spirituality in the lives of Black gay male college students, specifically the role of homophobia and racism in their spiritual journeys.

Quare Theory

Quare theory (Johnson, 2005; Johnson & Henderson, 2005), Black queer studies (Johnson & Henderson, 2005), and Queer of Color Critique (QCC; Ferguson, 2004) are similar perspectives that examine the intersection of race, sexual orientation, gender, and class. For this study, I used Johnson's (2005) term "quare theory" to encompass QCC and Black queer studies. The term "quare" for Johnson has roots with his Black, southern grandmother who pronounced queer as "quare." Johnson (2005) put forth "quare" to describe a LGB person of color and used quare theory as a way to discuss theory that makes

identity visible to interrogate issues of oppression, race, gender, sexual orientation, and class with a particular interest in Black LGB individuals. Quare theory as a framework has connections to Critical Race Theory (CRT), queer theory, and Black Studies, but these three frameworks have shortcomings in understanding the experiences and voices of LGB individuals of color; such shortcomings made quare theory the most appropriate theoretical framework to use for this study.

Similar to quare theory, CRT examines how racism is embedded in the social institutions and structures of education, legal, economic in the U.S. (Bell, 1995; Creswell, 2007; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Johnson, 2002; Valdes, Culp, & Harris, 2002). Like quare theory, CRT also rejects the idea of color blindness as a way to rid society of racism; these theories reject that racism is caused by individuals and not systems, and that one can only focus on racism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Valdes et al., 2002). CRT sometimes fails to only see people of color or brown and black bodies, and it often fails to recognize the experiences of LGB individuals or LGB bodies of color (Ortiz & Elrod, 2002). Thus, the voices of LGB individuals of color are overlooked, silenced, or excluded in CRT.

Quare theory also has strong connections to queer theory, which seeks to disrupt binarism and normalcy in social institutions and structures—education, legal, economic, religious, and medical (Butler, 2004; Johnson & Henderson, 2005; Johnson, 2005; Luhmann, 1998; Meiners, 1998; Tierney & Dilley, 1998). Still, this deconstruction at the same time can make salient identities such as race, gender, and class invisible (Cohen, 2005; Johnson, 2005; Johnson & Henderson, 2005). Also, queer is often associated with class, race, and gender

privilege, a privilege that is often unavailable to Black gay men and other LGB people of color who are socially located on the margins of society (Cohen, 2005; Johnson, 2005).

Quare theory also has connections to Black studies, which examine the social, cultural, political, and economic role of race, specifically Blackness, as a way to challenge and deconstruct the racism embedded in social institutions and structures (Johnson & Henderson, 2005). Unfortunately, scholarship and research in Black studies have often failed to recognize the intersection of sexual orientation in its discourse (Harper, 2005; Johnson & Henderson, 2005).

Quare theory scholars recognize the importance of understanding how race, class, gender, and sexual orientation intersect to inform one's social location (Cohen, 2005; Eng, Halberstam, & Muñoz, 2005; Ferguson, 2004, 2005; Harper, 2005; Johnson, 2005; Johnson & Henderson, 2005; Means & Jaeger, 2013; Muñoz, 2010). Quare theory rejects the idea that one can understand class, gender, race, and sexual orientation as separate formations; instead they intersect to shape one's reality (Ferguson, 2004; Johnson, 2005). This theory also recognizes the racism that exists within the LGB community and highlights the importance of interrogating the privilege of Whiteness (Cohen, 2005; Ferguson, 2005; Harper, 2005; Johnson, 2005; Muñoz, 2005). Quare theory scholars recognize the importance of including the counterstories of LGB people of color (Harper, 2005; Means & Jaeger, 2013; Misawa, 2010; Muñoz, 2005; Muñoz, 2010; Ross, 2005).

Quare theory is also grounded in performance theory (Johnson, 2005): "Performance theory not only highlights the discursive effects of acts, it also points to how these acts are

historically situated” (p. 136). Johnson used José Esteban Muñoz’s (1999) idea of disidentification to understand the performance of Black LGB individuals. Muñoz described marginalized individuals, specifically LGB people of color, using disidentification as “a survival strategy that works within and outside the dominant sphere simultaneously” (p. 5). Muñoz (1999) expanded:

Instead of buckling under the pressures of dominant identity (identification, assimilation) or attempting to break of its inescapable sphere (counteridentification, utopianism), this “working on and against” is a strategy that tries to transform a cultural logic from within, always laboring to enact permanent structural change while at the same time valuing the importance of local or everyday struggles of resistance. (pp. 11-12)

This disidentification strategy has been used by African Americans and quares of color (Johnson, 2005). For example, African Americans have used disidentification by turning to spirituality, specifically creative and resistance soul force, to resist oppression and demonization in society (Johnson, 2005; Stewart, 1999). Johnson (2005) also pointed to the ability of RuPaul, a popular Black drag queen, to demonstrate “the resourcefulness of quares of color to reinvent themselves in ways that transform their material conditions” (p. 140). Performances go beyond the stage to everyday spaces including residence halls, college classrooms, and spiritual spaces to resist assimilation, demonization, and oppression (Johnson, 2005).

Methodology

This study used a counterstory approach to understand how Black gay male college students at PWIs resist, transform, and transcend boundaries and barriers during their spiritual journey and how they find and create spiritual spaces (Bell, 2003; Yosso, 2006). People who have dominant identities typically have different stories from people who are members of marginalized identity groups (Bell, 2003; Polletta, 2006). Bell (2003) studied the views of race and racism from the perspective of White people and people of color. She argued that those in privileged positions understand the public discourse created by the dominant group in society, but they are not often exposed to the counterstories of people who are socially positioned as minorities.

Counterstories are the stories told by people, particularly marginalized people, to offer a counter voice to the majoritarian voices that often rely on stereotypes to describe the lives of marginalized people (Bell, 2003; Misawa, 2010; Yosso, 2006). Counterstories add a critical layer of information to the public discourse that allows people to begin to truly understand the experiences of marginalized groups (Bell, 2003; Carney, 2004; Harper, 2009; Misawa, 2010; Yosso, 2006). Yosso (2006) stated that “recognizing these stories and knowledge as valid and valuable data, counterstorytellers challenge majoritarian stories that omit and distort the histories and realities of oppressed communities” (p. 10).

Research Site and Sample Selection

Three predominantly White, public institutions were selected as research sites to explore the guiding research questions. Researchers have noted that “gay” has been seen as

limiting term for Black students (Goode-Cross & Good, 2009; Patton, 2011; Washington & Wall, 2010), so I included men who consider themselves gay, bisexual, non-heterosexual, queer, or same-gender-loving to be inclusive of these queer spiritual counterstories. A total of nine male students who attended these three institutions chose to participate in the study (see Table 1). Pseudonyms were used to protect the students' confidentiality. Of important note, four participants were not only children of pastors, but they were also music majors.

Table 1
Student Participants

Name	Major	Sexual Orientation	Spirituality Identity	Institution	Academic Year
Alexander	Music	Gay	Christian with music influence/Preacher Kid	East State University	Senior
Dante	Undecided	“Homosexual Feelings”	Christian	Mid-State University	Freshman
Dez	Music	Gay	Christian with science and music influence/Preacher Kid	Mid-State University	Senior
Eric	Music	Gay	Christian with music influence	Mid-State University	Freshman
John	Political Science	Gay	Nothing	West State University	Senior
Luke	Music	Gay	Christian with music and Eastern Philosophy influence	Mid-State University	Junior
Mark	Film	Gay	Nothing but something is there	West State University	Senior
S	Agriculture	Bisexual	Christian	West State University	Sophomore
Theogriote	Biology	Bisexual	Christian with science influence	West State University	Senior

I strategically built partnerships with LGBT centers, multicultural centers, and campus ministers prior to the start of my study by meeting with the staff members affiliated with these offices in person or via phone; many of these staff members became my gatekeepers as I worked to recruit participants. Participants for the study were recruited through the email listservs of the research sites' LGBT student organizations, campus ministry centers, student religious organizations, LGBT centers, and multicultural centers. I also presented an overview of the research study at student organization meetings to recruit participants. In addition, flyers were placed around the research sites. The emails, presentations, and flyers provided an opportunity to recruit students who were and who were not affiliated with traditional campus spaces for Black and LGB students.

I used a criterion sampling to recruit, identify, and select participants (Mertens, 2010). The goal of this study was not to generalize but to explore the rich experiences regarding spiritual counterstories and counterspaces of Black gay men. Criterion sampling allowed me to concentrate on a small number of participants while gaining a better understanding of their spiritual journeys and spaces. I established the following criteria for participants: (a) identify as African American or Black; (b) identify as bisexual, gay, non-heterosexual, queer, same gender loving; and (c) be an undergraduate student at a PWI.

Data Collection

Qualitative researchers often “deploy a wide range of interconnected methods, hoping always to get a better fix on the subject matter at hand” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998a, p. 3). Therefore, I gathered data through three interconnected methods: (a) semi-structured, face-to-

face, one-on-one interviews; (b) photovoice; and (c) field observations. All data were stored in *NVivo*, a qualitative data management program. Students participated in two 60- to 90-minute semi-structured, one-on-one interviews. The first interview explored the participants' spiritual journeys, how they resist oppression, and where they find their space to explore their spirituality. The second interview further explored their spiritual spaces and journeys after I conducted the field observation and photographs had been taken for this study, and the second interview also focused on the photographs taken by the participant. Photovoice is a qualitative method that provides research participants who often may feel voiceless in society the opportunity to reflect on their experiences and stories through photography (Strack, Magill, & McDonagh, 2004; Wang & Pies, 2008). Each participant was given a disposable camera and asked to spend at least one day taking 10-12 pictures that reflected their spiritual journey and spiritual spaces after the first interview.

I used field observations to better understand the spaces where African American gay men at PWIs go to explore their spirituality. Field observations allow researchers to develop a more authentic understanding of participants' daily experiences through first-hand accounts in natural settings (Hamel et al., 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Mertens, 2010; Wolcott, 2010). I could not have developed an authentic understanding of the spiritual journeys and spaces of Black gay male college students without being a part of their spiritual spaces if they identified one. Therefore, I gained a better understanding of the spiritual spaces and places of Black gay male students through one of the following ways: (a) I observed and experienced the spiritual place with the participant; (b) I observed and experienced the

spiritual space without the participant; and (c) I asked the participant to take photographs of their spiritual spaces and places. I used Yip's and Khalid's (2010) definition of spiritual space to help students understand a spiritual space: "A spiritual space could be amorphous, transcending physical boundary, and often personalized space where one was able to have a spiritual experience or moment" (p. 104). This definition allowed participants to transcend the "traditional" definitions of spiritual space where they may have at times been demonized or silenced such as churches, synagogues, or mosques. This flexibility in definition allowed participants to feel empowered to identify their spiritual space whether that is a religious space or not.

Data Analysis

DeCuir-Gunby, Marshall, and McCulloch (2011) describe analyzing interview data as "a multistep 'sense-making' endeavor" (p. 137). Since photovoice is integrated into the interview, I analyzed photovoice and interview data together. The interviews were transcribed by an outside source, which allowed me to spend more time on the data collection and analysis process. After transcription, I started by reading each interview transcript multiple times to get a sense of each participant. I then read the interview transcripts and took notes in the margins while focusing on how participants articulated their stories and what they articulated in their stories until I had a better understanding of the participant and their counterstories and counterspaces.

I then used open coding (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2011), and this led to 44 potential codes. I then used axial coding to make connections among codes (DeCuir-Gunby et al.,

2011). This led to a codebook with eight categories, some of which were pulled from the literature on creative and resistant soul force, to make sense of the data. Developed themes from the axial coding process were identified to construct the themes around the spiritual counterstories and counterspaces of Black gay men. Similar to the analysis process for the interviews, I read the fieldnotes multiple times to get a sense of each experience from a queer theory lens. The codebook was applied to the fieldnotes. In the end, the fieldnotes were integrated into the overall interpretation of the spiritual narratives and spaces as well as the spiritual counterstories and counterspaces for Black gay male college students.

Subjectivity Statement

The qualitative researcher serves as an instrument for data collection (Creswell, 2007; Harper & Gasman, 2008; Mertens, 2010). Therefore, it is important for the researcher to reveal any background information that shaped this study (Harper & Gasman, 2008). I am a Black gay male who identifies as Christian. Also, my researcher's worldview shapes this study. I believe research using an advocacy/participatory lens has the potential to transform the researcher's life, the lives of the participants, and social institutions. I also believe in a partnership between the participant and researcher to unveil voices of marginalized populations and reveal new ideas and possibilities. I approached this study with that framework. I believe it is important for this study to address the needs and concerns of gay male students of color, so I approached this study as an opportunity to partner with participants and allow them the space in the interview to express their ideas and opinions.

Limitations

This study cannot adequately account for any differences among the colleges and universities. The nine participants for this study came from three different institutions (four from Mid-State, four from West State, and one from East State). In addition, the participants attended colleges and universities located in the Southeast region of the United States, which cannot account for the experiences of Black gay male college students who attend college in another region of the United States or in another country. Nevertheless, the findings of this study provide a foundation for better understanding the spiritual journeys and spaces of Black gay men in higher education.

Most men in this study identified with Christianity. There were only two students out of the nine participants who did not identify as Christian; however, those two students had an extensive amount of experience either as a Christian or attending church. This study does not include the voices of students who are Muslim, Jewish, or from another religious tradition. Thus, this study is limited in its exploration of the spiritual journeys and spaces of Black gay men.

Trustworthiness

I used five techniques to establish trustworthiness: triangulation, peer debriefing, member checking, research log, and catalytic validity. Triangulation was used to establish trustworthiness; this process involves seeking evidence from more than one source or method to ensure consistency of the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2002; Mertens, 2010; Stake, 1995; Wolcott, 2010). Three data collection techniques were used—interviewing,

field observations, and photovoice—to understand the spiritual narratives of Black gay male undergraduate college students. Peer debriefing was also used to establish credibility. Peer debriefing involves consulting with other researchers to confirm consistency between the data and findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2002; Mertens, 2010). Six scholars in the field were utilized to debrief my findings. I used member checking, which involves asking participants for feedback on the accuracy of the researcher’s interpretation, to establish credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2002; Mertens, 2010; Stake, 1995). A summary of my interpretations were sent to the participants after all data had been collected and analyzed to receive feedback on its accuracy. Three participants responded to my email, and they confirmed the accuracy of my interpretations. I maintained a researcher’s log to keep track of my assumptions, questions, and thoughts as I carried out the research study; the log also include major decisions I made about the study including development of codes and the analysis process (Merriam, 2002).

Finally, critical researchers establish trustworthiness through “catalytic validity,” which “points to the degree to which research moves those it studies to understand the world and the way it is shaped in order for them to transform it” (Kincheloe & McLaren, 1998, p. 289). Critical research is judged by its ability to encourage people to take political and social action and then to transform social structures and institutions (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998a; Guba & Lincoln, 1998; Kincheloe & McLaren, 1998). Quare theorist E. Patrick Johnson (2005) emphasized the need for social action:

If social change is to occur, gays, bisexuals, transgendered people, and lesbians of color cannot afford to be armchair theorists. Some of us need to be in the streets, in the trenches, enacting the quare theories that we construct in the “safety” of the academy. (p. 147)

To that end, I partnered with the student participants to determine the best outlets to present the data to create positive change for the collegiate and spiritual experiences of Black gay men in higher education. Possible options included reports to senior administrators at participants’ respective universities, a dialogue about spirituality through LGBT centers, a theatrical performance of the data, presentations to spiritual and religious leaders, and a presentation on my findings through a local radio station.

Findings

The findings revealed that the participants not only experience oppression in their lives, but they also experienced the intersection of homophobia, racism, sexism, and classism during their spiritual journeys and in their spiritual spaces. However, several men were able to resist oppression through the use of creative and resistant soul force. The findings are presented with a mixture of direct quotations, paraphrases, and my interpretations. To allow for readability, I removed language such as “um” and “like” that did not hold significant meaning but was more distracting for the purposes of fully understanding the spiritual counterstories and counterspaces the participants.

Quare Disconnections: Bullying, Coming Out, and Experiences of Oppression

The participants in this study had tensions or disconnections at their identities' intersection, including the experiences of bullying and isolation in their K-12 school. Although most participants described having positive elementary school experiences, Alexander discussed how the move from his predominantly Black community to a predominantly White community was a major, racial shift for him:

I didn't have many friends in elementary school. I was always outside, always outside. I had two or three [friends] but I wasn't popular like I had been in elementary like before I moved. And I do believe it was because I was Black.

Alexander did not describe being bullied because of his race. Nevertheless, middle and high school were sites of bullying for several of the participants related to their assumed and claimed sexual orientation, including Alexander. Several participants described being called homophobic slurs and being "terrorized" for who they were or may be as individuals. Dante explained:

Of course people calling me gay because I had a high voice and I looked like a girl when I was younger, especially when I had hair people would ask me you know, "Are you a boy or a girl?"

S shared a story about being bullied:

I secretly told this one dude that I liked him [in middle school] and everything, and he went and told everyone around the whole school and that went kinda [in]to bullying.

Like most didn't care, but there was like quite a few who did care; they were all writing I was gay on the bathroom wall and everything.

Theogriote shared his story of bullying:

I was the gay kid, the fag, the queer. Anything ... any derogatory thing that they had out. And there's this kid who always would bother me and he ... the song by JayZ came out around that time, "I like girls, girls ..." You remember that? And he changed it to, "boys, boys, boys." And that was my theme song then, for the rest of the year. And they bothered me. They really terrorized the living hell out of me...And I really put a mask on for a lot of years to mask the pain I was in.

Several of the participants not only experienced this strong disconnection in their schools, but they also experienced this at home with their families. Alexander feared coming out to his family: "I was so terrified that I was gonna lose everything that I've ever known if I came out of the closet." He discussed how much he loved his family and did not want them to abandon him because of his sexual orientation identity. Others feared coming out to their family members after the responses they received from people whom they identified as friends. Luke described coming out to a friend and the response he received: "[He thought I was] making a bad choice and that was the first time that I had received negative comments towards coming out."

Once some of the participants did come out to their family members, they received negative responses. Mark's mom took him to get therapy once he disclosed his identity to

her. Others were told that they were “going to hell” or that it was just the “devil” trying to make them non-heterosexual, as Dez explained:

I had told [my parents], and they told me that it was just the Devil or whatever and that I needed to ... that it wasn't a legitimate thing, and so, basically, what happened was, I ended up kind of going back into the closet.

Eric explained his parents' response to his coming out:

But my parents' response was completely different. It's the religious approach, and I was told I was going to go to hell. So I responded back with, “I love you guys and I'm going to go to sleep now, so let's forget about this conversation.” And it hurt me that my parents could say something like that to me after living with me and them being my parents and going to church and hearing preachings about unconditional love; and your father being a pastor himself, it just kind of hurt, so.

These messages from schools and families pushed several students to “perform” masculinity to try to fit into their school and family environments. Alexander and Dez discussed their experiences of getting girlfriends to fit in. Dez also discussed the need to learn sports and memorize sport statistics and players to fit in although he had no interests in sports. These experiences not only harmed the participants, but at times they felt forced to treat women as objects just to fit into these environments. Dez explained the motivation and result of trying to be someone he was not:

I thought that if I was in a relationship with a woman, and I got married, I really thought that, you know, after having sex with a woman, like I would be straight

again. I never got to the point where I had sex with a woman, but I thought that being married and having a child would, like, tie me ...I thought that it would tie me down enough so that I wouldn't ever be in a relationship with a man, so I wouldn't have to worry about being gay...[Having a girlfriend] was just like I felt like she was just the perfect solution to my problem, and I definitely objectified her in that way, even though it was ... I regret doing that, and I feel bad about that now.

Dez saw having a girlfriend and performing masculinity as an opportunity to make his family happy; his girlfriend was the type of woman who would make his “father happy” and whom he could bring to church with him. These disconnections related to their intersections of identities did not only occur within the participants’ homes and K-12 experiences, but they also occurred once they entered college.

Alexander and S experienced feelings of isolation once they went to college due to their identities. Alexander explained the impact of arriving on his PWI’s campus:

When I finally came it was such a culture shock. I didn’t see any Black people anywhere. All I saw was trees. There wasn’t a mall. There wasn’t [a] movie theater. There was nothing to do. There was a Waffle House, a Wal-Mart, and a few gas stations, a McDonald’s and a few rinky-dink-like restaurants... “What am I gonna do like for fun?” So it was a culture shock to say the least.

Alexander continued by discussing how there were a lack of Black gay students at his institution, which made it challenging for him:

There aren't a lot of people here that are Black and gay like me. I don't have anyone else that I can relate to on every level of the spectrum, not just what I'm gonna do at my goals. And it's hard to look around and see that you're still different than everybody else, it's so hard.

S reflected on the challenges of being one of very few students who participated in his college's LGBT student organization:

There was only me and one other person who was Black in the LGBT group and everything. And I didn't say anything, but it really felt uncomfortable. I was uncomfortable because I didn't know any other African American LGBT people that went to the group. It was just me and him.

S not only experienced this disconnect within the LGBT student organizations, but he also experienced being called homophobic and racist slurs on his college campus by three White males. This was a moment that sent him back to the counseling center, a space he had become familiar with as a high school student who was harassed on a regular basis.

Luke identified incidents with two different roommates that made him realize that his roommates were uncomfortable with his sexual orientation:

I kind of have a few negative [run ins with] straight people but mainly on a personal level who was my first roommate here. He left when I had a guy over who was just sitting there. We weren't doing anything; we were just sitting there watching a movie. We were cuddling so [he] walked [in] and he was like, "Whoa." Then he just walked away and then I didn't see him again.

Luke reflected on his experience with his new roommate after the previous one moved out:

I was holding onto the rainbow flag for the [LGBT student organization] for the regulars because I was the last one to have it. So I had it in my dorm and it was just sitting there. Like at the end of the day that is when I notice[d] it was kind of bad.

He stopped showing up to the room as well but he came back every once in a while.

Luke experienced two different roommates who began to avoid the room because of how he claimed his sexual orientation. The disconnections for students had, at times, negative social and psychological implications. However, the students were able to find support for their quare identities.

Quare Connections: Finding Inner Strength and External Support

The students in this study developed a support system through internal strength, family and friends, resources available within their schools, and social media. These support systems for the participants helped them navigate their quare identities in settings and in a society that is entrenched in homophobia, racism, sexism, and classism. Several participants were able to develop inner strength to reject performing masculinity and resist homophobia and racism during their educational journeys. Through this resistance in dominant settings (e.g. schools), several participants were able to embrace their identities. Dante explained this process:

African-American gay male, and I've just been to the point where I've just accepted myself and have been open with who I am and not have been ashamed of who I am after all the different responses after I'm coming out and stuff like that. So it's just I,

I do find myself as a free-spirited individual and I'm just currently living my life for me, so.

Dante also commented, "You know I'm being myself and if you don't like it you can go on because there is only six billion people in this world and now it's seven billion I've come to find out."

Even when these men began to embrace all of their identities, they found people began to treat them like stereotypes. Eric remembered how his mother would take him shopping and expect him to have an opinion about fashion because of his sexual orientation. Theogriote found internal strength for his sexual orientation by finding an inner voice and realizing that he was intelligent and witty. He began to use to his wit to resist dehumanization in his high school. However, he saw that people began to treat him like a form of entertainment because they found his quips regarding his sexual orientation to be humorous:

So if somebody say something, they would just hold it until I was around so I could say something back. And I realized at one point, what people were doing. And I said, "You know what, I'm not going to. I'm not a Sega or Atari. You don't play me when you want to."

Several students in this study began to find their inner strength to resist oppression in dominant spaces in society. However, they had to continue to find their voices and inner strength as they began to be treated as a stereotype or a one-dimensional character.

Several students in this study instantly found support for their queer identity through other gay and bisexual students. Theogriote shared one such support: “I came out to [my friend] because she was going through ... she went through similar orientational things. She was bisexual as well. Or at least bi-curious. So, I went and I came out to her.”

S also had an LGB friend to confide in: “I talked to one of my friends, cause she's also bi. She knew what she, what I was going through because she went through the same experiences as I did...[She] had my back and everything, so I was glad for that.” Luke also shared finding support in a gay friend: “I decided maybe I should tell [my friend] since he'd just come out. He knows the best about like the whole coming out process. He just said, ‘Yes, Luke, you’re ready to come out.’ (Luke)

In return for the support he received, Luke began to mentor and support other gay students during his senior year of high school. Not only did students find support through their other gay and bisexual friends, but they also found support from people in their churches. Eric described finding support through his peers and friends at church for his sexual orientation. The students in this study discussed finding support from family members. Dez remembered his brother’s reaction when he came out to him:

I guess [my brother] sensed that there was something I wasn't telling him, and he was like, “You know, you should really feel like you can tell me anything, because I'm not going to hurt you, and I can't hurt you.”...Finally, I just came out with it, and I told him, “Yeah, I'm gay, and I have a boyfriend.” No, no, no. At the time, I didn't have a

boyfriend, but I had told him that I had been in relationships before, and he was like, “You know, it's really not that serious.”

Dez began to look to his brother as someone he could talk to about his sexual orientation.

Not only did several students find support in their siblings, but several found support from their parents who were pastors. Alexander shared:

My mom was always the one that was, you know, understanding of who I was and knew what I was going to be when the time came for me to come out. She knew, she knew. Everyone knew but they don't wanted to face it until I faced it. But she was ... and I think because the fact that she knew she had a gay son that she had to be open and affirming.

Luke explained how his father adjusted his behavior in response to Luke's coming out: “[My dad] stopped using like, ‘When you find a girlfriend’ and used, ‘When you find a person’ He started using switching his language to [become] gender neutral.”

Even when family members did not initially embrace or accept the sexual orientation of the participants, some family members eventually came around. Alexander reflected on the moment when his dying father accepted him: “When he was deteriorating from liver cancer, he finally told me like literally two weeks before he finally passed away and he's like he accepted me who I was.” Alexander cried for weeks leading up to the death of his father and after his father's death because he realized that they had missed out on opportunities to develop a stronger father-son relationship. Nevertheless, Alexander found some sense of closure hearing his father finally accept him.

Students received support for their queer identities from several avenues during K-12 and collegiate experiences. Eric discussed receiving support from his teacher:

I had a teacher who supported me 100 percent. He would allow me to walk in his room and tell him what was on my mind and how I felt and ... because he could, he could always tell when something was wrong because I'm a cheery individual on a regular basis. So whenever I looked sad, he immediately would pull me aside and say, "Hey, is everything okay? Do you want to talk? I'm always here." And I really appreciated that.

Both Eric and Luke described high school cultures that did not tolerate any type of bullying, so it was helpful for them to find support for their sexual orientation. Eric shared, "I can thankfully say that I was never bullied or anything, especially not for my sexual orientation because it was, it was unheard of in my high school to, to even do that to a person, so."

Several students discussed that once they arrived at college, they found support through their campuses' LGBT Center. Mark described this support:

[The staff in the LGBT Center] know my situation with my parents and my family and they know my situation with like school. I guess they are more or less like looking out for me. It is nice to go there and I guess almost like get away.

Theogriote found similar support in his school's LGBT center:

[The staff in the LGBT Center] just all really fell in love with me. And they were all ... I didn't have problems with anybody. So they all know who I am, because I've talked to them all in part or for some specific thing or question or whatever.

These support mechanisms helped students not only embrace their identities but receive emotional support during their educational experiences.

S and Theogriote found themselves turning to social media to find support when they initially came out and did not find support for their sexual orientation. S found coming out stories on YouTube to be very helpful, and it was the avenue for him to find support versus his peers who were harassing him on a regular basis in school. Theogriote found MySpace to be a site where he could not only explore his sexual orientation but also his sexual interests. He discussed going through a period where he would meet random strangers through MySpace, but this was his only place where he could be out and explore his identity. He eventually met his current boyfriend through MySpace, and he became a support system for Theogriote to begin to better embrace his sexual orientation. However, the spiritual lives of these men presented quare challenges and struggles as they navigated racism, homophobia, and classism during their spiritual journeys.

“Pray the Gay Away”: The Tragedy of Oppression on the Spiritual Lives of Quares

The participants in this study not only discussed experiences with oppression in their lives as Black, non-heterosexual men, but they also explored these experiences in the context of spirituality and religion as they claimed their quareness. Several participants had internalized homophobia based on their experiences in a spiritual and/or religious setting or based on religious texts. Several participants described disconnections with spiritual and/or religious spaces because of race, sexual orientation, and class.

Several men described feelings and thoughts that reflected internalized homophobia, a hatred or fear of one's identity as non-heterosexual. Several participants reflected on praying to God to "pray the gay away." Theogriote described this:

From seventh grade to eleventh grade, I [went through] this dark depression. I was just like, "God, why don't you come and take this? Why won't you take this away? Why won't you help me, you know? I'm coming to you every day. I don't want this." And it really ... it really became something I wasn't looking for.

Dez had a similar experience:

It was just like, "Why am I still dealing with this?" "What's wrong with me?" I remember that past month I had been praying really hard for God to change me and everything like that, and it seemed like nothing was happening.

S reflected that he thought God hated "the real me" and believed "it was tragic." Dante saw a conflict between his Christian identity and non-heterosexual identity, which led him to have contradictory ideas about LGBT rights. On one hand, he believed that LGBT individuals in the United States were being discriminated against, and he believed that this type of discrimination and oppression was wrong. Still, S believed that same-sex marriage should not occur within a Christian context:

I think [same-sex marriage] should be ok, it, maybe it should be okay that homosexuals be married legally, but no homosexual should look for a Christian minister to marry them. No pastor should marry a homosexual couple because it's not in their religion. Don't disrespect your own religion.

These contradictory beliefs about equity and Christianity also were reflected in comments from Eric and Theogriote, both of whom seemed to have reconciled their identities as gay and spiritual/religious. Yet, they believed that their sexual orientation was the will of a higher power and could be changed at any moment. Eric explained:

But when it comes to that are of my sexuality, I just don't talk about it because so many people have their own opinions. I'm just like this is who I am. If it's meant to change, as you say, then it'll happen. If not, then okay, but in that time, you can still support me if it is supposed to change or something like that.

Theogriote said, "If God decides to quote unquote 'pray the gay away,' then okay whatever. If he leaves me the way that I am, then okay whatever. It's either or at this point. And I just firmly believe that, you know, my orientation is a part of me." For Theogriote and Eric, their sexual orientation was a salient identity, but at the same time they were ready to follow the will of their higher power and change their sexual orientation. For these two students, their sexual orientation was never a matter of choice but rather was a result of their higher power having the ability to make them non-heterosexual and changing them to heterosexual if that was the supreme plan.

Several students experienced a disconnect in spiritual spaces due to race, sexual orientation, class, and sometimes the intersections of these identities. Alexander provided several examples of a disconnection in spiritual spaces to his race. Alexander was completing a paid music internship at a predominantly White church about an hour away from his university, and he was currently the only African American attending the church.

The church was also located in a predominantly White, affluent community. I visited this Presbyterian church during my field observation experience and noticed during my 2-hour visit to the community that I did not encounter another Black person. The only person of color whom I encountered was an Asian American woman. Alexander reflected on an experience after he volunteered to read scripture at an upcoming church program:

But before the service, one of the members in the choir came up to me and said, “Now, you better read this like you’re educated.” Now, I don’t know what [that is] supposed to mean. I’m pretty sure he didn’t mean [it] in the way that it came off, but to me it’s like would you ... I mean he only said it to me. He didn’t say [it] to anyone else so why would I not be able to read it like I’m educated. So I said, “I’m gonna read like I’m educated cause I am, I can read” (laughs).

Although Alexander encountered this racial disconnect in the church, he relied on the internship as a way to make money while in college. When Alexander was asked how the remarks regarding reading like he was “educated,” he described it as almost being normal because most of his life he and his family had been the only African American family in his the church that he called “home.” Alexander reflected on two experiences, in particular, growing up in a predominantly White, open and affirming (welcomes and affirms the LGBT identity):

[I had] cornrows at this point and I remember the first time that I went to [the predominantly White, open and affirming church]. A few little White girls [said], “Can we touch your hair?” I’ve never heard that before because that was ... what

was cool in [my previous community] was all the Black boys had cornrows. I just knew it was little things that made me feel sometimes uncomfortable, that made me feel different.

Alexander also commented on being asked to speak on behalf of Black people in his church choir:

So, me being the only Black person in the choir, they would ask me, “Is this offensive? Would someone be offended if we sang it this way? Should we sing it the correct English way?” and I would be just like, “I don’t really know.” I don’t really, I don’t get offended by it but I don’t speak for all of the Black people that possibly could visit the church this Sunday that we decided to sing this. For me, those were the only types of things that would single me out and I didn’t know how to handle it.

Although Alexander had identified this church as a space where he could be himself and where his identity as gay would be embraced, it was also a space, at times, where there was a disconnect because of his racial background.

Similar to Alexander, Theogriote reflected on his experiences exploring a predominantly White church during high school:

And then I would come and I would ... one person I met eight times. And she kept introducing herself to me. I'm like, “I'm the only Black guy here. I know who you are, Amanda. We've done this eight times. I haven't changed. You haven't changed. I know all of your names. Why do I have to keep introducing myself?” And they were really sheep and a crowded crew and it just became really depressing that people

weren't ... They were really, really like ... I was almost like a cult, almost. Where if you weren't there every Sunday and you weren't really home schooled or part of the clique, then screw you. It was kind of the attitude. I mean, people were nice and loving, but they ... Screw you.

Theogriote's statement reflects challenges with not only race but also potentially issues of not fitting in based on his educational and social class background. As Theogriote entered college, he continued to explore multiple, predominantly White churches, including an open and affirming church near his university. He described his experience:

I enjoyed being able to be myself without having to hide a certain part of my life from the church goers. But it wasn't the place for me because I didn't feel called there and some of the practices are Catholic in nature, which is different for me as a Black person. I'm used to shouting. I'm used to Holy Ghost. I'm used to prophesism. You know, they were real. They were real quiet. They would scream and stuff. But it wasn't the typical excitement I see in the Black church.

Theogriote finally decided to attend a predominantly African American church where he could hear the prophesism and the excitement, but this particular church was not open and affirming. He was fearful of being outed in this new spiritual space. When I asked Theogriote if I could do a field observation at his church, he became concerned and fearful of being outed. This fear stemmed from hearing about a non-heterosexual man being attacked in a church parking lot in his hometown after the man identified himself as gay:

I guess it started in the church and ended up walking himself out into the parking lot or something. So, and I mean, you would think fighting in the church? Yeah, it happens, and they just, they were walking on the person. Somebody was trying to break it up, I guess his boyfriend, and they ended up pushing him off. So, somebody else ended up being called, which was the gay underground (an informal network of Black gays in his hometown), once again. He ended up, I think he, may had threatened him with a bat or something and they got off of him and he broke it up. But they were going in. It's not like it was young people. These are the older generation. So, I'm always am fearful of that.

Although Theogriote had never been physically attacked in any church, there was a legitimate fear that this could happen anywhere. The man attacked in his story, fortunately, had an underground support group to break up the fight. Unfortunately, Theogriote did not have this underground support group in this community, so his ability to embrace his bisexual identity was fraught with many more implications and consequences regarding his personal safety and life.

Dez and S discussed messages they had received in church regarding LGBT topics, which led them to have a disconnection between their sexual orientation identity and the spiritual space. Dez and S spoke about the messages they had heard in church. Dez, whose father is a pastor, said, "My dad spends the majority of his sermons talking about the fact ... Especially lately, like when I was getting ready to leave, it was just like every single sermon, he talked about homosexuality, trans-gender issues." S said, "I know the pastor hates Jews or

homosexuality, so other than that it's actually a really good place to get your spirituality.” S found the church to be a “good place to get your spirituality,” but there was a qualifier there regarding the pastor’s views on Jewish individuals and LGB individuals. Dez did not have an option to leave his father’s church at the time because he relied on the money he earned as the pianist at the church.

Not only did several participants experience a disconnection between their sexual orientation identity and spiritual space, but they also experienced these disconnections on their own campuses. Three participants discussed their experiences with pastors who were Christian extremists. These individuals would come to their university campuses on a regular basis and set up in a heavily student-trafficked area such as a campus quad or outside of the student union. Their messages were about the need for students to turn their lives over to Christianity, and the messages often contained homophobic messages. Alexander and Mark described their experiences:

I remember freshman year this Baptist Church came to the most crowded point in ... on campus. And they were just calling all these people sinners and telling [them] that they’re going to hell. And the main thing they’re focusing on was being gay. And I hadn’t heard anything like that. I had never heard anything like that before that I was born a gay like my mom never told me anything about that.

Mark said:

Like today probably in the quad and I was wearing this shirt [to support LGBT rights], I would probably want to cover it up or something. I don't want to really hide

but at the same time I just don't want to bring that attention to myself and if I know I can avoid it.

For Alexander and Mark, these other individuals created a sense of fear and terror for them on their own university campus. Alexander described calling home and crying to his mother after his first encounter with the messages of hate towards LGB individuals. Mark described the need to conceal his identity when he knew these pastors would be on campus. These narratives of oppression in the spiritual lives of the participants were stories of tragedy, each a story embedded in violence against the soul as they claimed their quareness. However, these students re-claimed their souls as they begun to resist demonization and dehumanization.

Resisting Demonization: Soul Force

Participants described enacting a soul force—a creative and resistant soul force—during their spiritual in dominant settings and counterspaces. Examples of creative soul force in African American history includes the arts (e.g. jazz) and cultural movements (e.g. Harlem Renaissance). Examples of resistant soul force in African American history include the Civil Rights Movement and the Million Man March; these moments in history signified a resistance to the master narrative about who African Americans ought to be in society. In this study, the several students described creative and resistance soul force as ways to resist oppression and demonization.

Re-Claiming the soul through creative soul force.

Several students in this study discussed the use of creative soul force, including involvement in the arts, music, dance, theater, and student leadership opportunities to resist oppression and re-claim their soul. These students described using creativity to become more connected to their spirituality. Eric described this:

With me, [music] connects to my spirituality because listening to it really helps tap into that and it's like as if he's projecting my spirit through his music. I can see my spirit dancing to the music. I know that may sound crazy but that's literally how I view it sometimes. When you're in one with the music and you're in one with yourself and your emotions, all of them in their entirety as a person, mentally, physically and emotionally, you're just fulfilled. All the stress and all the worries are vanished from your sight.

Dante shared his feelings:

Cause sometimes when you go to churches kind of like a dome, I mean, you really just go and you're enjoying it, the space and atmosphere...Anything that God that, with the, it was really praise and worship and it was like not just singing and dancing just for the fun of singing and dancing. You just, it was just actually lifting your voice to God, actually singing to God Himself as if you were to sing to someone you loved. It's singing to God Himself and just praising His name and thanking Him for all His time.

Dez also shared his connection to music:

[Music is] definitely something that came from a higher power and that's how I felt about it. Through playing music, through playing specifically the music that we were playing in church, you could gain a connection with the higher, with that God, with Jesus in that case.

Eric further explained that singing in church allowed him to express his emotions related to embracing his sexual orientation identity without offending people:

I would sing in church and music was just like the thing I knew I was really good at and I didn't have to worry about ... I could express what I wanted to say emotionally through my music. That's the one thing I've been able to say. No matter how I'm feeling, if I put it in song ... if I put that emotion in song, it's 10 times more fulfilling to me as a person and it gets my point across without offending anyone and getting weird stares. This is my music, this is how I'm feeling, this is why.

The students in this study also enacted creative soul force by taking on leadership roles that allowed them to express innovation while resisting internalized oppression.

Alexander discussed how he wanted to “break down barriers” and “represent” for other African Americans. He worked with other students of color at his institution to begin a student organization that recognized students with a 3.5 GPA or higher. Luke was the president of the LGBT student organization at his institution, and he had become a person that other students looked to for leadership and support for other LGBT students on his college campus. Theogriote described resisting his leadership skills at first when he thought

he was being led to establish a LGBT organization or program to help students explore their faith and spirituality:

Well, I believe that God talked to me a couple of years ago and told me to do [an organization for LGBT students to explore their faith and spirituality], but I told him no. Because this was at a point where I didn't want to acknowledge the fact that I may have a gift, or that I have a gift rather, of leadership within the Kingdom.

Theogriote began working towards establishing the organization but then he was asked to consider being a youth pastor at a church. He had turned his attention away from the organization, but he recognized that he had the gift of leadership that he believed was given to him by his higher power.

Re-Claiming the soul through resistant soul force in dominant settings.

Several students in this study enacted resistant soul force to resist dehumanization, demonization, and oppression. The participants did this by questioning spiritual leaders or text that once had been oppressive, challenging norms about their identities as non-heterosexual and spiritual in dominant spaces, developing a personal relationship with a higher power, and creating counterspaces for their spirituality.

John and Alexander described questioning spiritual text as a way to resist oppression related to their queerness. John shared:

The thing is the Bible programs, that I was talking about earlier, again they were talking basically just semantics. Just what did Jesus say and I knew what Jesus said about this. He said nothing about gay issues, but Paul said a lot of things about it.

So, that was the point where I sort of started questioning this. How can I be born this way and then also how can this be so wrong. So, I guess that was what I was questioning directly.

John and Alexander both also described several conflicting messages in spiritual text. For John, it was the beginning of his shift as an atheist, while it allowed Alexander to reject these messages and to embrace the messages of love and acceptance in the Bible. However, Dante believed that being gay would not allow him into the “Kingdom of Heaven.” He discussed planning to change eventually and to marry a woman in the future. Nevertheless, he resisted messages of oppression by returning the message to heterosexuals, saying, “So for somebody, for a heterosexual person to say, ‘You, you’re going to hell,’ to a homosexual person, then the homosexual person should say to them, ‘You’re going to be right beside me because, they’re a heterosexual fornicator.’”

Dante believed that individuals did not apply spiritual text equally to all people, and he was a firm believer in sharing that heterosexual individuals were just as guilty of sin but the focus had just been placed on non-heterosexual individuals. Alexander and Theogriote resisted the idea that they could not be gay and Christian in dominant spaces. They described how other LGB students were confused by how they could be gay and a Christian.

Theogriote also discussed this notion within the church:

Especially to people in the churches who think that my worship experience can’t be real because of my faith and my orientation, because they don’t know the God I

serve. They don't know what he's brought me through, and they don't know my journey. They've never experienced it, you know?

Theogriote also challenged the juxtaposition between performance and the intersection of race, sexual orientation and gender identities within predominantly Black spiritual spaces:

There's a lot of discrepancies in people's religious experience when it comes to the gayness. Because they will hire the gay piano player that comes in you know, twist and shaking and just as feminine as they want to be. Eyebrows arched, you know they live with their cousin, and nobody will ever ask a word. They'll talk behind people's backs, but will never ask a word. But until that person overtly or accidentally is outed or comes out, then all of a sudden it's like all of the holiness that you've said they've done, all of it, the good God things that they've done, suddenly disappears.

Several students discussed enacting resistant soul force by establishing a personal relationship with a higher power that was not filtered through others or a spiritual text. Alexander said, "My relationship with God has nothing to do with my mom, it has nothing to do with you, it has nothing to do with my friends, it has nothing to do with anyone else. It's my relationship with God." Dez shared:

My spirituality is very personal to me and personal to my experiences. You know? It's something that's very true for me. Like, I mean, it works, and it makes

sense. There's always an explanation for ... Like, there's always an explanation for something, even if we don't know what the explanation is.

Eric expressed a similar sentiment: “My spirituality is like a personal, a personal connection with a higher being that understands me, loves me regardless of who I am, and is there to support me through my life.” This personal relationship between individuals in this study and a higher power led some to leave spiritual spaces. Dez, who was the pianist at his father’s church, decided to leave due to the negative messages about gay and lesbian people:

I didn't like the message that they were sending; the negative message about gay and lesbian people, about... You know? They [go] to Hell, or their relationships aren't valid. I just didn't want to associate with that anymore... Yeah, so yeah, now I'm not the pianist of that church anymore.

These men performed resistance in dominant spaces by challenging norms and sometimes by leaving spiritual spaces that no longer met their spiritual needs as they simultaneously re-claimed their soul and quareness. This led some men to keep a connection to dominant spiritual spaces but also to develop spiritual counterspaces.

Spiritual counterspaces.

Several participants described spiritual counterspaces where they could have a connection to their spirituality or to a higher power without having to be concerned about their racial, sexual orientation, and social class identities. In fact, many of the photovoice pictures reflected these counterspaces (See Table 2). Many participants described being connected to their spirituality in places of isolation, such as residence hall rooms, to pray,

read spiritual text, and to contemplate. Alexander described the use of his bedroom as a spiritual space:

[My bedroom] is obviously my sanctuary where I am alone and I pray every night [there] and just thank God for getting me through the day and pray that he wake[s] me up again in the morning and that's a spiritual space for me. (Alexander)

S also reflected on how he uses his bedroom to read the Bible, while Luke used his apartment as an opportunity to meditate.

Others described getting lost in nature to explore their spirituality. Eric photographed such a space, describing it here:

This view you're seeing [in the picture] is the building that I live in; it's calming. I have a great view of the campus and I can just look out my window or I can go outside of my building. No matter where I go on campus there is literally nature everywhere.

Alexander also photographed a natural space:

Another spot where I like to sit and just reflect...there's vegetation and you can't see it [in this picture] because where I was standing, but I've sat [there], sometimes I eat lunch [there], and just think about the week and reflect. It's a combination of being blessed [for the] food that I would eat here, and then being thankful for the vegetation that was around me, the beauty that was around me, reflecting alone when I sit [there].

Dez described sitting underneath the stars and staring up at the sky as a way to feel connected to his spirituality.

Eric, Alexander, Luke, and Dez discussed finding their spiritual counterspaces in music practice rooms. Alexander said, “That’s still like almost praise and worship space for me, the practice room. When I say praise and worship, it’s mostly thanking God for giving me the talent to sing um, and that’s how I connect to God most is when I’m singing.” Eric described his space:

When I'm in that practice room, I think about how can I convey the message of this piece and if I'm not working on a piece, I'm just improvising, what is my spirit telling me? How are my emotions feeling? What needs to be expressed out loud that I've been holding in... When I leave I just feel like ... what's the word ... it's just like a weight's been lifted off my shoulders. It's like another go-to tranquil spot for me. I feel accomplished, achieved and I feel whole with myself.

Although practicing music solo in practice rooms was identified as a space for four students to be better connected to their own spirituality, Luke and Dez discussed how playing music with others in a recital hall or rehearsal room was a way to become connected to their spirituality in collaboration with others. Luke described playing music with others in the rehearsal room as a “place of worship:”

It’s like when I go to rehearsal... I’m completely excited. I’m like, well, let’s do it.

This is finally I get to let my life shine ... in solo forms I get to let my life shine, but

also when an ensemble form is like I get to show how my life fits into others and how the human experiences works together to make something else.

Alexander was able to identify two spiritual counterspaces. He identified the church where his mother is the pastor, a predominantly African American, open and affirming church, and a church where a family friend is a pastor, a racially integrated, open and affirming church. Alexander remembered attending his mother's church after being a regular attender of an affluent, White church near his college campus:

It's just the anointing in a Black church is so overpowering when you have been going to a Caucasian church for the past year. And then goes again into the taking into account how African Americans approach the service in regards or in opposition to Caucasian folks in the service...[My mom] likes the passing of the peace but she does not make that a meet and greet hour. She really does make it pass the peace, hug someone, tell them that you love them type of thing that, "Oh, how many sales do you have at the car shop this year?" or "How's your new Mercedes doing" or "I love your blue hydrangeas." Like these are all things that I have heard during passing the peace at [the predominantly White, affluent church near my school].

Alexander described how his mother's church was a counterspace where he could "fully focus on this worship service" and not be concerned about "I wonder who knows?" These spiritual counterspaces allowed several participants to have a space, a connection to a higher power who was not concerned about their sexual orientation, race, or social class.

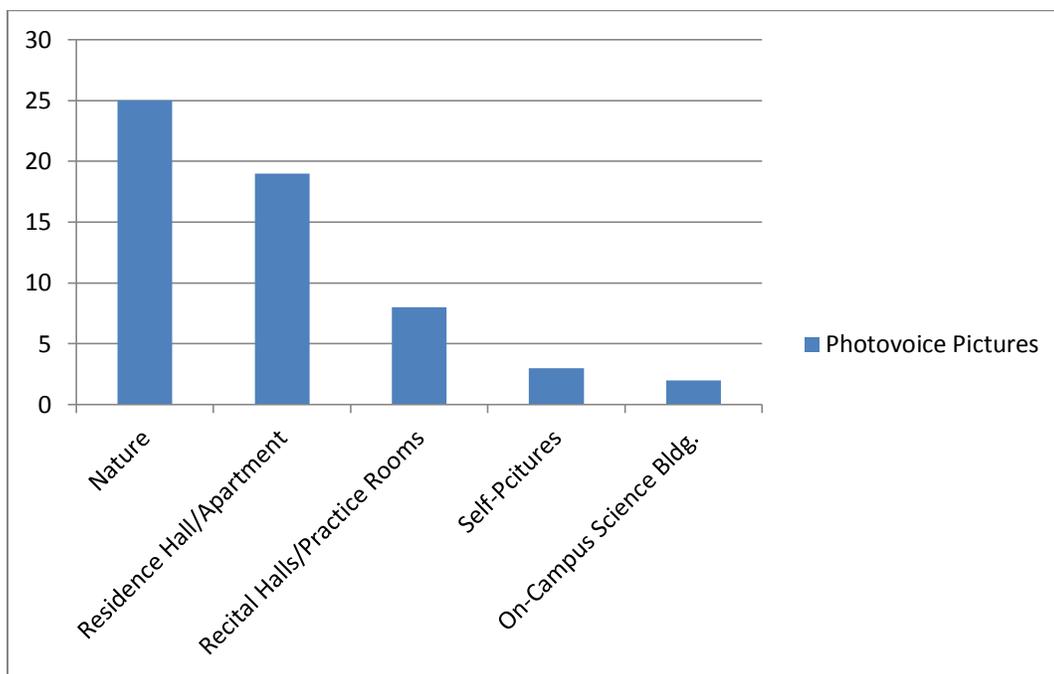


Figure 1
Photovoice Pictures that Reflect Spiritual Journeys and Spaces

Discussion

Inner peace is about striving for humanization and feeling like one can be fully recognized. Unfortunately, humanization is under constant threat by exploitation, injustice, and oppression (Freire, 1970/1993). There is a constant battle to resist demonization or dehumanization from internalized oppression, other individuals, as well as social structures and institutions. This resistance to demonization and dehumanization is particularly a struggle for marginalized individuals such as Black gay males, who are often made to be the “poster children” of corruption, demonization, and societal problems and whose bodies are

seen as problematic. The problematic views of the Black gay male body and the challenge to integrate several identities—race, sexual orientation, spirituality/religion, gender, and class—led to this study to explore not only the spiritual journeys of Black gay men, but also the spiritual spaces of Black gay men where they have the potential to escape queer gaze and racialized gaze.

Freire (1970/1993) stated, “In order for this struggle to have meaning, the oppressed must not, in seeking to regain their humanity (which is a way to create it), become in turn oppressors of the oppressors, but rather restorers of the humanity of both” (p. 44). By striving to restore humanity, the oppressed and oppressors can be liberated and establish a new order for humanity in society. This study revealed that although the Black gay male students in this study experienced racism and homophobia, many were able to restore humanization for themselves by resisting oppression, developing an inner voice, and constructing a soul force that refused to be demonized. Thus, this study extends the literature in multiple ways.

This study extends the research on Black gay men in higher education. There continues to be a lack of research on the experiences of LGB students of color (Misawa, 2010; Renn, 2010; Stevens, 2004). The research on Black gay male college students’ strengths, successes, and resiliency is almost non-existent in higher education. Social worker researchers Akerlund and Cheung (2000) emphasized the need for more research on how LGB people of color utilize strengths and strategies to be successful. The current research on Black gay male college students is focused mostly on challenges related to how they deal

with a variety of barriers including the lack of a supportive network of faculty and peers, difficulties with psychological and personal challenges, as well as struggling as a double minority at PWIs (Goode-Cross & Good, 2008, 2009; Harris, 2003; Henry, Richards, & Fuerth, 2011; Patton, 2011; Strayhorn & Mullins, 2012; Washington & Wall, 2010). This study further reveals the barriers and challenges for Black gay men in educational settings such as bullying in middle and high school because of sexual orientation, feelings of isolation and loneliness on their college campuses, and experiences with racism and homophobia at their institutions.

However, this study also revealed counterstories of inner strength. The men in this study discussed developing an inner strength to resist homophobia and racism. They also discussed sources of support, such as family, LGB friends, college LGBT centers, and high school environments, which allowed students to better integrate and in some cases embrace their multiple identities.

This study extends research on the application of quare theory. Quare theory scholars recognize the importance of understanding how race, class, gender, and sexual orientation intersect to inform one's social location (Cohen, 2005; Eng, Halberstam, & Muñoz, 2005; Ferguson, 2004, 2005; Harper, 2005; Johnson, 2005; Johnson & Henderson, 2005; Means & Jaeger, 2013; Muñoz, 2010). By examining these disconnections at the intersection of social formation instead of four separate formations, the study demonstrated how oppression could impact spaces that ought to be safe for individuals, such as K-12, family, collegiate, and spiritual settings. The students in this study discussed disconnections between their

formation of identities and these settings as they not only moved through life but also as they navigated their spirituality. For example, the students in this study described experiences with homophobia in spiritual spaces, which included the fear of revealing their sexual orientation in religious spaces and being soulfully violated in religious spaces where they were told they were sinners because of their sexual orientation. However, the homophobia that was experienced by the students was connected to their race, class, and gender as they encountered messages of homophobia in predominantly African American churches, were looked down upon by their White LGB peers who believed they could not be gay and religious, experienced difficulty leaving homophobic spiritual spaces due to the need to work and earn money in these spaces, and performed masculinity in order to find acceptance.

Nevertheless, quare theory discusses the use of the disidentification strategy for individuals to not buckle under the weight of oppression and assimilate; they also must not to develop an unrealistic utopia but instead to work within dominant structures to resist oppression (Johnson, 2005; Muñoz, 1999). Several students in this study described using multiple forms of resistance within dominant structural settings, such as churches, K-12 settings, and collegiate setting to resist oppression. They did so by questioning and challenging the master narrative on what it means to be spiritual and what it means to be a Black gay male in society. They challenged the master narrative not only in dominant society but also the one present in the LGB community that has a notion that people cannot be religious and gay because of oppressive religious institutions.

The ideas of quare theory and soul force are closely intertwined. Stewart (1999) discussed two essential elements of African American spirituality—creative soul force and resistant soul force—to demonstrate how African Americans have enacted these soul forces to resist oppression in society. This study reveals that the notion of creative and resistant soul force can also be applied at the intersection of identities—Black, non-heterosexual, and male. The students in this study described enacting several forms of creative soul force, the arts and leadership, to transform and transcend oppression through construction of new realities and possibilities. For example, several men in this study described a connection between their spirituality and music, which allowed them to gain a new perspective on how they could be connected to a higher power through an avenue other than a religious setting embedded in homophobia and racism. The students in this study also revealed enacting resistant soul force to resist oppression during their spiritual journeys. The students in the study did so by developing a personal relationship with a higher power and creating or finding spiritual counterspaces; these counterspaces included music practice rooms, places in nature, and predominantly African American, open and affirming churches. These counterstories challenged the master narrative and provided a deeper understanding of the connection among spirituality, social formations, oppression, and disidentification.

Implications for Higher Education

This study has implications for practice/policy, theory, and research. For practice and policy, the findings call for practitioners and policymakers to explore and interrogate the intersection of social formations. Higher education will not shift or change until

practitioners, leaders, and policy makers stop trying to tackle issues one social formation at a time and begin looking at the connection among classism, racism, homophobia, and sexism. This can be done on an institutional level in several ways. First, university departments and offices that work on topics related to diversity should collaborate more to make sure they are addressing the needs of students at the intersection of identities. For example, there are several opportunities for LGBT centers, multicultural centers, and campus ministry offices to become more fluid by having more open dialogues and collaborative efforts to acknowledge and address intersectionality.

Second, diversity training programs often look to educate faculty, staff, and students by discussing racial, social class, sexual orientation, religious, and gender identities as separate formations. Diversity training programs must be revamped to train people on how these formations intersect and add to the challenges of oppression in higher education and in society. Finally, colleges and universities have an opportunity to better assist students in learning how to resist oppression by helping students develop as activists who can resist and challenge oppression in dominant spaces. It is not enough to develop safe places on campuses for marginalized students; the true change happens when these students have an opportunity to develop identities as social activists who openly resist and interrogate oppression at the intersection of social formations.

In terms of practice and policy on a larger level, there is an opportunity to interrogate systemic oppression in higher education at the intersection of social formations. For example, although researchers have acknowledged that issues around access, persistence, and

graduation rates have often been informed by the intersection of class, race, and gender, conversations in higher education have failed to explore how sexual orientation can and does play a role in access and success. Furthermore, challenges around access and success continue to be addressed by treating race, class, gender, and sexual orientation as separate formations or by coupling two formations. For example, the federal government, state governments, and institutions of higher education have implemented college access and success programs to increase the number of low-income students and students of color. However, these initiatives often fail to address the issue of gender, performance of masculinity/femininity, and sexual orientation in the conversation of access and success. Additionally, these programs often prepare students to perform well and “behave” in dominant spaces, but they fail to prepare students to resist and interrogate oppression in these dominant spaces.

This study has theoretical implications, specifically around the use and application of quare theory. To date, only one known study in higher education has used quare theory to interrogate the intersection of social formations (Means & Jaeger, 2013). Quare theory provides the avenue for higher education scholars to reconsider oppression in higher education, but quare theory also calls for higher education scholars to join communities to use their research to create change or begin to break the chains of oppression in communities. Quare theory’s call for social action gives higher education scholars an avenue to do scholarship for the greater good.

Future research should apply quare theory to understanding the spiritual journeys and spaces of other LGB students of color, such as Black lesbian, bisexual, and queer women and Latina/o LGB students. Future research should utilize quare theory to better understand other topics related to student development, such the fraternal and sorority experiences of LGB students of color. Quare theory could also be used to better understand the experiences of LGB faculty and staff of color and college access of LGB high school students of color. This research would not only further problematize oppression in higher education but it would add more literature to the limited body of knowledge on LGB individuals of color in higher education.

CHAPTER SIX: INTERLUDE THREE

Spiritual Borderlands: A Black Gay Male College Student's' Spiritual Journey

Black gay men often find themselves at an intersection of cultures, identities, and value systems called a “borderland” that collide and conflict (Anzaldúa, 1999, 2010; Villenas, 2005). This borderland is an internal struggle filled with contradictions and ambiguity (Anzaldúa, 2010). For example, Black gay men may receive conflicting, ambiguous societal messages about what it means to be Black, male, gay, and spiritual. Anzaldúa (2010) explains that “the ambivalence from the clash of voices results in mental and emotional states of perplexity. Internal strife results in insecurity and indecisiveness” (p. 94).

This borderland for Black gay men is promoted and sustained in social spaces created and maintained by White and heterosexual dominant groups. For instance, PWIs are social spaces where Black gay male college students have been silenced and ostracized (Goode-Cross & Good, 2008, 2009; Harris, 2003; Stevens, 2004; Strayhorn & Mullins, 2012; Washington & Wall, 2010). In this environment, individuals such as Black gay men receive conflicting messages about who they ought to be in order to be successful in a society embedded in racism, sexism, and homophobia. However, Black gay men and other marginalized individuals can resist this silence and ostracism to find an inner peace where they can integrate their multiple identities (Anzaldúa, 1999). This inner peace is a consciousness or “*la mestiza*” where marginalized individuals accept and embrace the

contradictions and ambiguity of their multiple identities and end the internal war of identity conflict (Anzaldúa, 1999, 2010).

Drawing on constructivism and critical theory, queer theory more specifically, this study utilizes a theoretical borderland approach to explore the spiritual journeys and spaces of one Black gay male undergraduate student, Alexander. This in-depth case study of Alexander provides a deeper understanding of his spiritual life. His narratives of spirituality demonstrate the complexity of not only navigating his spiritual life but also integrating his multiple identities—gay, Black, and Christian.

Black Gay Men in Higher Education

Black male college students have found it difficult to identify a support network of Black male faculty, staff, and administrators due to a lack of available Black male mentors (Washington & Wall, 2010). The intersection of racial and sexual orientation identities has made it even more challenging for Black gay men in college to find faculty, staff, and administrators on their campus who also identify as Black and gay (Washington & Wall, 2010). Washington & Wall (2010) noted that Black gay men in higher education had to rely on White gay and bisexual men to serve as mentors.

While research has supported the fact that any type of faculty/staff to student mentoring is helpful, differences between the experiences of Black gay men and White gay men in higher education have been found (Goode-Cross & Good, 2009; Rhoads, 1994; Washington & Wall, 2010). For example, many institutions of higher education, specifically PWIs, have had and continue to have practices that promote racial exclusion, racial

subordination, and forced racial assimilation in their admission policies, mission statements, institutional visions, academic experiences, and general student life experiences (Chesler & Crowfoot, 1989; Chesler et al., 2005). White gay men, unlike Black gay men, do not have to navigate this system of racism that favors Whiteness in higher education (Chesler et al., 2005; Poynter & Washington, 2005; Rhoads, 1994; Stevens, 2004).

Black gay male college students also struggled with identifying a peer support network on their college campuses (Goode-Cross & Good, 2009; Stevens, 2004). Research has shown that “out” Black gay male college students were sometimes ostracized by the Black community and therefore struggled to identify a support network of peers who could potentially assist them in dealing with issues of racism and discrimination on college and university campuses (Goode-Cross & Good, 2009; Stevens, 2004).

Furthermore, Black gay men approach potential friendships based on how they believe people will respond to their sexual orientation identity (Goode-Cross & Good, 2008). Patton (2011) showed that Black gay male college students feared being involved with LGBT student organizations because of the fear of being “outed” to other African Americans which could lead to eliminating another social support network, LGBT students. Ultimately, Black gay men turn to each other for support, but these support circles were oftentimes small (Goode-Cross & Good, 2008). Unfortunately, Black gay male college students have found it difficult to locate safe spaces on campus that have accepted both their racial-ethnic and sexual orientation identities (Goode-Cross & Good, 2008).

Black gay men must deal with psychological ramifications of social responses to their identification as gay or bisexual (Crawford et al., 2002; Goode-Cross & Good, 2008, 2009; Means & Jaeger, 2013; Patton, 2011). Black gay men were often stereotyped as being flamboyant, feminine, and weak; also, some Black gay men fear being stereotyped or tokenized as being the same as all Black gay men (Harris, 2003; Patton, 2011). They often took extra measures to hide their sexual orientation identity to avoid being stereotyped by others (Patton, 2011), and these measures were exhausting for these students. Black gay men who had not integrated their racial and sexual orientation identities had lower levels of life satisfaction, more psychological distress, and more issues with loneliness or isolation (Crawford et al., 2002). In addition, Black gay men often rejected being labeled gay or queer because of the negative ramifications associated with the terms and their ties to White, middle class America (Goode-Cross & Good, 2009; Patton, 2011; Washington & Wall, 2010). For example, Patton (2011) found the gay and bisexual labels were too limiting for students at one historically Black university; Black gay men sometimes preferred the terms like “same-gender loving men” to resist the negative implications associated with the label “gay” or “queer” (Goode-Cross & Good, 2009).

Black gay men often experienced personal ramifications for identifying as gay or bisexual (Goode-Cross & Good, 2008, 2009; Means & Jaeger, 2013; Patton, 2011). They feared identifying as gay or bisexual would have ramifications for future careers. They felt a need to demonstrate their ability to do excellent work before coming out (Patton, 2011).

Black gay men felt like this allowed others to get to know them for their work and not to judge them based on their sexual orientation identity (Patton, 2011).

The White gay community on college and university campuses often does not allow space to explore religious and spiritual development; however, religion and spirituality have played a large role in the Black community (Goode-Cross & Good, 2009; Washington & Wall, 2010). Scholars have noted that LGB individuals who embraced religion or a particular faith were often received resistance due to the hostility LGBT individuals have faced from religious institutions (Poynter & Washington, 2005). Furthermore, Black gay male college students were often raised hearing messages from the Black church that homosexuality was a sin (Washington & Wall, 2010). While many denominations and faiths have become more welcoming to the LGBT community, scholars have noted they exist largely in the predominantly White religious communities (Washington & Wall, 2010).

Although most of the literature on Black gay male students is focused on their barriers, Strayhorn et al. (2008) found Black gay male college students “perceived themselves as self-determined, motivated, and independent, which in their view, affected their ability to succeed in college” (p. 99). Harper et al. (2011) also provided a case study on one student and how the student reconciled multiple identities to be successful in college. Additional research is needed to truly understand the strengths, success, and resiliency of Black gay male college students.

Theoretical Borderlands

Abes (2009) argued that “all theoretical frameworks that guide research are incomplete” (p. 141). Higher education research often uses one theoretical framework that does injustice to explaining the experiences of college students, specifically marginalized college students (Abes, 2009, 2012). Abes (2009) argues for using multiple theoretical frameworks called “theoretical borderlands” that help researchers better understand the experiences of college students:

The less traditional answer is that the research should consider experimenting with the choice and application of theoretical perspectives, bringing together multiple and even seemingly conflicting theoretical perspectives to uncover new ways of understanding the data. Rather than being paralyzed by theoretical limitations or confined by rigid ideological allegiances, interdisciplinary experimentation of this nature can lead to rich new research results and possibilities. (p. 141)

Abes (2012) used a theoretical borderland approach and integrated an intersectionality lens and a constructivism lens to better understand the experience of one student who identified as female, first-generation, low-income, and gay. Her article demonstrates the importance of understanding the lived experiences and meaning-making processes of marginalized students by using multiple lenses. The current study employed constructivism to understand the spiritual narratives and spaces of Black gay and bisexual men in higher education and also employed critical theory, specifically queer theory, to understand the counterstories and counterspaces of Black gay and bisexual men in higher

education. Bridging these two frameworks together will help scholars better understand the complexity of the spiritual journeys and spaces of Black gay male college students at PWIs.

While constructivism focuses on the micro-level and meaning-making process, quare theory focuses on social location and interrogates the system of oppression at the intersection of race, sexual orientation, class, and gender. Thus, constructivism and quare theory complement each other, and both were used to better understand the spiritual journeys and spaces of Black gay male college students at PWIs. The constructivism lens was applied to understand meaning-making process related to the spiritual narratives and spaces of Black gay and bisexual men in higher education on a micro-level. Quare theory was applied to understand the counterstories and counterspaces related to spirituality as Black gay and bisexual male students navigated oppression, homophobia, and racism. Methodologically, both constructivism and critical theories, including quare theory, are “aimed at the reconstruction of previously held constructions” (Guba & Lincoln, 1998, p. 209). The axiological stance of both assumes that the researcher’s values inform the research process from the formation of the research problem to data collection to data analysis.

The ontological stance for constructivism and quare theory is where the paradigms diverge the most. The ontological stance of constructivism assumes there are multiple realities that can conflict with each other and change (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998a; Guba & Lincoln, 1998; Lincoln, 1990; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Pitman & Maxwell, 1992), and these realities can only be understood holistically (Lincoln, 1990; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Unlike constructivism, quare theory is in line with critical theory’s ontological stance that reality is

shaped by one's location. For critical theories like quare theory, reality is "fundamentally mediated by power relations that are social and historically constituted" (Kincheloe & McLaren, 1998, p. 263). The very nature of critical theories demands a close link between the ontological and epistemological stances (Guba & Lincoln, 1998). Therefore, critical theories, like quare theory, and constructivism differentiate in their epistemological stances.

Both quare theory and constructivism assume that knowledge is created in partnership between the researcher and the participant, but there are slight differences in this reconstruction of reality. The example given earlier in this paper is that for quare and critical research, the researcher and participant may have different social locations that will lead to different ontological views; these differences will shape the epistemological understanding of the phenomenon. As the researcher, I acknowledged and recognized the different social locations as considered the realities of Black gay male college students and their spiritual journeys and spaces.

Constructivism and quare theory explored the spiritual borderlands for one Black gay male undergraduate student. These two perspectives guided the methodology of the study including the research approach, data collection, data analysis, and the presentation of findings.

Methodology

This study presents an in-depth case study of one Black gay male student, Alexander. Alexander was recruited to participate in this study through a program focused on diversity and student success of underrepresented students in higher education. His narratives are a

part of a larger study that explores the spiritual narratives of nine Black, non-heterosexual students who attend a predominantly White institution. I highlighted Alexander's narratives to demonstrate how theoretical borderlands—constructivism and queer theory—could be applied to better understand the complex spiritual journeys and spaces of Black gay male undergraduate students. Many of the themes in Alexander's narratives related to coming out to family, relationship with peers, spiritual disconnections because of race and/or sexual orientation, and reconciliation of identities arose across participants. However, Alexander's narratives were different from the other participants'. He was not only a son of a pastor, but he also presented complex, rich narratives about how he has been able to reconcile his multiple identities. His case study provides a glimpse into a spiritual counterstory of courage, strength, and faith.

I used a single instrumental case study approach. Single instrumental case studies explore one case to better understand phenomena within a bounded system (Stake, 1995). Case study is a qualitative approach that includes in-depth data collection to provide a holistic understanding of an issue, problem, or topic within its social context (Creswell, 2007; Mertens, 2010; Stake, 1995). The goal of a case study is not to develop generalizable conclusions but to develop an understanding of lived experience within a specific social context. This case study provides an in-depth understanding of the spiritual journey and spaces of one Black gay male student. Thus, this study cannot generalize the experiences of all Black gay male undergraduate students.

Procedures

I gathered data through three interconnected methods: (a) semi-structured, face-to-face, one-on-one interviews, (b) photovoice, and (c) field observations. First, students participated in two 60- to 90-minute semi-structured, one-on-one interviews. The first interview explored the participants' spiritual journeys, how they resist demonization, and where they find their space to explore their spirituality. The second interview further explored their spiritual spaces and journeys after photographs had been taken for this study. Second, photovoice was used; it is a qualitative method that provides research participants, who often may feel voiceless in society, the opportunity to reflect on their experiences and stories through photography (Strack, Magill, & McDonagh, 2004; Wang & Pies, 2008). Each participant was given a disposable camera and asked to spend at least a week taking pictures that reflected their spiritual journey and spiritual spaces after the first interview. I asked follow-up questions about each picture during the second interview. Third, I used field observations to better understand the spaces where, if anywhere, Black gay men at PWIs go to explore their spirituality.

Data Analysis

The theoretical borderland approach in this study called for the interview data to be analyzed utilizing both constructivism and quare theory to understand the complexity of the spiritual journeys and spaces of Black gay men. To adhere to the theoretical borderland, I analyzed the same interview data, which included photovoice reflections, from a constructivism lens and then a quare theory lens. I used NVivo to help me keep the data

organized during the analysis process, and I used open coding (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2011) with constructivism and quare theory lenses and then did a cross-case analysis to understand similarities and differences across participants. Axial coding allowed for making connections among codes (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2011). Developed themes from the axial coding process were identified to construct the themes around the spiritual journeys and spaces for Alexander.

My Spirituality is like a “Freight Train”: Narratives of Spirituality

Alexander is a senior at East State University. He grew up in a religious family that included his mother, a pastor at a predominantly African American open and affirming church; his father, who died from cancer when he was a senior in high school; his older sister; an older brother; and an older brother who was murdered when he was a kid. The arts have always been a major part of Alexander’s life. He is a music major at East State University, and he has been involved with singing, dancing, and acting since he was in elementary school. When asked to compare his spirituality to a metaphor, he compared it to a freight train:

I think about a freight train, you know, full speed, non-stop and [my spirituality] doesn’t stop. But then there are times when it does. But then there are times when it goes right back at it, and it’s strong and it is dynamic... There are times when it stops, but then it comes like ... for instance when my dad died, when my brother was murdered, when my sister was shot when I first came [to East State University] and

all those people were telling me that I was going to hell. But in the end, it starts right back at the end and it keeps going.

Alexander described his life as being “chaotic” whenever he stepped away from his spiritual beliefs, but he often turned to his mother for spiritual support in order to get his spirituality going again.

To reflect Alexander’s comparison of spirituality to a freight train, I present reflections of his spiritual life at three stations: spiritual narratives before coming out as gay to his family and friends, spiritual narratives of reconciliation, and spiritual narratives in college. These three stops or stations are then examined using both constructivism and quare theory lenses. These analyses provide a more complex reflection of the spiritual journey and spaces of one Black gay male undergraduate student who attends a predominantly White institution.

Station 1: Spiritual Narratives of Life Before Coming Out

Alexander described himself as coming from a religious family: “I am a pastor’s kid, preacher’s kid, a PK. I have been part of the church life since I was conceived (laughs). [I was] born into a religious Christian family.” Alexander and his family attended predominantly African American churches through his elementary school years; he described these as churches that were not open and affirming. At a young age, Alexander got involved in his church’s choir:

I was really enthusiastic about being involved in music in the church and I think I [started] singing in the church choir when I was six and people start[ed] to see, you

know, recognize that, “Hey, he can actually really sing.” So from that point on I was in the children’s choir.

In addition to singing in the church choir, Alexander, his mother, and older sister were in a gospel trio that traveled around his home state. Alexander reflected on the trio: “And from that point on, I knew that singing was [what] I want[ed] to do and how I could find my space and what my purpose in the church was through praising God through singing.”

Alexander’s mother was hired to be a pastor at a predominantly White, open and affirming church, so the family left their predominantly African American community and church and moved to a predominantly White community. Although Alexander called this church “home,” he often felt “singled out” because of his race: “I felt singled out almost, because we were so...we were the only African American family there.” Although he described an environment that was more relaxed in terms of dress code, he continued to be singled out. When asked if the feelings of being singled out ever changed, he responded:

No, it never changed because as I said, there weren’t ever really more Black people there in terms of youth. It was always my brother and I the only minorities represented in the church at all. So that part never changed but it almost felt like they begun to get used to us being around. So it would...it wasn’t as obvious that we were the only African American people there because after certain point, it wasn’t like, “What do you think Alexander?” I mean from a different point of view. It was like my voice was almost integrated into theirs.

His mother was encouraged to leave her post, and Alexander alluded to how he believed this was related to political reasons since his mother was “an African American woman holding such a position of power in that church that is usually filled by Caucasian males.” His mother was unable to find a permanent position for almost four years until she was hired to serve as a pastor of an open and affirming predominantly African American church. Nevertheless, Alexander and his brother continued to be members at the church because they found the space to be inviting for them as youth, and it served as their only consistent spiritual space since their mother began to frequently travel out of town to be a guest pastor for various churches.

Station 2: Spiritual Narratives of Reconciliation

Alexander came out as gay in middle school. He realized in middle school after having a girlfriend and having no romantic interest in her that he may be gay. He eventually told this girlfriend and a best friend that he was gay; however, the best friend told multiple people at his school and the news began to spread, including spreading to his older brother who attended the same school. His brother went home and told their mother. Alexander thought he was “going to lose everything” and be forced to leave his home because of his sexual orientation identity. Fortunately, Alexander described that his mother and brother did not care about his sexual orientation, and they embraced him. He also gained a lot of friends because he was, at the time, one of a few openly gay students in his high school. However, he did describe incidents of students calling him homophobic slurs in schools, but he had

several support networks in his peers and family to help him through these challenging situations.

Alexander reflected on the fact that his mother seemed prepared to have a gay son, and she instantly was supportive of his sexual orientation. Thus, he did not have as hard a time reconciling his identities as gay and Christian as many of his peers in this study:

I know growing up in the church that there is a lot of ... there's a lot of disagreement between the, you know, that one scripture in Leviticus about what it actually means the one that says, "A man should not lie with another man for it's an abomination." I've heard so many different people try to tell me what that came from or what it means. But I think because my mom is a pastor and that she has actually studied the Bible in that text that I don't believe God created me just to tell me you can't be who you are the way I have made you.

This reconciliation of his spiritual and sexual orientation identities provided him with the strength to resist negative messages during his spiritual journey: "I have befriended so many Christian people that don't agree with me being Christian because of the fact that I'm a homosexual male." The negative messages seemed not to bother him because he had not only reconciled his identities but also developed a personal relationship with a higher power:

I think I've said this before, most of [LGBT individuals] really don't understand how I'm so passionate about my faith when so many people have told them... I feel like they think that no one has told me that I'm going to hell, that no one has told me that I'm sinning or anything like that. They have but the difference is, I don't listen and

take what they say to heart. I listen to the word, I listen to the sermons, I listen to my own heart and what God speaks to me through my singing. I think that's the approach that more homosexual people should take, as to don't worry about what any other Christian says to you. Worry about how you are, how you can be pleasing to God, and I guess that goes back into making your relationship with God, your own and not worrying about anything else.

Alexander was not only able to resist negative messages about his spiritual and sexual orientation identities from his straight religious peers, but also from his gay peers.

Station 3: Spiritual Narratives in College

Alexander came to college with a strong sense of self, but college was his first time “realizing that there are so many people [in college] that didn't want you to be who you are.” He remembered during his first year of college religious extremists coming to campus:

I remember freshman year this Baptist Church came to the most crowded point in ... on campus. And they were just calling all these people sinners and telling [them] that they're going to hell. And the main thing they're focusing on was being gay. And I hadn't heard anything like that. I had never heard anything like that before that I was born a gay like my mom never told me anything about that.

Alexander called home crying to his mother. This incident sent him into a tailspin, and it was a moment when his freight train had stopped; however, his mother's and friends' support sent him back on his spiritual journey. He eventually found the inner strength to “scream back” at the religious extremist group and started the freight train running again.

In addition to the encounters with the religious group, he had challenges with his same-aged, gay, White peers. Alexander described how his White gay friends were “really confused” by how he could be gay and Christian. He reflected on living with two White gay males his junior year and feeling the need to “filter a lot” regarding his spirituality to keep “the environment pleasant to live in for all.” He described being “spiritually troubled” living with his roommates and how he needed “to go to church” or his “head would explode.” During Alexander’s time in college, he explored several spiritual spaces to be connected to his own spirituality.

With a friend, Alexander attended a predominantly White church that was close to the campus. He described the church as having “its ups and its downs” because he felt singled out like he did as a child:

I was obviously treated very differently. It was also...I was almost favor[ed] because they wanted me to continue and they wanted me to bring more Black people, but with my major and my degree, the people that I associated with weren’t of color because there weren’t that many Black people in the School of Music that are religious that will want to come with me. So I was always...I was always appreciated, you know, with being there. And they just like, “You should bring friends,” and I just knew that they meant bring Black friends because we want to diversify this church.

Alexander described other incidents where he felt uncomfortable because of his race:

But there were times when, you know, I would just feel like I was singled out. I remember one Sunday the minister preach[ed] something about ... I don’t remember

what exactly what the sermon was about, but there was a point in the sermon where he mentioned, “I went to an African-American church” and I just can feel everyone’s eyes shift to me. And I’m just like, “Oh my God, really.”

Although Alexander felt uncomfortable, he focused on his personal relationship with a higher power to allow him to remain in the church.

During Alexander’s junior year of college, he earned an internship at a church about an hour away from his campus in a predominantly White, affluent community. The church was also predominantly White and affluent. Alexander remembered his first time in the church:

I remember when I walked in everyone, everyone, children, and these are very older congregation, they were just looking, watching me walk and they’re like, “Who is he?” Like, I remember I saw whispering almost like. And I was just like, I was over it when I walked in.

Alexander went on to perform during his first visit to the church, and he received a standing ovation after his performance. He had never received a standing ovation after performing in church, so he was in shock. The next week, the two other interns who were White performed in the church, and they did not receive a standing ovation; Alexander also recognized that the two other singers were just as good as him. Alexander realized that he was being “singled out” again because of his race.

Alexander, however, was able to find spaces where he was not singled out because of his race or spaces where he did not have to be concerned about his sexual orientation

identity; he was able to find spiritual spaces where he could integrate all his identities. He described how he found an opportunity to be connected to God when he was in the music practice room or recital hall:

I'm in the practice room alone or the recital hall alone I truly am with God and God only. So I don't have to worry about or think about anything else. I block everything out and I just sing and praise. That feeling is ... overpowering almost but in the best way, in a positive way.

Alexander was also able to find a spiritual space to integrate all his identities in his mother's church, an open and affirming, predominantly African American church. At this church, he felt like he could put all his identities on the backburner and "just fully focus on this worship service and not think about who knows."

Constructivism Perspective

At a young age, Alexander's understanding and knowledge of his own spirituality was derived from his family. His family saw that spirituality and religion were connected concepts, and his mother, a pastor, emphasized the importance of faith. His involvement in music in the church led him to make a connection between his spirituality and music. He discovered at a young age that his purpose was to sing and the gift of voice was his purpose in the church. This discovery led him to build upon concepts learned from his family but also to build his own epistemological understanding of spirituality.

Alexander was able to make meaning of his spiritual identity through the positive messages derived from his mother. His mother assured him that he could be gay and a

Christian, which led him to develop a positive image of his multiple identities and to easily reconcile these identities. When faced with homophobic messages or messages that he could not be both gay and Christian, he was able to use his positive understanding of self to filter the messages. College was the first time that Alexander doubted he could be gay and Christian after hearing messages from the religious extremist group. Although hearing the messages from the religious extremist group was an emotional moment for Alexander, his understanding of his own spirituality allowed him the resiliency to overcome the situation. In addition, Alexander felt a need to conceal his spiritual identity at times when living with his junior year roommates. He was facing spiritual struggles that sent him into a tailspin and at times make him feel like he was going to “explode.” However, his spiritual journey during college led him to find meaning and purpose from attending church and utilizing music practice rooms and a recital hall; these were spaces where he could explore his spirituality.

Quare Theory Perspective

Alexander described tensions in spiritual spaces. Although Alexander had not identified as gay when he and his family were attending the predominantly African American churches that were not open and affirming, the two spaces would have presented challenges with reconciling his spiritual and sexual orientation identities when he came out. Alexander described finding “home” in the predominantly White, open and affirming church, yet he described several incidents of racial tension, including the removal of his mother from a position of leadership in a predominantly White church. Nevertheless, he continued to attend

the church and demonstrates this notion that a spiritual “home” is never perfect. As a Black gay man, he lived in a spiritual borderland, but he was able to embrace the tension.

Alexander’s narratives of spiritual reconciliation also reflect narratives of resisting homophobia. He was challenged in his reconciliation process with the notions of homophobia and oppression that are present in society and social institutions, including religion. Nevertheless, he was able to resist negative messages and reconcile his spiritual and gay identities through a strong inner voice and support from his mother. Alexander’s spiritual narratives in college are grounded in experiences with homophobia and racism. These experiences, at times, were internalized for Alexander and made him question his own spiritual life. Nevertheless, he was able to find and create spiritual counterspaces that allowed him to integrate all his identities. Music practice rooms, the recital hall, and his mother’s church allowed him to be Black, gay, and Christian in one place. Although he was able to do this in other spaces, these counterspaces provided him with the opportunity to just focus on his relationship with a higher power and not to worry about anything else.

Discussion

This case study extends the use of theoretical borderlands. Using theoretical borderlands, this case study expanded on the spiritual journeys and spaces of one Black gay male undergraduate student. This study revealed that theoretical borderlands are necessary to better understand the meaning-making, successes, and barriers of Black gay men in higher education as they navigate their spiritual journeys and locate spiritual spaces. Constructivism facilitated the exploration of lived experiences around spiritual journeys and spaces for

Alexander by focusing on how he makes meaning of his spiritual life. Quare theory interrogated the privileges of Whiteness and heterosexuality to understand the spiritual journeys and spaces of Black gay male college students. Constructivism alone can downplay the oppression that exists in society. Quare theory alone overshadows Alexander's lived experiences.

Together, the two frameworks revealed that Alexander was able to navigate his spiritual journey by finding a support system in his mother and developing an inner strength. He used these support mechanisms to reconcile his identities and to resist messages of homophobia and racism. In addition, Alexander was able to find and create his own spiritual spaces through music spaces. He was also able find a spiritual space where he could integrate his multiple identities. Most importantly, this study revealed that Alexander experienced this "between-ness" (Strayhorn et al., 2008) where he often had both racial and/or sexual orientation tension were present, but he was able to find an inner strength and to establish a personal relationship with a higher power in order to still make these disconnected places a spiritual place and sometimes a spiritual home.

Implications

This study has implications for practice, theory, and future research. For practice, the findings reveal the importance of creating more support structures on college and university campuses for LGBT students of color. College and universities can create these support structures by having more open dialogue among multicultural centers, LGBT centers, and campus ministry offices about how to best support students who have multiple marginalized

identities. For example, support structures could include small group meetings for students who are LGBT and spiritual. There is also an opportunity for college and university campuses to assist students in searching and finding on-campus and off-campus support structures and spiritual spaces that may be the most appropriate for them given their spiritual needs and wants.

This study also has implications for theory. This study revealed Black gay men are not one-dimensional “characters,” and theoretical borderlands allowed us to approach this case study with a level of sophistication that better speaks to the complexity of the spiritual lives of Black gay men. Thus, this study adds rich knowledge to the field of higher education and intersectionality literature by highlighting how this one student integrates and reconciles his multiple identities during his spiritual journey. The theoretical borderland approach allows for a complexity that provides a better understanding of marginalized college students in the end.

Future research should apply the theoretical borderland approach to other topics related to Black gay men in higher education. This approach could be utilized to better understand the collegiate experiences of Black gay men who attend a community college, historically Black colleges and universities, and religiously-affiliated institutions. It could also be applied to better understand the academic experiences of Black gay men who are pursuing degrees in fields where Black men are underrepresented, such as science, technology, engineering, and math, and also fields where students are at greater risk of losing job security if they are openly non-heterosexual, such as teacher education.

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSIONS

This study employed the narrative approach to examine two areas: (a) the spiritual journeys of Black gay male undergraduate students who attend predominantly White institutions (PWIs) and (b) the spiritual spaces of Black gay male undergraduate students who attend PWIs. This study used Abes' (2009, 2012) "theoretical borderlands" concept as a framework to better understand the meaning-making, successes, and barriers of Black gay men in higher education as they navigate their spiritual journeys and locate spiritual spaces. This study employed both constructivism and critical theory to explore the spiritual journeys and spaces of Black gay male undergraduate students. In chapter four, the data were explored utilizing a constructivism lens, specifically self-authorship. The data revealed that the nine participants moved along a spiritual trajectory from following external formulas (e.g. family members, religious leader) to make meaning of their spiritual lives towards spiritual narratives of self-authorship in the epistemological, intrapersonal, and interpersonal dimensions. Not all student participants reached an internal foundation of understanding their own spirituality, but the study revealed the complexity of navigating spiritual journeys.

In chapter five, the data were exploring utilizing a critical theory lens, specifically queer theory. The findings revealed tensions or disconnections for the participants at the intersection of social formations—race, sexual orientation, class, and gender. These intersections occurred in K-12, family, collegiate, and spiritual settings. However, the men described using multiple forms of resistance in these settings, including within dominant structural settings (churches, K-12 settings, and collegiate settings) and counterspaces

(predominantly African American, open and affirming churches; practice rooms, nature, etc.), to resist or reject oppression and to also work on challenging the master narrative in order to bring about change for themselves or for others.

In chapter six, the theoretical borderlands approach was employed by utilizing both constructivism and quare theory lenses to better understand the spiritual journeys and spaces of one of participant, Alexander. Together, constructivism and quare theory demonstrated the need to utilize more complex theoretical approaches when exploring the experiences of marginalized students. Constructivism alone could have downplayed the oppression that Alexander experienced in his spiritual life. Quare theory alone overshadows Alexander's lived experiences. Together, the two frameworks revealed that Alexander was able to navigate his spiritual journey by finding a support system in his family and developing an inner strength. He used these support mechanisms to reconcile his identities and to resist messages of homophobia and racism. In addition, Alexander was able to find and create his own spiritual spaces through music and musical spaces. He was also able find a spiritual space where he could integrate his multiple identities. Most importantly, this study revealed that Alexander experienced this "between-ness" where both racial and/or sexual orientation tensions were present, but Alexander was able to find an inner strength and to establish a personal relationship with a higher power in order to still make these disconnected places a spiritual place and sometimes a spiritual home.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: FIRST INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Life History Questions

1. Could you tell me about who you are?
 - a. Possible Prompts
 - i. How do you identify yourself in terms of race? Sexual orientation?
 - ii. Could you tell me about your family?
 - iii. Could you tell me about your closest friends?
 - iv. What is your major?
 - v. Are you involved in any organizations? If so, which ones?
 - vi. What do you do for fun?
 - vii. What are your goals after you graduate from college?
2. Could you tell me about significant life experiences from the earliest memories to the present?
 - a. Possible Prompts
 - i. Does anything stand out to you prior to elementary school?
 - ii. Does anything stand out to you during elementary school?
 - iii. Does anything stand out to you during middle school?
 - iv. Does anything stand out to you during high school?
 - v. Does anything stand out to you during your time in college thus far?
 - vi. Does anything stand out to related to family?
 - vii. Does anything stand out to you related to friends?

- viii. Does anything stand out to you related to student organizations or clubs?
 - ix. Could you tell me about your coming out experience as (insert sexual orientation label)?
3. Could you describe your experience at your institution?
- a. Possible Prompts
 - i. How did you come to choose this institution?
 - ii. How has your experience been with faculty members?
 - iii. How has your experience been with other students?
 - 1. Could you describe anything that stands out related to your interaction with other Black students? How about with White students? How about with lesbian, gay, and bisexual students?
 - iv. How has your experience been with student organizations?
 - v. How has your process been with making friends?

Spirituality Questions

- 4. Please fill in the blank. My spirituality is like _____.
- 5. What does spirituality mean to you?
- 6. How did you come to that meaning?
- 7. Could you tell me about your earliest memories related to spirituality to the present?
 - a. Possible Prompts
 - i. Do any memories stand out to you related to your family?

- ii. Do any memories stand out to you related to your friends?
 - iii. Do any memories stand out to you related to school?
 - iv. Do any memories stand out to you as a child?
 - v. Do any memories stand out to you as a teenager?
 - vi. Do any memories stand out to you prior to coming out?
 - vii. Do any memories stand out to you after coming out?
8. Where, if anywhere, have you gone to be connected to your own spirituality?
 9. How did you come to identify that place?
 10. Could you describe that place to me?
 11. What role, if any, has your institution played with regards to your spiritual journey?
 12. Would you like to share anything else about your spiritual experiences or spaces?

Conclusion: Thank you for participating in the first interview. As I mentioned as we discussed the consent form, I will ask you to participate in a method called photovoice. I will ask you to spend two weeks taking 10-12 or more pictures that reflect your spiritual journey and spaces. Do you have any questions about the procedures and guidelines we went over earlier? Do you have any questions about photovoice? If you have no more questions, I will now give you the camera. Also as we discussed the consent form, I mentioned the idea of joining you in your identified spiritual space and observing that space. Would that still be a possibility?

APPENDIX B: SECOND INTERVIEW PROTOCOL*

Field Observation Questions

1. Could you walk me through the experience when I visited you in your spiritual space?
2. Could you describe your relationship, if any, with the other people in that spiritual space?
3. Would you like to share anything else about the spiritual space I observed?

Photovoice

4. What do you see happening in this picture?
5. How does this picture reflect your spiritual journey or spaces?
6. How come this situation, concern, or strength exist for you?
7. How could this image educate others about your experiences?
8. Based on all your pictures, what can be done to acknowledge or address any challenges or opportunities related to the spiritual journeys and spaces of Black gay men?
9. Would you like to share anything else about your pictures?

*This protocol will be largely based on what I observe in their spiritual space and what is reflected in the photographs.