

QUEER, BLACK, DIS/ABLED, FEMME: A SACRED ETHNOGRAPHY BRIDGING
HIGHER EDUCATION BACK TO TRADITION

by

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(Under the Direction of Merrily Dunn)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this sacred ethnography is to examine the implications of living at the intersections of dis/ability, race, gender, sexuality, spirituality/religion, and class, while persisting through doctoral education in what is referred to as the United States. To further help describe the concrete ways institutions of higher education's compliance in systems of domination causes direct violence and harm against bodies that are othered and marginalized on-campus and provide a sacred and epistemologically diverse perspective to counter the current dominant narrative reproduced and maintained in knowledge creation. Grounded in African cosmology and utilizing nkwaethnography, longitudinal life note data is analyzed eliciting eleven themes and five emerging findings. The discussion of findings provides considerations and recommendations for institutions and institutional agents to consider to cultivate liberative and healing campus environments.

INDEX WORDS: students with multiple minoritized identities, intersectionality, students with dis/abilities, Black students, femme students, African cosmology, qualitative inquiry, autoethnography, nkwaethnography

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DEDICATION

For Dr. Marion Thompson-Wright, Tatissa, and Ms. Nina

Rest in Power

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The first African ascendant woman to earn a doctorate in education, Marion Manola Thompson Wright, died by suicide 22 years after she obtained her doctoral degree. The year before I started my doctoral degree program in education, I lost Tatissa, a queer African ascendant student I worked with, to suicide. Tatissa, unlike Marion and I, was an undergraduate student studying science. Before starting my doctoral journey, I would not have connected Dr. Wright's death to Tatissa's death. I definitely would not have tied my experience getting a doctoral degree so deeply to theirs even though I have been consistently grieving, depressed, anxious, and suicidal during this journey. It was not until I started studying higher education and student affairs while simultaneously *living theory* (Erevelles, 2011) that I was able to draw the parallels and barriers leading African ascendant femmes to consider, attempt, or complete suicide while managing the oppression of carceral education.

Living theory at the intersections of dis/ability, race, gender, socioeconomic status, sexuality, and spirituality is both a gift and a curse. On the one hand, I am equipped with the ability to dissect, disrupt, and counter systems of domination that directly enact violence against people similar to me with multiple marginalized identities. On the other hand, I am a body continuously and directly harmed by the same systems of domination I have been blessed to dissect, mostly because of my social location in the current sociocultural economic hierarchy. There is one glaring difference between Dr. Wright, Tatissa, and myself: I am still alive. Despite sharing the same racial identities and similar class and educational privilege to both Tatissa and

Dr. Wright, I was curious what explanations determined persistence among professional students (i.e. Ph.D., Ed.D., J.D., M.D.) with multiple minoritized identities traversing through institutions of higher education (IHE)? Specifically, in a higher education context that is so cold and violent towards *us*, how am I able to persist? Utilizing African spiritual methodology and centering theories of power and dis/ability I plan to conduct a self-inquiry, similar to critical autoethnography, to better understand God, spirit, myself, and purpose as I persisted through doctoral education in the southeastern United States.

As I write this dissertation, I carry the spirit of Dr. Thompson Wright, Tatissa, and all of my fallen sisters and brothers who died and were irrevocably harmed because of IHE compliance in systems of domination. Institutional compliance in systems of domination can take various forms at the individual and structural level. Some examples of IHE complying in systems of domination include, the corporatization of higher education where all forms of knowledge serve the neoliberal global capitalist agenda (Cannella & Koro-Ljungberg, 2017). For the analysis of this dissertation global capitalism is understood as a root cause of violence, harm, and disadvantage of individuals who identify as queer, Black, and dis/abled (Erevelles, 2011).

Although suicide led me to this study, my dissertation is not about suicide. My dissertation is about spirit, power, and violence. My dissertation is concerned with an in-depth vulnerable self-inquiry guided by spirit that directly leads to the liberation of students with multiple marginalized identities in higher education and student affairs (HESA). Specifically, examining (1) how does IHE compliance in capitalism and systems of domination directly enact violence against marginalized bodies in doctoral education? and (2) what impact does that violence and socio-cultural economic hierarchy have on students like me and the surrounding communities in U.S. higher education?

Although the violence Dr. Thompson-Wright and Tatissa faced in higher education are not the sole causes of their suicides, the violence each of them faced in the academy directly impacted their spiritual, emotional, and physical wellness. Despite HESA complying in systems of dominance and perpetrating violence against marginalized bodies, education is still a fertile ground to begin and continue liberation work because innately all of us are knowers and knowledge creators. We are spiritual beings who thrive to learn and create and experience joy. Education is not innately inequitable and if enough scholars continue to do the courageous, vulnerable, and power-conscious work necessary, education can provide society a path for healing and liberation.

Hyperlocal Context of Systems of Domination On-Campus

IHE were not constructed for students with multiple marginalized identities like queer, Black, and dis/abled students (Abes & Wallace, 2018; Caple, 1998; de Heer & Jones, 2017; Hachem, 2018; Harris & Linder, 2018; Miller, Wynn, & Webb, 2019; Ogunyemi, et al., 2019; Pryor, 2015; Tillapaugh & Catalano, 2019). Throughout this study I will refer to IHE and institutional agents on campus. Issues of power and domination impact IHE broadly but higher education and student affairs professionals arguably have the most training specifically on IHE. HESA professionals have the most direct experience supporting students and provide a fertile site for transformation on-campus most immediately since institutional agents comprise the power elites making policy and procedure decisions. HESA literature exploring one or more social identities like queerness, Blackness, and/or ability often report marginalized students experiencing intersectional erasure rendering their multiple minoritized identities hypervisible and invisible in research, policy, and practice (Abes & Wallace, 2018). Abes and Wallace (2018) further discuss this erasure stating,

Multiple systems of oppression impede disabled students' elusive search for home. As educators' partner with students in their search, ableism, racism, genderism, heterosexism, and other oppressive systems feed us "lies and false images." We must name these systems that render students invisible, create space for them to bring their whole bodies, and value disability as an intersectional social identity. Dismantling these systems is a campus wide shared responsibility (Abes & Wallace, 2018, p. 560).

Currently on-campus students who hold one or more minoritized social identities face higher rates of violence, especially targeted sexual assault (de Heer & Jones, 2017). Students with one or more intersecting identities typically suffer from anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation and face higher numbers of microaggressions and interpersonal prejudice on and off campus (Benshoff, Cashwell, & Rowell, 2015). Scholarship in students with multiple marginalized identities face lower retention rates, higher rates of debt, and issues securing well-funded assistantships. (Mendoza, Villareal, & Gunderson, 2014). More scholarship needs to be done that centers the experience of graduate and professional students with multiple minoritized identities. The research we have on professional students with multiple minoritized identities is still very limited and typically erases some form of the students' identity because rarely do studies focus on more than two intersecting identities with dis/abilities being nearly erased from a lot of scholarship on identity completely (Abes & Wallace, 2018). What limited knowledge we do have on professional students with multiple minoritized identities reveals they experience targeted violence, mental health issues, and prejudice (Abes & Wallace, 2018; Benshoff, Cashwell, & Rowell, 2015; de Heer & Jones, 2017; Mendoza, Villareal, & Gunderson, 2014); however, nuanced research is needed to make structural changes in IHE that better support students with multiple minoritized identities.

Education in the U.S. is grounded in white supremacy and transnational capitalism, which rewards whiteness, while rejecting and attempting to eradicate Blackness (Annamma & Morrison, 2018). Moreover, ableism works in tandem with anti-blackness due to the impact of chattel slavery which stigmatizes the Black body, translating to Black students being positioned as less smart regardless of their performance (Annamma & Morrison, 2018). The stigma and beliefs born out of white supremacy and systems of domination create a hostile education environment for students with multiple minoritized identities making those students more susceptible to hyper-surveillance, being pathologized, and overly punished in schools (Annamma & Morrison, 2018).

One study regarding graduate students with marginalized identities expressed that the violence students experienced in higher education due to multiple minoritized identities creates an isolating experience since our existence as a marginalized student is the “antithesis to the ivory tower,” (Ashlee, Zamora, & Karikari, 2017, p. 101). In addition to being isolated, students with multiple minoritized identities are targeted at higher rates for campus sexual violence especially if they identify as queer, BIPOC, or dis/abled (Bryant-Davis, Chung, & Tillman, 2009; de Heer & Jones; 2017; Linder, Grimes, Williams, Lacy, & Parker, 2020; Smith & Freyd, 2014; Stotzer, 2009). Moreover, social identity aggressions and microaggressions become daily norms bombarding students with multiple minoritized identities making them question their inherent worth, intellect, and purpose (Ogunyemi, et. al., 2019; Smith, Mao, & Deshpande, 2016).).

The campus climate is especially hostile for non-binary graduate students like me who do not fit the stereotypical narrative in HESA literature regarding transgender and gender nonconforming students (TGNC). Fluid and gender non-conforming graduate students do not “fit” the dominant meta- narrative about trans people and we are vulnerable because our identity

is constantly being rendered invisible and aggressed on- campus by faculty, staff, and even our peers (Goldberg, Kuavalanka, & dickey, 2019; Nicolazzo, 2016; Tillapaugh & Catalano, 2019).

“Nonbinary students, less likely to endorse bodily modifications as well as distinctly masculine/feminine gender expressions, are also less likely to be recognized as their authentic gender, and more likely to be misgendered,” (Goldberg, Kuavalanka, & dickey, 2019, p. 48).

Such oppressive and hostile climates can impede student physical, spiritual, and emotional health (Benshoff, Cashwell, & Rowell, 2015). Moreover, students with multiple minoritized identities typically have higher rates of adverse childhood experiences, making them more susceptible to violence and mental health disorders (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2019).

Purpose of Inquiry

IHE lack the structural and institutional support to meet the nuanced and diverse needs of doctoral and professional students with multiple marginalized identities. Institutional compliance in systems of dominance creates violent and hostile environments for professional students with multiple marginalized identities (Abes & Wallace, 2018; Annamma & Morrison, 2018; Ashlee, Zamora, Karikari, 2017; Benshoff, Cashwell, & Rowell, 2015; de Heer & Jones; 2017; Erevelles, 2011; Gildersleeve, Croom, Vasquez, 2011; Goldberg, Kuavalanka, dickey, 2019; Johnson-Bailey, Valentine, Cervero, & Bowles, 2009; Kutscher & Tuckwiller, 2019; Mendoza, Villareal, Gunderson, 2014; Miller, 2018; Miller, Wynn, Webb, 2019; Nicolazzo, 2016; Ogunyemi, et. al., 2019; Perry & Dyck, 2014; Pryor, 2015; Seelman, 2014; Shaw, Anderson, & Grant, 2016; Smith & Freyd, 2014; Smith & Deshpande, 2016; Tillapaugh & Catalano, 2019). IHE will tout being diverse and pro-equity but professional minoritized students report higher rates of microaggressions from faculty, staff, and privileged students in and outside the classroom (Ogunyemi, et. al., 2019; Smith, Mao, & Deshpande, 2016). Not only are marginalized students

facing microaggressions but they are also targeted at higher rates for campus sexual violence (CSV) and intimate partner violence (IPV) (Bryant-Davis, Chung, & Tillman, 2009; de Heer & Jones; 2017; Linder, Grimes, Williams, Lacy, & Parker, 2020; Smith & Freyd, 2014; Stotzer, 2009). Institutions repeatedly choose maintaining their brand or the status quo over adequately addressing institutional inequities to adequately support the needs of doctoral students, like providing inadequate healthcare, barely livable salaries, and virtually no professional-student centered support structures to allow marginalized professional students access to the resources they need to thrive (Ashlee, Zamora, Karikari, 2017; Benshoff, Cashwell, & Rowell, 2015; Cannella & Koro-Ljungberg, 2017; Gildersleeve, Croom, Vasquez, 2011). Typically, IHE only address oppression and inequity when it supports their own institutional interests, the institutional brand, and/or? provides capital gain (Cannella & Koro-Ljungberg, 2017; Hachem, 2018; Kezar, 2004; Matias & Newlove, 2017).

By continuously ignoring oppression on-campus and the needs of marginalized professional students, IHE render the needs and lives of marginalized professional students unimportant. IHE must recognize what is considered best practice for undergraduate and masters level students will never be adequate for professional students with multiple marginalized identities because our needs and lives are typically much more diverse and therefore will require different practices, structures, and solutions to support our needs. Professional students provide professional services to the institution through research, teaching, and administrative service in addition to balancing other duties off campus and taking courses or dissertating. Despite providing professional service anywhere from 13 to 20+ hours a week, professional students are paid just above the poverty line with some professional graduate students having to strike for higher wages for not being able to afford to live in the city their institution is located in

(Mendoza, Villareal, Gunderson, 2014). Professional students are the forgotten other that keeps IHE running.

For this self-inquiry guided by spirit, I will focus on my experience as a student with multiple minoritized identities traversing doctoral education. Choosing a methodology and approach that centers self-inquiry data has multiple purposes. First, it allows me to interrogate myself as both someone who enacts unintentional violence due to socializations in oppression while simultaneously exploring the ways I persist and center freedom and love. “We colonize ourselves, discipline each other, privileging the colonizers’ sensibilities, complicit in our own oppression.” (Bhattacharya, 2016, p. 314).

Self-inquiry allows me the opportunity to conduct scholarship that centers my positionality and analyze societal issues through my unique lens, sharing narratives from my individual perspective. Using my experience and self-inquiry data to examine structural violence and inequity in higher education, I can begin building a bridge between issues of power, inequity, and violence to help us reclaim education from systems of domination. The purpose of this inquiry is threefold:

1. Explore the implications of living at the intersections of dis/ability, race, gender, sexuality, spirituality/religion, and class, while persisting through doctoral education in the U.S.
2. Describe the concrete ways institutions of higher education’s compliance in neoliberalism and transnational capitalism causes direct violence and harm against bodies that are othered and marginalized in higher education.
3. Provide an epistemologically diverse perspective to counter current dominant systems of knowledge creation and power.

Nkwaethnography: A Sacred Methodology

“I embrace all of who I am with the understanding that I need to be fully present in all contexts I occupy, including the academy,” (Okpalaoka & Dillard, 2011, p. 70). The academy can no longer ignore spirituality and continue over-rely on a western and post-positivist scholarship to produce knowledge pressing it upon society as facts denying marginalized communities their humanity, healing, transformation, and acknowledgement of our own truths. Simultaneously, the academy denounces the vitalness of critical, African, Indigenous, and sacred scholarship without welcoming the multitude of diverse epistemologies that existed prior to colonization, which reifies the stereotype of Black and Indigenous epistemologies as lacking rigor (Dillard & Bell, 2011). Unlike critical autoethnography, nkwaethnography allows me to use myself as a site of observation while recognizing my spirit, shared humanity, and community, it embraces the royal *us* and *we*, acknowledging the collective ancestral knowledge that lives in every one of us (Dillard & Bell, 2011).

We first must acknowledge spirit. Spirit is the context I actively try to live in each present moment. It is every breath we take, every birth, and every death. It is what threads everything together. Denouncing spirit only begets harm, devastation and separation from God. My worldview although natural and logical to me is not the dominant worldview. To conduct this self-inquiry, similar to autoethnography, I needed a methodology that would allow my whole self to be recognized, validated, and examined while centering spirit. We do not exist without spirit. I do not come to this work without spirit. Nkwaethnography, translates to sacred ethnography, and is a methodology that combines what I value about autoethnography, the ability to conduct self-inquiry to illuminate our current socioeconomic culture while simultaneously holding the individual scholar accountable to our own compliance and performance in systems of domination

(Boylorn & Orbe, 2014; Chang, 2008). However, Nkwaethnography diverges from autoethnography by focusing on spirit centered scholarship grounded in African Indigenous spiritual truths as praxis (Dillard & Bell, 2011). Nkwaethnography allows me to conduct spirit guided self-inquiry acknowledging the “self” is multifaceted and spiritual made up of the lives we have lived and will live, our ancestors and highest spirits who guide us, and God the ultimate energy force we are all birthed from.

I cannot study myself and understand the pain and joy I experience without first acknowledging spirit. Spirit brought me to write these very words. I ultimately am guided by spirit to create scholarship that heals. Dillard (2012) writes, to become whole and heal, we must *re/member*. This inquiry utilizes Nkwaethnography, created by Dillard and Bell (2011), to provide *us* with a methodological approach that honors *our* whole person, spirit, and ancestral heritage. Throughout this study, I utilize plural language to specify the spiritual and ancestral presence that guided me during this sacred ethnography. Although I center myself as a site of observation in this inquiry, my worldview recognized that I am a spiritual being first guided by the spiritual forces in my life. When I am referencing those forces in my life and their impact on my scholarship I use the language *ours/we*. I recognize spirit as always present in my life and I am not negating spirit when I use singular language, instead I make a point to use plural language when I felt spirit speaking through me directly. My use of nkwaethnography was an intentional decision to push against HESA compliance in systems of domination and provide a methodology that honors my whole being. Lorde (1984) said it best, “the master’s tools cannot dismantle the master’s house,” which means positivist methods cannot help education dismantle systems of oppression (p. 112). By aligning *our* proposed study with an empowering and spiritual research design, *we* can begin to create new tools to build a bridge toward liberation.

Positionality Statement

I enter this doctoral study to better understand myself and the experiences of people similar to me to help eradicate the suffering we endure in higher education and beyond. There is a common misconception that there is not a hierarchy of oppression or marginalization based on political identities. This misconception is largely due to a miscomprehended Audre Lorde (1983) quote taken out of context from Lorde's short essay, "There is no hierarchy of oppression." Lorde experiencing oppression from the intersections of dis/ability, race, gender, and sexuality makes a call for people doing liberation work to recognize that because of the systems of domination that bind our marginalized identities we are not fighting a single issue of race or class or genderism or ability but instead all issues of oppression are related to power and *those with power believing they are superior and therefore have an inherent right to dominate* (Lorde, 1983). Lorde was making a call to bridge issues of power, domination, and difference across political movements because, we, liberation fighters, are at the root fighting the same thing. I have often described this dissertation as my positionality statement to the academe to say this is who I am, what I represent, and what I fight for. For this section of my dissertation, in my meta inquiry about myself, I intend to build on Lorde's call by showcasing through my *lived theory*, positionality, and scholarship, the root of our collective issues that maintain the current sociocultural economic hierarchy. Further, I hope this self-inquiry emphasizes that although we currently experience a hierarchy of oppression, "the master's tools cannot dismantle the master's house" and therefore liberation calls for us to dismantle the hierarchy between political issues, within our collectives to focus on the root causes of our collective domination. Before we can begin dismantling systems of domination at the structural level we must better understand our own individual compliance which maintains the systems that bind us. Nkwaethnography is my

attempt at practicing my worldview and values to create communities of liberation in higher education and across our global community.

My positionality and worldview undergird this self-inquiry. Therefore, to better understand the purpose of *our* inquiry, *our* decision to utilize nkwaethnography as methodology, or the future implications I have included my positionality in the introduction of dissertation. I focus this section on my spiritual beliefs, social identities, educational background, and hip-hop to better describe myself as I come to be a scholar in this present moment. Additionally, my positionality largely is utilized during the analysis.

I have always used poetry, life notes, and art to help me cope and make sense of my world. Poetry is a large part of who I am and will always remain a large part of my scholarship. Therefore artistic expression is inherently a large part of my scholarly praxis. I will rely on poetry, music, and other artistic expressions to break barriers that typical academic writing might create. When I conduct scholarship on myself it is innately ancestral, art is an expression my ancestors and elders can always connect to like when we were denied the right to learn to read and write. From a historical, dis/abled, and racial perspective language and writing has been a tool for domination. So, what I choose to say on these pages matters. The edits and choices I make matter. No matter how many times I hear, “just do it to get it done,” I inherently know I cannot say this is a spiritually guided ancestral self-inquiry and not be intentional about what words or expressions I present in this study. Additionally, I do not agree with perpetuating writing that is hard to comprehend in an attempt to call it more scholarly. Therefore, I try to write in ways that are congruent to my spirit, community, and the purpose of this study. Lastly, due to my neurodivergence there are certain grammatical mistakes that my mind will continuously make. I ask that as you read hold these words with grace and trust that I carried this study and

wrote these words with the most intentionality I could possess during the two physically hardest years of my doctoral journey.

Spiritual Beliefs. I come to this inquiry because spirit led me here. My choices, who I am, who I am in community with are all led by God and spirit. I cannot separate my spiritual beliefs from my work in the academe because my spiritual beliefs are why I am conducting work in the academe. I believe in a genderless God, Nyame, God is in everything, is the ultimate container for love, and is the first creator. God created spirit which is essentially God in action. Spirit can be found in anything, spirit is God's essence imagined. When I say spirit led me here I mean God. I believe in reincarnation and that between incarnates our spirits occupy the ancestral realm with our close family and connections. Scholars who have experienced the ancestral realm describe it as nature that is more beautiful than we could imagine and that it feels like a memory once forgotten remembered (Chireau, 2003; Karade, 1994; Parrinder, 1961; Somé, 1994; Teish, 1985). I am uncomfortable naming my spiritual beliefs so blatantly here for the world to read; however, I rely on spirit and my ancestors to conduct work especially on myself therefore I have to be straightforward and provide context for that connection to be understood.

I was born on a Thursday, March 7, 1991, at 6:16 am in Absecon, New Jersey. My spiritual beliefs would say that that one sentence will tell you more about me than anything I could write on a page. Many cultures recognize the importance of birth times and the placement of the stars when we are born. My belief is each spirit in a body has a purpose. Specifically, I believe I chose my purpose and chose to reincarnate to serve this distinct purpose. Each of us has a purpose to discover and fulfill. Education is a large part of how my purpose was uncovered to me. Since each of us has distinct individual purposes we also have individual and unique

strengths that should be cultivated to help us best live our purpose. These themes of God, spirit, purpose, and strength remain apparent in how I conduct, analyze, and discuss this study.

Hip-Hop. One of my life notes I wrote on September 4, 2018 read, “How do I get music added to my accommodations? I need music to live, decompress, write, even think sometimes. IT HELPS ME CONCENTRATE!!! But how? I wonder who would know—music therapist?” Before I could read or write, I heard soul music and hip-hop. Friday nights were spent by the record player with my family listening to old songs from the Drifters and dancing it out to 80s hits. Music, especially hip-hop remained a constant ritual apart of my daily life. Some kids watched tv, played video games, or ran around the neighborhood with their friends. My favorite memories were spending long days exploring in nature alone and listening to my favorite songs dancing and singing like I was headlining my own concert. As I grew older, outside of writing poetry, music was the daily ritual that helped me cope. Fast forward to today, hip hop was one of my strongest tools for coping. Outside of coping, hip-hop provides a site to examine and make sense of cultural issues and how systems of domination are manifesting currently in society. I utilize hip-hop and music to present the themes that appeared throughout my narrative and to explore my experience in a hybridized state of oppression and liberation and connect it back to the larger societal discourse of domination and freedom. Hip hop music captures how I encounter my identities, the structures that marginalize my social identities, and mirrors the broader systems of domination we are all enculturated in and strive to liberate ourselves from. Hip-hop music as pedagogy, is utilized in this self-inquiry as an interpretive and coping lens, that allows me to explore and challenge societal domination and my role in it.

Citations. I have a contentious relationship with citations. My great ancestors, the first scholars, healers, and thinkers relied heavily on oral tradition instead of relying heavily on

written tradition. Colonization forced many Africans and enslaved Africans into christianity which created a rupture between our traditions and knowledge. Cue systems of domination and we have our current climate of knowledge creation that relies heavily on positivist assumptions and African and indigenous plagiarized knowledge, while actively restricting access to marginalized folx to create knowledge or be considered and respected as knowers. Citations are one vehicle for domination that maintains the current sociocultural economic hierarchy and hierarchy in education (Stewart, 2019). Additionally, as a dyslexic scholar, citations take on a different meaning entirely. The pain I experience whenever I am forced to read and cite texts that I cannot understand because they were not written for people with my differences is no longer worth it. If a knower speaks to me through Twitter, a blog post, art, or in a book I plan to cite them. If I cannot comprehend or understand what a knower is saying, then I should never be required to cite that person. More importantly the knowers who have most transformed me and my thinking relied on narrative writing, observations, and poetry to make sense of their context and culture. I focus heavily on citing those knowers who transformed me and provided me the privilege of being able to conduct this inquiry. Lastly, there are knowers who I have not read who have also come to conclusions similar to mine and could not be cited because I have not had the privilege of reading them yet. My inquiry will rely on diverse knowledge and knowers, centering African ascendant, queer, and dis/abled scholars whenever I can.

Identity. I situate my identities in the current sociocultural economic hierarchy, which determines how much violence, oppression, power, or privilege I can garner depending on the context I am in. I identify as a Queer Black gender fluid femme who was assigned female at birth. My spiritual beliefs do not limit genders to binaries and instead, I believe our physical bodies are simply one expression of our spirit which encompasses a myriad of masculine and

feminine energies as they pertain to nature. For example, masculine energies like assertiveness or the sun, feminine energies like creation or the moon, are found throughout nature and each of us spiritually identifies with different traits and energies ranging from the feminine and masculine (Teish, 1985). Our spirits choose our bodies. I think it would be hard for a lot of us to have pathological ideas about our bodies if we grew up believing we chose our body for a specific purpose during this incarnation. Gender and purpose are closely aligned. I believe part of my purpose during this lifetime is to balance both the masculine and feminine energies that naturally occur in my spirit. Although I present as feminine, I have many traits and attributes that are masculine including biological traits. My gender cannot be limited to performance or display restricted often by class and socioeconomic status. It cannot be limited to female or male, scientific identifiers created by oppressive science. My gender is an expression of my spirit that like always acknowledges the both/and.

I have two learning dis/abilities, two debilitating chronic illnesses, and two mental health disorders (all considered dis/abilities) that significantly impact my day-to-day life and the amount of violence I suffer. My dis/abilities are rendered invisible for several different reasons. For example, my educational privilege and high degree obtainment lead most people to perceive me as neurologically normative because bias tells us smart, competent, intelligent bodies get professional degrees. People with learning dis/abilities are assumed to be incompetent, lazy, unintelligent, and slow to comprehend concepts. Due to this incongruence, there have been several times when I have disclosed my learning disabilities and they have been dismissed entirely because of my education. I do also have to own that I am intelligent and some people have the very simple bias that those who are labeled dis/abled especially with learning

dis/abilities are inherently not intelligent. What seems like a compliment to some is actually a harmful bias that allows dis/ability inequity and injustice to run rampant.

Similar to my dis/abilities, my sexuality is also rendered invisible, I identify as fluid or pansexual, consistent with my spiritual beliefs, I am attracted to and find romance with people who are interested in balancing their masculine and feminine energies and living authentic lives outside a gender binary. Therefore, I reject the notion of the cisheteropatriarchy being a natural hierarchy completely because it was constructed by those within group to dominate over anyone different from cisheterosexual men. Cisheterosexual men according to my spiritual beliefs do not exist because we are all genderless spirits with a varying degree of masculine and feminine attributes. Therefore, our bodies are an expression of our spirit and a means to create more life. Genderism has limited our societal understanding of gender to perpetuate dominance for cismen. My understanding of gender would posit gender fluid, gender non-binary, and trans people as an aspiration instead of bodies to be demonized and killed because the focus is on purpose, balance, and spirit not a hierarchy centered around oppressive science, religion, and domination.

The only one of my identities that is not rendered invisible ever is my Blackness. I am an ascendant of our planet's first people. I am an ascendant of African Americans from the shores of North Carolina and Virginia who persisted through the long journey across the Atlantic Ocean from my first home, the Bantu region of Africa. Unlike queerness, class, spirituality, sexuality, or my specific dis/abilities, my race cannot be hidden. No matter what space I occupy, people perceive me as Black and treat me according to their own hidden or unchecked biases. Due to being perceived as a Black ciswoman and the majority of my political identities being rendered invisible and marginalized, I am continuously misunderstood, violated, and attacked in interpersonal relationships, in the classroom, in our laws and policies creating a hostile world to

live in. Despite class, educational, pretty, American citizenship, and perceived acceptable body privilege, I have been primed for violence because of my multiple marginalized identities and five adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). People who have four or more ACEs tend to struggle with adult-onset of chronic illness, depression, anxiety, suicide, addiction, and being targeted for violence (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2019). I suffer from all of the above except I have been able to evade addiction through studying addiction, psychopharmacology, and committing to using natural remedies to support my health and chronic illnesses. After my first year of graduate school, I stopped all prescription psychotropic drugs and refuse to take opioids for my chronic inflammatory disorder unless after surgery or in emergency care. Instead, I practice talk-therapy, mindfulness, and spirituality combined with a strong community that allows me the strength to combat the violence enacted against me simply for being.

Educational foundation. I had the privilege of going to very diverse, academically rigorous, public schools for my primary education. From kindergarten until third grade I attended the same public-school in South Jersey. My first educator was a fat-bodied black woman named Mrs. Fauntleroy whose presence felt like home. She was one of the only educators who I can remember not making me feel dumb while teaching me math. I use to wake up excited each day to go to school to have class with Mrs. Fauntleroy. My experience in my first classroom planted a deep love of education and learning in me. My love for school continued to grow despite my learning abilities becoming more and more apparent and creating unknown tension for me in the classroom. I use to dread being called on to read aloud without having been able to read the text before practicing my pronunciation of the words. Or consistently struggling in math having to use my fingers to do simple addition, even now. Despite my learning dis/abilities going untested

and undiagnosed for years even with clear indications, I continued to love reading and learning. At the end of every school year, the teachers would let each of us students take any copies of our old edition textbooks and workbooks. Religiously at the end of every school year, I would lug home bags of books in every subject and I would play school forcing my younger brother Joshua to take my classes. He was my first student and I would teach him math, reading, and science and my parents were as grateful as Josh for his soaring grades learning concepts three years ahead of him.

School remained a site of both passion and pain continuing into my undergraduate degree program at George Mason University. Mason is where I learned what research was. I majored in sociology but hoping to change the world. Experiencing too many incongruencies in research and not seeing the use in it despite being a research fellow and conducting an independent honors thesis, I chose the path of healing and entered the mental health field working directly with displaced and neglected youth in the DC metropolitan area. My work with neglected youth and mothers without homes lead me to Wake Forest University to study mental health counseling. Wake Forest is where I discovered student affairs. Over ten years, I have worked on-campus in campus sexual violence awareness and response, dis/ability resources, college mental health counseling, career counseling, and social justice and equity consulting work. Despite consistently centering equity in my work, I face continuous inequity in higher education with Mason being the least harmful institution mainly due to strong faculty mentors, an emphasis on writing, the whole student, and innovation. My educational experiences ground how I come to understand our field, my practice, and scholarship in education. To conduct this self-inquiry, I chose a methodology guided by spirit grounded in African cosmology that challenges scholars to practice sacred scholarship that has the power to heal and reconcile what we collectively have lost by

participating in systems of domination. To breakout of the incongruencies riddled in higher education and student affairs (HESA) to maintain domination for power elites, meant I needed to birth a study unlike what has been renamed “traditional” to instead break to the root, love. To do so and honor my identities as well as hold myself accountable for my privilege and power, I rely on a sacred methodology that embodies what it means for me to be Queer Black Dis/abled and Femme in a context that is anti- all that I am and strive to be.

Significance of Inquiry

This study is significant for several reasons. First, it employs an epistemologically diverse methodology to disrupt the post-positivist standards of education research. My hope is this inquiry will add to the growing body of knowledge that is grounded in sacred, longitudinal, in-depth inquiries, guided by diverse worldviews and methodologies. Second, this inquiry will provide a living example of knowledge creation that is whole, artistic, and vulnerable to encourage readers to create with similar intentions and values to help liberate ourselves first from systems of oppression. Lastly, this inquiry centers on issues that impact the students targeted at the highest rates of violence and yet are extremely understudied.

Summative Expression

I want to speak a different truth

I want to inspect different roots

I want to examine what you choose to refute

I want to live in a world never having to breathe the words,

Don't shoot

I want to move in excessive joy and pleasure

without ever having to wonder

if the tide of -isms will take me over

I want to remember what was lost and forgotten

How I am ascendant of God's first daughters and was

never meant to be chattel put asunder

So now when I speak know-

My truth is my Truth.

I want to speak by niah shaylin

CHAPTER 2

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In lieu of a literature review, chapter 2 will focus on the conceptual framework and worldview guiding this sacred self-inquiry. I struggled the most to write this section because words can never wholly describe spirit, for spirit is felt. In true sacred praxis, I let go. Prayed. Reread from my spiritual guides. And released it all to spirit. The guiding worldview for this dissertation is African cosmology. African cosmology is not a religion instead a system of perceptions guided by African ascendant knowledge to help individuals understand their purpose on Earth (Chireau, 2003; Karade, 1994; Magesa, 2013; Olupona, 2000; Paris, 1995; Parrinder, 1961; Somé, 1993; Teish, 1985). African cosmology can be conceived as a belief system, set of values, tradition, worldview, or much more. For the purpose of our sacred inquiry, *we* have chosen to outline the perceptions *we* derive from African cosmology that inherently guide this inquiry. African cosmology is as broad and nuanced as the universe. Therefore, I am not positing that my interpretation of African cosmology is the same for every African ascendant. I am constantly writing from my own position guided by spirit, my lived experience, and thorough observation and analysis of HESA, inequity, mental health and wellness.

The spiritual power of the universe supersedes any of its constituent parts because all of the parts are born from spiritual universal power, the power of God (Chireau, 2003; Magesa, 2013; Olupona, 2000; Paris, 1995; Parrinder, 1961; Somé, 1997; Teish, 1985). Ideologies, philosophies, and religions that position the body over spirit naively believing their individual autonomous power is not directly given by God act according to values that do not honor God,

spirit, or Ubuntu. African spirituality presumes any immoral harm enacted impacts the whole of us, including God and our ancestors. We are all one unified source of love. No individual is better than anyone else. No matter what social identity background or misdeed that person has done, each of us spiritually equal despite our individual lived experience. Our separation is what spiritualists call the ultimate illusion (Chireau, 2003; Somé, 1997; Teish, 1985). The current year 2020 has already illuminated how far our physical world is from God and the values of African spirituality. Societal upheaval, genocides, catastrophes, illnesses, and natural disasters are all indications of humankind's mass disavowal of African spirituality and high rate of immorality being endorsed (Magesa, 2013). To reclaim our physical world and help all of society re/member we have to become aware and understand our history and traditions.

Traditional African cosmology tolerates all diverse worldviews and beliefs, like the worship of multiple deities or other Gods because African traditions do not make any claims to universal or absolute truth (Chireau, 2003; Magesa, 2013; Olupona, 2000; Paris, 1995; Parrinder, 1961; Somé, 1997; Teish, 1985). This openness is a foundational component of African cosmology that truly separates itself from Abrahamic religious traditions and lends itself to a culture of curiosity and inclusion. Another important element of traditional African cosmology, is the idea that each person takes what they need, share what they can spare, and avoid living in overabundance (Chireau, 2003; Magesa, 2013; Olupona, 2000; Paris, 1995; Parrinder, 1961; Somé, 1997; Teish, 1985). Tradition presupposes that the only overabundance should be found in nature (Somé, 1993). Additionally, African traditions are typically organized in decentralized and local forms instead of institutions of domination or large centers of power (Paris, 1995). Traditions have typically been persevered and passed down orally because African traditions place a large emphasis on God and spirit, and the power of spirit, and not on the physical and

material (Magesa, 2013; Olupona, 2000; Paris, 1995; Parrinder, 1961). Spirit is most commonly accessed through prayer, meditation, the practice of re/membering, nature worship, and through collective community or the practice of ubuntu.

African cosmology is a large and expansive worldview influenced by context, ancestry, and history. For this chapter, I will focus on the threads of African cosmology that shape my worldview and ground this inquiry. First, I will explore African cosmological values and beliefs that shape the design and analysis of this study. Then I will discuss re/membering our fluidity and explore how I understand queerness and gender through my worldview. The next section will cover the importance of centering community and the practice of ubuntu. Lastly, I will discuss the importance of bridging this worldview back into higher education.

Values of African Cosmology

“Everywhere we are, our values live and breathe.” (Teish, 1985, p. 111). African cosmology is a worldview grounded in three beliefs, there is one God or source that everything is birthed from, nature is a form of God and should be worshipped, and our ancestors should be revered for their spiritual presence in our lives (Chireau, 2003; Magesa, 2013; Olupona, 2000; Paris, 1995; Parrinder, 1961; Somé, 1997; Teish, 1985). From these three tenets every ritual, value, and practice are of African cosmology is derived. African cosmology does not recognize the concept of individualism, a value centered in systems of oppression. The perception of this physical plane alludes individuals in society into thinking we are separate from one another. This perception causes division between individuals even though all of us are from the same source and interdependent of one another (Chireau, 2003; Magesa, 2013; Olupona, 2000; Paris, 1995; Parrinder, 1961; Somé, 1997; Teish, 1985). Interdependence largely explains a prominent belief in African cosmology, do no harm to self, others, or nature, for harm to any of the three is harm

to God, self, and community (Chireau, 2003; Magesa, 2013; Olupona, 2000; Paris, 1995; Parrinder, 1961; Somé, 1997; Teish, 1985). African cosmology also posits that a large goal of our physical life is to find balance within ourselves and environment. Shadow work is a common practice of African cosmology to help people better control their projections, ego, and selfish wants that do not align with spirit or the highest good for all. Many scholars study shadow work practices which can include but are not limited to, inner child work, trauma healing, practicing awareness and gratitude (Chireau, 2003; Magesa, 2013; Olupona, 2000; Paris, 1995; Parrinder, 1961; Somé, 1997; Teish, 1985). When we fail to understand our shadow, the practice of oppression becomes ritual. The shadow also contains parts of ourselves that are othered. Intentional shadow work is a large part of finding balance and committing no harm to self, others, or nature. When we are able to observe ourselves with love, fully and curiously, harm and violence are more difficult to take hold in interpersonal relationships and structurally in society (Bhattacharya, 2018b).

At the core of serving God and spirit is unconditional love and radical honesty (Chireau, 2003; Magesa, 2013; Olupona, 2000; Paris, 1995; Parrinder, 1961; Somé, 1997; Teish, 1985). The ability to perceive everything as love or apply love to every situation is the Godliest act of all (Chireau, 2003; Magesa, 2013; Olupona, 2000; Paris, 1995; Parrinder, 1961; Somé, 1997; Teish, 1985). Judgement is indication of wounds that need healing caused by lack of love. Shadow work, practicing unconditional love, and radical honesty are core practices of freedom (Somé, 1997; Teish, 1985). It is difficult to succumb to the practice of oppression when love is rooted in all actions.

The practice of love requires engaging the mind, body, and soul in rituals and practices that keep us aligned with God and the highest good. These practices include prayer, pouring

libations, community rituals to honor God, nature, and our ancestors, spending time in nature without harm, silence, being still, practicing awareness, equanimity, gratitude, creating, stretching, drinking water and tea, and eating foods that are cultivated in love, sustainably and locally sourced. These are just a few examples of practices grounded in love and freedom (Chireau, 2003; Magesa, 2013; Olupona, 2000; Paris, 1995; Parrinder, 1961; Somé, 1997; Teish, 1985). Systems of domination and our societal compliance in acts of oppression make practices of freedom difficult to access and practice regularly. Most people who are othered and pushed to the margins can barely meet their basic needs. Engaging in freedom requires we have safety, shelter, security, and a thriving abundant community. Safety and security cannot exist when we are constantly othering ourselves internally and those around us to maintain systems of domination.

Re/membering Our Fluidity: Honoring Fluid Genders & Expressions of Love

Prior the advent of ‘gay’ culture and the religious colonization of Africa and other indigenous nations, there was no segregated movement made up of ‘lesbians and gay’ people. Although homophobia arrived on America’s shores with 18th and 19th-century slave owners and missionaries, divisions between heterosexual and same-gender loving, bisexual transgender (SGLBT) people in early Black American families and communities did not exist (Asanti, 2010, p. 24).

While studying abroad in Ghana I had the privilege of touring the Manhyia palace of the Asante kingdom. Our tour guide described how the Asante ruled with ubuntu as a foundational practice through an equitable matriarchy where the Queen Mothers of the kingdom would determine who would be chief and the wives of the Chief had the sole power to decide who the Chief would wed and therefore who the other wives of the chief would have intercourse with. This story reminded

me of the power of re/membering because colonization and forced evangelization has stripped many African ascendants from their traditions and rituals, traditions that were sexually fluid, matriarchal, and queer. If history were not colonized, so many bodies that have been historically pathologized, like queer genders and sexualities, would be free from the cages that bind their spirits. Before a hierarchy of gender and sexuality existed, many African tribes like the Daagba, did not recognize gender from an anatomical bodily perspective but instead gender was determined by spirit, and could not be limited to a rigid Eurocentric binary (Somé, 1997). Gender, much like the purpose of life, was about practicing authenticity and internal harmonic balance of one's feminine and masculine energies that manifest in a myriad of ways in all of us. As described by Asanti (2010),

Indigenous Africans clearly recognized the spiritual role of a man born with feminine energy and a woman born with male energy. Thus, sometimes, the names for same-gender loving, bisexual and transgender Africans were distinguished 'titles' based often on a particular spiritual gift or power that a person was imbued with because of their dual spirited nature. The Ambo-Quambo call bisexual people *kimbanda*, which means, "two-spirited diviners with sacred spiritual knowledge." (Asanti, 2010, p. 25).

African cosmology posits queer, transgender, and fluid people have divine spiritual purposes that require a blend of energies from the masculine and feminine (Asanti, 2010). The repression and persecution of gender and sexual fluidity can be directly tied to capitalism, settler colonialism, anti-blackness (Asanti, 2010; Magesa, 2013; Somé, 1997). The creation of capitalism coincides with the repression of sex and emphasis on sex for reproduction (Foucault, 1978). Enslaved Africans were encouraged to reproduce to supply the labor force for the slave owners while being indoctrinated with Christianity (Chireau, 2003; Magesa, 2013; Olupona,

2000; Paris, 1995; Parrinder, 1961; Somé, 1997; Teish, 1985). Thereby pathologizing our innate urges, pleasures, bodies, and traditions, systems of domination impeded enslaved African ascendants from our full selves. Systems of domination also impeded enslaved Africans from challenging systems like capitalism, cisheteropatriarchy, and white supremacy because we were being indoctrinated to disbelieve our own cosmology and universal laws of harmony and morality (Magesa, 2013).

Living an authentic life embodying any gender expression or sexuality is never against God or spirit, especially when all things created by God and spirit are intentional and divinely created (Chireau, 2003; Magesa, 2013; Olupona, 2000; Paris, 1995; Parrinder, 1961; Somé, 1997; Teish, 1985). However, systems of domination go against humanity and were created to serve the self-interests of a few instead of prioritizing the interests of the whole. If those marginalized understood that their marginalizations are not wrong or something to pathologized but were instead created to ensure capital and imperial power for a small group of people, I wonder how freeing it could be? Moreover, what would it mean for gender fluid and transgender people to understand they are a spiritual standard to aspire to instead of bodies to be demonized and murdered?

Sacred Community & Honoring Relationships

Battle (1989) was a foundational scholar to theorize the principle of ubuntu which simply states is, “I am because we are, since we are therefore I am.” The foundational principle of the African philosophy of ubuntu places emphasis on our humanness being dependent on spirit and honoring the spirit of God and divinity in one another (Battle, 1989). Ubuntu has been criticized by many womanist African scholars who state that ubuntu or hunhu, the Shona of Zimbabwe equivalent of ubuntu, excludes humans who were not cultured in ubuntu (Manyonganise, 2015).

Additionally, African womanist argue the primary study of African philosophy excludes a lot of women reinforcing patriarchy in ubuntu practices and conceptions (Manyonganise, 2015).

However, I offer different interpretation of ubuntu and argue the infiltration of patriarchy is related to power and domination not the foundational principle of ubuntu, specifically anyone espousing patriarchal intentions and genderism would not be acting in alignment with traditional African cosmology or ubuntu (Battle, 1989; Magesa, 2013). Those with power, like cismen, in patriarchal societies may ignore the principles of ubuntu and interdependence for their own selfish gain and position. However traditional African cosmology states our human actions need to align with the universal good and ubuntu for us to receive spiritual fortitude and prosperity (Battle, 1989; Chireau, 2003; Magesa, 2013). Similarly, many scholars and activists across fields who claim to work towards equity and liberation for people in the diaspora; however, their actions, teachings, and writings still espouse the dominant systems keeping us all oppressed. For example, when scholars write about African philosophies or issues of equity in the diaspora to gain financial and authoritative power for themselves instead of using their power to dismantle oppression and reify oneness, unity, and liberation for Black, Indigenous, people of color. A modern-day example in the U.S. would be when activists organize for Blacks Lives Matter (BLM) to end the tyranny on Black bodies only to use their BLM platform for their own self-interests using BLM donations for their own personal use. When we fail to re/member and ground our values in traditional African cosmology, we end up corrupting our most sacred philosophies like, ubuntu and we perpetuate the same systems of oppression dominating over us.

Despite our civilization being in complete moral disarray and corruption, we all have the ancestral universal knowledge within us. When I read Dillard and Bell (2011), Magesa (2013) or Somé (1997), I re/member our traditional ways of being and I feel a sense of wholeness and

truth. I re/member in my spirit that their words are true. The mass violence, war, genocide, desolation, famine, and natural disasters we face at the highest rate this earth has ever seen is not by mistake but consequence of systems of domination and mass avoidance of shower work (Magesa, 2013). As a collective we must recognize the consequences of our actions and inactions and reconcile with spirit to right our universal sins against God, love, and nature.

The Both/and of Power

Power has existed as long as our historical and ancestral memory can recall. Power is an extremely multifaceted concept and manifests at the individual, collective, and institutional level, which makes it a hard concept to fully articulate and grasp. In this section, I intend to discuss power and its forms and how they relate to our society's current articulation of systems of power/domination and their maintenance of the sociocultural economic hierarchy.

Typically, when people study students with multiple minoritized identities the research is done using an ahistorical lens that focuses on intersecting identities but does not always call into question power and systems of domination (Linder, et. al., 2020). Despite the emphasis of intersectionality as a tool to thoroughly analyze systems of domination, scholars often misinterpret the purpose of intersectionality and reduce systems of domination to issues of identity politics (Erevelles, 2011). Other scholars will utilize intersectionality, and inevitably comply in ableism and other forms of oppression instead of fully recognizing and honoring the student's whole person (Erevelles, 2011). Perpetually scholars participate in the same erasure they dedicated themselves to exposing or eradicating.

Power is not binary, unlike some scholars would have you believe. No individual or system can have complete power or be completely powerless (Freire, 1970/2000; Manning, 2017). Instead, power is transient, in flux, and mutable (Freire, 1970/2000; Magesa, 2013; Manning,

2017). The both/and of power is multifaceted. Power must be understood relevant to the context because power is hyperlocal and can appear and manifest differently depending on the situation (Freire, 2000/1970). Power is determined most often by how a person is situated based on their lived sociocultural economic hierarchy (Freire, 2000/1970). For the purpose of this inquiry, I will be critiquing systems of domination like imperialism, neoliberalism, transnational capitalism, globalization, and cisheteropatriarchy to showcase how individuals situated higher in the sociocultural economic hierarchy have more protection, privilege, access, positional and authoritative power that can create groups of power elites who hoard power and make decisions for the masses on behalf of the collective for their own imperial and capital gain (Freire, 2000/1970). Rarely does history reflect those having the most sociocultural economic power utilizing their power for the collective's wealth and nourishment, instead the gains made are used to distance those in the margins from those privileged creating policies, laws, and biases that lead us to our current revolution taking place in the U.S.

No individual is worthless; instead social hierarchies created by mostly white cis men who deemed their bodies able, generate bias based on differences to elevate groups of people over each other for imperial gain and or capital and in our modern day for overabundance and leisure (Chireau, 2003; Magesa, 2013; Olupona, 2000; Paris, 1995; Parrinder, 1961; Somé, 1997; Teish, 1985). Depending on who has governing power and authoritative power to make decisions any group of people regardless of identity could be at the top of the sociocultural economic hierarchy. Conceptualizations of power that do not account for the level of caution, humility, and intentionality needed to wield power to avoid causing harm perpetuate systems of dominance to maintain the social status quo (Chireau, 2003; Magesa, 2013; Somé, 1997; Teish, 1985). The idea of dehumanizing entire groups and ethnicities of people is a relatively recent phenomena in

history not taking place previous to the 1400s (Magesa, 2013). Although the roots of systems of oppression existed like imperialism and patriarchy they were not as widespread until globalization, chattel slavery, and settler colonialism created a perfect storm to destroy indigenous lands and economies in mass through transnational capitalism (Dei & Asgharzadeh, 2006).

Power & Oppression On-Campus

Higher education's purpose was intended to contribute to the public good which meant educating an engaged democratic citizenry, supporting local communities, preserving knowledge and creating knowledge, while working in tandem with other social institutions like healthcare (Kezar, 2004). However, as IHE become more concerned with producing workers and securing their institutional financial security and abundance like at Harvard University or Pomona College, institutions with large endowments yet as an institution do little to eradicate inequity in sustainable, structural, equitable ways. Education may be a fertile ground for liberation, however, I would argue higher education in the U.S. was always used in the interest of systems of domination. The first US colleges were made to educate the clergy, which the historical analysis above points to Christianity being a historical tool for domination and control over several groups all over the world (Chireau, 2003; Magesa, 2013; Olupona, 2000; Paris, 1995; Parrinder, 1961). Additionally, when more diverse students were admitted into institutions it was all in interest convergence and few sustainable and liberative structures were created to promote equitable environments for marginalized students being admitted on campus (Kezar, 2004).

Compliance in neoliberalism, transnational capitalism, and anti-blackness leads to an irrevocably toxic environment for minoritized students especially students at the intersections of race, dis/ability, and queerness. Specifically, the corporatization of higher education and the lack

of spirit in the academe perpetuates the same sociocultural economic hierarchy on-campus. Universities and colleges should be sites for learning and liberation instead they value neoliberalism and endorse ideals of competition, power, and domination contributing to our societal spiritual crimes against God, the universe, nature, and ourselves. While higher education and student affairs become more corporatized, relying on grants, adjunct faculty, exploiting international students, and creating mass online programs to generate revenue even when they do not have the capacity to facilitate those programs (Kezar, 2004). IHE must realign with traditional African spirituality and refuse to comply in systems of domination or our society will remain corrupt educating citizens of compliance instead of citizens of spirit, community, and equity.

Bridging African Cosmology Back to Higher Education

Afro-indigenous tribes lived and thrived across the continent participating in vibrant and diverse rituals and traditions grounded in God, spirit, nature, and inclusive community (Magesa, 2013; Somé, 1997; Teish, 1985). Contrary to a history grounded in anti-blackness that stigmatizes African ascendants as other, is a rich history and spiritual legacy that predates colonization and showcases the values, intelligence, and inventiveness of African ascendants before the fifteenth century. African ascendant scholars have done important re/membering work for our collective, writing about African spirituality to normalize our traditional ways of life grounded in God, ancestral veneration, and nature reverence (Dillard, 2012; Magesa, 2013; Olupona, 2000; Paris, 1995; Parrinder, 1961; Somé, 1994; Somé, 1997; Teish, 1985). African spirituality is an uplifting, honest, rational, and all-encompassing cosmology that provides all of us living on this physical world a memory of morality that ensures universal harmony and abundance. Western eurocentric cosmologies and ideologies like imperialism, neoliberalism, and

cisheteropatriarchy endorse values that justify self-serving interests such as hoarding power, wealth, land, and resources, also referred to as settler colonialism (Chireau, 2003; Dei & Asgharzadeh, 2006; Magesa, 2013). Post-traditional or eurocentric ideologies do not acknowledge spiritual power and disrespect our God and ancestors by not recognizing the divinity in all humans, nature, and living things on our physical world, which all would be nonexistent without spiritual power (Chireau, 2003; Magesa, 2013; Olupona, 2000; Paris, 1995; Parrinder, 1961; Somé, 1997; Teish, 1985).

Despite higher education largely being instituted, in what is referred to as the U.S., to generate clergy and assimilate African and Indigenous people of color to western eurocentric values (Caple, 1998). Learning at the root of education is not inherently colonized. We colonize education when we enforce the values of domination on learning. Armah (2002) discusses the new possibilities for higher education when he writes, “It says for the buried to rise, and the dead to live again, what has been dismembered through violence will first have to come together through love” (p.172). The tools to liberation exist and are readily available to all institutional agents. As IHE begin practicing freedom, honesty, and aligning their missions and actions in love, we can begin to bridge education back to African cosmological tradition.

Summative Expression

I have not simply gone through it – it has been the center of my life.

-Ayi Kwei Armah, KMT, (2002, p. 183)

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

“What we needed was a kind of ethnography that truly honored the complexities of the Indigenous and the ‘modern’ that we’d experienced in our bodies, minds, and spirits. Something both dialogical and multiple. Both spiritual and sacred. Something both historical and cultural. Something that honored fluidity of time and space, of the material and spiritual world. Mostly, we needed an ethnography that acknowledged both the joy and pain of location, dislocation and the transformation of both in our stories: African women are not stories of a singular self but are stories of we, collective stories deeply embedded in African women’s wisdom and Indigenous knowledges.”

-Cynthia B. Dillard & Charlotte Bell, (2011, p. 343)

I exist as an African ascendant scholar because of the spirit, faith, and strength of my ancestors, who endured the atrocities of chattel slavery. We cannot enter any context without acknowledging spirit as African ascendants (Dillard & Bell, 2011). Armah (2002) writes, “It is our learned duty not to see the culture of Europe as racism but civilization” (p. 134). The devastation of Indigenous and African nations and cultures through imperialism, colonization, and global capitalism, created a violent world for African ascendants to thrive in. Despite being taught a new tradition through the European lens, the only tangible thing individuals have to rely on during times of genocide, global capitalism, and current day slavery is our spirit and faith, which white supremacy and cisheteropatriarchy have tried to banish from our society, replacing them with controlling religions and a neoliberal practice. This chapter describes the spirit led and

sacred methodology we have chosen for this dissertation study. The purpose of our sacred ethnography is to (1) examine the implications of living at the intersections of dis/ability, race, gender, sexuality, spirituality/religion, and class, while persisting through doctoral education in the U.S., (2) help describe the concrete ways institutions of higher education's compliance in systems of domination causes direct violence and harm against bodies that are othered and marginalized in higher education, and (3) provide a sacred and epistemologically diverse perspective to counter the current dominant narrative reproduced and maintained in knowledge creation.

Nkwaethnography: Sacred Ethnography (Dillard & Bell, 2011)

getting yourself together.

what about undoing yourself.

-the fix (waheed, 2013)

Nkwaethnography, translates to English as 'sacred ethnography' and is grounded in endarkened feminist epistemology which requires scholars to re/member and center the spirit and what is sacred to unearth true meaning-making and dismantle interlocking systems of oppression (Dillard & Bell, 2011). One of the things that struck me most about this methodology was its attention and tending to both the joy and pain of living, especially as an African ascendant femme. Second was the emphasis nkwaethnography has on what is sacred and practicing actionable scholarship that is done in reverence and honor of spirit recognizing the sacred in our scholarship continuously (Dillard & Bell, 2011.) "We are all marked by enslavement, colonization, slavery, across temporal and geographic boundaries. But what we know now is that this fluidity of time and space is indeed real because we could feel them in our bodies, minds, and spirit," (Dillard & Bell, 2011, p. 345). Nkwaethnography makes space in scholarship for

honoring the understanding that I cannot speak for anyone but myself and simultaneously I am connected deeply to others through fluidity in time, space, and spirit. Dillard and Bell (2011) further posit, “Qualitative (re)search can be a spiritual (re)search, a place both physical and spiritual that can also position the qualitative researcher as a narrator of memory, both her/his [sic] own and the collective memory of our hearts and souls.” (p. 347).

To guide me in this sacred self-inquiry I focused on three tenets recognized in nkwaethnography, the first tenet is time and space are fluidly spanning spiritual and material conditions (Dillard & Bell, 2011, p. 345). Specifically, scholars must acknowledge the connection to God, Spirit, and our Ancestors as it relates to our interconnected experiences that are felt and (re)membered (Dillard & Bell, 2011; Karade, 1994). The second tenet of Nkwaethnography is *we* must re-center our personhood to heal our spirit and recover our collective and individual self-humanity by embracing community and our common destiny (Dillard & Bell, 2011, p. 345). The last tenet nkwaethnography honors is our mind, body, and spirit are all an equal part in the sacred praxis of scholarship and the three cannot be splintered or severed from each other, *we* bring our full self to our work (Dillard & Bell, 2011). Nkwaethnography provides me with a methodology that most aligns with my spirit, worldview, and the purpose of this self-inquiry, offering me a sacred and community driven healing approach to inquiry that is typically denied, erased, or plagiarized to maintain white supremacy and global capitalism (Armah, 2002; Dillard & Bell, 2011).

The value of interconnectedness in nkwaethnography reminds us that the actions and harm we face as individuals impact us wholly as a collective and when we recognize and honor the *royal we* societal issues and the problems we face due to systems of domination can begin to dissipate as we align with our purpose and spiritual selves (Dillard & Bell, 2011). Throughout

this inquiry, I will use the singular *I* and plural *we/us* to recognize the spiritual and ancestral guidance that occurs during this inquiry. Even when using the singular “I” we still acknowledge I am connected to spirit and never conduct this research alone. Whether we work together as a collective or as an individual, spiritual knowledge exists in all of us and is inevitably linked to our work and research (Al-Zoubei, 2011; Bhattacharya, 2016; Denzin, Lincoln, & Tuhiwai-Smith, 2008; Dillard & Bell, 2011; Shahjahan & Haverkos, 2011). Therefore, this nkwaethnography will center spirit with the intention of creating scholarship that is ultimately grounded in love, God, and unity with the intent to heal (Okpalaoka & Dillard, 2011).

Additionally, I chose to include trusted scholars, both peers and elders, to support me as I continue to embark on this inquiry, making actionable the values of community, accountability, and humility. A sacred and spiritual approach is process oriented and focused on what learning and growth is, and is birthed through the process of sacred scholarship. A sacred approach to inquiry requires practicing values such as community, humility, and accountability in the design and implementation of inquiry. The findings should be helpful for enhancing the welfare of community and maintain what is sacred. Sacred methodology relies heavily on actionable and solutions-based inquiry that can aid in creating balance, harmony, and peace.

Life Note Data & Crystallization

“...from peeling back layers and exposing our secret pleasures and pains, our uncertainties and doubts, our angers and despair have come transformation, empowerment, community, activism. We learn we are not crazy, or that we are the best kind of crazy. We bear witness, we affirm, we find our true voices, our true power. We heal. We are healed. We speak truth to power [...] we give ourselves permission to believe that our thoughts, feelings, issues, and words are valuable.”

-Marcia Ann Gillespie, quote from foreword in book titled, Life Notes: Personal Writings by Contemporary Black Women, edited by Patricia Bell-Scott.

In Bell-Scott's (1994) introduction she writes about the deep tradition Black women have of keeping notes of our lives, yet how often our life notes never reach a national or global audience and our truths are kept silent. Further Bell-Scott (1994) insists life notes allow Black women, "the freedom to define everything on our own terms. For those seeking to defy culturally imposed negative identities, personal writing has offered avenues for resistance and re-creation." (p.17-18). Life notes encourage writing for self-knowledge and empowerment and is a rich tradition often used by the ancestors from which I ascend to speak our truth to power, heal ourselves and reclaim our power in the process. Life notes can take multiple forms such as journals, meditations, poetry, and stream of consciousness (Bell-Scott, 1994). Life notes are powerful and also come with the burden of sharing vulnerable and intimate information about oneself on a global stage. Despite the vulnerable nature of life notes, utilizing life note data for this sacred ethnography provided me with self-inquiry data that completely aligns with my methodology, worldview, and purpose of this study. Additionally, life notes value speaking from my perspective to help empower myself and community by drawing on my personal experiences to help make broader connections to help liberate myself and others from systems of oppression. Life notes also inherently create a retrospective process which aids in healing, self-awareness, and data analysis (Bell-Scott, 1994).

Life note writing is fluid and sometimes the instruments to capture the life notes are unique, like written life notes on various mediums, computers, and nowadays, phones (Bell-Scott, 1994) For this self-inquiry, my life notes consisted of journal entries written on paper in various notebooks, in Evernote, or on Google Drive. I also wrote and collected poetry regarding

my experiences throughout my doctoral education. And lastly, I used pictures and screenshots of any relevant life note captured through my phone. *Our* choice of using journals, poems, and media life notes provided this self-inquiry with a high level of crystallization due to the multiple types of life notes collected and examined (data points), the life notes were collected over multiple points in time, and the journal life notes were analyzed using a team of co-scholars, further described in the following section (Ellingson, 2008).

Life note data was collected from August 2017 until December 2020. For the analysis of this dissertation, 103 life notes were selected to be examined by myself and our two co-scholars from journals I kept throughout my doctoral journey. Each of the life notes averaged 273 words in length and the life notes selected for analysis focused on living at the intersection of dis/ability, race, sexuality, gender, and class while receiving a doctoral education in what is referred to as the south eastern united states. The majority of life notes were from my personal graduate school journal, totaling 77 life notes. The remainder life notes were from various journals from coursework and a doctoral writing group, totaling 26 life notes.

After facing intense prejudice inside and outside the classroom while completing my doctoral degree, I started journaling as a way to vent my frustrations and begin processing the pain I was experiencing. I chose life note data because no matter how bad my anxiety, depression, or situation was I could journal. When analyzing, crystallizing, and triangulating my life note data, music provided that same outlet of production and release. I could listen to the songs covering the themes in the data and focus on passages I need to add, experiences to include from the memos, art to capture the themes and findings. Listening and re-listening was healing, seemingly passive but provided me with energy to heal and write. It feels like after the pandemic and my lack of access to healthcare until 2021, all I could focus on was healing and writing. Due

to my intersecting social identities, I determined my journal entries would provide the most vulnerable and honest data to help capture my experience as a queer Black dis/abled femme in doctoral education. Centering my self-inquiry journal data in this study allows me a liberative and reparative way to express my experiences and frustrations while simultaneously interrogating myself, my role in systems of dominance, and how I perceive it manifesting in doctoral education from my distinct positionality. Therefore, this study cannot be replicated, instead let it inspire other scholars to determine what scholarship is specific to their purpose and positionality and draw connections from this nkwaethnography that can help us eradicate the systems that bind us all.

To protect the confidentiality of people and any sensitive information that might be included in my life note data, I employed several different tools to protect the privacy of those disclosed in my journal entries. These tools included using pseudonyms or initials for people and places, and redacting information entirely to protect confidentiality of subjects mentioned in life note data. The tools used to protect the confidentiality of persons in this self-inquiry were consistent with tools used in self-inquiry studies (Boylorn & Orbe, 2014; Chang, 2008; Glass & Newman, 2015; Jones, Adams, & Ellis, 2013). Chang (2008) reminds us that self-inquiry and autoethnography are not exempt from measures ensuring confidentiality since our stories are often connected to others' stories making scholars engaging in self-inquiry work responsible for adhering to the ethic of confidentiality.

Trustworthiness

Despite the pressure I feel in the academe to produce scholarship rapidly, *we* have been as thorough, intentional, and mindful in preparing and ensuring the reverence of this inquiry consistent with sacred and spiritual praxis. My hope is this sacred ethnography showcases a type

of scholarship that bridges what we currently understand as research back to Indigenous and African ascendant traditions (Magesa 2013; Armah, 2002). To ensure this study was conducted using a sacred and honorable praxis, we created several layers of integrity, credibility, and trustworthiness meant to honor the major tenets of nkwaethnography (Dillard & Bell, 2011). First, spirit connected me with specific people to relationship with who would help shape my worldview, thinking, and scholarship a lot of those people were mentioned or included in the process of our sacred inquiry. Spirit also started transforming my body to prepare for what it was going to need to do physically, mentally, and spiritually as a container to conduct this inquiry. Spirit led me to African cosmology and my ancestors who assist me every step of this inquiry. Before any work takes place on this dissertation I pray to my ancestors and most elevated spirits to guide me and allow me to be a vessel for them. Before my physical body was aware of the dissertation project I would conduct, God, spirit, and my ancestors were preparing me for the dissertation and my purpose all along. My initiation was approximately 25 years ending this year 2021, the year of 5 action/creation, before 2022, the year of 6, prosperity. The fall of 2018, I began formally studying, writing, and reviewing self-inquiry scholarship and autoethnographic research. I studied every class related to self-inquiry and qualitative research I could while preparing for this study. I studied the scholarship of African and Indigenous scholars to better understand traditional ways of knowing and how our scholarship would contribute and add to what has been done by the ancestors and elders who came before us. The following spring of 2019, I attended an orientation for our study abroad trip to Ghana focusing on history and education. After that orientation, I began a practice of fasting, meditating in nature, and only ingesting all-natural foods and liquids for certain time periods to build up my stamina to conduct this sacred work and to ensure my ability to divine clearly interpreting the signs and messages

conveyed from spirit. Before each session of writing or analyzing, I would cleanse myself, and my space, and light an incense to set the intention for our writing. I also practiced several rituals to enhance and ensure my connection with God, spirit, and my ancestors such as moon rituals, pouring libations, ancestor offerings, work with stones, and divination through cowrie and oracle cards. For this inquiry, no dream work was used as I am not trained enough in interpreting dreams. However, this inquiry would have been a prime site for dream ancestral divination (Teish, 1985).

Additionally, I kept a methodological journal to memo my experience conducting this sacred work, to keep track of all methodological decisions made, and to track any spiritual synchronicities. For example, I saw the number 121 every day for the last three months of my analysis. Or life note entries that were of particular importance would fall on important dates representing numbers important to my family. The playlist used to triangulate the emerging findings was finalized at 123 songs totaling 7 hours and 3 minutes' worth of music. Four of my angel numbers present in these synchronicities, 121, 123, 7, and 3. The book KMT by Ayi Kwei Armah (2002) has a quote I use to triangulate my findings on page 121. KMT is also Armah's 7th book. My worldview argues these are not mere coincidences but synchronicities caused by spirit. It is also well documented that ancestor spirits divine with the physical world through numbers, nature, art, and much more (Chireau, 2003; Magesa, 2013; Olupona, 2000; Paris, 1995; Parrinder, 1961; Somé, 1997; Teish, 1985). The use of methodological memoing was useful throughout this inquiry especially tracking the multiple layers of observation, analysis, and personal reflections.

Methodological memoing provides another added layer of trustworthiness because I am continuously being reflective and mindful when documenting my decisions, feelings, and

experiences with spirit. The scholar journal also provides a reflective practice to help manage my individual biases, prejudices, privilege, power, and ignorance/gaps/growth edges (Birks, et. al., 2018). Utilizing memos throughout the data collection and analysis process provided clarity to assist when making decisions made throughout the research process especially when deciding how to present the emerging findings (Birks, et. al., 2018).

The second level of trustworthiness that intended to honor community and circular accountability in the study was the use of two co-scholars who were doctoral students studying higher education and leadership in was is referred to as the U.S. during the time of the study. The scholar team provided support during data analysis as an embodied community of accountability. The scholar team analyzed each of the 103 life notes to provide a layer of accountability to ensure the findings were consistent with the raw data. Typically, self-inquiry data is presented in the raw form ensuring that level of accountability. The hyperlocal context of this self-inquiry could not ensure confidentiality of people connected to my experience if the data was disclosed in the raw form. Additionally, the study was longitudinal and even presenting 30 life note entries did not capture the themes and emerging findings in the same culturally relevant and actionable way as the artistic parable presented in chapter 4. The scholar team was asked to challenge decisions I made as I analyzed the data and intercede with feedback when necessary. Provided below are the co-scholar positionality statements to better understand the context and strengths each scholar brought to the study. Sacred scholarship recognizes that nothing is conducted alone and moreover scholarship should be done in spirit and community (Dillard, Abdur-Rashid, & Tyson, 2000, Dillard, 2006a; Dillard 2012; Dillard & Bell, 2011). Utilizing a scholar team to triangulate my data and make decisions that honor God, our ancestors, the purpose of the inquiry, and our sacred praxis. Additionally, they were able to hold me accountable and point me towards

any gaps due to my positionality and closeness to the topic. To recognize the work of each of my collaborators or contributors (which I will use interchangeably) they were each compensated for their time, not in collusion with capitalism but because I recognize my collaborators might be directly impacted economically by the systems I am interrogating in this study. The collaborators on this inquiry are being compensated/gifted to acknowledge their contribution to community, knowledge, and expertise.

Co-Scholar Positionality Statement I

I am a first generation, Black, Ghanaian-American Christian woman born and raised in low resourced neighborhoods in New York City. My identities influence how I engage with and think about scholarship because I constantly have to lean on them to understand the world around me because the world responds to me according to its value of my identities.

I come to this work with understanding and praise for self-reflection and the use of personal experiences to validate how we know the world and the events we go through. I had the opportunity to write an autoethnographic piece on myself as a leader as a master's student and the use of reflexivity to understand my own self was captivating, surprising, difficult, and freeing all at the same time.

I grew up Christian and identify as a believer in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Although I have limited knowledge of African spiritualism, what I do understand is the concept of spirit and being guided by spirit as I feel led by the Holy Spirit in my Christian faith. As a person with strong cultural ties to the continent of Africa by way of Ghanaian born parents, faith and culture are inseparable and govern my ways of knowing and being.

Ghanaians have a strong sense of community. There's a saying in the Twi language "Ti koro nko agyina" which means that one person can't have a meeting; similar to "two heads are

better than one.” I have witnessed the communal traditions in everything from planning a wedding or funeral to discussing how to manage a wayward child or a divorce. As it relates to this study, the idea of community weaved throughout the methods and involvement of a scholar research team in an autoethnographic study. Including a scholar team only solidifies this study’s methodologies and strengthens the notions to (re)member that which was lost for African Americans through the violent and forceful removal from their homelands. I joined the team because I recognized the voice of tradition and the necessity of community to do the work.

While this is not an exhaustive description of my position in relation to this scholarship, it is a lens for others to examine how and what I see as a scholar.

Co-Scholar Positionality Statement II

"This ain't that other research study"

- Niah Grimes, December 4th 2020

Indeed, the scholarship echoed in these pages is like no other dissertation I have read. I came to lend my mind, body, spirit and voice to journey alongside Niah, serving as witness and council. When contemplating how I arrived here as a trusted contributor to an exceptional scholar in producing this artifact, I can only assume it was because we connected as spirits one to another. See, Niah did not need to defend the premise of this dissertation study to me. She knew I was already a believer. Now, it would not be truthful if I was to say I predicted or fully comprehend all of the intricacies she would reveal in her life's timeline. However, through her early shares in our budding friendship I was able to see glimmers of myself in her eyes. Later, in my reading of her sometimes heartbreaking but always deeply soulful and reflexive journals, I ultimately understood Niah in a greater light as a person and scholar.

I met Niah in 2020, through our shared participation in a dissertation coaching program. I joined the program with a hope and expectation of expanding my network and support system with other doctoral students with similar ancestral backgrounds and cultural contexts who were doing work they were serious about alongside communities they held great reverence for. This desire came from the woundedness I experienced upon entering my doctoral program at a medium-sized, Catholic institution where I continue to pursue my PhD in Leadership Studies today. Niah's invitation to contribute to this dissertation came to me at such a time where I was in low vibration around my own dissertation proposal process with fear and disappointment surrounding the twin pandemics of COVID-19 and the preponderance of white supremacy and systemic racism. I was also suffering with some recurring symptoms from what I would come to know was a diagnosis I shared with Niah called endometriosis. These were critical commonalities we shared as I identify as a Black woman, facing low socioeconomic status with a chronic, sometimes crippling illness attending a historically white institution with hopes of proposing and successfully defending a dissertation that centers Blackwomanhood, Spirit and the role of power in the context of academe. Again, I saw glimmers of myself in Niah's eyes.

I wholeheartedly connect with the nonnegotiable reckoning this dissertation calls for as a Spirit guided self-inquiry. I have had my own intimate relationship with the presupposition that higher education institutions may be sites of violence for doctoral students (and students of all levels) with multiple marginalized identities. I bring this perspective not only based on my own lived experience as a student but as an individual who has served in higher education institutions for over a decade at times to the point of exhaustion due to hypervigilance as I've understood what is at stake when our institutions lack humanizing practices.

My work is liberation work which for me always begins with self and Spirit. I lend credence to the notion that centering one's own humanity and personhood offers belief in how we can offer others the same, and vice versa. It is this paradigm that allows me to so often catch my own reflection in Niah's eyes. My participation in this dissertation study was an act of re/membrance. I am forever grateful.

Each co-scholars helped guide our analysis to avoid conducting sacred self-inquiry scholarship in a vacuum. Despite them validating my ability to conduct a self-inquiry without a scholar team, I knew having others to lean on during such a sacred, vulnerable, and overwhelming process would help produce scholarship my elders, ancestors, and community would also honor. The co-scholar team allowed me to see the life notes separate from myself and draw larger conclusions and implications from the life note narratives. The co-scholar team met a total of three times to conduct the overview, training, and analysis of the life note data.

To familiarize the co-scholars with the study our first meeting introduced ourselves to one another, discussed our individual worldviews and values, reviewed the purpose of the inquiry and expectations of them as co-scholars. Then I discussed their stipends for their work and the additional holistic ways I wanted to honor them for their sacred and confidential work on this nkwaethnography, like offering support on their independent scholarly projects and offering to publish a methodological paper with them on sacred methodology as it would align with the goals of each co-scholar. Our second meeting was to discuss the sacred analysis protocol and the plan for analysis. Our final meeting was our longest meeting where we discussed our memos and collectively analyzed the life notes.

For our final layer of trustworthiness, intended to honor our sacred praxis the scholar team reviewed the emerging findings, themes, and process of inquiry ensure the inquiry was

done to honor the three tenets of nkwaethnography: (1) time and space are fluidly spanning spiritual and material conditions; (2) we must re-center our personhood to heal our spirit and recover our collective and individual self-humanity by embracing community and our common destiny; and (3) nkwaethnography honors our mind, body, and spirit as an equal part in the sacred praxis of scholarship (Dillard & Bell, 2011).

Although nkwaethnography differentiates from autoethnography, our inquiry still met the following criteria Chang (2008) eloquently encourages autoethnography and self-inquiries to center when interpreting autobiographical data with the intent of understanding self and its cultural connection to others:

- Examine autobiographical data to develop deeper cultural and self-understanding; avoid over focusing on self in isolation from others.
- Focus on analysis and cultural interpretation of narrative data.
- Utilize multiple data points to triangulate personal memory and autobiographical recalling as data points.
- Attend to ethical standards of people included in autobiographical data.

Data Analysis

The data being analyzed for this sacred ethnography is considered diachronic data, containing temporal information about the sequential relationship of events (Polkinghorne, 1995). My life notes describe when events occurred and the effect the events had on subsequent happenings. Diachronic data are often autobiographical accounts of personal episodes and include reference as to when and why actions were taken and the intended results of the actions (Polkinghorne, 1995). Typically, self-inquiries utilize diachronic data to make assertions regarding culture and meaning making from that scholar's social position. The diachronic data is

vulnerably shared to illuminate the emerging themes and new discoveries from the self-inquiry. For this inquiry, I analyzed 103 life notes from my personal graduate school journals with a scholar team and present the findings utilizing art to capture the emerging themes, findings, and connection to our current culture.

For the purpose of this inquiry, the data analysis directly guided by the methodology resembled elements from autoethnography, ethnography, narrative, and grounded methodology grounded in spirit. Similar to ethnographic work, Van Maanen (1988) writes, "little need was felt to do much more than gather and arrange the materials, for they would . . . speak for themselves" (p. 19). Therefore, to analyze my data I will use a four-phase approach: (1) embodied reading (2) reading for power, (3) reading for spirit, (4) collective analysis for understanding (Birks, et. al., 2018; Northcote, 2012; Stewart, 2019). Each phase was multi-layered and required multiple readings, listening, transcription, and sitting with the data to make meaning at each phase.

The practice used to analyze the life note data was paradigmatic to best fit the many threads nkwaethnography bridges together. Paradigmatic analysis is an examination of the data to identify particulars as instances of general notions or concepts (Polkinghorne, 1995). The paradigmatic analysis of this study seeks to locate common themes or conceptual manifestations among the life notes collected as data. The principle investigator and scholar team inspected each life note to discover which notions appear across them. Before the analysis all of my life notes were read to determine which life notes to include for the scope of analysis focusing on life notes that discussed my graduate school experience traversing through doctoral education at the intersections of race, dis/ability, class, gender, sexuality, and spirituality. The first round of analysis focused on the embodied reading, we read the life notes inductively remaining aware of how our bodies responded to the data. For phases two and three, reading for power and reading

for spirit, the principle investigator read focusing on how power and spirit manifested individually and structurally within the data allowing the concepts to form based on the data. The final phase of analysis, the scholar team read looking across the previous readings and across life notes to determine commonalities across themes. Inductive moves from noted similar instances in the data to researcher-proposed categorical and conceptual definitions. Through codes and that emerged and the narrative diachronic data, we ordered the codes and stories into eleven themes that capture the major stories and experiences that were most salient during analysis.

Paradigmatic analysis can be conducted in two ways. Paradigmatic analysis is employed not simply to discover or describe the codes that identify particular occurrences within the data but also to note relationships among categories. The power of paradigmatic analysis allowed me to convey eleven themes focused on the narrative data and then further connect those eleven themes to the five emerging findings that were found across all eleven themes.

During the four phases of data analysis, I utilized qualitative memoing to record what is emerging in the data at each phase (Birks, Chapman, & Francis, 2018). Utilizing sacred ethnography, I needed a system to record what was emerging in the data that honored the tenets and fluidity of our methodology. The following quote describes the purpose of memos in qualitative inquiry,

Through the use of memos, the qualitative researcher is able to engage with their research to a greater degree than would otherwise be the case. An intense relationship is established with the data, enabling the researcher to feel a heightened sensitivity to the meanings contained therein (Birks et. al., 2018, p. 69).

Memoing is a qualitative analysis tool that aligned well with my purpose and methodology. Birks and colleagues (2018) share, “It is through memoing that the researcher is able to

articulate, explore, contemplate and challenge their interpretations when examining data.

Similarities and differences are identified, relationships are explored,” (Birks et. al., 2018, p. 71).

Four categories of memos were used during our analysis: (1) methodological memo, (2) coding memo, (3) analytical memo and (4) self -memo (Birks et. al., 2018).

Methodological memos reflected anything related to the scholarship process, methodology, or methods. Coding memos were used to help categorize and capture codes present in the life notes related to power/ spirit/ emerging categories not accounted for in worldview and epistemology or related to worldview. Additionally, coding memos kept record of situations, events, and conversations, between the scholar team and the principle investigator. Originally, I planned to keep memos in the document where the raw data was saved, however, during analysis it was easier to write the memos freehand in a hard copy notebook. Each memo was written with the line number and date of the corresponding life note. Coding memos contained the least amount of interpretation and were descriptive, “the who, what, when, where, and how of human activity” (Birks et. al., 2018). Analytical memos were used to make connections and meaning-making across coding memos and data points. Through analytical memos the scholars were able to interpret, infer, develop concepts, links to existing concepts, and relate observations to make new concepts and interpretations (Birks et. al., 2018). Lastly, self-memos provided me a space to capture my personal thoughts and feelings as I observed myself in this meta self-inquiry, of scholar observing self. These memos provided further insight into the reality of conducting nkwaethnography and the joy and pain that is inevitable in self-inquiry. Self-memos also provided a space for a lot of methodological insight about future qualitative practice.

Immediately during analysis, I noticed I was experiencing the data as three separate, yet connected, selves: the scholar, the participant, and the reader. The scholar was observant, keen,

constantly coding, constantly connecting and seeing the importance of neoliberalism, spirit, persistence, power, and relationships everywhere. The participant was hell bent on making sure their truth was honored and their data revered. The participant tended to the heart of inquiry without any concern for what the academe expected. The reader surprised me. The reader made me feel like you feel reading this now. It felt like I was able to separate myself from the study completely and read it as if I did not live it. The reader was an odd experience especially during analysis. The reader helped ask questions and make sense of what seemed clear to the participant and often scholar. The reader identity is largely what influenced the presentation of the findings. I needed a way to describe the phenomena in the study that also captured what I felt conducting it and honored the multiple selves present throughout the analysis.

Phase 1: Embodied reflection of data.

The first analysis of life note data was an embodied reflective reading. Dillard and Bell (2011) describe the experience of embodied analysis in the following quote,

We prayed and meditated. We wrote and wrote and wrote through our feelings and often through our tears. We listened deeply, allowing ourselves to feel the sounds, the environment, the very air that we breathed. We believe that such acts of radical openness, of hearing the voices of those who have been silenced and marginalized and being changed by those voices is a spiritual act, one which must come with a deep sense of humility and desire for intimacy. (Dillard & Bell, 2011, p. 346)

The first phase of data analysis was an embodied analysis of the life note data. The process for phase one and phase four of the data analysis process reminded me a lot of the above quote by Dillard and Bell. The body is often rendered invisible in research; however, rendering the body invisible directly perpetuates power and oppression against marginalized bodies

(Erevelles, 2011). I wanted to center our bodies in the analysis of such vulnerable and raw data. For over a decade, I have learned healing and working with people who survived intense trauma, that even as we restory and empower ourselves through our trauma, our bodies never forget. Our bodies are a large intelligent meaning-making part of ourselves, our minds are nonexistent without bodies, our bodies are nonexistent without spirit. The first phase of my analysis was an embodied reading of the data. I knew reexperiencing the trauma of the last four years would be intense for my body, which throughout this entire study was battling the trauma of chronic illness and pain. The embodied reading though intense, difficult, long, and ridden with tears, was illuminating and I was able to release energy in my body related to experiences that murdered my soul, like the completed suicide on-campus of a Black woman administrator. To continue to persist through the ongoing traumatic experiences I was unable to process a lot of the pain, joy, gaslighting, disappointment, guilt, and so much more that was present throughout the last four years. The embodied reading was pivotal in the analysis of this self-inquiry and provided a space to heal, grieve, release, and reflect.

The first reading required reading each line of the life notes and focusing my awareness on how my body responded and what it was responding to. I focused on what response my body had to the data. I also tried to pay attention to anything emergent but not named, anything emerging often, and anything I was avoiding. Throughout the analysis process I would get anxious and question myself. I would lean on the tenets of my methodology, purpose of the study, and lean into the process of discovery recognizing there is no wrong, *we* are only in the practice of deriving meaning from my life note data. The above was also explained and given to the scholar team through an orientation meeting, explanation of analysis, written analysis protocol, and discussed in the fourth phase during our collective analysis. The scholar,

participant, and reader were all present during this reading and cause a both/and feeling of being deeply connected and separate from the life notes.

Memos for this phase included a lot of describing what I was experiencing in my body, sweat, tears, anger, regret, guilt, embarrassment, pride, joy, whatever came up. I would then capture what in the life notes was triggering this embodied response. The scholar in me could not wait until the next phases to code for power. Memos captured power and systems of domination operating within the first reading. Largely, ableism/internalized ableism, codes connected to neoliberalism, how relationships were operating towards freedom or domination, and lack of basic needs being met was first present in the first phase of the reading.

Phase 2: Observing power. The second phase of analysis included re-reading and re-analyzing the data this time paying attention to power and oppressive practices that emerged in the data based on my equity background which is largely a synthesis of studying Queer Black feminism, dis/ability justice, interpersonal power and relationships, and systems of oppression since 2010. During this reading, I focused first on overt experiences and stories related to power, oppression, and bias. I used handwritten coding memos to capture the details of the events and how power, privilege, and oppression were manifesting externally, internally, and interpersonally. Similar entries, stories, and themes emerged in every phase of analysis.

The major codes that emerged during phase two were: fear, apathy, scarcity, opposition/duality, individualism, self-interest, avoidant, lack of accountability, entitled, harm/violence, devoid of spirit, gaslighting, inconsistent words and actions, boundary violation, competition, inaccessibility, and transactional relationships/behaviors. The codes emerged from the life note data and coding memos were used to track the codes and how they occurred in the life note data.

During the reading for power, I used memos to focus additionally on how I was utilizing my power to maneuver through the doctoral landscape with my social identities. I also coded for the tools or mechanisms being used to assert power over me. For example, my dis/ability accommodations were a large structural barrier to my academic success, largely because accommodations were based on the needs of undergraduate students and did not have fluid or personalized options. Lack of knowledge about my specific dis/abilities also was a code that was uncovered during this phase and was present in all spheres of the context being interrogated. As these codes and memos presented themselves, I focused on the entries present and started to determine what connections were being made across the readings. The second phase of analysis, is when the eleven themes started to emerge from the memos. For example, writing was one code that came up in the life notes constantly. Writing was discussed related to power, spirit, and was where I experienced the most personal frustration with my learning dis/ability in addition to it triggering my physical dis/abilities. Writing connected to power, colonization, and past educational trauma. Writing was also the means for which this study was to be presented. This one code writing was present in three of the eleven themes and in four of the five emerging findings.

Phase 3: Observing spirit. For the third phase of analysis, I observed spirit utilizing codes I derived from the literature that grounded chapter 2 and exemplified the values of the worldview that shapes this sacred self-inquiry. The codes for the third phase of analysis can be found in the Sacred and Spirit Affirming Praxis guide (Table 1). Using the codes from Sacred and Spirit Affirming Praxis guide, I analyzed the life notes and the stories presented for the values and codes present in the Sacred and Spirit Affirming Praxis guide, codes such as interdependence, faith, accountability, honesty, and synchronicity for example. The factors of

persistence and emerging themes around faith, community, and liberation were unearthed through the observation of spirit. Often similar stories of power, privilege, and oppression presented in the life notes would contain relationships, actions, and internal coping led by spirit. The themes presented in chapter four reflect the experiences that were most salient in the life note data paired with an analysis of spirit and power. The last four of the eleven themes were all observed in this phase and in the embodied reading in phase one. Spirit was also a consistent factor of coping and persistence when experiencing the violence of the other seven themes.

Phase 4: Collective analysis and understanding. The last phase of analysis was a collective analysis done with the scholar team which combined notes and learning from all previous phases of analysis. The fourth phase allowed for a collective understanding and analysis to occur focusing on prevalent notions across the themes that emerged in the first three phases of analysis. The high level of engagement in the data at each phase of analysis also ensured saturation and understanding (Birks, et. al., 2018; Chang, 2008, Northcote, 2012). The co-scholars and I came together to focus on our memos and initial observations. The co-scholars were asked to conduct an embodied reading of the data and participate in the collective reading in phase four. Each scholar was given a protocol to help guide their embodied reading. The goal was to focus on reactions and bodily responses to the data. The responses to the initial reading were important because the memos created by each scholar were not dependent on the other yet when we met in the final phase of analysis to discuss the previous three readings the principle investigator conducted, the memos, narratives, and themes that emerged from each scholars' analysis were similar focusing on the same narratives and themes. A thorough discussion of our memos and embodied response to the data took place and I kept notes on what was focused on and started to draw connections from the themes present in the 103 life notes analyzed. For

further crystallization, I analyzed my personal media (pictures, videos, and social media), text messages, and conversations to determine if the same eleven themes were present. Once I felt strongly about the themes, I triangulated my life note themes using art, poetry, books, and music to presented through an artistic expression in chapter four. The use of art, poetry, books, and music to present the themes discovered in *our* sacred self-inquiry was twofold, first to connect my personal experience to the collective experience of oppression and liberation beyond the context of this study. The second reason was to showcase the art that helped me cope through the experiences of doctoral education at the intersections of race, class, gender, sexuality, ability, and spirituality. The eleven themes through paradigmatic analysis garnered five emerging findings present across all the themes in the study.

Summative Expression

Tell the liberating truth, knowing all along that in a society so long turned into a living cemetery,

the price of unwanted truth-telling is death.

-Ayi Kwei Armah, KMT, (2002, p.184)

CHAPTER 4

EMERGING FINDINGS

Getting at the root does not diminish the tree, for we cannot conceive the roots without learning from the leaves, and the branches, and the trunk. It is because of the full tree that we can grasp where we came, where we are, and where we intend to go. The purpose of this sacred self-inquiry was to examine (1) the implications of living at the intersections of dis/ability, race, gender, sexuality, spirituality/religion, and class, while persisting through doctoral education in Southeastern U.S., (2) help describe the concrete ways higher education institutions' compliance with systems of domination causes direct violence and harm against bodies that are othered and marginalized in higher education, and (3) provide a sacred and epistemologically diverse perspective to counter the current dominant narrative reproduced and maintained in knowledge creation. Life note data guided this inquiry, with four phases of analysis focusing on analyzing 103 of my graduate school journal entries, written from August 2017 until December 2020. The emerging findings are written as a parable set in the post-apocalyptic future, inspired by Octavia Butler's *Parable of Sower* (1993).

Presentation of Findings

To present our findings in a manner that honored *our* methodology and purpose, inspired by artists such as Octavia Butler (1995), Ayi Armah (2002), and Sharrell Luckett (2018), we chose to write a parable set in an imagined post-apocalyptic world to illuminate how power, privilege, oppression, and love manifest in our sacred self-inquiry. The parable is set during the World Liberative Sankofa Conference in the year 3333. Our team of five scholars is tasked with

uncovering knowledge from the old-world artifacts describing the experience of a Queer Black Dis/abled Femme in doctoral education through the years of 2017-2021. The goal of the five scholars is to unearth all they can from the collection of artifacts to describe the experience of living at multiple intersections of oppression and learn how to prevent systems of domination and maintain a future grounded in spirit, liberation, and love. The five scholars represent my transdisciplinary background that impacted the analysis, concepts, and codes that developed grounded in higher education, mental health, equity, hip-hop, and spirit.

The purpose of using artistic expression to present the emerging finding was threefold: (1) to honor the multifaceted, sacred, and messy analysis, (2) connect my experience to the larger experience of domination and struggle for liberation with the intention to generate immediate action, and (3) present the findings in a manner that is accessible for knowers of all backgrounds. The findings are presented in two parts. Part one is a representation of the findings through eleven collections of artifacts that have been recovered from the old world. Each collection of artifacts includes life note data, poetry, and music to capture the emerging findings from the 103 life notes analyzed. Part two of the chapter is where the five scholars who represent my positionality across the disciplines of higher education, mental health, equity, hip-hop, and spirit provide their report of the five emerging findings to the Circle of Elders as they deduced from the collection of artifacts recovered from 2017-2020.

This chapter therefore focuses on the presentation of eleven themes through a collection of artifacts including life note data, poetry, and music. Then a description of the five emerging findings that are congruent across the eleven themes. Finally, the parable or presentation of the findings was musically scored, similar to a film with 123 songs that capture the themes present in each of the 103 life notes analyzed for this sacred self-inquiry. A short playlist is included in

each collection of artifacts utilizing lyrics to uncover the themes present in the data. After analyzing the data, the scholar team determined the narratives presented in the life note data fell under one of eleven themes: (1) queer rendered invisible, (2) incongruent AF, gaslight much, (3) dis/abled not unworthy, (4) healthcare woes, health care no, (5) relaxing with -isms, (6) co-conspirators of oppression, (7) Black femme murder suicide, (8) spirit saved me, (9) Black women are God, (10) no persistence without community, and (11) liberation takes courage. To protect my vulnerable information and the identities of people present in the narratives, I utilize music, poetry, and Audre Lorde's *Cancer Journals* (year) to capture the threads and themes uncovered by the scholar team in the life note narratives instead of publishing my life note data solely which is typical for autobiographical scholarship.

The same art presented in this chapter also contributed as a layer of persistence and helped me cope through this doctoral journey. Therefore the "artifacts" presented in each collection are also artifacts of persistence. For part one of this chapter, eleven collections of artifacts will be presented to illuminate the eleven themes above. Each collection will contain various art: poems from nayirrah waheed's book *salt.*, excerpts from Audre Lorde's *cancer journals*, my personal life note data or art created for the themes, and a mini setlist of songs capturing the collection's theme.

From the themes presented in the collection of artifacts, five emerging findings surface: (1) the power of relationships, (2) living at the intersections: structural violence and ableism (3) the shadow: building blocks of oppression, (4) persistence, privilege, and practicing freedom, and (5) managing the dissonance. Part two captures the explanation of findings across the eleven collections of artifacts recovered from recovered life note data. The five scholars representing, my positionality, the scholar team, and spirit also exemplify what it felt analyzing my past self.

During analysis I was observing myself outside myself and although it was painful I realized the person playing the largest role in my domination, was me.

As you read the parable and interact with the artifacts I ask you to consider, based on your unique positionality, what connections to yourself, power, and spirit do you uncover from the artifacts? How can what you learned from the artifacts below inform your practice of liberation?

Parable of a Queer Black Dis/abled Femme

Preface

Words do a shitty job at describing the felt. Words are a beautiful example of both/and or dissonance. As limiting as words are, they're just as expansive. This chapter and this inquiry exist because of words. I have a brain wired to have a both/and relationship with words. As much as I love words and the power of written language I also have an equal disdain for words and my inability to discern between them and pronounce them and string them together in ways that I assume are expected of me or have been expected of me. Writing and my relationship to writing was an entire theme of its own. From my life notes two excerpts about writing come to mind,

I love writing for myself. Saying what I want when I want. I hate writing what people want me to write. FOR WHAT! If you want to just hear your voice in my pages then what the fuck do you need me for?

Then this poem I wrote in a life note during September 2018,

I'm tired of writing for "them"

I'm tired of my art being subjected to white standards of knowing and being

To disrupt the academe we have to disrupt the academe

but they're just talking about it

Writing has the power to transform. The words of Walker, Angelou, Davis, Lorde, DuBois, Bhattacharya, Dillard, Armah, Butler, Somé, and countless more led me to this sacred ethnography. And no matter how much I read and re-read and think and write, I still will misspell spirit as 'spirirt' and countless as 'counteless' or spend hours trying to determine if everything is in APA for it never to be fully in APA. If you, the reader, are interested in our academic spaces being liberative and expansive enough to support minds and souls similar to mine, our traditions such as writing, and APA, and citations, and gatekeeping, and every other tool used to divide and push out must be transformed. I am not arguing away the written tradition, or citations, or grammar rules, and syntax. I am arguing that if IHE want to maintain liberative academic spaces that include a person like myself, then it would behoove us to understand what rituals, standards, and actions we currently maintain that push out those institutional agents and communities that are othered and marginalized. Similar to writing, I struggled with the large amount of inconsistency within the academy completing this degree. If writing, periodicals, APA, and carceral education as a whole do not have the distinct mission of pushing out students who are othered, why do we continuously allow the push out to occur if we know it perpetuates systems of domination?

Poetry was a way for me to write without being hindered by rules and for a dyslexic Black girl it was extremely important and I think helped me find my voice early on in my life. One of the things I struggle with is how much my mind is processing most times due to all the new learning. I'm constantly thinking and challenging my own worldview or refining it. Which came up often and is described more in the last findings section, managing the dissonance.

The shape of this inquiry and the presentation of findings has shifted and changed in my mind so many times. I wish I could blame it solely on my creative indecision but largely the

forces that shaped this dissertation were ableism, classism, and my daily chronic pain. I was getting one of many physical exams I have endured the past four years, when my doctor asked me my pain rating for the day and I asked what the scale was and the doctor said zero to ten. I was confused because I have never known a day with zero pain. Between athletic injuries, a chronic back disorder, and chronic illness, the last time I remember a day without pain I had to be in elementary school. Not many people know the pain and privilege of receiving a doctoral degree, and that is by design. Traversing through doctoral education as a Black student would be hard enough. Or as a queer student. Or as a dis/abled student. Or as a first-gen student. Or as a low-income student. Or as a house insecure student. Or as a student in chronic pain every day. As a student who is prescribed medications to live day-to-day. Now imagine attempting to complete a doctoral education with all of the above interpersonally at place. What's sad is I have not even begun to layer in the context or the adverse childhood experiences that foreground my body on the historically white campus where my doctoral journey took place. The amount of reading, quantitative analysis, writing, synthesis, and professional duties required of a doctoral student in a four-year time span was not nearly enough time for someone with my social identities to truly complete my milestones and also maintain my wellness. I chose to put my wellness and physical health on the line for a degree that would garner me access, however very little power without positional power and even then, my social identities continuously limit my power in any given space.

The multilayers of my context, identity, and worldview made this study overwhelming and yet this inquiry transformed me completely. As a campus sexual violence scholar, I never thought I would prefer to study perpetrators of campus sexual violence over inquiring about myself. I was and still am judgmental of scholars who avoid self-inquiry and sacred scholarship

because I wholeheartedly believe liberation begins there. However, through this sacred process of scholarship I realized the intense pain, honesty, and vulnerability self-inquiry and sacred scholarship require. Additionally, it is time consuming and, in an academe, compliant in global capitalism producing scholarship as quickly as possible is often championed. Therefore, I was not able to read and re-read as much as I wanted for this inquiry. I was not able to interview people who harmed me or who I harmed to reconcile and learn from our experiences. I was not able to secure funding to present my findings as a documentary to enhance the accessibility of what was discovered in the inquiry as well as bring to life the scholars who inspired this work. I was attempting to complete as much as I could all amidst a global pandemic, government supported coupe, major surgery, and ongoing political movements. Thankfully I had a committee that listened to me, advocated for me, and ultimately understood the purpose of this sacred inquiry. Through their relentless support and continuous learning as we embarked on this new type of scholarship together I was able to illuminate themes, values, and the heart of my study through a parable set in the future.

I wanted to breathe life into my life notes and the journey that birthed this dissertation and ultimately synthesis of art. Although this is my story, what I learned from spirit, empathy, and community is this was never my journey alone. This is why I was constantly coding memos for guilt. Guilt about not being able to show up for my community and family during this journey like I could before I started my PhD. Guilt for not taking care of myself and racing against the clock to finish when I was not capable of meeting the goals set for me. Guilt for the pain I was witnessing around me in my community and targeted violence against those with my social identities. A pivotal shift in my life notes occurred when I released guilt that was not purposeful to carry and turned to action instead to shift purposeful guilt into light.

The journey through artifacts that you are about to witness puts a spin on the traditional life note style or self-inquiry style of writing where the author or scholar will use journal entries and life notes to tell the story and showcase the findings. The interrelated and hyperlocal context of my story would not allow me to participate in that tradition for a dissertation. I intend to create a condensed manuscript for publication which focuses on my life note entries. For this manuscript, I was inspired by Armah's KMT and Butler's *Parable of the Sower*, which included similar themes of suicide, power, privilege, community, and spirit present in those books written decades before now. The inspiration and utilization of those texts showcases the tenet of nkwaethnography regarding time and space as fluidly spanning spiritual and material conditions. Additionally, it allows me to connect my seemingly individual story to the whole. Moreover, it showcases how the experiences, values, oppression, and liberation of African ascendants is interconnected. I also personally identified with Biko, a student who completed suicide in KMT for being too curious and questioning too much. KMT brings scholars from seemingly disparate worlds together to unearth the meaning of ancient artifacts to help liberate society. The book provided me a lot of insight into how I think education can become free and how we can begin to resist global capitalism and move forward in multilayers of community similar to the meaning behind the necklace worn by Astw. Additionally, KMT inspired me to personify the multiple scholars within myself on this journey as we uncover artifacts that tell a story of power, privilege, oppression, and liberation.

In *Parable of the Sower*, Butler sets the story in the 2020s which is very close to the time this study was conducted and written. Social chaos has led the world to ruins and the protagonist with the gift of hyperempathy helps lead the world to spirit through her vision and courage. I often identify as hyperempathetic, usually it manifests as people telling me I am too sensitive and

I care too much. I recognize the shadow side to hyperempathy and the gift in it is worth every tear, every heartbreak, and every emotional disturbance. Hyperempathy also taught me the importance of boundaries, living in my purpose, and practicing mindfulness. Hyperempathy was a common thread throughout my life notes and Butler also used life notes to tell the story of Lauren Oya Olamina in *Parable of the Sower*.

The use of artistic expression to present our findings allowed me the ability to use the art that healed me to make connections to the themes in my story and the roots of oppression in the diaspora. My hope is the poetry, music, and life notes presented help each reader make their own discoveries to help them act towards our collective liberation in higher education and beyond.

Prologue

Message from the Committee of Light Sankofa Liberation Committee

Subject: World Liberative Sankofa Conference

To: Community Scholars (all disciplines)

Greetings Scholars,

The committee of light is excited to begin the process of Sankofa in preparation for this year's World Liberative Sankofa Conference. After the global pandemic and sun storms of 2020, our world was blessed to see life and a new day in 3333. To show our gratitude to spirit, God, and nature we join every three years to look back at the various points in our histories to make sure we continuously center spirit, love, and harmony in our physical realm. Our new world consists of multiple small communities thriving on the lands they were born on or ascendant to. Each community has enough resources to meet the needs of every person and also contribute to the needs of the whole, our Global community. Additionally, each community has scholars in

several fields depending on the context of the community and Global need. For the World Liberative Sankofa Conference, our community scholars join together in their individual expertise to help us learn from the artifacts of the past. Together the scholars conduct a multi-phase analysis discovering and making as much meaning from the artifacts as they can to help our Global community learn from the actions of our collective pass.

After the artifacts have been analyzed each scholar team presents their findings to the Sankofa Liberation Committee and the spiritualists will begin incorporating rituals to atone for the past atrocities and disseminate the findings to communities for action and the maintenance of harmony and love. Every scholar is assigned to a team of five and given a collection of artifacts and life notes from a specific time period. For our conference this year we are focusing on education, wellness, and health. Please find your artifacts below, the committee looks forward to your findings. Please feel free to include as many artifacts in your report as necessary for the collective reading and impact needed for change.

Ashé

RE: Report for Sankofa Liberation Committee

DATE: JUL 3333

Scholar Team: 1212

REPORT TITLE: Parable of a Queer Black Dis/abled Femme

REPORT SUMMARY:

We first give thanks for the opportunity to conduct this liberative and transformative work on behalf of our ancestors, community, and global family. For the below report titled, *Parable of a Queer Black Dis/abled Femme*, the five of us came together in our distinct gifts and strengths to

analyze 103 historical life notes and artifacts uncovered from the old-world, year 2017- 2020.

Additionally, the artifacts included art, music, and journal entries from before 2017 dating as far back as the 1960s, which led this scholar team to conclude outside of the hyperlocal context the life note data provided for this report, there was a longstanding pattern of domination and ableism taking place across the African ascendant artists included in the data and report during the time period examined.

The scholar team has been presented the opportunity to learn from the artifacts uncovered from that time period to look back and learn from the past to continue a current day practice of love and harmony with our local and global community. The World Liberative Sankofa Conference is a time for each of us to reflect on our role in our collective and how we can maintain a praxis of freedom. We hope our report helped uncover new learning to help individuals in higher education and health services to continuously center equity and love in their practice to avoid harm, violence, and ultimately what led to the destruction of the old-world.

Queer Rendered Invisible Collection of Artifacts

Music

Chanel - Frank Ocean
 Better Safe Than Social - The Last Artful Dodgr
 Triangles - Bbymutha
 Gloria - Tierra Whack
 Wish You Would - Mykki Blanco and Princess Nokia
 Bbymutha This - Bbymutha
 Heaven's Little Bastard - Bbymutha

salt.

i am the line.
 on both sides there are songs
 in my name.
 -bi

Lorde Cancer Journals- 1/26/79

I'm not feeling very hopeful these days, about selfhood or anything else. I handle the outward motions of each day while

pain fills me like a pus-pocket and every touch threatens to breach the taut membrane that keeps it from flowing through and poisoning my whole existence. Sometimes despair sweeps across my consciousness like lunar winds across a barren moonscape. Iron shod horses rage back and forth over every nerve. Oh Seboulisa ma, help me remember what I have paid so much to learn. I could die of difference, or live-myriad selves.

Queer Black Dis/abled Femme

What's a closet in a cage?

The kicker is I was never anything other than fluid. I hear my UGA advisor laughing on the phone as we discuss the many, many, ways my fluidity shows up and out. Despite how fluid I feel and act, there are stereotypes and hierarchies that render my queerness invisible. I've never felt seen in a queer center despite them adding a brown line. Just like I never feel seen in a disability center, or women's center, or racial and ethnic center. My spirit gets limited to the perceptions of others, to hierarchies, to sins. How can I be understood in a society lacking awareness steeped in the practice of avoidance? Therefore, I am always distorted, pushed out, pushed over, pushed up above, and never does it help me connect, grow, or love more. Instead it divides and makes me a target for harm. I refuse to perform queerness to be rendered as queer. I am fluid and everchanging like water. My spirit scoffs at the need to gender anything.

Bodies were created to birth more bodies and allow us a physical experience on this land. That fact should not delineate my gender experience or determine my spirit's worth. I am you and you are me. We are all God. Dark and Light, the true binary.

Incongruent AF, GASLIGHT MUCH?

Music

Cap Dem - Young Nudy
 Same Ol' Mistakes - Rihanna
 BIA BIA - Bia
 Play - Mykki Blanco
 Lifeboats - Jorja Smith
 Hey Up There - Buddy

Queer Black Dis/abled Femme

All my life I've lived in, been captive in cages
 They cage all that is wild and free
 They cage what they fear
 They cage those who live in color
 They cage me

And when I am relinquished from one cage I am only released to
 another

Where is liberation?
 She used to visit me and sing me hymns of freedom, hymns of hope
 I see her less and less now

I am caged
 My creative mind, spirit, soul have been reduced to constructs
 of whiteness
 I am a wild animal in a cage

When I write of freedom from the cage
 They ask me how I can write of what I've never lived

I reply the same way you constructed this cage

...

We're not broken we're battered.

...

The day students became dollar signs instead of human spirits to
 nurture,

Is the day higher education lost its soul.

April 1, 2018

"You're too sensitive"
 "You're so emotional"
 "You cry too much"
 "You really should learn to care less"

How is this the norm? How is living devoid of emotions and
 caring the new expectation? I FUCKING HATE THIS. Yes, I am
 emotional. Yes, I am sensitive. Yes, I cry... A LOT. Yes, I care.

A LOT. My question to all of the people over countless years who have bombarded me with these hurtful messages I ask why aren't you? Why aren't you sensitive? Why aren't you emotional? Why don't you cry? Why don't you care?

Doctoral education brings ALL of it up. The pain, the fun, the hurt, the resilience, the strength, the laughter, the trauma. It's hard. It's hard to feel so many conflicting emotions at once. I'm tired of feeling voiceless. I feel unheard and misunderstood most of the time. Like who I truly am is being seen through a distorted lens and I can't fix the lens but I keep trying to anyway and my failed attempts do more harm than good. It's frustrating and exhausting. It makes me grateful for all of the amazing friends I have gained over the years. The people who see me and love me and accept me for all that I am. Damn I love them. Damn it feels good to be seen and heard and understood.

October 25, 2018

I need to figure out a way to cope through this semester quick or I won't make it. Ugh it is only October. Instead of coping all I can think about is why? why? Why did I decide to come back to grad school? Is learning in its purest form pain? Because this is painful. Today I woke up needing to drive to Athens for class. My gas tank was on E and so was my fridge. I ended up drinking a protein shake and putting \$15 in my tank. I only had \$50 until I get paid in the next few days. I HATE THE END OF THE MONTH. I swear if I have to text my mom again asking for money. I feel like a failure. I am doing one of the hardest things I've ever had to do and I have to convince myself every day that I am not a failure. A poor stupid failure.

salt.

decolonization
requires
acknowledging.
that your
needs and desires
should
never
come at the expense of another's
life energy.
it is being honest
that
you have been spoiled
by a machine
that

is not feeding you freedom
 but
 feeding
 you
 the milk of pain.

- the release
 ...

why can we never
 talk
 about the blood.
 the blood of our ancestors.
 the blood of our history.
 the blood between our legs.
 -blood

Collection 3: Dis/abled & Mis/understood

Music

0 to 100 - Drake
 Forever - Lil Wayne
 Galaxy- Chloe x Halle
 Movin - Young Thug
 Same Energy - Jacob Waddy
 On My Way - Reo Cragun
 Had Enough - Don Tolliver and Offset
 8701 - JID and 6lack
 As I Am - Her

salt.

my english is broken.
 on purpose.
 you
 have to try harder to understand
 me.
 breaking this language
 you so love
 is my pleasure.
 in your arrogance
 you presume that I want your skinny language
 that mouth is building a room for
 it
 in the back of my throat.
 it is not.

-I have seven different words for love. you
have only one. that makes a lot of sense.

...

it is being honest
about
my pain
that makes me invincible.
-yield

Lorde Cancer Journals - 10/3/79

I don't feel like being strong, but do I have a choice? It hurts
when even my sisters look at me in the street with cold and
silent eyes. I am defined as other in every group I'm a part of.
The outsider, both strength and weakness. Yet without community
there is certainly no liberation, no future, only the most
vulnerable and temporary armistice between me and my oppression.

Queer Black Dis/abled Femme

The issue isnt that Im slow
The issue is that you take issue with me being slow

Slower than what?
Slower than who?
Slower than you?

What's the standard?
Why a standard?
Im a standard

Fuck a standard.

The issue is not that Im slow
The issue is that a standard does nothing but divide

And division
Division is violence
And violence is my fucking issue.

...

I need more help, don't you?
Or do you actually compute all you produce
I need more space, don't you?

Or are you someone with power sucking the space from up under us
 though it was never yours to take
 I need more time don't you?
 Or did you construct the way we move needing to produce every
 minute every day counting every minute until we rise up
 I need rest, don't you?
 Or do you believe in rise and grind and money over health
 I need to be myself, don't you?
 Or are you complacent with our current conditional status
 maintaining fleeting power fueling capitalism

February 19, 2019

I keep trying to figure out how to reconcile having a disability
 with everyone having varying abilities and disability not
 existing.

Structurally the latter does not exist; people with disabilities
 are treated as such and there are severe consequences because of
 it.

Where is the stemming from? I feel like having non-visible
 disabilities means I am constantly having to defend being
 "truly" disabled while dealing with major consequences of
 ableist society.

The issue is when people with non-visible disabilities fail to
 acknowledge
 their privilege.

May 7, 2019

I wrote more last semester. I'm not sure if it made the
 difficulty of last semester any less difficult? I think
 autoethnography was a lot to do with it. I want to cultivate
 that type of discipline to my writing. I think about writing
 always so I surmise that should count for something.
 I use words all the time I think I don't know (my conscious
 brain) that I do know. People ask me all the time to define or
 explain the words. I can't.
 I know the word but I cannot define it, I know how to use it and
 I know what it means or the essence of it but I can never define
 it.
 I surmise this is another consequence, gift, symptom of my
 learning disorder.

I've been thinking lately about comorbidity. I never really liked the idea of it in counseling courses because it seemed lazy and not specific enough.

Also experiencing what experts call dyslexia and dyscalculia, I realize that it just feels like me not these separate disorders. It's just my way of trying to function in and interpret this world. It feels less like two things going on.

The root of it all is the same which feels to me like nothing but the world is being disordered and our bodies just respond to it the best way they can.

January 20, 2020

Some days are harder than others. I noticed I struggle when my endo, back, and anxiety are all flaring at once. It makes my body an almost unlivable place. Why is there not more grace for all the people living with chronic illness and dis/abilities? I feel like I'm expected to act normal in this amount of pain and fear, it's NOT OKAY! I know how much I have to play catch up on. I have been battling guilt and rest all week. How sad is it that I can share out and be vulnerable about this experience and even people witnessing my pain directly will still lack empathy and grace towards me? How do you maintain equanimity during the worst times? I need to know. I need to practice. I'm just tired of being misunderstood. But that doesn't seem to be going anywhere does it? I'm tired of contradictions. I do what is in my willpower to remain congruent and try to be open to hearing or noticing when I am not being congruent. I'm tired of being asked to do what others can't or refuse to do. I'm exhausted. I have to be my own support. How do you support yourself with no energy?! Please hold me up during this time and help me through this exhaustion.

Collection 4: Healthcare Woes

Music

You Can't Control My Heart -Timmies and Shiloh Dynasty
 Dance 4 Eternity - Kid Cudi
 Nunnadet Shit - Asian Doll
 DNA - Kendrick Lamar
 Black Truck- Mereba

Lorde Cancer Journals - 4/22/79

I must let this pain flow through me and pass on. If I resist or try to stop it, it will detonate inside me, shatter me, splatter my pieces against ever wall and person that I touch.

Lorde Cancer Journals - 4/6/80

Somedays, if bitterness were a whetstone, I could be sharp as grief.

Queer Black Dis/abled Femme

I was in my first car accident at three years old. My mother was pregnant with my brother and my dad was driving when a car pulled out in front of us. I vividly remember the medics putting a neck brace on me as they poked and prodded me to make sure I was safe. I saw my first healthcare specialists before first grade. I was diagnosed with scoliosis by age 14 and had my first cyst rupture two years later. My second car accident took place at seventeen. My fainting spells started in college, followed by three car accidents, one of which an ambulance carried me off campus after being t-boned by a student running a stop sign because he was running late to class. I have torn 4 ligaments and had one surgically repaired in 2014.

None of this holds a flame to being diagnosed with endometriosis. I was misdiagnosed for years, asthma, IBS, PCOS, you name it! It wasn't until large lumps started appearing all over my body that my gynecologist was able to diagnose me with endometriosis, a chronic inflammatory disease that can cause scar tissue and adhesions all throughout the body. There is no cure and the only treatment is surgical. The main symptom that disrupts my day-to-day is chronic pain mainly in my thoracic, abdominal, and pelvic regions. Somedays I cannot walk without excruciating pain. Other days I feel like someone is squeezing my lung and kicking me in my back and diaphragm. Before finding natural remedies that worked I would wake up most days nauseous. I was sick the entire duration of my pre-liminary exams.

I think it's cute when those outside the margins of the margins write about intersectionality. Intersectionality is choosing between racist ableist town A or racist ableist town B, because at least racist town B is less queer antagonistic. Which means I have to drive over 60 miles to get to class when I am afraid of driving, see car accidents 1 through 6, additionally the area is heavily policed by racist cops. All while recognizing that classism and ableism is going to fuck me no matter what town I choose.

Despite being prescribed medication for my chronic illness by the institution I attend, I cannot drive on my meds which means I have to choose pain relief over class or class and suffer in pain. I spend more time at the health center than I do in class or with my classmates. My insurance only allows me one PT treatment per day which means if I need to get my prescribed treatments I have to drive to campus multiple times per week or crash at a friend's house which means anxiety from sleeping somewhere new and not getting any sleep, which means I didn't heal or retain as much information as I could have. This is all to receive the healthcare I need to live with less pain, not even treatment to eliminate my pain.

Despite needing healthcare nearly my entire life, I never thought of myself as dis/abled until I understood the reality of living with a chronic illness. Even hiding my anxiety, depression, and neurodivergence never seemed odd because the goal had been to assimilate, fit in, produce to prove my worth. Fake well. I have become the best at faking well. That is why people will read this and finally understand why I cannot call, or text, or drive, or show up every time because all the time I am in pain. Yet as good as I can fake it that as harsh as endometriosis can dish it. Endo doesn't allow me to pretend often. I cannot hide the flare up that happens in the middle of answering a question as tears roll down my face or running to the bathroom because I'm nauseous, or not eating to avoid nausea. Excruciating pain is hard to hide, let alone learn and live with day-to-day.

The pain would be enough for any one person, but what is worse is when the gaslighting creeps in. It comes from all directions. I see a new physical therapist he conducts a provocative exam on me to determine the extent of my pain and injuries. His decisions to force my body to exhibit pain instead of believing my years of lived observation causes a week of neuropathy and pain, leaving me limited to rest and daily errands only. Or the complete lack of research and knowledge on my condition which means I'm constantly educating professionals hired to help me feel better.

Hiding the pain is worse than being honest about it. The worst people feel is uncomfortable, that doesn't hold a flame to what I feel in this body every day.

Music

Dream Sequence- BbyMutha
 Nice For What- Drake
 Only Child - Tierra Whack
 Antidote- Orion Sun
 No One Like You - Best Coast
 Airplane Mode - Fireboy DML
 Don't Be Late - Kofi Mole
 No Fun - Joji
 Quarantine Clean -Turbo, Gunna, and Young Thug

Lorde Cancer Journals - 5/1/79

Spring comes, and still I feel despair like a pale cloud waiting to consume me engulf me like another cancer, swallow me into immobility, metabolize me into cells of itself; my body, a barometer. I need to remind myself of the joy, the lightness, the laughter so vital to my living and my health. Otherwise, the other will always be waiting to eat me up into despair again. And that means destruction. I don't know how, but it does.

There is no room around me in which to be still, to examine and explore what pain is mine alone- no device to separate my struggle within from my fury at the outside world's viciousness, the stupid brutal lack of consciousness or concern that passes for the way things are. The arrogant blindness of comfortable white women. What is this work all for? What does it matter whether I ever speak again or not? I try. The blood of black women sloshes from coast and Daly says race is of no concern to women. So that means we are either immortal or born to die and no note taken, un-woman.

Queer Black Dis/abled Femme

April 7, 2019

Said to me on Spring Break:

"Oh, I'm a nigga. You see this? That's air jordan. [points to tattoo] Where I'm from I'm a nigga and I hit bitches like that [shows picture of fat bodied light skin Black womxn] and the way I talk, they consider me a nigga."

-20 y.o. white man from the southeastern United States.

"Honey, just let *pause of disgust* THIS pass us."

-40 y.o. white women shouting to children in customs to me and partner.

"So look where I'm from back then steel work was the thing you know. And it was hard grueling work, yeah. So you know they gave all those low paying crappy jobs to the Blacks. Well then they {Black workers} would rise up and become managers. This one bigoted Black guy would give me shit, right. But see my buddy was a manager and I called him Papa and he called me Son. One day he said son everything alright and I said Papa actually this guys been giving me shit [shares racist story] So the next day I go to work and that Black bigot says hey I cant believe you're related to my papa and Im cracking up because people will really believe him and I are really related but we don't look anything alike other than our smiles."

- 62 y.o. white man from the midwestern United States, unsolicited explanation as to how I could have been his niece if we were roasted during the comedy show.

October 2, 2019

Why would a student need to pay their fees before they would be granted access to THEIR UNOFFICIAL transcript? How about when I went through the 3rd party contractor to buy my official transcript they put my transaction on hold because of the financial debt I was in with the institution. The kicker is when I went to download the transcript earlier Athena was undergoing maintenance. What is the lesson? Detachment? I know this is the best I've been able to practice detachment yet I still wanted this award so much it made me anxious for over 8 weeks. I've felt like a stressed lunatic unable to write until now. Surprise, surprise, every time I have a realization I feel it in my chest like I can't breathe

Classism sneaks up in the most unexpected ways surprisingly I coveted this award because of the imagined stability I thought it would provide me hoping that the award would lead to jobs. What I've learned from so many people is that I can educate in multiple realms and I can publish and research in multiple realms. I will have a job after this and I will be able to pay my bills on time. It is so sad that my financial goal is to literally be able to just make all the payments on time. This is no way to live. How do I produce on behalf of this institution and not have the ability to pay my bills on time? Layer on the fact that I can't pay my medical bills, medical bills I have because of my dis/abilities! Which are all being triggered by reading and writing. I see a health care professional more than I see my colleagues in my department. I am tired and in constant pain and anxious and miserable and all to call myself a Dr. All

to have the right to scholarship. This system is flawed and damaging and weaponized and harmful.

I have resolved to stop. I have resolved to rest. For the next three days except for my interview and advisor meeting, I will rest and only do things I WANT TO, CHOSE TO, AM HAPPY TO DO. Because fuck this shit! And fuck capitalism and fuck the registrar and fuck health care not being free ESPECIALLY FOR A FUCKING QUEER BLACK DISABLED FEMME graduate student.

May 7, 2020

I haven't done a moon ritual in a long time since my moon bath. I can feel the need for one now, which is why getting the house clean is so important. I'm in terrible pain. I cleaned until the pain said stop. The house is clean enough for the ritual at least. Endo pain is a bitch especially being impacted in the areas I am.

Three black people have been lynched in a week. We are dying and contracting covid at the highest rates. I want to manifest something to end this transnational oppression. How can power elites continue to get away with killing us?

I feel grateful to have as much as I have spiritually, emotionally, and physically. Which is why I want to heal and end as much violence in this world as I possibly can.

May 9, 2020

I'm so tired of waking up cranky and irritated. Everyday being in grad school feels like a day of suffocation. Mind races what I'm not working on, what I actually want to work on, while managing two chronic illnesses anxiety and depression. I can't remember not waking up with these feelings outside of traveling, no wonder it's so important.

Collection 6: Co-Conspirators of Oppression

Music

Take a Step Back-Ski Mask the Slump God
 Mean Girl- Yung Baby Tate
 Not for Caucasians-- BbyMutha
 I Might Need Security- Chance the Rapper
 Free Bia- Bia
 Kim-Tkay Maiidza and Yung Baby Tate
 Humble- Kendrick Lamar

Queer Black Dis/abled Femme

I hate whiteness
 I hate whiteness
 Because it dont make sense
 I hate whiteness
 Because they rigged a game I cant win

...

I can see the shackles
 and the door to the dungeon shut.
 My pain makes sense
 and I can rest knowing
 I'm not the cause.

I'm walking around freely, unshackled.
 Why don't I feel free.
 I'm in pain and crying
 but there is no dungeon door.
 What is the source of my pain?
 I cannot rest.
 I think I may have shackled myself.

September 4, 2018

It is scary how much I think I can't do this. How does running for governor feel more possible than this PhD?

My therapist said in our last session, "Yeah you've been miserable all year."

SHIT.

shit.

September 8, 2018

Since the start of the semester I have been:

Sleeping 12+ hours most nights
 Breaking out
 Not eating
 Diarrhea
 Vomiting
 Nauseous

Anxious
 Paranoid
 Tearful
 Depressed mood
 Hopeless
 Irritable
 Angry
 Impatient
 Migraines
 Cold/sinus infection
 Diagnosed with IBS-M
 Prescribed higher anti-anxiety dose

February 19, 2019

I always know when it's time to write or I haven't written in a long time because the voice in my head changes.

I never noticed until today the distinct voice my "writing voice" has compared to my typical "in my head voice"

I have been thinking a lot about manipulation and power.

Manipulative people.

Power I have to manipulate others and how uncomfortable it feels to know I hold that power.

December 19, 2019

I'm tired of being tokenized for others' individual gain and my own education or needs not be centered or even considered.

...

Dear CisWhiteAblebodiedFacultyAdminHater,

Stop spewing your ego wounds onto me. I don't need a savior. I need to be taught with freedom. Learning devoid of bias.

Difference championed instead of battered. I'm tired of defending my life and our communities like it's debatable. Our rights and freedom should never be a scholarly exercise. Where

is action? How can the most knowledgeable educated community in the world maintain the status quo--For tenure? Or a paycheck? For false security? None of us are safe. No amount of privilege and blood we cloak ourselves in will erase the chaos or the fear we desperately try to avoid.

Dear CisWhiteAbleBodiedFacultyAdminHater,

Don't you realize this label is not you. It is not the essence of your spirit or your heart. These systems were designed to assimilate us and tear us apart. We all have power in the actions we take and when those in power take actions that go against the highest good actions grounded in scarcity, competition, advancement, entitlement, fear, greed, ..., we misuse our power. We dishonor our purpose and our community. More selfishly the feelings and consequences we are seeking to avoid we usher right in, anxiety, depression, alienation, paranoia, apathy... when we fail to act in the best interest for all, for nature, for God.

We are more than microaggressions

Binaries

Adversaries

We are each other. The pain done to me by you, is pain done to yourself.

The ways you advocate for me are band aids attempted to heal a system we maintain and comply in.

I deserved more than a band aid. My ancestors deserved more. Our communities deserve more. You deserve more.

What's the point of bleeding in front of you if you were never capable of mending my wounds.

Dear CisWhiteAbleBodiedFacultyAdminHater,

I am most dismayed because even though the words I speak our true

I still embody the values you espouse too

I crave freedom and liberation and healing and love

I need more models for a liberative praxis

Because I can no longer embody that which destroys

Collection 7: Black Femme Murder Suicide

Music

Birds Gave Up- Orion Sun
 Drift- Choker
 Nights- Frank Ocean
 Water (antidote) - Orion Sun
 Today- Omar Apollo
 Open Letter- Lil Wayne
 In My Room- Frank Ocean
 Nobody-Jhené Aiko
 Good News - Mac Miller
 Saturn-RIZ LA VIE
 Song 33- Noname

Queer Black Dis/abled Femme

I don't know how to forget, living with zombies but I'm the threat

...

I think about dying nearly every day now
 I lie in bed and think about the most painless way to take my
 life
 To kill a sacred vessel
 And I sit here and stare you in your face I say in my truth I am
 not suicidal
 I want to live
 I like to live
 I love to live
 Perplexed
 Have you ever been caged?
 Because when you have no choice, you create one. Just to regain
 some power.

...

You know why I cry at night?
 Because we are dying. We are being murdered in the street in the
 classroom at work at home abroad.
 You KILL US with your guns
 You KILL US with your policies
 You KILL US with your capital
 You KILL US with your words
 You KILL US and they watch in silence ignoring the smell that
 seeps into their bones and haunts them in their sleep.
 They ignore the smell of our ashes,
 because worse than you THEY watched us being murdered, in the
 street in the classroom at work at home abroad.
 They watched as you murdered us. They watched as we died.
 THEY fan the flames of the vicious cycle of oppression and the
 massacre YOU created continues.
 We die. We died. We're dying.
 But what you and they didn't know,
 is that you could never kill the spirit that lives, as we die.

November 4, 2018

I have too much of a burden to have to be subjected to your
 wounds
 We might not have control over much, but we do have control over
 our healing.
 Why when I speak does it continuously feel like no one is
 listening
 I'm talking to the wall. In one ear out the other.

I'm flooded people are in so much pain if they aren't taking it out on themselves they are taking it out on everyone else, or both.

Are most queer black women "disabled"? Mental emotional disorders?

I think anyone who is oppressed could technically be diagnosed with a mental health disorder.

I feel numb.

March 6, 2019

I had my first suicidal thought when I was 5 years old. I've grown to live next door to my suicidal 5-year-old self. She has never left me. She stays there and reminds me how tired, exhausted, heartbroken, and hopeless I can be and have been and continue to be. She reminds me it does not get better.

This is not meant to be a depressing monologue about my non-aversion to my suicidal self. This is meant to help you understand that living in a black labeled female dyslexic pansexual body with a chronic illness is really fucking hard and instead of ignoring that fact my beautiful 5-year-old self-recognized it and she said FUCK that shit. She said no, life can suck, and it can be unbearable at times but the bearable moments are never too far away. She was there to say you can feel all this pain and you can still live a life filled with extreme joy and fulfillment and creativity and love. She's awesome and oddly grounding.

This is not to negate the fact that living with suicidal ideation extremely hard and nearly unbearable. It has plenty of unbearable moments and somehow, I manage to survive them time and time again.

I had my first suicidal thought when I was 5 years old, I wish someone would have warned me that that thought would never go away.

June 2019

When will my heart stop grieving Black womxn suicide?
Rest in power Miss Nina.

May 2020

Personal Suicidal Ideation/Near Attempt May 26, 2020

salt.

you
will drown
if
you do not have boundaries.
they
are
not optional.
this structure
counts
on your inability
to
say
no.
mean no.
they take no
from
our
first breath.
go back
and
return it to your mouth.
your heart.
our light.
-swim | women of color

Collection 8: Spirit Saved Me

Music

I Shall Be Released- Nina Simone
I Am Light- India.Arie
Baguetti- Smino, JID, and Kenny Beats
Coming Home-Leon Bridges
Still Feel the Same-H E R B
Brujas- Princess Nokia
To the Light-A.CHAL
Open Up- UMI
Why Don't You- Cleo Sol

salt.

all that was
taken
from me
is still here.

-root | immortal

Lorde Cancer Journals 4/16/79

The enormity of our task, to turn the world around. It feels like turning my life around, inside out. If I can look directly at my life and my death without flinching I know there is nothing they can ever do to me again. I must be content to see how really little I can do and still do it with an open heart. I can never accept this, like I can't accept that turning my life around is so hard, eating differently, sleeping differently, moving differently, being differently. Like Martha said, I want the old me, bad as before.

Queer Black Dis/abled Femme

February 27, 2020

*No matter how hard it pours, you always sustain and live to see light again. You will overcome this, your life won't always be a pressure cooker.
It won't always be this bad, because you get better.*

July 7, 2020

Writing forward, means writing to liberate, writing for yourself, ancestors, and collective. It means writing in ways that are flexible and easily changeable. *Writing forward*, means writing that creates a fuller picture instead of aiding confusion and caging. *Writing forward*, is poetic it's as fluid as visual and performing art. It is writing as art; as nature. *Writing forward* is writing truth. Why can't writing be like art, free unfiltered, raw, and moving. Like you are in conversation with me, my truth.

Collection 9: Black Woman are God

Music

Bin- Solange
In the Morning-Jay Prince
Clones- Tierra Whack
I'm Every Woman- Chaka Khan
Keep Ya Head Up- Jhené Aiko

Queer Black Dis/abled Femme

November 4, 2018

My first teacher was a Black womxn
It set me up.

It set me up to believe that I was liberated.
 That I could be and do anything I wanted to do
 Ms Fauntleroy helped me see myself
 I wouldn't be taught by a Black womxn again until this year. 22
 years later

...

Black Womxn are God

I don't exist without Black womxn
 I am not aligned or whole without Black womxn
 Black womxn raised me
 Black womxn fed me
 Black womxn saved me
 Black womxn save everything
 What was socialized as a burden is the ultimate gift
 Who closer to mother God than the Black womxn

salt. by nayyirah waheed

black women breathe flowers, too.
 just because
 we are taught to grow them in the lining of our
 quiet (our grandmothers secret).
 does not mean
 we do not swelter with wild tenderness.
 we soft swim.
 we petal.
 we scent limbs.
 love.
 we just have been too long a garden for sharp
 and deadly teeth.
 so we
 have
 grown
 into
 greenhouses.

-greenhouses

Lorde Cancer Journals - 11/19/79

I want to write rage but all that comes is sadness. We have
 been sad long enough to make the earth either weep or grow
 fertile. I am an anachronism, a sport, like the bee that was
 never meant to fly. Science said so. I am not supposed to exist.
 I carry death around in my body like a condemnation. But I do

live. The bee flies. There must be some way to integrate death into living, neither ignoring it nor giving in to it.

Lorde Cancer Journals - 1/20/80

The novel is finished at last. It has been a lifeline. I do not have to win in order to know my dreams are valid, I only have to believe in a process of which I am apart. My work kept me alive this past year, my work and the love of women. They are inseparable from each other. In recognition of the existence of love lies the answer to despair. Work is that recognition given voice and name.

Collection 10: No Persistence without Community

Music

Proud of you -EARTHGANG and Young Thug
 Before I Let Go- Maze and Frankie Beverly
 Bloom-bLack pARty
 Mango- Orion Sun-
 Flowers- Sweet Female Attitutde

Queer Black Dis/abled Femme

April 1, 2018

It makes me think about how harmful it is to be silhoed based on our identity. Difference transcends identity. I think of so many people who feel alone because of the silo and I wonder how amazing it would be if they could break out across the sea of difference into the land of similarity, mutuality, and understanding. Damn how life changing. It was for me. My friends are SO different from me and each other but damn it if we are not the same in so many ways. They saved me and they continue to save me.

September 4, 2018

What keeps coming up for me is feeling like I am never enough and then that feeling like I am dropping the ball for everyone. I have tried to stop saying yes so much, I still say yes a lot but before it was so much. Still feel like I am dropping the ball.

wave/d

I can see all my friends and family on the shore they're waving at me.

I'm climbing waves with my arms fighting to be near them

And then a wave crashes over me taking me under
 Im swimming to the surface I can see the sun I can see their
 hands still waving
 My head breaks through the water for a breath of air
 And then a wave crashes over me taking me under
 My body summersaults underwater I hit my head on a rock
 Im floating away from the shore
 I see some hands stop waving
 They turn around and leave
 I float further away, losing the will to keep fighting the waves

My real community comes out to the water
 Life preservers ready
 They don't stop trying to save me until the waves settle
 And stop taking me under

the y's of community

I need to be a hacker but Im not
 A data mining coding webpage creating adapting hacker
 But I read and I write.
 I need to sew clothes and draw and farm and paint and engineer
 and mother and parent and father and organize
 But I write, think, and read.
 I need to save the land from the man
 I need to save our water and our heritage
 I need a militia and holistic healthcare and sites filled with
 abundant joy
 But they barely let me read, teach, think, sleep, eat, rest, and
 write, right?!

The y's of why I need all of you, our community.

Collection 11: Liberation Takes Courage

Music

Liberated- Dej Loaf and Leon Bridges
 I AM- Yung Baby Tate
 Once May Comes- Jack Harlow
 Toast- Koffee
 D.I.Y.- - BbyMutha
 Now- Miguel
 Freedom-Sampa the Great
 Nont For Sale-Sudan Archives
 La Diaspora-Nitty Scott
 New Breed-James BKS

salt.

the hard season
 will
 spilt you through.
 do not worry.
 you will bleed water.
 do not worry.
 this is grief.
 your face will fall out and down your skin
 and
 there will be scorching.
 but do not worry.
 keep speaking the years from their hiding places.
 keep coughing smoke from all the deaths you
 have died.
 keep the rage tender.
 because the soft season will come.
 it will come.
 loud.
 ready.
 gulping.
 both hands in your chest.
 up all night.
 to drink all damage into love.
 -therapy
 ...

unharm someone
 by
 telling the truth you could not face
 when you
 struck instead of tended.
 -put the fire out (unburn)

Queer Black Dis/abled Femme

It's hard to labor and create

...

I wish I could write what I want, when I want.

To me writing is art, if a painter is not forced to stay in the lines why should I?

...

I want to dance with the trees.

I read and I write, but
I want to dance with the trees

They wave their arms and shake their leaves
They sway and swish in her afternoon breeze
While I read and write, and
Mediate, and Fast, and Pray, and Sob

The trees dance in the breeze
I want to dance with the trees.
I read and I write, but
I want to dance with the trees, and
Sway my arms and shake my leaves
I want to move with the breeze, be still, be free
I want to move like the trees, be still, and
Be free.

Lorde Cancer Journal - 5/30/80

Last spring was another piece of the fall and winter before, a progression from all the pain and sadness of that time, ruminated over. But somehow this summer which is almost upon me feels like a part of my future. Like a brand-new time, and I'm pleased to know it, wherever it leads. I feel like another woman, de-chrysalised and become a broader, stretched -out me, strong and excited, a muscle flexed and honed for action.

Part Two: Emerging Findings

For part two of our report, we focus on the five emerging findings that presented themselves during our analysis. After a multi-phased analysis that included multiple readings and listening and triangulation through art, music, and cultural artifacts provided our scholar team with five emerging findings that were present across the eleven themes consistent in the collections of artifacts. The five emerging findings were, (1) managing the dissonance, (2) the power of relationships, (3) building blocks of oppression, (4) structural violence and ableism, and (5) persistence, privilege, and practicing freedom. Specifically, the first seven themes were present in all five emerging findings and the four themes of persistence (spirit saved me, Black women are God, no persistence without community, and liberation takes courage) were present

in the power of relationships, persistence, privilege, and practicing freedom, and managing the dissonance.

In each life note, narrative expressed, and art shared these themes emerge and create a context ridden with cycles of gaslighting, loving relationships, and deep reflection and grief. Our scholar team offers explanations bridging the themes and narratives together to synthesize the new learnings and discoveries that took place. We found showcasing a small representation of the artifacts analyzed would provide a felt, messy, cultural and spiritual experience that better captures our experience analyzing the life note data and artifacts. Writing can be so linear and organized that it does not always honestly capture the process we our living or lived. The emerging findings provides a bridge from the narrative presented in the life note data to understand how spirit, power, and relationships manifested in our analysis of artifacts.

Managing the Dissonance

The artifacts showcased in part one of our report represent a constant theme of dissonance apparent for our scholar and artists traversing systemic domination and living in a hybridized state of liberation and oppression. Our analysis illuminated five emerging dichotomies representative of the hybridized state socioeconomic hierarchies intrinsically create for students with multiple minoritized identities:

1. Educational privilege versus neurodivergence
2. Perceived body image privilege versus chronic illness
3. Class privilege vs low socioeconomic status
4. Perceived cisheterosexuality versus embodied queerness
5. Scholar versus learner

A hybridized state creates an embodied experience Black feminist refer to as both/and (Lorde, 1984). The life note data collected from 2017-2021, describing the experience of our queer Black dis/abled femme, exemplifies the tension and splintering that occurs maneuvering campus environments and relationships with institutional agents with the perception or sociocultural privilege does not align with spirit or our scholar's authentic self. Despite our scholar finding environments of freedom to courageously live wholly in, she is not able to escape the impact of systems of domination and the physical consequences it presents on her life.

The perceived privilege identities such as educational privilege, class privilege, and perceived heterosexuality, create barriers that consistently render our queer, Black, dis/abled, femmes authentic experience invisible. Although our scholar was able to position her perceived privilege paired with her power and capital to advocate for herself and persist through doctoral education, IHE and institutional agents practicing equity and love would not require a doctoral student to have to position their privilege, power, and capital to succeed. Leaving students with limited or unrealized privilege, power, and capital without access to higher education all together.

The Power of Relationships

Relationships are the foundation of our culture. Our campuses consist of individual and group relationships with the power to heal or harm. Institutional agents on-campus create our committees, boards, departments, and power coalitions that make decisions regarding the experience and environment for community members on and off campus (Hachem, 2018). The collection of artifacts and the life note data revealed in our analysis the foundational nature of relationships to the experience of doctoral education for our queer Black dis/abled femme. Consistently relationships were a major focus of the life note data. Relationships with family,

intimate partners, classmates, mentors, faculty, administrators, colleagues, and on-campus staff directly impacted the experience felt by our scholar.

What was most apparent is how internalized oppression is projected in relationships and acts as a tool for conformity. Similar to what hooks (1993) describes when parents and mothers perpetuate values and behaviors that maintain the cisheteropatriarchy in Black woman, internalized oppression is an invasive weapon that seeps into relationships when a praxis of freedom, awareness, and love is not being valued and continuously practiced. Our analysis uncovered continuous examples of institutional agents and individuals in relationship with our scholar practicing transactional relationships, fear, entitlement, avoidance, shame, competition, opposition, scarcity, apathy, and gaslighting. When equity, healing, love, and spirit were not centered in relationships, both external relationships and the relationship to yourself the analysis showcases how relationships grounded in practices and values devoid of spirit and love become building blocks of oppression, another emerging finding discussed below.

Internalized oppression first showed up in the relationship our scholar had to herself. Before any institutional agent perpetuated oppression while relationshiping with our queer Black dis/abled femme, she perpetuated the oppression within herself. There was a correlation between our scholar's harsh self-talk, self-doubt, and internalized ableism which happened more frequently when she was physically attending classes on-campus and her freedom praxis was limited instead of a daily ritual. When our scholar started intentionally incorporating a liberative practice into her scholarship no longer splintering her multiple selves from her work, her ability to relationship with herself in love and center her wholeness shifted. However, the environment on campus to constantly produce, focus on outcomes, and privilege dominant social identities limited the impact of relationshiping with self and others in freedom and love. Often times the

same praxis to undermine oppression and reify joy and freedom in our scholar's life meant she had to face consequences of not maintaining the status quo and playing by the rules of domination and global capitalism.

However, relationships also provided a site for freedom and persistence for our scholar. Only the self-relationship and individual relationships among our scholar and her peers were hindered by the culture of oppression. When relationships were built between those in the institution with positional power to make decisions to amend policy, accommodations, or financial decisions those relationships did have the capacity to directly change the environment and showcases the level of influence administrators and faculty with positional power have on campus have. For example, during the spring of 2018 our scholar co-led and participated in a healing group for doctoral students with multiple minoritized identities. Despite the ability for the group to come together and disrupt the values of domination on-campus through centering love, healing, personhood, and their own personal growth instead of outcome and production, the practice did not shift any structures on-campus or permanently transform the environment towards liberation. This is not to diminish the power of liberation work in individual and group relationships instead it showcases the limited power of healing work at that level to transform the environment structurally to provide a sustainable liberative environment. This limited power is directly related to the lack of positional power doctoral students have in their institutions despite having similar roles and responsibilities on-campus as our faculty and administrators with positional power. Whereas the interpersonal work completed between graduate students is transformative and provides them with a healing space on-campus, we must also interrogate why minoritized doctoral students have to come together to create an environment of liberation on-campus? What are they experiencing that would require that level of care and self-advocacy?

How can those with positional power utilize their power and relationships to alleviate the forces in the environment that would push those doctoral students to create a healing group for persistence?

Additionally, often times relationships were the major gatekeepers of information. Some information was not available to our scholar or other scholars, as witnessed by our queer Black dis/abled femme, unless relationships were cultivated to unearth that information. Unspoken rules, tips for success, courses to avoid, conferences to attend, certain information that could alleviate certain structural barriers was only accessible through building and maintaining relationships, most often with people at all levels of the institution to persist through doctoral education. Knowledge and the hoarding of knowledge through relationships immediately creates an inequitable environment for doctoral students with multiple minoritized identities.

Relationships are also the basis for community which was a major theme for our queer Black dis/abled femme because she was able to receive a lot of love, care, knowledge, joy, processing, and validation from her communities on and off campus. Despite relationships being the catalyst for most oppression, relationships also have the power to manifest as sites of liberation. Relationships where individuals are practicing the values and actions of oppression like apathy, individualism, competition, scarcity, entitlement, or lack of awareness were relationships that were mostly transactional and led to harm. Structures of violence are built and maintained when individuals and relationships are grounded in oppression instead of spirit, nature, and community.

Building Blocks of Oppression

We found one life note in the artifacts to best encompass our third emerging finding, building blocks of oppression, with the fullest expression of the felt experience that our scholar

felt traversing doctoral education on stolen land on a campus built over African ascendant bones with multiple intersecting minoritized identities. The following life note reads:

Queer Black Dis/abled Femme February 9, 2021

Where is the grace?

I cannot even start there because most people will come to read this never experiencing or understanding what grace is as an action.

Gaslighting. At the root of gaslighting is invalidation and dishonesty. Convincing others that what they feel, think, understand is wrong. I constantly think of MHP [Melissa Harris Perry] and the twisted distorted room she discusses black women constantly existing in. Now add a whole host of marginalized identities including chronic illness and my life becomes a perpetual series of distorted violent rooms made to invalidate.

Every day is waking up pissed the fuck off.

Pissed at being in pain.

Pissed at being rendered invisible.

Pissed at people making me do more work when they try to help.

Pissed at people for not doing their self-work.

Pissed at being in pain every moment.

Pissed at having to be. Pissed at being.

Pissed at having to constantly heal.

Imagine that.

Then imagine knowing most of what you experience that day will only aid in that feeling.

That is how I feel living with a chronic debilitating illness as a Queer Black Femme.

Like Biko in Armah's KMT who died by suicide, I'm a problem because I force people to focus on what systems try so hard to make us avoid, the truth.

The truth is yall worried about citations and plagiarism on stolen land. The biggest laugh. It's the incongruencies for me. The constant gaslighting and incongruencies.

What is being asked of me goes against my praxis, they force us into compliance or punish us and push us out for disrupting the status quo.

I cannot say this is a sacred self-inquiry guided by spirit grounded in honesty and then fit it into the same formula that has been created for dissertations.

They keep focusing on the outcome didn't they hear me say this was process oriented

I have to create an outcome about a process I'm still in the process of?

...

What our scholar so eloquently and honestly named is the emotional and spiritual toll systems of domination create for doctoral students like our queer Black dis/abled femme. To unearth the root of violence, harm, and domination we have to begin looking at the roots and in this sacred inquiry the roots included codes of oppression practiced by institutional agents and people in proximity to our scholar, primarily: fear, apathy, scarcity, opposition/duality, individualism, self-interest, greed, shame, insecurity, avoidant, lack of accountability, entitled, harm/violence, devoid of spirit, gaslighting, inconsistent words and actions, boundary violation, competition, inaccessibility, ahistorical and transactional relationships/behaviors. The codes of oppression helped our scholar team further examine the artifacts to determine how practices grounded in some of the above codes for example, fear, lack of accountability, and greed could create building blocks of oppression or dominance for individuals and power elites to generate and maintain systems of oppression and domination.

When ahistorical practices are maintained in large privileged knowledge centers like IHE, oppression thrives. Armah (2002) describes this same phenomenon in his epistemological novel *KMT*, which was not available for purchase on the land where our scholar completed her doctoral education. Armah (2002) writes,

Memory was considered not just a part of life, but the source of life. A body bereft of memory might, so the thinking went, as well be dead...And memory was on no account to be allowed to die, if the society was to live (p.194).

Ahistorical practice devoid of spirit only leads to ruins. When IHE and institutional agents practice codes of oppression they create and maintain systems of domination. Armah (2002) writes, “foolishness comes to a people through deliberate training, not through luck and not through nature” (p.185).

Structural Violence and Ableism

From the first life note entry it was evident to our queer Black dis/abled femme that doctoral education was not created to retain her. Living at the intersection of dis/ability, race, gender, sexuality, spirituality/religion, and class brought theory to life for our scholar traversing through old world domination. Her scholar award paid her just enough for the state to not consider her below the poverty line, which meant our scholar was unable to receive any state resources to help meet her basic needs. Yet, her monthly salary was not commensurate with her experience, actual hours worked each week, or did it meet her financial needs. Dissonance was felt often during our analysis and rears its head when considering the privilege and access our scholar had as a doctoral student generating scholarship and teaching across course levels while simultaneously struggling to stay out of debt and meet her basic needs. Like when she writes about not having enough money to pay for food and gas to get to class,

Today I woke up needing to drive to Athens for class. My gas tank was on E and so was my fridge. I ended up drinking a protein shake and putting \$15 in my tank. I only had \$50 until I get paid in the next few days. I HATE THE END OF THE MONTH. I swear if I have to text my mom again asking for money. I feel like a failure.

Not only was classism a major issue of structural violence facing our queer Black dis/abled femme, she also struggled with managing the high level of reading comprehension, writing, and quantitative analysis needed to complete her education as a scholar with dyslexia and dyscalculia. Our queer Black dis/abled femme found that time and time again her instructors and administrators were not well knowledgeable about her neurodivergence and she was constantly advocating and educating those with positional power who were supposed to be able to support her in creating an equitable learning environment. Instead, our scholar's intelligence was continuously questioned like when one faculty member asked her if she could read after she disclosed her dis/abilities after the first class session one semester. Even the office on-campus intended for students with dis/abilities did not have the proper structures or training in place to support or accommodate our scholar.

Our scholar faced some of her worse microaggressions in her interactions with the disability resource center on campus that ran more like a factory and provided less personalized service unless explicitly advocated for and even then, our queer Black dis/abled femme had to propose her own accommodations which meant no structures were in place and what she proposed was usually unable to occur or done poorly and sometimes cause more of a disadvantage than providing an equitable footing. Like when the disability resource center failed to update our scholar regarding the system for her textbook accommodations moving which

meant the scholar was three weeks behind on her readings as the comprehension rate as her peers.

Intersecting social identities meant that where class and ableism existed anti-Blackness was always present. Blackness was an inescapable identity of oppression and site of continuous strength, power, and spiritual connection. Sometimes our queer Black dis/abled femme would wonder is that microaggression stemming from anti-Blackness or ableism the lines blurring so often she felt the lived experience of Blackness as disabling. That layered with her first-generation status meant she had no family to rely on for knowledge about how to successfully persist through doctoral education. Thankfully on-campus community and colleagues across institutions provided our scholar with opportunities to fill in the gaps she did not even realize existed. It was hard for her to determine where the lines of classism, ableism, anti-Blackness, and first-generation student status were showing up verses the other when they seemed related, intertwined, and relating to each other.

What was most challenging was how the institution training our scholar was the same type of institution producing scholarship on the inequities of that time in the old-world, yet instead of utilizing their knowledge to transform and liberate the continuously enacted the same inequity and harm their scholarship unearthed. The structures of inequities were not limited to the experience of our scholar but also in her observed experience of those in her campus community. For example, our scholar could not help but notice the striking similarities between the doctoral students who passed preliminary exams the first time compared to students who sat for preliminary exams multiple times before passing or some students not passing at all. These milestones if not structured for those students pushed to the margins generate a cycle of pushout that no amount of persistence can combat.

Persistence, Privilege, & Practicing Freedom

Persistence for the queer black dis/abled femme largely existed because of the positions of privilege our femme could wield to advocate, relationship, and support herself. It is important to recognize positions of privilege exist due to societal hierarchies and the goal of the campus environment should be to fully eliminate the need for scholars to have to persist and position their privilege and exert power to create an equitable, safe, and fulfilling learning environment. We are not negating that learning exist outside of discomfort, we are arguing that learning should not be conducted in pain, in oppression, without basic needs and human rights being debated or negated.

In addition to privilege aiding in persistence, with the majority of our scholars privileged identities listed in managing the dissonance, our analysis also uncovered the importance of community and practicing freedom as pillars of persistence supporting our scholar traversing doctoral education living at the intersection of dis/ability, race, gender, sexuality, spirituality, and class. Community provided our scholar with opportunities to live authentically and experience validation and love for her authentic self. Additionally, strong networks of community were required to support our femme as she experienced anxiety, suicidality, and daily chronic pain. Despite the majority of our scholar's community members sharing similar social identities to her, the high level of love, truth telling, and consistency that existed within our femme's multiple networks of community provided her with support when she was operating from a deficit and unable to meet all of her needs and complete her doctoral requirements during her four years of funding.

Strong loving community networks provided a foundation to assist our scholar in persisting through doctoral education and suicidality. Through African cosmology our scholar

started incorporating daily spiritual and wellness rituals to support her well-being and help her access joy each day. Our scholar focused on a minimum of 7 hours of sleep each night and ate foods that were well balanced but also made her happy to eat. Our scholar walked, stretched, hiked, and complete physical therapy exercises weekly to maintain an active lifestyle that did not exacerbate her pain or irritate her pre-existing sports injuries. Our scholar prayed to her ancestors daily, divined through angel numbers and numerology, and practiced rituals to enhance her connection to God, spirit, and her ancestors. Our scholar also drank over 90 fluid ounces of water each day, herbal tea, and participated in fasts when necessary while maintain a practice of nature reverence including trying to act more sustainably for the environment. The above practices of freedom paired with strong networks of community allowed our scholar to persist even when life events created a hard reality for our scholar to manage day to day and continue producing scholarship and passing her doctoral requirement.

Lastly, despite the high amounts of individual and systemic gaslighting our scholar had an extremely strong sense of herself and her purpose which provided a guidepost for her to lean on even when she seemed to be questioning herself and the gaslighting was causing harm our scholar through therapy and the above spiritual practices was able to consistently return to her center and truth recognizing her undeniable worth no matter the sociocultural economic hierarchy attempting to oppress her spirit and body.

Summative Expression

if i write

what you may feel
but cannot say.
it does not
make
a poet.
it makes me a bridge.
and
i am humbled
and
i am grateful
to assist your heart in speaking.
-grateful | nayyirah waheed

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this sacred ethnography was to explore the implications of living at the intersections of dis/ability, race, gender, sexuality, spirituality, and class, while persisting through doctoral education in what is referred to as the United States of America. The goal of this study was to clearly describe how institutions of higher education's compliance in systems of oppression, like global capitalism and imperialism, causes direct violence and harm against bodies on-campus that are othered and marginalized. My hope is by providing an epistemologically disruptive perspective to counter the current dominant ways knowledge is created. At the end of my dissertation, I had the privilege of attending a virtual advanced methods conference and watched a profound session led by Dr. Kakali Bhattacharya on, *Critical, De/colonial, and Contemplative Approaches to Qualitative Inquiry*, where she describes the power of vulnerable, critical, and embodied inquires to disrupt our current system of knowledge creation (Bhattacharya, 2016; Bhattacharya, 2018a; Bhattacharya, 2018b). Dr. Bhattacharya illuminated many of the same arguments I make in this dissertation study, largely our socializations and desensitization as students, faculty, administrators, and staff to domination and our constant participation in the Oppressor/oppressed binary has created scholarship and environments that will not liberate us. Dr. Bhattacharya instead encourages us to embrace critical, contemplative, and creative approaches, similar to the methodology utilized in this study, to disrupt power and showcase a comprehensive view of the myriad of lived knowledge that we experience in our world. Dr. Bhattacharya mentions how the academe values certain intellects

and processes, that typically maintain the current sociocultural economic hierarchy, instead of valuing everyone as knowers and experts on the theories and epistemologies of their lived and observed experience. There is also a history of genocide and erasure of African and Indigenous knowledges despite a history of predominantly white European researchers studying our African Indigenous communities taking our knowledge and twisting it as something else (Dei & Asgharzadeh, 2006; Goduka, 2000; Higgs, 2010; Shahjahan & Haverkos, 2011). No longer can IHE and the individuals that comprise these institutions continue to blatantly participate in policies and behaviors that IHE, faculty, staff, and administrators know are harmful and oppressive.

Further, Dr. Bhattacharya stated IHE need scholarship that disrupts the current formula for knowledge creation and instead scholars continue to construct new possibilities for being, creating, and learning. Transcending borders, binaries, and domination, critical contemplative and creative inquiry acknowledges power relations and structures of oppression without reifying the Oppressor/oppressed binary. Critical contemplative and creative inquiry focuses on hyperlocal and situated knowledges that centers everyone as knower of their lived and observed experience, similar to the belief in African cosmology. Utilizing critical contemplative and creativity modes of inquiry, like sacred ethnography, autoethnography, or something you the reader creates, empowers the person inquiring to examine, wrestle, reflect with what Dr. Bhattacharya called our inner journeying. The inner journeying allows each knower to journey inward examining their individual privileges, shadows, wounds, purpose, interconnected relationships, and agency (Bhattacharya, 2018b). This creative approach immediately shifts the power back to the scholar even if the scholar is living in a hybridized state of liberation and oppression. I felt the weight of that power throughout this methodological journey as I wrestled

with what it meant to have access to even conduct scholarship when I believe everyone is a knower and should have access to share their knowledge. Simultaneously, I was living the real consequences of systems of domination at the intersection of dis/ability, race, gender, sexuality, spirituality, and class. Not only was I impacted by external forces of domination, individuals, policies, lack of structures, I was also doing the constant work of unlearning and managing my own internal socializations of dominance. I vividly remember when this finding resonated with me I drove myself to the emergency room, because of the pandemic I could not have visitors, feeling like a burden not wanting to make someone wait or drive back in forth, I drove myself in excruciating pain to the hospital. While in the ER being treated for an endometriosis flare up, my internalized oppressor was berating me for being in the ER and not being home to write my dissertation. I had been working for over a year without any extended time off and my flare-ups were averaging 21 days out of the month in addition to me not having access to physical therapy due to the pandemic and high cost of PT outside of my insurance network. Logically and spiritually I knew I deserved rest. Yet my socialization and internalized oppression was guiltting my sick body when logically I could not write in pain bad enough to warrant hospital care.

It was also during this realization the belief that I am you, and you are me in African cosmology that we all come from one source and are of one another. When I harm myself, I harm my community. White supremacy does not serve anyone not even the white supremacists. Only a small percentage of the population truly benefit from our current sociocultural economic hierarchy. African cosmology also honors the abundance model, there is more than enough for everyone especially when patience, respect, and gratitude are being practiced. We do not have to subscribe to any of the current structures that harm us and perpetuate a scarcity model that values money over natural resources and our communities.

Discussion of Findings

The critical contemplative and creative methods used to analyze and present the findings of this sacred ethnography garnered eleven narrative themes and five emerging findings, which were (1) managing the dissonance; (2) the power of relationships; (3) building blocks of oppression; (4) structural violence and ableism; (5) persistence, privilege, and practicing freedom. The emerging themes that surfaced in the life note data provided a visceral both/and experience of the hybridized state of traversing doctoral education with multiple intersecting social identities. Similar to Johnson (2018), I provide a synthesis of the emerging findings utilizing a counter narrative grounded in my insights as a scholar situated at the intersections of dis/ability, race, gender, socioeconomic status, sexuality, and spirituality.

Hypervigilance and Gaslighting

The power of relationships, building blocks of oppression, and structural violence existed and persisted in this hyperlocal inquiry mainly due to the employment of gaslighting and consequence of hypervigilance. First as a consequence of the trauma experienced living in my body in the current sociocultural economic hierarchy, hypervigilance was constantly coming up in my experience and life note data. I noticed I made generalizations about groups of people and types of institutions and places in the attempt to protect myself. Like the assumption, based on what I research and my lived experienced, that if I was at risk for being sexual assaulted it would most likely be a cis Black man I am acquainted with. This assumption immediately makes me weary of cis Black men I relationship with and I have to filter every interaction through a distorted lens fueled by hypervigilance as an attempt to regain power and control in an

environment I feel unsafe in. When my observed reality is in the last four years I was not harmed by any cis Black man that I am acquainted with. The two occurrences of sexual violence that occurred during this study were by perceived cis Black men who were strangers.

However, hypervigilance kept me alert against white faculty and administrators microaggressing me or making assumptions about me based on my race and ability. For example, for each class I am registered for the faculty member teaching that course receives a letter from the disability resource center outlining that I have learning dis/abilities and receive specific accommodations. Some faculty would reach out to me after receiving this notice to follow-up about me as a learner. On several occasions perceived white cis men and women faculty outed my dis/abilities in class, made assumptions about my intellect based on my dis/abilities with one faculty member asking me if I could read. Only during my preliminary exams and two semesters of alternative texts did I use and have adequate accommodations for my dis/abilities. With multiple faculty knowing one of my accommodations being needing to receive my texts and readings prior to the start of class to have time to read and comprehend them and convert them to alternative texts if necessary. More than three faculty more than once handed out readings multiple pages long in class and apologized to me out loud for not getting it to me prior in front of the entire class, singling me out as needing extra help or attention. Despite never experiencing direct harm from my classmates regarding my dis/ability the act of being the only person singled out is ostracized makes me feel pushed out. The disability resource center and faculty were ill-equipped with the knowledge and technology to adequately support my neurodivergence and not ostracize me in the classroom. The faculty and administrators that were the most healing and equitable inquired about each students' learning, focused on my strengths and did not make my inevitable hiccups due to dyslexia about my intellect or ability to conduct work at the doctoral

level, and they encouraged critical, contemplative, creative inquiry and practice. Despite hypervigilance distorting my view of my cis Black men acquaintances, in the instance of hypervigilance against faculty and administrators around dis/ability justice and equity it always behooved me to be hypervigilant and additionally advocate for myself to sustain in an environment not built for individuals with multiple dis/abilities and neurodivergence.

Gaslighting was a form of invalidation of my experience and truth. Living at the intersections of dis/ability, race, gender, socioeconomic status, sexuality, and spirituality I was bombarded with confusing messages about my worth, intellect, and scholarship. In a life note from September 21, 2017 I write about my experience of gaslighting,

It's interesting when psychologist discuss gaslighting they often times refer to women who have experienced domestic violence. Recently, the term has been used to discuss the experience of minoritized groups. As one can imagine, I have been made to feel like I am not enough my entire life. This poisonous belief made it really hard for me to develop a foundation or an "ego" to stand on, for lack of a non-ableist statement. I struggle most days to see myself clearly. I distrust myself. I often think what is wrong with me? Simply put, I rarely think or feel good enough. Logically, I have a lot of evidence that disputes this toxic lie but sometimes that evidence doesn't change the way I feel.

My intersecting identity meant of I was getting conflicting messages about myself, my worth, and my right to become a PhD. Through the process of this sacred ethnography and practicing healing and centering spirit I was able to stabilize myself and know my worth without needing external validation and messages to confirm what is constantly confirmed by Spirit.

Later in that same life note I write,

In Foundations class, I am slowly learning there isn't a "right" way to be a PhD. My goal in life is to dismantle oppression. (No big deal, am I right?) The thing is assimilation doesn't equal liberation. I want to start taking more risks and determining ways to bring my authentic self to my work in higher education and with students. But first I want to make sure that I help people see themselves clearly. Words of affirmation is my "love language" and I think people don't hear enough how valuable and worthy they are. The issues we are tackling are hard, complex, emotional, and frustrating. How can we be equipped to do this work if we don't see our own worth? Although I may have been gaslighted, I refuse to contribute to this toxic practice. I want to start believing the strengths people see in me AND I want to convey the strengths I see in others. I want to believe I am good enough to do this work. I don't know what that journey will look like but I am tired of being fed lies about myself to perpetuate the systemic belief that my melanin somehow makes me less than.

On-Campus in the Margins

Historically every social identity group I embody, queer, Black, dis/abled, and novigender, have had to force IHE to create space for us on -campus. The last presidential administration hindered the progress IHE were making to make campus equitable and accessible to transgender and gender non-conforming students. Dis/abled students continually face push back and push out when trying to enter and matriculate through higher education. I remember one of my first counseling jobs on-campus working with an autistic client who was brilliant and was struggling with the campus environment which was not accessible for him in the classroom and outside of the classroom. I remember growing frustrated every week after my sessions with this student because I knew no matter how hard him and I worked no matter how often he met with his professors and worked on his assignments he was not going to make it through

midterms. When I came back to campus after fall break my director shared the sad news with me. I was angry that the institution admitted him yet would not shift the environment to retain him and other students like him who fall through the cracks. I observed and experienced the same push out as a dis/abled doctoral student.

IHE fail to recognize the gift of diverse identities and college campuses that have students with varying strengths, backgrounds, and interests. Neurodiverse and dis/abled students deserve equitable access and space on our campuses. As a neurodiverse and dis/abled doctoral student I brought unique perspective, gifts, and considerations to the learning environments I had the privilege of occupying. For every grammatical error, misunderstood statistical analysis, misspelled word, and social faux pas was a multitude of strengths I offered our learning community. I witnessed the same brilliance and diversity in thought and practice in my fellow neurodiverse and dis/abled scholars. I also noticed where my queer, Black, and even spiritual identities could take up space my dis/abled identities were denied that privilege unless I advocated for them and rendered them visible. I recall multiple times in the life note data mentioning what it means to be a dis/abled scholar in the field of higher education and student affairs. Faculty and administrator after another all told me one of two things; you do not talk about your dis/ability or they were unsure what neurodiverse and dis/abled scholars did.

Similar to the push out and inaccessibility I faced and others face as neurodiverse and dis/abled scholars, my non-binary gender identity and fluid sexuality were identities that were ostracized even in LGB and queer centric spaces. The continuously growing acronym LGBTQQIP2SAA does not center pansexuality, fluidity, or novigender individuals. Moreover, the continuous labeling and hierarchy of our bodies is to disempower not bridge understanding or enhance our connection to one another, God, spirit, and nature. IHE could benefit from an

African cosmological approach to supporting students recognizing as many genders and sexualities exist for as many students that exist on our campuses. African cosmology states that our physical bodies are bodies each of us chose in the spiritual realm for our life experience during this reincarnation (Asanti, 2010; Olupona, 2000; Paris, 1995; Teish, 1985). Our bodies are intended to be diverse in their biological, physical, mental, and spiritual manifestation. Collectively when we come together and learn from each other's diverse experience of our bodies and realize together we encompass the perfect balance of both/and, no binaries but a universe of strengths and energies that encompass the endless possibilities that exist for us. Our experience and authentic chosen identities do not have to cage, isolate, or bring harm to each of us but instead can provide a lens to learn, grow, and build deeper connections with each other connecting over our shared traits and learning from our differences.

The social identity that was constantly rendered visible and competing with the stereotypes that were also present as a doctoral student with low socioeconomic status and multiple dis/abilities. I often had the experience of trying to determine was I experiencing this microaggression because they see my Blackness and equate that to mean something about my socioeconomic status and ability? Ervelles (2011) discusses how African ascendants have been deemed dis/abled after we were shackled and torn from our homeland across the ocean to rebuild a colonized land rife with genocide. Like in the instances of the microaggressions shared in the theme relaxing with -isms, I could tell when the violation was solely because of assumptions or beliefs about my Blackness. However, in instances with different offices on-campus, I was not sure if Blackness was the sole identity creating barriers for me in these interactions, especially when other Black students were treated differently by the same faculty or administrators. Then it caused the hypervigilant conundrum of trying to determine what part of my intersecting

identities is this person judging and how do I maneuver this situation to avoid further barriers to matriculate. On-campus and in the margins is not simple a research topic it is a lived experience that has severe consequences to the health of our students and their well-being. Oppression, gaslighting, and the barriers created because of my intersecting social identities directly led to my suicidality in addition to the risk factors in my history and lack of consistent wellness, coping, and boundary enforcement. For doctoral students pushed to the margins, our campuses can be violent environments worsening the realities minoritized doctoral students already face because of our current sociocultural economic hierarchy. IHE know better and we can no longer tolerate our IHE and institutional agents not shifting their practices to do better for our students and communities.

Shadow Work is Power Work

Leaders in our field are not trained or taught how to manage their power. Shadow work and healing needs to be an integral part of the education and training of individuals who intend to have positional power over others, especially when training faculty, staff and administrators. The majority of my life note data I was trying to tackle alone how to prepare and honor the power and responsibility that comes with creating knowledge as a scholar educator. The beginning of my life note data, I struggle as a new doctoral student with the weight of scholarship, knowledge creation, and how to situate myself in knowledge creation, despite conducting scholarship in the past and actively conducting scholarship as I am learning how to conduct scholarship. On October 8, 2017 I wrote in my life notes,

Well one of the things I've been struggling with is how much my mind is processing most times due to all the new learning. I'm constantly thinking and challenging my own worldview or refining it. I want to start writing poetry again to express my own experience as a

doc student and specifically focus on how I'm interpreting power. I think this will serve multiple purposes. 1) Remind me that I have a powerful voice 2) help me process all this PhD/world/life crap 3) allow me to rage against academic writing with my own writing with my own rules, which really means no rules.

I felt like I had so much power and no power. I always recognized how much power I have to harm and expressed a lot of guilt for the harm I did cause to myself and others throughout the process of obtaining my PhD. Outside of individual practice and awareness, how are IHE preparing scholar educators to heal and manage the power that comes with our work?

By focusing on healing and shadow work, IHE can begin normalizing the practice of healing and begin naming what is hidden unspoken. What remains in the dark and the parts of ourselves that we shame, avoid, or repress manifests in harmful ways allowing for values and practices that lead to systems of domination to take foothold, like scarcity, entitlement, and greed. Shadow work requires honesty, accountability, and humility as guideposts which when practiced with intention it is difficult to reproduce harm and domination internally and externally. To begin socializations of freedom we first have to do the hard work of reconciling the parts of our individual selves and collective institutions that allow domination and oppression to continue. When IHE and institutional agents begin the deep work of healing and illuminating our shadow, we can begin to imagine campus environments that are equitable and loving.

Persistence is Political

I started this sacred inquiry honoring three African ascendant scholars we lost to suicide because of oppression on-campus and our sociocultural economic hierarchy. Every student, staff member, and faculty does not have the same access to wellness and minoritized institutional agents are maneuvering a system from a deficit despite our multitude of strengths. My ability to

persist through doctoral education was largely because of my privilege, power, and access. Minoritized students with limited privilege, power, and access are expected to succeed in an environment built for our demise. Depending on our social identities the access students have to cope and persist through doctoral education mirrors the system of domination students are attempting to persist through. If access to persistence is dependent on our social identities, power, and privilege then are IHE not designed for our most marginalized students to fail?

Recommendations for Higher Education

Despite traversing years of harm and observing IHE fail countless students and communities, I have total faith that higher education remains a fertile ground for liberation and we can begin sustainable practices of freedom on our campuses now. For this section, I focus on the ways students, faculty, and staff can begin liberating ourselves and the institutions we occupy from compliance and maintenance of global systems of domination. Although my methods and conclusions may seem unconventional as a spirit led and transdisciplinary scholar, my recommendations are my attempt at focusing on the roots of our collective oppression, the ways we are already practicing freedom individually and on-campus, and through liberative creative imaging. This section is realistic dreaming of what could be based on my lived and observed experience that unearthed the emerging findings for this critical, contemplative, and creative self-inquiry. The recommendations are spirit centered honoring the values of African cosmology centering God, spirit, nature, and community.

The power to transform our campuses and environments towards love and freedom is within each one of us occupying space on-campus and within the communities our campuses exist in. The first recommendation I offer to bridge higher education back to a tradition of freedom, equity, and love is to re/center spirit and nature reverence in the mission and very

essence of our institutional culture and practice. Secondly, students, faculty, and staff must begin grounding our practices in equity, healing, and love. Despite an avoidant, competitive, entitled culture that persists in imperialist lands that allows the maintenance of harm and violence against African and Indigenous communities, individuals and relationships are the building blocks of our institutions policies, laws, culture is not created until groups with power come together and make choices. I urge in my second recommendation that every individual occupying space on-campus begin making choices aligned with equity, healing, and love.

Re/center Spirit & Nature Reverence in Higher Education

Before we are different, we are the same. No matter what social identities we individually subscribe to or the social identities placed on us each of us can relate through our spiritual and human experience. All of us. Regardless of race, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, cultural heritage, socioeconomic status, or ability we all are born from one source. The major finding, I come across in this sacred ethnography and in the multitude of my observations through years of practicing healing is that only harm comes from ignoring the only hierarchy there is to acknowledge, the natural hierarchy, God, spirit, and nature. When *we* ignore, dishonor, and fail to worship God, nature, and revere *our* ancestors, *we* willingly commit harm to *ourselves* and diminish *our* collective light. God and spirit will always restore balance for the highest good. Humans are conduits of spirit with freewill (Chireau, 2003; Karade, 1994; Magesa; 2013; Olupona, 2000; Paris, 1995; Parrinder, 1961; Somé, 1993; Teish, 1985). When we as humans fail to re/member the ancestral knowledge that lives within each of us, when we put our faith in cismen, rulers, and systems of domination over what we know in our souls to be true we dishonor God, nature, our ancestors and ourselves. One of the most sacred values of African cosmology is honesty. Pretending that any hierarchy matters outside of the sacred hierarchy

birthed from source herself, creates ruin and generates darkness. If we fail to do the collective work of re/membering we risk severely offsetting the universal balance, which God, spirit, and nature will take equal measures to restore.

Chattel slavery is a prime historical example. The nations of Africa were disparate and saw each other as separate entities to conquer. Before Spain began their exploitative conquest against the world, the Moors of Africa ruled over Spain until 1492 (Clayton, 2009). Nations warred with each other over resources, land, and misplaced ego. While our African nations focused on building our kingdoms, Europe sought to violently exploit and monopolize resources, lands, and tribes globally. As the west began colonizing the Americas and Caribbean, the Indigenous natives began dying rapidly due to the harsh slave conditions driven by global capitalism. Bartolomé de las Casas suggested to the Portuguese to start enslaving Africans instead of enslaving Indigenous people to farm the lands in the colonized new world because Africans could withstand the harsh conditions of enslavement (Clayton, 2009). To avoid further genocide of our Indigenous community, chattel slavery of our African community was implemented. Genocide is one of the worst wrongdoings according to African cosmology (Chireau, 2003; Karade, 1994; Magesa; 2013; Olupona, 2000; Paris, 1995; Parrinder, 1961; Somé, 1993; Teish, 1985). The colonization of what is referred to as North and South America created an imbalance rooted in greed which lead people with positional power to dehumanize an entire continent and its people. Chattel slavery devastated what feels like everything African ascendants hold dear, before we were colonized, we colonized ourselves by seeing each other as nations to be conquered instead of tribes connected to the whole who needed to come together to weather the harsh realities of life and the west. And although genocide of our Indigenous nations

continues, chattel slavery also stopped the genocide of our Indigenous communities that started with the onset of colonization.

IHE and institutional agents suffer from the same problem as our African nations did before chattel slavery. Competition, scarcity, and individualism are some of the values operating at the root of IHE and embodied in institutional agents such as, students, faculty, and staff, as evidenced by this sacred ethnography. Re/centering spirit, reconciling with our lands and the Indigenous communities birthed to our lands, revering nature, can all assist in rooting IHE and institutional agents in values meant to sustain our communities and generate climates of liberation and freedom. No system of oppression is stronger than spirit. A solar storm could end our entire existence in mere seconds. Ultimately, we live in continuous hybridized states. The spiritual and the physical, the liberated and the oppressed, the powerful and the powerless. As much power as we possess individually and collectively, it is nothing compared to the power of God, nature, and spirit. That existential reality can be unsettling or it can create an extreme sense of awe and gratitude.

I conducted this sacred ethnography because I am grateful to have the power, privilege, and capacity to conduct sacred scholarship that has the power to heal myself, my community, and hopefully create more space for more diverse knowers to share their power and knowledge. I recognize time and space to be fluidly spanning and I recognize my time as scholar Niah Grimes is limited. The words I use what I choose to study or not study matters and has power. My goal is to be in constant process of unlearning to yield my power to heal more than harm.

Re/centering spirit and nature reverence in higher education as an example I would encourage institutions and institutional agents to start restoring our indigenous land that our campuses reside on back to the tribes and communities who were born on that land before

colonization, genocide, and force removal. As institutions begin to heal and reconcile with our Indigenous communities and the land, IHE and institutional agents can begin working with Indigenous and African ascendants to reclaim, restore, and begin creating sustainable spiritual education that is not compliant or active in systemic and structural domination. We cannot continue conducting scholarship and making land labor acknowledgements when we know deeper than most the history of these lands. We must re/member and restore before anything else can be gained.

Campus Environments Grounded in Equity, Healing, and Love

I'm convinced we live to experience sorrow but we collectively and individually bring more sorrow on ourselves than is necessary. Higher education can be a site for freedom and not pain. Armah (2002) encourages us in his epistemological novel to "mix learning with love" (p.12). I argue campus environments grounded in love will lead to healing and equity. The first year of my doctoral program, I took a campus ecology course and learned that institutional agents have the most immediate change on the campus environment, consisting of the physical, human aggregate, organizational, and social components (Strange & Banning, 2015). Grounding our campus environments in a praxis of equity, healing, and love could begin transforming our institutions and remedying the consequences of systems of domination and surviving a hybridized state. IHE can become a model for reconciliation, equity, healing, and love instead of a continued site of domination and vehicle of oppression. These possibility models are taking place all over the world and need to be embedded in the mission and culture of IHE. I offer four examples of what campuses grounded in equity, healing, and love could look like mindful that there are so many ways to practice liberation and freedom. First IHE can start assessing students for adverse childhood experiences and empathy to better transform the environment for the

incoming students and their experiences while simultaneously ensuring empathy as a core requirement for community involvement. Understand the trauma histories of our students and the level of empathy they possess would allow IHE to better structure our campus environments to meet the distinct needs of the students IHE admit. Additionally, empathy is a large indicator of a student's ability to practice equity, healing, and love on-campus and in community.

Secondly, IHE need to make wellness and balance a standard and right for institutional agents on campus instead of a privilege. Wellness and balance as a standard on campus could look like comprehensive and free healthcare, individual and group talk therapy, somatic therapy, activities in nature, local and sustainably sourced food, physical environments to cultivate wellness, opportunities to give back and experience gratitude. The list of ways to center wellness on-campus could go on and on. Wellness cannot be left to individual institutional agents to access. Based on social identity, power, and privilege not everyone on-campus has access to wellness. Additionally, global capitalism and the constant production especially at the doctoral level makes it extremely hard for doctoral students in the margins to access wellness when we can barely meet our basic needs. No agent of the institution should have to live without their basic needs being met. IHE have enough power and resources to create campus environments for all of us to thrive in. We must demand better care and more from our institutions.

A third recommendation for IHE congruent with wellness, would be incentivizing institutional agents on-campus to practice shadow work and center their healing and rest. There are many schools of thought and components associated with shadow work. Primarily, I am suggesting IHE incentivize and reward institutional agents on-campus for centering their healing around their trauma, socializations, power, privilege, ego, and any component blocking an individual from moving in equity and love. Experts on our campuses studying shadow work,

trauma, healing, and equity are waiting for the opportunity to transform our campuses for liberation. Let them! IHE collectively have too much power, access, and knowledge to continue to comply in systems of domination and pretend it is for the collective best interest or consistent with “tradition.” This sacred ethnography showcases through African cosmology that God, spirit, and nature predated any human tradition created. When IHE re/align and begin acting towards equity institutional agents will begin seeing practices and policies that align with what is best for the highest good instead of for individual institutions and power elites.

Lastly, IHE need to create sustainable and fluid structures that support institutional agents especially agents most targeted for violence as we continue to live and practice in a hybridized state tending to the lived consequences of oppression. For example, if each IHE hired a coordinator to support every departments’ group of professional students to help reduce the burden of student affairs service on faculty and avoid relying on structures on-campus built for undergraduates and not the unique demands of professional students. The professional coordinators could help with advising, scheduling courses, managing accommodations, being a liaison between faculty, staff, and students, coordinating health and wellness initiatives, and beyond.

In addition to a staff member trained to support professional students another structural change IHE could employ is providing professional students with stipends before we start our programs to help with the costs of transitioning into doctoral education and stipends for when we exit to support us transitioning into the workforce or our next role. Housing and food should be in every package for professional students to avoid students with low socioeconomic status having to divert their energy and attention to meet their basic needs. The requirements of doctoral education are arduous enough without layering on basic survival needs. IHE have the resources

to better support doctoral students especially students pushed to the margins. Grounding campus environments in equity, healing, and love could have the power to transform our campuses towards liberation now.

Summative Expression

Let us work to turn the forgotten paths into the remembered way.

- Ayi Kwei Armah, *KMT*

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APPENDIX A

IRB LETTER



Tucker Hall, Room 212
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Human Research Protection Program

NOT HUMAN RESEARCH DETERMINATION

December 14, 2020

Dear [Merrily Dunn](#):

On 12/14/2020, the Human Subjects Office reviewed the following submission:

Title of Study:	Queer, Black, Dis/abled, Femme: A Sacred Ethnography Bridging Higher Education Back to Tradition
Investigator:	Merrily Dunn
Co-Investigator:	[student or primary contact]
IRB ID:	PROJECT00003068
Funding:	
Grant ID:	
Review Category:	[review category]

We have determined that the proposed activity is not research involving human subjects as defined by DHHS and FDA regulations. [Determination Comments/Notes]

University of Georgia (UGA) IRB review and approval is not required. This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these activities are research involving human subjects, please submit a new request to the IRB for a determination.

Sincerely,

[Name, Title]
 Human Subjects Office, University of Georgia

TABLE 1

Sacred and Spirit Affirming Praxis Codes

Sacred Praxis: Affirming Spirit
Love (Compassion/ Empathy)
Abundance
Wholeness/ Complimentary
Community/Interdependence
Purpose
Joy
Accountability
Detachment/Process-oriented
Humility
Responsibility
Creativity
Discernment/ Integrity
Freedom
Gratitude
Harmony
Re/membering
Respect
Equity
Recognition of Divinity
Prayer
Meditation
Mindfulness
Patience
Observing Longitudinally
Historical/Cultural
Ritual
Honesty
Synchronicity

(Inspired by themes found in Dillard and Bell, 2011; Dillard, 2012; Magesa, 2013; Paris,1995; Parrinder, 1961; Somé, 1994; Somé, 1997; Teish, 1985)