"What's Race Got To Do With It?": A Virtual Participatory Action Research Study of Community College Students Exploring Intersectionality In Queer Studies

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“WHAT’S RACE GOT TO DO WITH IT?”: A VIRTUAL PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH STUDY OF COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENTS EXPLORING INTERSECTIONALITY IN QUEER STUDIES

A Dissertation
Presented to
The Faculty of the School of Education
International and Multicultural Education Department

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

By
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San Francisco
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THE UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

Dissertation Abstract

“What’s Race Got To Do With It?”: A Virtual Participatory Action Research Study of Community College Students Exploring Intersectionality In Queer Studies

The purpose of this study was to identify and explore how curricula in queer studies at Community College of the Bay (CCB) reflect and ignore the lived experiences of Queer, Trans, Black, Indigenous, People of Color (QTBIPOC) by engaging queer studies students as co-researchers in virtual participatory action research (VPAR). This research utilized the frameworks of Queer of Color Analysis (QOCA) (Ferguson, 2004; McCready, 2013), critical whiteness (Baldwin, 1984; Du Bois, 1903), anti-oppressive education (Kumashiro, 2001), and intersectional theory (Crenshaw, 1989), to examine the experiences of QTBIPOC within queer studies in community college classrooms. The following meta-question guided this research: “How do students describe their experiences in queer courses at CCB?” The data sources included self-reflective VPAR journals by each of the 12 co-researchers, 15 interviewee transcripts, demographic surveys, assignments, and the Final: VPAR Paper and Reflection.

A significant finding in this VPAR study was identifying examples of whiteness in queer studies along with ways to disrupt white privilege. Even when race is not explicitly addressed, it is still being reinforced (Kumashiro, 2002). We see this through the interrogation of white privilege and whiteness assessed in our study. For example, Myung-Soon critiqued that the institution of education is still “a white system,” he named the need to have fewer white cismale readings in curricula and therefore stated the need for more QTBIPOC authors in the curricula. Caius appreciated how her queer studies
courses at CCB went beyond the “queer white perspective.” Another vital finding was the explicit requests for more inclusion of QTBIPOC histories and experiences in queer studies showcasing an example of how queer studies can improve. Myung-Soon, Caius, Edilberto, and Gohan provided examples of colonial erasure connected to their racial identity. Our VPAR study assessed the need for engaging in the rediscovery of histories thought to be lost entirely. Lastly, another important finding of this study was the importance of centering intersectional theory in queer studies, and that race cannot be separated from intersectional theory. To surmise, after collecting and analyzing all the data to answer the question posed in the title of this dissertation, “What’s race got to do it?” simply put, the answer is everything.
This dissertation, written under the direction of the candidate’s dissertation committee and approved by the members of the committee, has been presented to and accepted by the Faculty of the School of Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education. The content and research methodologies presented in this work represent the work of the candidate alone.

Breana Bahar Hansen 06/10/2022
Candidate Date

Dissertation Committee

Dr. David Donahue 06/10/2022
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Dr. Susan Katz 06/10/2022
Date

Dr. Emma Fuentes 06/10/2022
Date
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my co-researchers of this VPAR study. Thank you for sharing your brilliance, empathy, and creativity with me. You all were my inspiration throughout this journey.

This dissertation is also dedicated to my parents. I never thought you would read my dissertation, but you have multiple times. I am deeply moved by your support of my work. Thank you for going on this voyage with me and being open to new perspectives.

Thank you both for believing in me.
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To Dr. Katz, where do I begin? In my first semester as an International and Multicultural Education (IME) master’s student, I took Human Rights Education with you, which set the trajectory of where I am today. I never knew education could be so empowering, so creative, so outside-the-box, and so life-changing until taking your class.
The love you have for your students is awe-inspiring. I wanted to be an educator just like you (and still do). Thanks to you, we have been to Ecuador together, learning from the Achuar tribe in, definitively, the most powerful educational experience of my life as a student. That trip would never have happened without your hard work and dedication, and I am forever grateful. On a lighter note, I also appreciate your deep knowledge of APA. I always knew whom to turn to whenever I felt overwhelmed by the ever-changing world of APA. You have always been my advocate. Your belief in me helped me realize my strengths and opened doors I did not think were possible for me. Thank you for being my accomplice for more queer, trans, and nonbinary representation and power at the University of San Francisco. I have always felt heard and seen by you. Enjoy retirement! You deserve it.

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CHAPTER I: RESEARCH PROBLEM

Introduction

“Breana, I feel we focus way too much on race, I mean, this is a queer studies class.” A white cisgender gay male student made this comment when he approached me after class to share his concerns about my course Queer Culture, Society, and Resistance. His response is typical of the white students who attend my queer studies courses. I teach at a large urban community college that I will call Community College of the Bay (CCB), a pseudonym. In this class of 22 students, 18 were students who identified as Queer, Trans, Black, Indigenous, People of Color (QTBIPOC), while four were white. I identify as a white anti-racist, queer nonbinary intersectional-feminist, activist, dyslexic educator, and life-long learner.

These comments led me to ask many questions: What constitutes “focusing too much on race” within queer courses? Do other queer studies programs address race and whiteness; if so, how? What barriers do QTBIPOC face within queer studies? How do white students react when learning about race in queer spaces outside the classroom? How do queer studies courses create an environment where students feel comfortable bringing all their identities into coursework to talk about intersectionality within those identities? How can educators develop spaces that prevent privileged students from playing the “Oppression Olympics”? Chicana feminist Elizabeth Martinez coined this term to refer to the ways various social groups compare themselves to compete for the title of “most oppressed” (Martinez, 1993).

Based on my experiences teaching queer courses at CCB, these questions impelled me to investigate scholarship that investigates the experiences of QTBIPOC,
specifically within queer studies courses and programs within higher education. Unfortunately, I found a dearth of research studies on the intersections of the experiences of QTBIPOC within queer studies and the normalization of whiteness, or white-centering.

My efforts to de-center whiteness within my curricula are consistently met with “white fragility,” a term coined by DiAngelo (2018) to refer to “a state in which even a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves” (p. 121). I have had countless encounters with white fragility as a queer studies educator. I have observed white students become defensive, play the victim, argue, cry, and remain completely silent when talking about racism, white privilege, and white supremacy. As Saad (2020) stated, “Under white supremacy, whiteness is centered as the norm. Everyone else is seen as marginal. Whiteness is seen as the highest value measure of rightness, goodness, truth, excellence, and worthiness” (p. 136). White fragility sustains white supremacy in that it blocks the dismantling of white supremacy. White fragility would not exist without white supremacy.

Simply put, the problem at hand is white supremacy. However, dismantling white supremacy is far from simple. “White supremacy is a racist ideology that is based upon the belief that white people are superior in many ways to people of other races and that, therefore, white people should be dominant over other races” (Saad, 2020, p. 12). White supremacy is upheld by those who benefit from it consciously and unconsciously. Saad (2020) emphasized that white supremacy does not just exist on the individual level: it also extends into how legislation and institutions are structured to uphold white dominance, including in our educational system.
A message that I try to instill in my students’ minds through my queer studies courses is best summarized in the powerful quote from Saad (2020): “If you cannot talk about racism, especially about the ways in which you have been unintentionally complicit in racism, then you will never be able to go beyond a merely superficial understanding of racism” (p. 43). White students sometimes challenge even statements like this. These experiences and my overall journey as an educator and activist framed the focus of this dissertation.

One of the main goals of this study is to disrupt white supremacy to dismantle oppression endured by QTBIPOC by asking the following question: “How does white supremacy manifest within queer studies?” This study seeks to answer this question by: 1) exploring the experiences of QTBIPOC in queer studies, 2) examining a community college environment by conducting my research at CCB, and 3) utilizing the methodology of virtual participatory action research (VPAR) to highlight the voices of QTBIPOC as co-researchers. VPAR is an approach to inquiry in a virtual setting that seeks to resist Eurocentric research methodologies by centering historically marginalized voices as co-researchers to understand and disrupt social inequities (Cammock, Conn, & Nayar, 2021; Safari, 2021).

**Statement of the Problem**

A more intersectional approach to queer, trans, and nonbinary research started to grow exponentially in the early 2000s; it includes the lived experiences of QTBIPOC and has added to the complexity of queer theory. More researchers, such as Kim (2009), Mayo (2007), and Savage and Harley (2009), began theorizing about the intersections of
racial, sexual, and gender identities increasing the literature that has de-normalized whiteness within curricula and has centered QTBIPOC.

Researchers like Aguirre and Martinez (1993), Grady, Marquez, and McLaren (2012), and McCready (2013) have explicitly affirmed the need for more studies that center QTBIPOC and de-center whiteness. For instance, Whitfield, Walls, Langenderfer-Magruder, and Clark (2014) recommended that future studies explore the intersectional identities of QTBIPOC individuals. Additionally, McCready, Blackburn, and Taylor (2013) postulated, “One of the most exciting tasks for twenty-first-century educators who aim to use LGBT curricula will be to develop comprehensive approaches to their work — approaches that take into account how immigration, resegregation, and homelessness affect their pedagogies” (p. 195). McCready, Blackburn, and Taylor (2013) recommended that other researchers explore the intersectional identities of queer, trans, and nonbinary students and emphasize the experiences of QTBIPOC. Consequently, this study sought to contribute to this body of research by exploring the lived experiences of QTBIPOC within queer studies courses at CCB by utilizing VPAR.

In their published writings, Ferguson (2004), Goldberg (1992), and Kumashiro (2001) have discussed what queer studies courses should teach. For example, Jennings (2015) calls for a transgressive queer, trans, and nonbinary curricula that challenges the privileging of gay white upper- and middle-class abled-bodied cisgender men. Curricula should address how racism, sexism, classism, ableism, nationalism, xenophobia, and fatphobia are perpetuated within the queer, trans, and nonbinary community. As Jennings reported, “When race and class are highlighted as part of LGBTQ lives, it acknowledges
that the fight against racism and class inequality are simultaneously struggles for LGBTQ rights as well” (2015, p. 453).

Eng, Halberstam, and Munoz (2005) critiqued queer studies courses and programs that focus primarily on lesbian and gay identities. The authors stated that focusing on lesbian and gay identities promotes “progressive individualism” (p. 12), associating queer studies with whiteness, toxic masculinity, and the gender binary. This focus limits understanding the complexities of sexuality. Similarly, Eng et al. (2005) argued that the future of queer studies “depends absolutely on moving away from white gay male identity politics and learning from the radical critiques offered by a younger generation of queer scholars who draw their intellectual inspiration from feminism and ethnic studies rather than white queer studies” (p. 222). No existing studies explore the curricula of current queer studies programs. Furthermore, research has yet to survey the experiences of QTBIPOC within queer studies programs. This dissertation intended to fill this gap.

Today, we increasingly see more research analyzing the intersectionality of racism, heterosexism, and cissexism within formal and informal educational sites (Blackburn & McCready, 2009). Much research recognizes theoretical frameworks and theories that incorporate racial identities, sexual identities, and gender identities simultaneously (Higginbotham, 2017; Kumashiro, 2001, 2002; Powell, 2012). Yet researchers have not yet reached a consensus on how to apply these theories to praxis. My research contributed to and built on this body of research.

Kumashiro (2001) stated, “queer studies, queer communities, queer cultures, queer identities — these are not racially neutral… Just because we do not talk about race does not mean that race is not ever-present” (p. 11–12). Even if educators do not
explicitly discuss race, race is still being addressed. Whiteness then becomes normalized consciously and unconsciously as the default racial identity. What would it look like if queer studies programs utilized Queer of Color Analysis (QOCA), critical whiteness, and anti-oppressive pedagogy as their foundation? This research aimed to answer this question by focusing on the lived experiences of QTBIPOC within queer studies.

Several scholars, such as Jennings (2015), Pennell (2016), and Pryor (2015), have analyzed the campus cultural climates that affect queer, trans, and nonbinary students at four-year universities. However, research is limited when the focus is narrowed to queer, trans, and nonbinary inclusion within community colleges. Garvey, Taylor, and Rankin (2015) analyzed 102 surveys completed by undergraduate students enrolled in two-year institutions to evaluate the campus climates for queer, trans, and nonbinary students at the community college level. The authors indicated the “absence” and “scarcity” of research that address queer, trans, and nonbinary populations among community colleges. They recommended that future studies “… investigate the differences in curricular and cocurricular LGBTQ offerings and resources at community colleges” (Garvey et al., 2015, p. 539). Therefore, my study built on the limited research focusing on community colleges by conducting my research at CCB.

Finally, no previous studies on the queer, trans, and nonbinary community have utilized VPAR as their methodology in higher education research. This study sought to connect VPAR to queer studies at the community college level, which, to my knowledge, has never been done before. Therefore, this study aimed to fill this gap in the scholarly literature by exploring the perspectives of QTBIPOC within a queer studies program at a community college. The following section investigates queer studies and the need for
more research that centers the experiences of QTBIPOC and does not perpetuate the overwhelming focus on whiteness.

**Background and Need for the Study**

Over the past few decades, queer, trans, and nonbinary rights and representation have drastically changed, including within the field of education. The introduction of queer theory (Goldberg, 1992), queer pedagogy (Bryson & de Castell, 1993), and the lived experiences of queer youth (Telljohann & Price, 1993) in empirical research published in scholarly journals in the 1990s were also accompanied by significant limitations. Many focused exclusively on the experiences of white cisgender individuals who identified as either lesbian or gay. This limited perspective perpetuates the erasure of QTBIPOC and prevails in upholding white supremacy in queer scholarship since whiteness is established as the “norm.”

Higginbotham (2017) asserted that educational researchers have historically centered on the identities and lived experiences of white queer people. As Kumashiro (2001) warned educators and academic researchers:

… in our commitment to change oppression and embrace differences, we often fail to account for the intersections of racism and heterosexism, and of racial and sexual identities. Ironically, our efforts to challenge one form of oppression often unintentionally contribute to other forms of oppression, and our efforts to embrace one form of difference often exclude and silence others. (p. 1)

Even when educators do not explicitly discuss race, race is always at play (Kumashiro, 2002). Whiteness is so normalized in Western society that it becomes the assumed race;
this is also true within educational scholarship and research. Powell (2012) recognized the following:

… in our society the sameness/difference debate is predicated on white supremacy. One who is not the same as the white norm is both different and inferior and therefore can be excluded. On the other hand, if one wants to, one can seek sameness by being like the white norm. (p. 86)

A significant factor contributing to the erasure of the lived experiences of QTBIPOC in education is the abundance of studies that include entirely or mostly white participants. For instance, Wright and Smith (2015) explored queer, trans, and nonbinary educators’ insights concerning their schools’ climates at all grade levels, including higher education. The researchers compared the 2007 National Survey of Educators’ Perceptions of School Climate to the 2011 survey. However, the study was limited because the respondents for both surveys were overwhelmingly white.

In another example, Pryor (2015) investigated the experiences of trans students within college classrooms, as well as the support offered by faculty and peers. All participants were white. The experiences of trans students who are not white remain unknown since there was no racial diversity among the participants. Similarly, Smith (2015) examined how teachers navigate institutional resistance to queer, trans, and nonbinary inclusion. Smith (2015) conducted seven interviews with teachers who supported queer, trans, and nonbinary students. The teachers were all white heterosexual, cisgender women who taught in the central New York region.

In his doctoral dissertation, Sifuentes (2019) asserted, “The current prevailing [educational] models to explain and justify gender and sexual difference often rely on
understandings of selfhood that were developed in colonial, clinical, U.S., white, and middle-class cultural contexts” (p. 7). Beemyn (2015) challenged utilizing dominant narratives (like marriage equality) in gender and sexuality studies in higher education programs. She argued that QTBIPOC continue to be marginalized, even in spaces that are supposedly meant for them. Moreover, Mayo (2015) stated that asexual and intersex communities remain ignored in queer, trans, and nonbinary research and literature in education.

The field of queer studies aims to build on knowledge that challenges the mainstream ideas of normalization while upholding an intersectional lens to critique racism, sexism, classism, nationalism, transphobia, xenophobia, heteronormativity, cisnormativity, capitalism, white supremacy, settler colonialism, and heteropatriarchy (Eng et al., 2005). However, these critical questions must be asked: Do queer studies programs perpetuate the patterns of domination, exploitation, and unequal distributions of power within our community rather than transgress (inherent in the term “queer”) and disrupt them? Do queer studies courses engage mainly in colonial discourse that ignores the socio-historical context of racism, classism, and xenophobia? As Mogul, Ritchie, and Whitlock (2011) conveyed, “The story of colonial enforcement of sodomy and buggery laws tracks the narrative of criminal injustice in the United States — of profound racial and class disparities in policing and punishment from charging to prosecution to conviction to sentencing” (p. 16). If queer studies courses ignore the socio-historical context of the intersections of racism, classism, heterosexism, and cissexism within institutions such as the justice and educational system, the realities and lived experiences
of QTBIPOC will be unconsciously overlooked or consciously ignored. Therefore, this study investigated how white supremacy is upheld in queer studies.

**Purpose Statement**

The primary purpose of this study was to identify and explore how curricula in queer studies reflect and ignore the lived experiences of QTBIPOC by engaging queer studies students as co-researchers in VPAR. By doing so, I aimed to address obstacles that inhibit the success of QTBIPOC in queer studies in a community college setting.

Little to no research exists in queer studies that utilize the methodology of VPAR, which makes this approach unique. By utilizing VPAR, I sought to center QTBIPOC students by positioning them as co-researchers who are agents of change instead of an “at-risk” population.

A secondary purpose of this dissertation was to analyze how a queer studies program both disrupt and affirm white supremacy. I sought to accomplish this by evaluating students' experiences with multiple marginalized identities, specifically QTBIPOC. By examining QTBIPOC experiences, I aimed to explore how queer courses can challenge racism, whiteness, color-blind ideology, and cisnormativity within the curriculum.

Another purpose of this study was to explore the complex range of experiences of students enrolled in queer studies courses. I compared the experiences of QTBIPOC with the experiences of white students through an in-depth examination of CCB. I selected CCB as the site for this study because of its rich queer history. Not only was CCB home to one of the first queer courses ever created, but it was also the first community college in the nation to offer a queer studies program. By centering students’ perspectives, this
study intended to consider their perceptions of the curriculum and program resources along with peer-to-peer and peer-to-faculty relationships in the queer studies program. This study aimed to understand the needs of QTBIPOC who are enrolled in queer courses at CCB to critically evaluate how and if students’ identities are equitably represented.

**Queer Theoretical Framework**

This research utilized the frameworks of Queer of Color Analysis (QOCA) (Ferguson, 2004; McCready, 2013), critical whiteness (Baldwin, 1984; Du Bois, 1903) and anti-oppressive education (Kumashiro, 2001) to examine the experiences of QTBIPOC within queer studies in community college classrooms. QOCA names the multiple ways that oppression intersects to challenge patterns of domination, exploitation, and unequal distributions of power. QOCA examines systems that uphold heterosexism and cissexism, as well as racism, sexism, classism, xenophobia, ableism, economic exploitation, and criminalization (Ferguson, 2004; McCready, 2013). Critical whiteness aims to expose the invisible structures that manufacture and maintain white supremacy and white privilege.

Anti-oppressive education, as developed by Kumashiro (2001), seeks to disrupt the repetition within the educational system that normalizes certain identities while ignoring others. Anti-oppressive education centers intersectionality not only by focusing on the effects of oppression in day-to-day experiences but also by analyzing the systems that uphold Western, Eurocentric, and patriarchal ideologies in education (Kumashiro, 2001). QOCA, critical whiteness, and anti-oppressive education share a concern for transgressive education by upholding social justice, challenging the status quo, centering
the lived experiences of QTBIPOC, disrupting power dynamics and social hierarchies, and building knowledge based on intersectionality.

Queer of Color Analysis (QOCA)

QOCA builds on queer theory and critical race theory (CRT) to further understandings of systemic inequities. Queer theory emerged in the early 1990s (Halperin, 1995) and sought to transgress the status quo. Queer theory challenges the idea of fixed identities by focusing on more fluid identities and disrupts the notion that all people identify as only men and women to create space for trans, nonbinary, and intersex people. Queer theory defies the cultural norm that ascribes specific gender roles to individuals based on the sex that they were assigned at birth. Examining curricula through a queer theoretical framework helps people recognize and address the current inequities in education. Queer theory also allows students to confront heterosexism and cissexism in schools as a means of stepping out of the rigid gender definitions created by a world heavily immersed in heterosexual culture. “It [queer theory] offers an alternative paradigm, a richer possibility of insights into ways to facilitate individual and organizational learning because it questions relations of power, privilege, and identity” (Gedro, 2010, p. 400).

CRT emerged within the field of law as a legal study meant to disrupt racism (Savas, 2014). Derrick Bell (1992), one of the leading scholars of CRT, developed CRT to explore racial subordination and discrimination within the legal system. However, CRT does more than just examine racism as individual acts perpetrated by one person; instead, it pinpoints the numerous ways racism is embedded within the legal, social, and economic structures of the United States. Matsuda (1991) has defined CRT as follows:
[T]he work of progressive legal scholars of color who are attempting to develop a jurisprudence that accounts for the role of racism in American law and that work toward the elimination of racism as part of a larger goal of eliminating all forms of subordination. (p. 1331)

Researchers can use CRT as a tool not only to challenge racist policies, bills, and laws but also to disrupt more covert forms of racism, such as color-blind racism.

Gloria Ladson-Billings and William F. Tate (1995) took the lead in applying CRT in education; both argued that systemic racism limits BIPOC students from accessing quality education. Other central CRT scholars, Solorzano and Yosso (2000, 2002), identified five tenets of CRT in education: 1) the intersectionality of racism among other forms of oppression, 2) the disruption of the dominant ideology, 3) the commitment to social justice, 4) the centralization of the voices and experiences of BIPOC students, and 5) the addressing of the historical context of race and racism. QOCA seeks to bridge queer theory and CRT. QOCA aims to disrupt the power structures that uphold racism, heterosexism, cissexism, sexism, classism, xenophobia, ableism, economic exploitation, and criminalization as a means of dismantling systemic inequities.

Ferguson (2004), who coined the term “QOCA” in *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique*, defined QOCA as an “interrogat[ion] of social formations as the intersections of race, gender, sexuality, and class, with particular interest in how those formations correspond with and diverge from nationalist ideals and practices” (p. 12). QOCA “questions assumptions” that are not only made about queer people but also about BIPOC. QOCA critiques queer theory’s history of centering whiteness and consistently failing to engage with intersectional theory (Eng & Hom, 1998; Hong & Ferguson, 2011).
In addition, CRT has overlooked the experiences of QTBIPOC in education (McCready, 2010; Patton, 2011). Brockenbrough (2015) stated that “… a QOC critique… has centered the lived experiences of queers of color as sources for knowledge production. By doing so, the field deliberately resists QOC invisibility by recognizing QOC lives as worthy of critical scholarly attention” (p. 33). A vital aspect of QOCA is centering the voices and lived experiences of QTBIPOC, who are underrepresented within queer studies and research. Furthermore, QOCA “seeks to unveil the social and historical forces that have produced QOC marginality, as doing so provides a backdrop for exploring strategies of resistance… those resistances are rooted in the specificities of QOC lived experiences” (Brockenbrough, 2015, p. 30).

QOCA offers a unique way to defy, question, and investigate what is considered the “norm” in society (Gedro, 2010, p. 354). QOCA (Ferguson, 2004) also seeks to uncover “the politics of knowledge production; the lived experiences of intersectionality; and the politics of queer visibility” (p. 32). QOCA disrupts the idea that all QTBIPOC are exclusively “outsiders, outlaws, deviants, and sinners” (Jimenez, 2009, p. 173) since this stereotype is based on racism, homophobia, and transphobia. It allows room for QTBIPOC to defy these roles without being framed as “at-risk” or as “victims” (Talburt, 2004, p. 143). Instead, it allows QTBIPOC to act as agents of change to transform the educational system “to successfully negotiate the obstacles to their academic and personal successes” (Brockenbrough, 2015, p. 34).

**Critical Whiteness**

Critical whiteness emerged as a prevalent field of study in the 1990s (Chen, 2017). However, tenets of critical whiteness are not novice concepts. For example, over a
century ago, W. E. B. Du Bois (1903) proclaimed that “Everything considered, the title to the universe claimed by White Folk is faulty” (p. 454). Decades before critical whiteness was coined, W. E. B. Du Bois was questioning white superiority and white privilege. Another prominent scholar critiquing whiteness and white supremacy is James Baldwin. In his seminal article *On Being White...and Other Lies* (1984), Baldwin declared, “The crisis of leadership in the white community is remarkable – and terrifying – because there is, in fact, no white community. This may seem an enormous statement – and it is” (p. 1). Baldwin addressed how at the center of racism is whiteness, which connects to contemporary understandings of critical whiteness by present-day scholars. Casey and Jupp (2021) stated how “recognizing African-American and African-Caribbean scholars is important because these scholars were often ignored” (p. 223). Acknowledging the deep and rich history of critical whiteness is vital to honor the voices often overlooked within academia.

Critical whiteness is complex, layered, and nuanced. Nayak (2007) defined critical whiteness as:

underpinned by the belief that whiteness is a modern invention, it has changed over time and place, whiteness is a social norm. It has become chained to an index of unspoken privileges, and the bonds of whiteness can yet be broken/deconstructed for the betterment of humanity. (p. 738)

Bonnet (1996) named the invisibility of whiteness, identifying that “it appears to be both everywhere and nowhere, simultaneously a pervasive normative presence and an invisible, largely undiscussed absence” (p. 97–98). Critical whiteness aims to expose these invisible structures that manufacture and maintain white supremacy and white
privilege. Chen (2017) emphasized that critical whiteness “does make a substantial contribution to the study of contemporary racism and the process of racialization” (p. 20). Chen (2017) specified how racism is connected to white supremacy.

Tanner surveyed that critical whiteness approaches whiteness and white people’s connection to white supremacy “in more sophisticated, nuanced ways” (p. 1). Critical whiteness interrogates white people’s complicity in upholding and ignoring racism. Phruksachart (2020) warns that obstacles to dismantling white supremacy include how “white people think they are already too woke for its lessons” (p. 40). This dissertation sought to utilize critical whiteness as a framework to disrupt white supremacy and engage in difficult and vital conversations about whiteness, power, and privilege to dismantle white supremacy in queer studies.

**Anti-Oppressive Education**

Anti-oppressive education highlights how repetition perpetuates ideas of who is considered an “authentic American” (Kumashiro, 2002, p. 68). Having a curriculum that only displays heterosexual people normalizes heterosexuality while marginalizing queerness. Readings that showcase mostly white people normalizes whiteness and marginalize BIPOC. An anti-oppressive theoretical framework disrupts this cycle by bringing awareness to these marginalized groups and showing how frequently they are overlooked or ignored. This shift can impact how students interact with other social groups and how they view themselves. Butler (1990) and Kumashiro (2002) define repetition as oppression in society by means of harmfully repeating specific privileged knowledge and practices. Using the framework of repetition, Kumashiro challenges anti-oppressive activists and educators to disrupt some of their unconscious commonsense
discourses that serve as barriers to social change (Kumashiro, 2002). Implementing an anti-oppressive framework can affirm the multiple identities that students bring into the classroom and can help them “embrace various social differences” (Kumashiro, 2002, p. 70).

Simply reflecting on students’ individual experiences does not foster an environment where they can learn new information but only reiterates what students already know. In contrast, an anti-oppressive theoretical framework pushes students to identify the facts and information that challenge and conflict with established knowledge and ideas brought into the classroom. Anti-oppressive education is also used to address instances in which students resist learning information taught in class. In these ways, the anti-oppressive model provides “multiple and fluid ways of learning” while trying to support students’ “identities, experiences, perspectives, and values” (Kumashiro, 2002, p. 70).

McCready et al. (2013) reported three teaching practices based on Kumashiro’s (2000) research: education for the other, education about the other, and education critical to privileging and othering. Pulling from the work of Kumashiro and McCready (2006), the authors proposed another pedagogical practice: queer and anti-oppressive education that further disrupts multiple forms of oppression.

The experiences of QTBIPOC point to a need for approaches to curricula and pedagogy that explicitly address multiple forms of oppression and their intersections, such as anti-oppressive education (Kumashiro, 2000, 2002, 2004). “Education that is queer and anti-oppressive encourages practitioners to enter into repetitive practices and disrupt them from within... examining resistance to difference rather than merely
addressing difference” (Kumashiro, 2000, p. 199). By utilizing queer and anti-oppressive education, educators have the potential to challenge racism within white queer, trans, and nonbinary communities and disrupt heteronormativity and cisnormativity within communities of color.

The frameworks of QOCA (Ferguson, 2004; McCready, 2013), critical whiteness (Baldwin, 1984; Du Bois, 1903) and anti-oppressive education (Kumashiro, 2001) are applicable to this study because they provide a lens that centers the voices and experiences of QTBIPOC, which have historically been overlooked or outright ignored in academia.

**Research Questions**

After thoughtful conversations among the co-researchers, the following research questions were explored in our study:

1. How do students describe their experiences in queer courses at CCB?
2. What are the similarities and differences between students’ experiences based on different aspects of their identities? These aspects include the following:
   a. Racial identity.
   b. Sexual identity.
   c. Gender identity.
   d. Age.
3. How does the queer studies curriculum at CCB respond to the diversity of students’ identities?
   a. How do queer courses address intersectionality?
   b. What obstacles do QTBIPOC face within the queer studies program?
Limitations

VPAR engaged the students in my class, Queer Culture, Society, and Resistance, as co-researchers in my study. The fact that I am white, the instructor, and a co-researcher in this study is a limitation due to my position of power and privilege. I acknowledged these ethical dilemmas and discussed them fully in Chapter 3 under Ethical Considerations as well as the Researcher’s Profile.

Educational Significance

This study is significant because it was designed to highlight to queer educators, especially fellow white educators within queer studies, the value of staying true to the meaning of “queer” in queer studies. This study aimed to challenge the co-opted definitions of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) studies, which have been saturated in whiteness, color-blind ideology, and the gender binary, as a means of transgressing boxes, dismantling boundaries, and destroying binaries. This study sought to center the lived experiences of QTBIPOC by utilizing an intersectional, QOCA, critical whiteness, and anti-oppressive framework to de-center whiteness.

This study also aimed to build upon current pedagogical praxis within queer studies at CCB to reflect upon the program’s strengths and areas for improvement to best meet the needs of QTBIPOC. I hope to inspire educators not only in queer studies but also in all disciplines to constantly challenge the social “norms” that are perpetuated among curricula and to promote a queer anti-oppressive education (Kumashiro, 2000).

This dissertation was deeply an act of love. I worked with and for the queer studies community. This study was fully endorsed by the chair of queer studies and my fellow faculty members who work as full- and part-time instructors at CCB. The study
sought to stop the Administration and Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC) from cutting further funding and, ultimately, to prevent the closure of the queer studies program. This study aimed to accomplish this by recognizing the importance of queer studies at CCB to our queer studies students.

**Definition of Terms**

The terms used in this research are explained in the following definitions:

**Centering:** means repeated focus on a particular topic, emphasizing the significance and relevance of that topic.

**Nonbinary:** According to Mayo (2015), “nonbinary” means existing or identifying outside the sex/gender binary, being neither a man nor a woman, nor being only partially or a combination of these things. Although many nonbinary people also identify as transgender, not all do. Nonbinary people use any gender pronouns they want, but not all nonbinary people use they/them pronouns.

**Queer:** In the early 1990s, the term “queer” was first reclaimed as an umbrella term for all non-heterosexual and non-cisgender individuals. “Queer” has a long history of being used as a homophobic, biphobic, and transphobic epithet. This is because one of the definitions of “queer” is “that which is peculiar, strange, odd, or not normal” (Chauncey, 1994).

Queer is not just an identity. Queer is a call to action. Queer challenges all kinds of fixed binary interpretations of literature and knowledge, including the concepts of being gay or straight, male or female, Black or white, rich or poor, closeted or uncloseted, democratic or republican, and right or wrong (Halperin, 1995). Binaries exist everywhere in our society, even though many of us exist beyond binaries. The binary perspective
erases people who are trans, nonbinary, queer, intersex, asexual, bisexual, pansexual, demisexual, Latinx, Asian American Pacific Islanders (AAPI), biracial, and more. 

Queer, Trans, Black, Indigenous, People of Color (QTBIPOC): This acronym is built from the contemporary language of Queer, Trans, People of Color (QTPOC), which has been utilized in some queer studies research (McCready, 2004a, 2004b). Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) have used this term in current studies based on race theory (Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2019). I use this term because I want to be more inclusive and racially specific throughout my research. My research will not lump all People of Color (POC) into one category; instead, this study will identify the participants’ different perspectives based on their specific racial identities.

Repetition: is oppression in society by means of harmfully repeating specific privileged knowledge and practices (Butler, 1990 & Kumashiro, 2002).

Whiteness, also known as white-centering: is the “construction of the white race, white culture, and the systems of privileges and advantages afforded to white people in the United States, and across the globe, through government policies, media portrayal, decision-making power within our corporations, schools, and judicial system” (Guess, 2006, p.114).

White privilege: is a legislative, systemic, and cultural norms that supports unearned advantages that are granted to individuals because of one’s whiteness or ability to “pass” as white (Saad, 2020).

White supremacy: “is a racist ideology that is based upon the belief that white people are superior in many ways to people of other races and that therefore, white people should be dominant over other races” (Saad, 2020, p. 12).
CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

The purpose of this study was to engage Queer, Trans, Black, Indigenous, People of Color (QTBIPOC) as co-researchers in virtual participatory action research (VPAR) to identify and explore factors that contribute to obstacles that are faced by QTBIPOC within the queer studies program at Community College of the Bay (CCB). To address current research that centers QTBIPOC, the following literature review is divided into seven major sections: 1) “A History of Lesbian and Gay Studies,” 2) “A History of Queer Studies,” 3) “Queer Studies Today,” 4) “Queer and Trans Educational Research,” 5) “Queer and Trans Educational Policy and Law,” 6) “De-Normalizing Whiteness and Centering QTBIPOC Within Curricula and Pedagogy,” and 7) “Virtual Participatory Action Research (VPAR).”

A History of Lesbian and Gay Studies

The field of LGBT and queer studies is relatively new. The term “queer” was first reclaimed as an umbrella term for all non-heterosexual and non-cisgender individuals in the 1990s. The word “queer” has a long history of being used as a homophobic, biphobic, and transphobic epithet. One of the definitions of “queer” is peculiar, strange, odd, or not normal, and this negative meaning was first used around 1513 BCE. Researchers discovered that the term “queer” predates “gay” as an identity marker (Chauncey, 1994). By 1910, men in New York who were non-heterosexual identified themselves as “queer.” The term “gay” did not come into widespread use until the 1930s. In 1990, “queer” was reclaimed by academics and activists as an identity that unites everyone who are not heterosexual and cisgender (Halperin, 1995).
One of the first documented uses of “queer” as a reclaimed identity was made by Queer Nation, founded in March of 1990 (Eng et al., 2005). “That English-language slur [queer], turned defiantly against a social and discursive system abetting violence toward sexual nonconformists, reflects a culturally and historically specific dynamic of abuse and response in the US and UK” (Hall & Jagose, 2013, p. xviii). In the early 1990s, queer theory emerged, and the institution of lesbian and gay studies began to be transformed by queer activism and theory. During this time, the formation of queer studies had not yet emerged.

On April 19, 1993, Abelove, Barale, and Halperin published The Routledge Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader. This collection was the first of its kind in the emergent lesbian and gay studies field, which eventually developed into queer studies. This text includes 42 essays and totals 666 pages. These writings corroborated the development of a new scholarly field. This reader lay claim to the broader existence of lesbian and gay studies, which included theories around gender and performativity, which was a groundbreaking concept within the field in the 1990s. The reader consists of, arguably, Judith Butler’s most influential piece within queer studies: Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory, initially published in December 1988. This essay introduced the concept of gender as socially constructed rather than biologically determined. Butler described gender as a performance of masculinity and femininity and introduced language like “non-normativity” into queer discourse.

The Routledge reader set the foundation for the work of many queer, trans, and nonbinary scholars. In the brief introduction of the text, Abelove et al. (1993) postulated
that “lesbian/gay studies does for sex and sexuality approximately what women’s studies does for gender” (p. xv). As lesbian and gay studies began to grow, Butler (1993) attested to the importance of not putting sex, sexuality, and gender into silos and of not separating feminist studies from lesbian and gay studies. Butler critiqued The Routledge Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader a year after its publication and protested its critical indifference to gender (Butler, 1993). Butler warned that dominant social reproductions of gender would be perpetuated and normalized instead of interrogated within lesbian and gay studies if this indifference persisted. Butler also proposed that the new field of lesbian and gay studies build on the feminist tradition of radical sexual theorizing to disrupt the regulation of sexuality and gender.

Twenty years later, in 2013, Hall and Jagose published the updated version of the reader, which is now titled The Routledge Queer Studies Reader. Scholars continue to debate when queer studies started as its own field of study. Although researchers do not agree on the definition of queer studies, they generally agree that queer studies is more radical than lesbian and gay studies.

A History of Queer Studies

Eng et al. (2005) and Hall and Jagose (2013) have documented multiple definitions of the intent of queer studies. The field of queer studies aims to build on the knowledge that challenges mainstream ideas of normalization while using intersectionality to critique racism, sexism, classism, nationalism, transphobia, xenophobia, heteronormativity, cisnormativity, capitalism, white supremacy, settler colonialism, and heteropatriarchy (Eng et al., 2005). According to Hall and Jagose (2013), queer studies refuses to:
define its proper field of operation in relation to any fixed content... while predominately organized around sexuality, it is potentially attentive to any socially consequential difference that contributes to regimes of sexual normalization. Rather than separating sexuality from other axes of social difference — race, ethnicity, class, gender, nationality and so on — queer studies has increasingly attended to the ways in which various categories of difference inflect and transform each other. (p. xvi)

Queer studies is dedicated to exploring non-normativity, challenging settler colonialism by recognizing that we are on stolen land, and disrupting the oppression of overlapping identities.

Queer studies challenges all kinds of fixed binary interpretations of scholarly literature and knowledge, including the binary concepts of being gay or straight, male or female, Black or white, rich or poor, closeted or uncloseted, democratic or republican, and right or wrong (Halperin, 1995). Binaries exist everywhere in our society, even though many of us exist beyond binaries. This perspective erases people who are trans, nonbinary, queer, intersex, asexual, bisexual, pansexual, demisexual, Latinx, Asian American and Pacific Islanders (AAPI), and biracial. Hall and Jagose (2013) stated that queer studies establish “a broad and unmethodical critique of normative models of sex, gender and sexuality” (p. xvi). Queer studies is a political statement and a call to action.

The development of queer theory and queer studies can be attributed to feminist, queer Women of Color who revolutionized how academics write about identities. In the 1970s and 1980s, pivotal literature by the Combahee River Collective (1977), Audre Lorde (1984), Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa (1981) proclaimed the knowledge
and experiences of queer Women of Color. In April 1977, the Combahee River Collective, a group of Black radical socialist lesbian feminists, published a statement addressing “interlocking oppressions” (p. 1) that are based on race, sex, and class that works together “simultaneously” (p. 4). The statement argues for the significance of dismantling capitalism, which upholds these oppressions systemically (Combahee River Collective, 1977).

Twelve years later, this work laid the foundation for the currently popularized theory of intersectionality, a term coined by law professor Kimberle Williams Crenshaw in 1989. Crenshaw (1989) wrote about the intersections of racial identity and gender identity, which affirmed the unique and multidirectional experiences of Black women who had endured racism and sexism simultaneously. Crenshaw’s (1989) work asserted that it is not only essential to look at individual experiences but also to identify systemic levels of oppression that marginalize some while privileging others. In a 2017 interview with one of the original authors of the Combahee River Collective, Demita Frazier (2017) stated the following:

I have to talk about the young woman — Kimberle Crenshaw… who says that she coined the term *intersectionality*. I always laugh when I read that because I remember the day we were sitting at the women’s center in Cambridge, drafting our probably third or fourth draft of the statement, I said, ‘You know, we stand at the intersection where our identities are indivisible.’ There is no separation.

(Frazier, as cited in Taylor, 2017, p. 123)

Queer studies would not be where it is today without the work of queer Women of Color, yet, these voices do not receive the recognition and accolades they deserve. Many people
who write and discuss issues about intersectionality today do not even know that queer
Women of Color were writing about these experiences’ years before.

Starting in the late 1990s and early 2000s, the number of academic articles, 
studies, and works of literature that centered on the experiences of QTBIPOC surged. For example, in 1998, Eng and Hom edited the book *Q&A: Queer in Asian America*, which included the work of artists, activists, and writers who affirmed the experiences of being both Asian and queer at the turn of the century. This book was the first of its kind since it focused specifically on the perspectives of queer Asian Americans.

Other examples of scholarly literature that contributed to queer studies during this
time period exemplify some of the contention that arose while establishing this field of study. Ferguson (2004) developed the QOCA to challenge Eurocentric queer theory and highlight a more intersectional approach to queer studies. The QOCA focuses on the unique experiences of people who are subjected to inequities based on their racial identities and sexual orientations. Ross (2005) contested the idea of “coming out of the closet” as the grounding principle for sexual knowledge in queer theory. He argued that this is an extremely limited way of thinking about sexual identity since it does not engage in race theory. Allen (2009) conducted an auto-ethnographic study based on the experiences of QTBIPOC in underground Black queer dance clubs. One of the purposes of Allen’s research was to re-think the framing of queer studies by de-centering whiteness and advocating for more inclusive Black queer studies.

Hames-Garcia (2011) opposed the assumed whiteness in queer theory and stated how most work in queer theory maintains a “dependence on an unacknowledged white racial identity” (p. 21). He also advocated for a counter-narrative that acknowledges
“colonial difference.” In his essay, Hames-Garcia identified that most of queer theory is based on the perspectives of European colonizers. This limited narrative has been critiqued not only in queer theory but also in the larger framework of queer studies, along with educational research and policy.

**Queer Studies Today**

Nationally, the number of minors, majors, and certificates in queer studies within post-secondary universities has been established. Among four-year universities in the United States, only ten offer majors in queer studies or LGBT studies; 52 colleges offer minors. In comparison, over 600 women’s and gender studies programs exist nationwide (Younger, 2020). Nationally, only two community colleges, including CCB, offer an Associate of Arts degree (AA) in queer studies. Additionally, CCB provides a range of resources: queer academic counselors, the Queer Resource Center, the Gender Diversity Project, a queer studies office for faculty, a student-run Queer Alliance, and The Out List (a resource that lists all the out queer, trans, and nonbinary administrators, faculty, staff, and classified workers). These resources were not granted easily; they resulted from decades of struggle. However, many college settings do not have as many resources for queer, trans, and nonbinary students.

In many educational institutions, queer, trans, and nonbinary inclusion continues to be ignored in daily practice and scholarly literature. Little research addresses the experiences of nonbinary students at community colleges and four-year universities. For example, Beemyn’s (2015) study is one of the few existing examples. Beemyn interviewed over 200 college students who identified outside of the gender and sexual binaries. This study highlighted students’ narratives whose nonbinary identities were
invisible within curricula, housing, bathrooms, queer, trans, and nonbinary college spaces, and educational resources.

Additionally, Beemyn (2015) found that nonbinary students felt the least amount of support from faculty members. The students who participated in the study shared that faculty would assume their pronouns and use their dead names, even within gender and sexuality studies programs. When faculty do not create space for students to provide their names and pronouns, trans and nonbinary students within and without the gender binary risk beingouted. “Gender and Sexuality Studies should be the leader in recognizing and respecting students of all genders and sexualities. Simply being better than other departments is not good enough” (Beemyn, 2015, p. 361). More research is needed to address how students who identify outside of the gender and sexual binaries are represented within gender and sexuality studies.

Beemyn (2015) challenged curricula that solely focus on dominant narratives (for example, marriage equality, “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell,” and anti-discrimination laws) in gender and sexualities studies in higher education by asserting that these histories ignore the experiences of those within the queer community who live outside the gender and sexuality binaries. These communities continue to be marginalized and ignored even in spaces that are supposedly meant for them. For example, Mayo (2015) stated that the asexual and intersex communities remain ignored in queer, trans, and nonbinary spaces, especially within education.

**Queer and Trans Educational Research**

The history of queer, trans, and nonbinary research education and policy, although young, is rich and complex (Meyer, 2015). Before the early 1990s, specifically 1993,
educational journals published little empirical research and peer-reviewed scholarship that focused on the queer, trans, and nonbinary community. In 1993, the Governor’s Commission on Gay and Lesbian Youth in Massachusetts conducted the first report on lesbian and gay youth in education based on youth voices amplified through public hearings. In 1993, the American Association of University Women published the first national study to include questions that documented homophobic verbal harassment (Louis Harris & Associates, 1993). In the same year, Bryson and de Castell (1993) and Telljohann and Price (1993) completed a qualitative study on the lived experiences of queer youth and introduced queer pedagogy. “These publications provided research evidence that would start a wave of policy changes to provide support for LGBT youth in schools” (Meyer, 2015, p. 348).

The Gay, Lesbian, Straight Education Network (GLSEN) conducted its first National School Climate Survey in 1999 to assess the safety of queer, trans, and nonbinary youth in middle and high schools (Kosciw & Cullen, 2002). The purpose of the study was to survey queer, trans, and nonbinary students’ experiences with harassment based on their sexual and gender identities. GLSEN’s study did not include the experiences of QTBIPOC until ten years later (2009). The National School Climate Survey in 2009 found that 80% of QTBIPOC reported hearing anti-gay slurs in U.S. schools, while about 20% said that school personnel intervened when hearing the slurs. In the same study, 80% of QTBIPOC reported being verbally harassed in the last year because of their sexual orientations. Thirty-two percent of queer and trans-Latinx youth said they did not have an adult they could talk to about personal problems (GLSEN, 2009). The percentage of QTBIPOC who took part in GLSEN’s 2009 study and who
suffered physical violence in school because of their orientation includes 54% of Native Americans, 45% of Latinx and multiracial students, 41% of AAPI, and 33% of Black students. This is a real threat for queer, trans, and nonbinary youth and adults.

The Trevor Project is a not-for-profit organization created to combat the high-rate suicide within the queer, trans, and nonbinary community. Students struggling with suicide are unable to concentrate at school, and as a result, their grades plummet. Consequently, queer, trans, and nonbinary youth who experienced discrimination related to their sexual and gender identity were twice as likely to attempt suicide (Trevor Project, 2021). If a school climate is heterosexist and cissexist that could directly link to students’ struggling with suicide. Moreover, slightly higher than 50% of queer, trans, and nonbinary people have endured adverse reactions after coming out to given families (Trevor Project, 2021). This can range from verbal disapproval to violence to being disowned. A survey of over 35,000 queer, trans, and nonbinary youth found that 21% of young, Black, queer, trans, and nonbinary people have attempted suicide in the last year and 42% of all racial identities seriously considered suicide within the previous year. Unfortunately, suicidal ideations for queer youth are four times higher than for cisgender heterosexuals (Trevor Project, 2021). This is all too common in queer, trans, and nonbinary communities.

**Queer and Trans Educational Policy and Law**

In the early 2000s, the surge of queer academic articles, research, literature, and policy changes continued. Human Rights Watch concluded a report in 2001 (Bochenek & Brown, 2001), which included interviews with queer and trans individuals from around the world. This study was pivotal because it was one of the first reports that adopted an
international lens to examine queer and trans experiences. During this time, growth in theoretical publications and mainstream media that focused on lesbian and gay issues occurred. In the case *Nabozny v. Podlesny* (1996), Jamie Nabozny sued his Wisconsin school district and won a $900,000 settlement after enduring extremely homophobic verbal and physical abuse in his public middle school. The same year, Ellen DeGeneres came out as a lesbian not only in her show but also personally on the cover of *Life* magazine, an act that destroyed her career for years.

Moreover, homophobic harassment was found to be a form of sexual harassment under Title IX in the case *Wagner v. Fayetteville* (Lambda Legal, 1998). In 1998, the brutal murder of Matthew Shepard, a gay student attending the University of Wyoming, made national headlines (Shepard, 2010). Meyer (2015) mentioned that “... most policy changes have come about as a result of lawsuits or individual tragedies, rather than as responses to research” (p. 349). Even though numerous studies were published highlighting the verbal, physical, and emotional violence endured by queer and trans students, especially QTBIPOC, most policy changes occurred in reaction to the political climate of the time and outside educational research.

Although research that began in the 1990s provided precise data highlighting the extreme violence and abuse endured by queer and trans people, including within the educational system, most policy changes were in reaction to the overall cultural climate in the United States. In many cases, it took mainstream publicity based on the barbaric murders of queer and trans people for systemic change to occur; some individuals whose murder cases motivated such change include 19-year-old Steen Fenrich, who identified as Black and gay in 1999, 17-year-old Gwen Araujo in 2002, who identified as a Latina.
trans woman, 15-year-old Sakia Gunn in 2003, who identified as Black and lesbian, and 15-year-old Lawrence “Larry” King in 2008, who was Latinx and feminine presenting. In this brutal murder, Larry was shot in his class by a classmate. As queer, trans, and nonbinary educational research and policy continue to grow, building policies based on research to prevent assaults against the queer, trans, and nonbinary community is vital and should supersede taking a reactionary approach based on homophobic, biphobic, and transphobic harassment and violence.

Some of the policies and laws that have been passed in response to a violent climate that seeks to harm queer and trans people include the Fair, Accurate, Inclusive and Respectful (FAIR) Education Act and the expansion of Title IX, which is a federal law that bans sexual discrimination in education; these policies and laws seek to protect transgender students (Romesburg, Rupp, & Donahue, 2014). The FAIR Education Act, which was enacted on January 1, 2012, mandates that the queer and trans community be included within curricula for history and social sciences in grades one through twelve. However, the bill does not require queer and trans inclusion throughout every grade; instead, it allows school districts to choose the grades in which queer and trans themes may be implemented. Furthermore, this bill does not require that California state standards be changed because themes related to queer, trans, and nonbinary people could be naturally integrated into existing standards. Also, the FAIR Education Act requires the accurate inclusion of queer and trans people and topics in textbooks and curricula materials. This bill does not offer students or parents the option to skip classes that deal with queer and trans themes. The curricula are mandatory for all students (Romesburg, Rupp, & Donahue, 2014).
In May 2016, the Obama administration issued a guidance document that confirmed that transgender students are protected under Title IX. These protections, which apply to students who attend public K-12 schools and colleges and universities that receive federal funding, including respecting trans students’ gender identities by using the students’ preferred names and pronouns and guaranteeing access to educational opportunities, sports teams, and sex-segregated bathrooms and other facilities that correspond with students’ gender identities (Berman & Balingit, 2016).

In a statement accompanying the guidelines in 2016, Attorney General Loretta Lynch said, “This guidance gives administrators, teachers, and parents the tools they need to protect transgender students from peer harassment and to identify and address unjust school policies” (Berman & Balingit, 2016, p. 1). In response, 11 states filed a federal lawsuit because they claimed that the guidelines could cause “seismic changes in the operations of the nation’s school districts” and that the administration sought to rewrite Title IX. The law permits waivers for educational institutions that are “controlled by a religious organization” so that the religious institutions do not have to comply with Title IX if doing so “would not be consistent with the religious tenets of such [an] organization” (Berman & Balingit, 2016, p. 4).

Currently, many states have laws that stigmatize queer and trans people in their curricula. Laws that stigmatize queer and trans people in curricula, also known as “no promo homo” laws, are on the books in seven states: Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Texas, and Florida. These local or state statutes expressly forbid teachers from discussing queer and trans issues, including sexual health and HIV/AIDS awareness, in a positive light, if at all (GLSEN, 2019).
Twelve states require the discussion of sexual orientation in sex education. Three require the teaching of inaccurate and harmful information. In Alabama, for example, sex educators must teach that “homosexuality is not a lifestyle acceptable to the general public” and that “homosexual conduct is a criminal offense under the laws of the state,” even though the Supreme Court invalidated Alabama’s sodomy law in its 2003 *Lawrence v. Texas* ruling (Slater, 2013, p. 5). The lack of queer, trans, and nonbinary inclusion in education mirrors the time's political climate. Protective and inclusive policies and laws are vital in creating environments where queer, trans, and nonbinary students feel supported both in and outside the classroom.

**De-Normalizing Whiteness and Centering QTBIPOC within Curricula and Pedagogy**

How has white dominance affected historical and contemporary QTBIPOC identities, communities, and movements within education? Mayo (2015) articulated that “LGBTQ communities are often structured by white dominance and are unwilling to see how whiteness structures ideas about who is legitimately LGBTQ or who can easily access LGBTQ community resources and social spaces” (p. 27). Talburt (2004) provided an example of this by stating that the coming out process has focused on white queer, trans, and nonbinary people. He also asserted that this does not relate to QTBIPOC since families regard being gay as a white issue. Dilley (2010) stated that individuals who identify as “lads without labels” and “twitter twinks” have rejected mainstream queer, trans, and nonbinary identities for many reasons, including how dominant narratives are centered in whiteness. Additionally, de Vries (2015) provided a way to disrupt whiteness through the “multifaceted prism”: 
This multifaceted prism aims to complicate each plane of analysis, highlight normative positions (e.g., ability or whiteness) rather than universalize the experience of those who are attributed or occupy these positions, and emphasize the interconnection of social positions to broader institutions and structures. (p. 12)

Jennings (2015) affirmed the importance of including curricula that challenge mainstream queer, trans, and nonbinary rights and movements. Pedagogy that focuses on intersectionality creates opportunities to dissect how multiple forms of oppression (including racism, sexism, classism, xenophobia, heterosexism, cissexism, ableism, economic exploitation, and criminalization) overlap to accurately address differences within the queer, trans, and nonbinary community. To address the importance of centering QTBIPOC, Pennell (2016) provided an example of the Undocuqueer Movement, which Julio Salgado named. Pennell wrote, “… this one word [Undocuqueer] illustrates the complex idea that their sexual orientations and gender identities are combined with their immigration status and can never be separated” (p. 331). Curricula that address the Undocuqueer Movement disrupt assumptions that queer, trans, and nonbinary issues are inherently white and do not include matters like immigration. It is vital to center QTBIPOC in curricula to address intersectionality. Queer, trans, and nonbinary pedagogies like the Undocuqueer movement that critically examine multiple oppressions create opportunities to uncover how institutional inequities based on white supremacy are upheld.

McCready (2004a) asserted, “… the need to de-normalize the perceived whiteness of queer youth identity” within pedagogy (p. 48). His study addresses two significant
challenges that queer youth programs in urban schools endure: racial segregation and the de-normalization of whiteness (McCready, 2004a, p. 38). McCready analyzed in-depth interviews with two openly gay Black students involved in Project 10, California High School’s (CHS) queer, trans, and nonbinary social and support group. The data are drawn from a high school collaborative action research project from 1996 to 2000. The study found that the racial segregation at CHS and faculty advisors’ limited awareness of the needs of QTBIPOC greatly affected the involvement of QTBIPOC in Project 10. This study contributes to a better understanding of how to serve QTBIPOC within education. McCready advised faculty to diversify their curricula by incorporating the experiences of QTBIPOC and to build coalitions with other students, faculty, and staff who were aware of how multiple forms of oppression create unsafe environments within urban schools.

Curricula that acknowledge power, privilege, and oppression can provide spaces for coalition building. As Pennell (2016) acknowledged:

Seeing cultural differences as assets and funds of knowledge changes the prevailing dialogue from reactive to proactive, and allows for connections among activist groups. These assets must also be viewed in an intersectional, pluralistic framework that sees queer identity as inextricably linked to other social markers, such as race and ethnicity. (p. 332)

Centering QTBIPOC can help foster coalition building inside and outside the classroom. As McCready (2004a) wrote:

Those who organize and/or facilitate queer youth programs can challenge the normalization of whiteness by making a conscious effort to use speaker bureaus and workshop facilitators that are racially diverse, decorating the meeting room
with queer historical figures from multiple racial and ethnic backgrounds, and having books, magazines, and other reading materials on hand that reflect a range of racial and ethnic experiences about queer identity. (p. 48)

By focusing on QTBIPOC in curricula instead of only addressing mainstream queer, trans, and nonbinary topics (i.e., marriage equality, “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell,” same-sex adoption, and Caitlin Jenner), de-centralizing whiteness becomes possible. Therefore, queer, trans, and nonbinary pedagogies, curricula, and teacher preparation programs need to integrate QTBIPOC, disrupt white supremacy, and challenge assimilationist narratives within education.

Jennings (2015) pulled from his experiences as a researcher and educator to explore the implications of educator preparation programs that utilize assimilationist narratives to epitomize queer, trans, and nonbinary people:

Assimilationist strategies may secure some privileges for some LGBTQ people but fail to confront broader issues relevant to, for example, LGBTQ people of color or of low socioeconomic status. These issues include racism, patriarchy, capitalism, militarism, and other structures that reinforce racial, ethnic, sex, and class marginalization of and within the LGBTQ community. (p. 453)

Furthermore, Jennings (2015) highlighted the importance of teaching transgressive representations of the queer, trans, and nonbinary community. Jennings spoke about how transgressive queer, trans, and nonbinary representation does not reinforce social hierarchies as assimilationist strategies; instead, teacher preparation programs need to “broaden the scope of who is accepted and affirmed” (p. 453). Transgressive curricula need to include works that challenge the privileging of gay white upper- and middle-
class, able-bodied, cisgender men. Curricula should address how racism, sexism, classism, ableism, nationalism, xenophobia, and fatphobia are perpetuated within the queer, trans, and nonbinary community. “When race and class are highlighted as part of LGBTQ lives, it acknowledges that the fight against racism and class inequality are simultaneously struggles for LGBTQ rights as well” (Jennings, 2015, p. 453).

Examples of assimilationist pedagogy include hate crime legislation, the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), marriage equality, adoption, “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” (DADT), trans inclusion within the military, access to gender-affirmation surgeries, and the Employment Non-Discriminatory Act (ENDA), which mainly benefit the most privileged within the queer and trans community. In the book *Normal Life: Administrative Violence, Critical Trans Politics, and the Limits of Law*, scholar Dean Spade (2011) stated that these laws center a Western Eurocentric patriarchal administration that perpetuates Western colonialism and neoliberalism:

The compromises made in lesbian and gay rights efforts to win formal legal equality gains have come with enormous costs: opportunities for coalition have been missed, large sectors of people affected by homophobia have been alienated, and the actual impact of the ‘victories’ has been so limited as to neutralize their effect on the populations most vulnerable to the worst harms of homophobia. (p. 15)

Similarly, as previously quoted in Chapter 1, Sifuentes (2019), in his doctoral dissertation, named that, “The current prevailing models to explain and justify gender and sexual difference often rely on understandings of selfhood that were developed in colonial, clinical, U.S., white, and middle-class cultural contexts” (p. 16).
By de-centering whiteness and focusing on the experiences of QTBIPOC, it is essential to address how white supremacy, including color-blind racism, manifests. As Bonilla-Silva (2003) named:

… color-blindness has, at least for the past several decades, dominated national thinking and discussion about race in the United States. The basic premise of color-blind ideology is that the problems of racism and segregation made so vivid during the Civil Rights Movement have been solved; all that is left is individual motivation and overcoming cultural barriers to achieve the American Dream. (p. 58)

The overrepresentation of BIPOC in the United States prison system, the underrepresentation of BIPOC in high-paying jobs and higher education, racial segregation in school districts and neighborhoods perpetuated through white flight, and loan availability are not seen as acts of racism through color-blind racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Burke, 2012). Through color-blind racism, white people can view these systemic racial disparities and associate them with the stereotypes that allow them to believe that BIPOC do not work hard, do not want success badly enough, or are lazy (Bonilla-Silva, 2003). These stereotypes reinforce the narrative that anyone in the United States can get a high-paying job, buy a home, and support their loved ones financially if they put their mind to it and work hard enough. This avoids critically looking at the barriers that do not afford BIPOC the same opportunities to achieve the American Dream as white people.

Color-blind racism also focuses on class instead of race (Burke, 2012). This shifted focus perpetuates the idea that BIPOC are more disenfranchised than white people because of their class, not their race. However, as Bonilla-Silva (2003) identified, “…
people of color still experience systemic discrimination and remain appreciably behind whites in many important areas of life, so their chances of catching up with whites are very slim” (p. 26).

Color-blind racism perpetuates the stigma that one should not look at the color of a person’s skin but at who they are inside. This presents a framework in which race has not disappeared; however, this framework normalizes white people ignoring issues of race (Burke, 2012). Racism is deeply embedded within American culture that no individual can “escape its influence” (Burke, 2012, p. 65). DiAngelo (2011) affirmed that “all are responsible for either perpetuating or transforming” (p. 66) systemic inequities. Therefore, it is the responsibility of all white people to recognize, understand, and actively work against the perpetuation of white privilege. Burke (2012) stated, “… we are all (hopefully) recovering racists because we all live in a society that accumulates privileges and disadvantages around race” (p. 70).

When the effects of oppression are not seen on a day-to-day basis, privilege, which takes many forms, can be unconscious (Calderon, 2012). For example, even if a person is a white, able-bodied gay man, his endurance of heterosexism is not a free pass to erase all his other privileges, including the uncountable advantages he has that stem from racial privilege (Powell, 2012). Privilege can blind people and communities, so they do not even realize the oppression they are projecting. As Pease (2010) asserted, “When people are unable to recognize their privilege because they are so focused on their oppression, they are unable to see their role in keeping others subordinated” (p. 11).

Being queer means transgressing, pushing back, and disrupting what has been deemed “normal” within our society. To honor queerness as a call to action means
centering those who have been marginalized within our community. Therefore, to be truly queer, queer studies must be QOCA-centered, decolonial, feminist, sex and body-positive, and anti-ableist. If the field of queer studies does not center QTBIPOC, then it is not transgressing social roles and expectations that normalize whiteness and uphold white supremacy. Suppose queer studies does not address decolonial theories and perspectives. In that case, it does not transgress the fact that the United States is founded on stolen land, which normalizes settler colonialism and upholds white supremacy. If queer studies does not include feminism, then it perpetuates heteropatriarchy, which normalizes sexism and heterosexism and upholds white supremacy. If queer studies does not incorporate the experiences of people who are abled differently and neurodivergent, then it normalizes ableism, which also upholds white supremacy. DJ Kuttin Kandi asked the following question concerning this issue:

How can we be antiracist, anti-sexist, anti-classist, anti-ableist, anti-homophobic, anti-transphobic, anti-heterosexist, anti-religious oppressive, anti-imperialist, anti-colonial, and anti-etc. activists committed to dismantling white supremacy, patriarchy, heterosexism, cisprilege, and all other oppressions within ourselves and within our movements? (as cited in Calderon, 2012, p. 163)

Kuttin Kandi’s question also applies to the educational system. The journey needs to start from within to realize and understand all aspects of privilege.

**Virtual Participatory Action Research (VPAR)**

Since the 1940s, participatory action research (PAR) is an approach to inquiry comprised of researchers and participants working together to understand a social inequity within their community and change it for the better (Stapleton, 2021). PAR
seeks to de-center Eurocentric frameworks and center the marginalized voices directly affected by the social inequities being researched while emphasizing their lived experiences as sources of academic knowledge (Cammock, Conn, & Nayar, 2021). This study builds on these definitions of PAR and adapts them to virtual settings due to COVID-19. Safari (2021) defines VPAR as engaging the PAR framework in a virtual environment if there is “effective communication, adaptability to change, and strong connection between researcher, facilitator, and the participants” (p. 99).

Safari (2021) reflected that to practice VPAR, it is essential to constantly be “open to adapt to new changes in the agenda by pivoting to a virtual format due to the current global pandemic” and that VPAR “is philosophically commensurate with the emancipatory nature of PAR” (p. 100). As Creswell and Baez (2021) explain, PAR is a methodology that is emancipatory due to the fact it “unshackles[s] people from the constraints of irrational and unjust structures that limit self-development and self-determination” (2021, p. 10).

Scholars Cammock, Conn, and Nayar (2021), Creswell and Baez (2021), and Stapleton (2021), explained their definitions and explanations of the methodology as PAR, and I have added the lens of VPAR. Adding the “V” to PAR was necessary due to the global pandemic, COVID-19. All courses at CCB were pushed online, and in March of 2020, classes began meeting via Zoom. It is essential to note that the original works describe PAR, and I added the word “virtual” for the application of this study. Utilizing VPAR provides an opportunity for students to not only be participants but also co-researchers in my study. VPAR gives students more of a voice compared to more traditional forms of methodology.
Furthermore, VPAR requires action, a form of resistance, and a chance to be seen and fight back. VPAR identifies a problem and does something to address that problem. Using a methodology where students are co-researchers, recognize a problem in their community, and then do something about it situates students as agents of change. This challenges traditional research studies that have positioned queer, trans, and nonbinary students as “at-risk” through a deficit model (Talburt, 2004).

The deficit model of education emphasizes the student as the problem instead of looking at the educational system. For example, if a student does not do well on a test, the deficit model attributes that failure to a lack of skill, focus, structure, or desire on the student’s part (Smith, 2015). The deficit model does not consider how the educational system might have failed the student. Moreover, the deficit model does not account for social inequities, including systemic racism, heterosexism, and cissexism. Furthermore, when students are identified as “at-risk” in academia, they have a higher probability of failing or dropping out of school (Talburt, 2004). Again, the focus is on the student and not the institution.

Traditional modes of research mirror deficit models by situating the researcher as an observer to marginalized communities who needs to be unbiased and therefore needs to be an outsider to the community being observed. As a result, most of the findings of these studies ignore the complexities and nuances of social inequities, especially interlocking oppressions, and identify the marginalized group as needing to change instead of changing the systems that reinforce oppression. For example, in the field of education, numerous studies (Garvey, Taylor, & Rankin, 2015; McGuire, Anderson, Toomey, & Russell, 2010; Pryor, 2015; Wright & Smith, 2015) identify queer, trans, and
nonbinary students as at-risk of homophobic and transphobic bullying, which the researchers claim correlates to a failure in student success. These studies frame queer, trans, and nonbinary students as victims instead of empowering students to advocate for systemic change in education, like fighting for mandatory teacher training and inclusion in curricula about queer, trans, and nonbinary communities.

Fields, Mamo, Gilbert, and Lesko’s (2014) study contributes to our understanding of the limitations of queer, trans, and nonbinary inclusion within education that solely focuses on dismantling homophobic, biphobic, and transphobic bullying. The authors highlighted how this approach reinforces queer, trans, and nonbinary youth as “at-risk” instead of agents of change. “The Beyond Bullying Project aims to solicit and share stories beyond victimization and bullying and to provoke new ways of understanding queer, trans, and nonbinary sexualities in schools” (Fields et al., 2014, p. 81). Broader and more in-depth curricula must represent the queer, trans, and nonbinary community. Schools should not solely focus on how trans, queer, and nonbinary people are bullied, are made to be victims, and are consistently portrayed as “at-risk.” Jennings (2015) described transgressive (meaning challenging imposed social acceptability) representations of queer, trans, and nonbinary individuals as challenging homonormativity (or queer, trans, and nonbinary conformity to heterosexual norms) and going beyond deficit models of teaching.

Talburt (2004) challenged researchers who position queer, trans, and nonbinary youth as “at-risk” and who positively foster identity development. Talburt stated that it is vital to not only avoid the narrative of these youth as being “at-risk” but also the dichotomy of queer and trans youth as “secure” (2004, p. 114). This perspective is a
grave oversimplification of the queer, trans, and nonbinary experience and provides a limited understanding of intervention practices:

… in order to support positive development, LGBT students need information and role models to cultivate self-esteem and counter negative stereotypes as well as extracurricular groups for support and community. Even as these interventions create openings, implicit in their underlying assumptions are narrow norms of who LGBT youth are and what they need. (Talburt, 2004, p. 118–119)

Smith’s (2015) study broadens this argument by recognizing the importance of disrupting narrow suggestions of intervention practices based on the narrative that queer, trans, and nonbinary people are victims.

Smith (2015) addressed the limitations of allyship to queer, trans, and nonbinary students. Some examples of this include the following: only challenging overt homophobia; displaying a queer, trans, and nonbinary ally sticker in the classroom or office; creating “safe spaces” in the school; and attending conferences or training sessions that focus on queer, trans, and nonbinary inclusion in education. Smith argued that these actions do not disrupt institutionalized heterosexism and cissexism. Smith (2015) urged that it is vital to “create spaces in education that don’t just shut down overt homophobic bullying but provide opportunities for institutional resistance” (p. 240).

Furthermore, Wright and Smith (2015) identified how administrators could support queer, trans, and nonbinary teachers to create a more accepting school climate for students, faculty, and staff. Administrators must strictly regulate homophobic, biphobic, and transphobic language and require all faculty and staff to do the same, including in the classroom. Furthermore, administrators should create more opportunities for faculty and
staff to participate in professional development that focuses on queer, trans, and nonbinary inclusion to improve school climates. My study seeks to move beyond recognizing the importance of disrupting bullying and creating more opportunities for faculty training. VPAR creates a space to go deeper and work to dismantle institutional inequities.

Categorizing queer, trans, and nonbinary youth as “at-risk” or “secure” can erase the intersectionality of identities. For example, Kumashiro (2001) addressed how youth who are out as queer, trans, and nonbinary in this binary framework would be considered healthy. However, what about the experiences of youth of color whose communities may associate queerness and transness with whiteness? The complexities of the queer, trans, and nonbinary identities are lost within this binary frame. Talburt (2004) wrote about how these limited perspectives can inform and expand teaching practices. She stated:

Who determines which representations are the right or accurate ones? And for whom? What kinds of gay life or gay people should be presented…? Are the representations meeting a need adults presume LGBT youth have, or are interventions guided by the interests and desires young people express? (Talburt, 2004, p. 119)

My dissertation sought to answer these questions and more by centering QTBIPOC as agents of change and focusing on their experiences, interests, and needs. As previously conducted studies (Talburt, 2004) have demonstrated the importance of rejecting the framework of queer, trans, and nonbinary youth as “at-risk,” this study aimed to utilize VPAR as the methodology. It is vital to go beyond the deficit model when addressing
queer, trans, and nonbinary topics to emphasize how these identities can empower and provide a form of agency for all students, regardless of racial, sexual, and gender identity.

Summary

This literature review is built on the limited research that explores the experiences of QTBIPOC in queer studies by providing a brief history of queer studies. In addition, this section detailed how educational policies and laws affecting queer, trans, and nonbinary communities have evolved over the past few decades. Furthermore, this literature review collected studies that addressed the importance of de-centering whiteness in queer studies, courses, and curricula. Lastly, this literature review critiqued educational studies based on a deficit model identifying QTBIPOC as “at-risk.” It acknowledged the importance of utilizing VPAR as a methodology to challenge these narrow interpretations of QTBIPOC students.
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Restatement of the Purpose of the Study

This study aimed to identify and explore how queer studies reflect and ignore the lived experiences of Queer, Trans, Black, Indigenous, People of Color (QTBIPOC) students through engaging a cross-section of these students as co-researchers in virtual participatory action research (VPAR). By doing so, this study aimed to address obstacles that impeded and contributed to the success of QTBIPOC in queer studies and positioned the co-researchers as agents of change.

The necessity of this study has been reflected in the observations made by other researchers. For example, Spelman stated, “… the categories and methods we may find most natural and straightforward to us as we explore the connections between sex and race, sexism and race, confuse those connections rather than clarify them” (1990, p. 115). This dissertation by no means tried to provide easy answers on how best to incorporate the history and experiences of QTBIPOC into curricula. This is a complex and layered topic, especially when addressing the intersectionality of multiple marginalized identities. As Mayo (2010) recognized:

LGBTQ [lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer] communities are often structured by white dominance and are unwilling to see how whiteness structures ideas about who is legitimately LGBTQ or who can easily access LGBTQ community resources and social spaces. This white dominance may be expressed through overt racism or implicitly assume what gayness means and thus be unwilling to recognize the sexual and gender identities that emerge within racial and ethnic communities. (p. 212)
We live in a society where homophobia, transphobia, racism, classism, ableism, and much more are not only explicit; instead, these practices and ideologies are also made implicit through everyday experiences and interactions. Although this viewpoint may seem bleak, there is always “critical hope” (Duncan-Andrade, 2009; West, 2008). West (2004) defined critical hope as a committed and active struggle “against the evidence in order to change the deadly tides of wealth inequality, group xenophobia, and personal despair” (p. 296–297). For me, keeping critical hope alive meant creating a course entitled “Queer Culture, Society, and Resistance.”

The purpose of my course was to engage in the research approach and methodology of VPAR to uncover and dismantle systemic inequities against queer, trans, and nonbinary communities, as well as other marginalized communities. The course addressed how VPAR in education is rooted in collective examination and action to expose and dismantle social inequities. The course positioned my students as collaborators to create brave spaces where, as a community, we can begin the healing process from hegemonic logic and systems of dominance while developing agency to transform injustice.

With this goal in sight, the course sought to deconstruct the theoretical and practical applications of VPAR while understanding VPAR on a personal level and how it informs our responsibilities as students and contributing members of society. Queer Culture, Society, and Resistance examined queer, trans, and nonbinary histories and contemporary experiences to inform ways of working with and for queer, trans, and nonbinary communities. The course positioned lived experience as funds of knowledge
and approached the study of gender and sexuality from feminist, anti-racist, QOCA, intersectional, transnational, and decolonial perspectives.

This course challenged pedagogical practices that adhere to conformity to suppress critical thinking skills (Giroux, 2011). It sought to address the whole person by not focusing on one marginalized identity; this course included all the beautiful and complex intersecting identities that individuals hold. “It is not easy to think about gender, race, and class in ways that don’t obscure or underplay their effects on one another. The crucial question is how the links between them are conceived” (Spelman, 1990, p. 115). My research added to this concept by including sexual identity and gender identity with the layers of intersectionality. Furthermore, Mayo (2010) stated:

… all communities are made up of diverse people, not all of whom are adequately served by the community norms or political groups that claim to represent them. Furthermore, forms of gender and sexual identity emerge from within different cultural, racial, and ethnic traditions and thus push us to understand the importance of place, context, and relation. Transnational immigration brings diverse understandings of sexual and gender identity into conversation with dominant versions, and racial and ethnic traditions provide particular forms of gender and sexual identities and activities that inform, challenge, and mingle with dominant forms. (p. 213)

Queer Culture, Society, and Resistance sought to centralize intersectionality instead of single-issue identity politics. It strove to focus on the lived experiences and local knowledge of the individuals involved to challenge mainstream academic ideals. This section describes the following aspects of the methodology: 1) the research questions, 2)
the research design, 3) the research site, 4) the selection of co-researchers, 5) ethical considerations, 6) the data collection, and 7) the research’s profile.

**Research Questions**

After thoughtful conversations among the co-researchers, the following research questions were explored in our study:

1. How do students describe their experiences in queer courses at CCB?

2. What are the similarities and differences among students’ experiences based on different aspects of their identities? These aspects include the following:
   a. Racial identity.
   b. Sexual identity.
   c. Gender identity.
   d. Age.

3. How does the curriculum in queer studies at CCB respond to the diversity of students’ identities?
   a. How do queer courses address intersectionality?
   b. What obstacles do QTBIPOC face within the queer studies program?

**Research Design**

*Virtual Participatory Action Research (VPAR)*

I had to adapt quickly to the unprecedented times of a global pandemic. I had planned my participatory action research (PAR) study for a face-to-face setting for three years. I had created curricula that catered to the co-researchers interacting in person. Consequently, I had to think on my feet and quickly transition the course to meet via Zoom and implement the course materials and assignments to Canvas. As mentioned in
Chapter 2, the definition of VPAR is “engaging the PAR framework in a virtual setting as long as there is ‘effective communication, adaptability to change, and strong connection between researcher, facilitator, and the participants” (Safari, 2021, p. 99). Clear and open communication was a fundamental factor in my study. I encouraged the co-researchers to be as honest as possible when writing their journals ensuring they were graded on effort. I reinforced to the best of my ability that if they were confused, struggling, or completely stuck in engaging with the VPAR process, that experience would receive the same grade as someone who understood the process. I guaranteed that it would not hurt my feelings if they wrote about being confused and overwhelmed with the course material and that the journals only worked if they were honest. I stated that critique is an essential tool for growth and improvement.

VPAR involved a community of co-researchers working together to understand a problematic situation and change it for the better (Lovaas, Elia, & Yep, 2010). Everyone involved in this study, including myself, were co-researchers and took a leading role in the research (Morrell, 2006). The co-researchers enrolled in my course, Queer Culture, Society, and Resistance. The essence of the class included learning about the history and current needs of queer, trans, and nonbinary communities and explicitly focused on the experiences of QTBIPOC.

Then, we acted to address those needs. More specifically, we proposed solutions to our research problem to transform words into actions (Koirala-Azad & Fuentes, 2009). I posed multiple questions to spark an essential dialogue in choosing our research questions. For instance, we considered whether the current curricula in queer studies courses addressed the perspectives and needs of QTBIPOC. We also examined what
support systems and educational tools are needed to produce effective representation of QTBIPOC within queer studies.

VPAR also involved going beyond talking about change to implementing change (Morrell, 2006). This key factor required the co-researchers to step outside the traditional classroom, in our case, the virtual classroom setting. Collectively we assessed contemporary issues, collected data, and demanded change. The co-researchers gained the skill sets that they needed to conduct individual interviews. For example, they participated in a workshop to identify best and worst practices for conducting an interview. They learned coding techniques to find themes in data while being able to validate and honor the voices in our research.

Finally, the co-researchers also critically analyzed their research to determine accurate and appropriate action plans. The first action was creating a demographic survey for our college that included sexual and gender identities, titled Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity and Expression (SOGIE) Survey. This survey is availed in Appendix B. We started by disseminating the survey to queer studies courses at CCB to pressure the administration to add our inclusive language to the demographic survey utilized throughout our institution. The second action was to create an Instagram page for the queer studies department at CCB, so we could share our research findings with our community and make it as accessible as possible while trying to reach the largest audience.

Spade (2008; 2020). We dissected each article or chapter, applied their work to the process of VPAR, and discussed ways better to understand queer, trans, and nonbinary communities. The class brought our cultural knowledge into the virtual classroom to begin the process of uncovering issues of oppression and the intersecting ways oppression unfolds. The course then began to brainstorm research questions. As a class, we identified three main research questions addressing our community's educational inequities. At least once a week, the class was split into three or four breakout groups so that the co-researchers could engage on a deeper level with the course material and the process of VPAR without the direct observation of the instructor.

Most breakout groups were not recorded to encourage learning in a peer-to-peer setting without supervision to create a space of vulnerability and open communication with their fellow co-researchers. However, three times throughout the semester, the breakout rooms were recorded to discuss vital aspects of VPAR, including: 1) brainstorming the research questions, 2) examining the findings of each co-researcher’s interview or interviews, and 3) deliberating the potential actions for VPAR. Some of the purposes of the breakout rooms were to build community and, as Tong (2014) describes, to create a “home in which everyone has a room of her own, but one in which the walls are thin enough to permit a conversation, a community of friends in virtue and partners in action” (Tong, 2014, p. 7). We attempted this in a virtual space by changing who was in the breakout room each week to diversify the voices the co-researchers were engaging and connecting with each week and to create opportunities for leadership and growth.

The co-researchers went virtually into the CCB community. They used various methodological tools such as interviews, surveys, and group dialogues to uncover the
community’s needs and what needs to be done to address them. Each co-researcher was tasked with keeping a journal and writing detailed reflections on their feelings and thoughts throughout this experience. The journal’s focus was their journey throughout the VPAR study. By the end of the semester, they also had to write a five to seven-page paper based on their data findings, their notes about how they grew as critical thinkers, and what they learned throughout their experiences.

We were responsible for planning an action based on our research questions, and we discussed how they could be as creative and critical as possible. I provided examples from other PAR studies highlighting their actions. We brainstormed potentially: presenting a PowerPoint, iMovie, Prezi, or performance piece; creating pamphlets; creating a conference or symposium at CCB to present their findings; or engaging in other imaginative outlets to share their research findings. They entailed the action part of VPAR by presenting our findings virtually via social media with the CCB community and provided specific ways to challenge systemic inequities that further marginalize our community. Action inspires coalition building, and organizing and joining with others is vital (Canestrari & Marlowe, 2013). In Rebecca’s eleventh journal, she wrote “our VPAR crew,” and that descriptor has been utilized since.

**Research Site**

CCB was founded in 1935 and today is known as one of the largest junior colleges in the nation. At its prime, CCB had more than 100,000 students. CCB “... has maintained a strong commitment to helping people from underrepresented and historically oppressed minorities” (Plake, 2013). According to recent enrollment statistics, BIPOC “account for over 70% of CCBs full-time student population alone, and
many of them are first-time college attendees” (CCB, n.d.). In addition, CCB has a rich queer history and has been a pioneer in queer studies.

In Fall 1972, Tim Smith, a pseudonym, an English instructor at CCB, created one of the English department's first queer courses in the nation. A few years later, Tim Smith retired due to illness and was replaced by Dr. Fred Jones, a pseudonym, who created four new courses that addressed queer issues at CCB. In 1989, CCB established the first gay and lesbian studies department in the nation; the department’s title was later changed to “Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Studies” in 1996 and then to “Queer Studies” in 2010.

The mission statement of the queer studies department at CCB includes providing the highest academic standards for those who wish to study the intellectual, cultural, and material conditions that have shaped our current understanding of sexuality and gender. The queer studies program approaches the study of sexuality and gender from anti-racist, QOCA, decolonial, feminist, transnational, and intersectional perspectives to reflect the diverse communities within and beyond the campus. The program’s core values aim to generate new, resistant theories and practices that are equitable, respectful and visibly engaged in challenging systemic oppression. (CCB, n.d.).

The mission statement also states that the intersectional curriculum strives to retain, connect, and sustain students to enrich learning outcomes and improve student success. The queer studies program at CCB utilizes current research to develop and expand student consciousness and build theoretical and practical tools for understanding and engaging with intersex, asexual, queer, trans, and gender-nonconforming identities and communities resistance and activism. The queer studies department aspires to create a welcoming campus environment by providing equity-and-social-justice-based
education, resources, counseling, and overall support for students across the spectrums of sexuality and gender, emphasizing intersectional experiences. The statement concludes by specifying that “the program offers Associate Degrees, as well as courses that satisfy general education, transfer, and credit/noncredit certificate requirements” (CCB, n.d.).

To date, CCBs multiple queer resources include the Queer Resource Center (QRC), the Gender Diversity Project (GDP), Queer Alliance (QA), queer and queer-friendly counseling, and student health providers. This research aims to play a small part in supporting CCBs legacy so that the college can continue to pioneer in queer, trans, and nonbinary issues and work with and for QTBIPOC, undocumented students, nonbinary students, and students with various abilities and intersecting marginalized identities.

CCB serves a wide range of identities beyond the queer studies department based on age, gender identity, and racial identity. As of Spring 2020, age groups found that CCBs population is 6% 19 or younger, 14% 20-24, 13% 25-29, 14% 30-34, 12% 35-39, 17% 40-49, 13% 50-59, 7% 60-69, and 4% 70 or older. The 2020 census base on gender identity found that 66% of CCBs population identifies as female, 29% as male, and 5% as undeclared (California Community Colleges, 2011). It is important to note that the only options for gender categories were: “female,” “male,” and “undeclared,” which left no options for transgender and nonbinary identities. Currently, CCB does not collect demographics that are based on sexual identity.

The 2009-2010 census (CCB Research & Planning, 2010) found that CCBs student population is 30.08% Asian, 17.95% Latinx, 8.41% Black or African American, 6.74% Filipinx; 0.86% Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, 0.41% Native American or Native Alaskan, 7.69% unknown or not reported, and 27.86% white. By the
Fall of 2020, the CCBs student population changed to 31.8% Asian, 27.1% Latinx, 5.8% Black or African American, 4.2% Filipinx; 0.6% Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, 0.2% Native American or Native Alaskan, 3.8% two or more races, 9.7% unknown or not reported, and 16.9% white. The most significant change was that CCB went from serving over 100,000 students before the accreditation crisis in 2009-2010 to dramatically dropping to slightly over 53,000 in the Fall of 2020 (CCB Research & Planning, 2020).

In July 2012, the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC) voted to end CCBs accreditation, but CCB did not accept this decision. In 2017, CCB won the five-year battle and remained fully accredited. However, there were many losses within those five years. The threat of CCB losing accreditation led to funding cuts for many courses within the ethnic studies and social justice programs and resource centers, including the queer studies department and resources. Additionally, CCBs enrollment seriously declined during this period, which resulted in job losses and salary reductions.

In October 2012, California’s Community College Chancellor’s Offices appointed a “special trustee.” This trustee was hired to keep CCB accredited, but their appointment resulted in negative consequences. Resource centers, including the QRC, Family Resource Center (FRC), Multicultural Resource Center (MCRC), Veterans Resource Center (VRC), Voices of Immigrants Demonstrating Achievement (VIDA), and the Women’s Resource Center (WRC), lost almost half of their funding. Thousands of classes were canceled, and faculty, staff, and student workers lost income due to salary cuts. At the same time, the administrators’ salaries were raised (Plake, 2013).
Many faculty, staff, and students led protests to demand that the special trustee “End the Dictatorship!” and resign as a special trustee so that CCB can reinstate the Board of Trustees to ensure a more democratic process. The special trustee pushed for CCB to be focused exclusively on “general education.” As a result, the special trustee publicly renounced their support from CCB’s Ethnic Studies and Social Justice programs and resource centers that allow students to graduate from CCB with not only all their general education requirements but also minors in the following departments: African American Studies, Asian American Studies, Asian Studies; Interdisciplinary Studies; Labor and Community Studies; Latin American and Latinx Studies, Queer studies; Philippine Studies; and Women’s and Gender Studies.

In Spring 2015, the special trustee unexpectedly retired; however, this corruption continued. CCB has had almost ten chancellors and interim chancellors in the last ten years. As of Fall 2021, a new chancellor was elected. CCB never recovered after the threat of the accreditation loss. CCB is in a debt crisis, and the semester I collected my data at CCB, Spring 2021, 163 full-time faculty received pink slips, including myself. These pink slips were given to 40 departments, including: Queer Studies, Aircraft Maintenance Technology, Architecture, Art, Astronomy, Auto/Motor/Construction, and Building Maintenance, Behavioral Sciences, Biological Sciences, Broadcast Electronic Media Arts, Business, Chemistry, Child Development and Family Studies, Cinema, Communication Studies, Computer Science, Counseling, Culinary Arts and Hospitality Studies, Earth Sciences, Engineering and Technology, English, Environmental Horticulture and Floristry, English as Second Language, Fashion, Health Education, Interdisciplinary Studies, Library and Learning Resources, Mathematics, Music, Nursing-
Licensed Vocational, Philippines Studies, Physical Education and Dance, Physics, Radiological Sciences, Social Sciences, Theater Arts, Transitional Studies, Visual Media Design, Women's and Gender Studies, and World Languages and Cultures (The Chronicle, 2021, n.d.).

After a long fight, the faculty at CCB voted to take an eight to ten percent cut in salary to avoid firing 163 full-time faculty. In 2021, the Ethnic Studies and Social Justice programs at CCB are still affected by the accreditation battle (The Chronicle, 2021, n.d.). The school’s administrators require that a minimum of 20 students be enrolled in each class, and more and more Ethnic Studies and Social Justice courses are being cut every semester. These cuts in resources within the Queer Studies department have led to a decline in funding for the QRC, dramatically limiting the number of student workers the center can employ and the number of open hours it can offer. Furthermore, one of the most significant effects on the Queer Studies program is that before the accreditation battle, the faculty had some racial diversity in its faculty: 50% of the faculty members were QTBIPOC, and 50% were white. However, after the renewal of accreditation, the CCB Queer Studies faculty became 100% white. This change was made due to the massive cuts in the faculty’s salaries and the administration’s refusal to replace one of the QTBIPOC Queer Studies faculty after they retired.

**Selection of Co-Researchers**

The co-researchers for this study were the 14 students enrolled in my course Queer Culture, Society, and Resistance at CCB. All the students enrolled in this course opted to be co-researchers in our VPAR study, even though all were given the option to decline participation with no penalties to their grades. Unfortunately, two co-researchers
had to drop the course midway through the semester. Consequently, the number of students enrolled in Queer Culture, Society, and Resistance and co-researchers dropped from 14 to 12 in March 2021. Even though all my students were required to complete the VPAR study, I did not necessitate for the co-researchers to be a part of my dissertation. They were given multiple chances to decline to be a part of the final research product. All 12 co-researchers signed the waiver in Appendix A of this dissertation to include their journals, assignments, Zoom class discussions, and interview transcripts in our study. In addition, the co-researchers were given the option to receive honor’s credit for our course by completing two to three interviews instead of one. Two co-researchers opted for this opportunity and, at the end of the semester, received an “A” in the course and an “H” in their academic transcripts to represent completing honor’s credit. It is important to note that in Rebecca’s eleventh journal, she described the 12 co-researchers and myself as “our VPAR crew,” and that was our title from then on.

**Data Collection**

Each co-researcher participated in bi-weekly Zoom class discussions every Tuesday and Thursday from 12:40-1:55 pm. All Zoom classes, including all breakout groups, were recorded and transcribed. Seven to eight students consistently attended the Zoom courses, and four opted to take the course entirely online, which meant that they never attended Zoom classes. In addition, all the co-researchers completed journals, assignments, and conducted at least one interview anywhere from 20 minutes to 90 minutes with a fellow queer studies student. The co-researcher’s final included the completed interview and a 5 to 7-page VPAR Paper and Reflection, focusing on an analysis of their interview and reflections on the VPAR process. This study aimed for co-
researchers to teach and learn from one another their experiences based on the course material to build an even stronger and more connected presence at CCB in queer studies. Coalition building between the queer studies students aimed to allow more opportunities to validate our beautiful and complex intersectionality of identities. A personal goal I had was to resist teaching about marginalized sexual and gender identities as segregated, detached, and isolated.

This course also constantly practiced self-reflection and general reflection on the coursework and the research process. As Tong (2014) stated, “There is always… room for growth, improvement, reconsideration, expansion – for all those intellectual processes free us from the authoritarian trap of ‘having to know it all’” (p. 8). Questions that the co-researchers reflected on throughout the semester included: 1) What did you learn?, 2) How did it affect you emotionally, mentally, and physically?, 3) Whose stories and voices were heard today?, 4) Whose stories and voices were not heard?, 5) Why were those voices not heard and present?, and 6) Did you feel represented in this week’s curriculum? If so, how? If not, why? A self-reflective question we came back to numerous times throughout the semester asked the co-researchers to consider, “What did you gain while at CCB?” These questions and many like them were proposed to the queer studies community.

The data sources collected for this study included: 1) my field notes, which I completed throughout the semester, 2) Zoom recordings and transcripts of every class, including three different sessions of breakout groups, 3) students’ archival work that was completed throughout the course, including assignments and weekly self-reflections VPAR journals, 4) 15 individual interviews conducted by the 12 co-researchers via Zoom
that I transcribed, and 5) queer studies demographic data collected by the SOGIE Demographic Survey. I emailed the SOGIE Demographic Survey to all queer studies faculty, who shared the link to the survey with all their queer studies students in the Spring semester of 2021. In addition, that same semester, I emailed all queer studies faculty a flyer (see below) to share with their students that called for any interested queer studies students who wanted to be interviewed about their experience in queer studies at CCB. Faculty receive countless emails a day, so it is easy for emails to get lost in the chaos. Therefore, in my emails to queer studies faculty, I aimed to make their life as simple as possible when sharing the information on the SOGIE Demographic Survey and the call for interviewees. I began the emails with a quick hello and check-in, followed by a brief explanation of the purpose of the survey and the interviews. Then I included a pre-written email to their students about the project, its purpose, and what it entailed so faculty could copy and paste the pre-written email to share with their students. Also, when I disseminated the flyer asking for potential interviewees, I included multiple formats recognizing that instructors vary significantly in how they share information. Most queer studies faculty offered five extra credit points for being interviewed in our study.
Figure 0.5. Queer Studies Wants to Interview You! Flyer
Once the Zoom interviews were completed, I transcribed all 15. The interviews ranged from around 20 minutes to 90 minutes. All data were triangulated to find significant themes throughout the data, focusing on the voices of our community through the interview transcripts. The first round of coding the data entailed pinpointing the repetition of responses to find patterns across the 15 interviews. Themes were given one- or two-word descriptors, like “racial representations,” “positive representation,” “improvement,” “activism,” “erasure,” “whiteness,” “benefits,” and many more. Every time a theme was repeated throughout the 15 interviews, it was tallied in an Excel chart to identify the most frequent responses. In the second round of coding, I looked for connections in the repeated responses acknowledging if there were similarities or differences based on students’ racial, sexual, and gender identities. In the third round of coding, I flagged any time someone said they did not feel represented to name all the examples of how queer studies can improve, no matter if one or two students only identified it. Finally, I read through all the transcripts looking for anything I found significant as a queer studies instructor that I might have overlooked in my prior readings. My focus was on students who identified as queer, trans, and nonbinary, with a primary emphasis on QTBIPOC students. However, clear themes were uncovered based on heterosexual and cisgender interviewees and were included in the findings of this study.

**Ethical Considerations**

As the course instructor, I was in a position of power over the co-researchers. I assessed what grades they received on assignments and determined their final grade. This fact had limitations in my study because my students could have censored their work in
their assignments, journal reflections, and class discussions. Instead of writing their truths, they potentially wrote and said what they thought I wanted to hear as the instructor to receive a strong grade. This might have significantly altered the data and findings of our research.

In addition, I identify as white. I am a white nonbinary instructor who explored the experiences of QTBIPOC. My privilege as a white person influenced the findings of our study. Potentially, my QTBIPOC co-researchers might have felt uncomfortable or unsafe fully disclosing their thoughts and experiences because I cannot relate. I am an outsider researching racial inequities. As hooks stated, “... if genuine closeness cannot emerge between teachers and students, the learning process is impaired” (2010, p. 112). I believe through this research that, I was able to develop close relationships with my co-researchers. However, I do not have shared experiences based on racial identity with my QTBIPOC co-researchers, which limited the depth of my study.

Consequently, my position of power and white privilege presented major ethical considerations that I continually reflected on and reviewed throughout the study. However, no amount of discussion or contemplation erased my position and privilege. Before beginning the data collection, I reflected on ways to address these issues.

Furthermore, one of my primary goals in conducting this study was to protect the mental and emotional energies of QTBIPOC co-researchers from fellow white co-researchers who do not understand or share the same experiences. White fragility, color-blind racism, white silence, and tone policing were absent in the Zoom courses, but I could have missed examples in class and breakout sessions when I was not supervising. Examples could have also happened in the co-researcher’s interviews with someone in
queer studies at CCB, as I did not have access to all the Zoom interview footage. They could have disrupted discussions and interviews without me knowing. An ethical consideration is being able to curtail white, heterosexual, and cisgender students who ask QTBIPOC for emotional labor in the class.

To the best of my ability, I was honest and open with the co-researchers, interviewees, and the audience about our study. This included stating the fact that the co-researchers voluntarily signed up for the class, and I named the bias it potentially had on the study; for example, if the co-researchers were open enough to learn about issues affecting queer, trans, and nonbinary people, they have been already a little comfortable with this topic. This meant that my co-researchers were likely to be somewhat open-minded. Therefore, it was assumed that I would not have any co-researchers who were overtly homophobic. I also included information about myself which helped address researcher bias so that the audience understood that I am queer and nonbinary, which clarified the possible influence my involvement could have on the study.

**Researcher’s Profile**

I identify as a white anti-racist, queer nonbinary intersectional feminist activist, dyslexic educator, and life-long learner. Of all these identities, I am, first and foremost, an activist realizing my activism through education. I am a full-time Queer and Interdisciplinary Studies instructor at CCB. To me, nonbinary means identifying and expressing myself in ways different from society’s binary norms. I do not identify as a man or woman. I feel gender euphoria (extreme happiness, or comfortability, experienced because a person’s gender is being affirmed) when I am described in gender-neutral terms and pronouns. For me identifying as nonbinary is a way of queering my gender.
identity. Even though I identify as nonbinary and use gender-neutral pronouns (they/them/their) because I was assigned female at birth, many people see me as a woman. I consistently have students and faculty misgender me and ignore my nonbinary identity. No matter how often I correct people, some individuals never acknowledge or respect my gender identity.

My identity as queer is not just my sexual identity but a political statement. For me being queer is a call to action. It is also a verb that means rejecting, defying, pushing back, going beyond, transgressing, and disobeying societal norms. Because queer is a sexual identity, a verb, and a political statement, being queer also means advocating for Black Lives Matter (BLM) and ending police brutality. Queer means fighting to abolish U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). For me, to be queer is following in the footsteps of radical Black lesbian socialist feminists to end capitalism. Queer means standing for everyone’s fundamental human rights. For me, queer is synonymous with being an abolitionist working to abolish systems of oppression, like the Prison Industrial Complex, Military Industrial Complex, Medical Industrial Complex, Housing Industrial Complex, Non-Profit Industrial Complex, and the Ally Industrial Complex.

Recognizing, disrupting, and dismantling my white privilege was essential throughout my study. My understanding of whiteness is constantly evolving and growing. My master’s and doctoral program at the University of San Francisco (USF), International and Multicultural Education (IME), has changed my life, especially in identifying my privilege. It has opened doors I never knew existed. The IME program has expanded my definition of what it means to be an instructor, including what it means to practice cultural humility.
The Whiteness: Power and Privilege class I took with Dr. Emma Fuentes made me look in the mirror about how I am racially-biased, how I contribute to a society founded on racism and genocide, and how I benefit from white supremacy. For the first time, I honestly looked at my own life and recognized that if racism exists, so does white privilege and that I benefit from this system of oppression. I went through a long period of white guilt and shame, resulting in my white silence. As I continued my doctoral program, I saw how selfish it was to be silent because my silence was rooted in fear of me being judged for saying the wrong thing. I finally recognized how my silence was my form of protection and that I was hiding. I was doing nothing to challenge racism.

Looking at the best ways to understand and dismantle white supremacy in my life and my classroom is something I continue to ask myself, students, colleagues, and my community. I continued this self-reflection and participated in community discussions throughout this study. My white identity influenced my study; therefore, I consistently engaged with questions like “what are the best ways for me to acknowledge, reflect, and disrupt my white privilege?” This is a question that I explored in an ongoing way throughout this research process, and I also sought guidance from colleagues and my dissertation committee to broaden my limited perspective.

As hooks (2010) stated, “when overt hierarchal power dynamics make domination of the weak by the strong acceptable, then students will not respect teachers and vice versa” (p. 111). For this research to embrace the VPAR ideals as closely as possible, I was both a co-researcher and co-facilitator. Those who would traditionally be known as the “participants” in the VPAR research acted as co-researchers. This research and course centered on their experiences and identified where they wanted to take the research and
class. It is important to note that throughout the research and facilitation process, there was no difference in title between me and the 12 other co-researchers. What makes my role as the co-researcher unique is that I shared my knowledge of VPAR with my other co-researchers by assigning readings and organizing the course to facilitate a space in which we reflected and connected the lessons to our everyday lives and grew in our consciousness of systemic inequities within our community.

Furthermore, my role involved creating spaces where all the co-researchers connected, collaborated, and bonded on individual and group levels, allowing us to share our authentic selves, including all the beautiful ways our identities intersect. This included discussing race, class, sexual identity, gender identity, ability, nationality, immigration status, and how these identities intersect. By building a foundation in the course where individuals felt comfortable enough to dig deeper, share more, and look more critically at the society around us, the space did not require the co-researchers to separate all their marginalized identities; instead, it allowed them to share their experiences with all the beautiful layers and complexity that accompanied their multiple identities.

This study aimed to create opportunities that validate the histories and identities of all queer studies students. VPAR enabled individuals to learn from one another in a peer-to-peer setting and promoted and emphasized the power of the individuals in the class and the collective knowledge that can accrue from listening openly and honestly to one another. Even though I structured the course, Queer Culture, Society, and Resistance, and chose the readings, I did not enter the classroom assuming I was an expert in VPAR; instead, VPAR focused on the identities, histories, and lived experiences of the co-
researchers. The co-researchers are the experts and shaped where the class went through their local and cultural knowledge (Bautista, Bertrand, Morrell, Scorza & Matthews, 2013; Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008).
CHAPTER IV: THE RESEARCH TEAM

Introduction

This chapter is split into three major sections. The first part provides portraits of each co-researcher and the second section includes a brief profile of each interviewee. This chapter concludes with a breakdown of the VPAR process. Understanding the research team and their interviewees is paramount due to how central they were in every aspect of the research process. In the first part of this chapter, each co-researcher wrote their profile defining how they wanted to present themselves in the research and their positionality within the study. Due to this, each profile varies greatly. While some wrote a couple of paragraphs about themselves, others wrote pages. The distinctions in each narrative highlight the research team's complex and beautiful identities and interests in their writing. I have not edited their work to keep the authenticity of their voice. While I did not edit their words, I did create each co-researcher’s profile based on numerous homework assignments and journal entries throughout the semester. I pulled their words from multiple sources to provide as detailed a profile as possible. Additionally, I chose the images for each co-researcher who did not have their midterm art used. The images I chose to represent these co-researchers were based on one of their major strengths and passions expressed throughout the semester.

In the second part of this chapter, the interviewee profiles are based on their demographic surveys. Therefore, their information is written by me and is shorter than the co-researcher profiles. Each co-researcher has an image below their name to represent them, to creatively embody each person. Most of the images representing the co-researchers were created by themselves for their midterm project. The rest are images
chosen by the co-researcher that they felt represented themselves. The images for the interviewees were chosen by me due to lack of time to reach out to all of the 15 interviewees. These images will be used throughout the dissertation to help differentiate each researcher and interviewee. Some of my suggested prompts for the co-researchers included: 1) What are your significant identities? What do each of these identities mean to you? What pseudonym (fake name) would you like to use for our VPAR project?, 2) How do the labels and assumptions others make about us influence our identities? Why are you taking a queer studies course?, 3) What is one thing that you would like to learn more about in our course?, 4) What are your academic interests?, 5) What are some of your passions, hobbies, and interests?, and 6) What are some of your long-term goals? These can be career, academic, family, and personal goals.

Part 3 of this chapter describes the VPAR process as it unfolded over the semester. As mentioned in Chapter 3, over the course of five months, each member kept a journal documenting their personal experiences throughout the VPAR project, including myself. We met twice a week for one hour and fifteen minutes per class. All Zoom classes were recorded. Seven to eight students consistently attended the Zoom courses and four students opted to take the course fully online, which meant that they never attended Zoom classes. Throughout the semester, students’ completed assignments addressing the tenets and application of VPAR, including interviews and a final reflective paper based on the process of VPAR.

**Part 1: Co-Researcher Profiles**

*Alejandro Mendoza (He/Him)*
Hello! My name is Alejandro Mendoza and I go by He/Him. I’m 26 and my highest level of education is a high school diploma, but I’m currently in college. I am not working because I am a full-time student. I am labeled and identify as Homosexual/Gay but I also identify as queer when it comes to my self-expression and gender. I enjoy blurring the line between my masculine and feminine side and I don't feel bound by the labels placed on me. I labeled and identify as Latino. I speak fluent Spanish and English. I identify as Chicano as well. This may not make sense since it's not a race per se but since I was born in both Mexico and the US, then it makes more sense to me.
Labels and assumptions are something I've always struggled with and never really found the box I fit. I was always too feminine yet wasn't allowed to embrace those feminine qualities because I had to be a man. Was too gay for some men, too big for some men, too small for others, etc. There was always a reason why I didn't fit in. It hindered my growth and self-esteem but in the more recent years, I have learned to be okay with not fitting in those boxes/labels because I don't care about them anymore. I'm still exploring myself and my identity but I'm much more comfortable thinking of myself as me and not limiting myself to what others want me to be.

I'm taking this course mainly to meet one of my A-G requirements, but I'm also taking this course to educate myself more about the queer experience and its history of it. I feel like a lot of members of the LGBTQ+ community, especially the younger members, don't educate themselves on our history and all the different facets of the queer experience. So, I want to educate myself so I can share the knowledge when I can. I would like to learn anything and everything. I know that sounds vague or general, but the truth is, most of what I know about the queer experience comes from social media and stories passed on from others.

My academic interests are art in general. I want to become an illustrator and do art not only for fun but also as a source of income and primarily, as a form of self-expression. My hobbies or interests are mostly all art-related. I love drawing and painting. I loooove singing a lot (my dream is to one day make music, even if it's only my mom who streams it lol). I also have an unhealthy obsession with drag. I loooove RPDR [RuPaul’s Drag Race] and I participate in paper drag so that’s also fun.
Three of my long-term goals are to transfer to CCA by next year which is something I've been working on for a while. I also wanna go to Japan, I had plans to go by my 25th bday but covid has gotten in the way of that so now it's my goal to make it as soon as I can. Another goal I have is that I want my hair to grow all the way to my butt. I want the length, I WANT INCHES!!

_Aselia (He/Him)_

Figure 2. Aselia’s VPAR crew profile image.

My name is Aselia and I use he/him/his pronouns. I self-identify as a heterosexual cisgender man. I am 21 years old and first-generation, with a high school diploma. I’m unemployed and trying to get an AA in Business Administration at CCB. I also identify as a: Vietnamese Asian American, full-time Student, Man of Quality. As an Asian American, this is one of my identities that I am never ashamed of and is ingrained into my DNA that stems primarily from understanding my culture and trying my hardest to
preserve it to pass it onto generations because it is really important to me and my family to truly embrace the identity of being Asian or Asian American in order to spread awareness of hardships and be able to share emotional stories and struggles so history does not ever repeat itself, even if it’s out of hatred or stubbornness.

I am currently a full time student, like many people my age, it can be difficult to earn a salary but for some it is necessary for survival in order to provide necessities, while I envy those who work to continuously build up their resume and learn skills, I am at the state where I think I would be okay working but since there's a global pandemic happening at the moment, I will focus on my studies to do the best I can because it is difficult to find job openings hiring right now (for me at least).

Man of Quality was something I heard someone call me when I was at a Women's Rights Movement, they were relatively surprised someone my age (I was about 16 or 17) attended a rally that stood up for Feminism by supporting them and not being afraid of judgement, I felt good about myself and ever since that day, that woman who said that to me has had me identifying myself as a Man of Quality.

I am taking this course to inform myself more on the topic of LGBT Culture and Society and Resistance, but also because I need this course as a transfer requirement for a four-year university on AREA D. I would like to learn about the history of LGBT by understanding why it has a big impact on today's society and to become a better ally to support others without trying to assume things and educate myself and others.

For most of my life before college, I never really was academically intelligent, but since I enrolled into CCB, I have found a couple of interests. For instance, I strive to get a passing grade at the bare minimum because I still want to prove that I learned something
but still have expectations to do better, and if I do get a letter grade of B or an A, I am very proud of myself. But I think any class that makes me feel engaged or welcome like this class makes me really interested as I feel comfortable and capable of sharing things I can't in like Math classes or English classes because it seems like (in my personal experience) it is too serious and never enough time to discuss other things in the real world. In addition, my final interest probably would be finding resources around campus as there's always something to explore as I discovered programs I wouldn't have known about if I didn't get lost one day looking for my class. But this was before COVID lockdown was put in place.

My passions/hobbies/interests vary on a weekly basis, but for the most part: As a freelance graphic designer, I love making designs where I would help my brother-in-law with his screen-printing company, and it’s very time-consuming but it helps pay the bills and I love doing it. In addition, I've been enjoying working out but I'm waiting for gyms to reopen in the city, but for now I've just been biking which isn't quite the same as weightlifting, but I do enjoy it still. Recently, I've been getting into creating custom mechanical keyboards. People usually buy pre-built ones, but custom keyboards are expensive and it’s an expensive hobby but it’s a lot of fun. I play video games and I love playing role-playing game like Dungeons and Dragons.

I love setting goals for myself, especially if it means doing whatever it takes to reach it. I usually set myself a deadline for short term goals and long-term goals for a couple of months. Ultimately, I want to live a comfortable lifestyle where I'm able to break the mold of societal norms. I like to practice what I preach so I sort of want to find a job that's really fun but also able to live in the city. Another goal would be to obtain my
fitness physique goal, not sure what it is, but it’s up there once gyms reopen up. Finally, my last goal would be to graduate from a four-year university after transferring.

*Bob (He/Him)*

*Figure 3. Bob’s VPAR crew profile image.*

Hey! My name is Bob and I go by he/him! I'm originally born and raised from Florida and moved here to San Francisco a little more than four years ago. Some important identifiers that I feel resonate with me the most: Being a Chinese American Asian trans man queer an artist (drawing) cat enthusiast self-employed 24 high school graduate and I aim for my AA in Graphic Design. Being an open and proud Asian trans man is something I'm very proud of. I don't, if rarely, see much representation from that
specific community and I realize not many have the privilege to either transition or come out because of culture and family, so I'm very fortunate to have the opportunity to be outspoken on my identity.

Saying I'm queer feels empowering to me. I use it as an umbrella term for both my identity and sexuality too, since I identify as bisexual but would much rather say I'm 'queer' to keep it short and sweet. I've always been a little artist since I could grab a crayon as a kid, this is a self-identifier that really makes me ecstatic as I now am self-employed for drawing designs that I love and make others happy. As for identifying myself as a cat enthusiast, this one is very to the point. I love cats and own two great boys. My goal in life is to eventually create a cat sanctuary where older cats can come live out their last few years feeling happy and loved.

When being constantly surrounded in an environment or society that heavily relies on labels and assumptions of others, it influenced my identity to believe for a long time that I had to present myself as hyper-feminine, submissive, and subdued from my true interests. Even after I realized I was trans, there was a period where I thought I had to be hyper-masculine for the sake of receiving approval and acceptance of cisgender people. It took me a good solid couple of years and a great community of people for me to break out of that mindset and to finally just enjoy what I like and how I like to dress and present myself regardless if labelled traditionally masculine or feminine.

I wanted to take this course to finally dive more into the history and culture of the LGBT+ community. For a majority of my life, I lived in a small suburb located in central Florida, there never was any open conversation or much talking at all regarding the LGBT+ community aside from the GSA club at my local high school. I hope to learn
more about how the community pushed the societal boundaries, and how to continue that level of advocacy in present day. I'm very new to general LGBT+ history, but I'm looking forward to other's responses so I can get a better idea on what everyone else is interested in! However, if I was to generally name an interest, I would love to learn more about present day activist groups.

_Gohan (He/Him)_

*Figure 4. Gohan’s VPAR crew profile image.*

Hi! I am a cisgender male and I use he/him pronouns. I’m an introverted heterosexual Filipino American, who is 26 unemployed and receiving an Associate of Arts in Humanities. For my pseudonym for our PAR study, you can call me Gohan he's
my favorite character from my favorite anime (Dragon ball z). How I am labeled in society never fully aligns with who I am. In some ways, other people's assumptions of us reaffirm the assumptions that we have about our own identity. Acknowledging that someone has a false assumption about you can strengthen the way you feel about your own identity. I am taking this course to fulfil some requirements for an AA in English. I would just like to learn how to approach people in the LGBT community in a respectful and knowledgeable way in this day and age.

I was never academically intelligent in subjects that most people care about like math or science. Where I excelled was in my English classes. I was always better at writing essays than I was at remembering the right formulas. Currently, my three hobbies that are taking up most of my time are anime, cycling, and reading. Now that I think about it three of my long-term goals are building enough stamina to cycle from one end of the city to the other and back, earning my bachelors in English, and securing a career that'll allow me to live in the city that I grew up in.

Jeremy (He/Him)

Figure 5. Jeremy’s VPAR crew profile image.
Hi! I am Jeremy, he/him. I am currently studying journalism but also interested in math and computer science, music, video games, and musical theater. My goals include continuing journalism, being a member of some sort of labor union, and developing a few video games. My self-identifiers include: cis male: I don't think of this one as particularly "meaningful" I guess. I just ... am. Gay: The first time I really became politically active was during the fight against Prop 8, which felt very personal to me as a gay person, even though I was probably not planning to get married. White: This one also isn't particularly "meaningful" but it is probably worth noting and keeping in mind, rather than just thinking of white as the "default" race. Jewish: I am not religious, didn't get a bar mitzvah, etc. but I grew up celebrating the major Jewish holidays so this still feels like it's a part of my identity, in some sense, even though if someone asked if I'm Jewish, I would generally say "Not really" or "Well, kind of, but basically no." I am a cisgender man with a mostly masculine gender expression. I am a student and part-time gig worker. I am 33 years old. I have already completed a Bachelor of Science in Journalism and I’m taking classes at CCB for myself and my own personal growth. I've been LGBT but I don't know very much of the history or academic thinking about what it means to be LGBT. Seems like a good thing to know! LGBT history beyond just Stonewall and Compton's Cafeteria, especially *before* those events.

Jukai (They/Them)
My name is Jukai. My preferred pronouns are they/them; though I don’t mind being addressed by any pronouns. I am a queer, non-binary, androgynous, outspoken Person of Color. I’m mixed Black, Pacific Islander, and white. I’m 22. Bilingual (Spanish and English). I’m a student aiming for my Bachelors of Art. Each of these titles hold a different impact on my life and my community. Growing up queer in a religious environment was difficult, I felt like I was always fighting to be comfortable with who I was while being told not to. Though being in a setting where queerness was shamed upon, I was fueled to learn more about my identity. Coming from indigenous descent
taught me the same thing my sexuality did; to stand proud in the face of adversity or judgement, because all of my being represents obstacles I’ve overcame.

I’ve always had to deny labels and assumptions because they come with everything you do no matter who you are. I always knew this came more with being a queer person of color. Growing up, most other kids in my class felt personally victimized by my femininity and self-expression, which I never understood. In which I was always facing judgement or having to explain myself to others, which I found exhausting. It made me feel like an outsider, like a misunderstood, incompetent person who could not be taken seriously. When I felt like the odd one out of a whole group, I thought I needed change. It shook my core, and I was ashamed of who I was and always tried minimizing myself to avoid being judged. This inspired me to strived to be a trailblazer, someone who I’d never thought could be embraced that deserved to be. I thought if I couldn’t find it through my peers to be embraced, I’ll find it in myself.

I’m taking this course to learn more about the queer history and those who have fought to make queerness more acceptable. I’m taking this course to be prouder of how hard I’ve fought to be here. I also want to learn about more experiences similar or different to mine. I’m taking this course to learn more about queer stories and widen my knowledge on terminology of all identities. I want to learn about every aspect of the LGBTQIA+ community. I also want to learn more about my own identity.

*Lilith (She/Her/They/Them)*
Figure 7. Lilith’s VPAR crew profile image. “The Evolution of Me” created by Lilith for the Midterm: My Queer Experience.

I use she/her/they/them pronouns. I picked Lilith as my fake name for our study just because there is a whole theory on how God killed Lucifer’s lover named Lilith and then created Eve in her exact likeness. It is a very interesting theory. My academic interests are mainly anything art related along with sociology. My three passions currently are graffiti, getting tattoos, and exploring the Bay. A long-term goal of mine is
to earn a degree and move on to an internship in whatever my decided major will be.

Another long-term goal is to settle into my own apartment/house without any roommates. The last goal is to travel outside the country such as to Cancun.

I currently identify as pansexual. I identify as BLM supporter. I identify as a feminist and as Filipina. These self-identifiers are important to me because part of these identities build who I am and what I stand ground for. I will not let others change whom I identify or change my mind for what I believe to hold true to me. Labeling or to assume that others can give a false perception of the individual to feel false strong emotions about themselves and can even influence their actions and behaviors to fit that label and/or get negative treatment if they fight against the label. I am taking this course because not only I want to be a part of the LGBTQ+ I also want to learn more in depth about the community that includes history. This is my first LGBTQ+ class I’ve registered in and although I never had a class with Instructor Breana I’ve been looking forward to learning and growing with the class together!!

*Lily (She/Her)*
Hello! My name is Lily, and my pronouns are she/her. Important self-identifiers for me: I identify as a cis woman. I am a woman of color. I am biracial and proud. I am Mexican and Black. I am a trans inclusive feminist. I am an ally and advocate to the LGBTQ+ community, survivors of sexual and domestic violence, people who are oppressed, targeted, or overlooked (particularly people of color). I am 25. I am employed full time with an Associate degree in Social Justice. I was born and raised in the bay. I believe labels and assumptions influence how people express and perceive themselves because if someone's identity goes against the norm in a society, it becomes dangerous and may bring shame or fear of disappointing loved ones. Labels can help us distinguish objects, but people aren't just one thing, we're components of many experiences, cultures, feelings, sexual desires and much more. On the other hand, labels can help others figure
out how they don't want to fit society's mold and expectations. I'm taking this course because I have taken similar courses in the past and as an ally I want to educate and better myself so I can help understand the LGBTQ+ community and their needs. I look forward to learning about the historical facts/stats/figures within the LGBTQ+ community.

_Napoleon (She/Her)_

*Figure 9. Napoleon’s VPAR crew profile image.*

I chose my pseudonym, Napoleon, because it's my cat's name and it's French, so two birds one stone. I am a European first, French second. I love Europe with all of its flaws, it is where I came from, where I grew up, where I built some of my best memories. I was born in France, and I speak French and English fluently. I am not working right now and focusing on learning Japanese at CCB. I am 33 years old, and I already have a Master’s degree. I am a ciswoman and I use she/her/hers pronouns. I am an intersectional Trans-inclusive Bad Feminist (and striving every day to be better at it). I
I am a bisexual woman married to a man. People always assume I am straight, and when I was younger it really hindered my awareness of my own queerness. It took me way too long to figure that one out. I also struggled to accept that my bisexuality was a big part of my identity, even within a straight relationship. These past years really taught me that silence is complicity. I am straight-passing, and I realize it is a privilege, and I want to use it however I can to help people in my community. I am taking classes this semester so I can learn and empower myself and others.

I love learning new languages. I am currently learning Japanese, and I hope to be learning ASL soon. Otherwise, any social science is of interest to me, especially sociology and psychology. I love to read, I am passionate about epic fantasy series, gritty thrillers, and queer romance novels. I am a trained pastry chef/baker, and I am passionate about baking bread. And finally knitting/crocheting. All of my friends are having babies and I love making baby blankets and clothes for them.

One of my main goals in life is to finally settle in one place and buy a house with a garden where I can grow my own veggies and fruits. The cherry on top would be to have goats and chickens to make my own cheese and have fresh eggs every day. My main career goal is to open a bakery with my husband wherever we settle.

I love fantasy more than anything else! My favorite book series is The Wheel of Time and it's a behemoth with 14 books. Amazon is developing it as TV show and that's pretty much the only bit of news that is keeping me going through the pandemic. Very recently I read The House In The Cerulean Sea and it's the literary equivalent of a hug, which again was much needed during hard times. It's queer, and fun, and with just enough fantasy to make it perfect.
Figure 10. Noodle’s VPAR crew profile image. “Loving Myself for being Myself”
created by Noodle for the Midterm: My Queer Experience.

I go by Noodle for out PAR study, and I use she/her. Three of most significant self-identifiers for me are: first generation Korean Asian American, queer, and a dreamer. First generation: an immigrant who moved to a new country she knew nothing about: an outsider, an adapter. Born in Seoul, Korea. Queer: a homosexual, first lesbian in our family who do not follow the steps of our cultural norm. Korean Asian American: a dreamer, learner, who lives in two different worlds; America and own culture. I also identify as nonbinary, my gender expression is androgynous/stemme. I am 30 and work full time in hospitality with a bachelor’s degree.
I have decided to take this course to get educated and familiar with my long community I do not, technically, feel familiar with. Due to unfamiliarity of the LGBTQ+ culture, I was not sure what to expect and not to expect. I joined the class without any expectation other than to expand my knowledge and learn about the culture and society of my community I wish to be more involved in.

Rebecca (She/Her)

Hello, I'm Rebecca I go by she her pronouns. I identify as a 21-year-old Latina, I speak Spanish, I'm bisexual, a cisgender female, a baker, and student who also has a job. I have graduated high school and now I am going to get a radiology AA. Labels and assumptions influence our identities because society has created "norms" of what should be accepted for us and help shape us to be put in a specific binary category which holds you down from accepting who you are. I'm taking this class to better education myself on
LGBT resistance, society, and culture. My friends partner goes by they them pronouns and I didn't understand at first being confused, this pushed me to take this class and better my understanding. The thing I want to learn more about is the historic background of LGBT culture and how much is has changed in the past hundred years.

Some of my academic interests are in science knowing how the body works is super interesting and complex. As well as taking history classes like Latino history and LGBT culture to learn the history that I wasn't here for. Three of my passions are painting for fun, hiking it clears my mind and rock climbing. I haven't rock climbed since quarantine and had just got into a month or two before covid but I fell in love with this activity. Three of my long terms goals is to be done with school and have my career started by the time I'm 25. As well as buy a house between 27-32 once my career has skyrocketed (Fingers crossed). Another one of my goals is to travel the world Italy, Japan, Iceland etc.

Rob (He/Him)
Figure 12. Rob’s VPAR crew profile image.

My name is Rob (he/him/his). Some of my self-identifiers are: Gay: To me, it means that I identify as a male who happens to be attracted to other males romantically. Latinx: To me, it means that I identify with my Latin American heritage. However, I believe that established binary gender norms are a problem for many people. Left-Handed: To me, it means that I will always bump shoulders with however is sitting to the left of me in class and annoy them. Kidding... kinda. Some other identities include: cisman, Spanish speaker, first-generation born in Mexico, employed, 29 years old, and I have my AA in Computer Science. I think labels and assumptions can be harmful in developing our own identities. Many times, it can shape younger people into trying to fit into the norm, which can also transition into adulthood as well.
I am taking this course because I am missing one of my lower GE requirements. I actually just transferred to SFSU as a CS major, it's my first semester there. All the classes for this category were taken at that school (at least the ones I was interested in). So I decided to take a look at CCB to see if there were any openings. I'm glad I did! I took a class with Instructor Breana a little over a year ago and it was great! I think it was Introduction to Queer Studies in summer or fall 2019. I think something that I would like to learn more about in this class is about early culture of people in the LGBT community.

Scott (He/Him)

Figure 13. Scott’s VPAR crew profile image. “Growth” created by Scott for the Midterm: My Queer Experience.

My name is Scott and I use he/him pronouns. I am a Gay Queer Male. I think assumptions other people make about you can make it harder for you to really define our own identities. Labels come along with stereotypes of how that person is expected to act.
Those stereotypes can make it harder to really discover with being gay or Latinx or whatever identifier may actually mean to you. I'll admit I initially found this course because it meets a GE requirement, I still need fill but once I found it I got very excited! Like I said earlier I identify has gay so it’s cool to have an opportunity to learn more about I consider myself to be a part of. One thing I'm excited to learn more about is queer history. I had really little exposure to any kind of queer history outside of effort I put in myself. So, I'm excited to learn more about queer history in a real class, from a real teacher!

*Vontressa (She/Her)*

![Vontressa’s VPAR crew profile image.](image)

Hello, my name is Vontressa my pronouns are she/her. I identify as a black anti-racist. A black anti-racist is someone who is against people being treated unfairly based off of their sexual preferences or race. Black Lives Matter advocate is someone who stands with defending the Black Lives Matter movement, and someone who's against the
mistreatment of African Americans. Additionally, I identify as a heterosexual ciswoman, this to me means that I like the male sex. I am a single mom who is dedicated to my children and being the best mom possible. I’m 30-years-old. I’m not working. I am a student working towards interior design as my degree.

I feel the labels other people place upon us do influence our identities some in negative ways and some in positive. Some individuals aren't sure or secure in their identities and they sometimes accept whatever society says, "they are." I am taking this course to get as much insight on this topic as possible. I love everyone, regardless of your sexual preference. I'd like to know more about the LGBT culture. I'd like to learn more about the trans community.

**Part 2: Interviewee Profiles**

*Ashley*

Ashley was interviewed by Rebecca. Ashley uses she/her pronouns. Ashley identifies as a lesbian ciswoman, who is a tomboy/femme presenting White. Ashley is 39 years old and has not declared her emphasis for her AA.

*Avda*

Avda was interviewed by Napoleon. Avda uses she/her pronouns. Avda identifies as a lesbian ciswoman, who is a femme presenting White Russian. Avda is bilingual and speaks Russian and English. She is 39 years old and is working towards her Humanities AA.

*Caius*
Caius was interviewed by Gohan. Caius uses she/her pronouns. Caius identifies as a bisexual ciswoman, who is a femme presenting Latina. Caius is 37 years old and is working toward her Broadcasting AA.

**Diaz**

Diaz was interviewed by Alejandro Mendoza. Diaz uses he/him pronouns. Diaz identifies as a gay cisman, who is a masculine presenting Mexican American. Diaz is bilingual and speaks Spanish and English. He is 30 years old and is working towards his AA in Administration of Justice and his Diversity and Social Justice Certificate.

**Edilberto**

Edilberto was interviewed by Alejandro Mendoza. Edilberto uses he/him pronouns. Edilberto identifies as a gay cisman, who is a gender conforming first generation Filipino. Edilberto is bilingual and speaks Tagalog and English. He is 26 years old and is working towards his Queer Studies and Asian American Studies AA.

**Gian**

Gian was interviewed by Vontressa. Gian uses she/her pronouns. Gian identifies as a heterosexual ciswoman, whose gender expression is represented by varying levels of masculine and feminine. She is Filipina, 25 years old and has not declared her emphasis for her AA.

**Jun**

Jun was interviewed by Alejandro Mendoza. Jun uses he/him pronouns. Jun identifies as a heterosexual cisman, whose gender expression is represented by varying levels of masculine and feminine. He is Filipino, 25 years old, and has not declared his emphasis for her AA.
**Kagami**

Kagami was interviewed by Noodle. Kagami uses they/them pronouns. Kagami identifies as a Queer Nonbinary, who is a femme to soft masculine presenting biracial Japanese and Welsh American. They are 25 years old working towards their AA-T in Social Justice Studies: Feminist, Queer, and Trans Studies.

**Lamar**

Lamar was interviewed by Aselia. Lamar uses he/him pronouns. Lamar identifies as a heterosexual cisman, who is a masculine presenting Latino. Lamar is bilingual and speaks Spanish and English. He is 20 years old and working towards his Computer Science AA.

**Lazaro**

Lazaro was interviewed by Rob. Lazaro uses she/her pronouns. Lazaro identifies as a lesbian ciswoman, who is an androgynous first-generation Latina. She is bilingual and speaks Spanish and English. She is 37 years old working towards her Queer Studies AA.

**Min-ji**

Min-ji was interviewed by Bob. Min-ji uses he/him pronouns. Min-ji identifies as a gay cisman, who is a gender nonconforming first-generation Korean and Japanese American. He is 34 years old working towards a Queer Studies AA.

**Myung-Soon**

Myung-Soon was interviewed by Gohan. Myung-Soon uses he/her/they pronouns. They identify as a pansexual genderfluid, Korean American. Myung-Soon is bilingual and speaks Korean and English. He is 32 years old, already has a Bachelor of Arts, and is
not working towards a degree or certificate. Myung-Soon is taking classes that interest him to further his growth and understanding of himself.

**Mikaili**

Mikaili was interviewed by Lilith. Mikaili uses she/her pronouns. Mikaili identifies as a Black heterosexual ciswoman, who is a femme presenting. She is 45 years old and is working towards her AA-T in Social Justice Studies: Ethnic Studies.

**Ralph**

Ralph was interviewed by Noodle. Ralph uses he/him pronouns. Ralph identifies as a White gay cisman, who is gender nonconforming. He is 58 years old and is working towards his Film Studies AA.

**TK**

TK was interviewed by Jeremy. TK uses he/him pronouns. TK identifies as a White gay cisman, who is gender conforming. He is 54 years old and is working towards his Queer Studies AA.

**Summary**

Working with these brilliant co-researchers and reading the experiences of these profound interviewees has been a privilege and one of the most meaningful times of my life. My hope is that I can honor the voices of each co-researcher and interviewee by accurately representing them in their profiles. These profiles set the stage for Chapter 5, which discusses the findings for each research question and themes uncovered beyond the scope of the research questions.

**Part 3: VPAR Process and Chronology**

**The Story of VPAR**
Lastly, the third part of this chapter chronicles our journey and presents the experiences the co-researchers and I shared while engaging in VPAR. Spring 2021 was a semester like no other, as we were nearly a year into a global pandemic. COVID-19 greatly influenced our VPAR study. First and foremost, the global pandemic's greatest effect on our study required the V in VPAR. Everything was virtual. The class was virtual. My office hours were virtual. Meetings were virtual. My dissertation check-ins were virtual. Even social gatherings were virtual. Many times, throughout the semester, it felt as though I never left my desk and that my life revolved around Zoom. All our interactions were remote, and there was no opportunity to meet face-to-face throughout the five months of research. This will be expanded upon more in the Challenges of VPAR section. VPAR required me to get creative when building our VPAR crew. I had to think outside the box on what it means to build community virtually. How can our class connect with each other, and how can I connect with my co-researchers when throughout many Zoom classes, students do not turn on their cameras? How can I “read” the class and connect with students emotionally when it feels as though I am lecturing to a blank void? These questions will continue to be integrated throughout this chapter.

The start of the semester had a similar structure to most of my courses. The first week of class began with an indigenous land acknowledgment, recognizing that we occupy the unceded ancestral homeland of the Ramaytush Ohlone peoples, who are the original inhabitants where CCB is located. I defined the difference between self-identification and labels to have students think internally about what the terms mean to them. I defined pronouns, sexual identity, gender identity, race, ethnicity, culture, society, ideology, discourse, normalization, and norms.
I listed that I identify as: a white anti-racist; queer; nonbinary (they/them pronouns); masculine of center, with a splash of high femme; dyslexic; neurodivergent; intersectional-feminist; abolitionist; survivor; activist; educator; and life-long learner. Further, I explained *what* my identities mean to me. For instance, I asserted that for me identifying as queer does not just describe how my sexual and gender identity fall outside societal norms and assumptions, but that it goes so much deeper. For me, identifying as queer means advocating for Black Lives Matter and bringing an end to police violence and brutality; abolishing U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and abolishing borders; fighting to dismantle capitalism; advocating for healthcare for all and for all beings to have fundamental human rights; and much more. This is my queer identity.

I do this for students to go deeper into our curriculum and bring more meaning to identity. Furthermore, this lecture is meant to be an example for students to thoroughly answer questions about their identities to connect with others in the course and take our first steps to build a virtual community. In our first discussion post, the co-researchers shared five significant self-identifiers. They described what each identity means to them, highlighting the importance that only you can define yourself and that not all people have the same definition of identity markers.

The VPAR methodology helped our crew begin the dialogue about the role of research in academia, how research can inform activism, and how activism can inform research. We explored and critiqued research that provided examples of how to dismantle systemic inequities based on racial identity, sexual identity, and gender identity. If I had all the time in the world, I would have also included examples of how to combat ableism,
classism, and fatphobia. I established early on that VPAR is designed for oppressed and under-resourced communities to own their knowledge instead of having an outside researcher observe, report, and gain wealth and capital. Furthermore, we began identifying how we can “queer” our VPAR study.

Following the discussion on VPAR in week four, we focused on the research questions. I initially offered five guiding questions and recommended we begin there. The first question considered how students describe their experiences in queer courses at CCB, which sparked a thoughtful dialogue.

It is important to note that the VPAR process changed due to the climate at CCB. In response to the threat of course cuts and massive layoffs, including myself, the VPAR crew created the Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity and Expression (SOGIE) Demographic Survey. This was a reactionary action since the school-wide demographic survey for CCB does not include questions regarding sexual identity. Currently, there are only two options for the category of gender: “female” or “male.” The current school-wide demographic survey does not represent the queer, trans, and nonbinary community. We sought to change that.

The VPAR crew made a realistic goal of creating a queer, trans, and nonbinary-inclusive demographic survey and began by only surveying students taking queer studies courses at CCB in the Spring semester of 2021. By doing this, we sought to dive critically into how to ask questions regarding sexual identity and gender identity. Our survey’s long-term goal aimed to include the queer, trans, and nonbinary community in the larger conversation about who is affected by the faculty and staff layoffs and class cuts at CCB. Our intent in creating the survey was to improve the current CCB demographic survey
and build from it with carefully crafted language. The VPAR crew spent a 75-minute class engaging with language throughout our survey.

We meticulously scrutinized what identities we were including. For example, co-researcher, Jeremy, recognized that gender is complex and layered. He reflected that it is vital to not just ask for someone’s gender identity but also to ask what their gender expressions are. Jeremy did not want our survey to subtly assume peoples’ gender expressions. He felt that by explicitly asking for peoples’ gender expression, we would disrupt assumptions based on gender identity, for instance, assuming someone presents as feminine because they identify as female or assuming a masculine gender expression for someone who identifies as a transman. Alejandro Mendoza built on Jeremy’s insights by investigating the best ways to illuminate the differences between gender identity and gender expression for those taking the survey who need clarification.

Ultimately, the co-researchers agreed to include gender identity and gender expression in the survey. In addition, everyone agreed that for each question, we would insert a short video defining the specific identities we were asking for. We included definitions for: pronouns, gender identity, gender expression, sexual identity, racial identity, and ethnicity. In addition, we assessed how we were asking the questions. All the co-researchers unanimously agreed that an essential aspect of our survey was how we asked the questions. Bob discussed that our survey needs to represent the complexity of identity and said, “no pun intended, we need to think outside the box for putting people in boxes. I’m kidding. Seriously though, I really want us to go beyond putting people in boxes and not present binary options or limited choices for our survey” (Bob, class discussion, March 2, 2021).
He continued addressing how as a transman, he hardly ever can check “trans” as his gender identity on surveys or paperwork. Furthermore, he has never been able to check “transman” as his gender identity. This sparked a conversation about whether we should have all our questions be open-ended. If we provided ten options for each question, that is still limited and perpetuates a hierarchy based on which identities we include and which goes first and last. Consequently, the co-researchers decided on open-ended questions for every survey request because it was the most inclusive option. Also, it was agreed that the open-ended questions would be worth the extra work of analyzing the responses as researchers. We recognized that if the survey was implemented school-wide at CCB, it would occur in the distant future. The final SOGIE Demographic Survey is included in the appendix section of this dissertation.

The co-researchers reflected on the VPAR process at the end of the study in the final journal entries and reflections. The following sections cover the strengths and challenges associated with the VPAR methodology as experienced by our research crew.

**Strengths of VPAR**

Overall, the experience for the research crew was positive, and the strengths of VPAR include: 1) the sense of community VPAR created in a time of vital mandatory quarantines and social distancing, when community felt more critical than ever, 2) the resistance the co-researchers sparked in each other by delving into VPAR, primarily through the action part of VPAR, and 3) the agency students felt taking research into their own hands and disrupting power dynamics within academic research.

**Building Community Online**
For this research, VPAR created an opportunity to connect the students taking Queer Culture, Society, and Resistance in unique ways and to connect with students outside of our Zoom classroom. This was not a simple task, and creating opportunities for our VPAR crew to bond and build community was often tricky. However, I believe building community was more important than ever since many of us lived alone or with given family. One example of the effects of our VPAR study and how it influenced building long-term connections is that the VPAR crew exchanged numbers and created a group on Discord, an application for instant messaging and a digital distribution platform. Users converse with voice calls, video calls, text messaging, media, and files in private chats or as part of groups called “servers.” Through Discord, one of the co-researchers created a server for our VPAR crew to communicate as a group, to talk, connect, share each other’s work, especially art, and distribute resources outside the class. The VPAR crew, including myself, continued communicating after the Spring semester of 2021.

Furthermore, we set a goal to meet face-to-face once over the summer if the COVID-19 numbers continued to decrease and it was safe, which, sadly, we were unable to achieve. Due to the spread of the COVID variant, there was too much risk to meet face-to-face. However, we plan to meet in the future to see each other face-to-face finally. The VPAR crew intends to meet in person to connect, catch up, and highlight the work we accomplished. A primary goal for the meetup will be to discuss plans for the future of our research by contemplating potential conferences and grassroots organizations we can present our findings. Lastly, I will share our study's latest version to celebrate all their brilliant work and begin a conversation on potential input or critiques they have. Unfortunately, I could not add their updates to this version of our study. Only
recently have I shared this dissertation with my co-researchers due to time restraints. Consequently, I did not give them enough time to send feedback.

In addition, many co-researchers planned to continue building on our second action for our VPAR study. They were excited to continue to work on our study even after the semester ended. On the last day of class, the co-researchers exchanged phone numbers and discussed what they would like to contribute to the queer studies Instagram page they created. Most co-researchers shared that they would be thrilled to create a couple of Instagram posts based on their midterms to feature their hard work. There was also a discussion, led by Alejandro Mendoza and Jeremy, stating how the first handful of posts should highlight the rich history of the queer studies department at CCB. The co-researchers agreed they wanted to help create posts for the queer studies Instagram page but needed a well-deserved break first. They shared that they were exhausted after a strenuous semester. They eagerly traded ideas on facts about the development of the queer studies department over the decades. They shared that they would like to focus on celebrating the history of queer resistance against a heterosexist and cissexist institution over the years. Queer resistance manifested throughout the Spring 2021 semester in each of the 12 co-researchers.

**Resistance**

The second strength of VPAR is the resistance the co-researchers sparked in each other by delving into this methodology, primarily through the action part of VPAR. This study conducted two significant actions throughout the Spring 2021 semester. The first action was the creation of the SOGIE Demographic Survey, which asked identity-based questions that were inclusive of the queer, trans, and nonbinary community.
was an act of resistance against the invisibility of sexual and gender identities beyond the binary options of “female” or “male.” This erasure was perpetuated throughout CCB and ignored conversations on how the institution serves nonbinary, trans, and nonbinary students. The co-researchers attempted to resist this blatant and consistent exclusion. CCBs demographic surveys asked questions based on being a veteran and a foster child, which are vital to include. Unfortunately, for decades these surveys have excluded questions about students’ sexual identity and continue perpetuating the gender binary. Through this resistance, which is key to the methodology of VPAR, students’ sense of agency was centered.

**Student Agency**

Another strength of our VPAR study was the disruptions of power dynamics. Students took pride in structuring parts of the course and the VPAR study. They enjoyed dismantling the instructor and student paradigm and taking some authority over their education. The week the course went into depth defining queer theory, Queer of Color Analysis (QOCA), critical race theory, critical whiteness, intersectional theory, and anti-oppressive education; this created opportunities to discuss power dynamics within the classroom. We deliberated ways power is not binary in education. We postulated examples of how students hold power over their instructors. This stimulated a lively conversation. Lily shared how she relies on Rate My Professor, a website where students can praise and critique their instructors, to create her school schedule. She continued expressing how it helps with her anxiety to do her best to avoid strict or aggressive professors. Lily contemplated that she had never thought of that as holding power before. Not only does she have the ability to avoid specific instructors, but she also has the power
to critique them publicly and anonymously. She reflected that understanding her power and controlling her education by thoroughly vetting whom she takes courses with, made her feel empowered to continue to take agency in her educational career.

Another example of students taking agency in Queer Culture, Society, and Resistance is designing the VPAR study. Jeremy took the lead, running a conversation about how to be more inclusive in recognizing generational differences in our research questions. Jeremy was inspired by our guest speaker, Gabriel Abbazadeh, a pseudonym, who lectured on his life in the 1980s and 1990s in New York City. Gabriel provided examples of how ballroom culture saved his life throughout the AIDS epidemic displaying hundreds of pictures he took of the balls throughout the decades. Jeremy was moved by everything Gabriel shared and how much trauma he was able to survive. He wanted to recognize generational differences in our research. Through our research, he sought to create more opportunities for millennials to learn firsthand from our elders. This agency continued throughout the semester, and Jeremy developed into one of the leading voices in our course, consistently going above and beyond the expectations of the class. He was a positive example for the other co-researchers in our study.

**Challenges of VPAR**

We encountered more challenges than expected while engaging with VPAR, including: 1) COVID-19, 2) everyday hardships of managing coursework and survival, 3) Zoom fatigue and the workload of the VPAR study, and 4) isolation.

**COVID-19**

One major challenge I could not foresee when I began my dissertation journey was that at the start of the Spring 2021 semester, the world was ten months into a global
pandemic: COVID-19. All classes at CCB were pushed online. Educators either did remote learning where the class met via Zoom during their scheduled class time or transferred their face-to-face course into a fully online course. This created unique challenges, including creating new kinds of curricula. I had never taught online prior to COVID-19; therefore, I had a steep learning curve to manage. In addition, the push online created significant obstacles in nurturing relationships in a virtual context.

Due to the pandemic, one of my biggest challenges was time. This study took longer than expected since students’ schedules were constantly changing due to COVID-19. A few students were struggling with completing this course. Consequently, I opted to offer Queer Culture, Society, and Resistance remotely via Zoom and entirely online. This was one of my most consistent struggles throughout the semester because it was incredibly time-consuming, but I believe it was worth it in the long run. Students had the choice to complete the class in whatever format worked for them and could decide for themselves what fit their specific needs the best.

*Everyday Hardships*

Students lead complex lives. Many students have part-time or full-time jobs, adhere to family expectations and responsibilities, partake in activism, and maybe even have time for a social life. Subsequently, a further challenge in the VPAR study was the consistent everyday hardships that emerged for each co-researcher. Each student had unique challenges to overcome throughout the semester, including Vontressa. Daily hardships for her included managing the Zoom classes and the course workload, all while prioritizing her family. Vontressa, who identifies as African American, heterosexual, cisgender, and a single mother of two, often did not want to speak in our Zoom classes,
not even in the breakout rooms. This was because she did not want people in our class to hear her crying infant in the background (Vontressa’s journal, April 30, 2021).

**Zoom Fatigue and Course Workload**

The next major challenge was Zoom fatigue. At the end of the semester, it wasn’t easy to keep everyone’s energy up to stay engaged in the course material. In addition, the amount of work expected throughout the semester for each co-researcher to complete the VPAR study was an obstacle. Most students did not fully meet the expectations of the interview and final. While the co-researchers were exemplary students, and many were leaders throughout the VPAR study, it did not come without challenges. Unfortunately, one co-researcher did not complete the course and stopped attending shortly after the midterms.

Furthermore, after collecting all the data throughout the semester, only five co-researchers accomplished all the course requirements. Two co-researchers concluded the course with honors and exceeded the requirements of the class by conducting multiple interviews. Out of the 12 co-researchers, everyone turned in their midterm. However, five co-researchers did not complete their VPAR Final Paper and Reflection. In addition, four did not turn in their Zoom transcripts, and four different co-researchers did not submit their Zoom recording. In the final reflection of the course, Noodle, Alejandro Mendoza, Jeremy, and Gohan admitted to being “exhausted” after completing the research. All four of these co-researchers received over 100% for their final grade and were prominent leaders throughout the semester.

**Isolation**
The last notable challenge was the isolation, primarily due to COVID-19. A substantial challenge I had was teaching to what felt like a black void. Halfway through the semester, all my co-researchers stopped turning on their video during our Zoom classes. There was a disconnect using Zoom, and building community within the course was challenging. I asked students to keep on their videos because 80% of communication is nonverbal (Hadiani & Ariyani, 2021). A couple of students turned on their video for the first month, and others turned on their video only for small group discussions. However, around midterms, no one turned on their videos during the Zoom classes, including small groups. This contributed significantly to my feeling of isolation as the instructor. I struggled with not feeling connected with the co-researchers when their cameras were off.

In addition, an obstacle that took me by surprise was that my co-researchers did not know anyone to interview for our VPAR study. I should have foreseen this since we were all so isolated because of COVID-19. Our world changed quickly and drastically. I knew building community would be challenging in a VPAR study. Therefore, I was so focused on how to shape a community within our class that I did not stop and think about the relationships or, more accurately, the lack of relationships being fostered outside our class to the entire queer studies department at CCB. I had multiple students in my class taking two to three queer studies courses in Spring 2021. However, due to most queer courses having a more traditional online format, combined with the isolation COVID-19 brought, my students did not know one person to interview. No one had a connection with any student taking a queer studies course at CCB.
Consequently, I had to pair all my students with someone to interview. This took a great deal of time I did not plan for. Some interviewees stated initial interest in being interviewed, then didn’t respond to the email where I paired them with one of my co-researchers. This meant some of my co-researchers had to be paired two to four times. This caused extra stress for the co-researchers because they were trying to manage their busy schedules, and when interviewees did not respond, it took extra time. This again emphasizes the challenges of virtually building community outside the classroom.

Personally, this was a unique strength and a challenge for me. Due to the isolation of all courses at CCB being remote or online and having none of my co-researchers know anyone to interview, I was able to handpick each pair (the co-researcher and interviewee). To the best of my ability, I was able to create affinity pairs, meaning I could pair the co-researcher with someone that had at least two of the same identities as their interviewee. The primary identity markers I focused on included: racial identity, ethnicity, sexual identity, gender identity, and age. I had access to the interviewees’ demographics, which they filled out and shared voluntarily, and my co-researchers had already completed their demographic surveys earlier in the semester. Almost every pair of co-researcher and interviewee had the same racial identity. The second common identity varied based on ethnicity, sexual identity, gender identity, and age.

The challenges of VPAR had an impact on our study. However, there were many lessons entrenched in them. They included: 1) COVID-19, 2) everyday hardships of managing coursework and survival, 3) Zoom fatigue and the workload of the VPAR study, and 4) isolation. The following section presents the outcomes of VPAR.

Outcomes of VPAR
The outcomes of our VPAR study span from the personal to the professional. I have never seen the amount of engagement as I did in the co-researchers breakout rooms, brainstorming the potential actions for our VPAR study. Before the breakout rooms, I lectured on what feasible actions we could create. I provided examples of queer zines, visual art, including murals, short videos, theatre of the oppressed-based performance art, and interactive academic presentations that could be shown virtually to the larger CCB community. I connected all these examples to ways we could modify each action to highlight the future findings of our VPAR study.

After the breakout rooms, the co-researchers came together and shared what they discussed. I was in awe at the magic I witnessed in this more extensive class dialogue. Each group did the same thing: they brought the examples I provided to the twenty-first century. One group shared how many of them are visual artists and that they could create visual art with short written descriptors breaking down our research findings and posting them on social media. Another group mentioned how a couple of them had experience with zines and that it would be exciting to create individual posts on social media in the style of “old-school zines” (Rebecca, class discussion, March 18, 2021). The third and last group advocated for creating short videos that could be posted on Instagram and described how the videos could be simple to work with Instagram’s new video features that also includes embedding music in the videos. The last group noted that if we create Prezi or PowerPoint presentations with our VPAR findings, we could break them down into short one-minute videos to be posted via Instagram, so our research can “get to as many people as possible and to do that we have to post our findings on social media. It’s only logical” (Bob, class discussion, March 18, 2021).
As a group, the co-researchers decided the best media platform to post our research would be Instagram and if time allows it, we could spread to TikTok, Twitter, SnapChat, and Facebook. Most of the co-researchers agreed that Facebook was dated, but that it is still important to utilize to “reach an older demographic” (Gohan, class discussion, March 18, 2021).

Alas, time was a major factor here and the actions conveyed in our class in March became a plan of action for us to continue after our course ended in May. This meant that the co-researchers would be volunteering their time after they completed our class Queer Culture, Society, and Resistance. In May 2021 we created an Instagram account for queer studies at CCB, however, we were not able to upload anything to the Instagram we created, but we planned our action. Students offered to post their midterm project and to tag themselves, so the CCB queer studies Instagram page reached as many people as possible. The following are examples of their planned posts:
Figure 1. Alejandro Mendoza’s VPAR crew profile image. “Code Switching” created by Alejandro Mendoza for the Midterm: My Queer Experience.
Figure 7. Lilith’s VPAR crew profile image. “The Evolution of Me” created by Lilith for the Midterm: My Queer Experience.
Inhaling

I am mutilated, granulated
Without an escape

Inhaling

I was told that my words,
held no weight meaning or weight
That my spine had no strength
Yet to my surprise
In the center of my being
I’m supported by a spine
A spine that is righteous
But Righteousness cannot resist
That similar to my spine,
my thoughts can also twist
& Make me think it’s normal,
To not want to exist

My spine has stayed with me
Veins, Muscles and Bones
It reminds me from each cell and atom
I never remained alone

Inhaling

Though my thoughts made my chest cave in
The chest of a body that feels like confinement
It always makes me ponder on sex assignment
Or why we’re stuck in the body we get

The one you’ve had since you were a child
In which you had to get used to
But what if in this body, I am not tactile

Growing up never sat well with me,
Now I just age inevitably?

What about the times I’ve wanted to forget?
the suns that never set?
the times I never slept?
the emotions I’ve swept?
the tears I’ve wept?
I question if things are any better compared to that?

Than the layers of tissue I hacked away at.

Of the world that’s a beach
I am but a grain of sand
Let this stream of consciousness
Not let me lose focus, of the task at hand; Inhaling

Exhaling
Releasing the stored air in my lungs

Exhaling
I can feel the stillness of the room in its loudest setting

Exhaling
Realigning my Brain to my Core
It resets me to a time of being inferior
Those times are Over
Reclaim
There are no steps for healing
Just a nonstop cycle of emotional reconstruction
Revisiting the past makes me think of now
The more I scan it the less time I feel avoiding it
It makes the solitude I’m given even more serene
I’m proud
Of the steps I’ve taken
Of my journey
To have made it so far

I will one day wilt like a flower and have hopefully further met myself; I cannot wait to meet them.

What a joy it is to be
Non-binary.

Every breath I take is healing

Jukai’s poem, named “Inhaling.”

We discussed how *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) by Brazilian educator Paulo Freire is one of the foundational texts in the field of critical pedagogy, which attempts to help students question and challenge domination and the beliefs and practices that dictate society. We explored how *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* challenges the standard
practice in education that students are an empty receptacle waiting to be filled with knowledge and tested to see how much leaked out. By completing the My Queer Experience Midterm, the co-researchers emphasized their deep understanding of queer, trans, and nonbinary topics. I discussed with the class how a goal of this course is to build on their knowledge.

I explored how this is an opportunity to be as creative as they like and to think outside the box of “traditional” homework assignments. I shared how it is a chance to share some of their lived experiences with the class. They had the option to write poetry, make a poster, perform spoken word, or write a paper. These were just ideas, and we discussed how the sky is the limit regarding creativity. The requirement was they needed to focus on “queer experience,” this may mean sharing personal stories of individual “queer experiences,” what being an ally means, or “queer experiences” they have witnessed. This helped build a community for the VPAR study because the co-researchers were incredibly vulnerable with what they presented to the class. Jeremy presented how he got into activism, focusing on assimilation politics within the queer community and underscoring ways to resist assimilation. Noodle shared her coming-out story to her family and close friends as well as to herself. Rebecca reflected on how influential San Francisco Pride was for her to recognize she had the strength to come out as bisexual and how meaningful being in community was to her.

At the start of Spring 2021, 14 students started Queer Culture, Society, and Resistance, and 12 completed the course. Four students stopped showing up around a month after midterms. I sent all four of them an email. I let them know: 1) I am here to support them, 2) I don’t blame them for not attending class, especially since we are amid
a global pandemic, which can make life overwhelming, 3) I would never judge them if they are having difficulty or issues with my class, I am here to help, and 4) I care for them and I want to see them complete the course and succeed. Two of the co-researchers responded, thanking me, and then we collaboratively planned on how to transition back into the class and catch up with late work. One of the students was Vontressa, who became overwhelmed with school and being a single mother of two, one of whom was a newborn. The second, Bob, was no longer welcome at the place they were staying and was desperately trying to find stable living. As a result, he did not have access to consistent internet. Unfortunately, I did not hear from the remaining two co-researchers. I tried emailing them both one more time, but they never responded and did not complete the course.

**Summary**

This section examined the processes of the co-researchers throughout the VPAR study. The first part shared the story of VPAR and discussed the chronology of VPAR. The next section reflected on the strengths of VPAR, followed by its challenges. The final portion uncovered the outcomes of the VPAR study. The following chapter breaks down the findings based on the research questions.
CHAPTER V: FINDINGS

Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of our virtual participatory action research (VPAR) crew. The research findings are organized by research questions and emergent themes using data collected from the co-researcher’s journals, interview transcripts, demographic surveys, assignments, and the Final: VPAR Paper and Reflection. This chapter identifies the findings that emerged from the researchers’ explorations of the research questions. Two themes surfaced related to the first research question, “How do students describe their experiences in queer courses at Community College of the Bay (CCB)?” The two themes are: 1) understanding identity and 2) complicating identity.

Additionally, two themes materialized based on the second research question, “What are the similarities and differences between students’ experiences based on different aspects of their identities? These aspects include the following: racial identity, sexual identity, gender identity, and age.” The first notable theme is erasure, colonialism, and whiteness. Students identified how a barrier to having some of their racial identities reflected in queer studies is due to the destruction of their histories from colonization. Whiteness was also embedded in many of the interviews. A significant aspect of this theme was how queer studies courses can improve to be more representative of students racial, sexual, and gender identities. The final theme in exploring the second research question considers the positive representation students experienced regarding their identities.
Lastly, the final research question asks: “How do queer courses address intersectionality?” While investigating this question one major theme emerged: the significance of centering intersectionality within queer studies.

Part 2 examines themes that came to light outside the scope of the research questions. Based on the co-researchers’ individual Zoom interviews of queer studies students, the coursework, journals, and VPAR reflections by the co-researchers throughout the semester, three themes emerged that did not directly align with the research questions for this study. These themes are: 1) queer studies and activism, 2) supportive spaces, and 3) building community.

**Part 1: VPAR Research Questions**

**Research Question 1:**

**How do students describe their experiences in queer studies courses at CCB?**

The first research question laid the foundation for this VPAR study. This question was mainly answered in the 15 interviews conducted by my 12 co-researchers. It is important to note that every interviewee had something positive to say about their experiences in queer studies courses at CCB. Overall, there were more positive comments about their experiences than negative critiques. This could be because CCB is one of the few colleges in the nation with its own queer studies department; therefore, just the existence of multiple classes covering queer topics and issues is validating and affirming to students. Another influence could be the structure of our VPAR study; students fearing their anonymity would not be respected and that they could be outed to their instructors about their critiques of queer studies courses.
Through coding the transcriptions of each interview, two themes emerged. First, all the interviewees addressed how the queer studies courses helped in understanding their own identities. In this theme, students delved into how the curricula in queer studies courses bolstered, affirmed, validated, and questioned their own identities.

Second, a major theme emerged: how queer studies courses complicated identity for many students. Throughout the interviews, multiple students took the course content deeper than just identity affirmation. They explored how the queer studies courses challenged preconceived notions or biases against specific queer, trans, or nonbinary communities. Others argued for the need to complicate the curricula by including more historical context within the pedagogy. This theme was identified in multiple interviews and was complicated by the analysis of some of my co-researchers in their Final: VPAR Paper and Reflection.

**Understanding Identity**

The first notable theme that students experienced in queer studies courses at CCB was understanding their own identity. Based on Merriam-Webster’s dictionary (2021) definition, we described understanding as the power to make experience intelligible by applying concepts and categories. In our study, understanding focused on the queer experience, and the ability to be empathetically aware of other people’s feelings. Furthermore, identity was defined as a particular form of social grouping that mediates the relationship between the individual and social order (Chyrssochoou, 2003). Research shows that students are more connected to course material if they see themselves represented in the curricula (Kumashiro, 2002). This section begins by examining the significance of understanding identity in queer studies. The second part of this theme
provides specific benefits to understanding identity. Lastly, this theme concludes by addressing how students understood their identities and others in queer studies at CCB.

**The Importance of Understanding Identity**

The co-researchers and I were initially introduced to the importance of understanding identity from the first action implemented in our VPAR study, which entailed creating a demographic survey inclusive of racial, sexual, and gender identities. Consequently, the Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity and Expression (SOGIE) Demographic Survey was disseminated to all queer studies courses in the Spring of 2021. One of the open-ended questions in the survey was why they were taking a queer studies course. Out of the 95 survey responses, 49 noted that at least one of the reasons they were taking a queer studies course was to fulfill a General Education (GE) or certificate requirement at CCB, which was the most frequent response.

Out of the 95 survey responses, 37 declared that at least one of the reasons they were taking a queer studies course was to learn more about themselves and further understand their own queer, trans, and nonbinary identities. This was the second most common response. In addition, learning about community was another central theme in the surveys. Eighteen students determined that at least one of the reasons they were taking a queer studies course was to be in community with other queer, trans, and nonbinary people.

**Benefits of Understanding Identity**

The next part of this theme provides examples of the benefits of understanding identities in queer studies. In the following two quotes, both Michal and Edilberto explored how understanding their identities in queer studies was empowering and
validating for them. Co-researcher, Gohan, interviewed three people separately. In his last interview with Myung-Soon, Gohan asked him to describe what had been the most helpful form of support for him to succeed as a student at CCB. Myung-Soon responded:

It [queer studies courses] was great. It was the knowledge that I've always been looking to learn more about, but often had to rely on my own experience and desire to learn more on my own time. So, to be in a community of other students and be learning things that were relevant to myself, my own identities, and just kind of putting the words, the language that I never had, that was very, very empowering. (Gohan’s interview, May 3, 2021, p. 7)

Myung-Soon addressed how what he learned in queer studies was something he had always wanted to explore but did not have the opportunities within his educational career. Therefore, Myung-Soon must have had little to no exposure to queer, trans, and nonbinary communities within curricula before taking this class, including grades K-12. He continued by acknowledging that his understanding of queerness was typically based on his own experiences or that he had to educate himself. The importance of being represented in curricula stands out in his speculations. Myung-Soon expanded to state the significance of being in community and developing language to express his own identities further.

Co-researcher Alejandro Mendoza interviewed Edilberto, who explored the benefits of understanding his identities. Edilberto revealed:

Queer Communities of Color in the United States class was the one [course] that was more affirmative in terms of you know, highlighting my identities and other issues. So that was helpful for me… and validating, you know, like, queer and
Asian ancestry and also shining a light about, you know, what's happening with our experiences and heritage here. And also, like, shining a light on kind of, like, how solidarity works. (Gohan’s interview, April 30, 2021, p. 12)

Edilberto affirmed how understanding identity is about “validating” his racial and sexual identities both in modern and ancestral contexts. He recognizes the healing power of supporting communities through solidarity. These two quotes stress how part of understanding identity is being in community, developing language around queerness, and being in solidarity with other marginalized communities. Myung-Soon advocated how understanding his identity and community was “very, very empowering,” while Edilberto identified how it was “helpful” for him. Edilberto expanded how validating it was for his queer studies course to address the intersection of his queer and Asian identities and ancestry.

In addition, Gian, Lamar, and Mikaili noted how understanding queer, trans, and nonbinary communities provided new ways to see and interpret the world around them. Co-researcher Vontressa interviewed Gian. In their interview, Gian shared, “I believe it [queer studies courses] has impacted me in a positive way. Initially, I was not knowledgeable about queer identities and people at all. Taking this class has given me new insight and opened my eyes” (Vontressa’s interview, April 30, 2021, p. 3). Here, Gian named that understanding queer, trans, and nonbinary identities was important to her and helped her have “new insights” to perceiving the world. She stated that she had little to no knowledge about queer people and their experiences and that her queer studies course opened her eyes to communities to which she was not privy.

Supporting this theme, Lamar, interviewed by co-researcher Aselia, stated:
…hearing other people’s experiences and what being gay, lesbian, or asexual meant to people really helped me have an understanding of the struggles and difficulties that come with identifying as those in the LGBTQ community because I don’t have the capacity to know everything. (Aselia’s interview, April 26, 2021, p. 4)

Lamar recognized the power of storytelling. He shared how hearing the experiences and struggles of queer, trans, and nonbinary communities helped introduce him to a more encompassing perspective. He affirmed how as a heterosexual cisman, he had a limited understanding before taking a queer studies course.

Examining this theme, Mikaili went deeper, revealing how understanding queer, trans, and nonbinary communities is also essential for heterosexual and cisgender allies and people of all ages. Mikaili was interviewed by co-researcher Lilith. Mikaili discussed how vital it is to require queer studies courses for all people in college settings and high school. Mikaili reflected that queer studies courses could help young people “step out of their point of view” (Lilith’s interview, May 2, 2021, p. 13). Mikaili identified herself as an “ally” to the queer, trans, and nonbinary community. She is a 45-year-old Black, heterosexual ciswoman, and a single mother of three sons, two of whom identify under the queer umbrella. Mikaili recognized that the queer studies course helped broaden her lens as heterosexual and cisgender to be a more substantial “ally.” Mikaili stated how queer studies courses provide opportunities for students to dive deeper into understanding their own identities and identities that are not their own.

Moreover, Lamar discussed the ways queer studies helped him question his own identities and interrogate what he was socialized to think about his identities. In the
interview by co-researcher Aselia, his interviewee Lamar contended that after taking the Introduction to Queer Studies course a few semesters back, “it definitely made me stop and question my sexual identity” (Aselia’s interview, April 26, 2021, p. 5). Lamar recognized that the curricula in queer studies pushed him to look inward. He was encouraged to go beyond the societal expectations placed upon him to find his inner truth. Introduction to Queer Studies created an opportunity for him to question the status quo based on attraction, sex, and intimacy.

Another benefit of understanding queer, trans, and nonbinary identities is how it encouraged confidence in students and inspired ways to challenge homophobia. In co-researcher, Napoleon’s Final: VPAR Paper and Reflection, she assessed her interview with Avda. Napoleon wrote:

My interviewee told me a story about her time at a Thanksgiving dinner during which she was faced with a woman who made homophobic comments. Avda told me how at the time she could not react, and she did not know what to say. After taking her queer studies class though she confirmed that it helped her: ‘I’m glad that this class exists. I will definitely be more confident.’ Coming from a very homophobic culture, she never felt like she could go against it and fight it alone. Reinforcing one’s sense of identity, and providing knowledge about the community, its history and culture, did provide her with the confidence needed to deal with the verbal violence that is an overhanging threat for any LGBT+ people. (Napoleon’s Final: VPAR Paper and Reflection, May 6, 2021, p. 2)

Napoleon analyzed how Avda could better combat homophobia within her family by scrutinizing her own queer identity through academia. Avda’s “confidence” isn’t just
about feeling good about being queer but being “confident” in fighting against homophobia. Avda’s understanding of queer identity, “community, its history…culture” and bridging that knowledge to know herself better, helped give her the tools to respond to homophobia.

**How To Understand Identity**

As seen above, understanding identity was essential and had multiple benefits for many students in queer studies. This theme concludes by recognizing the developing avenues utilized in queer studies for students to have the opportunity to know themselves. Edilberto reported in his interview with Alejandro Mendoza:

> For my experience in the queer studies department, I thought it was really positive. I was able to learn so much history and so much knowledge about, you know, the queer culture, queer history, and queer participation, and activism in the United States. So, I thought that was very informative and very crucial to learn, especially here as a queer artist and an individual in San Francisco. (Alejandro Mendoza’s interview, April 30, 2021, p. 3)

This demonstrates that being represented in the curricula does not just mean defining and lecturing about a student’s specific identity. Queer history, culture, and activism are directly connected to not just his queer identity but his identity as an artist and San Francisco resident.

To expand on this further, when asked to describe their most memorable moment in queer studies, Kagami stated, “just realizing, like, confirming that, like, hey, we've been around forever...” (Noodle’s interview, May 1, 2021, p. 7). Kagami was interviewed by co-researcher Noodle. Kagami’s quote highlights how history connects with queer
students today. Kagami implied how history could bring our culture to life on a much deeper level. Significantly, the most *memorable* experience for Kagami in their queer studies courses was seeing themselves and their community in history. A history that is often ignored within mainstream education.

In the first notable theme of our VPAR study, interviewees highlighted why understanding their identities was important to them. Next, the benefits of understanding identity were addressed. Students being empowered, validated, providing new frameworks, looking inward, questioning assumed identities, building confidence, and disrupting homophobia were brought to light. Lastly, this theme acknowledged *how* queer studies students learn about understanding identity, including a connection to history, culture, and activism. In most interviews understanding identity was a significant theme. Consequently, many interviews continued to go deeper when discussing identity to scrutinize how vital it is to complicate and not oversimplify identity.

**Complicating Identity**

The second theme discusses how students described their experiences in queer courses at CCB as complicating identity. Through the exploration of this theme, it became clear how intertwined understanding identity is with complicating identity. For this study, complicating was defined as making something more complex to understand (Macmillan Education, 2021).

Complicating identity is multifaceted, and some aspects can even be contradictory. Therefore, this theme has multiple layers and is broken down into four major sections, which include: 1) recognizing the cross-section between complicating identity and challenging preconceived opinions about the queer, trans, and nonbinary
community, 2) identifying privilege in queer studies, focusing on white privilege, 3) highlighting the relationship between allyship and complicating identity, and 4) discussing the need to further complicate identity in queer studies.

The first section investigates the ways complicating identity intersects with challenging preconceived notions and biases. Some of the most significant biases in this section include: 1) the assumption that there are no more people who identify as lesbian, 2) associating all lesbians with being transphobic, 3) declaring that queer, trans, and nonbinary identities are not age appropriate for young people, and 4) being gay is a choice.

**Assumptions and Bias in Queer Studies**

Interviewee Ashley complicated identity by engaging with multiple preconceived notion and biases about lesbianism. The first two examples examine the assumption that lesbians do not exist anymore and then linking all lesbians with transphobia. Ashley, interviewed by co-researcher Rebecca, explained her experiences in queer studies courses at CCB as not inclusive of lesbians. Ashley highly critiqued her Introduction to Queer Studies course. She proclaimed that she wanted to learn more about “the end of lesbians” (Rebecca’s interview, April 29, 2021, p. 2). She continued by inquiring “I kind of wanted to touch base on the issue of what happened to lesbians” (Rebecca’s interview, April 29, 2021, p. 3). This line of thinking led to her question: “Are now all lesbians considered TERFs [Trans Exclusionary Radical Feminists]?” (Rebecca’s interview, April 29, 2021, p. 3). Ashley generalizes and assumes that there are no more lesbians. Furthermore, she associated all lesbians with transphobia by asking if all lesbians are TERFs.
Exploring the theme of assumptions and biases, Ashley further complicated identity by observing:

I want to know about terms that are derogatory words like “TERF.” I want to know why that's used against women but there isn't a male term for that. Women have a word for being inclusive but what's the male term for when males aren't being inclusive. It is more discrimination against women. I want to learn more about that. (Rebecca’s interview, April 29, 2021, p. 4)

She identified how to make improvements in queer studies by complicating identity regarding language about TERFs, while simultaneously, she made an assumption that all feminists are women and not men. She oversimplified gender by only identifying men and women in this quote and throughout her interview. Also, she named the need for more representation on the “discrimination against women,” highlighting that this was not addressed enough in her queer studies course providing an example of how to improve queer studies.

Mikaili complicated identity by challenging the assumption that learning about queerness is not age-appropriate for young people. Interviewed co-researcher Lilith, Mikaili identified herself as an “ally” to the queer, trans, and nonbinary community. She is a single mother of three sons, two of whom identify under the queer umbrella. Mikaili shared how much she grew as an ally and how much she learned about the queer experience and linked this to how important it is to expose as many people as possible to queer studies no matter their age. She went beyond the college classroom and acknowledged how the younger students are when they become aware and begin to understand queer, trans, and nonbinary communities, the better. Mikaili proclaimed, “a
big thing that people don't realize there's no age limit when someone comes into their identity” (Lilith’s interview, May 2, 2021, p. 13). Mikaili made the connection that people of all ages recognize and understand various aspects of their identities in numerous ways, including sexual and gender identity.

Mikaili further complicated identity by stating that students should learn about queer, trans, and nonbinary communities as early as possible because “there's no age limit” for someone coming out of the closet. Mikaili then addressed how studies show that people come out younger and younger, with some coming out as early as kindergarten. She declared that she knows this firsthand as a mother of two gay sons and a gay nephew who came out in elementary school. This quote complicated identity because one major explanation given as to why students in elementary, middle, and even high school should not learn about queer, trans, and nonbinary communities is due to the fact it is not “age appropriate.” Mikaili overtly contested this argument by recognizing student identities can evolve at young ages and therefore need exposure to modified versions of courses like the queer studies class she took at CCB.

Mikaili disrupted the idea that it is inappropriate to talk about queer, trans, and nonbinary communities at a young age because they are not equipped to understand. In Lilith’s interview with Mikaili about why she thinks it is vital for all people to take queer studies courses, not just in college, the topic of coming out in a heterosexist and cissexist environment surfaced. Mikaili opened up adding:

…my nephew is 14 right now and he's been feeling different for a long time. My son, who is going to be 24, has been feeling like he is gay for a long time too, but people were so horrible to him and he was so scared. My middle son came out
when he was in high school. People are so afraid though, they don't want to talk about LGBT people, they don’t want to put that out there, so they don't they don't openly discuss it but you have to. (Lilith’s interview, May 2, 2021, p. 13–14)

Mikaili complicated identity by acknowledging that it is not easy to come out for many people. It can be difficult and even dangerous to come to terms with one’s sexual identity. Some people can be forced back into the closet due to verbal and violent backlash or through a cultural climate of silence. Fear can keep us from being authentic to ourselves. Fear can force us into hiding. Fear can make us ignore vital and beautiful parts of ourselves, as we see with the experiences of Mikaili’s sons and nephew. Mikaili recognized the struggles linked to coming out in homophobic environments and homophobia's connection to fear and silence.

Furthermore, Mikaili delved into how some people within her community argue that people choose to be queer, trans, and nonbinary. Mikaili advocated that “identifying as lesbian, gay, or bisexual is not a choice” and that if we get to choose our identities, she gets to choose her socioeconomic status. Mikaili jokes, “if people get to choose something, if they get to pick who they are, well I choose to be wealthy, how about that?” (Lilith’s interview, May 2, 2021, p. 14). Here she complicated identity by challenging the status quo and homophobic rhetoric. Whether queer, trans, and nonbinary people are “born this way” or chose to be is not the focus here. Mikaili is hitting a highly contested topic among queer scholars, and I do not want to make a claim supporting one argument over the other. Instead, at the heart of what Mikaili is doing is defending the rights of her sons, nephew, and all queer, trans, and nonbinary communities by disrupting the language used to normalize homophobia and queer erasure.
Mikaili continued by saying that, unfortunately, she does not get to choose her socioeconomic status. She went on to explain that living in the Bay Area, the cost of living is so extreme that “I have to give maybe 60% of my income to be able to keep a roof over our heads” (Lilith’s interview, May 2, 2021, p. 14). Mikaili is navigating being a single mother of three sons on a limited income, where over half of her paycheck goes to rent alone. In the multiple quotes above from Mikaili, she unveiled her open and inclusive parenting style and what it means to her to be an “ally.” With everything she must overcome daily as a Black ciswoman, she still can actively challenge heterosexism and cissexism.

Mikaili recognized the heaviness of conversations around queerness. Ashley supported this concept stating, “Stuff like that I wanted to know more about these issues, they’re kind of sensitive issues, and people don't talk about it enough” (Rebecca interview, April 29, 2021, p. 2). These last two quotes highlight how the interviewees consider conversations around queer, trans, and nonbinary communities as difficult, while simultaneously identifying the significance and need for these conversations.

In addition, Mikaili shared that “people will assume that I like men, I mean I do like men, but people assume that I will… and then they assume that you like a particular type” (Lilith’s interview, May 2, 2021, p. 12). Mikaili took sexual identity to a deeper level than just sexual intimacy and attraction in relation to gender identity. She named the assumptions made about her, including what gender expression and “type” of person she is interested in. Not only do people assume she likes men, but people assume she is attracted to masculine presenting cismen. Mikaili complicated heterosexual identity by not equating heterosexuality with being attracted to what society describes as
“masculine” men acknowledging the rigidity and the limitations of being forced into either/or boxes through societal norms and expectations.

Mikaili continued:

…I mean people, people judge, so much. I'm like, I have three kids but it doesn't mean I’m married, like somebody asked me the other day, they were like, ‘Oh, so you're married?’ and I was like, ‘No!’… You know who you are is who you are. I don't like to judge people, but that's all this world is about. Prejudice and assuming is very much a part of our culture. (Lilith’s interview, May 2, 2021, p. 13)

Here Mikaili challenged the prejudice and assumptions surrounding sexual attraction to assumptions made frequently about her marital status. Just because she has children, the societal assumption is that she is married; she connects this with people assuming her sexual identity and the “type” of man she is attracted to. When it comes to her sexual identity, she identifies with what most people assume about her: that she is heterosexual. However, she complicated her identity by continually disputing the preconceived notions of the societal definition of heterosexual. Mikaili powerfully proclaimed how assuming is problematic and perpetuates prejudicial and discriminatory thoughts and practices.

White Privilege

Another layer of the theme complicating identity identified privilege in queer studies, particularly white privilege. TK was interviewed by co-researcher Jeremy. In Jeremy’s Final: VPAR Paper and Reflection one of his most significant findings was analyzing the climate of the classroom in TK’s transphobia course and identifying TK’s privilege. In TK’s interview, he reflected:
I was the only white person in the class, and for some reason a couple of the trans people sitting at one table, every time they talked about hegemony and masculinity, they looked directly at me and tried to deny my view of things when I was talking. (Jeremy’s interview, April 24, 2021, p. 10)

TK has privilege as a white middle-class gender-conforming cisman. When considering TK’s marginalized identity as gay in relation to his privileged identities, we cannot disregard TK’s hyper-awareness of his white and cisgender identity. TK felt that trans people in the course would stare at him whenever they addressed “hegemony and masculinity.” In a class of 50 students, TK was the only white student. This supports Jeremy’s claim written in his final paper that the course could have been a safe space for QTBIPOC, contributing to the course being almost 100% BIPOC.

In Jeremy’s Final: VPAR Paper and Reflection, he postulated ways the transphobia course was centering the voices of QTBIPOC and de-centering whiteness. Jeremy wrote that by creating a space where “students who are more marginalized” are understood and able to share aspects of their lives, the course is centering people who live intersectional lives. Another reason Jeremy’s analysis of TK’s experiences is noteworthy is that he acknowledged the role of intersectionality in the transphobia classroom. Jeremy examined how the classroom climate generated a space for centering multiple marginalized identities. Jeremy concluded his final surveying how many of his courses at CCB have not created a space for marginalized voices to speak and be heard. Therefore, Jeremy affirmed, “I think this is a very positive thing to hear” (Jeremy’s Final: VPAR Paper and Reflection, May 15, 2021, p. 1). In Jeremy’s final, he overtly supported centering communities that endure multiple forms of oppression in queer studies.
Continuing the discussion of white privilege, Ashley and Avda complicated the relationship between curricular representation based on racial identity to representation based solely on sexual identity. Ashley identifies as white, and when asked if her racial identity was represented in the curriculum she stated, “I feel a huge thing that you [queer studies instructors] need to incorporate is being inclusive. I think that many races were covered in the curriculum” (p. 4). Ashley evaded answering the question directly, recognizing that many races were included but does not state whether she felt her racial identity was represented. Furthermore, when asked if her sexual identity as a lesbian was represented in the curriculum she replied: “No, I don’t think so” (p. 4). Later in the interview Ashley went deeper on this topic revealing BIPOC lesbians were represented in the course material, but that she did not feel represented as a lesbian.

Additionally, in Napoleon’s Final: VPAR Paper and Reflection, she identified how her interviewee, Avda, reacted when asked if her racial identity was represented in queer studies. Napoleon wrote, “As a white cis lesbian, Avda had no issue seeing herself reflected in the classes. But she quickly dismissed it to talk about how the class introduced her to intersectionalism [sic]” (Napoleon’s Final: VPAR Paper and Reflection, May 6, 2021, p. 2). Napoleon illuminated how Avda quickly changed the topic and avoided the question of feeling represented based on her radical identity. Napoleon continued naming how Avda “quickly dismissed” being represented and changed the subject to intersectionality. In both examples of Ashley and Avda, we see an underlining discomfort with talking about their whiteness. For Ashley, she completely avoided any response to the question, while Avda quickly changed the topic. These examples highlight the complicated relationship between queer studies and whiteness.
In Napoleon’s final paper she further complicated Avda’s whiteness in queer studies when she wrote, “It would be interesting to know if being reflected in the class is less important to people identifying as white as opposed to people identifying as BIPOC” (Napoleon’s Final: VPAR Research Paper, May 6, 2021, p. 3). Here Napoleon is engaging with discussions around the normalization of whiteness in queer studies. She identified that racial representation is important to BIPOC students, naming that there is a clear need and desire for representation. Napoleon then reported that she did not see that want and need in Avda. Therefore, she pondered if being represented as white was important at all for white students, implying the normalization and repeated representation of white identity in queer studies.

To support Napoleon’s observations, by analyzing the length of the 15 interviewee responses to the research questions about racial identity representation in queer studies, BIPOC students had significantly longer responses. This supports Napoleon’s claim because none the BIPOC interviewees avoided or dismissed the question, instead they actively engaged with rich and complex answers far beyond “yes,” “no,” or “kind of.” Napoleon acknowledged Avda being uncomfortable talking about whiteness and avoiding a deeper discussion about race.

We see through Ashley’s interview the connection between complicating identity with whiteness, underlining white privilege. Continuing to explore the invisibility of lesbianism, Ashley stated:

The most challenging, is the fact that we don’t talk much about lesbians, I think that’s a big deal. There was some stuff about activism and talking about being a Person of Color and a lesbian, but I think really going into the history about
lesbianism and how it has evolved today is important. (Rebecca’s interview, April 29, 2021, p. 3)

As seen in Ashley’s previous quotes, it is overt that she thought that lesbians were not covered in her course Introduction to Queer Studies. The required readings for this class are *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (1981) edited by Cherrie Moraga and Gloria E. Anzaldúa and Audre Lorde’s, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*, originally published in 1984. She recognized that BIPOC lesbians were covered but did not feel that lesbians were talked about much in the course. Does including the “history about lesbianism” for Ashley simply mean providing more of a historical context to the required books for the Introduction to Queer Studies? Maybe Ashley would have felt more represented if the various waves of feminism would have been presented prior to reading the texts. Because the required texts for the class center lesbianism, bisexuality, and BIPOC women, is she asking for the history of white lesbians?

The idea of lesbianism being replaced by queer and nonbinary identities came up almost verbatim twice by Ashley “…there’s not a lot of lesbians anymore; they all identify as queer or nonbinary” (Rebecca’s interview, April 29, 2021, p. 3) Twelve minutes later in the interview Ashley repeated that “There isn’t a real lesbian community, everyone one is queer or nonbinary. I think that’s a challenge and a topic of conversation” (Rebecca’s interview, April 29, 2021, p. 4). The instructor for her class identifies as queer and nonbinary; therefore, are these two comments asserting that the instructor favors teaching about being queer and nonbinary because it is their identity? Would Ashley have
felt seen and represented if her instructor identified as a lesbian? Is this stemming from a place of not being queer enough and feeling othered because of it?

**Allyship**

The next part of this theme looks at allyship and complicating identity. The leading voice in this section is Mikaili, who demonstrated through her words and actions why she identifies as an “ally” to the queer, trans, and nonbinary community. Mikaili recognized that “along with being confused comes a lot of cries out for help,” especially for queer, trans, and nonbinary youth (Lilith’s interview, May 2, 2021, p. 14). This quote highlighted how cries for help or support comes in many different forms and may not be visible to all. She scrutinized that teachers and parents do not necessarily recognize signs of struggle, which emphasizes the need for queer studies education being accessible to all. Mikaili continued by vulnerably sharing:

…a lot of kids and adults contemplate suicide behind, not being accepted, not knowing what their future holds. And, and I know that personally because my, my sons struggled with that and I feel like my nephew does too, so I think because of this, schools need to get in front of it and open up the conversation. (Lilith’s interview, May 2, 2021, p. 14)

Mikaili hit upon a vital topic and a real threat to queer, trans, and nonbinary youth and adults: suicide. Mikaili shared how both her gay sons and her nephew, who is only 14 years old, have struggled with suicidal ideations, which is four times higher than cisgender heterosexuals (Trevor Project, 2021).

Mikaili experiences stressed the importance of recognizing cries for help. This also attests to some of the many reasons why Mikaili is such a knowledgeable and
committed self-identified “ally,” who actively seeks opportunities to continue to educate herself and stay in dialogue about queer, trans, and nonbinary communities. Mikaili declared, “It is a heavy, heavy topic. No one wants to talk about it though. We need to” (Lilith’s interview, May 2, 2021, p. 14). Mikaili exposed a necessity in not only her community but throughout the United States: more opportunities for conversations centering queer, trans, and nonbinary communities. Mikaili avowed how these conversations need to happen in school, at places of worship, and with friends and loved ones.

Mikaili contended how these vital exchanges cannot occur once, demanding the need for continued discussions beginning at a young age and throughout adulthood. Identifying how heterosexism and cissexism do not stop at a certain age, she then reinforced how vital these talks are no matter how uncomfortable people get. Throughout her 87-minute interview, she named at six different times the importance of queer, trans, and nonbinary inclusion in education. Mikaili attested that “starting as early as preschool, and I can’t say this enough, we need LGBT education at younger ages and more frequently” (Lilith’s interview, May 2, 2021, p. 19). Not all the cisgender and heterosexual students in queer studies at CCB had overwhelmingly positive experiences like Mikaili.

For example, co-research, Vontressa, complicated the role of allies in queer studies. Vontressa identifies as an African American, heterosexual, cisgender, single mother of two. She did not want to speak in our Zoom classes, not even in the breakout rooms. Vontressa journaled that she did not want to participate in our Zoom discussions since she was “just an ally” and did not want to “accidentally say something wrong or
offensive” (Vontressa’s journal, April 30, 2021). I find this consistent struggle in my queer studies courses: the silence of allies due to fear. Is this silence ok? Would we, as queer studies instructors, rather have cisgender and heterosexual students in queer studies stay silent and focus on actively listening? Or is it more valuable to spend more time in the classroom creating a safe space for cisgender and heterosexual students to feel more comfortable sharing their thoughts, questions, and experiences?

Gian paralleled the experiences of Vontressa. Interviewed by co-researcher Vontressa, Gian shared:

My biggest challenge taking this class has been trying to ensure my ignorance on this topic does not offend anyone. So, it’s challenging to explain things sometimes due to my fear of offending someone. The most challenging thing is trying not to offend my classmates when speaking in class due to my lack of knowledge in regard to the LGBT community. (Vontressa’s interview, April 30, 2021, p. 2)

It is important to note how significant this concern is for Gian since she said the word “offense” three times in as many sentences. Unsurprisingly, Gian showcases a trepidation cisgender and heterosexual students have of unintentionally saying something heterosexist or cissexist. This quote highlights heterosexual and cisgender privilege because the course material is not about their lived experiences. Due to this, they may fear having a question, comment, or reflection in class that could hurt queer, trans, and nonbinary students’ feelings. Another reason Gian’s quote is meaningful is that the “offense” she mentions could be done without recognizing that what is being said is offensive. As a result, they risk being embarrassed, labeled as intolerant or ignorant, ridiculed, or publicly shamed.
Continuing To Complicate Identity

The final layer of this theme presents the need to complicate identity in queer studies further, especially regarding history. Simply put, history is complicated. Caius underlined the complexity of queering history with contemporary views of assessing sexual and gender identity. Co-researcher, Gohan, interviewed Caius, who reflected, “It's difficult because with the LGBT history related stuff we don't know if they were just, if they're being hetero because of the time, but they were actually gay or if they just didn't have the wordings for bisexuality” (Gohan’s interview, April 30, 2021, p. 16). Caius is complicating identity by displaying the complexity of analyzing histories of same-sex attraction and people transgressing gender expectations, acknowledging the limitations of Western language and perspectives.

Caius is acknowledging how queer, trans, and nonbinary history is complex and layered. Caius also noted how there might be historical figures that are assumed heterosexual but identified as lesbian, bisexual, or asexual. Furthermore, she explained how bisexual-erasure might exist through scholars and academics assuming someone is lesbian or gay when discovering how historical figures had same-sex partners or sexual experiences when they could have identified as bisexual.

Summary

The first research question of our VPAR study asked, “How do students describe their experiences in queer courses at CCB?” Through coding the transcriptions and assignments, two themes emerged on this question. First, all the interviewees addressed how the queer studies courses helped in the understanding of their own identity. This theme affirmed the significance of understanding identity in queer studies, provided
specific benefits to understanding identity, and concluded with concentrating on how students were able to understand their identities in queer studies at CCB.

The second major theme that emerged was the way queer studies courses complicated identity for many students. This theme was broken down into four sections, which included: 1) the link between complicating identity and challenging preconceived biases about the queer, trans, and nonbinary community, 2) privilege in queer studies, focusing on white privilege, 3) the relationship of cisgender and heterosexual students in complicating identity, and 4) the need to further complicate identity in queer studies. The following theme goes into more depth about how students felt reflected and ignored in queer studies courses.

Research Question 2:

What are the similarities and differences between students’ experiences based on different aspects of their identities?

The second research question we investigated allowed us to evaluate and analyze students’ individual racial, sexual, and gender identities to assess if their identities were represented within queer studies curricula. Two significant themes materialized in answering the research question, “What are the similarities and differences between students’ experiences based on different aspects of their identities?” The first theme addressed erasure, colonialism, and whiteness. When students talked about the erasure of some of their identities in queer studies courses, many students overtly connected that erasure to colonialism. Comparing student experiences based on racial identity elicited the role of whiteness and white privilege as a topic relating to erasure and colonization. In addition, students talked about the ways there is room for improvement in queer studies
courses and provided examples for the program to continue to grow. The second noteworthy theme focused on the positive representations of students’ identities in queer studies and how that representation benefited and affirmed students. This theme is broken down into two parts, which include examples of positive representation, followed by its benefits.

This research question is incredibly complex. Therefore, there were many potential ways to organize and code the data. To not perpetuate single-issue politics and single-identity based understandings of students’ experiences, this section aims to be intersectional in coding the data by bridging the connections of difference. I did not try and separate student experiences based solely on racial identity, and then sexual identity, and then gender identity. I aim to resist perpetuating divisions among our layered, intertwined, and beautiful identities.

**Erasure, Colonialism, and Whiteness**

Research Question 2 inquired: “What are the similarities and differences between students’ experiences based on aspects of their identities?” Isolating and connecting the differences between students’ experiences in queer studies elicited the theme of erasure, colonialism, and whiteness. This theme was multifaceted and expressed the unique ways erasure, colonialism, and whiteness are both intertwined and distinct from each other. All three are linked by race and simultaneously, vary greatly based on specific racial identities. For example, erasure and colonialism were identified by multiple QTBIPOC interviewees, while the role of whiteness emerged, both implicitly and explicitly, in all four of the white students’ interviews. For this study, erasure was defined as “the act of ignoring, deleting, or removing something” (Merriam-Webster, 2021). Moreover,
colonialism was described by co-researcher Rebecca in her eleventh journal entry as, “a violent action or process of establishing control over indigenous peoples of an area” (Rebecca’s journal, April 14, 2021, p. 1).

Erasure and colonialism were overtly linked in some of the interviews. Therefore, we defined colonial erasure as “cultural and physical colonial violence, assimilation policies, and mainstream misattribution, where cultures are removed from the record” (Na’puti, 2019, p. 497). To build on this definition, our study recognized that erasure is a powerful word that can delineate a finality to the described erasure. However, we distinguished that erasure is not permanent and how currently, as well as historically, scholars and activists have been working to re-discover lost histories (Zoom lecture, February 18, 2021, p. 14).

The final definition of this section is whiteness. As mentioned in Chapter 1, whiteness is defined as the “construction of the white race, white culture, and the systems of privileges and advantages afforded to white people in the United States, and across the globe, through government policies, media portrayal, decision-making power within our corporations, schools, and judicial system” (Guess, 2006, p.114). This is the definition of whiteness the co-researchers and I utilized. The first theme for the second research question is divided into three sections: 1) erasure and colonialism, 2) whiteness, and 3) improvement and growth.

**Erasure and Colonialism**

A theme that clearly surfaced throughout the interviews, as well as in the co-researcher’s journals, assignments, and the recorded Zoom classes, was erasure and its relation to colonialism. The major differences between the experiences of the
interviewees and co-researchers were mostly based on students’ racial identities. Furthermore, this theme touches on what identities and histories students felt were invisible in queer studies. Three interviewees and one co-researcher, who all identify as QTBIPOC, felt that parts of their racial identities were not covered at all or not addressed enough in queer studies. When the feeling of not being seen was tied to race, all the QTBIPOC interviewees took that observation deeper by connecting that invisibility to erasure due to colonialism. Simultaneously, almost all four of the white students interviewed felt represented based on their racial identity.

In the following quotes, Caius, Gohan, Edilberto, and Myung-Soon all address the links between erasure and colonialism and identify its influence within queer studies at CCB. Caius, interviewed by co-researcher Gohan, reflected:

…so my family comes from Central America, Unfortunately, with most of the colonizing a lot of our records got destroyed. So, like the Mayans and Aztecs and Incas, there's only so much information there from what the conquistadores did… I do feel, like, I have been represented and everything [in queer studies]. However, I do feel that we could do more, and it might be needing to, like, especially for non-English countries to like to find the resources that they have in Spanish, and then, like, maybe, make grants or something to have those translated into more accessible languages like English because I can only like 80% understand Spanish. (Gohan’s interview, April 30, 2021, p. 13–14)

Gohan, the interviewer, responded by stating,

Yeah, I feel it, I’m Filipino and Spain colonized the Philippines so there's a lot of, like, documents in history about LGBT that kind of got erased. I also had a
yearning for that information that was erased, so I understand you on that.

(Gohan’s interview, April 30, 2021, p. 14)

Recognition that history is limited due to colonization is key in the quotes above. Where Caius focused on Central America, Gohan included the Philippines.

To expand further on this, co-researcher Alejandro Mendoza, interviewed Edilberto, who also covered the complexity around racial identity and colonial erasure.

Edilberto stated:

I identify as Filipino American and a lot of LGBT history in the Philippines has been erased because of colonization so that's something I wished was covered more, but I understand, like, the lack of information… I think it's valuable and finding the intersection in those, you know, identities and learning more about it.

(Alejandro Mendoza’s interview, April 30, 2021, p. 9)

Again, we see the theme of the erasure of history due to colonization being addressed. Edilberto, almost verbatim, expressed what Gohan shared in his interview with Caius about colonization in the Philippines and the erasure of histories that ensued.

Continuing to explore the theme of erasure, Myung-Soon went deeper in this analysis, explaining how not providing enough historical context in queer studies curricula is a form of erasure because it oversimplifies the complex and even contradictory histories and experiences. Myung-Soon revealed the need for more historical context in queer studies. For example, Myung-Soon provided the idea of going in-depth about Japanese imperialism during WWII when learning about the Japanese internment camps throughout the United States in one of his previous queer studies courses. Myung-Soon stated how historical context provides opportunities for richer
dialogues in class. Myung-Soon also tackled how it engages with history on a deeper level depending on how much context the instructor offers. In addition, Myung-Soon suggested how when learning about the Japanese internment camps and reading the graphic novel *They Called Us Enemy* (Takei, Eisinger, & Scott, 2019), required in his class, identifying the role of Japanese imperialism further queers the curriculum by disrupting the notion that during the time of WWII, the war was only good versus evil, with Americans being on the side of good. Lastly, when Caius, Edilberto, and Myung-Soon gave examples of what is lacking or what could be improved in queer studies courses regarding colonial erasure, they all shared a reason as to why they understood the instructor did not provide more racial representation. A deeper analysis of this will be provided in Chapter 6.

*Whiteness*

White people are connected to colonial erasure based on their race. However, their relationship to colonial erasure is vastly different compared to the experiences of QTBIPOC. White people are in positions of power. Therefore, the effects of how colonialism relates to white people and whiteness might not be on white peoples’ radar. For example, none of the four white interviewees discussed colonialism in their interviews, while three QTBIPOC interviewees and one co-researcher named colonialism. In addition, out of the four white students interviewed, three of their responses to the question “Do you feel your racial identity is represented within queer studies? If so, how?” stated their racial identity was represented. One white interviewee evaded the question by not explicitly saying if she felt her race was represented; instead she broadly responded that she thought many races were covered.
The four white interviewees’ responses to the question on racial representation in queer studies were drastically shorter than BIPOC students. Two of the four white students simply replied “yes” without any further examples or analysis in answering the “how” part of the question. Co-researcher Napoleon wrote in her Final: VPAR Paper and Reflection that her interviewee Avda “had no issue seeing herself reflected in the classes” regarding her whiteness (Napoleon’s Final: VPAR Paper and Reflection, May 6, 2021, p. 2). There are many reasons why the BIPOC students answered this question in far greater depth, including white privilege and white supremacy, which will be addressed at greater length in Chapter 6. The white students do not have to think about racial oppression because they are not racially oppressed, leaving their responses far shorter than the BIPOC interviewees. Furthermore, only the QTBIPOC interviewees provided suggestions on improving representation in queer studies based on students’ racial identities leaving their answers far more complex.

Myung-Soon continued to investigate this theme with co-researcher Gohan. Myung-Soon reflected on feeling invisible within academia by struggling “to find my place, like, as an Asian American, but also as like a Queer Person of Color” (Gohan’s interview, May 3, 2021, p. 11). Gohan prodded Myung-Soon to go deeper by asking him, “what makes you feel invisible?” After taking a moment to contemplate this question, Myung-Soon responded that academia is still fundamentally a “white system” (Gohan’s interview, May 3, 2021, p. 14). Myung-Soon then lamented how he gets frustrated in many of his classes, including outside of queer studies, and often says to himself “here's another old white guy I have to read” (Gohan’s interview, May 3, 2021, p. 14). Myung-Soon interrogated academia as a system of oppression that benefits whiteness and
perpetuates white supremacy by its curricula focusing mostly on older white men.

Myung-Soon followed this by linking the “white system” of academia to the erasure of his identity as a pansexual Korean American. Myung-Soon proclaimed:

There's, like, a long lineage of queerness throughout Asia, including Korea, and it's something to be proud of and something to honor, but also something to fight for because it is still constantly being erased and to be able to take that knowledge and to share it with my own family, especially family members that I haven't come out to and for the first time, explain to them, you know what is gender, you know, and how it is that different than sex. (Gohan’s interview, May 3, 2021, p. 11–12)

Myung-Soon highlighted the erasure of queer Asian representation, including his racial identity as Korean American. Further, he explained the importance of sharing his knowledge with his family, even to family members with whom he has not shared his sexual identity. This information could empower closeted family members as well.

**Improvement and Growth**

The last part of the theme erasure, colonization, and whiteness, provides ideas on how to interrupt the invisibility of students’ identities, which could improve queer studies overall. Much of the findings around the theme of improvement and growth occurred in conversations addressing erasure. Caius, interviewed by co-researchers Gohan, reflected:

So, I identify as bisexual and aromantic…I feel they did an adequate job with the representation of bisexuality, I think it could be much, much better, and there's definitely enough resources out there for that. It is just that there is a lot of biphobia… The asexuality spectrum, it has only been like mostly footnoted, and
so I believe, like, those could be represented in a lot more ways. I think there's probably enough material out there now so that, that's a possibility, but I don't feel like I’ve been ignored. (Gohan’s interview, April 30, 2021, p. 16)

Exploring the theme of improvement in queer studies, Caius argued for more representation of bisexuality, including biphobia, and the spectrum of asexuality. She felt there was bisexual and asexual erasure that needed to be improved.

Myung-Soon acknowledged how there is room for improvement in the queer studies courses and covered ways for the program to continue to grow. Myung-Soon recognized that the instructors “do their best to try to incorporate everyone's perspective” (Gohan’s interview, May 3, 2021, p. 13). He continued by naming the need to center QTBIPOC and de-center whiteness, identifying that a great deal of queer literature “has been predominantly written by, like, white cismen” (Gohan’s interview, May 3, 2021, p. 13). Myung-Soon postulated ways to include more indigenous people, decolonize queer studies, and be more intersectional. He asked, “how can we include more, like, Latinx people?” (Gohan’s interview, May 3, 2021, p. 14). Myung-Soon asserted there was a positive representation of local writers stating, “the instructors do a good job of like incorporating, like, writers from the Bay Area” (Gohan’s interview, May 3, 2021, p. 14).

Myung-Soon suggested that “I think it'd be really cool for, like, as a Person of Color to see more People of Color presented in the actual curriculum itself, and I think, like, not seeing that at times has been something challenging” (Gohan’s interview, May 3, 2021, p. 14). He then pinpointed that a way for queer studies to improve is to include more representation of queer people throughout Asia. He explained how there are many countries and queer communities in Asia and that there was some representation in his
queer studies courses, “but, like, I just wish that there were more” (Gohan’s interview, May 3, 2021, p. 14). Myung-Soon is stating how queer studies can continually improve and find more ways to be representative of students and their intersectional identities. Caius argued that queer studies could be more inclusive and should be improved regarding representation of “racial identities” (Gohan’s interview, April 30, 2021, p. 16). This continued growth aligns with the methodology of VPAR and the significance of constant self-reflection in educational spaces.

**Positive Representation**

Lastly, in answering the second research question: “What are the similarities and differences between students’ experiences based on aspects of their identities?,” the theme of positive representation emerged. The major theme uncovered between all the 15 interviewees and 12 co-researchers was that each person provided at least one example of positive representation in queer studies based on their racial, sexual, and gender identity. Some interviewees and co-researchers identified how all three social classifications were represented, while others only isolated one of their identities being included in queer studies curricula. For this study, the definitions of “positive” and “representation” were based on dictionary definitions (Merriam-Webster, 2021). Positive was defined as relevant, affirming, and inspiring, while representation was defined as the portrayal of students’ identities, focusing on curricula (Merriam-Webster, 2021).

**Examples of Positive Representation**

A theme that surfaced was the acknowledgment of positive representation of at least one of the students’ identities in queer studies. Co-researcher, Alejandro Mendoza,
interviewed Diaz, who felt that his Gay Male Intimacy class represented his racial, sexual, and gender identities. He stated:

…being able to have that book [Velvet Rage] as one of our textbooks and being able to relate to the author and, like, truly relate to this author was an amazing feeling because I haven't felt that in a long time, with all the textbooks that I read.

(Alejandro Mendoza’s interview, May 3, 2021, p. 14)

Diaz affirms the importance of his identities being reflected in the book, Velvet Rage: Overcoming the Pain of Growing Up Gay in a Straight Man’s World (2005) written by Alan Downs, in his queer studies course. The fact he expressed he had not felt represented as a gay Mexican American cisman within his coursework for “a long time” highlights the need for more representation of the intersections of his identities. What stood out with Diaz is how all three of his identities were represented in the required text, Velvet Rage. He stated the benefit of that representation was an “amazing feeling.” Diaz continued re-affirming, “the course Gay Male Intimacy represented me 100%, you know, being a man, being gay, and Mexican American” (Alejandro Mendoza’s interview, May 3, 2021, p. 15). Overall, Diaz felt he had overwhelmingly positive representation when it came to his racial, sexual, and gender identity.

Edilberto had similar experiences to Diaz, identifying being both affirmed and validated based on his racial identity. Edilberto reported:

You know my [racial] identity is reflected, and I think Queer Communities of Color in the United States class was the one that was more affirmative in terms of you know, highlighting my identities and other issues. So that was helpful for
Edilberto conveyed that it was his course, Queer Communities of Color in the United States, and the inclusion of Asian ancestry that made him feel represented racially. Further, he noted the benefits of being represented based on his racial identity were that he felt affirmed and validated. Edilberto continued sharing, “I’m gay so a lot of this stuff that you know we're learning about has to do with queerness…so everything seems very affirming and reflective of who I am and my sexual identity” (Alejandro Mendoza’s interview, April 30, 2021, p. 13–14). This provides another reason why accurate representation matters. It’s not just about seeing yourself, it’s making sure that when others see you, you’re not misrepresented.

Mikaili felt represented based on her racial, sexual, and gender identity in her Introduction to Queer Studies course. Mikaili, interviewed by co-researcher Lilith, contemplated how “a lot of things when I'm reading it and I'm like, wow, like, this is a little piece of me, you know, minus, you know, the actual LGBT part, but still, it very much relates to me and my identity” (Lilith’s interview, May 2, 2021, p. 11). Mikaili continued by recognizing, “I feel like this class, like, it relates to me, as a straight Black woman, just as much as it would relate to anyone else because it just relates to us on different levels” (Lilith’s interview, May 2, 2021, p. 12). Mikaili felt represented as a Black heterosexual ciswoman, and that her socioeconomic status was represented as well, which was a major connection to her being a single parent of three sons. She overtly tied how being a single mother links to class.
Additionally, when asked if Mikaili felt her gender identity was represented, she responded:

I do, I'm somebody that probably always wanted to be a mom, and it's in my nature, I guess, as me as a woman to care for others, not saying that a woman has to be caring like that because men are just as caring. And I know men that are single parents and, you know, so it's not just a woman thing but it is for me… So, when I self-identify it's always like, I'm a woman. I'm a mom. I'm a sister, a friend, I'm somebody that is going to be there for first for someone. And that is who I am as, as a woman. I felt that was reflected in my LGBT classes. It is okay to be me, as I am. (Lilith’s interview, May 2, 2021, p. 15)

Here we see that not only was her gender identity as a woman represented, but her definition of what it means to be a woman was reflected: being a mom, friend, caretaker, sister, support system, and having the pride of being her true self. Furthermore, she included a feminist lens by clarifying that all those identity descriptors she mentioned are not just applicable to women. She wanted to make it clear that men can use those descriptors as well and can be single parents, which highlights the deep level of gender analysis she has when discussing her gender identity.

**Benefits of Positive Representation**

Another factor in this theme was how positive representation benefited and affirmed students. Avda emphasized the impact her queer studies class had on her, “I’ve learned how to be proud” (Napoleon’s interview, April 23, 2021, p. 12). Taking the Introduction to Queer Studies course she did not just learn more facts and statistics, she also felt accepted and valued as lesbian woman a part of the queer, trans, and
nonbinary community. On a similar note, Diaz shared, “…if it wasn't for these courses I wouldn't be where I’m at today, well, I’m more open about my sexuality and more understanding. I feel more comfortable. I feel comfortable within myself due to these classes…” (Alejandro Mendoza’s interview, May 3, 2021, p. 7). Diaz continued stating: I feel my most memorable experience is finally being able to have peace of mind about myself and accepting my sexuality... being free of all the negative and all the false things I would tell myself was about being a certain way, and I feel like that was truly something that I could like carry on for the rest of my life because they allowed me to be myself and love myself and just continue to be me. (Alejandro Mendoza’s interview, May 3, 2021, p. 11)

Queer studies helped him love himself and recognize the importance accepting ourselves as we are. He also addressed how he had to unlearn heterosexism as well.

Edilberto provided another benefit of having his identities represented in queer studies. Edilberto reflected, “I think the department has done such a tremendous job with supporting the students and creating kind of a safe and supportive environment for all” (Alejandro Mendoza’s interview, April 30, 2021, p. 11). Edilberto conveys the benefit that positive representation in a queer studies classroom is an example of a supportive space, welcoming to all. Gian took the benefits of positive representation one step further by surveying how much she learned in queer studies. She presented the need to get as many people as possible in queer studies courses. She reported the importance of heterosexual and cisgender people taking these classes, so they could have the opportunity to learn as much as she did. Gian proclaimed, “I think that LGBT classes should be a part of the general courses offered for everyone. It would really make a
difference and enlighten a lot of people who have certain opinions on the LGBT community” (Vontressa’s interview, April 30, 2021, p. 2). Gian named the importance of reaching people with “certain opinions,” which could be a nice way of saying heterosexist and cissexist people. She is embodying the famous quote by Angela Davis (2016) “Educate to liberate.”

**Summary**

In answering Research Question 2: “What are the similarities and differences between students’ experiences based on different aspects of their identities?” I identified two major themes: 1) erasure, colonialism, and whiteness, and 2) positive representations of students’ identities. The first theme addressed what identities students felt were invisible in queer studies and the connection of that erasure to colonialism. Based on the examples of erasure experiences of whiteness emerged. This question revealed the importance of positive representation of students’ identities in queer studies, which was the final theme for second research question.

**Research Question 3:**

**How does the queer studies curricula at CCB respond to the diversity of students’ identities? How do queer studies courses address intersectionality?**

Exploring how the curricula in queer studies respond to student individual identities elicited one major theme: centering intersectionality in queer studies. This theme included the significance of building intersectional theory as foundational to queer studies curricula. There were no significant findings in any of the interviews responding to the first part of Research Question 3: “How does the queer studies curricula at CCB respond to the diversity of students’ identities?” This could be a result of confounded
language and not clarifying how this question differs from the second research question. Therefore, this section solely examines the second part of this research question focusing on how queer studies teaches intersectionality and explores how intersectional theory connects with queer studies students. For the purpose of this study intersectionality is defined as “the interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, sexual identity, gender identity, and class as they apply to a given individual or group and...how overlapping social identities relate to systems and structures of oppression, domination, or discrimination” (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 42). Centering means repeated focus on a particular topic, emphasizing the significance and relevance of that topic (Butler, 1990; Kumashiro, 2002). Centering intersectionality was one of the most significant themes found in our VPAR study.

**Centering Intersectionality**

The theme of centering intersectional theory in queer studies surfaced in multiple interviews. Edilberto, interviewed by co-researcher Alejandro Mendoza, advocated that:

> I love the Queer Communities of Color in the United States class. Again, the intersectionality within marginalized identity is something I am very interested in learning about and I was thrilled to learn more and more about it in my class. It continuously challenges my thoughts and perspective and provides me kind of, like, a very different understanding, or at least lens on how to view things.

(Alejandro Mendoza’s interview, April 30, 2021, p. 10)

Edilberto acknowledged a desire to learn about intersectionality highlighting the importance of being intersectional when representing students’ identities. Edilberto
underlined how integral intersectionality is within queer studies. He also examined how intersectional theory changed the ways he sees the world. Caius declared:

I learned a lot…They've [queer studies courses] always been really good for trying to not just get the white queer perspective but try to get, like, from other, and not just also not the US perspective and try to get like world perspectives which I appreciate and doing their best to be as inclusive with language. (Gohan’s interview, April 30, 2021, p. 2)

Caius profoundly asserted how teaching intersectionality in queer studies means de-centering the white perspective, providing frameworks that are international, and utilizing language that is inclusive. These two quotes emphasized how vital intersectionality is within queer studies. Language is power, so these statements are significant in advocating to de-center whiteness and center QTBIPOC. She provided an example of including international voices and not just focusing consciously or unconsciously on whiteness to challenge “the white queer perspective”.

Exploring the theme of how to teach intersectionality, Mikaili, interviewed by co-researcher Lilith, went deeper reporting:

I felt seen in all my identities…For me, being a straight Black woman, well, the things that we talked about in class are not just about being LGBT. It is also about race, like being Black in America, which I am. Also, it is about class, being a single parent who I am, we discussed the social and the inequality in our social economics tied to race, where I have also been, which a lot of us are right now. (Lilith’s interview, May 2, 2021, p. 11)
Mikaili named how intersectionality was addressed in her queer studies course. She illustrated that discussing experiences of identifying as Black in the United States within the context of the queer community was one example of intersectionality. Further she broke down how queer studies included the links between racism and classism, and she shed light on the importance of tying race with class. Mikaili explored intersectional theory through racism and classism and felt represented within the curriculum.

Addressing the theme of centering intersectionality in queer studies, Myung-Soon contemplated:

I've always been struggling to find my place, like, as an Asian American but also as, like, a Queer Person of Color and one of the most memorable experiences was being in Tom June’s Queer Anthropology course and reading about the history of Queer People of Color throughout Asia. (Gohan’s interview, May 3, 2021, p. 11)

Myung-Soon attested how finally being represented in Queer Anthropology was the most memorable moment for him in queer studies, maintaining the importance of being represented within curricula. How to be intersectional in queer studies for Myung-Soon means pedagogy that centers the history of queer people in Asia. Myung-Soon named the importance of the intersections of racial identity, sexual identity, and history. Furthermore, Myung-Soon challenged assumptions that queerness is connected solely with whiteness. Myung-Soon continued declaring that “experiencing that feeling of solidarity, for the first time was like, wow, like, these people have existed for a long time it's not just me” (Gohan’s interview, May 3, 2021, p. 12). Myung-Soon contended how affirming and validating it was to his identity as Korean American to learn that we have always existed, as Tom June’s course did.
Diaz, interviewed by co-researcher Alejandro Mendoza, proclaimed the significance of not focusing on whiteness and builds on the theme of intersectionality by scrutinizing, “I feel that a special part about these courses is that it's open and it does not center or focus on just one” (Alejandro Mendoza’s interview, May 3, 2021, p. 16). Diaz affirmed how queer studies does not separate social categories and instead centers how they are connected. Diaz expounded how this is a strength of queer studies based on his experiences in the program. Diaz continued advocating how he felt “100% represented” in his racial, sexual, and gender identities as a gay masculine-presenting Mexican-American bilingual 30-year-old cisman. Diaz explored that queer studies “allows other identities to join into the conversation and does not block anyone else out” (Alejandro Mendoza’s interview, May 3, 2021, p. 16). Diaz is articulating intentionality. He is providing an example of a queer studies course at CCB that currently utilizes intersectional theory in its curricula and how that made Diaz feel “100%” represented in his racial, sexual, and gender identities. Diaz notes how the course created opportunities for students of various backgrounds to contribute to class discussions.

Diaz asserted, “that's why these [queer studies] courses are super important, even if one does not come from the LGBT community anybody could join these conversations and learn, and I feel like that's why these courses are so special” (Alejandro Mendoza’s interview, May 3, 2021, p. 16). Diaz connected how people who identify as heterosexual and cisgender are welcome in the queer studies courses to learn more about the experiences of queer, trans, and nonbinary communities. Here we see Diaz making room for heterosexual and cisgender people in queer studies.

Building on this concept, Edilberto stated:
Overall, looking at all my LGBT classes, you know, I’d love to learn more about the queer history that stems here in San Francisco and particularly about you know queerness and Asian American communities and how that, like, influences, you know, activism and art and power and leadership here in the in the country…I think it's valuable and finding the intersection in those you know identities and learning more about it. (Alejandro Mendoza’s interview, April 30, 2021, p. 9)

Edilberto suggested how queer studies curricula should focus on the intersections of his racial and sexual identity as well as being a resident of San Francisco and its relation to “activism and art and power and leadership”. Edilberto is touching on how queer studies can address intersectionality, as opposed to the original research question of how does queer studies implement intersectionality into its curricula. Edilberto continued utilizing an intersectional analysis to suggest examples of how to grow queer studies. He provided a brief roadmap to investigate the potential direction queer studies can go pedagogically.

Avda expanded on the theme of intersectionality by exploring, “But, and the most important thing that I, I didn't think that race and sexual oppression, they, they are connected topics” (Napoleon’s interview, April 23, 2021, p. 8). Avda had never thought about how racial and sexual oppression are linked opening her eyes to new ways to see the world. Napoleon wrote in her Final: VPAR Paper and Reflection, “The class she took opened her eyes to queer and race theories, and to issues, she, as a white person, would have never been privy to on her own” (Napoleon’s Final: VPAR Research Paper, May 6, 2021, p. 3). Napoleon identified one example of teaching intersectionality: through
recognition and awareness of how intersectional theory applies to “queer and race theories.”

Avda determined how “Reading this book, *Writings by Radical Women of Color*, was a very interesting experience for me because I didn't think of it, I don’t see the world as it is. So this problem with race is pretty new for me” (Napoleon’s interview, April 23, 2021 p. 9). Avda shared how the book, *This Bridge Called My Back: Radical Writing by Radical Women of Color* (1981), helped her name and build on understanding of intersectionality. Napoleon postulated in her Final: VPAR Paper and Reflection how one of the most vital aspects of queer studies is implementing intersectional theory. Napoleon continued reflecting, “Maybe what matters the most is to have a rainbow of identities explored to ensure all experiences are shared and valued” (Napoleon’s Final: VPAR Research Paper, May 6, 2021, p. 3). Researching the theme of intersectionality, Napoleon’s analysis interrogates how representing a “rainbow of identities” is the best way to share, learn, and study as many identities as possible. How do we teach intersectionality knowing that including “all experiences” is impossible? How do we not perpetuate reinforcing social hierarchies? These questions will be developed more in Chapter 6.

**Summary**

One central theme emerged to answer Research Question 3: “How do queer studies courses address intersectionality?” The theme covered how intersectional theory should not be separated from queer studies. This finding examined the importance of centering intersectionality in queer studies pedagogy and curricula to reflect as many identities of our students as possible.
Part 2: Queer Resistance

Through the coding of the interview transcripts and the co-researcher’s journals, assignments, and class Zoom recordings, three significant themes emerged beyond the scope of the research questions. First was the link between queer studies and activism. It was not surprising that many of my co-researchers addressed activism throughout their work in our course Queer Culture, Society, and Resistance since activism is foundational in the course. What was surprising was the number of interviewees who also reported the vital link between queer studies and activism. The second theme highlighted the importance of understanding how integral supportive spaces are to queer studies and included suggestions for cultivating more opportunities for supportive spaces. The final theme of building community in queer studies surfaced, as well as the significance of returning to in-person classes as soon as possible.

Queer Studies and Activism

By exploring the first major theme beyond the scope of the research questions, it became clear how intertwined activism is within queer studies. Most of the finding highlights suggestions from interviewees for queer studies to grow and continue to incorporate activism within pedagogy and curriculum. For this study, activism was defined as the intentional action by an individual or group to bring about social or political change (Merriam-Webster, 2021). Edilberto sheds light on this definition of activism in his interview with co-researcher Alejandro Mendoza.

Edilberto recognized how activism connected with multiple identities, which made him feel represented in queer studies, and he identifies how powerful that representation was for him. Edilberto reported how the curriculum about queer activism
connected with his sexual identity and his identities as an artist and a San Francisco resident, which he found to be “overwhelmingly positive” (Alejandro Mendoza’s interview, April 30, 2021, p. 3). He explored this further by acknowledging that historical and contemporary queer activism in the United States was critical for him and was an example of seeing himself in his queer studies courses.

Further, Edilberto suggested how queer studies should have more curriculum based on queer history in San Francisco and how history links to activism and leadership. Edilberto continued contending how this should include the intersections of queerness and Asian American identity, in which San Francisco is rich. Edilberto reinforces how integral activism is in queer studies, including our vibrant history of activism throughout the decades (Alejandro Mendoza’s interview, April 30, 2021, p. 9). To build on this further, Edilberto reflected:

I think I would want to learn about the buried history about queer contributions in the United States and also the political kind of tension that exists in other countries as well, you know the criminalization of LGBTQ+ people and how they came to kind of fight that discrimination as a community, so the radical actions in activism that's happening in the in the entire world, not just in the United States, I think that would be a beneficial. (Alejandro Mendoza’s interview, April 30, 2021, p. 17)

Edilberto accepts the erasure of aspects of queer history by affirming the existence of “buried history” in the context of queer history, resistance, and leaders. This inspires a sense of uncovering these histories, placing the student as an active learner instead of a passive learner. Edilberto considers international-focused frameworks of learning about
queerness. A theme that surfaced is his desire to learn about queer, trans, and nonbinary activism happening throughout the world, not just in the United States. He notes how he would like to study examples of how queerness is criminalized internationally and what local communities within that specific country, are doing to fight the discrimination. All three of Edilberto’s quotes underscore how intertwined activism is with queer studies.

Regarding queer studies, Myung-Soon identifies the importance of linking activism with opportunities within pedagogical praxis for student involvement in community organizations. Myung-Soon surveyed how queer studies:

…exists in a really unique space. The progressive nature or political nature of San Francisco and, like, the history and the culture surrounding it is like very well-known and would be, I think, very empowering for the students to be able to have more actionable ways to live out their learning whether that's taking part in, you know, community activism, volunteering, or just learning to reach out to other marginalized communities such as like disabled communities. (Gohan’s interview, May 3, 2021, p. 9–10)

By Myung-Soon reporting how he would like more chances for “actionable ways” to engage in the learning process through simply living, Myung-Soon is creating a bridge between queer studies pedagogy and curriculum with activism in the community. Myung-Soon suggests how queer studies can improve by providing opportunities for firsthand experiences in activist environments. He includes examples such as volunteering at grassroots organizations or learning ways to engage directly with marginalized communities. He overtly ties queer studies with chances to disrupt ableism and create opportunities to engage in disability justice.
Building on this idea, Diaz suggests queer studies would be stronger “…if there was something we could include, something more current, addressing what's going on in the moment in queer activism and its movements…also in platforms and how information is shared…you know anything that includes being current with today's media” (Alejandro Mendoza’s interview, May 3, 2021, p. 9–10). This quote highlights examples of how today’s media could potentially link to queer pedagogy and curriculum. Diaz recommends that queer activism could be addressed through social media platforms relevant to current times, including Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok.

In Lamar’s interview with co-researcher Aselia, Lamar examines that “I still have a lot to learn because as a Latino, I barely see any LGBTQ members in my social circle racially” (Aselia’s interview, April 26, 2021, p. 4). Lamar recognized that his social circle, comprising of mostly Latino heterosexual cismen, does not include any queer, trans, and nonbinary people. Lamar goes on to identify how one way to be a better ally means being more inclusive of queerness within his group of friends. Lamar acknowledges that he must actively do something to interrogate why he doesn’t have any queer, trans, or nonbinary friends.

Lamar advocates that “I just want to become a better ally” (Aselia’s interview, April 26, 2021, p. 4). Lamar continues to determine how to be a better ally he must look in the mirror and at his relationships with his friends to ensure he was not unknowingly participating and perpetuating heterosexism and cissexism. Building on this observation, Lamar contemplates that he wants to make sure he and his friends are inclusive to Latino gay people due to having to overcome experiences of racism and heterosexism. Lamar explores how though he may not personally relate to queer experiences; he does have
firsthand knowledge about what it means to overcome racism as Latino. Here we see Lamar actively engaging with potential ways he can be a better activist and advocate as an ally to queer, trans, and nonbinary people. Lamar starts by looking within himself and within his spaces to see if they are safe and welcoming of queerness.

To expand on this activism, Myung-Soon reflects in his interview with Gohan, “I think it [queer studies courses] equipped me to have better conversations with my own friends and family in my own community, so I definitely would recommend those classes to anyone” (Gohan’s interview, May 3, 2021, p. 3). Myung-Soon is taking direct actions to create more thoughtful and purposeful spaces engaging with queerness with his family and friends. Both quotes from Edilberto and Myung-Soon identify the significance of looking inward and within our communities to create space for meaningful conversations about queerness. These are examples of activism within our own communities to improve dialogues and conditions for queer, trans, and nonbinary people. While Lamar focuses on being a better ally, Myung-Soon asserts ways to have more meaningful discussions on queerness. Both report specific ways to create safe and supportive spaces in their own communities for queer, trans, and nonbinary people.

**Supportive Spaces**

When considering how the co-researchers and interviewees discussed their relationship to queer studies, we cannot disregard the importance of creating supportive spaces for queer studies students. Students provided examples of current supportive spaces in the queer studies department and their benefits. Subsequently, students made suggestions for creating more supportive spaces. The co-researchers and I agreed on the definition of supportive spaces as a network of people who provide an individual with
practical or emotional support (Merriam-Webster, 2021). This section includes identifying the importance of creating supportive spaces for queer studies students and names how they are beneficial. Then it provides specific ideas for creating more opportunities for supportive spaces.

**Creating More Supportive Spaces**

Students made suggestions for creating more supportive spaces. When Diaz was asked by co-researcher Alejandro Mendoza how he thinks queer studies could improve, Diaz proposed that “…if the professor’s kind of started building some kind of way where they could involve students into volunteering or to be mentees if they want to be mentored by them, I feel they'll be a great start” (Alejandro Mendoza’s interview, May 3, 2021, p. 6). Diaz identifies the need of more opportunities for a mentor/mentee relationship with the queer studies professors throughout their entire CCB experience, not just one semester.

Michal suggested that:

…one thing that has come up, just in my conversations as well with like other queer People of Color in like students, taking the class is you know, often a lot of this material it's like very intimate very personal and it can be triggering, it can bring up a lot of things, especially like as People of Color when we are learning about like oppression and discrimination and things that, like our ancestors or even like our parents are like that we ourselves experience, so I think it would be like an incredible thing for the community to be able to have some sort of like mental health resource... (Gohan’s interview, May 3, 2021, p. 7)
Additionally, Diaz and Myung-Soon both suggest that improving queer studies requires opportunities for creating more supportive spaces. Both provided overarching examples about how to improve queer studies by looking at the needs of the programs, not just within the confines of the classroom.

**Building Community**

The last theme relates to the role of community around queer studies. In this theme, we realized that the interviewees went beyond the classroom when discussing communities’ relationships to queer studies. For this study, community is defined as a feeling of fellowship with others, because of sharing common attitudes, interests, and goals (Oxford, 2021). This definition was applied to examples both inside and outside the classroom of queer studies courses. The first part of this section includes identifying that building community was imperative for queer studies students and how building community is beneficial. The last part of this theme names the hardships of not being in community due to COVID-19.

**The Importance and Benefits of Building Community**

A noteworthy finding of this study is how identifying that building community was crucial in queer studies and how building community is beneficial to queer studies students. In Napoleon’s final VPAR paper and reflection, she revealed:

One of the main struggles of LGBTQ+ people is the sense of inadequacy, of not belonging, of being on the sidelines of society. This is why LGBTQ+ circles emphasize building community and providing safe spaces. Taking classes relating to queer studies are one way to belong and strengthen their sense of self as LGBTQ+. (Napoleon’s Final: VPAR Research Paper, May 6, 2021, p. 1)
Napoleon addressed why building community is important in queer studies. She identified that supportive spaces for queer, trans, and nonbinary people, including the classroom, creates a sense of fitting into a community and forms opportunities to feel better in our own skin. She names both individual and collective care through maintaining a sense of community, generating supportive spaces, and taking queer studies courses. By doing so, Napoleon overtly connected the significance of the last two themes of this dissertation to queer studies: building community and creating supportive spaces.

Furthermore, Myung-Soon provided specific examples about how being in community was valuable for him. Myung-Soon identified how to be in community with other students who share similar identities and who have experienced related social inequities based on their sexual and gender identities was “very, very empowering” (Gohan’s interview, May 3, 2021, p. 3).

**Hardships of Not Being in Community**

There are many examples of the hardships of not being in community due to COVID-19 and the limitations of online learning. We see this through experiences provided by Ashley, Avda, and TK. For instance, Rebecca’s interviewee, Ashley, critiqued that “I wish it was a class that we could have taken in person, I think that would have been better than online because we could've connected with a lot more people, but it's COVID…” (Rebecca’s interview, April 29, 2021, p. 1). Ashley recognized the importance of in-person interactions and emphasizes the limitations of online learning in building community, mainly due to the confines of Zoom interactions with other students.
Ashley identified how face-to-face queer studies courses are a better way to bond and connect with other queer studies students.

When Rebecca asked how queer studies can be improved by the interviewee, Ashley answered, “I think bringing students back into the class to create a stronger community would open up discussions” (Rebecca’s interview, April 29, 2021, p. 3). Ashley continued explaining that “having students who are LGBTQ+ and students who aren’t exchange ideas, well, well, that would be good for the community” (Rebecca’s interview, April 29, 2021, p. 3). Ashley related how meeting in person in queer studies courses leads to building deeper community connections. Furthermore, Ashley spoke to how creating more opportunities for face-to-face discussions is a powerful way to share and support the ideas of fellow queer studies students, including allies. She recognized how these interactions are good for our community overall.

Avda, who was interviewed by Napoleon, supported Ashley’s observation stating, “There’s not as much a sense of community because it’s online” (Napoleon’s interview, April 23, 2021, p. 10). Exploring this, TK went deeper revealing how moving the queer studies courses online was not in the control of the instructors, but still was unfortunate. TK lamented that “COVID-19 took away the opportunity for in-person contact with students and professors” (Jeremy’s interview, April 24, 2021, p. 17). It was not just in-person courses that were affected but shared spaces, like the Queer Recourse Center, and the queer studies office, where faculty hold office hours. In Jeremy’s analysis of TK’s interview, Jeremy explored how:

…it seems that the value and importance of the queer studies department comes largely from the sense of community and the chance to discuss things in a safe
space, not just from the curriculum and content of the classes…First, it’s important to advocate not just for the department, but for similar resources that provide that kind of space, such as the queer resource center. (Jeremy’s Final: VPAR Paper and Reflection, May 15, 2021, p. 2)

Here we see Jeremy reporting on the importance of building community inside and outside the classrooms. He identified the need to support external queer spaces, as well as the current resources in queer studies, like the Queer Resource Center.

Summary

In the last section of Chapter 5, I identified three major themes that were uncovered outside the scope of the research questions through the coding of the interview transcripts, as well as in the co-researcher’s journals, assignments, and class Zoom recordings. The first major theme that emerged was the vital link between queer studies and activism. In the second theme we considered the role of supportive spaces in queer studies. Finally, the final theme examined the concept of building community in queer studies and advocated for returning to in person classes as soon as it is safe due to the pandemic.
CHAPTER VI: DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

This study examined the experiences of queer studies students at Community College of the Bay (CCB) by conducting virtual participatory action research (VPAR) with 12 co-researchers enrolled in my course Queer Culture, Society, and Resistance during the Spring semester of 2021. Key elements in our study identified the relationship of intersectionality and racial identities to queer studies. My fellow co-researchers each interviewed at least one person taking a queer studies course at CCB. In addition, throughout the process, the co-researchers reflected on their experiences through journals, course assignments, and their Final: VPAR Paper and Reflection. Simultaneously, the methodology of VPAR allowed us to take agency to focus on the voices of our community, as well as build relationships within our own VPAR crew. In Rebecca’s eleventh journal, she wrote “our VPAR crew,” and that descriptor has been utilized since (Rebecca’s journal, April 29, 2021, p. 2).

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the findings, deepen the analysis of the three main research questions answered in this study, and address the themes that were uncovered beyond the scope of the research questions. At its start, this study utilized the frameworks of: Queer of Color Analysis (QOCA) (Ferguson, 2004), critical whiteness (Baldwin, 1984; Du Bois, 1903), and anti-oppressive education (Kumashiro, 2002); I now see the importance of acknowledging another framework: intersectional theory (Crenshaw, 1989). As mentioned previously in Chapter 1, the original frameworks of this study share a concern for transgressive education by disrupting power dynamics and social hierarchies, challenging the status quo, protecting social justice pedagogy,
centering the lived experiences of Queer, Trans, Black, Indigenous, People of Color (QTBIPOC), while de-centering whiteness, and building knowledge based upon an intersectional lens.

By investigating the findings through these frameworks, I raise critical questions about the purpose, power, and potential direction of queer studies courses. I also argue that curricula in queer studies courses need to focus on the experiences of QTBIPOC and actively de-center whiteness. This chapter is broken down into six parts, which include: 1) De-Centering Whiteness: “Here's another old white guy I have to read,” 2) Centering Intersectionality: “I felt seen in all my identities,” 3) Erasure and Colonialism: “Yearning for that information that was erased,” 4) The Role of Accomplices in Queer Studies: “I'm somebody that is going to be there first for someone,” 5) Community, Activism, and Supportive Spaces: “More actionable ways to live out learning,” and 6) Growing and Improving Queer Studies Programs: “At younger ages and more frequently.”

After this discussion, I present the implications and recommendations, for the specific audiences: 1) educators, staff, and other leaders in queer studies specifically at CCB, 2) all queer studies faculty and staff, and 3) students. This VPAR study concludes with my final thoughts as a co-researcher and the instructor of Queer Culture, Society, and Resistance. An important aspect of VPAR as a methodology is the continued reflection on what this study found, what the process was like, and how it could be improved.

Discussion

*Queer Studies and Queer of Color Analysis, Critical Whiteness, Anti-Oppressive Education, and Intersectional Frameworks*
My co-researchers and I examined the role of queer studies regarding the representation of students’ individual racial, sexual, and gender identities. As such the first research question grappled with how students described their experiences in queer studies courses at CCB. This question was purposefully constructed to be broad. This was an attempt to ask questions that are as unbiased as possible and do not lead interviewees.

The second research question proposed what the similarities and differences might be among students’ experiences based on different aspects of their identities, including racial, sexual, gender identity, and age. This question was based on intersectional theory to find examples of connection and create opportunities to build bridges across difference for queer studies students. Lastly, the final research question postulated the role of intersectionality within queer studies. This aimed to assess if and how intersectional theory and praxis are already established in queer studies at CCB to find gaps and provide ways to construct more of an intersectional lens within its courses. As mentioned in the findings, we broadened our exploration of these three research questions to consider the importance of activism in queer studies, as well as acknowledge the influences of supportive spaces and building community.

Intersectional theory was critical at the forefront of this study, including throughout the development of the research questions. Therefore, I build on the theoretical frameworks already established in Chapter 1, QOCA, critical whiteness, and anti-oppressive education, and add intersectional theory as a framework to this study. To name why intersectional theory was not established as a framework at the start of this study, I could not have said it better than my dissertation chair, Dr. Donahue, who
observed “intersectionality is to you like water to fish. This study reminded you to see that water/theory” (Meeting with Dr. Donahue, December 10, 2021).

In the previous chapter, intersectional theory was defined by Crenshaw (1989), who coined the term, as a form of inquiry interrogating the intersections of social groupings and “how overlapping social identities relate to systems and structures of oppression, domination, or discrimination” (p. 42). Intersectionality stems from the histories of political movements and has been built on the work of Black lesbian feminists, critical race theorists, and Women of Color scholars, including but not limited to the *Combahee River Collective* (1977), *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (1981) edited by Cherrie Moraga and Gloria E. Anzaldúa and Audre Lorde’s, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*, originally published in 1984. To build on Crenshaw’s definition, Collins and Bilge (2016) recognize that intersectionality can be a tool to study the numerous levels of human interactions based on identities and their correlations to social structures. It is multilayered and opens doorways to interconnect the world. The very word intersectionality implies complexity. May (2015) describes intersectionality as an “example of social action” that approaches “theorizing as active” to eliminate inequity (p. 19), which supports the purpose of VPAR as a methodology.

“Intersectionality is political, philosophical, and pedagogical in nature: it invites us to think from ‘both/and’ spaces and to seek justice in crosscutting ways by identifying and addressing the (often hidden) workings of privilege and oppression” (May, 2015, p. 21). As May contests, privilege and oppression are “often hidden.” Therefore, most of my discussion in this chapter seeks to read between the lines of our findings to reveal ways
privilege and oppression manifest in queer studies at CCB, both overtly and covertly, to utilize an intersectional lens throughout the chapter.

“Ordinary people can draw upon intersectionality as an analytic tool when they recognize that they need better frameworks to grapple with the complex discriminations that they face” (Collins & Bilge, 2016, p. 3). Students have a voice. Students have agency. Students have power. If we do not talk to the communities that endure oppressive structure and those realities, how can we understand, analyze, and enact change? Intersectional theory seeks to do just that.

Consequently, to sufficiently scrutinize the finding of this study, I utilize the frameworks: (a) QOCA (Ferguson, 2004), (b) critical whiteness (Baldwin, 1984; Du Bois, 1903), (c) anti-oppressive education (Kumashiro, 2002), and (d) intersectional theory (Crenshaw, 1989). Ferguson (2004) reminds us how we must include critical race theory (CRT) in queer analysis. Chen (2017) argues for the disruption of whiteness as the norm within education and other systems of oppression. Kumashiro (2002) asserts the need to challenge the societal expectations of what it means to be an “authentic American” and exposes the role repetition plays in perpetuating and normalizing privileged identities. Butler (1990) and Kumashiro (2002) define repetition as oppression in society by the means of harmfully repeating certain privileged knowledge and practices. Using the framework of repetition, Kumashiro (2002) challenges anti-oppressive activists and educators to disrupt some of their own unconscious discourses that serve as barriers to social change.

For this study, the term “center” mirrors Butler’s (1990) and Kumashiro’s (2002) definition of repetition because the act of repetition is assumed in the concept of
centering. Centering does not mean mentioning an idea once or twice and then not addressing it again. Centering means repeated focus on a particular topic, both overtly and covertly, emphasizing the significance and relevance of that topic. Kumashiro identifies how educators need to recognize how repetition is used when including racial identity in queer theory. Therefore, my discussion about representation in queer studies utilizes these frameworks. My research is contextualized by the intersection of racial identity with sexual and gender identity, de-normalizing whiteness, and focusing on how key it is to center the experiences of QTBIPOC who have been historically marginalized in academia, including queer spaces in education.

De-Centering Whiteness: “Here’s another old white guy I have to read”

In Chapter 1, the first sentence of my dissertation asserted, “Breana, I feel we focus way too much on race in this class, I mean this is a queer studies class.” This was a statement made in my Queer Culture, Society, and Resistance course by one of my white gay cisman students five years ago. I found that there is little to no empirical research on the experiences of students in queer studies, and little research focusing on queer studies and the normalization of whiteness in community colleges. As a result, I investigated these questions without a clear model to follow. In doing so, I am proud of the findings of this study with the collaboration of my 12 co-researchers. With that said, I recognize my scope is limited and that I made many mistakes along the way that I will report on later in the chapter to present ways this study could have improved. This research is not comprehensive, but it is illustrative.

One of the seminal studies this dissertation used as a foundation was the work of McCready’s (2004a) study, Some Challenges Facing Queer Youth Programs in Urban
High Schools: Racial Segregation and De-Normalizing Whiteness. Since he conducted his research at the high school level, I wanted to see if the results of his study were similar in higher education. Applying the four frameworks of this study, I found that the importance of centering the experiences of QTBIPOC and de-centering whiteness was one of the most significant findings.

One example to support this is when Myung-Soon declared that the institution of education is still “a white system” (Gohan’s interview, May 3, 2021, p. 14). He named how he felt invisible in this “white system” and proposed the need for change. Myung-Soon revealed how he grappled “to find my place, like, as an Asian American, but also as like a Queer Person of Color” and how he felt invisible within academia (Gohan’s interview, May 3, 2021, p. 11). When co-researcher Gohan asked him “what makes you feel invisible?” Myung-Soon exposed how academia is still largely a “white system” (Gohan’s interview, May 3, 2021, p. 14). Myung-Soon provided an example of what that “white system” looks like by stating how in many of his classes, including outside of queer studies, he often says to himself “here's another old white guy I have to read” (Gohan’s interview, May 3, 2021, p. 14). Myung-Soon interrogated academia as a system of oppression that benefits whiteness and perpetuates white supremacy. He noted that the required readings in most of his classes were written by older white men. Myung-Soon followed this by linking the “white system” of academia to the erasure of his identity as a pansexual Korean American. Myung-Soon’s words imply that to challenge the “white system” of education it is vital to assign more QTBIPOC authors and embed more QTBIPOC narratives in curricula. Along similar lines, Jennings (2015) observed the need for transgressive queer, trans, and nonbinary curricula that challenges the privileging of
gay white upper- and middle-class abled-bodied cisgender men. Caius supports Jennings (2015) quote by identifying how her queer studies course at CCB provided “not just the white queer perspective” (Gohan’s interview, April 30, 2021, p. 2).

Our VPAR study continued to support Jennings’ (2015) call for more “transgressive” queer studies curricula. The most frequently suggested improvement for queer studies at CCB was the need for more representation within its pedagogy based on racial identity. When asked if interviewees felt their racial identities were represented in queer studies four students stand out: Edilberto, Myung-Soon, Caius, and co-researcher Gohan. Edilberto stated, “I wished it [colonial erasure in the Philippines] was covered more” (Alejandro Mendoza’s, April 30, 2021, p. 9), while Myung-Soon critiqued how “I just wish that there were more” opportunities for racial inclusion (Gohan’s interview, April 30, 2021, p. 14). Additionally, Caius asserted “I do feel that we [queer studies] could do more” (Gohan’s interview, April 30, 2021, p. 13). The significant word in all three of these quotes is “more.” Co-researcher Gohan described a “yearning for that information that was erased” (Gohan’s interview, April 30, 2021, p. 14). Edilberto, Myung-Soon, Caius, and Gohan are all identifying how to improve queer studies: more racial inclusion, including the exploration of colonial erasure of same-sex desire and transgressing gender roles and expectations in Central America, the Philippines, Vietnam, and more broadly throughout Asia.

Additionally, Edilberto, Myung-Soon, Caius, and Gohan highlighted the importance of repeated representation and not just some representation when it comes to the intersections of racial identity with sexual and gender identity. Repetition is a vital tenet of the anti-oppressive education framework. As quoted in Chapter 1, “Education
that is queer and anti-oppressive encourages practitioners to enter into repetitive practices and disrupt them from within... examining resistance to difference rather than merely addressing difference” (Kumashiro, 2000, p. 199). All four contended that there was “some” representation of their racial identity, while calling for “more” representation arguing the need for repetition.

Another example to support the importance of centering QTBIPOC communities (McCready, 2004a) in queer studies is the over-representation of white identity named in our VPAR study, as well as the aversion of engaging critically about whiteness in queer studies by the white interviewees. All interviewees were asked “Do you feel your racial identities are represented in queer studies? If so, how?” Three of the four white students interviewed briefly said that their racial identity was represented within the curriculum. Two out of the four white interviewees replied in one word, “yes.” These two interviewees did not provide any further expansion addressing the “how” part of the question. Another white interviewee, Ashley, when asked if she felt that her racial identity was represented, responded, “I think that many races were covered in the curriculum” (Rebecca’s interview, April 29, 2021, p. 4). Ashley evaded the question and instead she recognized multiple races were addressed. Applying the framework of critical whiteness, this could be due to the fact she was uncomfortable talking about her whiteness and, potentially subconsciously, deflected the question answering in a broad and generalized way.

Along these lines, the analysis of co-researcher Napoleon, in her Final: VPAR Paper and Reflection is crucial. Napoleon identifies as a pansexual, Filipina ciswoman and feminist. She observed how her interviewee, Avda, was uncomfortable talking about
whiteness and quickly changed the topic to avoid a deeper discussion about race. For white people, it may not be about not seeing themselves, but seeing how others view them. In that sense, they go from being “invisible,” because their identity is the norm, to understanding how they’re seen and seeing themselves in a different way. Avda might have cared about how Napoleon perceived her in their interview and might have feared accidentally saying something offensive.

White interviewees evading discussions of race is also supported by the fact that the four white interviewees’ responses were drastically shorter than the students who identify as BIPOC, when asked if they felt their racial identity was represented in queer studies. Napoleon, my co-researcher, wrote in her Final: VPAR Paper and Reflection that her interviewee Avda, “had no issue seeing herself reflected in the classes when it came to racial identity” (Napoleon’s Final: VPAR Paper and Reflection, May 6, 2021, p. 2).

There are many reasons why the BIPOC students answered this question in far greater depth, including white privilege and white supremacy. The white students do not have to think about racial oppression. They have the option to put blinders on when it comes to racism and choose not to see racism on a day-to-day basis or at all. They are not racially oppressed, leaving their responses far shorter and the BIPOC responses deeper and more complex. Applying the framework of critical whiteness, these responses demonstrate white students’ lack of practice seeing themselves as racial beings and the limited language accessible for them to discuss whiteness beyond one word or even the complete aversion to the question.

In Napoleon’s final she continued to examine Avda’s whiteness in queer studies when she wrote, “It would be interesting to know if being reflected in the class is less
important to people identifying as white as opposed to people identifying as BIPOC” (Napoleon’s Final: VPAR Research Paper, May 6, 2021, p. 3). Napoleon’s speculation named how being represented racially is potentially more significant for BIPOC students as opposed to white students, whose whiteness is in the position of power. There is a clear need to go more in-depth about the intersection of sexual and gender identity with racial identity.

Another example of the need to de-center whiteness is provided through the experiences of Ashley. She mentioned numerous times in her interview with co-coresearcher Rebecca that she did not feel represented as a ciswoman or as a lesbian in her Introduction to Queer Studies course. Ashley critiqued:

The most challenging, is the fact that we don’t talk much about lesbians, I think that’s a big deal. There was some stuff about activism and talking about being a Person of Color and a lesbian, but I think really going into the history about lesbianism and how it has evolved today. (Rebecca’s interview, April 29, 2021, p. 3)

Ashley not seeing herself represented as a white lesbian within the required texts for her queer studies course, *This Bridge Called My Back: Writing by Radical Women of Color* (1981) and *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (1984), appears to contradict McCready’s (2004a) study. He wrote how it is vital to center QTBIPOC voices when teaching about queer, trans, and nonbinary communities because almost all students can see at least one of their identities represented in the curriculum. Ashley acknowledging that she did not feel represented in any of her identities in queer studies is not the major finding here. The experiences described by Ashley speak more to white privilege and
white supremacy, which supports McCready’s (2004a) findings for the need to de-center whiteness.

To further support the need to de-center whiteness in queer studies TK’s interview with co-researcher Jeremy is vital. Numerous examples of the manifestation of whiteness in queer studies at CCB are uncovered through the experiences shared by TK. He felt that some of the “trans people” in his class would stare at him whenever they addressed hegemony and masculinity. It is significant to note that in a class of 50 students, TK was the only white student. TK described the students who would look at him in his transphobia course as “trans people” but did not include their race. If he is the only white student then it is probably to deduce, he is talking about “trans people” who are also BIPOC. Even when race is not explicitly addressed it is still being reinforced (Kumashiro, 2002). TK exemplified this. By not identifying the students in his class as BIPOC that does not mean their races disappear. On the contrary, TK ignores race, highlighting how he is uncomfortable talking about race, just like what we see with Ashley and Avda. These three students provide an example of how whiteness manifests in queer studies.

Additionally, when TK described the “trans people” denying his views, there is space to take pause and question, whether these “trans people” merely engaged in dialogue with him and were offering other ways of perceiving the world. The intention might not have been to dismiss his perspectives, but to add to them. Utilizing a framework of critical whiteness, one assessment could be that TK feels on the defensive in the transphobia course due to white fragility which shapes how his fellow students engage with him.
As seen by the experiences of Myung-Soon, Caius, Edilberto, Gohan, Napoleon, Avda, Ashley, Jeremy, and TK, whiteness is something queer studies needs to actively work to de-center. To provide comparison, Spelman (1990) stated, “… the categories and methods we may find most natural and straightforward to us as we explore the connections between sex and race, sexism, and race, confuse those connections rather than clarify them” (p. 115). This study does not seek to “clarify” the differences of racial, sexual, and gender identity, but instead adds to literature that complicates them. For example, as seen in Jeremy’s Final: VPAR Paper and Reflection, he “confuses” TK’s experiences by not simply agreeing with TK and moving on. Instead, Jeremy ascertained that what happened to TK in his transphobia course was not necessarily wrong or bad. Jeremy read between the lines of TK’s words and complicated TK’s understanding of the dynamics that occurred in his transphobia course showing that Jeremy was implicitly acknowledging TK’s white cismale privilege.

Jeremy is queering his analysis by disrupting the good versus bad and right versus wrong paradigm. Although Jeremy did not overtly identify TK’s white privilege, he named how the climate TK described was purposeful in creating a space where “students who are more marginalized…are able to express themselves and be heard” (Jeremy’s Final: VPAR Paper and Reflection, May 15, 2021, p. 1). Queer studies should not be a safe space for white privilege and white supremacy to be reinforced, which Jeremy recognized by pushing back on his interviewee’s viewpoint of what dynamics were occurring in TK’s transphobia course. To provide comparison, Eng et al. (2005) identified that the future of queer studies “depends absolutely on moving away from white gay male identity politics and learning from the radical critiques offered by a
younger generation of queer scholars who draw their intellectual inspiration from feminism and ethnic studies rather than white queer studies” (p. 222). Jeremy addressed this point in his paper by postulating how the transphobia course was centering the voices of QTBIPOC and de-centering whiteness.

The previous findings all align with the work of McCready (2004a), who asserted “…the need to de-normalize the perceived whiteness of queer youth identity” within pedagogy (p. 48). His study addressed two major challenges queer youth programs in urban schools endure, which are racial segregation and de-normalizing whiteness (McCready, 2004a, p. 38). Although our study cannot speak to racial segregation, this work builds on the idea of centering QTBIPOC communities and de-centering whiteness, specifically focusing on pedagogy in queer studies.

Centering Intersectionality: “I felt seen in all my identities”

At the heart of the interviews and its findings was the vital connection between intersectional theory and queer studies. This section: 1) identifies current examples of how queer studies at CCB teaches intersectionality, 2) names the interest interviewees have in learning about intersectionality in queer studies, 3) explores the benefits of including intersectional theory in queer studies, and 4) calls for more expansive understandings of intersectionality in queer studies.

The first part of this section provides examples of how intersectional theory is currently being taught in queer studies courses at CCB. In Napoleon’s Final: VPAR Paper and Reflection, she examined how her interviewee, Avda, was introduced to intersectional theory in her queer studies course (Napoleon’s Final: VPAR Paper and Reflection, May 6, 2021, p. 2). Avda attested, “I didn't think that race, and sexual
oppression, they, they are connected topics” (Napoleon’s interview, April 23, 2021, p. 8). Utilizing an intersectional framework, here we see this queer studies course providing Avda the tools to bridge false divides and question default analytical categories that seek to separate identity groupings (May, 2015). Avda had never thought about how racial and sexual oppression are correlated and had never applied an intersectional lens in understanding sexual identity. Through the application of critical whiteness, Avda is naming the assumption that queer studies is saturated in whiteness. For Avda, this assumption seemed to be unconscious since she had never thought about the link between racial and sexual oppression before.

Intersectionality opposes hierarchies of identity and oppression, for example, gender-first or class-first thinking (May, 2015). The following quotes from Mikaili and Diaz shed light on how current teachings of intersectionality in queer studies at CCB do not reinforce a hierarchy of identity categories. Both Mikaili and Diaz felt represented based on their racial, sexual, and gender identities. Mikaili also felt her class was represented in her Introduction to Queer Studies course. Mikaili, interviewed by co-researcher Lilith, contemplated how:

For me, being a straight Black woman, well, the things that we talked about in class are not just about being LGBT. It is also about race, like being Black in America, which I am. Also, it is about class, being a single parent who I am, we discussed the social and the inequality in our social economics tied to race, where I have also been, which a lot of us are right now. (Lilith’s interview, May 2, 2021, p. 11)
Mikaili’s response mirrors the work by Jennings (2015) when he reported, “When race and class are highlighted as part of LGBTQ lives, it acknowledges that the fight against racism and class inequality are simultaneously struggles for LGBTQ rights as well” (p. 453). Through intersectional theory, I articulate how Mikaili’s experiences in her queer studies course are building a connection of difference without the reinforcement of hierarchies. Mikaili does not say that one social grouping was more important than the other, instead she stated how she “felt seen in all my identities” (Lilith’s interview, May 2, 2021, p. 11). Diaz maintained something similar by asserting, as a gay masculine presenting Mexican American bilingual 30-year-old cisman he felt “100% represented” in his Gay Male Intimacy course. Diaz and Mikaili are highlighting current examples of how queer studies courses at CCB implement an intersectional lens. Mikaili continued discussing this theme by voicing how she felt her queer studies course was about sexual and gender identities but that it did not stop there. She reported “I feel like this class, like, it relates to me, as a straight Black woman, just as much as it would relate to anyone else because it just relates to us on different levels” (Lilith’s interview, May 2, 2021, p. 12). Mikaili is underlining how the course “relates to us on different levels” bringing multiple identities into the curricula implying her queer studies course does not determine one social grouping as being more important than another. In addition, Diaz surveyed how queer studies courses, “allow other identities to join into the conversation and do not block anyone else out” (Alejandro Mendoza’s interview, May 3, 2021, p. 16). His course created opportunities for “other identities” to be included in queer studies. Diaz expressed, “I feel that a special part about these courses is that it's open and it does not center or focus on just one” (Alejandro Mendoza’s interview, May 3, 2021, p. 16). This
quote affirms the heart of an intersectional analysis, not only identifying that intersectional theory is being taught, but that “it does not center or focus on just one.” The key word here being “center,” which attests to how his class did not put one identity as superior or more important than another, instead it centers and focuses on multiple identities. These examples from Mikaili and Diaz underscore how intersectional theory does not reinforce hierarchies.

Another current example of how queer studies courses at CCB are practicing intersectional theory is seen through co-researcher Jeremy’s analysis of his interviewee’s experiences. Jeremy proposed how “students who are more marginalized” are most probably represented in TK’s transphobia course. By creating a space where “students who are more marginalized” are understood and able to share about their lives, the course is centering people who live intersectional lives and endure multiple forms of social inequities. To compare to the literature, Crenshaw (2011) explored how one-way intersectionality dismantles systemic inequities is by centering dynamics that have been ignored or suppressed. Jeremy’s analysis of TK’s experiences supports Crenshaw’s description of the role of intersectionality in the classroom. Jeremy examined how the climate of TK’s classroom created space for centering multiple marginalized identities. Jeremy concluded his final by saying how many of his classes at CCB have not been a space for marginalized voices to speak and be heard. Therefore, Jeremy affirmed how he thinks the disrupted power dynamics in TK’s transphobia course, “is a very positive thing to hear” (Jeremy’s Final: VPAR Paper and Reflection, May 15, 2021, p. 1).

Avda recognized in her interview how “Reading this book, Writings by Radical Women of Color, was a very interesting experience for me because I didn't think of it, I
don’t see the world as it is. So, this problem with race is pretty new for me” (Napoleon’s interview, April 23, 2021 p. 9). Avda declared how the book, *This Bridge Called My Back: Radical Writing by Radical Women of Color* (1981), enriched her understanding of intersectionality. These texts in her queer studies course helped open her eyes to the complexity of intersectionality and gave her an awareness to perspectives outside her own. Ashley supported this, by indirectly answering the question about how current queer studies courses teach intersectionality. Ashley noted how her Introduction to Queer Studies course required the intersectional texts, also named by Avda: *This Bridge Called My Back: Writing by Radical Women of Color* (1981) and *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (1984). Ashley advocated for racial inclusion in queer studies courses by specifying “I feel a huge thing that you need to incorporate is being inclusive racially. I think that many races were covered in the curriculum” (Rebecca’s interview, April 29, 2021, p. 4). Ashley is pinpointing the importance of intersectionality as “huge” which signifies how vital intersectionality is in queer studies for her. She communicated how her queer studies course included “many races,” while examining the "need” to be racially inclusive. Myung-Soon provided an example of how his Queer Anthropology course practices intersectionality through “reading about the history of Queer People of Color throughout Asia” (Gohan’s interview, May 3, 2021, p. 11). Avda, Ashley, and Myung-Soon all give examples of readings in their queer studies course that engaged in intersectional theory. Avda and Myung-Soon specified the benefits of those intersectional texts, while Ashley is more critical of them. The significance of the previous quotes by Avda, Mikaili, Diaz, Jeremy, Ashley, and Myung-Soon is that they are reinforcing the connection intersectionality has to queer studies. All supplied current examples of how
queer studies incorporates intersectional theory. Many also go on to give illustrations of its benefits.

Another finding seen in the following quotes by Edilberto, Caius, and Myung-Soon is the clear interest and desire in learning about intersectionality in queer studies students. The passion is there, and it is the queer studies instructor’s job to foster and enrich that passion. Edilberto proclaimed “I love the Queer Communities of Color in the United States class. Again, the intersectionality…is something I am very interested in learning about and I was thrilled to learn more and more about it in my class” (Alejandro Mendoza’s interview, April 30, 2021, p. 10). Edilberto reported being “thrilled” to learn “more and more” about intersectionality in his queer studies course. This exemplifies a clear interest in learning about intersectionality from a queer studies student. This is further supported by Caius, who said:

I learned a lot…They've [queer studies courses] always been really good for trying to not just get the white queer perspective but try to get, like, from other, and not just also not the US perspective and try to get like world perspectives which I appreciate and doing their best to be as inclusive with language. (Gohan’s interview, April 30, 2021, p. 2)

Caius affirmed how her queer studies course at CCB is engaging in dialogues about intersectionality and that she “appreciates” the representation of QTBIPOC. Caius has an interest in intersectional conversations that do not focus on the “white queer perspective.” Myung-Soon assessed how being represented as Korean American in his Queer Anthropology course was the “most memorable experience” for him out of all his queer studies courses he took at CCB (Gohan’s interview, May 3, 2021, p. 11). This
exemplifies an interest in intersectional theory by being represented as both queer and Korean American in his assigned readings about the history of queerness throughout Asia. This is a powerful statement identifying this representation as his “most memorable experience.” That aligns with studies that acknowledge the importance of being represented within curriculum (Broom, 2014; Mockler, 2011).

Not only did interviewees give current examples of how intersectional theory is being included in queer studies as well as relay an interest in learning about intersectionality, but also named its benefits. Napoleon investigated in her final research paper, “The class she [Avda] took opened her eyes to queer and race theories, and to issues, she, as a white person, would have never been privy to on her own” (Napoleon’s Final: VPAR Research Paper, May 6, 2021, p. 3). This is an illustration of a benefit of queer studies courses addressing intersectionality. Avda was able to learn new frameworks to understand queer theory broadening and complicating sexual and gender identity. Napoleon evaluated Avda’s limited view as a white person in understanding racial oppression. Napoleon is showcasing the value of Avda growing her perspective in queer studies, since she had never thought of racial and sexual oppression as entangled. By learning about intersectionality, Avda was able to disrupt the assumed whiteness in queer studies and center a QOCA in queer studies. Intersectionality is attentive to “unrecognized knowers and overlooked forms of meaning” (May, 2015, p. 19). The “unrecognized knowers” in queer studies being QTBIPOC authors, poets, scholars, artist, activists, and community leaders and the “overlooked forms of meaning” being a QOCA and intersectional analysis in queer studies. Napoleon clarified a benefit of intersectional
theory being the expansion of white students’ views to a greater awareness of race theories.

To expand on this, Edilberto also explored the benefits of including intersectional theory in queer studies, scrutinizing, “It continuously challenges my thoughts and perspective and provides me kind of, like, a very different understanding, or at least lens on how to view things” (Alejandro Mendoza’s interview, April 30, 2021, p. 10). Edilberto said intersectionality “challenged” his views and created opportunities for “different” ways of seeing the world. While Caius did not identify anything specific, she noted she “learned a lot” in her queer studies course when it went beyond the white perspective. Caius is implying she “learned a lot” through understanding intersectional theory (Gohan’s interview, April 20, 2021, p. 2). Also, Diaz mentioned the benefits that anyone can learn about queer, trans, and nonbinary communities in queer studies. Diaz expressed “even if one does not come from the LGBT community anybody could join these conversations and learn, and I feel like that’s why these courses are so special” (Alejandro Mendoza’s interview, May 3, 2021, p. 16). Lastly, Jeremy provided an example of being intersectional in queer studies and its benefits. Jeremy remarked the importance of being intersectional and said it created a climate that centers “students [who] are more marginalized” (Jeremy’s Final: VPAR Paper and Reflection, May 15, 2021, p. 1).

The last section on centering intersectionality is a call for more expansive understandings of intersectionality in queer studies. This can be seen in the experiences of Edilberto, Ashley, Napoleon, and Jeremy. Edilberto clearly documented the desire to be more intersectional when he conveyed how he would love to learn more about
“queerness and Asian American communities” and their tie to “activism and art and power and leadership” in the United States (Alejandro Mendoza’s interview, April 30, 2021, p. 9). Utilizing an intersectional framework, Edilberto is calling for a continued interrogation of power dynamics in queer studies by engaging in questions about power and equity (May, 2015).

A further call for queer studies courses to be more intersectional is through Ashley acknowledging that her lesbian identity was not represented in her Introduction to Queer Studies course. Ashley recognized that BIPOC lesbians were covered in her class, but then reiterated that she did not feel that lesbians were talked about much in the course. At three different occasions, throughout her 35-minute interview, she repeated that she did not think lesbians were reflected in the curriculum. Utilizing a QOCA, critical whiteness, and intersectional framework, is she really saying in her interview that she does not identify with BIPOC lesbians? Is it the case that the writings by BIPOC lesbians took a more intersectional look at identity, where white lesbians took a more essentialist look at identity, and consequently did not feel represented with an intersectional framework? Is it the instructor’s job to show students that when we center QTBIPOC all students are represented? Do instructors at CCB need more time framing this analysis? Would that look like affinity groups? How would that be taught?

Continuing to apply intersectional theory, May (2015) wrote how intersectionality is “multifaceted” and that “boundaries are not absolute, they interact in important ways” (p. 33). This can be seen through the perspective of Ashley when discussing representation in queer studies. Ashley said she felt her lesbian identity was not represented. The required readings for her Introduction to Queer Studies course were This
Bridge Called My Back: Writing by Radical Women of Color (1981) edited by Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa and Cherrie Moraga and Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches (1984) by Audre Lorde. What I find fascinating is that both texts are written by mostly BIPOC lesbians and a great deal of the chapters address lesbianism. In fact, one of the chapters assigned in the course Ashley completed is titled, “Lesbianism: An Act of Resistance” by Cheryle Clarke, where the term “lesbianism” is overtly found in the title. Ashley is acknowledging interactions between her sexual identity and racial identity. Instead of interrogating how “boundaries are not absolute” (May, 2015, p. 33), Ashley seems to be reinforcing strict “boundaries” that concretely separate her sexual identity from her racial identity. This perspective maintains the need for more of an intersectional analysis in queer studies to provide students the tools to better understand how sexual identity and racial identity “interact in important ways” (May, 2015, p. 33).

Napoleon calls for more of an intersectional analysis in her Final: VPAR Paper and Reflection. She postulated, “Maybe what matters the most is to have a rainbow of identities explored to ensure all experiences are shared and valued” (Napoleon’s Final: VPAR Research Paper, May 6, 2021, p. 3). How do we teach intersectionality knowing including “all experiences” is not possible? By leaving out some social groupings while keeping others, how do we not perpetuate reinforcing social hierarchies which could insinuate that the social groupings not included are not as important? How do we decide who gets left out because there is not enough time to cover “all experience”?

Lastly, another example of how queer studies courses at CCB are currently engaging in intersectional theory and the need to add more intersectionality is examined by co-researcher Jeremy. He acknowledged the role intersectionality played in creating a
safe space for QTBIPOC students by centering “students who are more marginalized” in his analysis of his interviewee’s experiences (Jeremy’s Final: VPAR Paper and Reflection, May 15, 2021, p. 1). Jeremy advocated for the transphobia course to continue to center people who lived intersectional lives. Jeremy evaluated that since the class was almost 100% BIPOC, the course most likely was a safe space for QTBIPOC. TK being the only white student in a class of 50 is rare in my experience as an instructor at CCB. For me, as a queer studies instructor, I find this encouraging. This highlights the potential direction the queer studies program at CCB is heading. Ideally, meaning continued representation of a majority of QTBIPOC students in queer studies courses.

*Erasure and Colonialism: “Yearning for that information that was erased”*

Queer studies courses are far from perfect. It is important to assess who is being included within the curricula and who is being either unintentionally overlooked or overly ignored. White identity was clearly represented in the findings of this study. There were multiple examples of students not feeling represented within queer studies courses at CCB, with the majority advocating that they would like more representation regarding their racial identity. Many of these examples were connected to colonial erasure due to the destruction of many cultures’ histories.

Out of the 11 BIPOC students who were interviewed, three interviewees and one co-researcher declared the need for more representation in queer studies based on their racial identity. Caius, Myung-Soon, and Edilberto, and Gohan all felt there was some representation of their racial identities in their queer studies courses, but that there was room for more. It is significant to note that all three interviewees and the co-researcher overtly connected the limited representation of their racial identities to colonial erasure.
Is this colonial erasure mentioned by Caius, Myung-Soon, Edilberto, and Gohan being perpetuated by queer studies instructors at CCB? I would argue yes. I advocate for queer studies instructors to define and explain the role colonial erasure has on the criminalization of same-sex desire and the transgression of gender roles and expectations. These four students have a clear understanding of colonial erasure. To utilize this knowledge, I push queer studies instructors to go further to connect the effects colonial erasure has today, and to analyze this erasure at the macropolitical level.

We need to center the rediscovery of histories erased and not use colonial erasure as a reason to avoid representing these vital histories. Caius presented an example of how to reverse this erasure while simultaneously creating opportunities to build coalitions. Caius stated how her family “comes from Central America, Unfortunately, with most of the colonizing a lot of our records got destroyed” (Gohan’s interview, April 30, 2021, p. 13). She went on to say that researchers from Central America have been unearthing histories thought to be destroyed by the conquistadors. She suggested creating grants to translate these documents from Spanish to English. This idea has the potential to be an exciting assignment in queer studies for our students who speak Spanish. Caius’s suggestion recognizes opportunities for queer studies courses to create assignments focused on bringing these histories to light.

Gohan, who interviewed Caius, connected this erasure to the Spaniards colonizing the Philippines. Gohan stated how he had a “yearning for that information that was erased” (Gohan’s interview, April 30, 2021, p. 14). Gohan’s statement affirmed the desire queer studies students have to go deeper when learning about lost histories due to
colonialism, which supports my earlier suggestion of centering the unearthing of these histories in queer studies curricula.

Like Gohan, Edilberto also discussed the effects of colonization in the Philippines. Edilberto, Myung-Soon, and Caius all share that they have a desire to learn “more” about the colonial erasure of queer, trans, and nonbinary histories outside of the United States. This addressed the desire and potential for re-discovering history. Recognition that history is limited due to colonization is key in the quotes above. Therefore, creating an assignment where students research their own ethnic backgrounds to discover hidden histories based on same-sex desire and going beyond the gender binary could be empowering and create a space for students to broaden their understanding of colonial erasure. In addition, this could make history more active and could be a powerful way to make history feel alive and connected to students’ current lives.

Caius, Myung-Soon, Edilberto, and Gohan offered that colonial erasure might be the reason that there was not as much representation as they would have liked in queer studies courses. These four students were potentially being empathetic to their white instructors and/or they were afraid there would be retribution to any negative critiques, so they softened the blow. I want to directly address all queer studies faculty, even those outside of CCB, to assert that colonial erasure is not an excuse to minimize, marginalize, or tokenize QTBIPOC representation. Myung-Soon and Edilberto noted how they discussed colonial erasure in their queer studies courses, which is important. However, that should not be where the conversation ends. Briefly addressing communities that have experienced colonial erasure and then moving on to the next topic perpetuates white
supremacy in queer studies. It sweeps colonial erasure under the rug, pushes it to the side, and avoids complex conversations about colonialism and its connection to white supremacy. You cannot talk about colonial erasure without engaging in difficult conversations about how white supremacy was violently enforced through assimilation, theft, genocide, and more. There are more than enough resources of QTBIPOC communities rediscovering their histories. Caius identifies as Latina. Myung-Soon identifies as Korean American. Both Edilberto and Gohan identify as Filipino. All their racial identities have resources to look deeper into their histories and overall experiences. To incorporate an intersectional lens, May (2015) declared, “To contest false binaries, reveal links among systems of oppression, and forge political coalitions, intersectionality attends to patterns that cut across scales, focuses on unstated assumptions, and explores the meanings of gaps and absences” (p. 21). In the analysis of the experiences of Caius, Myung-Soon, Edilberto, and Gohan, May’s “unstated assumption” is that queer studies equates whiteness, and the “gaps and absences” are limited representations of QTBIPOC histories. Therefore, this study calls for the engagement of conversations about how colonial erasure intersects with queer studies and its relation to contemporary QTBIPOC experiences.

_The Role of Accomplices in Queer Studies: “I'm somebody that is going to be there first for someone”_

How do we continue to assess the role of heterosexual and cisgender students taking queer studies courses without catering to privileged identities? Multiple heterosexual and cisgender students were interviewed and surveyed in our VPAR study. Students reflected how much they learned and appreciated these classes, but some also
addressed the fear of “saying the wrong thing” in class. They indicated that they were afraid they might “unintentionally offend” other students and wanted to stay silent because they were hesitant as to whether their comments and questions were ignorant.

An ongoing struggle I find in my queer studies courses is the silence of allies due to fear. Gian observed a climate of outsiders versus insiders in queer studies. In other words, Gian felt like an outsider in her queer studies course as heterosexual and cisgender. Gian shared:

My biggest challenge taking this class has been trying to ensure my ignorance on this topic does not offend anyone. So, it’s challenging to explain things sometimes due to my fear of offending someone. The most challenging thing is trying not to offend my classmates when speaking in class due to my lack of knowledge in regard to the LGBT community. (Vontressa’s interview, April 30, 2021, p. 2)

She feared her understanding of the course material was limited. By asking clarifying questions or by contributing to class conversations in queer studies, she feared she would cause accidental offense to an insider. Co-researcher Vontressa, who identifies as African American, heterosexual, ciswoman, single mother of two, often did not want to speak in our Zoom classes. Vontressa journaled that she also did not want to participate in our Zoom discussions, since she was “just an ally” and did not want to “accidentally say something wrong or offensive” (Vontressa’s journal, April 30, 2021). Gian and Vontressa are taking steps forward in being an “ally” by enrolling in queer studies courses, but they continue to stay silent. Should queer studies actively seek to end this silence? Is having heterosexual and cisgender students’ main contributions in each class be active listening instead of participating a bad thing? If queer studies seeks to create more spaces for
heterosexual and cisgender students to have a voice, what are the best strategies to disrupt these silences and create a more open climate open? Did Gian not want to make the focus of the class about her thus taking away from queer, trans, and nonbinary experiences? Is the silence of heterosexual and cisgender students mainly due to being self-conscious, the fear of ridicule, being embarrassed, or public shaming and should curricula address these concerns?

Mikaili was the only heterosexual and cisgender interviewee that did not express a fear of offending someone in class. Mikaili adds a different perspective to the role of heterosexual and cisgender students in queer studies. She helps bring awareness to the role of accomplices in queer studies. Indigenous Action (2014) defines an accomplice as “a person who helps another commit a crime” (p. 2). Indigenous Action critiques the term “ally” by dissecting its meaning and what it has come to represent. They argue that “The term ally has been rendered ineffective and meaningless” (p. 2) and does not seek to fight side-by-side queer, trans, and nonbinary communities like an accomplice does. Indigenous Action contends that an ally is associated with making money off the backs of the oppressed and reports the current practices of the Ally Industrial Complex. “Where struggle is commodity, allyship is currency” (p. 1).

Even though Mikaili uses the term “ally” throughout her interview, it is clear through her description of what it means to be an “ally” that Mikaili aligns more with the definition of an accomplice. Mikaili utilizing the term “ally” shows the limited language in the queer studies courses at CCB, surmising that the term “accomplice” and more contemporary terms like it are not covered in the curriculum of her queer studies course.
An ally “profits off suffering” and an accomplice “has something to lose” because of their partnership with oppressed groups (Moore & Cox, 2021, p. 19). Mikaili advocated for more courses, like her Introduction to Queer Studies course, to be required at all grade levels and not just accessible in college. She addressed the potential for these classes to help young people “step out of their point of view” and how they can help students in the understanding of their own identities (Lilith’s interview, May 2, 2021, p. 13). Here she is advocating to build more systemic representation in education for queer, trans, and nonbinary communities. She does not seek profits; she seeks change.

When in dialogue, an ally “is in dialogue with others in power” whereas an accomplice “listens to and with those who are oppressed and both takes risks in moving dialogue outside of the accomplice relationship” (Moore & Cox, 2021, p. 17). Mikaili is an example of an accomplice by creating opportunities for transformative conversations about queerness in overtly heterosexist and cissexist environments. Mikaili contended, “People are so afraid though, they don't want to talk about LGBT people…they don't openly discuss it but you have to” (Lilith’s interview, May 2, 2021, p. 13–14). This shows how Mikaili is an accomplice and beyond the definition of an ally. She is not conversing with power structures; she is taking the knowledge she gained from her queer studies course and is conversing with her own community and at the same time taking great risks of losing relationships.

Moore and Cox (2021) write that in regard to power relations, an ally “maintains power over and doesn’t engage the power structure meaningfully” whereas an accomplice “shares power and works with the oppressed to engage the power structure meaningfully” (p. 17). Mikaili proclaimed “I'm a woman. I'm a mom. I'm a sister, a
friend, I'm somebody that is going to be there first for someone. And that is who I am… It is okay to be me, as I am” (Lilith’s interview, May 2, 2021, p. 15). Mikaili is more of an accomplice than an ally because she gives up some of her power and privilege as heterosexual and cisgender by being there “first” for oppressed groups. Mikaili will fight side by side and potentially risk losing her positionality. Mikaili does not have “power over”; Mikaili “shares power” by putting others first and does not apologize for it.

When the queer trans and nonbinary community gets cut “an ally cries and an accomplice bleeds” (Moore & Cox, 2021, p. 17). Mikaili is an accomplice because she recognizes the struggles of coming out in heterosexist and cissexist environments. This shows how Mikaili is more than an ally as she fights oppression against queer, trans, and nonbinary communities. She discerns that when people are “confused” about their sexual and gender identity, there can be “a lot of cries out for help” (Lilith’s interview, May 2, 2021, p. 14). This quote highlights how teachers and parents do not necessarily recognize signs of struggle and identifies the need for queer studies education being accessible to all. Mikaili isolated that if these “cries for help” go unnoticed or ignored it could result in suicide. She stated, “my sons struggled with that [suicide] and I feel like my nephew does too, so I think because of this, schools need to get in front of it and open up the conversation” (Lilith’s interview, May 2, 2021, p. 14). The experiences of Mikaili’s sons and nephew are all too common in queer, trans, and nonbinary communities. Mikaili hit on a vital topic and a real threat to queer, trans, and nonbinary youth and adults: suicide. Mikaili names that suicidal ideations in queer, trans, and nonbinary communities are four times higher than cisgender heterosexuals. As mentioned in the Literature Review, slightly over 50% of queer, trans, and nonbinary people must endure negative reactions
after coming out to given families (Trevor Project, 2021). This can range from verbal disapproval to violence to being disowned. Moreover, queer, trans, and nonbinary youth who experienced discrimination related to their sexual and gender identity were twice as likely to attempt suicide (Trevor Project, 2021). A survey of over 35,000 queer, trans, and nonbinary youth found that 21% of young, Black, queer, trans, and nonbinary people have attempted suicide in the last year and 42% of all racial identities seriously considered suicide within the last year. Mikaili is an accomplice because she actively fights to abolish the systems that reinforce the othering, shaming, and internalized oppression of queer, trans, and nonbinary communities that can lead to suicide. She is not crying; she is taking initiative, looking for signs of struggle, finding ways she can help, and bleeding all along the way.

The roles of heterosexual and cisgender students within the classroom were varied and complex. Mikaili thrived in the classroom and felt all her identities were represented in her queer studies course illustrating positive representation. Alternatively, we learned through Gian and co-researcher Vontressa that they both were afraid to speak in their classes due to the fear of offending someone. This demonstrates an example of how queer studies can improve. Links between fear and silence identify a climate within classrooms where students may become passive observers as opposed to active participants.

**Community, Activism, and Supportive Spaces: “More actionable ways to live out learning”**

A finding of this VPAR study was the importance of building community, creating more opportunities for activism, and the need for more supportive spaces in queer studies. A purpose of this study was to identify and explore how curricula in queer
studies reflect and ignore the lived experiences of QTBIPOC. By doing so, we aimed to report obstacles that inhibit the success of QTBIPOC in queer studies in a community college setting. One finding detailed the need to resolve the divide between academic support, emotional support, and community support. Queer studies students reported a desire to learn a foundational aspect of intersectional theory: learning at both the individual and collective level. Intersectionality has been used across many fields of study and has been applied as an “analytic tool to create more expansive understandings of individual and collective identities” (Collins & Bilge, 2016, p. 114).

The SOGIE Demographic Survey was shared with all queer studies courses in the Spring of 2021. One of the open-ended questions in the survey was why students are taking a queer studies course. The third most common response was to learn about community and what it means to be in community. Eighteen students out of the 95 survey responses, identified that at least one of the reasons they are taking a queer studies course is to be in and learn about community with other queer people. Being in community was named to be important in queer studies.

In the previous chapter, Myung-Soon stated how he would like opportunities for “more actionable ways to live out [our] learning” and how he would like more chances in queer studies to learn “to reach out to other marginalized communities” (Gohan’s interview, May 3, 2021, p. 9–10). Myung-Soon proposes that connection is important to queer studies students. Furthermore, Diaz suggested creating pedagogy and curricula in queer studies that is contemporary, including current ways of disseminating information about queer activism and movements, for example, Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok. The examples by Myung-Soon and Diaz highlight exactly what the second action of our study
sought to do: to center action in curricula by utilizing contemporary social media platforms to share information with our communities about queer studies. This was the purpose of the VPAR crew’s second action in our study. We sought to create a social media presence for queer studies at CCB focusing on Instagram. The action sought to display the brilliant work of queer studies students while promoting queer studies.

Additionally, Myung-Soon argued for multiple opportunities within queer studies for engaging in queer activism. I would argue this VPAR study is a chance for queer studies students to learn how to enact forms of activism. My co-researchers participated in queer activism throughout the entire semester. It was not just one week of curriculum, but 17 weeks. What are the best ways to convey how political and activist centered VPAR is as a methodology as well as a pedological praxis? How can VPAR fill the need suggested by Myung-Soon for “more actionable ways” to learn?

TK mentioned in his interview with co-researcher Jeremy that queer studies students want more chances to interact with peers and faculty outside the classroom. Diaz and Avda presented they want more opportunities to build community within the classroom. Myung-Soon gave an example that a supportive space that should be available in queer studies is mental health support due to course materials being triggering and emotionally draining. Edilberto and Myung-Soon provided the idea of having more opportunities to volunteer within queer studies building stronger relationships between grassroots organizing and higher education. In addition, Edilberto and Myung-Soon recommended starting a program to help foster mentor and mentee relationships with faculty and students in queer studies.
How can instructors create activities and assignments that foster community and uphold a rigorous academic standard? Where is the balance? For example, how can dense required readings that might be challenging for many students be used in a way to learn from other students and create opportunities for authentic connection? How do courses create alternative options for people with social anxiety who are not able to engage in interactive and group-based pedagogy and curricula?

**Growing and Improving Queer Studies Programs: “At younger ages and more frequently”**

There are not enough queer studies programs or departments in higher education. As mentioned in Chapter 1, among four-year universities in the United States, only 10 offer majors in queer studies or LGBT studies, while 52 colleges offer minors. In comparison, over 600 women’s and gender studies programs are offered across the nation (Younger, 2020). Nationally, only two community colleges, including CCB, offer an Associate of Arts degree (AA) in queer studies. Our findings indicate a desire for queer studies to continue to grow. Interviewees asserted that this does not include adding only a few more queer studies courses for community colleges but developing more queer studies departments and degrees “at younger ages and more frequently” as mentioned by Mikaili (Lilith’s interview, May 2, 2021, p. 19). Mikaili continued, “a big thing that people don't realize there's no age limit when someone comes into their identity” (Lilith’s interview, May 2, 2021, p. 13), highlighting the need for more representation in education about queer, trans, and nonbinary communities at all ages. Mikaili discussed how vital it is to require queer studies courses for all people in not only college settings.
The desire to expand queer studies courses and incorporate more ethnic studies and social justice courses as General Education (GE) requirements was identified in our study. Gian stated, “I think that LGBT classes should be a part of the general courses offered for everyone, it would really make a difference and enlighten a lot of people who have certain opinions on the LGBT community” (Vontressa’s interview, May 3, 2021, p. 1). This addresses the need to not only expand the number of queer studies courses, departments, and degrees but how vital it is to require a queer studies course as a GE. This would be a great way to educate people who are not queer, trans, and nonbinary. This could be a way to reach a larger student base and provide opportunities for intersectionality and creating accomplices of heterosexual and cisgender students. Gian continued, “I believe it [queer studies courses] has impacted me in a positive way. Initially I was not knowledgeable about it at all, taking this class has given me new insight and opened my eyes” (Vontressa’s interview, May 3, 2021, p. 3). This accentuates the importance of growing queer studies because for Gian, it helped her become more “knowledgeable” and provided “new insights” on queer, trans, and nonbinary communities, which overall, she found to be a “positive” experience. Similarly, Mikaili expressed how queer studies courses could help young people “step out of their point of view” (Lilith’s interview, May 2, 2021, p. 13).

Furthermore, the SOGIE Demographic Survey found that the most frequent response to the question, “Why are you taking a queer studies course?” was to fulfill a GE or certificate requirement. Out of the 95 survey responses, 49 asserted that at least one of the reasons they are taking a queer studies course is to fulfill a GE or certificate requirement at CCB. This is significant to recognize as it highlights the importance of
including queer studies courses as a GE requirement to spread learning across difference. This is a way to create new accomplices by informing them of the trials, tribulations, and resistance of queer, trans, and nonbinary communities.

Caius said that an improvement of queer studies courses should be more representation of bisexual and asexual communities, experiences, and examples of resistance to oppression. There is another gap that needs to be filled, acknowledged by Ashley, that queer studies courses at CCB need more representation of lesbians and women in general. Ashley requested for more representation on the “discrimination against women. I want to learn more about that” (Rebecca’s interview, April 29, 2021, p. 4). She continued by inquiring “I kind of wanted to touch base on the issue of what happened to lesbians” (Rebecca’s interview, April 29, 2021, p. 3). Caius and Ashley are providing examples for how queer studies courses at CCB can improve: more representation based on bisexuality, asexuality, sexism, and lesbianism.

Myung-Soon and Caius both evaluated the need for more context in understanding the histories of queer, trans, and, nonbinary communities as way to improve queer studies. Myung-Soon gave the idea of going in-depth about Japanese imperialism during WWII when learning about the Japanese internment camps throughout the United States when reading the graphic novel, They Called Us Enemy (Takei, Eisinger, & Scott, 2019). Caius underlined the complexity of queering history with contemporary views of assessing sexual and gender identity. Co-researcher, Gohan, interviewed Caius, who reflected, “It's difficult because with the LGBT history related stuff we don't know if they were just, if they're being hetero because of the time, but they were actually gay or if they just didn't have the wordings for bisexuality” (Gohan’s
Caius is describing perverse presentism coined by Jack Halberstam (1998). Perverse presentism means looking at historical figures with a grain of salt. It means acknowledging that modern day scholars cannot apply contemporary Western terminology and understandings of sexual and gender identity to the past. By doing so scholars could be disregarding unique cultural ties and connections to same-sex attraction and the transgression of gender throughout the ages.

For example, what we define as transgender today cannot be applied to historical figures that transgressed gender expressions because it is not always clear why someone pushed back against societal expectations and norms based on gender. Was it because they identified as a different gender than the one they were assigned at birth? Did they transgress gender roles due to the reinforcement of a rigid gender binary to access more rights? Was it to avoid abuse or harassment, whether verbal, physical, or sexual? Unless overtly explained in the historical figures’ personal writings and journals we will never know and should not make assumptions based on our contemporary understanding of gender identity. It is clear that growing queer studies generally and improving queer studies at CCB are principle findings of this study.

**Implications and Recommendations**

Taken together, these findings are particularly important for: 1) educators, staff, and other leaders in queer studies specifically at CCB, 2) all queer studies faculty and staff outside of CCB, and 3) students.

*For Queer Studies Faculty, Staff, and Leaders at CCB*

*Hiring QTBIPOC: The Limitations of White Instructors*
My first recommendation is based on the experiences of Ashley. Ashley critiquing that her teacher is nonbinary and queer is named twice in her interview. Ashley felt queer and nonbinary identities were abundantly represented. Would she have felt more represented if her instructor was a ciswoman and a lesbian aligning with her sexual and gender identity? I believe the answer is yes. Students seeing themselves represented in their faculty is vital. I would like to bridge Ashley’s critiques to systemic inequities when it comes to hiring practices and advocate for the hiring of multiple QTBIPOC faculty in queer studies at CCB. Hiring only one QTBIPOC faculty is a form of tokenism and puts that faculty member in the position of being the spokesperson for all QTBIPOC. Therefore, it is necessary to hire multiple QTBIPOC faculty. Even though Ashley is white, she might have had a better experience in her class if it was taught by a BIPOC faculty member who also identifies as a ciswoman and a lesbian. “Intersectionality as a form of critical inquiry invokes a broad sense of using intersectional frameworks to study a range of social phenomena… that explicitly challenge the status quo and aim to transform power relations” (Collins & Bilge, 2016, p. 33). My hope is this dissertation “challenges the status quo” and “transforms power relations” in multiple ways, but especially in disrupting systemic inequities in higher education focusing on hiring practices.

We need more QTBIPOC in positions of power within academia, especially faculty because they interact a great deal with students. This is drastically needed at CCB, and I ask administrators and the board of trustees at CCB to stop defunding programs under the ethnic studies and social justice umbrella and create opportunities for us to
grow and flourish. What queer studies at CCB needs first and foremost is the hiring of full-time QTBIPOC faculty.

In addition, I want to support the work of McCready’s (2004a) study by recommending representation in pedagogy, curricula, and in positions of power for QTBIPOC. McCready (2004a) advocates that “Those who organize and/or facilitate queer youth programs can challenge the normalization of whiteness by making a conscious effort to use speaker bureaus and workshop facilitators that are racially diverse” (McCready, 2004a, p. 48). I advocate for hiring QTBIPOC speakers, workshop facilitators, and I push this one step further and advocate for the hiring of full-time QTBIPOC faculty members in all queer studies programs, especially CCB. Hiring QTBIPOC is essential to de-centering whiteness in our actions both within and beyond the classroom.

QTBIPOC students need to see an instructor in a position of power who reflects their race. Positionality and power matter. Representation matters. Numerous studies have emphasized the lack of racial diversity among administration, faculty, and staff within higher education in the United States (Crass, n.d.; Collins, 2009; Leonardo, & Hunter, 2009). Investigating junior colleges specifically, Snyder and Dillow (2012) found that “Full-time contracted or tenured community college faculty constitute only 12% of the community college instructional and counseling workforce…Of this 12%, more than 80% are white, non-Hispanic” (p. 38). CCB mirrors these statistics. Four faculty identify as white, one counselor for queer studies identities as Pacific Islander, and one queer studies staff member identities as Latinx. As we see here, it is not just about representation in curricula, it is also vital to disrupt the climate within higher education
that normalizes whiteness. One way the queer studies department at CCB can follow this, is to immediately hire full-time faculty members who identify as QTBIPOC.

White instructors who do not tokenize race and center the experiences of QTBIPOC still are limited in connecting with students who experience racism on a day-to-day basis. It can be triggering and emotionally draining for QTBIPOC students to have a white instructor talk about race and racism to them. It can feel condescending, pretentious, and dehumanizing. Due to this, the students could disconnect from the curricula. Therefore, even though the white instructor is technically focusing on race, QTBIPOC students can still not feel represented.

For All Queer Studies Faculty, Staff, and Leaders

A clear finding in this study is the importance of including intersectional theory and the voices of QTBIPOC in queer studies curricula. What is not as clear, seen by the complexity of Ashley’s interview, is how to interact with white students while centering the experiences of QTBIPOC. How do we engage white students, while pursuing ways to de-focus whiteness? One example is before assigning texts focusing on the work of QTBIPOC, like, This Bridge Called My Back: Writing by Radical Women of Color (1981) edited by Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa and Cherrie Moraga and Sister Outsider (1984) by Audre Lorde, instructors might lecture on McCready’s (2004a) study about centering QTBIPOC in education. This will not only highlight the work of a Black gay cisman thriving in academia, but it will also be a chance to participate in pedagogical processes de-centering whiteness. This could be exceptionally helpful for students interested in education as well.
Further, it could be helpful to state how focusing on the experiences of QTBIPOC is a way to represent white queer students simultaneously. This way the instructor is providing a lens for white people to read *This Bridge Called My Back: Writing by Radical Women of Color* (1981), *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (1984), or other work written by QTBIPOC knowing that when sexual identity and gender identity are acknowledged they can connect on those overlapping identities. The aim would be to provide a platform for white students to actively interact with the text to see how, even though their whiteness is not represented, there are ways they can still connect on a personal level with the texts and that it is possible to see parts of their experiences in the work. This is not to say that white students can fully understand racism or see their whiteness align with racism. White people can learn to be in solidarity with BIPOC but will never completely understand what it is like to experience racism. It is possible for white students to connect with other aspects of their identity, in this case, specifically of sexual and gender identity. Assigning McCready’s (2004a) work would also be a way to actively center QTBIPOC.

Providing an intersectional lens where all students are given the skills necessary to engage with the literature to recognize the importance of centering QTBIPOC in texts and overall pedagogy and de-centering whiteness is vital. In my classes, before reading in texts that delve into complex intersectional identities, I define key terms; for example: power, privilege, highlighting white privilege, white supremacy, intersectionality, and internalized, individual, institutional, and cultural racism, heterosexism, and cissexism. With these key terms and McCready’s (2004a) framework, students have the tools to find ways they can connect with and relate to various aspects of intersectional identities. It is
possible for a white lesbian ciswoman to connect with certain, not all, experiences of a Black lesbian ciswoman, specifically in the context of sexual and gender identity, but not race. The overarching aim would be, in the beautiful words of Audre Lorde (1984), to understand that “It is not our differences that divide us. It is our inability to recognize, accept, and celebrate those differences” (p. 111). The curriculum would seek to not just to name how we are different, but “celebrate” those differences.

If white students do not feel recognized at all in queer studies and leave the classroom angry and frustrated that they were not represented, at least we know, as educators, that the seed of knowledge has been planted. In time that seed might be able to grow and potentially even blossom someday as they continue to learn about white privilege and white supremacy. Further, they are exposed to the ways they are complicit with this system of oppression and how burying their heads in the sand to avoid these conversations does not placate their roles in perpetuating white privilege and white supremacy. To quote Audre Lorde again (1984), “The true focus of revolutionary change is never merely the oppressive situations that we seek to escape, but that piece of the oppressor which is planted deep within each of us” (p. 246). Maybe curriculum focusing on intersectionality, which links directly with power, would force white students to look inward to see, if their experiences as a white person are not reflected in the coursework, do they have “a piece of the oppressor” within themselves?

This study is significant because it was designed to highlight to queer educators, especially fellow white educators within queer studies, the value of staying true to the meaning of the word “queer” in queer studies and the true meaning of intersectionality. This study aimed to challenge the co-opted meanings of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and
transgender (LGBT) studies, which have been saturated in whiteness, color-blind ideology, and the gender binary, as a means of transgressing boxes, dismantling boundaries, and destroying binaries (Eng et al., 2005). This study sought to center the lived experiences of QTBIPOC by utilizing an intersectional, QOCA, critical whiteness, and an anti-oppressive framework to de-center whiteness.

This study also aimed to build upon current pedagogical praxis within queer studies at CCB to reflect upon the program’s strengths and areas for improvement to best meet the needs of QTBIPOC. I hope to inspire educators not only in queer studies but also in all disciplines to constantly challenge the social norms that are perpetuated among curricula and to promote a queer anti-oppressive education (Kumashiro, 2000).

A suggestion for future research would be the repetition of this study. Since this research was collected at the start of my full-time work at CCB, a possibility for future research would be to repeat this study in a decade. Understanding the progression of knowledge and development for both students and instructors, as well as how the needs and interests of queer studies students have evolved could be of great value.

*Intersectionality is the Heart of Queer Studies: The Two Cannot be Separated*

Another meaningful recommendation is the importance of engaging with intersectional theory in queer studies. Intersectionality needs to be the heart of queer studies. Intersectionality brings life to queer studies and provides multiple ways students can connect with the course material. Already established queer studies courses and departments, including CCB, need to continuously seek ways to build their curriculum to be more intersectional and to discover and reflect the best ways to improve the representation of ever growing and evolving student populations within their community.
college or university. Especially as the field of queer studies continues to flourish, so should the level of analysis of deeply queering queer studies. For example, it is vital to ensure that queer studies challenges colonial ways of looking at gender and sexuality and creates curriculum that seeks to explore ways to bridge social movements of the past to the social movements of today, including Black Lives Matter, the Undocuqueer movement, and Stop Asian Hate. More overt connections need to be made about how abolishing the Prison Industrial Complex, Military Industrial Complex, Medical Industrial Complex, Housing Industrial Complex, Non-Profit Industrial Complex, Ally Industrial Complex, Academic Industrial Complex, and beyond are examples of queering queer studies. Actively seeking ways to de-center whiteness in queer studies will be the best way to ensure queer studies continues to thrive and stays relevant and connected to ethnic studies.

Evolving Language

Our study found that queer studies does represent the identities of students’ racial, sexual, and gender identities with some exceptions, and that raises important questions. Some sexual identities that interviewees felt were not represented fully in queer studies include bisexuality and asexuality. This criticism is widespread. It also speaks to a challenge that as the acronym expands to include more letters, how do we include everyone meaningfully in the curriculum? It is not possible for queer studies to represent all sexual and gender identities. How do we decide which to include without perpetuating a social hierarchy of queer, trans, and nonbinary identities? In this dissertation utilizing the umbrella terms queer, trans, and nonbinary to try and be as inclusive as possible still leaves out other umbrella term, such as asexuality and intersex. How does queer studies
keep up with the rapidly evolving language based on sexual and gender identity? How do we continue to represent students’ identities in curriculum when the GL, LGB, LGBT, LGBTQ+, LGBTQIA+, LGBTQQ2IA+ acronym is always growing? Is it important to represent every student’s sexual and gender identity? Or is it more important to shift from LGBT, GLBT, LGBTQ, LGBTQQ to Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Expression (SOGIE)? SOGIE unites us because everyone has SOGIE. LGBTQQ2IA+ acronyms create a social hierarchy of who is included in the acronym and who is left out, as well as who comes first in the acronym and who comes last. Should language based on sexual and gender identities in queer studies shift to the acronym SOGIE even though LGBT is recognized globally? A limitation of utilizing SOGIE is that it does not center queerness in its name.

For Students

This study mirrors the research of Broom (2014) and Mockler (2011) who recognize how important it is for students’ identities to be represented within education. Therefore, one hope of this study is for students to fight for their representation in the classroom. This study is for students who want to advocate for having their identities discussed throughout their educational career and to identify why it is so important to be represented and be leaders within their classrooms as a student.

Conclusions

I began this study with an indispensable question: “What’s race got to do with it?” Going deeper, the question evolved to: “How does queer studies both affirm and ignore students’ beautiful and complex identities including their (a) racial identity, (b) sexual identity, and (c) gender identity?” To answer these principle questions, the co-researchers
each interviewed at least one student taking a queer studies class at CCB. Simultaneously, the weekly self-reflection journals allowed us to process how each co-researcher engaged in the practice of VPAR. In addition, we were able to form professional and personal relationships as a VPAR crew.

The findings of this study did not try to perpetuate single issue understandings of identities that keep all identity groupings siloed. Instead, it sought to give snapshots to the ways students’ identities intersect. Perceptions of the world can conflict. “There may be no ‘resolving’ the differences, as doing so could require erasing differences or denying important disconnects” (May, 2015, p. 43). This was not the aim of this dissertation. It sought to challenge the status quo, dismantle “one size fits all” applications of education, and further complicate the intersections of racial, sexual, and gender identities in queer studies.

Our work spotlighted that a major finding was identifying examples of whiteness in queer studies along with ways to disrupt white privilege. Even when race is not explicitly addressed, it is still being reinforced (Kumashiro, 2002). We see this through the interrogation of white privilege and whiteness assessed in our study. For example, Myung-Soon critiqued that the institution of education is still “a white system,” he named the need to have less white cismale readings in curricula, and therefore stated the need for more QTBIPOC authors in the curricula. Caius appreciated how her queer studies courses at CCB went beyond the “queer white perspective.” Another vital finding was the explicit requests for more inclusion of QTBIPOC histories and experiences in queer studies showcasing an example of how queer studies can improve. Myung-Soon, Caius, Edilberto, and Gohan provided examples of colonial erasure connected to their racial
identity and our VPAR study assessed the need for engaging in the rediscovery of histories thought to be lost completely. Lastly, another important finding of this study was the importance of centering intersectional theory in queer studies and that race cannot be separated from intersectional theory. To surmise, after collecting and analyzing all the data to answer the question posed in the title of this dissertation “What’s race got to do it?” simply put, the answer is: everything.

Final Reflection

“We have to talk about liberating minds as well as liberating society” (Davis, 2016, p. 194). I want to end this study by continuing to queer this dissertation. I want to challenge the urge to tie loose ends into neat bows. What are the best ways for queer studies to utilize QOCA, critical whiteness, and anti-oppressive education frameworks within curricula? What does that curricula look like? How do we continue to push queer studies to be as intersectional as possible? While I cannot completely answer these questions, I will continue to engage with these questions and many more and I hope you will join me.

Just over 10 years ago I stepped into my first class as a graduate student in the International and Multicultural Education program at the University of San Francisco. Little did I know that my life would change forever. My entire life I have always felt more of an observer of the world than being an active part of it. The VPAR process allowed me to stay in my comfort zone as an observer, while simultaneously pushing me to be an active part of the world by working with and for my queer studies community.

I put my heart and soul into my work as an activist, educator, and student. I care deeply about what I do. I want to inspire my students to create change in their lives and
communities to dismantle systems of oppression. I had painful and challenging
experiences growing up in a heterosexist and cissexist world. These struggles led me to
my current path and sparked my life as an activist for social change. I share this to
convey how deeply invested I am in my work and my profound level of emotional
connection to my students, this dissertation, and my work inside and outside the
classroom. The personal is political. This emotional connection can be inspiring, moving,
transformative and powerful. On the other side, it can be overwhelming, draining, and
painful. I experienced all these emotions and more throughout the dissertation process. I
want to address vulnerability by being vulnerable.

For me this process was a rollercoaster: filled with ups and downs, moments of
terror and dread, moments of excitement and thrills, and ending with a rush of adrenaline
leaving me wanting more. Many of my moments of terror and dread included struggling
with imposter syndrome, burnout, and loneliness. Burn out is real and self-care is
feminist and revolutionary. In the words of my idol, Audre Lorde (1984): “Caring for
myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political
warfare” (p. 71). This quote was so important to me during the VPAR process I got it
tattooed on my arm. Writing a dissertation is innately isolating and lonely, which I felt
tenfold. I felt extreme isolation especially with COVID-19 and having to be virtual
during the PAR process. This was my biggest and most continuous struggle.

Many of my moments of excitement and thrills included my growth as a writer
and instructor and my love for my co-researchers. I have grown more than I could ever
imagine throughout this dissertation process. I have so much more to learn, and I have a
limited perspective, especially being white, but I am excited for the journey ahead and
my continued growth. VPAR is challenging but in the best way possible with a greater return than I thought possible. Each one of my co-researchers gave me hope. Hope for uncovering hidden histories. Hope for coalition building. Hope for the growth of queer studies. Hope for a more intersectional world. Hope that students in queer studies want to fight for a more intersectional world. “Can any one of us here still afford to believe that the pursuit of liberation can be the sole and particular province of any one particular race, or sex, or age, or religion, or sexuality, or class?” (Lorde, 1984, p. 140).

Lastly, but most importantly, I want to conclude this dissertation by thanking my brilliant and awe-inspiring co-researchers. I knew I would learn a great deal from my co-researchers throughout the VPAR process. What I did not expect was how profoundly life changing those lessons would be. Here is a brief thank for each one of you:

**Alejandro Mendoza (He/Him)**

Figure 1. Alejandro Mendoza’s VPAR crew profile image. “Code Switching” created by Alejandro Mendoza for the Midterm: My Queer Experience.

Alejandro Mendoza taught me the transformative power of visual art. I believe his art is one of the best things to come out of this VPAR study. His midterm, pictured above, has inspired me to create a module on code switching.

**Aselia (He/Him)**
Aselia reminded me how learning and education are life-long journeys with many ebbs and flows throughout the way.

*Bob (He/Him)*

Bob was an example of if you follow your dreams, you will inspire those around you. He is a social media influencer who embraces and celebrates his femininity as a transman. He challenges rigid binaries in the most profound and queerest ways possible.

*Gohan (He/Him)*
Gohan gave me hope in the love, empathy, and advocacy within given families and showed me what an accomplice truly looks like.

Jeremy (He/Him)

Each co-researcher had various examples of leadership skills, but Jeremy taught me what it means to be a leader among leaders. His intellect, determination, and strength is deeply inspiring.

Jukai (They/Them)
Figure 6. Jukai’s VPAR crew profile image.

Jukai provided me with tools to better understand the benefits of online learning.

*Lilith (She/Her/They/Them)*

Figure 7. Lilith’s VPAR crew profile image. “The Evolution of Me” created by Lilith for the Midterm: My Queer Experience.

Lilith gave me hope in the passion for activism in my students.

*Lily (She/Her)*
Figure 8. Lily’s VPAR crew profile image.

Lily inspired me to never give up. No matter how far behind you think you are, there is always a way forward.

*Napoleon (She/Her)*

Figure 9. Napoleon’s VPAR crew profile image.

Napoleon provided me with tools to take pauses for reflection in search of serenity.

*Noodle (She/Her)*
Figure 10. Noodle’s VPAR crew profile image. “Loving Myself for being Myself” created by Noodle for the Midterm: My Queer Experience.

Noodle reiterated the importance of education. As educators we seek to plant seeds of knowledge and Noodle reminded me of the power of what can be grown when that seed is nourished and cultivated.

Rebecca (She/Her)

Figure 11. Rebecca’s VPAR crew profile image.

Rebecca reminded me it is not selfish to take breaks, to have fun, to enjoy life, to laugh, to ground myself, and take care of myself.

Rob (He/Him)
Figure 12. Rob’s VPAR crew profile image.

Rob reminded me to see through the world through a prism and showed me how complex, layered, and beautiful that prism can be.

Vontressa (She/Her)

Figure 14. Vontressa’s VPAR crew profile image.

Vontressa encouraged me to find ways to create space for all voices in queer studies to speak up and be heard. Her voice was so powerful, but only I got to experience it because she did talk in our Zoom classes and only expressed herself through her assignments. Silence can only be broken if we speak.

To all my co-researchers: words cannot express how grateful I am to you all. Thank you. I love you.
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Appendix A

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

Below is a description of the research procedures and an explanation of your rights as a research participant and co-researcher. You should read this information carefully. If you agree to participate, you will sign in the space provided to indicate that you have read and understand the information on this consent form. You are entitled to and will receive a copy of this form.

You have been asked to participate in a research study entitled “What’s Race Got To Do With It?”. Lived Experiences of Queer and Trans Students of Color at Community College of the Bay conducted by Breana Bahar Hansen, a doctoral student in the International and Multicultural Education Department at the University of San Francisco. The faculty supervisor for this study is Dr. Dave Donahue, Professor of International and Multicultural Education Department at the University of San Francisco.

WHAT THE STUDY IS ABOUT: The purpose of this research study is to identify and explore how curricula in Queer studies reflect and ignore the lived experiences of Queer, Trans, Black, Indigenous, People of Color (QTBIPOC) through engaging these students as co-researchers in Virtual Participatory Action Research (VPAR). By doing so, this study aims to address obstacles that inhibit the success of QTBIPOC in Queer studies in a community college setting. Specifically, it will examine the complex range of experiences of students who are enrolled in Queer Studies courses. In particular, the experiences of QTBIPOC will be compared to the experiences of white students.

WHAT WE WILL ASK YOU TO DO:

During this study, the following will happen:

1. You will participate as a co-researcher in a Virtual Participatory Action Research (VPAR) study.
2. You will meet with the principal investigator for 60-90 minutes. The interviewer will ask about your experience in Queer Studies courses at Community College of the Bay (CCB).
3. After the interview is complete, you will be asked to review the written transcripts to make sure they are correct and complete.
4. In collaboration with seven other co-researchers, you will agree on research questions.
5. You will keep a journal observing your personal experiences throughout this study.
6. You will conduct one interview with a student who has taken a Queer Studies course at CCB for 60-90 minutes, asking about their experiences in Queer Studies.
7. You will transcribe the interview.
8. After the interview is complete, you will ask the person you interviewed to review the written transcripts to make sure they are correct and complete.
9. You will work with other co-researchers to find themes in the interviews collected while validating and honoring the voices in the research.
10. You and the co-researchers will critically analyze the research to determine an appropriate action plan.

DURATION AND LOCATION OF THE STUDY: Your participation in this study will take ten weeks, from March 15, 2021, to May 21, 2021. You will meet with co-researchers twice a week, each session lasting 60-90 minutes. The sessions will take place on Zoom at a time chosen by the co-researchers.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS: You will be asked to interview someone about their personal experiences and stories in Queer Studies courses. These stories could include examples of racism, sexism, heterosexism, and cissexism, which can be challenging to share and hear. I will provide a list of
community resources for you and your interviewee so you can reach out for additional support if needed. In addition, your interviewee may skip any questions that make them uncomfortable. If you wish, you and your interviewee may withdraw your consent and discontinue your participation in the study without penalty.

**BENEFITS:** You will develop the skills to conduct a VPAR study and will have the option to present the findings of this study at various conferences with other co-researchers.

**PRIVACY/CONFIDENTIALITY:**
Any data you provide in this study will be kept confidential unless disclosure is required by law. This means I will have a record of who participated, but the data will be kept private. In any report I publish, I will not include information that will make it possible to identify you or any individual participant. Specifically, I will ask you to choose a pseudonym to use in place of your real name. This information will only be available to me, the researcher.

All interviews will be audio or video recorded and then transcribed afterward. Recordings will be stored on a personal recording device and saved on a personal computer in an encrypted file which only I will have access. Signed consent forms will be held in a locked filing cabinet to which only I will have access. Digital and hard copy data files will be stored in a locked and secured location until three years after the completion of the study. At that point, they will be securely deleted or otherwise destroyed.

I consent to the presence of a translator/interpreter if necessary. I understand that confidentiality may be lost through the translation process.

**COMPENSATION/PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION:**
There is no payment or other form of compensation for your participation in this study.

**VOLUNTARY NATURE OF THE STUDY:**
Your participation is voluntary, and you may refuse to participate without penalty or loss of benefits. Furthermore, you may skip any questions that make you uncomfortable and discontinue your participation at any time. In addition, the researcher has the right to withdraw you from participation in the study at any time.

**OFFER TO ANSWER QUESTIONS:**
Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you should contact the principal investigator: Breana Hansen, at 415-622-3831 or bnhansen@dons.usfca.edu. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a participant in this study, you may contact the University of San Francisco Institutional Review Board at IRBPHS@usfca.edu.

**I HAVE READ THE ABOVE INFORMATION. ANY QUESTIONS I HAVE ASKED HAVE BEEN ANSWERED. I AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH PROJECT, AND I WILL RECEIVE A COPY OF THIS CONSENT FORM.**

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**CO-RESEARCHER'S SIGNATURE**

**DATE**
Appendix B

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

Below is a description of the research procedures and an explanation of your rights as a research participant. You should read this information carefully. If you agree to participate, you will sign in the space provided to indicate that you have read and understand the information on this consent form. You are entitled to and will receive a copy of this form.

You have been asked to participate in a research study entitled “What’s Race Got To Do With It?” : Lived Experiences of Queer and Trans Students of Color at Community College of the Bay conducted by Breana Bahar Hansen, a doctoral student in the International and Multicultural Education Department at the University of San Francisco. The faculty supervisor for this study is Dr. Dave Donahue, Professor of International and Multicultural Education Department at the University of San Francisco.

WHAT THE STUDY IS ABOUT: The purpose of this research study is to identify and explore how curricula in Queer studies reflect and ignore the lived experiences of Queer, Trans, Black, Indigenous, People of Color (QTBIPOC) through engaging these students as co-researchers in Virtual Participatory Action Research (VPAR). By doing so, this study aims to address obstacles that inhibit the success of QTBIPOC in Queer studies in a community college setting. Specifically, it will examine the complex range of experiences of students enrolled in Queer Studies courses. In particular, the experiences of QTBIPOC will be compared to the experiences of white students.

WHAT WE WILL ASK YOU TO DO:
During this study, the following will happen:

1. You will participate as an interviewee in a Virtual Participatory Action Research (VPAR) study.
2. You will meet with the principal investigator for 60-90 minutes. The interviewer will ask about your experience in Queer Studies courses at Community College of the Bay (CCB).
3. After the interview is complete, you will be asked to review the written transcripts to make sure they are correct and complete.

DURATION AND LOCATION OF THE STUDY: Your participation in this study will take 60-90 minutes between the days of March 15, 2021, to May 21, 2021. During this time, you will meet via Zoom with a co-researcher and be interviewed about your experiences in Queer studies. The sessions will take place on Zoom at a time you and the co-researcher choose.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS:
You will be asked to interview someone about their personal experiences and stories in Queer Studies courses. These stories could include examples of racism, sexism, heterosexism, and cissexism, which can be challenging to share and hear. I will provide a list of community resources for you and your interviewee so you can reach out for additional support if needed. In addition, your interviewee may skip any questions that make them uncomfortable. If you wish, you and your interviewee may withdraw your consent and discontinue your participation in the study without penalty.

BENEFITS: You will develop the skills to participate in a VPAR study, and your voice will be heard in the Queer studies department.

PRIVACY/CONFIDENTIALITY: Any data you provide in this study will be kept confidential unless disclosure is required by law. This means I will have a record of who participated, but the data will be kept private. In any report I publish, I will not include information that will make it possible to identify you or any individual participant. Specifically, I will ask you to choose a pseudonym to use in place of your real name. This information will only be available to me, the researcher.
All interviews will be audio or video recorded and then transcribed afterward. Recordings will be stored on a personal recording device and saved on a personal computer in an encrypted file which only I will have access. Signed consent forms will be held in a locked filing cabinet to which only I will have access. Digital and hard copy data files will be stored in a locked and secured location until three years after the completion of the study. At that point, they will be securely deleted or otherwise destroyed.

I consent to the presence of a translator/interpreter if necessary. I understand that confidentiality may be lost through the translation process.

**COMPENSATION/PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION:**
There is no payment or other form of compensation for your participation in this study.

**VOLUNTARY NATURE OF THE STUDY:**
Your participation is voluntary, and you may refuse to participate without penalty or loss of benefits. Furthermore, you may skip any questions that make you uncomfortable and discontinue your participation at any time. In addition, the researcher has the right to withdraw you from participation in the study at any time.

**OFFER TO ANSWER QUESTIONS:**
Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you should contact the principal investigator: Breana Hansen, at 415-622-3831 or bnhansen@dons.usfca.edu. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a participant in this study, you may contact the University of San Francisco Institutional Review Board at IRBPHS@usfca.edu.

I HAVE READ THE ABOVE INFORMATION. ANY QUESTIONS I HAVE ASKED HAVE BEEN ANSWERED. I AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH PROJECT, AND I WILL RECEIVE A COPY OF THIS CONSENT FORM.

__________________________________________  __________________________
PARTICIPANT’S SIGNATURE                DATE
Appendix C

Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity and Expression (SOGIE)
Demographic Survey

1. What are your pronouns?
2. What is/are your sexual orientation/orientations?
3. What is/are your gender identity/identities?
4. What is/are your gender expression/expressions?
5. What is/are your racial identity/identities?
6. What is/are your ethnicity/ethnicities?
7. What language/languages do you speak fluently?
8. Where were you born?
9. What is your current employment status?
10. What is the highest degree or level of education you have completed?
11. How old are you?
12. What Associate of Arts Degree (AA) or certificate are you working towards?
13. Why are you taking a Queer Studies class?
14. Do the current CCB cuts affect you? If yes, how?
15. Would you be interested in being interviewed about your experiences in Queer Studies?
16. If yes, what is your preferred form of contact?