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University of San Francisco

**Our Bodies are Our Stories: How Educators Impact
the Educational Experiences of Fat Queer Students of
Color**

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

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in Human Rights Education

By:
Elissa A. Rodriguez
May 2023

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the experiences of fat queer students of color in education, and how their experiences were impacted through interactions with educators as they navigated education with their intersectional identities. Through qualitative narrative based research, three participants were interviewed, and their experiences were examined and analyzed based on these conversations. This research aims to expand and fill in the gaps of knowledge in the field of education that surround the experiences of fat queer students of color. Even more specifically, how anti-fat biases impact these other intersecting identities, and how educators have the ability to hold and act on these biases whether cognizant of it or not. From this research, there were patterns of positive and negative experiences that each participant described through their stories, and how those experiences impacted them as individuals, and how it impacted their education. The negative experiences included anti-fat biases, classroom callouts, and seemingly implicit biases. The positive experiences included empathetic experiences from educators, and fat people loving and supporting other fat people. The hope of this research is to bring insight to these important stories and to reimagine educational practices to support these students through their educational journey.

Keywords: anti-fat biases, teacher-student implications, queer education, critical fat intersectional theory, students of color, fat queer students of color

CHAPTER I

Introduction

The dread sits over my head like a dark cloud, it's that time again – back to school shopping. I know that stores do not cater to my body, yet here I am. I walk into the dressing room with 20 items, I can feel the blue fluorescent lights making me hot. As I watch the mirror disfiguring my body, I become flustered and overwhelmed, I walk out empty handed, defeated. Another school year starts, I dread walking into the new classrooms, this feeling has stayed the same since high school. As I try to find my seat, I noticed that I am one of few fat femme-presenting people, I can feel myself being stared as I walk through the room. I look at the rows of desks, and they are the metal, one-armed chairs, any fat person's worst enemy. I knew for a fact that my fat body could not fit, but reluctantly I squeezed myself into this too small of a chair. It is digging into my back, my side is hurting from sucking in my gut to make myself fit, and of course I have the chair that makes a noise. I can barely focus in class, but I have no choice but to make do. It does not help that I established the reputation of being “difficult,” or that “Social Justice Warrior.” I could not hide my body nor my attitude. I was not well liked, I was outspoken – I made space for myself when others thought I shouldn't. I knew how I was being perceived – how could I not? It did not stop me. I am still that loud, outspoken, fat femme, who is making the space for myself.

Statement of the Problem

My experiences are not unique. I am one of many fat queer folks of color that have had to experience life in the United States' educational spaces. Many others know the feeling of being judged by our peers and educators, being marginalized by the educational system, and knowing

that we were not meant to even be in these spaces. Lack of representation and inclusion of historically marginalized communities – more specifically marginalized identities that intersect with one another can lead to lack of social inclusion (Juvonen et al, 2019). Learning and teaching, specifically centered around fatness is paramount for advancing social justice (Fahs, 2016). Although each intersection has been researched individually – I have seen a gap in the literature when it comes to addressing these identities collectively. I must also mention that although I do not explicitly look at gender, this is a factor that can not be erased or ignored when examining the treatment of fat queer folks of color (Butler, 2006; Crenshaw, 1989,1991; McCready, 2010).

As laid out in Chapter Two, I touch upon the identity of fatness, the identity of queerness with race, and the implications of teacher student relationships. As I have worked through my own experiences in these identities, and as I worked in the educational setting I witnessed and experienced first hand how student’s intersecting identities – specifically fatness, race, and queerness have impacted their relationships with peers (Puhl & Brownell, 2001), but more importantly with their educators. This is important to examine since this type of discrimination is a social problem that deeply impacts these individuals at all stages of one’s educational experiences (McNinch, 2016 ; Stevens, 2018).

Background and Need

I have seen the lack of literature that takes into account all three aspects of identities: Fatness, Queerness and Race. Each intersection of these identities are important and have been examined (Butler, 2006; Crenshaw, 1989; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Pausé, 2020; Saguy, 2011; Strings, 2019), but this thesis is my attempt to fill in these gaps of literature and to uplift and focus the light to the experiences of fat queer students of color in the educational setting.

The need to examine the identity of fatness is an important one, and it is one that is newly being explored in academia. I aim to emphasize the crucialness of fatness since it is an identity that individuals, more specifically students are unable to hide. This visible fatness is one that holds negative connotations such as being perceived as lazy, or lacking motivation (Stevens, 2018). As students learn to work and navigate their life, it begins in the classroom. Yet it is the same classroom that can be one of the first places these students will face weight-based discrimination and judgment not only by other students, but unfortunately by their educators, and other school staff (Russell, 2020).

To better understand how fatness can play a role in the potentiality of educators discriminating or having weight-based bias, I wanted to look at Queerness and Race together. As mentioned previously, I have not seen all three identities examined together, but I was able to locate literature with two of the three. These two identities deeply impact the way students work through the education system and the world. Misawa (2006) claims that whether we want it or not, all parts of our identities are shaped by the socially constructed positions in which we belong. Also noting that although identities are socially constructed (Butler, 2006), they have real world impacts on student's lives –this includes looking at the positionalities educators and students have (Misawa, 2006). Some research has also articulated that queer students of color have had to become resilient to be able to exist in the educational system that is cis-male, white, and where heterosexuality is canon (Duran, 2021; McCready, 2010).

This same research has claimed that teacher intervention and support can save the lives of queer students, when educators are better informed on how to take action (Swanson & Gettiger, 2016) While research focuses only on the impact of student teacher relationships for either fatness or queerness with race, not all three combined, the research also shows that there are

multiple ways that educators can influence their relationships with students (Fredriksen & Rhodes, 2004). Research demonstrates some of the anti-fat biases educators may possess of their students (Lessard & Puhl, 2021). What was discovered was that the way educators viewed their students impacted how they were treated, leading to those same notions of laziness and lack of motivation – leading to achievement gaps since educators would begin to bias judgment in their grading techniques. Queer students’ self esteem was also deeply impacted by their educators (Dessel et al., 2017).

Overall, the literature shows that these identities individually do impact the relationships students can create with their educators. I am aiming to fill in the gap and to focus on how these relationship dynamics can change and differ when taking into account all three combined.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this thesis is to conduct narrative research in order to understand and explore the multifaceted experiences of fat queer folks of color in the educational setting. This study will be conducted among folks who identify as fat, queer, and as a person of color who have experiences in the educational system of the United States. Also the study fills in the gaps of how student identities are impacted by their relationships with their educators or lack thereof, and to suggest ways that educators can build fruitful relationships and create more inclusive school spaces for fat queer students of color.

Research Questions

The prominent question for this study is: How did the identities of fatness, queerness, and race impact the relationships students developed with educators? Following this, I aimed to look at how this impacts the way fat, queer students of color engaged with their education.

More broadly, I aimed to understand what can be done to make schools more supportive and welcoming for fat queer students of color - meaning that students who are not white, cis-gendered, and straight-sized people can feel like they are taken into account in these educational spaces.

Theoretical Framework/Rationale

While reflecting on the work I want to do, and the issues I want to tackle, I have been inspired by countless theories that discuss the multiplicity of the intersections of identities that I am interested in. Although many theories discuss fatness, queerness, and race individually, or at most, two, I have yet to find a theory that fully incorporates all aspects of these identities.

Although I am not looking at gender specifically, it must be noted that gender can not be entirely excluded when looking at these three identities, because it too plays a huge impact in this work.

That being said, I am hoping to bring about a concept which incorporates the identities that are mentioned above into something I call Critical Fat Intersectional Theory. While other fat scholars are doing the work that needs to be done for the Fat Liberation movement, for me as a scholar, I want to create a space that looks at Fatness, Queerness, Race and even Gender within the context of education specifically.

I am deeply inspired by aspects of Critical Race Theory (Ladson-Billings, 1998, 2013), Queer Theory (Butler, 2006; Johnson, 2018; McCann & Monaghan, 2019) Intersectional Theory (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991), and Feminist Theory (hooks, 2014). Each of these theories offers worthwhile insight, but for me I felt as if something was missing. Feminist Theory at its core looks at sexism with the identity of gender. Intersectional theory at its foundations looks at the intersecting identities of gender and race, and dismantling singular identity approaches. Critical Race Theory at its heart examines race and how folks understand how race, although socially

constructed, impacts our realities. Queer Theory at its essence questions dualistic thinking and the cultural norms that are upheld. Each theory also contains many great scholars that have contributed and continue to contribute to the work inside each individual theory, so the scholars and thinkers I have listed are just one small portion of the many who continue to theorize fatness, queerness, and race. At the cores of each of these theories, none truly center the identity of fatness with another intersecting identity, fatness becomes an afterthought. For me I want to center fatness at the forefront of Critical Fat Intersectional Theory. I must emphasize that the field of fatness is not one that has not been explored until recently, and many authors and scholars have and continue to do the work of liberating and discussing the identity of fatness and fat politics such as: Roxanne Gay, Virgie Tovar, Sabrina Strings, De'Shaun L. Harrison, Aubrey Gordan, Cat Pausé, and so many more.

My goal is to broaden the way we view the experiences, and ideologies of fat, queer people of color. Therefore for the sake of this thesis I will be utilizing a handful of scholars who are having these conversations that have inspired my thinking and learning.

I begin with hooks' (2014) original scholarship claiming that feminism is a movement that is to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression (p. 1). hooks also states that it is a framework that is broad enough to include the understanding of systemic institutionalized sexism (p. 1). hooks notes that by the late 1980s feminist scholarship began reflecting an awareness of race and class differences as well (p. 22). It also must be noted that the original radical foundations of contemporary feminism call to end the interest of white supremacist, capitalist, patriarchy, so it can be reformed to restructure our nation (pp. 4-5).

Moving through the notions of feminism led me to Intersectionality theory and Kimberly Crenshaw's original work from 1989 and 1991. Crenshaw began to examine the tendency toward

a single-axis framework in Feminist and Antiracist theories (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 139), essentially erasing Black women from the notions of both race and sex discriminations by limiting the questioning of the privileged individuals of the group (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 140). In other words, Black women were being further marginalized with the notion of a single axis framework. Crenshaw goes on and explains that to embrace identity politics is to view it instead as the source of social empowerment and reconstruction, rather than an intrinsically negative framework that social power works as a place to exclude or marginalize those who are different (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1242). More importantly, ignoring differences within groups contributes to the tension among groups. When practices and or theories place folks into an either/or position, their identities are regulated – in this case Black women, to a location that is one that is untold. (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1242). Once we start incorporating the concept of “both/and” within discourses that is when we become able to respond to the multiplicity of how these identities interact with one another and how one can be marginalized within both intersecting identities (Crenshaw, 1991, pg. 1244).

Gloria Ladson-Billing is one out of many Critical Race Theorists that have moved my thinking, and for the sake of this thesis I will be referencing some of her work from 1998 and 2013. Critical Race Theory stems from Critical Legal Scholarship (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 7) There are some core tenets of CRT which includes: the belief that racism is normal/ordinary, race is socially constructed, Interest Convergence, intersectionality and anti-essentialism, and lastly the importance of the counternarratives/storytelling (Ladson-Billings, 2013, p. 37). Not to say any tenets are less than one another, but the three that struck me the most were the importance of storytelling, intersectionality – as previously mentioned, and the belief that racism is ordinary, each of these tenets have deeply moved my thinking and work as a scholar. Ladson-

Billings writes, “CRT becomes an important intellectual and social tool for deconstruction, reconstruction, and construction: deconstruction of the oppressive structures and discourses, reconstruction of human agency, and construction of equitable and socially just relations of power” (1998, p. 9).

Ending with Queer Theory, an area of theory full of rich scholars and a theory that is seen as indefinable – Hannah McCann and Whitney Monaghan informed my thinking. McCann and Monaghan, when discussing queer theory, utilized works of other scholars and academics to describe it. They describe it as a way to resist the conflation of sex, gender, sexuality, normativity, and assimilation, rigid binaries, and hierarchies of power and identity categories (2019, p. 179). They speak deeply on how intersectionality contributes to queer theory as a way of addressing some of the problems of erasing differences in queer theory’s historical articulation (2019, p. 181). Although Queer Theory is hard to define, it has an ability to remain flexible and open to new directions and discussions (2019, p. 2). The term Queer itself was utilized as a way, a hope for a different kind of thinking and engagement in terms of sexuality, gender, identity, power, and the politics of oppression – pushing on the foundations of sexual identity and resistant to fixed categorizations (2019, pp. 3-4).

Rae Johnson, in *Queering/ Querying the Body Sensation and Curiosity in Disrupting Body Norms*, discusses how queer theory asks us to question the norms that are associated with bodies, how they came to exist, and whose authority is being enforced. Johnson also describes how our bodies are perceived by others’ expectations and that we must consider the impact of conforming or nonconforming to these bodily implications (2021, paragraph 9). She writes, “Queering/querying the lived experience of the body in the world means not only exploring the embodied lives of those whose identifications have pushed them to the margins of the social

world, but also questioning normative assumptions about all bodies and all experience.” She continues to say, “Practically speaking, queer theory and somatic practice provide a means for interrogating body norms in ways that offer the potential for disrupting implicit assumptions about what bodies are – as well as how they should look and behave – while simultaneously anchoring our bodily expressions in subjective sensory data (2021, paragraph 24).

It is these scholars’ insights that allowed me to be able to work through my own theoretical thinking. To incorporate aspects of each into a theory I utilized, as I explore Fat Queer Students of Color through Critical Fat Intersectional Theory. Being deeply aware of the multidimensions of identity politics, the importance of intersectionality, how impactful race is, and the need to incorporate fat folk’s experiences into this theoretical and praxis based scholarship. Fat folks’ experiences are more than single-axis experiences, they are multidimensional, the discrimination is not solely based on a singular identity, each intersectional identity – queerness, race, and gender, deeply impact how students are treated, and how they walk through the world. It is with this frame of reference that I will work through my literature review and narrative based data collection.

Methodology

This thesis utilized narrative based interviews. Data collection included the oral and written transcriptions of the interviewees’ experiences. The participants included folks who identify as fat, queer and as a person of Color – meaning that they don’t identify as white ethnically. The setting of these interviews was through zoom or in person depending on the comfortability of the interviewee in light of navigating the world since the start of the global Covid-19 pandemic. Once the data was collected and analyzed, it was used to understand how

each participant's experience was unique, similar, and whether or not it impacted them inside and outside of the walls of educational institutions.

The plan for the protection of human subjects included engaging participants in the process of informed consent orally and through written information; informing subjects of all of the procedures, content warning, and answering any questions they may have before the interview process, and allowing them to guide the interview including the need for breaks, and deciding what can or cannot be included after transcription. I also discussed the confidentiality of these interviews and identity with participants, the to use pseudonyms, how their information was kept in password-protected data storage, and who had access to this raw information. Lastly, I identified and discussed with participants the potential benefits, such as the importance of telling stories that center their experiences and allowing for the authenticity of the participants to be showcased, respected and written and analyzed as truthful and candid.

Limitations of the Study

This study has several limitations including the timeline of the study, the sample size, and the method/data collections. Researcher positionality also shaped the study. The timeline of this study is a limitation because the research, interviews, and other aspects of this thesis were completed in a short time frame of nine months. If allowed for a longer time frame, there would have been the opportunity for more interviews and other forms of data collection. Another limitation can be found in the convenience sample used for this study because not all folks who identify as fat queer folks of color in the United States were given an opportunity to participate in this study. This may have influenced the results because the sample population is from California, a state known for being more left leaning and progressive, which in turns reflects on the experiences of fat queer folks of color. It also reflects on the education that educators and

administration must complete and participate in to be able to teach and work in the educational systems compared to other states in the United States. Related to this, the small size of the sample means that the results of this study cannot be used to define all experiences of fat queer folks of color as a whole. It must also be noted as well, that this sample includes people that the researcher has interacted with in their daily life – meaning that these individuals have a deep understanding of how these intersections of their identities operate and are impacted in societal terms. The procedures of the methods and data collection for this study also included limitations. Data was collected through narrative research which may have influenced how their experiences could be interpreted – these stories can range from personal experiences from elementary to post-secondary education. The time since these experiences occurred can lead to skewed memories.

Finally, I as the researcher can be seen as holding a definite perspective on the topic of this study, since I also identify as a fat queer person of color. To some this may be seen as a limitation to the study, to the data collection, and to the interpretations process because this topic is closely related to my lived experiences. Yet to myself and others this can be a positive position as it allows me as the researcher to acknowledge, empathize, and analyze the experiences of the participants in a light that is humanistic and full of empathy.

Significance of the Project

This thesis may be of interest to educators of all grade levels, primary to post secondary, administrators, support staff, and to other fat queer folks of color. It may hold significance for educators because educators disrupt the status quo, and this research can help motivate them to become more inclusive and non-biased towards all students, specifically those who identify as fat, queer and a person of color. In addition, this research may also interest administrators because they are the folks who advocate for more teacher education, who create policies that

impact students and educators alike. Finally, this thesis may be important to other fat queer folks of color because there are many who work inside of education – who have lived through these experiences first hand, who want to better help other students who are going through this educational system so they also do not face similar challenges. There has been much research on queerness of students, the race of students, and there is more research developing that looks at the identity of fatness – but I hope to bring all three of these identities together to benefit those that continually work in or partake in the education system.

Definition of Terms

Straight-Sized: Is a term that is defined in the fashion industry as clothing sizes that can be purchased from nearly any clothing store. These sizes usually range from size 00 to size 14. This term is utilized in references of people with size privilege – instead of using terms such as normal, regular, or average (Gordan, 2020, p. 11).

Fat: I utilize the term fat in reference to someone who would not be perceived as “skinny” and would not fall under the term straight-sized. For the sake of this article I reference fat as an all encompassing term that includes the notions of the multicomplex identities of fatness such as: Small fat (sizes 16 -18), Mid-fat (sizes 20-24), Superfat (sizes 26-32), and Infinifat (sizes 34 + up). It must be noted that these different levels of fatness solicit different experiences, some privileging others despite all experiencing fatphobia (Gordan, 2020, p. 9). The term fat has been and still is a way for folks who identify with fatness to reclaim a term that has been used to demonize and/or shame the bodies they exist in.

Queer: Is a term in which the meaning has changed from a slur to an encompassing term that can refer to folks in the LGBTQIA+ community, or ideology. More specifically *Moveme: A Guide to Social Movements and Social Media*, created by the University of California, Berkeley,

defines Queer as: “attraction to anyone not specifically the opposite-sex; A reclaimed slur for anybody in the LGBTQ community, or who do not identify as cisgender and/or heterosexual/heteromantic” (<https://moveme.berkeley.edu/project/lgbtqrightrights/>). I utilize this inclusive term to reference students, as defined, who do not fall into the categories of cis, heterosexual, or heteroromantic without defining who they are based off assumptions.

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

Educators should not put students in the margins based on the intersections of students' identities. But, as this literature review will show, when each intersection of the student's identity differs from their educators and/or when an educator has no prior knowledge of these intersectionalities, there can be a lack of connection between student and teacher - in particular when a student is a fat, queer, and a person of color. The student ultimately suffers without this connection due to their rightful need of belonging. The intersection of fatness with other aspects of identity is relatively new. What some current research shows, which I will discuss more deeply, is that fat folks, more specifically fat students, have been discriminated against by peers and educators.

Race has always played a crucial role in student teacher connections. Some teachers still hold racist stereotypes of their students, which blurs the reality the students face – boxing them into particular roles and identities. Lastly, being openly queer puts students in a position of being marginalized by rampant homophobia in our current society. Although teachers should be “allies” or “co-conspirators,” this doesn't mean that they are. Teachers can hold homophobic ideals, and/or lack an understanding of queerness, which negatively impacts students mentally and physically. There has been no study that I have been able to locate that discusses all three of these intersections simultaneously: fatness, race, and queerness. I aim to bring light to student experiences with these intersecting identities, and how that impacts their educational experience, utilizing Queer Race Theory, Intersectionality, Critical Race Theory, and Feminist Theory to understand the both/and aspect of falling in multiple historically marginalized identities. As I present each section: The Identity of Fatness, The Identity of Queerness and Race, Impact of

Student-Teacher Connection – the main objective is to understand each intersection to be able to reveal the gaps of knowledge when examined from the perspective of fat queer students of color in its entirety.

The Identity of Fatness

Research is just beginning to address fatness as an important area of identity, similarly to race, gender, and class. This identity of fatness incorporates how fat students, more specifically fat girls are more likely to be bullied in primary and secondary education (McNinch, 2016). This leads into how fat college students become hyper(in)visible on college campuses (Stevens, 2018), which leads into the need to combat fat oppression in education (Pausé, 2016), and how educators and administrators can utilize fat pedagogy in ways to better the experiences of fat and straight-sized students in all classrooms. This is crucial because fatness is an identity that is hypervisible on any individual's body, it is unable to be concealed. Students can not hide or deny how they are perceived in this way, due to the stigma that fatness holds: such as laziness, sloppiness, lack of motivation, or as simple as not fitting inside of a classroom desk (Stevens, 2018). Students are experiencing hyper-stigmatization by peers based on what is considered the current beauty standards, what is acceptable bodyweight, and how fat people should be treated. Students face discrimination and judgment that is upheld by societal standards not only by their peers but by school staff (Russell, 2020).

To begin, research illustrates that fatphobic rhetoric or bullying based on weight begins as early as elementary school. More specifically, it is the young girls who are being bullied heavily inside the walls of their elementary and secondary schools. Evidence of this can be found in McNinch (2016) who conducted a case study that interviewed students, who were in their final year of their bachelor of education program, and who were impacted by fat bullying in primary

and secondary education. What was discovered was that folks experienced bullying outside of just physical education, these experiences took place in the cafeteria and inside of the classroom. Teachers had failed to intervene on the bullying, and due to this, participants had felt as if there was no place where they were safe. Additionally, participants noted that when the bullying was called out, educators had neglected specifically naming what type of bullying was occurring. Now, these participants were taking the steps of becoming educators, and they have experienced this anti-fat bullying first hand, they still felt as if they were ill equipped to tackle it with their own students.

Similarly, Stevens (2018) demonstrated that fat college students face visible stigma on their college campuses. Stevens formulated the term hyper(in)visible, meaning that fat students are hypervisible due to their physical size, and at the same time fat students and the oppressions they face make them hyperinvisible to the point they are forgotten, and they end up being pushed further into the margins. This anticipated stigma – or rather anticipated fatphobia, similarly occurred in cafeterias, gyms, and classrooms, but also at bars and other student services offered on campus such as the health centers. This stigma caused deep emotional crises that led to negative experiences that affected their education.

Pausé (2016) adds how faculty in post secondary education perpetuate the harmful notions of fatphobia. Pausé emphasizes the need for faculty to be committed to the ideals of social justice, meaning that when a social justice framework is created, space for the intersection of fatness or body size should be included. Not only that, fatphobia and anti-fatness impact all the actual bodies of the folks inside the classroom – teachers and students. This is important to note because the bodies of those inside the classroom reflect the way we do or do not see ourselves.

Related to this, research investigating the implementation of fat pedagogy with the collaboration of other critical pedagogies can help shed light on the fat oppressions that students face. Russell (2020) claims that although there is “no size fits all fat pedagogy” (p. 8), there are conversations and exploration of critical pedagogies such as critical theory, queer, and antiracist work functioning alongside fat pedagogy that can shed light on weight based oppression. This can help us understand what is occurring with fatphobic rhetoric from educators and students’ peers so it can be tackled, so all students – despite body type – can flourish in education. Similarly, Pausé (2016) demonstrates that fat study courses can help disrupt anti-fat biases in educators as well as in students. Pausé emphasizes that fat education occurs in multiple disciplines such as health, social sciences, and other sciences, but it is ultimately up to the educator to be willing to do the work to disrupt fat biases. Similarly, McNinch (2016) claims more work needs to be done in teacher education. More particularly, there should be pre-service educator courses that tackle fat oppression from a systemic perspective, and that for primary and secondary educators there should be workshops on fat bullying. In total, this research illustrates that the need for more teacher education is crucial to the liberation of fat students and their need for belonging in education. In tandem, this research suggests that fatphobic views and rhetoric are embedded in educators. Regardless if a fat student is being discriminated against or bullied by a peer, the lack of intervention or understanding on the part of the educator is damaging to fat students’ education and overall well-being.

In summary, research demonstrates that the identity of fatness is one that causes discrimination in many sectors of a fat person’s life. This includes education and their relationship with educators. McNinch’s (2016) research illustrates that even educators who were once bullied for their fatness were not prepared to discuss or intervene with their own students

due to lack of resources. Stevens (2017) articulates the need for more research on the anti-fat biases that educators hold because they can further marginalize students. Russell's (2020) research claims that fat pedagogy should be utilized with other pedagogies in teacher education, and that education is a vital component in tackling fat oppression. Taken together, this body of research illustrates how educators can marginalize students based on their weight either directly or indirectly. Related to this is how queer and racial biases also play a part in the educators' inability to understand or empathize with student experiences, and can place students in the margins based on stereotypes, which can create situations where students feel like they do not belong.

The Identity of Queerness and Race

Similar to the identity of fatness, research demonstrates that the two intersections of queerness and race impact the way students move through their educational experiences. This includes looking both at queerness and race through Queer Race Pedagogy, research that articulates that queer students are also lacking support due to personal beliefs or lack of resources, and research that displays the resilience of queer students of color to exist in these spaces. This is important because queer students of color exist. With these two intersecting identities their experiences differ from cis-hetero students of color, and white queer students. The spaces they occupy can subject them to both racism and homophobia, not just one or the other.

To begin, research on Queer Race Pedagogy illustrates the importance of people's positionality. Misawa (2006) claims that whether we want it or not, all parts of our identities are shaped by the socially constructed positions in which we belong (p. 26). Misawa (2006) discusses that issues that affect queer people of color play a part in the educational sector. They explain how the field of education is dominated by the white and heterosexual dominant

discourse. This perspective is deemed to be universal, when it is not. The universality only makes the queer students of color, and other historically marginalized identities, even more invisible - similar to the invisibility of fat students, and can lead to misunderstandings between educators and students. Misawa (2006) adds that Queer Race Pedagogy (QRP) is designed with the intentions of queer students of color in mind and how their experiences have been overlooked in education. QRP is emphasized as a holistic tool for educators to examine how various identities influence the way folks interact with one another. Similarly, Misawa (2006) claims that educators are perceiving students' appearances – noting that some identities are invisible, so they must take into account all aspects of students' positionality, even those that are unseen. In sum, this research articulates the importance that students should have an education that is accessible to all. This can be done through QRP and other theories and pedagogies. Overall educators are responsible for creating environments where queer students of color, and all other aspects of a student's positionality are supported and included.

Research has also looked at queer students of color and their resilience in institutions that are predominantly white. For example, Duran (2021) claims that resources in post-secondary education are not intersectional, meaning that they do not benefit all of the identities of students. For example, students must suffer from racism in queer spaces, or they might suffer from homophobia in ethnic/cultural centers (p. 218). This emphasizes the importance of being inclusive of all identities of students – if not, they are marginalized even further. Similarly, Duran (2021) demonstrates that this marginalization stems from lack of institutional intervention. When institutions do not take initiative and action to combat environments that do not foster community, it is the students that suffer. Duran (2021) adds that this deeply impacts students' mental and emotional health. Students have no choice but to become resilient to exist in these

spaces. Noting that it is easier to be resilient when there are folks who affirm their experiences and identities (p. 224). Additionally, Duran (2021) claims that when queer students of color have support from staff who identify as also queer people of color, they have been able to find meaningful connections and crucial role models. In total, this research illustrates that queer students of color become resilient to be able to survive predominantly white institutions, and that having faculty who also identify similarly to students deeply impacts them for the better.

A final body of research investigates teachers' knowledge and attitudes towards queer students and whether teachers were unsupportive of students due to lack of resources or due to personal beliefs. Swanson and Gettinger (2016) claim that the reason queer students are not being supported is due to the lack of Gay Straight Alliances, queer specific anti-bullying policies, and, unsurprisingly, a lack of teacher training. LGBTQ+ students had reported that they do not feel supported due to their queer identity, and despite them experiencing harassment, 57% of them decided not to inform staff. Of those students who did end up reporting, 62% of them stated that school staff did not take action (p. 327). Additionally, it was noted that queer students who had social support, such as Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs), had capabilities of stronger resilience (p. 327). Similarly, Swanson and Gettinger (2016) demonstrate that teachers tend to feel more empowered to intervene for queer students when there are clear and concise policies that articulate the protections for LGBTQ+ students. Swanson and Gettinger (2016) add that it is educators who play a key role in the environments that queer students experience daily. Additionally, they added that when students have a positive relationship with their educators, it is deemed one of the best indicators of school success in queer students, even more so than peers and family (p. 331). Swanson and Gettinger (2016) also claim that educators who reported having high levels of training and active GSAs, reported more positive attitudes toward queer

students than those who worked in schools without GSAs. When taken together, researchers determined that there are a variety of reasons teachers might be unable to support LGBTQ+ students, such as lack of knowledge, unwillingness due to personal beliefs, or just being unaware of the true importance of intervening. This research suggests that the most frequent barriers in support of LGBTQ+ was related to training and resources, but not attitudes or personal beliefs on queer students (p. 339). Regardless, teachers have a responsibility to make school environments that are welcoming, safe, and responsive to the needs of all students, and their support and intervention can be lifesaving.

In summary, research demonstrates that the identity of queer students of color deeply impacts their experiences in education. This includes looking at the positionalities educators and students have, research that articulates how queer students of color have to become resilient to be able to exist in these white-heterosexual dominated spaces, and research that claims that teacher intervention and support can save the lives of queer students, when educators are better informed on how to take action. Taken together, this body of research justifies that students' experiences in education are deeply impacted by the identities that they hold and that when educators have no prior knowledge in these identities, students are the ones who are negatively impacted. Related to the importance of student identities is how student teacher connections are developed, maintained and influenced and how they can become more supportive and caring to better serve students.

Impact of Student-Teacher Connection

Research demonstrates that identities of queerness, race, and fatness in students impact the way teachers view and interact with their students. This includes the roles of teachers' relationships with their students and how that impacts their lives, research that articulates weight

biases amongst educators, and research that claims that there are differential impacts by gender and sexuality in teachers' support of students. This is important because when we take this all together, the impact of student-teacher connections with the intersections of these three identities we begin to see that fat queer students of color are impacted at higher rates than their straight-sized, white, heterosexual counterparts.

To begin, research illustrates that there is not just one way in which educators can influence their relationships with students. Evidence of this can be found in Fredriksen and Rhodes (2004) who claim that student factors and how they are perceived, can contribute to the quality of the relationships teachers have with students. Relationships are also affected by the amount of stress that educators might endure, which can negatively impact the student-teacher relationships. Similarly, Fredriksen and Rhodes (2004) demonstrate that these relationships have psychological impact (p. 46). Claiming that when students had perceptions of little to no teacher support, or dropping of that support – it was shown to increase depressive attitudes and a lowering of self esteem. Fredriksen and Rhodes (2004) add that students who display behavioral problems are more likely to have their relationships with educators negatively impacted. These students then tend to view their educators as lacking warmth and as being less supportive (pg.47) Fredriksen and Rhodes (2004) also claim that the interactions that take place between teacher and student in their adolescence, suggests that these relationships will continuously be important through a student's entire academic career. Similarly to other articles mentioned previously, educators can only do so much unless they are backed by administrative support. This includes better pay, smaller classes, better training, and overall support in being able to create these very necessary environments for students. In sum, this research articulates that there are many ways educators' relationships with students are impacted, and there needs to be more support from

administrators so teachers can better support students, and have better tools to cater to all identities of their students.

Related to this, research has investigated how a student's weight can cause biases from educators. Evidence of this can be found in Lessard and Puhl (2021) who document negative perceptions of fat students, meaning that fat students are perceived by educators as lazy, unsuccessful, and unintelligent (p. 796). Similarly, Lessard and Puhl (2021) demonstrate that there are achievement gaps in historically marginalized identities such as race, which means that weight bias in educators likely plays a role in weight related gaps in educational achievement (p. 796). Lessard and Puhl (2021) add that based on their sample of educators, over a third of them had endorsed negative stereotypes that put the blame on students on an individual level for their weight, which included viewing them as having no willpower, having poor self control, and lastly seeing them as self indulgent (p. 799). Lessard and Puhl (2021) emphasize that these judgements are detrimental to fat students in grading, and in the lack of intervention in fat students being bullied. Lessard and Puhl (2021) also note that educators are more likely to notice their fatphobia and fatphobic biases when there are anti-bullying policies that distinguish fat bullying directly. In total, this research illustrates that teachers can hold negative weight biases against their fat students, and that these negative stereotypes can and have hurt fat students in multiple aspects of their education.

Finally, research claims that there is a deep connection between students' well being and their relationships with their educators. Dessel et al. (2017) claim that schools must provide adequate training and resources for educators when it comes to their LGBTQ students. Similarly, Dessel et al. (2017) demonstrate that teachers play an important role, whether they are cognizant of it or not – in shaping, creating, and maintaining the climate of their classrooms, and the

climate of the school, meaning that teachers are the first who can interrupt biases, and become the models of counteracting bullying, especially for marginalized students like those in the LGBTQ+ community. Even teachers who are cisgendered and hetero, can influence students when acting and identifying as allies since their identities match up with those who are more likely to bully queer students (Dessel et al., 2017, p. 137). Dessel et al. (2017) add, similar to other articles mentioned previously, that when educators offer supportive interventions, they were more likely to support and empower queer students. It was also noted that when students felt like they had trusted adults at school, their self esteem was positively impacted (p. 140). Additionally, Dessel et al. (2017) claim that when queer students feel victimized by their educators, it directly impedes their ability to engage in learning. Dessel et al. (2017) also emphasize that schools must be able to provide inclusive environments for students who are marginalized, and that can be done through educational policies, and support for educators in intervening in targeted bullying of queer students. When this intervention happens, queer students will thrive and so will schools (p. 143). When taken together, this research suggests that teachers can determine how students will perceive themselves and their success, depending on how they intervene and interact with their marginalized students.

In summary, research demonstrates that student-teacher connection is deeply impacted by educators themselves. This includes how there are multiple ways that educators are influencing their relationships with students, research that articulates the biases educators may have, more particularly their weight biases of fat students, and research that claims that queer students' self esteem is deeply impacted by their educators. Taken together, this body of research justifies that teachers are the bridges between how fat queer students of color are treated, perceived, and evaluated in education. By looking at all these intersections, when put together, fat queer

students of color are even more marginalized than their straight sized, white, heterosexual peers. These identities are connected to many biases, and due to this, educators have the capacity to marginalize them even more.

Summary

This literature review claims that fat queer students of color, are more likely to be impacted by biases from their educators than their straight-sized, white, heterosexual counterparts. This also means that the vital relationships between them and their educators are impacted deeply, and this dynamic sets them up for the entirety of their educational career. This claim and body of evidence addresses students' need for inclusive pedagogies in education, specifically fat pedagogies (Russel 2020; Stevens 2018). Additionally this review highlighted the importance of teacher support and intervention on queer students being bullied (Dessel et al., 2017; Swanson & Gettinger, 2016). This review also examined the role of educators, and how they are shaping, impacting, and influencing how students see themselves as scholars, and as individuals (Dessel et al., 2017; Duran 2019; McNinch, 2016).

With my thesis/field project, I propose to research through narrative based, qualitative research how fat queer students of color relationships with educators were impacted, whether that be positively or negatively. Nevertheless, my research wants to highlight the educational journeys of fat queer students of color in navigating these spaces that were not created for us and our bodies in mind.

CHAPTER III

The Power of Personal Narratives

The purpose of my study is to bring the experiences of fat, queer, students of color in education to the forefront. Making space for our bodies, ideas, and knowledges. This passion stems from personal experience. With my time in education as a Fat, Queer, Person of Color, I knew first hand there were gaps of knowledge. My undergraduate degree being in English, I have fallen deeply in love with the power of personal narratives. Understanding and having the ability to share your story on your terms is a form of resistance. It has been a form of survival and rebellion to speak against or to counteract the dominant narratives that have been pushed onto fat people, queer people, people of color, the combination of, and other historically marginalized peoples.

My hope is to shed more light on these stories, to bring insight on the gaps that are missing from this discourse. That other researchers in the fields of education, fat studies, queer studies, or critical race studies will utilize this work to liberate our students from fatphobia, homophobia, racism, and overall marginalization and oppression.

Participants' Background

For the privacy and safety of my participants, I asked them to choose a pseudonym and refer to them with only first names. Each participant identities as a Fat, Queer, Student of Color, and each story is unique and theirs alone. Here are their stories.

Anastasia:

Hi, my name is Anastasia, I am a fat, cisgendered twenty-three year old Iranian-American woman. I have been openly pansexual for a few years now as well. I'm also an English major who is currently in my 3rd year of college.

I was always aware of that feeling of being fat, as far as I remember I was never slim. I always knew what a metabolism was, I even understood what dieting was. I feel like it's always been like that. I was probably four or five when I became aware of my weight. My family put me into those health classes when I was younger. Those classes taught me about dieting and how to be “healthy.” I’ve always been around all that. But as I look back at childhood photos, I wasn’t even fat as a kid, I really wasn’t. I was a little chubby, but that’s normal. I think that’s what really fucked with me. I ended up developing a binge eating disorder – which caused me to actually be fat. I really got depressed because of that.

I do think about my body a lot. I know I try to love it, but then I hate myself over it, and then it's complicated, so there’s times I don't know how I think about my body. I never had conversations about fatness until recently, my friends have been great. For example, I saw the movie “The Whale,” and that movie was the most real thing I ever saw. His binge eating wasn’t romanticized. It was real and it felt as if I was watching myself. Seeing it with my friends who aren't fat, I didn't know how our conversation after the movie was going to be like. Are they gonna feel uncomfortable? But honestly, they were really chill about it, especially when I was trying to tell them my experience as a fat girl and they respected it. So that was a really good experience.

But honestly, I haven't had any bad experiences with my friends, or even with any strangers. I feel like it’s because I don't talk about it really, and they don't bring it up. It mostly comes from my family, it’s talked about more, and it’s talked about in a negative light. Yeah, those negative conversations are more at home than with my friends. I only recently started to feel more comfortable labeling myself as a fat girl, because before I wouldn't even want to think about it or say it even in public. But now as I’ve learned and grown I'm more comfortable being

like, “oh yeah, I’m a fat girl, who cares?” But at home no matter how I feel, it will still be seen as mostly negative.

Being Persian and Iranian is something I've always been proud of, I've been immersed into my culture since I was a kid, it's so ingrained into my childhood and everyone knew. I was always talking about it as a kid, I was very proud. I'm pretty sure I knew Farsi before English. But I do feel like my Persian culture and identity is what negatively affected my school experience, and my social life. I'm pretty pale now, but as a kid I was not. It was obvious that my brother and I weren't white or anything else, kids were rude and would ask, “what are you?” Not only that, we were the only Middle Eastern and Persian people in elementary school. So, we were definitely bullied. It was bad. I feel like the most racist encounters I've had were in elementary school, from both kids and teachers. I don't even know when that was, it was around 2006 or 2007, so 9/11 had just basically happened, so people were very racist toward Middle Easterners, and kids would get that information from their parents. They would echo what their parents had told them and say the same shit to me, or to another Middle Eastern person. They'll look at me be like “You're the fucking people that my parents talk shit about when they see it on the news.” They would humiliate me, they would call me Osama Bin Laden's daughter. I used to be called these things when I was seven years old. I wonder if they knew what they're saying? Now that I think about it, it doesn't make me upset with the kids, but more at the parents or whoever the fuck was watching them. Like, why are you telling this to children? I don't understand, so here they go and bully the fucking Middle Eastern kid who does not know anything about what they're talking about! My brother and I had no idea what was going on

when we were told these things, we're like, "Who are you talking about?" And then we had to go find out at home what was going on. It's humiliating, and this was elementary school!

I was twelve or thirteen, so I believe that's middle school and we were writing poems in my English class. My teacher Mr. Tebbs had offered, if we felt comfortable at the end of class, to share our journals with our poems. We would place our journals in a pile which allowed the teacher to read it. He wouldn't say our name or who placed their journals -- he was really chill about it. So, I did it because I was proud of my writing. That day I wrote about my Persian culture and the hardships of being Iranian-American. All of it, the positive and the negative, it was a mix, He read it and he cried. He actually got pretty emotional. I was like, "OH" not realizing the impact I had made with my writing. It was such an affirming day for my writing and my identity. He also asked for my permission to share it with the other teachers. This poem is what started the conversation about my identity amongst the teachers, hopefully it was a positive spark. Teachers were saying, "That's what you dealt with? That's so messed up!" but also, "I'm so happy that you also feel accepted in this community."

In middle school, I had a group of three boys bully me. I don't know if they were trying to bully me because of my identity per se, but definitely my name was something that they started using to attack me, because my name is a Persian name. I still don't know if it was because I was Persian, or if it was because I was emo. I had the hair and everything. But I do know my name was just a starting point for them, because my name was definitely something people noticed was different. I must say that the bullying got really bad. It even got physical sometimes, and of course there was the verbal bullying. But they did end up getting in trouble, actually one of the

teachers who read my poem actually stood up for me and no other fucking teacher wanted to stand up for me!

Not only was I dealing with that in middle school, I was also dealing with being sexualized at that young age. I remember the first time I was catcalled, I was around the ages of 10 to 12. I was definitely not a teenager, but I had definitely hit puberty. God men are disgusting, and you know, I was fat as a child so I had curves, but it doesn't excuse the fuck that he said. I remember being so confused, so I was smiling at him because I was taught to never look at someone without smiling, also if you look at them while not smiling, you're a "fucking bitch." Now that I'm older and I look back at pictures of myself at that age, it's like damn, that is a child!. I used to get catcalled extremely often when I would go out in public, to the point where it even happened in front of my mom. The catcalls were horrible, and I was hypersexualized all because I was fat or "curvy," it was just horrible. I also know that if I wasn't fat, I would have still been catcalled. But the energy was so different compared to my skinny friends. At the time they were excusing the men's behavior because I looked "older" but really it was just because I had an ass, and because of my weight I "looked more mature" compared to like the skinny girls who were my age who had bodies who looked more prepubescent.

In my junior year of high school, I had an AP class with a teacher named Miss Parsons. I was sitting in the front -- and let me say yes she's a white woman, a white Republican, a registered Republican she made sure to tell us! That just tells you what, what kind of person she is! So I was sitting in the front of the classroom and a lot of the time she would point to the people in the front if she wanted an answer or whatever. At this point I don't even know what the fuck we were talking about. But for some reason, she came up to me and she's like, "Anastasia,

tell the class what a Muslim funeral is like? Tell us the process.” I’m sitting there confused, “I’m not Muslim. I’m Persian. Yes, I’m Middle Eastern but that’s it.” Like, come on, what the fuck? It was a weird, awkward situation and everyone in the class stopped what they were doing, they were staring at her, then staring at me. It was obvious that they were pissed at her, it was a collective feeling of “what the fuck?” One of my other classmates then stepped in and said there was an actual Muslim student in the class, “I think this person can answer. He can answer for you Ms. Parsons” so he answered for her. She then replies, “Oh, actually I don’t need the answer, it’s okay.” Obviously she was just trying to bully me or something! I don’t know, and I guess I wasn’t the best student because I was going through mental health shit. Regardless, if I was not the best student she doesn’t need to embarrass me! She ended up embarrassing herself at the end. But it was just horrible, oh my God I was more shocked than hurt at that moment. I think my peers felt more terrible for me, and now as I think about it as an adult, this teacher, a grown woman, was doing something that horrible to a student!

The negatives of bullying from students and my teacher, I feel like it shaped me into who I am now. It made me definitely prouder to be Persian, it made me more vocal about talking about issues! I’m very vocal now and I want people to talk about it because I don’t want people to forget about us. Not only Persians, but Middle Easterners as a whole, because nobody talks about us unless it’s something happening like the recent earthquake in Turkey. Then they’re gonna talk about it for a day, and then they’re gonna forget about us. But it’s still gonna be there... the destruction, the death. We need help, we need voices that aren’t just us, because we are so tired. But then sometimes I’m kind of hesitant about what people are going to say. Are they going to say the right thing? In class when I did speak out, it was to correct something that someone else

had said. I'm telling them, "This is propaganda. This is not true. What are you speaking about? You're falling into a trap of American propaganda." So I felt as if I had to talk about it to correct their misinformation. For example, I would go to Iran a lot to visit my family. And before I went, it was the summer of my sixth grade year, and people were like, "You're going to be safe, right?" and I'm like what the fuck? Yes! It is not an unsafe country... well now it's horrible. But back then, yes you had to follow the rules and they were pretty extreme rules, but there weren't people holding guns up in the street. It's just a city, like the cities here. That kind of stuff definitely made me sad because where are they getting this information? Definitely the news, which is sad because the news shouldn't have been like that. Especially because it's the Middle East, people are either feeling sorry for us, or they're either making us look like crazy people, which yes there are extremists, but there are also extremists here in the US.

Also there are other people who are doing way more, they're seeing things that are difficult for me to even talk about right now. We really would love some help from people. But as I said, I feel like I'm kind of like a representative in a way, even though a lot of Persians wouldn't agree because I'm American first. Not to erase that I am Persian, but I am an American. I grew up here, so other Persians would definitely be like, "she shouldn't be speaking" even if I'm the only person speaking. I'd definitely be shamed by my own people, but Americans, I feel like I've gotten a lot of appreciation from Americans. For example, like my peers and teachers hearing from me. Even as a child, I would be talking about these things. I feel proud, but there's definitely a pressure that is placed on me. I would love for people to do their own research at the same time, and it's sad because we didn't learn about Iran, or other parts of the Middle East at all in school. I can remember maybe two or three times in my life we've had conversations in my

school, and that's including elementary, middle, high school, and college. I've never really had these discussions in a classroom setting, and the times that I did, like I mentioned earlier, it's always me initiating it or correcting people, but I'm proud to do so at the same time, but it's a very complex feeling.

I've also had a terrible experience in higher education, specifically at a university here in the Bay Area that is known for being inclusive. The main reason why I wanted to go there was because of its reputation of being inclusive and safe for marginalized people. To myself I was like, "I'll be more comfortable there because my high school was inclusive." I was comfortable in high school for the most part, so I assumed if I went there, I'd have the same feeling, the same environment, but it was not. My professors were helpful, but not the administration. They were horrible, they were really. They did not care and they knew that I was struggling -- I basically told them I was gonna kill myself, but they didn't care.

What happened was I tried to drop out, well I did drop out, but I tried to get help at first and people didn't take me seriously. I was very suicidal, and it was obvious that I was not in a good headspace. It was the higher up people, the ones who dealt with admission. I made an appointment, because I didn't know what to do -- like should I take a break, should I drop out? I need guidance because my mental health was really bad, and the receptionist wouldn't even look at me. I waited a really, really long time for this appointment, and I was the only person there just waiting the whole day. They looked at me for a little bit, and I know they looked at me in the hallway, they just looked at me and left me there for at least an hour and 45 minutes. I was there for almost 2 hours! Until finally, they found someone to get me. She didn't look at me once. I was there for 5 minutes. I was crying saying, "I just need help" and they laughed in my face and

were like, “Go somewhere else. I don't need to help you. You're wasting my time. Just go away” and I didn't know what to do. I was crying and then that's when I got help from my RA, she saw me and she helped me figure out what paperwork I needed, and I just dropped that off. I didn't really talk to anyone about the paperwork stuff because at that point, why would I want to talk to anyone? I just had to drop it off to get a stamp, and yet still no one helped me with that. It was really bad. Now that I'm thinking about it now, years later, this happened like five years ago, I can't believe they basically were laughing in my face and refusing to help me. Like I mentioned, the only person who helped me was my RA, she actually helped me figure out the proper steps to drop out. Now that I'm thinking about it, I can't help but wonder if I was conventionally attractive, or if I was a white girl, or if I was skinny? Would they have taken it seriously? I obviously looked like shit at the time because I wasn't taking care of myself. I don't know and I hate that I have to question that, or they were just horrible people deep down. I don't know! When I do reflect on it I definitely felt as if I was targeted. It felt targeted! I definitely think it was because of who I am and how they perceived me!

At least I got some help from some people. I felt like when someone my age related to me, it really helped me. It felt like no one's judging me. Unlike those fucking old quacks, they didn't care. I couldn't expect anything from them, but I was more comforted by that RA. She was also a fat girl of color. She was really lovely. She was really sweet. She was really the best. I went into her room and she sat me down, and explained everything to me and she was making sure this was a decision I wanted, “Are you sure? I can support you.” I was also manic at that point, I was going through manic episodes for like two weeks, so I was just not in the right headspace. But I knew what I had to do. She supported me through the whole process. She was

the sweetest. She even helped me pack up. I feel like if I didn't see her, I probably would have killed myself, because of the way *that* administrator spoke to me... I didn't need that. I really didn't need that, and I thought if I spoke like an adult, like someone who knows what they're doing they would've helped me, but I didn't get that. It was just horrible. The RA saved my life. I wish I could remember her name, I forgot it but she was the best, I love her.

Overall I wasn't comfortable with the whole structure of that university. But I definitely had some professors who opened up. Now I'm at CSU East Bay and I feel a lot more comfortable here. I really do feel more accepted... yeah, definitely more accepted here. From the discussions that I've had so far more people are willing to speak up and out.

I also had a good experience at Chabot Community College too. I was there for two years, I was in the LGBT literature class and we talked a lot about fatness and queer people of color. That was honestly a really great experience for me. We talked a lot about things that I've never really talked about with anyone. With that experience it's definitely easier to talk about being like queer, fat, or just anything really. I feel more comfortable in the spaces that I'm in, not how it was in the past. I feel that as I got older, the more fatphobic experiences I've had. I don't remember many from childhood, no one really bullied me because of my weight because even my bully was fat! This then leads me to seeing more empathy more with fat girls or fat non-binary people. I do not see it from fat men, fat men are the haters. They're haters, they literally act like they're not fat and take out their internalized fatphobia onto us.

Overall with my queerness though, I was a little bit uncomfortable about my own sexuality, because I didn't really talk about it. I kind of just came out to my friends and my brother, and then didn't really discuss it much further than that. So, it truly was my LGBT class

where I was introduced to more LGBT authors, and the book Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe... that book changed my life. I wrote an essay about the machismo and queerness in that book. I wrote about that, and how they dealt with it because I saw it in my own family. Queerness and identity has been such a complicated thing as well because my family doesn't talk about it. For example, my cousin is trans and they're obviously Persian so it's a weird topic with my family. I am the only person who respects their pronouns, I don't gawk at them, I don't act weird. They're just existing, and there is no need for my family to bother them.

My pansexual identity is pretty new for me. As I mentioned I'm not out to my parents. My friends know and I'm pretty sure my teachers knew. I've definitely talked about it in essays so everyone knows but my family. It's complicated, I don't know how to explain it. It's not cultural because they're not very traditional, but it's more of a "not my kid." They accept everyone else, but they'll be like not my kid but their kid *is* pansexual. I'm still nervous about it, because I still live with them and I don't wanna deal with any weirdness or bullying. Not from my mom, mostly my dad. I'm not ready for that. So, I'm happy where I'm at now with my sexuality. My friends and brother were very open and accepting about it, and now people don't even question it anymore.

I've had plenty of relationships with my teachers in elementary, middle, and high school. I had a lot of close relationships in high school and middle school. Tebbs, who I mentioned earlier, was a pretty great teacher to get advice from, and I'm pretty sure he came out as gay after I left middle school. He definitely figured out that I wasn't straight, and we had some conversations where he'd drop little hints about things and he'd tell me not to be afraid to be

myself. He really gave me a lot of confidence in my writing and my identity, even if he was a white man.

The other teacher I mentioned who intervened in the bullying I experienced, Mr. Hines, he had also read my poem. He was very helpful with my confidence and my identity as a Persian American. Also interesting enough with my identity as a woman. He really made me feel more comfortable being like feminine because I used to be very anti feminine or against stereotypical things that women would like, like the color pink, if you know what I mean? I was emo so I felt as if I had to be the opposite of a “traditional” girl. So he really helped me with my femininity, my sexuality and with just being confident in my skin. I've never met a man like that before, and he was a really open minded, nonjudgmental person, and he always gave the girls and queer people a space to feel comfortable in during lunches. He'd be that teacher that would have his door open to hang out in, with no judgment. He never judged, and even if we talked about some stupid topics, he'd still listen. He'd ask questions and be interested in people and what they had to say, that was like the best thing about him. Also my high school journalism teacher, he was the best. He always had my back, we never had one-on-one talks, but I knew that if I was struggling, or if I needed to stay in his classroom a little longer, he would be there. He was like my second dad, I saw him like that. He was so sweet. I loved him, he wasn't judgmental either.

Of course there were also negative experiences like Parsons -- the white, cis, republican woman was definitely the only teacher that I've ever had that was bad. Well I did have another teacher, who was bad but it wasn't about my race. It was targeted mostly towards my mental health. She was also a white woman, and I ended up in the hospital because I tried to commit suicide. She was also an AP teacher. I was gone for like a month because I was in the hospital for

a while. When I tried to coming back to school, she basically said my grades were fucked because I was gone for that time. I asked for help and she basically told me no, so I had to drop it because I couldn't deal with that grade. There were also only two professors that I had bad experiences with, also both white women.

Thankfully I am happy to say that I had mostly had a lot of support from teachers. My friends, they weren't really my friends, I'm not friends with them anymore... they weren't very helpful, so I'm grateful my teachers were really helpful. They really pushed me in ways my family didn't, I didn't really have that much support at home. My teachers were the ones who really helped me out when I was going through it mentally. High school was not fun and they got that. They really caught on to that and they made sure to be there for me.

As I reflect on my experiences, I definitely think empathy needs to be taught more in school. We're only focused on learning about writing and math, which is important too. But there should be a space where people can learn about empathy, and to be open minded. Possibly in health classes is where these conversations could be had. I feel that way because I was really lucky to have a health teacher who was the best example of the type of a teacher who should be teaching our children. Teachers need to have more professional development to learn about identities, and the type of language they should be using with children. I don't think a lot of people learn empathy from home. So if students don't have family to teach them about it, or if they don't see a teacher who is empathetic and treats other students fairly, how can students learn to be better people? There's always room to learn, I really do think so.

I also think that there needs to be more fat teachers. If I was being bullied because of my weight and a skinny teacher tried to stop this bullying it would feel performative since they don't

have that mutual understanding. So if a fat teacher stopped this bullying, I would feel more protected as a fat person.. Even though I understand that this skinny teacher cares about me it still feels hard to believe it. There is more genuinity when fat people care for other fat people. It feels like they actually are trying to look out for one another and I know that's such a selfish and weird feeling towards skinny teachers, but I just do not feel safe or protected from them because it feels performative, and there's always a chance of dealing with their fatphobia too.

Evelyn:

Hi, I'm Evelyn, and I am a queer immigrant Mexican woman. I have feelings about the terms Latina or Chicana but that's for a different time. I'm Mexican and my immigrant identity is a huge part of how I navigate the world. I think it's the lens I use the most that, and definitely my queer identity. When I was younger, I felt that I needed to be either fully lesbian or fully bisexual and I don't fit into any of those categories. Especially in elementary and middle school, I've known I was queer since I was five years old. So when people would ask me when I was a kid if I liked boys or girls, I'd let them know it was none of their business because I didn't want to be put in a box, so I like the safety of "queer" ; it's the one that feels most comfortable. Other than that I don't think my queer identity was ever questioned. It's also a given of me being fat, because when I show up into any space, whether it's on zoom or whether it's in person you can see my body type, and I don't call it out, because just by seeing me, it's there. My other identities, I feel that you can't see them as much, more specifically with my immigrant identity. When I tell folks that I'm not from the country, that I wasn't born here, and that I identify very closely with the immigrant experience they're like, "Oh, I would have never guessed, you don't have an

accent!” But I've never been questioned about my weight. But when I was working at a previous college, we were having a conversation about purchasing new desks. Of course, when you're working in a public institution, budget is kind of in the front of your mind for everything, and we only had so much money to order desks and they needed to last us like a good ten years, so they wanted to get like those fucking little metal desks. Those desks that have the attached arm thing! Mind you, I've been plus size my whole life and I was the only one who mentioned that we should not get those. That's when I mentioned my identity of fatness by stating, “As a fat woman, those have been the most uncomfortable things in my schooling.” They didn't understand it because I'm not what they envision as a “fat person.” They were just like, “Oh, you're not fat, you're plus size.” and I'm like “I am a fat person” I think that was one of the few times that I really called out my fatness in that sense, because it wasn't being acknowledged. But overall, I typically don't introduce myself in that way because you see me and it's noticeable.

When I came here to the US -- I don't remember much. I remember bits and parts of when I lived in Mexico, but I do remember that I was made aware very early on that I was “other.” First of all, my language played a part in it. When I came here, I fully spoke Spanish and they just threw me straight into kindergarten, and the only thing I knew how to say was “I need to go to the bathroom.” That is the one thing my mom was adamant on learning that, “You need to know how to say this or else you're gonna pee your pants,” she would say, because I was around four or five, and that immediately othered me. Secondly, I've always been very tall, incredibly tall for my age. I was half my teacher's height at a young age, and everybody else was hella short. So with that came the fact that I've always been big, right? I guess I've grown

proportional to my size. So I think the entire experience in kindergarten of not speaking the language and on top of that I'm bigger than all of these kids, so I felt as if I didn't fit in.

But I will say, I was never othered by students. It was always teachers. More specifically one of my PE teachers. I hated that bitch. It was never students, I was never bullied for my weight. I've never been bullied for any of my identities. It was always the adults using their limited perspectives to kind of try to pin me in a box.

One example is in the 3rd grade we were putting together an event, and our parents were going to visit and for some reason we needed to move boxes, and I remember my 3rd grade teacher didn't say something like I need the bigger kids carry stuff, she was more like, "I feel like you're strong, you can help carry the boxes." And of course, because I was so freaking tall and bigger, I could carry a lot more things than others, and a 15 pound box wasn't gonna tip me over, I was able to carry that with no problem. And that was when I noticed that she wasn't saying just the bigger kids, or even just the boys, she said the "stronger kids," even that word change made such a difference.

In the 5th grade, I remember it was my friend and I, we were the tallest and the heaviest girls in this class. So, this PE teacher split us up by weight, like literal weight, so if you were between God, I don't remember. I don't know what's an average weight for a fifth grader, but let's say 90 to 100 pounds, you would group up with your line if you were similar weight. But our group was just me and my friend, the heaviest, so we were the last two kids towards the back of the room. The teacher was like: "OK you know we've split you up by groups, if you're in this part of the class you're healthy, you're doing good. But if you're towards the back end of the class, well, you're not so healthy -- we gotta keep an eye on you. If you're friends, you have to

make sure that they're running their laps" etcetera. She was really putting us out there. My friend took it really, really poorly, which would be a natural reaction for a kid. She started crying and I remember I was so mad because I'm healthy, Like I was not not healthy, but again. I thought my body and who I was, was normal.

After I left elementary school, I didn't know just how wrong that PE teacher was. Once my younger brother and my sister started going through school, it came out that the teacher would specifically pick on the fat kids. Apparently she was a former fat person not wanting to have fat kids. So when my brother was going through school I had asked him about her and warned him to keep an eye out for her because she was known for being really mean. But again, that was fifth grade, and I was telling my mom that memory on how she was mean to my friend and I, and that's when my mom had told me she got fired because she was bullying the fat kids. That incident was one of the bigger moments where we were ostracized in front of the class and our classmates because of our weight.

I think the idea of losing weight makes folks feel as if it will fix the issues that they feel about themselves, but in reality your body image can change, and if you hate yourself, nothing will change that unless you work on yourself internally. But I didn't internalize what that teacher had said, in my mind it was fuck her. My mom says I'm fine and although my mom has her own issues with her weight, I didn't take any of that to heart.

My other friend who I was grouped with, I could tell it really affected her. I remember seeing her in high school -- after elementary school we went to different middle schools, so it had been years since I had seen her. We caught up one day and she confided in me that she was in a battle with an eating disorder. I don't wanna say that the PE teacher caused it, but I do think

if somebody is already battling with self-image and they are subjected to a situation like that, that could be enough to push somebody over to completely develop an eating disorder. Her and I were just ridiculed in front of our classmates, our peers, and friends as being targeted as the fat kid. How would one react? It would make sense for someone to want to stop eating right? Especially at the age we were. She never outright said it was but I could tell that, you know? She said “You know how we were treated as kids. I just wanted to change, ” and I told her that she was just killing herself. She ended up leaving high school and going on independent studies because she was in rehab for an eating disorder. So it was a really big thing, and that's the biggest thing I remember from her, that experience we both went through as kids.

I lived in middle and high school as a small-fat person. Meaning I was somebody who's chunky, but it's more socially acceptable. At school we still had those ugly ass desks I had mentioned earlier, the ones with the armrest that you can't take off the chair. I did have some teachers after seeing me the first day who would pull me aside and let tell me, “Evelyn, we have a seat in the back for you if you'd like,” but at least they'd pull me aside and tell me when other folks weren't there, versus saying something like, “We saved the the extra big seat in the back for Evelyn” in front of the class. I was taken aback because I didn't ask for it, so I'd tell them I was fine. Now that I'm older, I know they meant well but when you're pinpointing the fact that, again, I was the tallest and the biggest in most of my classes. That just kind of put a spotlight on me that wasn't necessary, because I didn't ask for any accommodations. They were just assuming that I needed those accommodations when I was fine.

I also danced Folklorico for about 10 years, and again I've always been the tallest. Through that experience, I was never defined in terms of my weight. More specifically, my

dance coaches never told me that I needed to lose weight, or that I needed to be different. They were more focused on finding a dress that looked better on your body versus saying something like “This shit doesn't fit because you're too big.” So even though my dance instructor was like a drill Sergeant since even before we got to folklorico we were classically trained in ballet, which I would have never thought of for folklorico, because we're just stomping and stuff. They would just try to find me a dress or an outfit that made me look better -- that accentuates me better, that made me feel better. I was so okay with that, it never worried me to be the bigger one in the room. I think even through that, there were other students who, because this was in high school, were fairly bigger than I was and they were treated with the same respect. I mean if I was worried and I was a small fat, like a size twelve or thirteen, which was considered plus size. So there were these folks who were bigger than I was and they were treated with the same respect which was great to see.

Yet, there were a lot of times when maybe I was more self-conscious about my body, especially when I started to develop and change, you know you're going through puberty, things like that. When I didn't feel good about myself in high school, I wouldn't go to college workshops because I didn't want to be seen. It was like maybe four times throughout my entire four years that I can remember in high school that I wouldn't go to an event or a field trip because I was so self-conscious about my body. I just did not want to be seen by other people even though they were seeing me every day in school. So I think in a way these things did impact me.

I was also seen as the opposite of being oversexualized, I was infantilized because I was chunkier and people assumed that nobody was gonna be interested in me sexually. I remember

when my friend and I had a question about our sex ed class freshman year. By that point, my friend and I were both sexually active. My friend actually had a kid when she was 12. So we knew what was up, but we just didn't understand something about an STD. So when my friend was having issues she wanted me to go with her to our teacher because she wasn't sure what was going on, and she was hesitant to go to the health center because she didn't want her mom to find out and assume she was pregnant. So of course I went with her to support her. We went and asked our teacher our question, and I remember her telling me "Evelyn, do you wanna wait outside? You shouldn't be hearing this." Mind you, every teacher knew that my friend had a son. She was fourteen and her son was two. So my friend replied that she wanted me to stay with her. This just showed me that people did not think that I had the capacity in high school to be a sexual being, not just teachers, but a lot of my peers as well believed that about me. It kind of backfired on me because I got away with a lot more things because I was not one people expected. This ended up being really unhealthy because I knew that it didn't matter what I did because I was not going to be called out for it. Additionally nobody would believe it anyway if I was called out, versus my friends who had bodies more developed and smaller than mine. If they were caught doing something or even rumored to have done something they'd immediately be labeled in a negative light, and that really affected how they were perceived. Even something as simple as a crush would turn into a perception of "ohh they just wanna have sex with them." But because of my body type and the infantilization of me, I was not given that label and I did a lot more than I probably should.

I think when you exist kind of outside of the status quo in any way it affects everything you do. So again, there were a lot of things that I did not know. So when I was thinking of going

to college, both my immigrant status, being first generation really impacted me. My dad never finished middle school, and as I was in high school, my mom was able to get her GED. Before that, she also didn't finish middle school, right? So there was no way for me to find resources and connect with folks because the high school that I was in, it wasn't easy to get an appointment with a counselor. It was so incredibly hard to even meet with them and to get help throughout my education. Also if I'm thinking about all of my intersecting identities, and in terms of queerness, I never identified myself as a particular identity.

What I've noticed though is that my immigrant identity is something that I can't separate myself from. It's a kind of default that I fall into when navigating the world. My parents didn't know a lot of how school worked in the US, so one of the things that was pretty shocking was the PE test that they used to have students do in elementary and middle school. My parents didn't understand what it was, so when I had to take a permission form home and they had to sign off saying that the school could weigh me, take my height, and test my eye vision, my parents were like, what the hell is this? They felt as if I was enlisting in the army because it was so much information about me that was being asked of me. So my parents didn't know, I remember this was also in fifth grade. I was a little worried about it because what if I'm being measured to be in a certain criteria, and my parents not knowing what it's about either, I had to go into it blind. Even though it wasn't a big deal, it felt like one at my age. On top of the way that my teacher emphasized that we were focusing on it felt as if it was like state testing, which was a big deal. Our teachers would be like "you have to do good or else we're not gonna have money for school." So I was really worried that because I was taller and because I was deemed heavier, that those things were gonna cost the school something.

Through my experiences with teachers, I would also notice that there were particular students that teachers would favor. What I noticed was that most of those favorites were athletes, and they would get so much leeway due to that. There was one particular math teacher my senior year who favored the athletes. I needed to go on a senior trip and I don't remember if it was like an overnight field trip or just a college visit back-to-back in the Bay Area, but regardless I needed to miss two days of the week for the field trip. I approached this teacher, and I was like “Hi, I need to get my homework ahead of time so that I can do it because I'm missing these two days this upcoming week for a college tour” and he was surprised like, “Oh, *you're* going to college?” I was shocked that he was shocked that I was planning to attend college. While there were students who were missing class for like a statewide championship and shit. Those athletic students would disrupt class to ask and he would never question them because they were athletes. They had their workout bags, they had their letterman jacket so it was like, “Of course yeah! Not a problem.” So, in my head I was like, is it happening because I'm not smart enough, I'm an immigrant, or they think I shouldn't go to college? Why am I getting questioned? Just because I'm not an “athlete,” even though I was dancing like basically like four hours after school every single day up to five days a week, even fucking Saturdays! I wasn't seen as an athlete because of my body type and so I was still being questioned. Of course the athletic kids that I would see would be water polo players or football players, and it was mostly men. So that could have definitely been as well, it being a gender bias since the teacher was male. Even in class he would tend to prefer the boys. If I answered a question – first of all, I was terrible in math, – so if I ever raised my hand and answered a question, it was because I was confident that I knew the right answer, and he would question me! “Are you sure you know the answer Evelyn?” Versus if a

male student responded, he would just respond with “You're correct.” He would question every single student in the class that was not male. There was a time myself and two other girls would raise our hand and he waited until a dude raised his hand and picked them.

I did have some positive experiences with educators, but again, I don't know if because I was a smaller fat person when I was in high school, if that had anything to do with it. I know that when I went to college, my weight fluctuated as I changed birth control and was on different medications. Some days I was super skinny and some days I was super swollen and bloated.. I would get comments from faculty members asking if I was okay because I looked different but I never once felt that it was like, “Girl, you look fat, like what's going on,” it was more like, “Hey, we're noticing things, we wanted to check in,” which made it feel like I had kind a magnifying glass on myself because I couldn't just explain it because my body's fluctuating and I was already bigger, so changes were very noticeable. When I lost weight because I was on certain medications, it was very noticeable. When I would gain weight because I was on certain medications, it was very noticeable. I could not exist and just let my body go through its stages without it being called out, so that made it a little tough because shit, I just lost hella weight and people are going to keep mentioning it! But the remarks were never in a “Oh my God you lost so much weight. You look so much better” by faculty or staff. It was always from a place of concern. It was in a caring way, not a, keep the weight off because you look great kind of way. The staff members who reached out were the Multicultural Center coordinator, who was a very petite woman. She was kind of like a second mom to all of us, so I knew hers came from that maternal instinct, but now that I think about it the other faculty members and professors who did pull me aside, they were all plus sized people, so I think they might have been addressing things

with such a careful lens because they were bigger people as well and they probably knew what it felt like to be have comments on your weight happen.

With my negative experiences with educators, I already talked about my PE teacher in fifth grade. Another one that really stands out was when I was in college. I was in my first quarter Geography or Global Studies class, one of those two. I've also always been very smart, I've always read beyond my years. So the professor was talking about something, and I raised my hand and made a comment and referenced some theory that we hadn't been taught yet, but again it was one of my special interests, and I just wanted to know everything about everything. He responded with, "Oh wow, you're really smart for a Mexican." Mind you, this person did not know I was Mexican. I know he didn't because when we introduced ourselves in that class, I said my name, that I was from the Bay Area, how many siblings I had, and what my favorite color was. Never once did I say I was Mexican, so for him to say this in a lecture hall full of a hundred people, I felt like what the fuck? It really pissed me off. I didn't say anything at the moment because I was so stunned that somebody would just make that comment to me. I ended up going to talk to him during office hours and I let him know his comment made me feel really uncomfortable. And he couldn't understand why because he thought calling me smart for a Mexican was a compliment and why it would make me uncomfortable. So I told him, "One, you don't even know if I'm Mexican." and he responded that I just "looked Mexican." I responded with, "Well, a lot of people look Mexican and they're not like, you can't just make that assumption. Secondly, when you say you're really smart for a Mexican, you're in saying that Mexicans aren't smart, right? It's taking me a lot to get to your office hours and tell you this because you're the one who's gonna grade me at the end of the quarter, and I'm afraid that if I say

something, you're gonna dock me points or you're gonna be pissed because this student made a big old deal about just a comment.” He tried to reassure by saying “No, no. I would never do that. I would never do that.” I also emphasized, “Okay, but by saying that comment, other Latino students might not want to talk to you, because of the assumptions you have made with your comment.” He was a white man, tenured faculty, so he did not care, and he did not listen. At that point I thought I was going to fail the class because I went and argued with him. Thankfully that wasn't the case, but I also didn't know, due to my immigrant status, that I could have gone to a Dean and said, “Hey, you know, this is a larger conversation that needs to happen. Secondly, I'm really afraid of retaliation. So can somebody else read my papers or grade me?” Any office hours that I had with the professor after that were super short and awkward. Unfortunately, I didn't know at that point the level that I could advocate for myself. I just knew that I had to say something, but I didn't know how far I could take it. I was ill informed, and I could have made a big ole deal about this because that comment wasn't okay! Talking with friends later down the line; especially older friends who had been at the college for two or three years, they mentioned that he did this all the time like it was his phrase. “Oh you're so smart for this race,” I was shocked because this incident was a lot bigger than me, and nothing ever changed.

I think being a student in education is a lot easier than being a professional who is a fat, queer person of color in higher education, because at least as a student, I can build community with so many other folks like me -- queer students, immigrant students, femme presenting students, fat students. But I think as you get higher and higher into education, you're definitely going up an ivory tower. It gets a lot whiter, it gets hella older. So the body conversations, the outfits you want to wear -- my age also comes into play because if I wanted to wear a funky

blazer, I would be the only one doing it. For example, I have a conference next week, the Association for California Community College Administrators. I had to really think about what am I gonna wear, because first of all, my age. I'm so young to be an administrator and I'm infantilized because people assume that I don't know anything. Secondly, gender also plays into that because at any age women get infantilized. I also don't look like a white man in education with a gray suit and a tie, but if I wanted to wear a tie, that's where my queer identity comes into play because they would assume that I was a "butch" or question what I am. Yet, when I would go to conferences as a student, nobody would question what I would wear, because I've worn bow ties and a blazer, with my curly hair down, and my beaded earrings. I would get complimented in those spaces versus when I go into those spaces as a professional, I get called "colorful" because it is very noticeable. When people say that, it's hard to know what they're talking about in particular. Are they talking about my weight? Are they talking about hair? I'm also not in a place to speak on hair texture and stuff, but I've been questioned why I wear my hair curly to work. How is it not seen as professional to have curly hair?! I'm also only a Mexican woman, I can only imagine what Black folks have to go through in terms of hair texture, how it looks and how they are perceived. So when those comments are made, I don't know what to fucking pinpoint it at. I just take it as everything about me, that I'm too noticeable to be here, I'm not blending in, I'm kind of a stick in the mud because "everybody else looks great," but I'm just "a little colorful because I'm so young."

Finding educational spaces that don't care so much about how you dress are so hard to come by. That's why I love working with my current boss so much. First, it's incredibly rare to see a plus size woman be an executive member at a college, point blank period. It's even more

rare to know that that person is like a first generation college student, and who is also a Latina who came from the community! When our executive Dean came into the picture, myself and my friend who formerly worked at the college, we went up to her and told her we were so happy that there is a fat Latina leading the charge. I think it's few and far between but when you find someone who looks like me, I really latch on to those people, which is also why I have so many students who latch onto me, because they know that you're not the rule, you're the exception. It feels hard though because when they ask me what it's like, or that they want to be a supervisor, they want to be a counselor, and ask what tips do I have, or if it gets easier; I feel like, shit! Do I tell them the truth, that no, it doesn't get easier. That as they move up, they're going to be more ostracized. They'll be questioned more, not only on what they can provide, but even how they say it, their tone, and just how they show up into spaces. If I'm presenting as a fat person, I might be seen as aggressive or intimidating if I call something out, versus I'm here to work efficiently, and I'm going to call out what's preventing me from doing that.

One of the things I do want to mention is the amount of diet culture that is deeply embedded in these educational spaces. At my previous office, before I was in this one, my previous boss and coworker would eat the smallest salads, would go on walks, and not want to have soda in the office, and other things like that. As I was starting in a new place, it felt like I needed to fall into that culture in order to be accepted into the office. Again, they never made direct comments about my weight. Even after I left the office, I noticed they continued doing stuff like that and when they would talk to other people around the college, it was repeated, right? They would constantly talk about weight, their weight gain, or how they didn't want certain food in the office because they didn't want to be tempted. What if I want to eat my

Reese's Pieces though? What if I want to do that? What if one day I just want to show up with hella fucking food and eat it right? There was always a conversation around “good food” and “bad food” in the office. Just having that wording in itself is not good! This is another reason why I love being under my current executive Dean, because those conversations are not allowed. There is no good food. There is no bad food. If you wanna eat a snack. Go for it! As an office, it's a very welcoming space to just do your work without being judged! Or deal with being asked to exercise during the work day because, what if I don't want to walk as an office during our breaks? They might look at me differently because I don't want to fall into diet culture like they are. Yet, that's a culture in higher education. You either have to go to the gym or you're gonna talk about your salad. You're gonna talk about what you ate. Or you're going to do this, or you're going to do that. Without giving folks the space to naturally exist in high stress situations. I love what I do and I love all the jobs that I've had, but in high stress situations, your body craves comfort. Your body craves something that's familiar, comforting and maybe sweet, something that just makes you get some endorphins, and some positivity. For me that's gonna be a bag of Takis. I don't want a fucking carrot when I'm already stressed.

Yet, this is such a huge thing that I've noticed in higher education, especially when the offices tend to be all women led. I would think that as women we know – again this is an assumption – how our bodies are nitpicked in society, but diet culture and fatphobia runs so deep, I even want to say it kind of goes through every aspect of our society. The comfort of being in an all women office is taken away because now I am in a “diet zone” because my image is seen as more important than what I can bring to the table.

I remember this one girl from Mean Girls who says, “I just want everything to be rainbows and butterflies” when it comes to being better for other fat, queer, students of color. I think the first step is just even acknowledging students’ identities! For example, one of the classes my sister is taking this semester, the teacher at the beginning of the year had the students fill out a Google form asking them questions like: What are your pronouns? What is your preferred name? Do you have a preferred name? Could I use that preferred name with the adults in your life? Is it just for us? Do you need to use the bathroom more often when you menstruate? Just even acknowledging those things! This questionnaire, her teacher trying to understand and be inclusive has made it her favorite class. The teacher shows that she can be trusted because my sister shared her identity, she shared things that she struggles with, and the teacher didn't tell anybody else. The teacher keeps all this information between the student and her.

My sister also mentioned that this is the class that more students are engaged in. That more students participate, share ideas, and feel that they can make mistakes. I think for a lot of students, and I want to say this especially when I wasn't going to those college meetings because of how I felt in high school, I already felt in such a low place physically. I know that I didn't want to show up and be wrong, and feel like shit like on top of everything else. So students knowing that this teacher is immediately acknowledging and validating them as they are from the start, even if they make those mistakes, they won't feel like that one mistake is enough to break them.

I also think education is a bit different once coming to a college campus because conversations about pronouns, or how you identify yourself are had more often on a college campus. At least I've seen it a lot here at my campus, but I think in high school it's treated as if

the kids don't know, the kids don't pay attention. When in reality the kids know a lot, they notice a lot, but I say all this to emphasize that just acknowledging students' identities and not ostracizing your students for whatever difference they may have is so important.

I also want to mention that schools need to definitely get rid of those fucking small metal seats! Even now as my body has fluctuated with medication and with life itself, a lot of us gained weight over the pandemic. It was a traumatic event, we were locked in our houses, so of course people gained weight. Recently my office will go into a classroom because that's where we're meeting and none of us fit in those seats! Not just the fatter folks either, none of us fit! If we don't fit and we're adults, we also have students who are adults who are thirty years old and up, who are on campus who might not also fit in those chairs!

Looking at the needs of students from a holistic approach versus a budget approach is so important. I know that it is kind of impossible when you work at a Community College so small, but I think that's why it's important to sit on budget allocation committees to bring these things up, because if I am an administrator and I need to order seven hundred desks, I'm going to order the cheapest ones, which are those metal ones. But, if I have somebody in that committee telling me the reality of our students and that they don't fit in them, that they're really uncomfortable, I would hope they'd try to find more inclusive chairs that are comfortable for all students! We don't know what students are going through, it might have already taken so much for a student to get here, and if they show up and see those desks, they're not going to come back. I know I wouldn't come back, because if it's already a high stress situation it takes one thing for a student to just not come back to that class.

In terms of curriculum, one of the things that I think really helped me in high school was taking a transpersonal psychology class. It was actually created in the 70s at my high school for students who were dealing with severe drug addiction, who were addicted, from the seventies through to the nineties, to heroin and meth. It was literally a class based out of reflection and acknowledging your inner child and shadow work. It was basically therapy for two periods every single day during senior year. It was an incredible class and it was such a small class because our instructor was a licensed therapist and a teacher. I think just even implementing this in freshman year during life skills classes, and teaching students that they are not the things that happen to them, they are not the situations they have lived through, and their trauma doesn't define who they are. This could be implemented into life skills, because those are life skills we all need!

It would be super beneficial because it really helped those in my class and myself. We were talking about such heavy topics in that classroom and we were all under eighteen years old. It was really cathartic, and liberating to have that in a controlled environment. A lot of my friends from that class went on to find mental health providers, and got help for their anxiety and depression in healthy ways, versus a couple of friends who weren't in that class who were addicted to taking pills, Xanax, and other stuff like that because they did not know how to handle their emotional turmoil. This class was also great for my friends who were questioning their sexual identity. They were either closeted or they were on the down low, or they were trans and did not tell anybody until that class. There was a day where we literally showed up to class not knowing what we were going to do that day, and my teacher showed up and told us we were going to talk about our darkest secrets that we were going to get to know everybody today. We were seventeen in a classroom acknowledging that! Oh my god, I think we ran out of Kleenex

that day. It was such a cathartic experience because everybody was so welcoming. It was just so validating in that sense. Now, that high school has a LGBTQ studies course, like an actual course on the queer community. So even if students can't be fully out, they can still feel so much validation and just love for their identity, and for the future that they can envision because they learned about other queer folks, and they are taught that it is possible to have a fully fulfilling life. They imagine who they can be versus keeping it a secret they have to carry with themselves until they are either in college or out of their parents' house.

Overall it should be known as educators, and again including folks who are getting their master's degrees to work with students, how to work with the multiple intersections of all students' identities, the crossroads they might have to get through. I don't think that's addressed enough, and in order to get a degree to prepare people to work with students, taking one class is not enough! I believe it should be more involved because we cannot view students as just a student, who is nothing else but that identity. Educators should be constantly working to better understand the students and their identities.

In education, this is one small part of a student's entire lived experience, and I think a lot of our teachers and educators are ill-prepared, not by their own fault. I don't know what type of training would make it better in terms of implicit bias. Regardless, it affects students, especially when that educator has unresolved issues like the PE teacher who was a former fat person who still had a lot of hatred for their fat self, so they lashed out at children. The same thing could be said about somebody who is forced to be closeted by a parent, and now they have internalized homophobia against other queer people. They might not mean to be bigoted or they're not intentionally wanting to be a bad person, but I think internalized issues educators are feeling

need to be addressed because those issues will overflow, and now the kids are the ones getting the negative effects of the issues that they do not want to address.

Deondre:

I'm Deondre, I'm twenty-six, and I identify as a cisgender, big, Black, gay man. It has honestly been a journey coming into each of my identities, and it is still a continuous process. Coming into my Blackness, first of all, was a thing of its own. I was around eighteen years old when the Black Lives Matter movement really came about. That's when I started learning and unlearning things about myself as a person. I had to really sit down and open my eyes and take a step back, especially growing up in a predominantly white family with a white mom. My parents were separated so that really impacted me, and it impacted how much I was connected to my communities. I had to really take time and educate myself with that.

My body image is something that I'm still currently working on, and honestly it's an ongoing process. I'm finally getting into a place where I need to accept where I'm at, and accept that this is the body that I gotta go through life with. It has been difficult because I've been on some sort of diet since I was in the sixth grade, which is around the age of eleven. At the time I didn't understand why! Other kids weren't doing that! So why, why me? I just wanted to be a kid and eat my McDonald's in peace like everybody else. Even at home and in sports I had to be on a diet. When playing football, I had to be a certain weight to even be able to play the game. I was told to maintain a certain weight, which immediately made me think of food as good or bad. I was on such a restricting diet, it impacted my relationship with food, and with myself at such a

young age, and it made me feel as though I had to maintain this body ideal that wasn't ever going to come.

It didn't help that around that time I had this teacher in middle school -- let me start off and say I would always go to the liquor store in the morning before school. I would get some type of energy drink, some chips, or some other snack. I would do this because he let us eat in class, so that's on him. So, one random day I came in and had my usual snacks in hand. That day he came in, walked up to me in front of the whole class and said, "Why do you always gotta eat in here?" I was so hurt, like dang. Now I'm pinpointed as the fat kid, the one that everybody's looking at. Maybe he wasn't necessarily picking on me because I'm fat, maybe he was picking on me for something else, I don't know. Regardless, I was targeted, and it was something that just sat with me, like damn. Now if I decide to eat in that class again, everybody will notice and view me as this little fat kid eating every day. I didn't even wanna bring any food to school after that. That interaction changed my entire dynamic on how I felt about myself in general.

To this day I still feel like people in the grocery store, restaurants, or anywhere there is food, are watching me. Whether it's what I'm putting in my basket, what I order, or wondering if the people in the fast food drive through line think I'm ordering too much. I definitely still have a weird, crazy relationship with food. I also definitely don't want to eat in front of people. I hate feeling like I'm overeating, or being perceived as just "the fat guy" or whatever. My fatness also impacted me with my my gayness. I felt like because I was fat for so long that I could not come out. Fatness impacts a lot of things, society, teachers, and family. It just puts so much on you from the jump, and it makes people go into a shell, and all one can do is just try to coast through life unscathed till you feel comfortable and safe to be yourself.

In high school it felt different -- I don't know. Maybe because I grew up in the Bay Area in Hayward, everybody was so different. I feel like people just let people do them for the most part. Weirdly, I actually didn't have a lot of male friends. So, I didn't get a lot of shit from them for my weight specifically. But you could definitely see the difference between interactions amongst others and myself, because all of my friends were fat people too. I could definitely tell it was different with me versus a girl who was fat. If we're walking up to a group of guys, it would be seen as cool and then my friends would be viewed as "the fat chicks." It was always that and as much as I try to be aware -- maybe because as a man, I didn't notice it as much at the time. But yeah, I would say there's definitely a difference in how I as a fat man was treated versus how my fat women friends were treated.

Nevertheless, there was something in that teacher's words that made me feel less than, and unfortunately I've kept that with me. So I'm trying my best to work on getting comfortable with my body, but it's only been in the last year where I truly started feeling content with myself and my body for the first time. I also do want to mention that after I lost some weight recently, I definitely noticed the difference in how people treat me! Going to school when I was bigger, I didn't make that many friends. Not necessarily saying people wouldn't talk to me, but it wasn't like people were going out of their way to talk to me. Now though, I feel like people -- and I'm not even necessarily skinny at all -- but I feel like people go out of their way to talk to me, go out of their way to be friendly. It just goes to show how fatphobia is in society and you don't even notice it until you are on both sides, it's crazy.

As I think about my experience in school overall, especially with teachers, I have few that stand out to me. I had a teacher in middle school that was my Leadership and English

teacher. He also ended up coming to my high school, and he became my English teacher for my senior year. He did his best, and it was nice that he found ways to always relate with us, and teach us through music. We would always go through lyrics together and talk about the meanings and ideas together. He was able to teach us in a different way, not the standard way most teachers did. He understood how our society was gonna perceive us or whatever the case may be, and he did his best to push through that. I also feel like he was just able to teach me a different way to love, not necessarily just myself, but how to care about people in general. He helped me find my love for people in my communities, and overall for all people. Since then I try to be as inclusive as possible to all people in my career and in my life. With him teaching us empathy and how to be accepting of all people in society, he helped me in ways I can't even explain, and I am so grateful for that. He also became a mentor for a lot of the other male students, the ones who were kind of less privileged. He would take them on trips, and on boats and other stuff to be a father figure for them. I didn't have a father figure, so I feel like he was always just trying to help, and help us to get to places and experience things that we wouldn't necessarily be able to at home.

I have one teacher that I still talk to this day, she was my AVID teacher in high school. She has invited us to her baby showers and other life events, which is really cool. She was the first teacher to let me just be me. I would go into her class, crack jokes, and just be stupid. I always felt like I could relate to her, and she never made me feel like I was weird. Or if I felt like I was acting a little bit *gayer*, she wasn't ever judging me or looking at me differently. I always felt like in school, if you act in a certain way, or you know had a little twang to your voice, you

would always get a look. Whether it be a teacher or a student, she always just let me be me, which was really cool, and that's one reason I still keep in contact with her.

You know, people that I kept around, we knew that there were other people that always *knew*. But I always remember having my cousin, who is also my best friend, who knew, without me telling her, and she would still defend me and say I wasn't queer. Even though in the back of their mind, they knew. But it was always reassuring to have somebody that is always going to be there, and always gonna stick up for you even when you're not around.

I've had people question my sexual identity, ever since elementary school. At that age, I was a kid, and I especially liked to wear a lot of bright colors. I had a family friend that would custom design clothes and shoes. He made me, I remember this one pair of shoes I had, they were Air Force Ones that were all glittered out in blue and silver. He then made me a matching shirt to go with it. I was so juiced to go to school with my matching stuff, and everybody liked it for the most part. At the end of the day, there was an older girl and she was like, "You know everybody talking about you saying you're gay, right?" That comment crushed me immediately, it didn't matter if everybody the whole day said that I looked good, that my outfit was fly! All it took was that one person to kill my whole mood.

Growing up, even on TV, when you saw a gay character, it was a little white twink, and I didn't relate to that. Honestly to this day -- well, maybe in a Marvel movie or a tv show -- I think I have seen only a few fat Black men that are gay, so it's not often that I have a lot of representation even now. Folks are working on it of course, but I didn't think that gay people could even be fat until I decided I wanted to come out. Even after, it's still a struggle, you know?

It doesn't help that the gay community, in itself, have their own weird fatphobia. It's built in everywhere you go.

Anyway, what I noticed after this was that plenty of people when I was growing up, my whole life, would talk about me behind my back, saying that I was gay. Being gay is not a bad thing, but talking about it like it was negative, or just questioning it behind my back was. Just the fact that it was never brought up to me, people like they couldn't ask me, I feel like maybe the more we talked about it, it would have been a little bit easier for me to feel safe enough to come out. Teachers are also not necessarily going around in high school, asking who's talking about who. I didn't necessarily feel like I had a safe place where somebody's gonna have my back. Other than my cousin, who wasn't always at school. For example, we used to do roast battles in school, people thinking it's just playful roasting, everybody's having fun, we're all laughing. It would always come down to me being gay. Like yes, they were right, but they made it be such a stigma! So much so it made me scared to actually come out. They were just pushing it on me so hard on it, and made it seem like such a bad thing. So that stuff hurt me at the end of the day. The things people were saying whether they're joking or not, it hurt my feelings. It made me feel like I couldn't be me.

I had one younger teacher, she was either twenty-four or twenty-five at the time, who I got really close with. I feel like we all need to have somebody that people could go to, and I felt like I could go to her. It's also not necessarily easy to have that one person on campus for everybody, but just making teachers more accessible to students in general. I feel like, especially the older teachers, are tired of doing this work, they kind of just close off, but kids still need a

little extra help. Students just need somebody to talk to, the kids are bullying them and the teachers don't know because they're not out there.

Despite it all, I would say that I had a great school experience, but not in the way that I wanted to. I think because I'm so charismatic, outgoing, and people kind of just get along with me pretty well. It was easy for me, I still had friends, and I still had a good time, so that was fine. But did I live my truth? Go through school the way that I wanted to? No, not at all. So, I definitely think that it was good, but it could have been a million times better if I was able to be me. I believe I could have flourished a lot more if I felt like people weren't talking about me, and they just talked *to* me, I didn't even necessarily feel like I was an outcast at all or anything. It's just the fact that people were doing it, you know?

Now it's amazing to be able to go to school now and just walk into a room and say, “Yeah, I'm that fat, gay, Black guy, and what about it?” Just introducing people to the real me is amazing versus when I first started college. Before I'd definitely walk into a room and I'd still be in my shell, still trying to be a straight guy, like how I was in high school. So, it's definitely a different experience doing phlebotomy. Being me, getting along with people, making even a couple of friends. I felt like I wouldn't have done the same thing in high school or in my first experience in college.

In college, I ended up going to Hawaii for just a vacation right before the start of the semester, and I was supposed to come back the day before. I was in this communication class and I missed my flight home, so I missed the first day at school. I had this professor that basically told me I wasn't serious about school. He basically told me he didn't think I was serious about my education if I'm going on vacation right before school. So, I ended up dropping his

class and took a sign language class with another teacher. She ended up just being one of the few people I could talk to too and connect with as I was learning more about myself after high school. I think she was trying to make this deaf film, trying to just bring awareness to deafness, the struggle, and how people live, and trying to build connections. I just felt like she was a really just good soul. Surprisingly she was not a person that I related to at all, she was just this older white lady that was there to support us students. She just made me feel like I could be myself. Whatever the case was where I was stressed, I would message her and she would just tell me to relax and I would just get through it and be done. She was the only good person I had compared to other professors I had in my brief time in traditional higher education. Reflecting on all my teacher interactions, I just feel like the negative experiences are the hardest because I feel like they are the ones that have stuck with me for the longest time.

As for what I could change for queer students of color, I would definitely want some resource, I'm not sure what yet, that could be anonymous. Especially because people that don't feel like they could be seen or heard, can have somebody to talk to without the fear of being outed, targeted, or whatever the case may be. That's why I think people are so scared of what we do have, like a Gay Straight Alliance. We had that, but I mean, I was not going to do that. Because if I did go, people would automatically know that I was gay, and I was so scared of people talking about that part of me. As much as you want students to be able to feel comfortable, to do that, it's still scary. So, something maybe a little bit more anonymous, would be a bit easier. Maybe if there is a hotline or an anonymous text number that students could text every once in a while, just text and talk about how they're feeling that day. The counselors, even

in school, were not counselors, they were there to make your schedules. They weren't there to listen to your home stories.

For our fat brothers and sisters -- I don't know. It's hard to make support groups or get help without making you feel like you're different. Not necessarily different, but without feeling like you're pinpointing just that attribute. Some people might not feel comfortable talking about their fatness, especially if they are still working through their own fatphobia.

As far as teachers, I feel like we need to be way more strict on who we're hiring as educators, and overall the staff in schools in general. We have a lot of people that are teaching that don't need to be, and are judging our students rather than teaching them.

I'm back right now working at a school right now, actually, in the meantime while I'm in phlebotomy. I definitely love being a different kind of educator, you know, just not your standard white male teacher. I feel like it's something different for students to look up to. I feel like the kids are getting someone young minded, I guess you could say. I still know all the TikTok trends and the current trends, they love that. They love to be able to talk about that stuff with me, so being funny, Black, and gay... well I'm not out to my kids necessarily yet. But I mean, if they asked, I would tell them! It's just something I wish I would have had. I wish I would have had a me for me as a kid.

For example, a couple of years ago, there was this kid that I was really close with, he was just attached to me every day to the hip. He was a real athletic kid, came in like basketball shorts and t-shirts every day, a little white boy. One day he came with press-on nails, and a lot of the staff were like, "Oh my god why does he have nails on?" while I was the opposite and was like "Aw Jessie, you came with nails today. Those look cool. Those are nice!" You know, just trying

to make him feel comfortable, trying to make him feel okay because the kids at school were talking about it and making him feel weird about it. As previously mentioned with my outfit from elementary school, if I had a teacher or somebody that I would have gone up to, and they said, “Your outfit was cool today!” maybe I wouldn't have cared about what the little girl had said about people calling me gay!

There was another kindergartener a few years back, and I work in Castro Valley so it's a predominantly white and Asian American area. We had a little Black boy that came to our program, and students are elementary aged, so they were young. They just learned about slavery that day, so when they came back to our after-school program, some of the kids started talking about – I don't know if they were talking about him or his hair or something – but it was in a negative way. I came up and I just sat them all down and I was like “when you guys are learning about this stuff they are teaching you about some of the bad things that have happened to Black folks” etc, and I mean, for kindergarteners, it's kind of hard to explain. But as best as I can, I broke it down and just let them know that it's not right to make fun of him. I didn't have, at least as a kid, I didn't have somebody like me to talk to like that or defend me when I needed it.

Overall, I would definitely advocate for more teachers with intersectional identities to be teaching students or teachers who have a commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. But I understand that it's so hard too because they're not getting paid enough, and nobody's fighting for them in ways that they deserve.

CHAPTER IV

Data Analysis

As mentioned previously, each of these individual's stories is unique and theirs alone. Yet their identities of being fat queer students of color is shared. It must be noted that although their journeys are unique, as I will explain, their experiences are similar in nature due to their intersecting identities. At the same time, their experiences are quite different as well due to the way differences of race, gender identity, and other contributing factors play out in their experiences. As I analyze their stories, I will be keeping the questions of this study in the front of my mind: How did the identities of fatness, queerness, and race impact the relationships developed with educators? How did this impact the way these students engaged with their education? Lastly, how can schools be more supportive of and welcoming for fat queer students of color?

Utilizing my theoretical framework of Critical Fat Intersectional Theory, as I reflect and analyze these stories, I aim to be deeply aware of the multidimensions of identity politics, the importance of intersectionality, and the overall need to incorporate Fat folks' experiences into this theoretical and praxis based scholarship. Fat folks' experiences are more than single-axis experiences. The discrimination they experience is not solely based on a singular identity, each intersectional identity – queerness, race, and gender - deeply impacts how students are treated, and how they walk through the world. As you read this analysis, my hope is that their experiences can be made clearer. I aim to utilize Crenshaw's (1991) notion of "both/and" rather than "either/or" to be able to respond to the multiplicity of how their identities interact with each other.

As I spoke about earlier in Chapter 1, examining the way fatness is understood and explored in academia, how it plays a role in the way educators, and administrators on campus

view or examine their own weight-based biases and how they project these biases onto students is of vital importance. A case in point about the impact of these intersecting identities is the way Evelyn, Anastasia, and Deondre had negative experiences with adults on campus, or even the way that diet culture is pushed deeply in higher educational spaces as mentioned by Evelyn, or how Deondre's queerness superseded his other identities of fatness, gender, and race since in his body as a man, these other identities were held differently because they could be seen in light of his higher positions of power as a man in contrast to Evelyn and Anastasia who are women. In the sections that follow, I begin by analyzing just some of the negative experiences, including those in schools, that participants shared. Not wanting to engage solely in damage centered research (Tuck, 2009), I follow with an analysis of their positive experiences, including those in schools.

The Negative Experiences

In this following section, I describe and analyze three different types of negative experiences encountered by participants: anti-fatness from others, classroom call outs, and seemingly inevitable biases. Each is described in the sections that follow.

Anti-Fatness from Others

Fatness has always been present in each of the participants' lives. This notion of fatness was not conceived by their own accord, but rather was placed on them by society, their family or educators. Meaning that experiencing fatphobia, anti-fat rhetoric, or diet culture, contributed to their experiences in education.

For Evelyn and Anastasia, both of their families fell into the trap of Eurocentric ideals that obesity is frowned up, and that attaining smaller frames and bodies are ideal, especially in women and femme presenting people (Harrison, 2021, String, 2019, Tovar, 2018) This

perception of being fat as negative, is heightened due to their gender. As mentioned in chapter two, McNinch (2016) found that fat girls are more likely to be bullied in primary education - which was Anastasia's case.

Anastasia relates that her bullies were also fat, but they were fat boys. Fat boys, although they experience fatphobia as well, do not experience it in the same capacity as fat women. As talked about by Anastasia, fat men perpetrate fatphobic rhetoric towards fat women – falling into a trap of eurocentric and gendered beauty standards that are a part of diet culture in American society. Anastasia also mentions that she is unsure if her weight was a contributing factor to the bullying, stating that her name and racial identity contributed to the bullying first. However, if we remember the experience expressed by Deondre – how he knew he was treated differently by peers than his fat women counterparts, the intersection of gender with fatness cannot be ignored. Similarly Anastasia believes that all her intersectional identities contributed to her horrible treatment in higher education. Her experience was similar to other fat students in higher education as documented by research Stevens (2018). As she reflected on her higher education experience, she felt that if she was not a fat queer person of color that the administration would have taken her mental health and concerns more seriously. If she was skinny and white, that administration would have paid her more attention, and would have made sure to connect her with appropriate resources for her mental health and safety.

Regarding fatness and gender, for women and femme presenting people, the idea of oversexualization and infantilization are two concepts on the same wheel. For Anastasia, her body was oversexualized at a young age. Where her weight was distributed among her body, had made men feel as if they could catcall a child. As she noted, it was due to her appearing older, but she still looked like the child she was. But due to her body developing differently than her

straight sized peers, because of where her fatness was placed, men felt as if they had a green light to begin sexualizing her. On the contrary, Evelyn who described her body as a small fat body, noted that she was infantilized at her young age, because the idea that a fat person is a sexual being was one that her teachers and peers could not understand.

In the case of Deondre, as a fat, Black, gay man, he had never seen representation. He had never seen fat gay men of color, only skinny white gay men. Experiencing fatphobia and erasure is a very common experience for fat gay men of color, and other fat folks in the LGBTQIA community. Unfortunately, being skinny and having eurocentric features, is a beauty standard that transcends into all communities. Due to this, Deondre felt as if he could not come out as gay, because he had never seen people like himself, who are fat and Black, reflected in his community, which left him feeling isolated and trapped.

Being judged based on where you land on the fatness spectrum is still an experience that many fat folks continue to encounter. There is no good fat or bad fat, there are only misconstrued ideas about what is acceptable in our society, and to be oversexualized and infantilized are very common experiences for fat women and fat femme presenting people. Not only that, the erasure of fat folks and their experiences, particularly fat queer men of color, has and continues to impact the way we are supported and seen in our own communities.

Classroom Callouts

To be called out in class, whether to answer a question or to bring insight, for most students can cause a sense of anxiety. For the participants, they were not called out to add discussion to the classroom, they were called out to be humiliated by their educators. Parts of who they are, parts that they cannot change were made apparent to all their peers through these acts of involuntary identification.

Evelyn's weight was pointed out by her physical education teacher in front of the entire class, which to most is not surprising. Her educator, being a formerly fat person, held deep fatphobic rhetoric which caused her to treat fat students horribly in comparison to their straight-sized counterparts. It is assumed that formerly fat people would hold more empathy for fat students, but as described by McNinch (2016), this is not always the case.

Not only did Evelyn experience one classroom callout in elementary school, she experienced another one in college. When, because of her intelligence, she made a reference to a theory that was not yet covered by her professor, he felt it was appropriate to say that she "was really smart for a Mexican." Of course this made her uncomfortable, as it would anybody, because this professor assumed her identity without knowing, and secondly his comment made it seem as if all Mexicans were dumb, and it has been common in higher education as noted by Pausé (2016) that faculty also perpetuate harmful notion of fatphobia, such as students being seen as lazy. This comment called her out as the exception to other Mexican or Latine students. It is also calling out her proactiveness that educators and faculty assume that fat folks do not have.

Although fatness can be and is gendered to women, Deondre's experience, also including an educator pointing out his weight, is still valid. Again, Deondre was unsure why he was being targeted specifically in this class by his teacher, but one thing is certain: as a fat queer student of color, he was targeted for his weight by the teacher's comment regarding just the foods he was eating in class. It could be another case of weight biases held by his educator (Stevens, 2017) similar to Evelyn's educators. Regardless, each of these experiences have stuck with the participants through their educational career and through their life.

Seemingly Inevitable Biases

Unfortunately, fatphobia, homophobia, sexism, racism, and many other forms of discrimination are deeply embedded into the systems and institutions that we work in. With these biases being systemic, educators inevitably can have these biases instilled in their mind and daily life. It takes a lot of deep learning and unlearning to combat biases, but for some educators, this work is too much, or the biases they hold can be even unknown to them. Unfortunately, students are still suffering from these biases.

Evelyn brought to light how diet culture and fatphobia are deeply embedded in higher education (Pausé, 2016). Coming from her first hand experience, she talked about how it was pushed onto women and femme presenting people specifically. Being in a women led office, she had hoped that fatphobia and diet culture wouldn't have impacted the office environment, but unfortunately it did because as mentioned previously fatphobia and diet talk is gendered. Although these conversations were being discussed in an office setting, these folks are still making decisions that impact fat people. For example, Evelyn described the problem with metal chairs at school. Unaware of the lack of accessibility typical one armed metal chairs hold, her colleagues were unable to understand why Evelyn protested buying these chairs for the university. She had to describe her positionality as a fat person to make her colleagues understand that not all bodies were being taken into consideration with this chair buying decision. This diet culture, lack of accessibility for fat people, and anti-fat rhetoric impact not only the way students are treated, but also how fat queer students of color are supported and how their bodies are hyper(in)visible (Stevens, 2017).

As an Iranian-American, Anastasia experienced racism from a very young age, but I want to examine how all of her identities, of gender, fatness, and race, were contributing factors to the

torment she faced not only by peers, but unfortunately by her educators as well. With queerness, in her case and in Evelyn's case, they were able to "pass" for the majority of their educational experiences. Meaning that to most, the way they were perceived, didn't include their sexuality, since their other identities took center stage. Her educator, Ms. Parsons targeted Anastasia, initially for her race. Asking if she could describe a Muslim funeral, a racist question since she had assumed her identity. Anastasia could not answer that question, and when another student volunteered to answer, who was Muslim, Miss Parsons decided she did not want the answer anymore. It is easy to see the racism that this educator had, but Anastasia's fatness cannot be ignored in this situation as well, why her of all her peers? There was another middle eastern student in the class, but Miss Parsons decided to pick on her, a fat middle eastern girl who was particularly visible at that moment. Anastasia describes feeling humiliated by her educator, a feeling that no student should ever experience, and unfortunately this humiliation was heightened and targeted by her intersectional identities.

As a young boy, Deondre was comfortable in expressing his authentic self. He described a day where he wore a blinged out outfit from head to toe, just being a child who loved glitter and felt fly because of his new outfit. He felt confident all day until one comment crushed him, he was told that "everybody is talking about you being gay." Unable to be his true self, the negativity and fear that came with being seen as gay, became disheartening, and unfortunately it became a common theme in his educational experience.

Personal biases are human, but as educators, it is our responsibility to overcome these biases that have been taught to us. Each student is unique and we must understand that, no matter how one might feel about fatness, queerness, race, and their combination, each student deserves respect, support, and care, without fear of humiliation or retaliation.

The Positive Experiences

Thankfully, not all of the participants' experiences were negative. The participants in this study also described experiences with educators, or other support staff on campus that centered on empathy and love. This allowed students to feel seen and heard in such radically healing and supportive ways.

Empathy is Cool

Empathy is an ability to truly be able to understand another person's thoughts, feelings, and or experiences from their point of view. It has a deep tie to emotional understanding and closeness to other individuals. To be able to be empathetic allows for deeper emotional bonds amongst educators, support staff, and their students. These bonds can leave deep lasting impacts.

Anastasia was able to connect with some of her educators through her poetry. She notes that she was able to connect with one of her educators, Mr. Tebbs, who was able to empathize with her, even more so after he had read her first hand experiences. It must be noted that Mr. Tebbs, is the complete opposite of Anastasia, he is white and straight sized, but as she found out later, he is queer. It could be assumed that these differences impact his understanding of her experiences, but in this case, he used it as a way to sympathize and/or empathize with Anastasia since he hasn't experienced life similarly to her. He was able to support her through identities and through her writing. She also had Mr. Hines, a man, who helped her build confidence in her femininity, her sexuality, and her Persian identity. He empathized with students so much, he became known as the teacher that was never judgemental, and made sure to keep his door open during lunch so students could have a judgment free space.

Evelyn mentions having her Multicultural Center coordinator who would check on her as well when she started college. Evelyn talks about how due to her medications, her weight would

fluctuate. Her coordinator would pull her aside to check in on her. Rather than praise her for losing weight during the periods of weight loss, she aired on the side of concern even though when a fat person loses weight, it is common just to praise them. It is not common to check in, to make sure they are not suffering from an eating disorder, a sickness, depression, or anything else that can be impacting them negatively that could be causing the weight loss.

Deondre was able to feel supported by his middle school teacher, who was the first to teach him empathy, who taught him how to be accepting of all people of society, not only through his teaching but through his actions. This teacher supported his students in ways that followed Deondre and his peers. Deondre also mentions his AVID teacher, someone who he still keeps in touch with to this day. He talks about how she was one of the first to let him exist as just himself. He described how he felt like he could act in any way, even in ways that made him seem “gayer.” She never judged him, never let him feel weird, or looked at him differently. She created a space that allowed Deondre to show up as his complete and authentic self.

Not only that, Deondre became the person he needed when he was a kid. He currently works at an elementary school, and he has taken it upon himself to become that person who shows empathy, compassion, and understanding to his students. He talked about a previous student, who, just like him, wanted to express himself in a way that some folks wouldn’t understand – this little boy came to school with press-on nails. Rather than criticize him like his colleagues, he supported him. He complimented him, and made him feel confident in himself, just as he had wished an educator would have done for him so many years ago.

Fat People Loving Fat People

There is nothing more powerful than radical community love. Fat folks are not immune to internalized fatphobia, so to have the ability to love one another, and support one another is

not a feeling that is always felt. To be able to empathize with and connect with others who have a mutual understanding of your experiences can be inspiring and can instill hope in one another.

Supporting our communities is the best way to combat and recharge from the biases we face.

Anastasia shares the first example of seeing another fat person of color care for one another. She talks about her RA, her name still unknown, but her actions are unforgettable. She was the one who supported Anastasia through her grueling experience of trying to drop out. She supported her emotionally, helped her find the paperwork needed to drop out of college, and even helped her pack her dorm room. This care, love and kindness literally saved Anastasia's life. This person, who was also a fat woman of color, supported Anastasia when she needed someone the most, when she had already felt targeted for her intersectional identities, someone who could relate to her on a level that is hard to come by.

Evelyn describes her new office environment as a better one, since it is run by an executive dean, who is also a fat first generation Latina. For Evelyn, having this dean, who is someone like her, has been inspiring. Seeing a fat woman, as an executive member of a college is hard to come by, so seeing a fat woman of color is something to celebrate. So much so, she even let her dean know just how happy she was to now work under someone like her. Not only that, Evelyn is now able to work in an environment that isn't focused on diet culture or has fatphobia because her dean doesn't allow for these conversations to happen. Fat people are allowed to exist naturally, as they are, in these high level stress positions without having to worry about fatphobic rhetoric or conversations occurring.

Evelyn also mentioned previously that her multicultural coordinator would also check in with her when her weight would fluctuate. She also mentions that she had a faculty member, and professor who were both fat as well, check in with her in a similar manner, to check in and make

sure she was doing okay. Although she states it was frustrating to have the changes in her body constantly noticed, she understands now that they were addressing these things, and doing it carefully because they knew as fat people themselves, what it was like to have comments on their weight happen, especially those regarding weight loss

Through these few experiences, seeing fat people loving and caring for other fat people is a beautiful thing to witness and experience, and these few folks in educational spaces are doing such powerful work by supporting fat queer students of color.

Reimagining Educational Practices

Each participant has hopes in reimagining educational practices for other fat queer students of color who will inevitably go through the same educational systems as them.

For Anastasia reimagining education includes including more empathy based learning for students. She suggests that students can have the opportunity to understand others and connect on deeper levels by beginning these conversations in classrooms. Allowing for all students to feel safe to ask their teachers questions that they might not feel comfortable having at home, or even if they feel like it's a "dumb question". For educators, she would love to see more professional development for educators that includes understanding and utilizing empathy in the classroom and with student interactions – she notes the interactions with students are important because students are constantly watching their teachers, watching how they act and treat others in the classrooms. Lastly she includes the importance of hiring and supporting fat educators so they can also support fat queer students of color. Not many educators, as seen through the participants' experiences, were fat. Not because they don't exist, but because anti-fatness can lead to fat folks being pushed out of employment settings and educational spaces, this can impact

many not making it through school or through teacher education programs to be hired or supported enough to make it to the classroom (Pausé, 2016).

For Evelyn, reimagining education includes getting rid of the metal chairs that are so inaccessible to many fat students. She also wants the needs of the students to be looked at through a holistic lens and approach, rather one that is budget focused. She understands that it can be a tough task, but it is one that is necessary for the benefit of students. In terms of curriculum, Evelyn believes that including a mandatory class, whether through state standards or individual school graduation standards, should include a class that is similar to therapy. In her case this class was called Transpersonal Psychology, which allowed students to learn and share space with their peers, to work through their traumas, and develop the life skills and other skills needed to understand, empathize, and sympathize with each person's intersectional identities. Lastly, she would like to see educators truly understanding the importance of how to work with all student's intersectional identities – so they can view students as more than just students, but as people who will walk through the world. It is teachers' responsibility as educators to do better for their students.

For Deondre, reimagining education includes more resources, such as anonymous based groups to be able to talk to folks without the fear of being outed or targeted by peers, whether that be a hotline or a text number for students to reach out to mental health counselors or other support staff on campus. As for hiring practices, he would like to see a more selective approach of who is hired, not to discriminate against teachers but to wean out teachers who have biases that they are not willing to unlearn for the betterment of themselves and for the student population they are serving. Having educators who are judging and discriminating against students does nothing for the betterment of fat queer students of color, or other historically

marginalized students. Deondre would also advocate for more teachers with intersectional identities, such as other fat queer people of color and those who have a commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion, to become teachers. He understands that this is a difficult task due to lack of administration support, lack of teacher support, and a lack of pay that is given to educators for their hard work.

Reimagining education is just the first step in bringing the participants' ideas into fruition. It is this hope, notions, and work that can help create schools that are more supportive of and welcoming for fat queer students of color.

CHAPTER V

Conclusion

Through examination of my participants' stories, I am able to conclude that their identities deeply impacted their relationships with their educators. Each participant had experienced negative fatphobic, racist, or a combination of both, interactions with their educators. This included being called out in class, explicit anti-fat rhetoric, or seemingly inevitable biases. Thankfully, despite these negative experiences, participants had also experienced positive experiences that helped sustain them which included being supported by other fat people in education, and having educators who had the ability to be highly empathetic.

Each experience contributed to their overall experience with education. Thankfully, the good and empathetic teachers' impact sustained them throughout their educational careers. Evelyn currently works in higher education after receiving her bachelor's degree. Anastasia had decided to continue to her undergraduate degree at CSU East Bay. Lastly, Deondre has decided to continue his education in phlebotomy.

The participants in this study had an overall consensus in hiring educators who have the ability to be understanding, empathetic people who are willing to unlearn biases before entering into a career that exposes them to an array of student identities. They have also suggested that there is a need to push for more inclusive hiring practices that includes more fat educators, educators of color, and the combination of both, in hopes of bringing folks in who can support fat queer students of color. Other hopes included updating and implementing curriculum to help teach students empathy and the differences that each student can experience in their intersectional identities. Lastly there were suggestions for more professional development to help

educators, administrators and other support staff, to begin unlearning their biases, and to learn about different intersectional identities that differ from their own.

Recommendations for Further Study

As mentioned previously, this study has many limitations, whether that is the sample size, timeframe, or data collection, there are many ways to expand on this research. A larger sample size, with locational diversity can help us more deeply examine participant experience and look for patterns across a larger and more diverse sample. It can also contribute to data collection in examining the educators who had a negative impact on students, and examining the best techniques used by educators who made a more positive impact on students. With a use of a larger sample size, the ability to use more quantitative data collection could be utilized to find more proactive ways to understand other themes amongst the experiences of participants. I also recommend having a study that explores the intersection of transness specifically. The experience of fat trans people of color, especially now, is one that should be explored as well. Due to a timeline constraint, further research can include best practices in educating and unlearning anti-fat biases that can be utilized for teacher training, and professional development for all support staff on school campuses.

My hope for this research is that administrators, educators, and support staff can read through and reflect on their participation in these biases, whether that is knowingly or not, and how they might have contributed to their student's lives and educational experiences. Depending on whether they contributed positively or negatively, I hope that they aim to continue to be better, or that they start doing the necessary unlearning to be better for current students, and the next generation to come. I also hope that they take proactive steps to educate themselves and their colleagues in ways that are sustainable and long lasting.

Final Thoughts

Through powerful narrative research this study sought to bring more light on the experiences of fat queer students of color, and how their educational experience was impacted through interpersonal relationships with their educators. Existing literature had focused on one or two of these three intersectional identities, and my hope was to shed light on all three of these intersections.

As a fat queer student of color myself, navigating education has not been easy. I have faced very similar issues that have been discussed through these narratives, and my goal was to tell these stories in the hope of changing the rampant fatphobia, homophobia, misogyny, and racism that many students face, and continue to face in educational spaces from elementary to higher education.

My intention with this thesis was to understand other fat queer students of color's experiences in education. To see how their intersectional identities impacted their relationships with educators and how they engaged with their education. From these narratives, I was able to understand in which ways their experiences were positively and negatively impacted by educators. The ways they engaged with education was shaped by those experiences. As mentioned in their narratives, all participants have continued to engage in academia. Evelyn works in higher education, Anastasia continued her undergraduate degree at a different university, and Deondre is currently working in education, and has continued his own education to become a phlebotomist. Despite their negative experiences with educators, their positive experiences helped them work through the difficulties that came along with education while existing in a body that can and has experienced many forms of discrimination.

What I have taken away the most is that educators will not always remember the things they have said to students, but students will never forget how those experiences, negative or positive, made them feel. Each interaction students had or will have with educators is one that they will carry with them through their entire educational career. As educators, and all support staff on school campuses, especially now in the political climate we are working in, it is our duty to come into these spaces with open hearts and open minds to understand, empathize and sympathize with the multidimensional wholeness of our students' lives, and accept that we might not always understand. We do not always need to understand everything, but we do need to know when it is our time to teach, and when it's our time to be taught.

A Letter to all Fat Queer Students of Color

I understand the difficulty of being who we are in a society that has not been made with our bodies in mind. Just existing in our bodies, and loving who we are is an act of defiance and resistance. We deserve respect, kindness, and dignity. This past week, I was reminded of how little my fat body is taken into consideration in academia specifically. I picked up my regalia for graduation which included: a cap, gown, and hood. Excited for this big step in my educational career, I came home and decided to try on my gown and hood for the first time. Not to my surprise, the gown did not fit. My arms felt tight in the sleeves and I could not zip up the gown. My body is not a body that is expected to graduate with a Masters degree, so much so it wasn't even an option from the beginning to list my weight to ensure a proper fitting. I had no other fat person in this program to look towards, and to connect with in this experience, another reminder of how infrequently there are fat people in higher education. This was a physical reminder of why this work needs to be done. I had to work a bit harder to ensure my comfortability in my

own graduation, to be able to get a gown that fits properly around my soft body, an extra step that non-fat people do not need to do.

Times are hard, especially now with the wave of anti-trans legislation here in the United States. To be afraid for your life, as an educator or student, in our schools with the rampant gun violence taking lives. To be a person of color in our deeply racist society, dealing with microaggressions and much more within the walls of education. To experience anti-fat biases on a day to day basis, disguised as “health concerns” by peers, educators, health professionals and many more.

But despite all this hardship, the way we organize, combat, connect, celebrate, uplift, and work in our communities is sustaining and inspiring. Being resistant is beautiful, but it is also hard and exhausting. It is important for us to take care of ourselves, truly taking care, relaxing, resting our bodies and minds when needed. We do not need to be martyrs, we can work in conjunction with each other and build coalitions amongst ourselves to better support one another without burnout. This includes understanding our positionalities and making sure that all people in the spectrum of our communities are supported, knowing when to step in and when to take a step back. There is so much to learn and unlearn, and I can not wait for the day where we can exist in peace, and live the reality of our most radical and inspiring dreams.

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