The Spaces Between Us: A Queer<=>Intersectional Analysis of the Narratives of Black Gay International Students

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The Spaces Between Us: A Queer Intersectional Analysis of the Narratives of Black Gay International Students

A Dissertation

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Abstract

The experiences of international students along the lines of race and ethnicity, sexuality, gender, and nationality are virtually unknown. This study utilizes experience-centered narrative inquiry to explore the experiences of Black gay international students, and how they are racialized and sexualized in American higher education. Using a Queer and Intersectional framework, this study highlighted power structures and processes that continue to marginalize Black gay international students in the U.S. and in their home countries. Their narratives reflected significant moments or events that were important to them and how they understand their identities and realities. This study provides a strong foundation to continue the exploration of the lives of LGBTQ international students. The findings of the study offer the foundation for establishing several conclusions. It is important to note that these findings are specific and could be different if it were four other Black gay international students or varied if they attended other institutions. The findings showed that Black gay international students perform and experience their race and sexuality as connected, even in cases when they experience some dissonance due to negative experiences. The findings of the study included 1) construction of personal counter-spaces produced by resistive performances by participants 2) the problematizing race 3) tensions created by sexuality and 4) the positions within liminal national spaces.
Acknowledgements (Jah-I-Dun)

Dedicated to those I have loved, lost and gained along the way...

The culmination of this dissertation project marks an accomplishment that has taken sacrifice and has withstood great loss. For this reason, I would like to dedicate this to many of my close friends and family that have passed away and are not able to experience this moment. To my mother Evencia and sister Mirella, who have sacrificed much of their lives to see me live my life to the fullest—thank you. To Nick who was instantly my rock, transcriber and personal chef, I am forever grateful and fortunate to have you as part of my journey. A heartfelt thank you to Dr. Mary Wanza and Dr. Helen Ellison, who both encouraged and empowered me to make a difference in the lives of others. Over the years in this higher education program, I met numerous scholars, friends and mentors who have changed my life: Chayla Haynes Davison, Saran Stewart, Evette Allen, Kristin Deal, Nicholas Bowlby, Stacey Muse, Cerise Hunt, Jacquie Rich, Chris Linder, Jessica Harris, Raquel Wright-Mair, Bryan DeShasier, Kerrie Montgomery, Shametrice Davis, Myron Anderson, Lori Patton Davis, Cathy Akens, Ryan Barone, Tamara White, Janell Lindsey, Varaxy Yi Borremo, Delma Ramos, Darsella Vigil, and Nicole Russell. A special thank you to Tawny Hiatt who has always been a listening ear and getting me through some hard times. Thank you to my friends and colleagues at Cal Poly including Kathleen McMahon. There are so many others that I am not able to mention but I will be thanking you personally. I have been moved by my dissertation committee as they have seen me through the end: Frédérique Chevillot, Frank Tuit, William E. Cross Jr., and especially Ryan Evely Gildersleeve. Lastly, thanks to my participants for being brave enough to share your truth and life with us all.
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**Initial Positionality**

Beginning this dissertation project, I believed that it was an exploration of myself, after all I would be studying people like me. That has not been the case as I have combed through the literature. At this point I cannot truly and holistically conceptualize nor contextualize who I am based on what has been produced in the academy. There are academic pieces that resonate with me. Where research findings have aligned with my experiences, but even those seem to make me feel like parts of myself are still hidden. Like the process of partitioning myself to navigate, protect, and cope with discrimination and stress, extant literature in higher education reflects my fragmented self. It is like saying, this time I am Black and this next time I will be gay, and maybe this other time I will be Caribbean, or no how about a man, but wait, how about a Black man?

The literature is fractured, like how I have perceived myself, how I have produced myself, and as a matter of fact, how others have projected what and how I should perform the identities I hold. So how can this dissertation be an exploration of self, when this self cannot be wholly or complete? I know my truth and I have experiences that have shaped who I am today. This dissertation project then, is not an exploration of myself, but an exploration of those who are similar to me and their lives in the United States. This project remains important because as proposed, there is a need for this research. Based on anecdotal and experiential knowledge a need also exists to disprove the assumption that all Black men in college are the same, where a one size fits all approach will work for
those who possess the same social identities. But the question remains, *who am I?* In relation to this project my identity and experiences have a great influence on my research. My experiences should be considered an asset to this research and not a limitation.

So, who am I? I am a Black gay international student in the United States. I have had a unique and experience-rich educational journey, attending a community college in the Caribbean, being a non-traditional student at a Historically Black College and University in the STEM field, and a graduate student at a Hispanic Serving Institution and a Predominantly White Institution. I have always described myself racially as Black and ethnically mixed or Carib Amerindian when the probing questions arise. Going to an HBCU, I fought hard to claim being Black because that part of me was constantly challenged. People I would meet on campus would say, “*Oh, you’re Caribbean... not Black*” And I would say, “*No! Clearly, I am Black*” and the conversation would go on until, “*Wait, are you an international student?*” and I would go through a coming out of sorts.

Trying to figure out what I am would end there usually, and the questions that follow focused solely on *where* I was from and *why* would I ever want to leave there to move to *fill in the blank* [Baltimore, Miami, Columbus, or Denver]. But across all these cities I would also get the question “*Does everyone down there look like you?*” The answer I would give is, *no, I look like me*. Knowing exactly what they were asking, I would simply say I am Black. But the next statement always makes me feel like an inanimate object or a caged animal on display, “*But you look so exotic!*” So, does that
mean that other Black or African American people in the United States do not look exotic? It was a coupling of not fitting the stereotype or what it is to be Black in America.

When I met one of my best friends, Keenan, we were in New York in the subway, getting on the number 1 to the Bronx. I was pacing because it was the first time I took the train without someone who lived there. Keenan saw me pacing and asked me if I was lost. I responded saying “No I am ok,” even though I was sweating and visibly nervous because I was so unfamiliar with the system. The response that I got caught me off guard and bonded Keenan and I for life. “Oh, you’re a coconut!” Baffled, I asked him to explain. He then simply said, “You’re from the Caribbean” in his thickest Jamaican accent. Keenan is a second generation American, with family from Jamaica. But that signaled to me that many Americans assume that someone else is American unless otherwise noted or perceived. However, I do believe that disproving assumptions about race and nationality re-categorizes someone as different, and therefore treated differently. But there are some Americans who still rightfully remain under the assumption that “you are still Black” But wrongly equate that to being African-American. Despite my identification as non-American, I still get the statement “Oh, you’re not one of them!”

A prospective student, who I had a conversation with as he waited to meet with a faculty member made this statement. The student was a White man in his 40s attending an event at the school, interested in being an elementary school teacher. “Whatever do you mean?” I asked vindictively. He said as a whisper, “You know, them, the other Black people in America, ‘they’ are just ‘here’ and ‘they’ cannot speak well.” After I had recovered from the metaphoric punch to the stomach, I gathered my thoughts and asked
“Why do you think they don’t speak well and why do you assume that ‘they’—African Americans, right—are simply just there?” He explained, unphased by my line of questioning, that I was educated and is not the case with all Black people. Yes, I did walk away from the conversation feeling defeated from defending my fellow brothers and sisters and also “gay people” (which I will get to later). What this brought to light was the stereotype that Black Americans are not educated and unproductive members of society.

At this point I need to own and identify a past assumption that I held as it relates to Black or African Americans. This assumption I had not confronted until my doctoral program. As a Black international student who had similar experiences with my Black counterparts, I struggled to understand their experiences with racism and advancement with regard to careers and education. I questioned why many remained in their communities, churches, or in positions where they continued to experience marginalization. I even took this further by buying into this belief of meritocracy where I expressed that if Black Americans worked harder, they could achieve everything I achieved, and in many cases, surpass me. Confronting this belief was challenging since I had to acknowledge my privileges and forced to understand a perspective that was foreign to me. I began to realize, identify, and challenge this learning as a form of internalized racism that I projected outwardly.

It is important to acknowledge my change in thinking and perceptions since it signals my growth understanding of race and intersections of racism with other forms of discrimination. It also signals that understandings of race are different based on an individual’s country of origin. Black international students, although experiencing racism
may perpetuate it despite its insidious impact on their experiences. This interaction with
the prospective student went beyond my Critical Race Theory course, which
contextualized what I spent months trying to confront, and helped me challenge my own
assumptions. Critically reflecting on this interaction helped to connect the dots when
thinking about my participation in American society. I became abnormal to the
prospective student who thought I was working the refreshment stand at the event. His
racialization of my body seemed different than for others, where I troubled his thinking
and labeling. Although this points to an underlying assumption about the institution the
student sought admission to, it explained more about the belief system that he
foregrounds his thinking.

As mentioned previously, coming out is not only confined to sexuality and it is
something that happened regularly with not much ease. Before I go on, I should explicitly
identify myself further. I am from Castries, St. Lucia with roots grounded in the south
village of Choiseul and Laborie. Coming out as an international student would require
educating others about what it is or means to be one. “Oh, how does that work? You’re
still African American... right?” This conversation would happen on campus but not as
frequent as the awkward off campus conversations. Coming out as an international
student, always reminds me as coming out as gay—It is a process that continues to
happen. Many times, I look for opportunities to pass, because I do not want to go through
the mini-interviews or just the process of divulging that information. I always think that it
is obvious that I am not from the United States because of my accent, but how safe is it to
pass when harmful assumptions are being made or negative stereotypes are being perpetuated? This I am still trying to answer.

In the United States, I go through several coming out processes, but coming out is usually associated with being part of the LGBT community. It is sometimes obvious to some people that I am gay, but others have been surprised when I have said terms like “partner, boyfriend, gurl, and gay bar.” In some cases, I have had to identify as gay because of the assumption that a Black man who is not overly flamboyant is not gay. Black masculinity just does not allow it! Some people will literally ask, “You’re joking, right? You can’t be a fag!” Sometimes it has been difficult to find a place in the Black community because I have experienced homophobia within it. In the gay community, I have felt like a threat to the cause or an outsider to eroticize, where there is no way that I could be gay; and so, within the gay community I experienced racism in the gay community. I can remember reflecting about my experience being Black and gay:

I think of my safety constantly since my friend was beaten to death back home for being gay. Now, in America, there is an even greater sense of self-awareness because I have no choice but to think about the color of my skin. Although many people are a lot more open here in certain areas, I still walk in fear because I am gay… and Black… and not from around here. So, I gently partition the different parts of me, putting the one that causes me less discomfort up front. But, that does not stop the confusion that arises when trying to choose which identity is more important. A constant tension for me lies between the competing identities I hold.

(Hubain, journal free write, 2012)
My sexuality and how I understand it is influenced significantly by my past experiences. Growing up in St. Lucia and the Caribbean, there is a significant amount of people who practice what I consider to be religious homophobia. Where religious homophobia is the use of religion and passages from the bible to justify homophobic and heterosexist behaviors, or exclude specifically lesbian, gay, and transgender people. Experiencing this is compounded when there is a constant reminder that there is a law that criminalizes “homosexual acts,” and although not enforced by the courts, it is policed and enforced by some people.

This fear of persecution, homophobia, and challenge to my masculinity was internalized and I found myself disliking who I was and thinking that I was not normal, and I should be a “man” because being a man is not being gay. These experiences made my transition difficult in the United States, and there was a lot of negotiating and mistakes being done along the way to overcome this self-hatred. Referring back to the prospective student earlier, I believe that he, like many people assume that everyone is and should be heterosexual. I also believe that like many others, he believes that being non-heterosexual is a conscious decision and should not be rewarded. In switching his focus to current events about lesbian and gay people, the prospective student posed a few rhetorical questions, “Didn’t we just give them rights? Why would they want more?” As I combatted his attack, I responded with a question, “but isn’t it problematic that ‘we’ should give ‘them’ rights when they are people and citizens in a democratic society?” and he responded by explaining that lesbian and gay individuals choose their sexuality and they are asking because heterosexual people make the laws.
An LGBT international student who has not gone through the coming out process or striving to understand his or her sexuality or gender identity can have a negative reaction to the perspective of someone with similar beliefs as the prospective student. In my case, there were no resources available in my undergraduate program and I did not feel comfortable going to anyone. It also did not help that some other athletes during my undergraduate life would say very disturbing things about gay people and what they would do to them. The men on the basketball team gossiped about who was gay or a lesbian, and some went as far as making a move on people that they suspected just to find out. This identity as a student-athlete made it easy to “pass” or the way I would describe it sometimes, give me masculinity points. Beyond the locker room and track and field spaces, my student-athlete status protected me from much of the homophobia perpetuated on campus. This disturbing paradox of feeling marginalized within and protected beyond sport complicated my navigation of the many “isms” that I faced and sometimes perpetuated on campus. But these behaviors by my peers and myself produced two worlds, where I was protected in a larger campus setting but at risk within sports.

There are a number of lived experiences that have contributed to how I have understood myself, and in some of those cases, they are results of how I have performed the identities that I hold. These performances and understandings are complex and intertwined but they contribute to my role as a researcher and actor in this research. So, who am I?

I am an international student

Who is
Racially Black

Very Gay

Ethnically diverse

Proud to be St. Lucian

A conflicted Catholic

Proud to be a member of the HBCU and HSI Families

Educated and knowingly privileged because of my educational background

As I move on with this study, I will continue to reflect on how my identities, my experiences, and subjectivities influence this project and my role as a researcher.
Chapter One: Introduction

“I’ve never seen one of those before…” were the words that stopped me midsentence as I recruited international student advisors (ISAs) for a study that was concerned with ISAs’ best practices when working with Black international students who identified as members of the LGBT community (Hubain, 2012). The most important finding from this previous study was the overall statement by the ISAs who did not participate. These non-participants indicated that they either would not know where to begin assisting students or they never made any contact with LGBT international students. The non-participants stated that their lack of knowledge was attributed to international students not making their sexuality known, and their lack of exposure to an international student identifying as both Black and lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT). Thinking of the United States alone, there are an estimated 8.8 million people who identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual (LGB) (Gates, 2006). This number is not only an estimate but also dated; however, it should not discount the fact that a significant number of individuals in the United States identify as LGB.

The estimate only captures individuals who report their sexuality; some identifying as LGB and transgender do not report or disclose their sexuality (Black, Gates, Sanders, & Taylor, 2007). Consequently, when thinking about the international
student population, the following question can be asked, how many can we estimate identify as being LGBT, especially as this specific population continues to increase?

The international student population in the United States is consistently increasing (Institute of International Education, 2017). The United States was host to 690,923 international students in the 2009/10 academic year, in 2010/11 the United States witnessed an increase to 723,277, climbed in the 2011/12 academic year to 764,495 international students, by 2012/13 a 7.2% increase over the previous year of 819, 644, and with the following 2013/14 academic year 886,052 international students. Figures indicated an even greater increase over the previous academic year (2014/15) of 974,926 (Institute of International Education, 2015). This most recent Open Doors report shows a 7.1% increase in the number of international students at institutions of higher education in the United States to 1,043,839. The Open Doors Report is published by the Institute of International Education (IIE), and is the only comprehensive resource that provides data on international students and scholars who are studying or teaching at U.S. institutions of higher education. The report also provides information on U.S. students who are studying abroad for academic credit.

Inferences from the Open Doors data show that international students have had a significant economic impact in the United States. Corroborating this finding, the Association of International Educators, also known as NAFSA, states that international students and their dependents contributed approximately $35.8 billion to the U.S. economy for the 2014-2015 academic year (NAFSA, 2016). Furthermore, service areas aimed at supporting international students expanded to include 400,812 jobs (NAFSA,
2016). The 2015-2016 *Open Doors* report also reflects the heterogeneity of the international student population, and with this occurrence, American higher education faces a new challenge when thinking about the services that international students utilize on campuses. With the increasing number of international students and the economic benefit to the U.S., it is becoming important to expand the scope of services offered to them by various departments on campus, including the service provided by departments similar to International Students and Scholar Services (ISSS).

Despite the variety in the backgrounds of international students, these students continue to be seen as a single student population when their citizenship becomes known on campus (Yoon & Portman, 2004). This occurs as a result of how international students are defined in policy, research, and administrative processes—and as a result they are viewed on campus as a monolithic group. There are several visa classifications for international students, but the majority are granted entry into the United States on F-1 visas. The United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) define this type of international student (also referred to as foreign student, academic student, or F-1 nonimmigrant student) as:

an alien who has been admitted to the United States as a full-time student at an accredited college, university, seminary, conservatory, academic high school, elementary school, or other academic institution or in a language training program. The student must be enrolled in a program or course of study that culminates in a degree, diploma, or certificate and the school must be authorized by the U.S. government to accept international students. (USCIS, 2011)

Within this definition, the use of the term alien refers to “an individual who is not a U.S. citizen or U.S. national” (USCIS, 2011). Considering these two definitions being used to describe who an international student could be, frames a category that does not
take into consideration diversity based on country of origin or diasporic association. Therefore, the student is simplistically considered to be an international student, and the definition then limits and defines the performance of other identity dimensions of students. From a higher education administrative perspective, the category supposes that there are a range of services or rights not available to or attainable by international students, such as federal financial aid, work authorization, etc.

Operating solely based on these definitions, constrains the development of services on campuses, because the objective is then to keep international students in status or in line with immigration policies, which govern how they are identified, tracked, serviced, and beneficial to respective institutions. For these reasons, not all demographic information on international students are collected or reported by educational institutions in the United States; demographics included are gender, country of origin, dependents or family members, visa type, and academic programs. When confronted with other differences among the international student population, student personnel sometimes are perplexed, and although some find ways to help students, there are many that will refer international students to another department (Tsang, 2002; Kato, 1997; Katz, 2008). In line with what the ISAs mentioned above, administrators/student personnel are challenged to think beyond their definitions of an international student, and what is considered to be racially and sexually normal in the United States.

Purpose of Study

As international student mobility increases to the United States, international students who do not fit neatly into various social categories will increase. Arguably, this
is already the case and has placed many international students in vulnerable positions where they experience discrimination based on U.S. notions of racism, sexism, and heterosexism (See Hanassab, 2006; Lee & Rice, 2007; Yoon & Portman, 2004). It is therefore important to understand the experiences of international students who possess multiple marginalized identities. The expression of their narratives assists in understanding how they might make meaning of the marginalized identities they hold, the experiences and contexts in which marginalization occurs. Consequently, the purpose of this study is to explore these experiences of international students at the intersections of race and sexuality. Despite the findings from existing literature that bring attention to the many forms of discrimination that international students experience, policies and administrative practices do not allow for the bodies of international students to be racialized or sexualized.

International students and immigrants have different experiences from their American counterparts, due to their countries of origin and immigration statuses (Alex-Assenoh, 2000; Rogers, 2000). Immigrants who belong to the same racial group as some Americans of color will have similar racial experiences to them purely based on phenotypical similarities (Fries-Britt, George Mwangi, Peralta, 2014; Santiague, 2007; Devine & Waters, 2003; Waters, 1994, 1999). Sexual orientation is often considered to be an invisible characteristic of international students (Kato, 1997; Tang, 2007; Tsang, 2002), because of the overall assumption that everyone is heterosexual unless revealed as the opposite (Evans et al., 2010; Johnson, 2006). Contributing to our understanding of LGBT students, is the extant literature that does not accurately capture the issues
affecting the specific groups making up the LGBT student population on campus (Renn, 2010). Some of the emerging research on LGBTQ international students shows that they experience and understand their sexuality differently than their domestic counterparts (Hebert, 2003; Tang, 2007; Tsang, 2002). The perception of these students’ race and sexuality may be different because of their respective nationalities.

Race is a social construct “that society invents, manipulates, or retires when convenient” (Delgado & Stefanic, 2001, p. 7), and therefore “signifies and symbolizes social conflicts and interests by referring to different types of human bodies” (Omi and Winant, 1994, p. 55). Subsequently, a Black international student is raced in the United States because this tool for organizing, that is race, already exists and presupposes how they should be treated. Predominantly, the gay community in the United States, due to representations by the media, reflects White men. Through the media, gay Black men are sometimes represented as being on the down-low thugs, athletes/athletic, and/or hypersexualized (Collins, 2009; Ward, 2005). However, in many representations of gay men, Black bodies are not reflected. Black gay international students’ raced bodies are therefore, sexualized based on the assumptions or stereotypes of Black men (including Black gay men) in the United States. The invisibility and in some cases hypervisibility of Black male bodies can be isolating due to the lack of visibility or stigma respectively (Ward, 2005). As a result, the experiences of Black gay international students in American higher education institutions was the primary focus of this study and explored qualitatively.
Research Questions

My dissertation explored the central question of, “how do Black gay international students understand their racialized sexuality?” I used a combined analysis to understand these experiences of Black gay international students from a queer and intersectional perspective. Based on the previously stated assumptions and the two guiding perspectives my dissertation is directed by four sub-questions.

a. In what ways do Black gay international students perform their race and sexuality?

b. What events or pre-determined factors are significant to how black gay international students understand or have come to understand the intersection of race and sexuality?

c. What lived experiences highlight the intersections of race and sexuality?

d. What contexts, if at all, inform the intersectional experiences of Black gay international students?

The overall research question and four sub-questions helped in understanding how a foreign racial-sexual minority’s (more specifically identifies/can be identified as Black and gay) body is racialized and sexualized in/beyond their respective institutions of higher education. The questions also offered a way to focus on understanding the cross-cultural experiences of this group of international students as they contrast previous experiences in their home countries and experiences in the United States. This study

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1 Term that could be used to describe an international student, as simply, not being a native or citizen of the United States
focused on international students who possess a privileged identity i.e. being a man. In the case of this study, both race (Black) and sexuality (gay) can serve as points of departure from privilege. For many of these international students, being Black may not be seen as marginalized identities per se since they make up the majority of their respective country’s population, and in those cases discrimination may be based on class or socio-economic status. Therefore context-specific experiences help to understand the stability and instability of identity itself as international students move between the United States and home countries.

**Framework**

To assist in the conceptualization and understanding of what it is to be a Black gay international student requires an analysis of their perceptions and performances of social categories and the exploration of their racialized and sexualized experiences. This is done through the use of queer theory and intersectionality. Intersectionality theory allows for an exploration of experiences at the intersections of identity dimensions, where individuals name significant defining moments, factors or events within context. Queer theory extends this analysis to a more macro-level as the performances of subjects are scrutinized based on the structures or institutions that inform their positions in a given system. It is important to note that these two theories are contradictory, however they provide different ways of studying the Black gay international student.

**Queer Theory.** Queer theory is the academic extension of the queer movement, including queer activism. Queer theory first emerged in the 1990s, but in 1991 Teresa de Lauretis coined the term (Morland & Willox, 2005; Sykes, 2006). de Lauretis (1991)
contended that queer theory would no longer regard homosexuality simply as deviant versus natural, transgressive versus proper, or marginal with regard to a dominant stable heterosexuality (Morland & Willox, 2005). Thus, queer theory demands that sexuality is analyzed as a constitutive element of social life and not just as the discrete area of sexual practices and identities (Warner, 1993; Epstein, 1996; Pascoe, 2005). To this end, queer theory challenges the meaning of identity itself, seeing identity as unstable and fluid, where identity is a product of continuous resistance to oppressive social constructions (Butler, 1990). This instability of identity is exemplified when considering international students. Their lived experiences, perceptions, and performance of identity in their home countries may contradict and influence experiences/perceptions/performances in the United States. As a result, the mutual reconstruction or redefining of identity occurs when interacting with others in the United States. This process of reconstruction of identity reflects the resistance to oppressive social constructions that Butler (1990) refers to.

Queer theory has been proven to highlight the tensions that exist within normative understandings of categories such as sexuality, gender, and race (Wellard, 2006). Identity is critiqued through the use of queer theory by rejecting a unified and coherent subjectivity in favor of social construction (Danuta Walters, 2005). By doing so, resistance to essentialism is produced and the notion of a single gay identity is disrupted. This postmodern perspective can also be applied to notions of Black identity (hooks, 1990), where Black identity is broken down to varying notions of Blackness (Cross, 1991). In the case of Black international students, meanings of being Black may change depending on the context in which their Blackness is experienced. For example, a Black
immigrant can view his/her race as normal or view themselves as part of the majority in home countries, whereas in the U.S. they become part of a minority or do not see themselves reflected in majoritarian discourses. Despite queer theory’s opposition to essentialism, it still “attempts to rehabilitate a subjectivity that allows for sexual and political agency” (Taylor & Vinquist, 2002, p. 326).

As eluded to by Epstein (1996) and Pascoe (2005), and explicitly stated by Butler (1990), regardless of sexual identity, a contemporary queer analysis should help understand the everyday reality of individuals. A queer analysis is less concerned with the strict dimensions of identity being assigned or prescribed to subjects (i.e. Black gay international students) at a given moment. The identities of international students are not considered to be static constructs, because the theory reinforces that identities are fluid based on the contexts of their lived realities. “In its emphasis upon the disruptive, the constructed, the tactical, and performative, queer analysis reveals some of the ways in which many late-modern individuals experience the fractured and contingent nature of human existence in the twenty-first century” (Hall, 2003, p. 5). Hall (2003) is specifically addressing the need to scrutinize the lived realities of diverse individuals and supporting the use of queer theory in this study to explore the perception and performance of individual subjectivities.

There are notable studies that have informed LGBT research and shaped theoretical understandings of queer theory in higher education. Although there are many studies addressing LGBT issues (such as visibility, discrimination, advocacy, and campus climate) in higher education, many fail to employ queer theory or a queer analysis (Renn,
Now, it is important to separate that addressing identity development of LGB people in higher education research is very different than employing a queer lens to identity development research. With this being said, a small subset of queer research focuses on specifically transgender identity and the queering of gendered systems to reveal the unique experiences and identity development of transgender people, the non-conformity of some men to masculinity, and participation of women in higher education (Bilodeau, 2005; Bilodeau, 2009; Pusch, 2005; McKinney, 2005).

Some of the queer research in higher education that would inform this study extends from research on LGB faculty and administrators. Tierney’s (1997) autoethnographic account in Academic Outlaws: Queer Theory and Cultural Studies in the Academy focuses on the position of lesbian and gay men in the academy as faculty members and applies queer theory in a cultural analysis of higher education and the academy. What queer theory allowed for, was the problematization of cultural norms in academia that force lesbian and gay academics to perform (or not perform) their identities in certain ways. As a result, Tierney (1997) suggest several strategies for change to increase the democratic involvement of lesbian and gay men in academia. Talburt’s (2000) ethnographic study Subject to Identity: Knowledge, Sexuality, and Academic Practices in Higher Education, follows three lesbian faculty members. Queer theory was used to trouble the very notion of identity as fixed social identities, which essentially revealed that identities are contextually bound and fluid. Both these studies had significant institutional, practical, theoretical, and methodological implications.
Queer theory studies on LGBT students in higher education are also very few. Pusch (2005) in “Objects of curiosity: Transgender college students’ perceptions of the reactions of others,” studied the lives of thirteen transgender students and examined their perceptions of peoples’ reactions who knew them as transgender. Students in Pusch’s (2005) study expressed that the reactions of people around them impacted their feeling of being normal as they transitioned. McKinney (2005) in “On the margins: A study of the experiences of transgender college students,” used surveys from 75 students to examine, qualitatively, the experiences of undergraduate and graduate students identifying as transgender. McKinney (2005) presented implications for colleges and universities based on the experiences of participants in the study, and described reasons for the lack of resources and knowledge about transgender students. Pusch (2005) and McKinney’s (2005) studies, showcases a resistance to and transgression from gendered norms, which are consistent with the use of queer theory. Bilodeau (2005, 2009) in “Beyond the gender binary: A case study of two transgender college students at a Midwestern research university” and “Genderism: Transgender students, binary systems, and higher education,” used queer theory and D’Augelli’s (1994) lifespan model as a framework to analyze the experiences and identity development processes of transgender students to reveal unseen power structures of binary gender systems that exist on campuses, and the practical issues that arise when these systems are not challenged (Bilodeau, 2009).

As seen above very few studies in higher education utilize a queer lens to explore LGBT issues, and many focus on identity itself. Further these studies only offer a way to conceptualize and contextualize a queer understanding of domestic LGBT students, and
based on these studies, inferences can be made to shape a queer understanding of LGBT international students. However, in remaining consistent with the use of queer theory, such research needs to be problematized as it projects an LGBT domestic student way of being onto the foreign bodies of LGBT international students. There are only four significant studies that look explicitly at LGBT or Queer international students in higher education. Two of these studies are based in Canada within the past ten years, one study by Hebert (2003) that looks specifically at lesbian and queer international students in the United States, and the most influential study by Kato (1997) that explores the unique issues and experiences of LGB international students studying in the United States. Out of these four, Hebert’s (2003) study is the only one that uses a queer analysis. However, the Hebert (2003) does not adequately capture the opportunities for deep analysis that queer theory allows. Despite the scarcity of studies that explicitly address the experiences of LGBT and queer international students, these studies possess the most potential to inform an understanding of the population. Kato’s (1997) and Hebert’s (2008) studies are the only two, which informs the understanding of the performance of a racialized sexuality of international students in the United States. Recently, there was one specific study in the United States that studied the experiences of LGB international students from China. Yang (2015) explored the ways in which his participants made meaning of their multiple dimensions of identity. Yang (2015) was concerned with how sexual identity and cultural factors contributed to participants’ higher education experience and how, if at all, were interconnected constructs.
The study at hand adds to existing literature on queer theory in higher education. A goal of this study is to call attention to unseen and unaddressed power structures that could influence the performance of Black gay international students. Although queer theory is being used, I am mainly concerned with performativity and power structures influencing performance. Sullivan (2003) asks the question, “Is it a matter of being... or doing?” Black gay international students whose home countries have laws criminalizing homosexuality may perform their sexuality differently than their domestic counter-parts. Also, given the historical significance of race relations in the United States, Black gay international students may be treated and act very differently when contrasted with their lived realities in their home countries. It is therefore, important to understand the performance of race, sexuality, and gender in the U.S. setting and home countries.

Performativity relates to the creation and re-creation of individual identities such as gender and sexual identities through repetitive behaviors and actions (Butler, 1990). This tenet uses heteronormativity as a point of tension. Individuals learn how to perform gender and sexual identity and socially construct them into being through her or his behavior (Abes & Kasch, 2007). In the case of this study, performativity can include the ways participants’ actions inform/defines their identity. Participants in this study thus define notions of identity themselves instead of using preconceived notions of race, sexuality, and gender. This is of great importance to a queer analysis “because individuals enact genders and sexualities that do not exist prior to their enactment” and “performatives provide the potential for resisting dominant social constructions of gender and sexuality” (Abes & Kasch, 2007, p. 621). Although queer theory can allow for an
even broader analysis, I focus on the way that students perform identity and create resistance and redefinition of social identity categories. What I mean by this, is the ability of participants to assign new definitions to their subject positions and therefore contradicting current definitions of social identity categories. Defining my use of queer theory in this way adds to “the different voices and sometimes overlapping, sometimes divergent perspectives that can be loosely called queer theories” (Hall, 2003, p. 5).

Queer theory is traditionally applied when addressing power structures associated with sexuality and gender and their relationships with other structures and subjects. This is based on the assumption that notions such as sexuality can be understood where power relies on binaries or hierarchies (Foucault, 1980). As stated previously, queer theory does not advocate for a single queer identity, rather it proposes that there exists variety and richness in respective subject positions. Acknowledging this employment of agency, assumes that the theory resists “oppressive social constructions of sexual orientation and gender” (Abes & Kasch, 2007, p. 620). This framework will therefore use this underlying theme of power and performativity to further explain social negotiations made by Black gay international students through their narratives. Queer theory enables a more contextual and less categorical examination of identity that considers the mutual influences of multiple, fluid identity domains (e.g., race, social class, ability, religion, nationality) (Abes & Kasch, 2007; Hall, 2003).

**Intersectionality Theory**

Intersectionality theory serves as the second component in this conceptual framework and provides an approach to the exploration of the intersections of multiple
Intersectionality theory focuses on how multiple identity dimensions such as sexuality, race, and class intersect (Crenshaw, 1989). The origins of intersectionality can be traced back to Kimberle’ Crenshaw. Crenshaw (1991) used intersectionality to frame an analysis of violence against women and argued that traditional gender-only analysis did little to explain violence against women of color. Crenshaw (1991) believed that an analysis of violence against women through “intersecting patterns of racism and sexism” (p. 1243) explains how the experiences of women of color are the result of these intersecting forms of discrimination. In regards to this study, intersectionality allows for a sophisticated analysis of the intersecting patterns of multiple forms of oppression that international students can experience in the United States.

Intersectionality theory disrupts the binaries that may describe race, sexuality, and gender as singular constructions, proving for a richer and more complex exploration of holistic identity. Nash (2008) states that “the destabilization of race/gender binaries is particularly important to enable robust analyses of cultural sites (or spectacles) that implicate both race and gender” (p. 89). Unlike queer theory, intersectionality relies on strictly defined identity dimensions to explain and discuss diversity within identity dimensions based on specific intersections. Intersectionality emphasizes the lived experiences of historically marginalized and oppressed groups. Therefore, the theory offers a way of understanding the representations of marginalization that operate within institutional discourses in which power is continuously legitimized (Crenshaw, 1991).
Recognizing the legitimization of power requires that privileged identities of individuals be acknowledged. This is important to my use of the theory, because it acknowledges that individuals experience both marginalization and dominance simultaneously (Dill, McLaughin, & Nieves, 2007). Therefore, an intersectional analysis reveals the complexities of identity by showing that although an individual is marginalized in one context, he or she can be privileged in another. Despite the theories reliance on strict dimensions of identity, the actual intersections of those dimensions highlight the variation of identity dimensions. For example, the notion of only being Black (marginalized identity) or simply identifying as a man (privileged identity) is complicated when looking at the experiences of Black men, especially in relation to White men or Black women. Revealing this also accounts and explains instances of multiple oppressions, such as Black gay men. An intersectional analysis of the experiences of Black gay international students can indicate the contexts that they experience marginalization. Identifying these contexts allow for mechanisms to be in place that help to undermine intersecting forms of discrimination. Thus, the intent of an intersectional analysis is therefore not simply theory building or knowledge creation but also undertaking real, on-the-ground practices that result in social change and social justice (Carbado, Williams Crenshaw, Mays, & Tomlinson, 2013; Duong, 2012).

Intersectionality has been used in many fields of study, including in higher education and student affairs where a significant number of studies explore the experiences of students based on intersections of race, sexual orientation, gender, or class. Most of the studies in higher education have focused on the intersections of two
identity dimensions but were mostly preceded by studies on single dimensions of identity including those examining identity development (Abes, Jones, McEwen, 2007). There are also a small number of studies that focus on the multiple dimensions of identity of students (Abes, et al., 2013; Renn, 2009). This study contributes to a multi-intersectional approach to the study of identity, similar to existing studies on multiple dimensions of identity. However, this study differs in that it looks specifically at international students and it relies solely on intersectionality and queer theory as tools of analysis.

Prior to studies focusing on complex conceptualization of identity, academic research in the early 1990s that specifically focused on LGBTQ identities on campus (separate from identity development theories) were mostly autobiographical in nature (Renn, 2009). Although there is a plethora of studies on lesbian, gay, and bisexual identities, and an increasing cadre of studies examining transgender identities, there remains a need to research the intersections of LGBT students who identify as international students (Yoon & Portman, 2004) and students of color (Renn, 2009; Strayhorn et al. 2008; Washington & Wall, 2010). Due to the large number of studies using intersectionality, I draw specifically on those that examine Black gay college men in higher education. However, few studies explicitly address Black gay college men on campus as a stand-alone line of inquiry. Many have described Black gay men in higher education as feeling and being invisible on campus (See Gasman & Harper, 2008; Strayhorn et al., 2008; Strayhorn & Scott, 2013). Despite the limited research on this specific group of students, I identify several relevant studies that approach the study of race and sexuality through an intersectional lens.
Wall and Washington (1991, 2006) have contributed to the study of gay and lesbian students on campus who identify as racial minorities and the impact that religion and class can have on their experiences in college. In *Understanding gay and lesbian students of color*, Wall and Washington (1991) examined the intersecting patterns of discrimination (heterosexism, racism, sexism) and the unique issues faced by gay and lesbian students of color developmentally and socially. The authors use the idea of intersectionality to explain the impact that multiple oppressions can have on the lives of individuals who identify as a person of color and gay or lesbian. With African-American men specifically, the authors found that expectations of African-American men shape the ways they may experience their sexuality. The impact of family and friends’ approval is significant to determining a positive identity for African-American gay men, and these individuals will try to maintain a masculine or heterosexual appearance (Wall & Washington, 1991).

Poynter and Washington (2005) examined the experiences of LGBT students of color on campus. Using an intersectional approach, the authors explained the complexities of multiple identities. Examining students’ experiences on campus in this way revealed some of the struggles that African American men faced. The authors found that African Americans distance themselves from terms (such as lesbian, gay, and bisexual) linked to sexual orientation because they associate them with White culture. Like Wall and Washington (1991), the authors found that race had an impact on how students regarded their sexuality. The authors also recognized the benefit of single
identity theories but critiqued these theories’ inability to “address overlapping and multiple identities and how they intersect” (Poynter & Washington, 2005, p. 42).

Further contributing to how intersectionality can be used in the study of the sexuality of Black men in the United States, Strayhorn, Blakewood, and DeVita (2008, 2010) found that within-group differences among Black males reflect the heterogeneity of the Black male student population on campus. The authors constructed a foundation for understanding the experiences of Black men in college by using various lines of inquiry to conceptualize the intersection of race, sexuality, and gender. The study took place at multiple campuses, however this article by Strayhorn et al. (2010) focused solely on Predominantly White Campus. Strayhorn et al. (2008) found that college choice of the men in the study was influenced by their race but more so, by their sexual orientation and the need to intentionally go through the coming out process. Due to the nature of intersectionality as a theory to locate identity within a context, it can be used to identify nurturing or hostile environments. Findings from Strayhorn et al.’s (2008) study, which looked at the experiences of Black gay men in varying campus contexts contradicted findings from previous studies (See Feagin, Vera, & Imani, 1996; Tatum, 1997; Patton, 2006) that suggest, “Black students are most comfortable among Black peers and in Black social enclaves and other cultural spaces (e.g., Black cultural centers) on campus” (pp. 100-101). This finding also has significant implications for studying Black gay international students because although they may possess similar identities to their American counterparts their experiences can be markedly different.
Strayhorn and Scott (2013) also drew from data from a multiyear qualitative study exploring the experiences of Black gay men on various campuses. Like Strayhorn et al. (2008, 2010), Strayhorn and Scott (2013) used existing literature to conceptualize Black gay men in college. However, this specific studying focused solely on Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). Challenges that Black gay men attending HBCUs faced were encounters with homophobia and harassment, invisibility and marginalization, lack of family support, and issues identifying as gay (Strayhorn & Scott, 2013). The analysis of the experiences of Black gay men at HBCUs revealed these individuals situated in the margins of campus life (Strayhorn & Scott, 2013), where they navigate their (social and academic) involvement within and beyond campus. Implications that are relevant to the study at hand include revising or hypothesizing gay identity theories to reflect other identity dimensions of gay students of color based on other dimensions that directly shape their lived experiences (Strayhorn & Scott, 2013). Revisions of institutional non-discriminatory policies to combat homophobia on campus should be developed to create inclusive environments for students.

The studies above do not reflect all studies on intersectionality, but do however focus specifically on Black gay students in college. Studies on Black gay men in college are very few (Strayhorn et al., 2008, 2010) and it is becoming increasingly important to focus the diversity within the Black male student population (Palmer & Wood, 2013). Black gay men in some cases can face isolation because they experience racism from White peers and homophobia from Black peers (Strayhorn et al., 2008; Wall & Washington, 2010). Although intersectionality offers a more categorical approach to
understanding identities, it is helpful to center intersecting patterns of racism and homophobia. Intersectionality as a theory explains the ways in which experiences with racism and homophobia are qualitatively different at the intersections race, gender and even sexuality of Black gay international students as compared to their Black and White gay domestic counterparts; what Crenshaw (1991) would consider a form of structural intersectionality. Consequently, this shift to a structural analysis of social issues goes beyond the theoretical capabilities of intersectionality, because of its overt focus on individual identity dimensions and narratives. Therefore, the use of a lens such as queer theory is beneficial. Queer theory, thus, provides “a more contextual” and “less categorical” approach to understanding identities and identity development, and showcases identities (such as race, nationality, religion, and class) as mutually informing and fluid (Renn, 2009, p. 135).

**Queering Intersectionality/Intersecting Queer Theory**

Queer and intersectionality theory share a common analytical interest concerned with the multiple and conflicting processes of identity formation. However, queer theory does not adequately address intersecting topics related to people of color (Ferguson, 2004; Cohen, 2005) and intersectionality often neglects notions of sexuality (Yekani, Michaelis & Dietze, 2010; Carbado, 2013). There have been theoretical innovations in intersectionality and queer theory to address these invisibilities and many scholars have called for innovative examinations of the intersections of sexuality, race, class, gender identity, and religion. Carbado, Crenshaw, Mays, and Tomlinson (2013) contend that intersectionality should be considered a work-in-progress and the application of
intersectionality should not be definitive. Queer theory is also going through its own evolution in qualitative research due to the transdisciplinary and interdisciplinary perspectives of researchers. “This work-in-progress understanding of intersectionality suggests that we should endeavor, on an ongoing basis, to move intersectionality to unexplored places” (Carbado, Williams Crenshaw, Mays, & Tomlinson, 2013, p. 305). Dilley (1999) goes a step further to argue that the queer theory necessitates new and altered methods of investigation and analysis. Due to the unstructured nature of the application of queer theory, and therefore researchers use the theory in various fields (Britzman, 1995). Despite the varying and new approaches to the use of queer theory, Dilley (1999, p.432) defines three tenets that remain consistent across fields: 1) examination of lives and experiences of those considered non-heterosexual, 2) juxtaposition of those lives/experiences with lives/experiences considered “normal” and 3) examination of how/why those lives and experiences are considered outside of the norm.

Carbado et al. (2013) and Duong (2012) call for a more critical application of intersectionality, where researchers move away from simply describing identities, to exposing societal power structures underlying institutional discourses of discrimination. Duong (2012) categorizes previous research that employs intersectionality into two paradigms—descriptive representations and critical approaches. Critical approaches move beyond the first paradigm of simply describing the social categories under analysis. Although not directly conveying this, Carbado et al. (2013) present examples of ways that intersectionality can be used critically (intersectionality as a social movement,
intersectionality as a move to engage Black men, intersectionality moves across national boundaries, an interdisciplinary approach to intersectionality, and intersectional approaches to study Black women).

Using multiple theoretical approaches emphasizes the significance of focusing on dismantling inequitable power structures, and showcasing the power of narratives of marginalized people. Based on the nature of this study I use an intersectional and queer analysis to understand Black gay international students whose identities conflict with and resist common notions of race and sexuality in the United States. A queer and intersectional lens provides both descriptive and critical analyses that result in a rich or holistic analysis. Although a descriptive representation of intersectionality helps in focusing the scope of the study and delineating the objective/subjective perspectives of the identities at the center of the study, it fails to uproot the systems of power that police categories of difference and the political problem of exclusion that is being produced.

Therefore, a queer analysis captures the nuances for new social understandings that the raced and sexualized bodies of international students participating in the context of American higher education. Intersectionality, which tends to be more descriptive in nature, is supported by queer theory because of its utility in helping to name more practical interventions in the field of higher education. As the two theories bear on each other, a richer analysis reveals the complexity of identity, drawing on larger socio-historical contexts and calling into question the normative ordering of ideological systems; naming these systems can result in political implications for change. Intersecting queer theory (descriptive and critical) in this study will foreground race and sexuality in
the analysis of this study. Queering intersectionality also forces the researcher to not essentialize single identities (at the center of this study), which are socially constructed.

**Significance of the study**

The performance of race and sexuality form a basis for inclusion and exclusion in the United States. Individuals fitting into these marginalized groups, regardless of their country of origin could experience discrimination. Therefore, it is important to understand their experiences in the United States. This study, takes a step in this direction by aiming to understand the experiences of Black gay international students, and how they might experience and perform their sexuality and race. Results from large-scale studies by some researchers, show that non-Americans experience homophobia, racism, and sexism on college campuses in the United States (See Barletta & Kobayashi, 2007; Hanassab, 2006; Lee & Rice, 2007; Yoon & Portman, 2004). Despite these forms of discrimination appearing in the results of these studies, there have been very few studies that center discrimination based on specific marginalized identities that international students may hold.

Moreover, there are very few studies that explore the intersections of these identity dimensions, and the multiple oppressions that could be experienced by international students. It adds to a growing body of literature, which adopts multiple theoretical approaches to provide a rich, critical, and informative analysis of the phenomenon. This study also attempts to understand these intersections and the implications for future research and campus practices related to international student engagement or services offered to them.
Like other research studies that focus on sexuality and the experiences of gay men, this study will contribute to a growing body of literature in higher education. However, it differs in that it explores the racialized sexuality of specifically international students. Findings from this study can reveal new definitions or understandings of race and sexuality in the United States. Findings from this study can help develop strategies for international student mobility between their home and host countries. Additionally, this study helps to challenge current notions of global citizenship and global civic engagement programming that also includes international students.

Overview of Chapters

Chapter two draws on several bodies of literature to build a foundation for making sense of the Black gay international student. The literature review proposes the social constructions of difference in the United States and how international students are positioned in this system. The review gives a broad overview of the journey of international student navigating homophobic contexts depending on respective home countries. The concept of race emerges into the literature on international students, to build on what it could be like to be Black or a person of color. To show the complexities of the topic, literature on lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) students are presented, but funneled down to the experiences of gay students on campuses. The chapter concludes with findings and the overall direction of this research project.

Chapter three of this study encompasses the methodology and the research design being used to explore this topic. It restates the research questions guiding the proposed study. The methodology used is described along with its theoretical grounding necessary
to explain the methods of data collection and data analysis. This study uses experience-centered narrative inquiry to gain an understanding of the intersection and performance of race and sexuality by Black gay international students. It describes the specifics of the data collection, including the recruitment of study participants and instrumentation. The data analysis section of this chapter reviews the intersectional and queer approaches that I use in this study. The chapter briefly summarizes the potential structure of the final project including findings from the two analyses and a discussion of those findings.

Chapter four captures narratives that were co-constructed with participants in the study. Using the critical events timeline as a guide, we noted events that were significant to creating a sense of self-awareness. This chapter offers readers an introduction to each participant and their pseudonyms. Each narrative shows the importance of events leading up to a move to the United States and after arriving, where participants experience growth and share their journeys. In this chapter, Casper shares his racializations in Brazil, United Kingdom and the United States. His experiences offer much insight into contextual understanding of race that is specific to him, and how he became his authentic self. Barabbas, shares his struggle with navigating interactions and experiences with salient identities that touch on sexuality, race and religion. We get to share in his experiences as he negotiates these conflicting identities. Inkognito shares how he attempted to reinvent himself and also discovered who he wanted to be. His narrative is couched on becoming rather than simply being. Finally, Island Joe shares his experiences that explores his negotiations around identity and happiness. His narrative captures the
pursuit of happiness that many international students go through. His narrative ends with his decision to move back to his home country.

The narratives of the participants provide an understanding that is distinctive to four Black gay international students attending universities in the United States. Chapter five provides a more focused view based on salient thoughts that were revealed through analysis. These four Black gay international students shared some experiences that allowed for the emergence of noticeable commonalities over the course of the study. In this chapter, common and divergent experiences, ways of knowing and resisting are reconciled to understand some realities of Black gay international students studying in the United States. Although there were many notable findings, those that are highlighted here contribute significantly to how we understand identity and Black gay international students in the United States.

This study provides a strong foundation to continue the exploration of the lives of LGBTQ international students. Concluding this dissertation, Chapter six provides a discussion of the findings in this study. This chapter reinforces the need to get a sense of the racialized experiences of international students who study in the United States, and the importance of leveraging knowledge about international students that are transferable to those who possess multiple minoritized identities. In this chapter, I explore implications for practice, research, and my evolving positionality as a researcher. The reflective entry helps to communicate my feelings regarding this dissertation topic as a researcher and some of the things that I struggle with around some of my privileges that at times formed a disconnect with participants.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

This literature review reveals an evolving storyline describing the Black gay international student in the U.S. This review will propose the social constructions of difference that informs the international student experience through race and sexuality. It visits laws restricting sexual behavior of sexual minorities outside the United States. The international student is then introduced, bringing to light how they are seen through the existing literature. The concept of race is then introduced into the literature on international students, and build on to what it might be like to be Black and a student of color. To show the complexities of the topic, literature on lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) students are presented, but funneled down to the experiences of gay students on campuses. Due to the nature of this research topic, it is relevant at times to incorporate literature that addresses LGBQ and at times transgender individuals. To wrap up the review of existing literature, the focus will be switched to the Black gay international student, revealing the gaps that exist and the direction for this study.

The Construction of Difference in the United States

The categories ascribed to and subscribed by people are the products of social factors rather than biological (Ore, 2006). Ore (2006), in the book The Social Construction of Difference and Inequality, described our identifiers as categories of difference, which are guided by cultural values that result from our human activity.
Categories such as race, ethnicity, social class, sex, gender, and sexuality are constructed through institutionalized processes while simultaneously creating structures of social inequality (Ore, 2006). In the U.S., a single group can possess privilege due to the social construction of the identities they hold, which by extension informs the oppression of other groups. Evans et al. (2010) supports Ore (2006) and adds that some people have advantages due to identities that determine their social status, such as heterosexuality, socioeconomic background, and citizenship.

Weber (1998) explicitly contended that the categories of race, class, gender, and sexuality should be understood through power and privilege rather than the simplistic notion of gender roles, biological and moral understandings of sexual orientation, and ethnic approaches to race (Weber, 1998). Weber’s (1998) work contributes to the ways that race, sexuality, gender, and class are understood. Weber’s (1998) work contested other works that only focused on the importance of race, class, gender, and sexuality. She argued for the inclusion of the cultural and historical contexts informing the power relations that are associated with these respective dimensions (Weber, 1998). Her framework considers the social construction of power relations that operate simultaneously at the societal and individual level. She proposed that these categories and the power associated with them should be based on context. The relationship between context and identity is important, it highlights the fluid nature of identity dimensions based on specific points in time or history and location.

Abes et al. (2007) borrow from Weber (1998) in a study exploring the multiple dimensions of identity of college aged lesbian women, adding that identity dimensions
should be connected to context, and therefore a better understanding of an individual’s self-perception or identity salience could be achieved. Most importantly, Weber (1998) stresses that, “race, class, gender, and sexuality must always be understood within a specific historical and global context” (p. 16) and they cannot be understood as fixed biological traits because we would not fully capture their meaning in daily life. Therefore, each category and its construction should be understood based on the social context in which it is experienced. One of the messages driven by Weber (1998), Abes et al. (2007), and Ore (2006) is that prior experiences shape how individuals experience current and future contexts or events. Preceding their experiences in the United States, many gay international students navigate homophobic environments in their home countries.

**Homosexuality Outside the United States**

As of 2010, homosexual acts were illegal in 76 United Nations countries and punishable by death in 5 countries (Ottosson, 2010). Aggravated assault and hate crimes are prohibited against the LGBT population in only 17 countries (Ottosson, 2010) out of the world’s 195 countries. A report conducted by the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA) compiles and assesses the laws marginalizing nonheterosexual, transgender, and intersex people (Itaborahy, 2012; Ottoson, 2010). This annual report, now for 2012, has reflected a slight increase in the number of countries criminalizing same-sex sexual acts between consenting adults; increasing to 78 countries as compared to 76 countries in 2010 (Itaborahy, 2012; Ottoson, 2010). Let it be noted that out of these 78 United Nation members, five of them mandate
that a violation of their respective law is punishable by death. Anecdotally, gay international students’ interactions in the United States may be affected or could be influenced by their experiences in respective contexts criminalizing homosexuality.

According to the ILGA report, Mauritania, Sudan as well as 12 northern states in Nigeria and the southern parts of Somalia, all territories in Africa, punish violators of their law through death (Itaborahy, 2012). Section 148 (c) of Sudan’s Penal Code states that “If the offender is convicted for the third time he shall be punished with death or life imprisonment.” Mauritania’s penal code, ART. 308, also states that, “Any adult Muslim man who commits an impudent act against nature with an individual of his sex will face the penalty of death by public stoning. If it is a question of two women, they will be punished as prescribed in article 306, first paragraph” (p. 63).

Latin America and the Caribbean, follow strict buggery laws that sentence violators to long periods or terms in prison. Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, St. Lucia, Jamaica, St. Kitts and Nevis, Trinidad and Tobago, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and Belize, all mandate that a violator of their laws spend between 2-25 years in prison (Itaborahy, 2012; Ottosson, 2010). Other regions and territories not identified as having majority of students coming to the U.S. that maybe identified as Black, also have similar laws that mandate imprisonment or death. Iran has some of the strictest laws that criminalize homosexuality or “sodomy” as stated in their penal code (Itaborahy, 2012). Alarmingly, the ILGA did not delve into statistics or laws in the United States and Canada, but noted that in the United States the final state to decriminalize homosexuality was Missouri in 2006 (Itaborahy, 2012).
International students hailing from countries with strict laws and policies against gay men may perform their sexuality differently when in the United States. Because these laws require particular behaviors from same-sex individuals, this reinforced message could still be practiced in the United States. Although many gay international students might see the U.S. being liberal, as it relates to their sexuality when compared to their home countries, there are still many states and communities, which are still very homophobic. The resultant behavior from home countries however, do shape the way international students experience their sexuality, and in some cases race and gender.

**International Students in the United States**

Institutions of higher education in the United States have experienced highs and lows with regard to the numbers of international students coming to further their education. Two years after the establishment of nonimmigrant F and J visa classes in 1952, 34,232 international students were studying in the United States (See Board on Higher Education and Workforce, National Research Council, 2005). According to a 2010 report by the Institute of International Education, the number of international students enrolled in the U.S. increased by 2.9% in the 2009-2010 academic year to 690,923 (Mamiseishvili, 2012). This number continues to increase based on the latest figures of the Institute of International Education (IIE), therefore the U.S. continues to be a prime location for international students hailing from many countries (IIE, 2013a). This growing population “brings valuable educational, cultural, and economic benefits to the U.S. colleges and universities” (Lee & Rice, 2007, p. 2). Lee and Rice (2007) found that
there is much dissatisfaction after enrollment on the part of international students due to discrimination, financial difficulty, and adjustment.

**Coming to America.** Many international students experience much of their academic career alone with increase pressure to succeed, which are sometimes tied to perceived or actual responsibility from their native countries (Hanassab & Tidwell, 2002). Hegemonic conditions, policies, and practices that already exist at their respective institutions may even exacerbate pressures. Hanassab and Tidwell (2002) believe that preconceived notions of what being educated in the U.S. may inform international students’ perceptions and expectations prior to their arrival. These expectations are altered as students experience their new environment and come into contact with discrimination and prejudices (Hanassab, 2006). Lee and Rice (2007) propose that the resulting discrimination experienced by international students in the U.S. as a basis for further exploration and analysis. This calls for further research to understand even more aspects of the lives of international students, which can include the imposition of identity constructs existing in the United States.

**Adjusting.** As students reach actualization of their current realities and dispel their preconceived notions of their new cultural environment, they move into a state of shock that is referred to as culture shock (Barletta & Kobayashi, 2007). Culture shock is a natural and inevitable process that many immigrants including international students experience as they begin to adjust to a new cultural environment (Barletta & Kobayashi, 2007; Ward & Kennedy, 1994). Behavioral shifts in speaking, dressing, or eating, help in their sense of belonging but can also be negative and manifested as acculturative stress.
(uncertainty, anxiety, or depression) (Berry et al., 1997). Klomegah (2006) proposes that cultural adjustment happens as international students adopt the cultural aspects of the host culture and they begin to lose some of the aspects of their home culture or country.

This process, also known as acculturation, shows general changes in beliefs, customs, economic and political lives, and the values of members of one culture when they come into contact with a dominant culture (Berry, 2005; Berry, Phinney, Sam & Vedder, 2006; Evans et al., 2010). However, this process is not one sided. Berry (2005, 2009) sees this as a dual process, and further views it as a two-way interaction, in which no one cultural group remains unchanged, and both the host culture and immigrant culture act and react to contact situations. Klomegah’s (2006) study exploring the alienation experienced by international students in the United States, and their correlation with social factors took place at a historically minority-serving institution. Results from 94 respondents (51 international students and 43 American students), indicated that the more students engage with the campus and its programs, the greater their sense of belonging. But, younger students experienced greater alienation than older students. Berry’s work (1995, 1997, 2005, 2006, 2009) supports the findings of Klomegah (2006). Implications for institutions included programs that exposed the campus community to foods and culture from international students’ backgrounds, and supports Berry’s (2005, 2006, 2009) assertion that acculturation is not a unilateral process.

Ward and Kennedy (1994) borrowed from Berry’s (1974) acculturation strategies to form a theoretical approach to culture shock. The researchers looked specifically at deficits in individual psychological resources such as self-esteem, language ability and
values and found that all these areas affect acculturation and can be a source of stress (Ward & Kennedy, 1994). The very troubling side to acculturation, as merely echoed in the literature on adjustment, is that the non-dominant group must adopt the basic values of greater society, and the dominant group must adapt national institutions (education, labor, and health) to meet the needs of all groups of a now plural society (Berry, 2009).

One assumption that arises from this process that is proposed by Berry (2009) is that the dominant group will adapt already established institutions to meet the needs of the other groups. This adaption, in its own right, is problematic because of already existing structures of oppression that marginalize, and exclude minorities and disenfranchised members of the host country. This lack of change in already established systems, amalgamated with issues of acculturation adds to a host of issues faced by international students (Tidwell & Hanassab, 2007).

**Problems faced.** International students are left vulnerable to factors that affect their adjustment to a new college environment (Sherry, Thomas & Chui, 2009). Literature on international students often neglects to inform an understanding of the role that the university community plays in international student adjustment. Sherry et al. (2009) found that at the University of Toledo, not enough was done to assist international student socialization and financial stability. The current services provided by the institution did not encourage international students to feel connected to the university community. This conclusion was the result of a study with 121 international student participants. Their findings are important to the field of higher education because it supports previous findings linked to the other issues faced by international students.
However, they make a clear connection to the role of the university community and its contribution to international student departure. Opportunities for funding by the institution were a major concern for the participants. This finding reflects a growing area of concern for many students in higher education institutions due to the increasing cost of higher education (Altbach & Teichler, 2001). The researchers found that international students experience financial vulnerabilities from not only the cost of living but also the cost of education and fees (Sherry et al., 2009).

Colleges and universities over time have made a paradigm shift from one of “diplomacy and intercultural exchange to globalism, often with underlying motivations” (Lee & Rice, 2007, p. 383). One may consider that one source of funding for an institution of higher education is their recruitment and enrollment of international students. Yet, institutions of higher education are not doing enough to support or provide additional resources to retain international students, which might be a result of their shift to commercialization. This shift may be perceived as a lack of commitment by institutions. Atlbach and Teichler (2001) suggest that the lack of commitment of equal opportunity for international or foreign students on the part of an institution of higher education contributes to the students’ financial exploitation.

In addition to financial issues, some of the literature suggests that international students can experience loneliness, interpersonal problems, alienation, homesickness, racial discrimination, and academic difficulty (Hsu, 2003; Sherry, Thomas & Chui, 2009; Yeh & Inose, 2003). Alienation, loneliness, and English language proficiency have been constant fixtures in the literature on international students. The causes of alienation and
loneliness are attributed to the lack of social support networks, and the cultural/linguistic environments (Sherry, Thomas & Chui, 2009; Tidwell & Hanassab, 2007; Yeh & Inose, 2003). Yeh and Inose’s (2003) 359-participant quantitative study explored reported English fluency, social support satisfaction, and social connectedness of international students, as predictors of acculturative stress. English fluency or proficiency, according to Yeh and Inose’s (2003) analyses, had an effect on the level of acculturative stress experienced. They found that participants who are more fluent in English experience less acculturative stress (Yeh & Inose, 2003).

English language proficiency has been researched extensively, and found to be a vital part of international student success, and an important element in both academic and social adjustment (Tidwell & Hanassab, 2007; Sherry et al., 2009; Yeh & Inose, 2003). Although addressing some of these issues are important, it is crucial to acknowledge the greater societal problems affecting international students. Yoon and Portman (2004) contended that issues such as racism in the host community contribute to the environmental factors that affect international students. Often in the literature, personal factors of international students such as English language proficiency, cultural and familial background, and adjustment are the sole focus of interrogation (Yoon & Portman, 2004). Often times, this can be misconstrued and international students are perceived to be the problem. By focusing on race, the label “international student” becomes unstable and a breakdown in the essentialized group can be seen. Yeh and Inose (2003), and Klomegah (2006), who have been highlighted in this section, have noted that the racial dynamic in the United States could have varied effects on the level of
acculturative stress. Yeh and Inose’s (2003) study indicated that individuals from Asian, African, and Latin American cultures, felt more connected socially depending on their interactions with others members of similar cultural backgrounds. Similarly, Klomegah (2006) found that African students who were similar phenotypically to African-American students at the institution adjusted comfortably to their U. S. campus. Further evidence that international students who are perceived to belong to minority groups in the U. S. could experience distress in a majority White campus or environment on the basis of race.

**The Construction of Race and the Black International Student**

Race is sometimes seen as a way of categorizing a group of people based on distinct hereditary traits, and it [race] can also be used as a way of referencing power, socioeconomic status, or even a means of self-expression (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Omi & Winant, 1986). These different meanings of race signal that race is fundamental to how one views the world and interprets racial differences (Omi & Winant, 1986). Even through science, scholars in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were persistent in their interests in ranking variations of humankind (Omi & Winant, 1986). Omi and Winant (1986) posited that the biological definition of race was not sufficient to explain the concept across various scientific arenas such as anthropology, genetics and educational psychology. Furthermore, Ore (2006) hypothesized that critical exploration of reality requires an awareness of place, time, and culture, maintaining a common thread proposed by Weber (1998). Supporting what many researchers such as Crenshaw (1991) suggests, that race is not biological and should be seen as a social concept.
Omi and Winant (1986) saw race in two ways: 1) as a social concept, and 2) as an ideological concept. As a social concept, racial meanings have varied tremendously over time and between different societies, where racial categories are embedded in specific social relations and historical contexts (Omi & Winant, 1986). Therefore, race to Omi and Winant (1986) could be seen as a sociohistorical concept. The concept however then comes into contention when race is defined through collective action or personal practice (Omi & Winant, 1986), adding to the competing construction of identity dimensions at societal and individual levels proposed by Weber (1998). However, the importance and content of racial categories, as proposed by Omi and Winant (1986) are determined by social, economic, and political forces and further shaped by racial meanings; a process known as racial formation. As an ideological concept, race is seen as fixed and rooted in nature, and as part of this concept, we omit the historical construction of it, thus not acknowledging a reality of a racialized society and its impact on raced people (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1996).

Navigation of race relations is dependent on the way individuals look, therefore individuals not fitting neatly into these categories defy what is imagined when picturing a particular racial group (Johnson, 2006). Using stereotypes and other preconceived notions to determine what is suitable for particular races, reinforces and maintains the social order in the United States (Omi & Winant, 1986). Superior and inferior categories are created based on racial origins, and the result is discrimination of other racial groups.
For these reasons, it is valuable to study the experiences of people who participate in societal institutions\(^2\) that reinforce oppression based on race.

**The Black international student.** One thing that is becoming increasingly evident in current literature is the need to acknowledge that some international students experience racial discrimination (as seen in Barletta & Kobayashi, 2007; Hanassab, 2006; Lee & Rice, 2007; Tidwell & Hanassab, 2007; Sherry et al., 2009; Yoon & Portman, 2004). Therefore, it is timely to pursue a study that will help gain an understanding of the experiences of Black international students when many factors shape the way that race is experienced. The results in many studies exploring the experiences of international students is that race matters in the context of the United States. In a study having 501 international student participants, Lee and Rice (2007) found that through social interactions on and off campus international students experienced varied rates of discrimination based on the country of origin, language, and race. Focusing on race, a White male student from the Netherlands shared:

> Well I haven’t experienced discrimination. But then again, I take a cynical view that I’m a White guy who speaks English. So that makes you less a target for discrimination. But if you’re a non-White and you have trouble with the language then, yes, I suppose you can be even singled out. As I said, I haven’t had any negative experiences...I am enjoying myself here. (Lee & Rice, 2007, p. 393)

This experience for White international students is further supported by a student in a different study from Ireland in relation to their interaction with classmates, “When people look at me, they take me for an American so I don’t suffer any discrimination” (Hanassab, 2006, p. 163).

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\(^2\) Refers to the family, education, the economy, the state, and the media (Ore, 2006)
However, for other international students who identify as being of color, their experiences differ markedly. Barletta and Kobayashi (2007) emphasize that “racial discrimination is one of the crucial problems for international students” and “tends to occur mostly in public places…” (p. 187). A Korean student remarking on their experience interacting with students at their host institution shared that, “Racial discrimination among students definitely exists” (Hanassab, 2006, p.164). While a Costa Rican student shared that “Some classmates were saying that black comes in more shades of black, referring to me (Latino)” (Hanassab, 2006, p. 167). The results in Hanassab’s (2006) study indicated that although there is an awareness of diversity, it also means that there is segregation that is accompanied by stereotypes. A Spanish student highlighted in this same study that, “The cultural diversity in Los Angeles still coexists with racial stereotypes” (Hanassab, 2006, p. 167). Hypothetically, some international students across the United States are exposed to racial stereotypes and discrimination, despite the experiences of participants of this study who were based in Los Angeles.

When considering literature on discrimination of international students, the literature suggests that African, Asian and West Indian students may experience more discrimination and prejudice due to the color of their skin (Barletta & Kobayashi, 2007). Literature on immigrants of color and their children also support that race relations matter in the United States (Waters, 2004). Waters (1994) has noted that first generation Black immigrants have faced overwhelming pressures to only identify as “Blacks” in the United States but distance themselves from “American Blacks” and stress their national origins and ethnic identities. Bryce-Laporte (1972) has even described Black immigrants as
invisible immigrants. Rather than be compared to other immigrant groups, Black immigrants are compared to Black Americans (Waters, 1994).

Lee and Rice (2007) added to an increasingly common trend. A woman from the Gulf Region who is often wrongly classified as a Black American questioned her race because of the way Black Americans were portrayed in the media. She shared that:

The most difficult thing for me personally was the race issue. I wasn’t that conscious of my race because of where I come from. Race issues do exist but it’s more social class. American students would ask me why I spoke like a White person [and] I didn’t get it. I had no clue what they were talking about… If you’re going to get robbed it’s going to be a Black guy, if you’re going to be killed it’s going to be a Black guy, because that’s what’s on television... I think it shifted in my understanding of what was going on in terms of race relations in America, I know there are more Blacks involved in crime and more Black men in prison more than any other group in the U.S. (Lee & Rice, 2007, p. 395)

Lee and Rice (2007) found that immigrants want to understand where they belong in the context of American society and want to understand the dynamics of race for Americans because “they find themselves at times pushed into particular categories while at other times excluded due to their position as outsiders” (p. 395). Questioning where they fit is further amplified when negative social images of particular racial groups are displayed through the media and the stereotypes associated to them are thrust upon immigrants (Lee & Rice, 2007). For many international students, this process occurs at an early stage as they enter the United States and for some it is the first time being confronted with discrimination because they have never experienced it in this way in their home countries (Lee & Rice, 2007).
The Construction of Sexuality and the Black Gay International Student

Social institutions govern the construction of sexuality (Ore, 2006). Altman (2001) stated, “sexuality, like other areas of life, is constantly being remade by the collision of existing practice and mythologies with new technologies and ideologies” (p. 36). Nevertheless, Ore (2006) and Quinlivan and Town (1999), contend that categories of sexuality are strictly defined and limiting, they confine and reinforce institutionalized behaviors. Ore (2006) elaborates on this statement, adding that the dominant categories that construct sexuality are the heterosexual and homosexual (or non-heterosexual) binary. Where heterosexuality is seen as normal and non-heterosexuality is seen as abnormal (Katz, 1995; Johnson, 2006; Ore, 2006). Birzman (1997) gives this abnormality a definition, where he emphasizes the privilege of being heterosexual, and states that heterosexuality determines what is natural and what is not.

Unlike race, some social constructions such as sexual orientation are more difficult to identify at first glance. This is due to a blanket assumption that everyone is heterosexual until proven otherwise (Johnson, 2006). An individual not ascribing to the dominant culture of being straight or heterosexual is seen as abnormal, yet many people who identify as heterosexual experience their sexuality as normal. They continue to think and experience their sexual orientation as normal until they come into contact with someone who identifies as gay or lesbian (Butler, 1990; Evans et al., 2010; Johnson, 2006). By not questioning the naturalness or normalcy of their sexual orientation, many heterosexual people do not recognize that they are privileged (Abes & Kasch, 2007; Johnson, 2006).
Being that heterosexuality is seen as normal for both men and women in the United States, there are laws and actions that allow access to resources to heterosexual people but deny them to lesbians and gays (Ore, 2006). Making the claim that stereotypes that were biologized emerged from the categorization popularized by sex reformers, Hubbard (1990) argues that the homosexual was seen during this period as a deviant who should not be found responsible for his or her unnatural behavior. Hubbard (1990) stated that behaviors came to define particular persons, rather than being attributed to them. As a result, same-sex attraction and same-sex love was shifted to a medical problem to be treated by doctors due to its deviant nature (Hubbard, 1990). The term homosexuality originated toward the end of the nineteenth century; in 1869 to be exact (Hubbard, 1990; Katz, 1995). A homosexual was seen as an individual who had sexual relations with someone of the same biological gender (Hubbard, 1990).

A key tenet in queer theory argues that heteronormativity creates a binary that forces individuals to identify as heterosexual or non-heterosexual (Abes & Kasch, 2007). Individuals who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) are many times grouped together in the context of higher education for the purposes of providing programs and services (Renn, 2010). This is also reflected in some of the existing literature on sexual orientation, but distinctions between these essentialized groups are needed because the categories (i.e. LGBT) are different and are also experienced in different ways (Bilodeau, 2005). Renn (2007) distinguishes between these groups by stating that lesbian, gay, and bisexual refer to terms based on sexual orientation, while
transgender refers to gender identity. This paper brings the focus solely to individuals identifying as gay.

Non-heterosexuality or homosexuality has come a long way in the United States, from the 1950s when men identifying as homosexual were depicted as a “nighttime marauder of public parks or molester of boys” (Sears, 1998, p. 75). Yet, individuals identifying as lesbian and gay are still seen as abnormal and bear the burden of justifying their sexuality as natural as being heterosexual (Sears, 1998). Katz (1995) found it necessary to not ignore the concept of heterosexuality. By ignoring it and focusing on the unnatural act that is homosexuality, we fail to critically question what is considered normal (Katz, 1995). The heterosexual idea is privileged when not studied and questioned, thus protecting it from being challenged and being seen as normal or natural. Katz (1995) stated that by studying the history of heterosexuality we see the evolution of its definitions and upset the basic preconceptions through this challenge of power by exploration.

Katz (1995), in his conceptualization of heterosexual history, regards the 1945-1965 period as Heterosexual Hegemony, where heterosexuality went almost unchallenged. Alfred Kinsey’s report, Sexual Behavior in the Human Male, was dubbed by Katz (1995) as the challenge to the idea of heterosexuality. In this report, Kinsey found that homosexual relations were more common than previously thought (Kinsey, 1984). Katz (1995) saw Kinsey’s work as reforming the hetero-homo dualism by widening the heterosexual category to account for the varied sexual encounters experienced by individuals. By doing so it suggests “there are degrees of heterosexual
and homosexual behavior and emotion” (Katz, 1995, p. 97). Katz (1995) argues that the study of the history of the heterosexual experience will be a challenge intellectually because in order to question it we must isolate heterosexuality, homosexuality, and sexualities in general from the biological realm.

The Black gay international student. So far in this literature review, the opportunity has been given to build a brief foundation for understanding the construction of difference in the United States, which emphasized the social construction of identity categories. The importance of contexts and the behaviors expected within them were touched upon by giving an overview of laws that criminalize same-sex acts in countries outside the United States. International student arrival, acculturation, problems faced, and the overall manner in which they are described in existing literature was presented. This presentation of literature showed that international students experience discrimination and marginalization constantly while studying in the United States, and often times this leads to isolation and loneliness. Revealing an intersection of minoritized identities that international students may possess in the U.S., which complicates their experience and perceptions of who they are due to their unfamiliarity with particular labels. This section exposes the intersections of identity of the Black gay international student.

Experiences of international students cannot be separated from their identities, and furthermore, participating in a U.S. higher education system forces these students to interact with other stakeholders, which further shape their core sense of self. “Our racial, gender, sexual, and class identities are enmeshed in such a way that we cannot neatly separate them” (Kim, 2001, p. 108). Weber (1998) in her conceptual framework
acknowledges this complexity of life experiences, and refutes the thought that the
dimensions of everyday life could be separated neatly. Identities of individuals are not
separate entities, and they intersect and interact to shape the way that individuals see the
world (Shields, 2008). However, it is important to delineate identities and the prejudices
that could be associated with them. Parks, Hughes, and Matthews (2004) state that social
identities such as race and sexuality overlap, however, they are distinct. Nabors et al.
(2001) suggest that individuals identifying as people of color and LGB experience
multiple oppressions. Someone identifying as a person of color and gay or lesbian may
feel that one of these dimensions of identity could be more important than the other (Wall
these dimensions can be difficult, and individuals with those identities may feel
disempowered and discriminated with regard to both oppressed identities.

Rosario, Schrimshaw, and Hunter (2004), in a longitudinal quantitative study on
ethnic/racial differences in the coming out process of 145 LGB youth, hypothesized that
the development of an LGB sexual identity differs based on the ethnic/racial background
of an individual. The results of the study by Rosario et al. (2004) found that Black youth
were more uncomfortable disclosing their sexuality and shared this with fewer people
than their White peers. Black youth experienced a greater increase in positive attitudes
when compared with White youth later in the study. The researchers attributed a change
in negative attitudes of Black youth to the resolution of some internalized homophobia,
and by the end of the study, there were no differences from their White peers. However,
it is important to note that involvement in LGB organizations increased positive attitudes,
coincidentally decreasing negative attitudes about being LGB (Rosario et al., 2004). Contradicting their hypothesis, Rosario et al. (2004) found that Black and Latino youth were more aware of their LGB identity as compared to their White counterparts. The researchers attributed this to the cultural pressures shaping their perceptions of homosexuality (Rosario et al., 2004). These pressures could be attributed to the level of discrimination that LGB students are exposed to in the United States (Lewis, 2003), when they are perceived to be one of the most disliked groups (Blumenfeld, 1992). Due to constant victimization or fear, some students may remain closeted. LGB students may choose to switch between two identities, a heterosexual identity that is known by some family and friends at home, and an emerging sexual minority identity (Evans & D’Augelli, 1996; Sanlo, 2004).

Lesbian and gay students face stigmatization and harassment due to their sexual orientation, and some do not have support from their institutions. Many institutions of higher education have been slow to incorporate LGB students into initiatives that include other minoritized student populations on campus (Sanlo, 2004). This becomes problematic because higher education environments are usually where many students begin to disclose their sexual identities (Vaccaro, 2006). Wickens and Sandlin (2010) conducted a study that examined how heteronormative discourse becomes embodied, resisted, and negotiated within a college of education. The researchers found that homophobia and heterosexism were perpetuated by both professors and students within the college through overt and hidden forms of curricula (Wickens & Sandlin, 2010). Sanlo, Rankin, and Schoenberg (2002), have acknowledged that education and advocacy
training for faculty on curriculum inclusion, mentoring, and counseling programs may have a positive impact on student retention. But a very harsh reality still exists regarding centers that support LGB students across the United States. In 2008, the National Consortium of Directors of LGBT centers reported only having 195 campuses with LGBT centers out of approximately 4,495 colleges, universities, and junior colleges in the United States (Institute of Education Sciences, 2010; National Consortium of Directors of LGBT, 2009).

With many institutions not having the necessary resources to support students who identify as LGB, and faculty members who do not practice inclusive teaching, there is an increased chance of student attrition. The findings by Wickens and Sandlin (2010) stress an important message, the practices of professors can reinforce a culture of discrimination against people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT). Keeping this in mind, and coupled with the results from Rosario et al.’s (2004) study, institutions should attempt to heighten its efforts because of the level of awareness that Black students have of their sexuality, and knowing that the practices by faculty members could further marginalize Black gay students. Based on Rosario et al.’s (2004) findings and insights by Wickens and Sandlin (2010), institutions can develop services and organizations that support LGBT students, and trainings to faculty members that could counteract some of the internalized homophobia that students of color are already experiencing.

Like their LGB domestic counterparts, LGB international students, may also encounter homophobia/heterosexism (Tang, 2007). International students studying in the
United States interact and form relationships with other individuals of the dominant group in order to acculturate. Through various strategies, international students can acculturate into greater society or to the new/dominant culture (Berry, 1997, 2008). Thus, international students are not static in this new environment. As Berry’s (1995, 1997, 2005, 2008, 2009; Berry & Annis, 1974) body of work on acculturation proves, immigrants interact with both the new culture and its constituents. As a result, this means that they are held to the standards of the dominant group. The dominant group often defines the ways in which the non-dominant group acculturates (Berry, 1997, 2005, 2008; Berry & Annis, 1974). When international students navigate through this new cultural environment, in some cases, are exposed to stereotypes, prejudices, and discrimination (Hanassab, 2006; Leong & Chou, 1996). These stereotypes, prejudices, and discrimination, might be due to them being perceived as belonging to a specific group. In many U.S. communities and campuses, individuals perceived to be LGB can experience hostility, and to many international students from a Western European country these attitudes maybe difficult to understand (Katz, 2008). These experiences of discrimination from members of the host country add to other issues that LGB international students already experience (Katz, 2008; Tsang, 2002).

International students can experience several issues, such as, a lack of social support from host nationals and disappointment with their relationships, language barriers, financial difficulty due to strict immigration regulations, and psychological and physical stressors (Tsang, 2002). In Tsang’s (2002) qualitative study, he found that gay international students do not share the difficulties or problems they experience with
others, and do not seek counseling because these problems are seen as personal problems beyond their control. Although Tsang’s (2002) study takes place in Canada, it informs partly our understanding of gay international students. Tsang (2002) recommended that many of the support services that are available to domestic LGB students can also be used by LGB international students. However, in the United States, Kato (1997) found that university support-staff’s commitment to assisting LGB students is unclear. Kato’s (1997) study is the first to look into the experiences of LGB international students and their international advisors who serve them in the United States.

Tang’s study supports Kato’s (1997) findings in the United States. Tang’s (2007) qualitative study, explored the experiences of three gay (male) international students and four student support service professionals in a Canadian university. The student service professionals perceived their roles on campuses as being available to help and support students, but acknowledged that they were unfamiliar with concerns/issues gay and lesbian international students faced (Tang, 2007). Tang (2007) described gay and lesbian international students as “the invisible minority” (p. 71), because there may be no obvious visual or physical characteristics as to the student’s nationality, culture, and sexual orientation. In Tang’s (2007) study, a student service professional indicated that LGB international students need to self-identify themselves. But as Katz (2008) shares, self-identification might be out of the question for many international students who identify as LGB from countries that oppose their sexuality, and whose families buy into discrimination against them.
Hebert (2003) posits that depending on the cultural context, it is difficult to self-identify. In a study exploring the experiences of lesbian, bisexual and queer\(^3\) international students, Hebert (2003) found that many of the participants thought that there was an inability to identify with being LBQ in their home country, but in the United States they strongly identified with their true sexual orientation. The study also found that religion and spiritual affiliation played an important role in the sexual identity development of the women. For many of the participants who continued to explore their sexual orientation, they expressed that they experienced various forms of oppression (Hebert, 2003).

However, on campus some women felt that they could express and explore their sexual identity. One participant described her experience of coming out as directly relating to coming to the United States. It was also noted by the participants that being in the United States led to difficulty managing their multiple identities (Hebert, 2003). LGB international students are psychologically and culturally different, and this has been a major challenge for international student advisers in the United States (Katz, 2008). Some students’ comfort levels depend on the space that they are in, and can be very private on one hand while on the other hand some may feel like they can compartmentalize, and be out in one context but not in another (Katz, 2008).

International students having to navigate discrimination based on their race and sexuality will have a higher level of acculturative stress. What this section has conveyed is that there is a need to be more informed of this international student sub-population. Existing literature can help explain broadly the intersections of race and sexuality,

\(^3\) The study only consisted of women who identified as lesbian, bisexual and queer (LBQ).
through research on minority populations and Black lesbian, gay and transgender youth.
Having literature on LGB international students closes the gap in the literature, but leaves
the task of exploring gay international students open to scholars. Clearly more research
still needs to be done on their identity development and their overall experiences on
college campuses.

**Against a Backdrop of Masculinity and Gender Performance**

Much of our understanding about gender and masculinity originate from the
understandings of sexuality. McLauren (1997) contends, that “normal” heterosexual
masculinity can only be understood in relation to ideas around homosexuality. In his
book, The Trials of Masculinity, McLauren (1997) pays close attention to the
construction and reconstruction of the deviant-normal and female-male binaries, through
the shifting definition of normality. He builds an argument based on medical and legal
discourses on masculinity. This piece of literature did not focus on femininity, rather it
sought to focus on masculinity and what masculinity should be, there were however
intersections on contradictory behavior among “deviant” men that would in some cases
be compared to behavior of women.

In introducing the topic of gender categories, McLauren (1997) gives this
example to showcase an emphasis, which was placed on sexual identity, and the privilege
assigned to gender in the early twentieth century:

“A man who killed ‘like a man’ was applauded by spectators and set free in one
courtroom, while in another the judge sentenced the accused, whose only crime
had been to dress like a woman, to a prison of eighteen months’ hard labor” (p. i).
This is only one example of how the courts contributed to the social construction of masculinity. The medical field, including psychology, also had a great impact on what was considered to be masculine. The simple notion of what we know now such as, men do not cry, has an origin. In the late nineteenth century, male emotionality became part of a larger debate over flogging (McLauren, 1997); a man’s tears were seen as embarrassing and weak. McLauren (1997) contended that tears, according to Darwin, were “largely given up by the civilized and more highly evolved; that is why idiots, women, and children were still prone to bouts of weeping while mature men reserved their energy for creative purposes…” (p. 133). Such examples by McLauren (1997) show some ways gender was institutionalized and specific roles were carved out for men and women. Although only a few examples are stated above, they are reflections of the changing definition of roles. These gendered roles form a gendered system that places men and masculinity to the top of a hierarchy, where women and femininity fall to the bottom (Ore, 2006).

What has been established above is that, masculinity is not a natural occurrence that everyone just knows. Masculinity has been constructed and policed by institutions such as the state, the economy, and the family. An individual’s interactions with these institutions and members of these institutions shape the way that masculinity is experienced. Kimmel (1994), sees the definition of masculinity as dynamic, and it is constructed through relationships with each other, through the world, and ourselves. Kimmel (1994) further argues that manhood is different for each person. This is especially important, because masculinity and men, as McLauren (1997) has clearly
established, is policed and sanctioned by the courts and medicine, but more specifically the male actors in those spheres. Kimmel (1994; 2008) further confirms this in his studies on masculinity in America. He asserts that men are constantly and carefully scrutinized by other men. In “Bros before Hoes”: The Guy Code, Kimmel (2008), states that “masculinity is largely a ‘homosocial’ experience: performed for, and judged by, other men” (p. 47).

Masculinity, and as a result, manhood is used to justify many actions taken by other men who violate the strict roles that become increasingly restrictive as they become older (Edwards & Jones, 2009). Due to the homosocial nature of masculinity, there is a risk of failure and constant competition to meet personal expectations and the expectations of other men (Kimmel, 1994). One source of this fear is homophobia (Kimmel, 2008). Kimmel (1994) explains that homophobia is the fear that one might be considered weak, shamed, and humiliated, therefore this fear has less to do with being considered gay or fearing gay men; men are simply ashamed to be afraid.

**Why is All This Important?**

Understanding the construction of difference and focusing on race, sexuality, and masculinity shapes an understanding of the expectations placed on men, but it also gives insight on the racialized and sexualized experiences of Black gay men. This section of my literature review is meant to provide a foundation for understanding how identity dimensions or categories have been constructed over time. More importantly identities are not only constructed socially, the individual within society also constructs them. This was very evident in the construction of masculinity where both the individual and other
men shaped expectations. And further hypothesized by Weber (1998), Omi and Winant (1986), and Ore (2006). It should however be noted that although individuals personally construct their identities, the literature shows that the conditions for identity formation is not solely determined by them. This section also informs the understanding that identities are socially constructed and what we understand as race, sexuality, and gender, are all labels assigned to positions in society that is determined by the dominant group or dominant narrative.

Conclusion and Directions for Further Research

Separate bodies of literature were pulled together to help conceptualize the Black gay international student. The orienting question used to guide the review revealed a need to understand and center the discussion of discrimination experienced by different sub-populations of international students. Being that these students possess multiple marginalized identities, it is important to understand their experiences and development. This adds to a need for further research to understand how Black gay international students perceive their identities. I was able to conceptualize whom a Black gay international student could be, but by using several bodies of literature to understand them. At times literature on gay Black/African Americans and LGBT international students were used in order to supplement each other and parallel experiences of gay international students. Furthermore, the literature on the construction of social identity dimensions, international students, and acculturation proved that there is also a need to understand identity in context.
Another finding from the literature was the importance of culture and country of origin. The additive method I used to construct my literature review should have made understanding Black gay international students more seamless. Now, despite the additive process employed to build this understanding of the Black gay international student, it was done to build on and weave in the identity dimensions and reveal complexity.

Therefore, a finding in itself and an implication for future research is to look at the broader social categories that shape the way individuals experience their identity. One avenue for further research is to investigate the identity development of international students’ multiple dimensions of identity, more specifically the intersections of nationality, race, sexuality, and gender. Future research on identity of international students should focus on understanding should include an examination of the institutional context. As part of my analysis within this literature review, I found that individuals with minoritized identities can construct their understanding of identity but they do so in a context that is already predetermined. There were some instances in this literature review where LGB international students felt invisible and in some cases very visible. This juxtaposition of visibility and invisibility needs further exploration to investigate whether this is a selective action by international students in order to navigate safely, or a form of “intersectionality blindness” (Rodricks, 2013).
Chapter Three: Methodology and Research Design

This study uses narrative methodology to explore the experiences of Black gay international students in the context of American higher education. From sharing their stories, an understanding can be gained of how Black gay international students understand their identities in multiple contexts. “People reveal the ways they interpret their identities and experiences through their stories” (Tracey, 2013, p.29). Thus, the narratives of Black gay international students can reveal contradictory experiences to what is considered normal for Black or African American college students, but also undermine structures of inequality rooted in socially constructed categories of race and sexuality. As a result, this study explored the experiences of international students at the intersections of race, sexuality, gender and nationality. This study offers ways to understand the patterns of discrimination in relation to structures of power that influence the experiences of Black gay international students in the United States. To understand their experiences the study attempted to answer the following research question and sub-questions:

*How do Black gay international students understand their racialized sexuality?*

a. *In what ways do Black gay international students perform their race and sexuality?*
b. What events or pre-determined factors are significant to how black gay international students understand or have come to understand the intersection of race and sexuality?

c. What lived experiences highlight the intersections of race and sexuality?

d. What contexts, if at all, inform the intersectional experiences of Black gay international students?

This chapter provides a description of the methodology and research design, including data collection and data analysis. The theoretical orientation of this methodology and research design is grounded in the fusion of Queer Theory and Intersectionality.

**Narrative Inquiry**

Narrative inquiry is being used more frequently in educational research, and focuses on the experiences of human beings and how they experience the world (Connely & Clandinin, 1990; Lapan et al., 2011; Riessman, 2002). This form of social inquiry claims that we are storytellers and our stories impact the individual and the collective (Berger & Quinney, 2004). However, there are different forms of narrative inquiry that allow for varying ways of understanding an individual’s narrative (Denzin, 1999).

Narrative inquiry, allows individuals to analyze and criticize the stories they hear and share (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990; 1995). For the purposes of this study, I use experience-centered narrative inquiry to capture individual lived experiences as extended accounts of their lives over the course of the interview process (Riessman, 2002).

Narratives told are constantly reconstructed throughout life, capturing how we come to know who we are (Lieblich et al., 1998). This form of storytelling has the
potential to not only create agency but also construct notions of how individuals view themselves (Berger & Quinney, 2004).

Theoretical tenets of my framework undergird the assumptions of experience-centered narratives. Experience-centered narrative research is grounded in four assumptions (Squire, 2008). The first, sequential and meaningful, assumes that representations of personal narratives includes all sequential and meaningful stories that participants produce as personal experiences. Under this assumption, researchers tend to focus on experiences and relevant events in context and time. For example, a researcher could focus on a turning point in the life of a participant, and he recounts the realization of his sexuality and the context in which this occurred. This methodology from an intersectional approach allows for the identification of contextual influences on the lived experience of individuals relying on rich description that qualitative research facilitates. Intersectionality therefore assists in qualitatively revealing oppressions that marginalized people experience (Crenshaw, 1991), and as a critical theory, Intersectionality, “theorizes the simultaneity of race and gender as social processes” (Nash, 2008, p. 89). A Queer analysis of the subjective accounts of individuals would reveal that an individual’s understanding of their sexuality would be based on their historical and/or cultural recollection of significant events.

Narratives as a means of human sense-making, acknowledges and delves into the significance of stories of the human experience that Queer Theory and Intersectionality are concerned with (Abes & Kasch, 2007; Jones, 1997; Dilley, 1999). This assumption is focused on the special relationship between individuals and their stories and supposes
that narratives make us human (Lieblich et al., 1998; Squire, 2008). However, a critique of this assumption is that there are some facets of the human experience that cannot be made sense of through participant narratives, for example emotion (Frosh, 2002; Holloway & Jefferson, 2000; Squire, 2008). Despite this, Riessman (2002), contends that this assumption of human sense-making is important because through the “meaning making units of discourse” (p. 705) self-awareness and awareness of society can be articulated. Jefferson (2000) also contends that an emotional account can offer insight into an unconscious logic that the sequencing of stories cannot adequately capture. However, meaning in itself is problematic because it is contextually based and “is never simply an abstracted text, discourse or narrative” (Plummer, 1995, p. 106).

The third assumption of experienced-centered narrative inquiry centers the representation and reconstruction of narrative across space and time. Participant stories cannot be repeated exactly and the reconstruction of these stories depend on the time and context in which the participant recounts experiences/events (Squire, 2008). However, this reconstruction of participants’ narratives, as Frosh (2002) contends, can give insight into the unconscious (if the unconscious is defined) and through the uncertainties in representation in and through the narrative. For example, my (the researcher’s) phenotypical and vocal attributes can influence what a participant chooses to share or not share. My participation in the context of the study can influence the way that participants represent their narrative.

The final assumption, narrative as transformation forces the researcher to situate experience in context, where narratives can represent personal change or transformation
These narratives usually involve violations of normality through human agency that can be indicated by personal growth. However, under this assumption the narrative can also be represented through negative experiences indicating a decline rather than personal growth (Squire, 2008) and can be represented controversially.

The underlying theme through each assumption is that contexts play a part in influencing how a participant perceives his experience. Therefore, the representation of his experiences is also culturally based, or as Squire (2008) refers to it as culturally-oriented. Theoretical perspectives on both experience-centered and culturally-oriented representations are contradictory, like the constructivist and postmodernist perspectives guiding this study. Each narrative representation and theoretical perspective informs the study in different ways, where personal identities, cultural representations, and unconscious meanings can be understood (Squire, 2002). Both the theoretical frameworks informing this form of narrative inquiry have been used in previous research on gender, sexuality and racial politics in the United States.

**Research Design**

As the orienting goal of this study is to understand the experiences of international students who identify as Black and gay, this qualitative methodology was suitable. This research design utilized an exploratory approach to understand these student experiences and helps me to operate within these two contradictory theoretical worlds. Figure 3.1 provides an overview of the data collection and analysis used in this study. I present this design in a sequential manner, beginning with the recruitment and participants who were a part of this study.
Participants and Recruitment. Remaining consistent with the practices in experience-centered narrative research, I maintained a small number of participants in order to focus on biographical accounts of significant moments of participant lives (Squire, 2008). Participants were international students in the United States who identified themselves as Black and gay. The study focused on the narratives of four (4) Black gay international students from four different institutions in the United States. Due to the nature of this study, I utilized “an opportunistic and network bias” approach to recruit participants (Squire, 2008, pp. 47-48). This was important for reaching as many potential participants as possible because men of color are usually more difficult to recruit in studies that examine sexuality (Anderson & Spencer, 2002).
I identified various e-mail listservs and groups that share interests that capture the sample needed for this study, such as NAFSA Rainbow, CSPTalk, LGBT, African, Caribbean diasporic Facebook groups/pages. Student organizations that I contacted were organizations that serve as social groups for students of African heritage or diaspora, example Caribbean Students Associations, Black Graduate Student Associations, and African Student Associations. All communications took the form of an electronic invitation/flyer to participate in the study, which was also used to forward to select students who met the criteria of the study (See Appendix J). Key informants at various institutions shared information about the project and how participants were able to become involved with the project. I created a contact list of 485 entities that included student services, International Student and Scholar Service offices and student personnel at select institutions to ask for assistance in recruiting participants. I specifically targeted LGBT student organization advisors, International Student Advisors, and student leaders who may have had some personal interactions with international students who identify as gay.

There were six Black gay international students who expressed interest in being part of the study, with two of them ultimately deciding that they could not participate. One of them from Jamaica at the initial stages of the study (review of informed consent) shared that he could not participate due to fear of being discovered. The other, also from Jamaica, shared during the first interview that he did not feel comfortable moving on because he was still trying to understand his sexuality and what it meant to openly disclose and discuss his sexuality. Table 3.1 provides demographic information for each
participant. It is important to note that one participant in the study from the Caribbean, requested that his specific country of origin be masked.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Country/Region</th>
<th>Classification</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Years in U.S.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Barabbas</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Bahamas</td>
<td>Doctoral</td>
<td>Mountain</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casper</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>South</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inkognito</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Caribbean</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>Mid-East</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Island Joe</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>St. Lucia</td>
<td>Bachelors</td>
<td>North East</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.1 Study Participants

**Data Collection.** Creswell (2007) describes data collection as “a series of interrelated activities aimed at gathering good information to answer emerging research questions” (p.118). Qualitative researchers employing narrative inquiry explore individuals’ stories through various data collection methods, such as interviews, observation, focus groups, artifacts related to the phenomenon, journaling, and videos (Creswell, 2003). Sources of data collection can also be based on the researcher’s experiences from the past or during data collection through researcher reflections/journals and analytic memos.

In this section, I describe the sources of data and the tools that I used in the data collection process necessary to provide answers to my research question. Figure 3.2 provides an overview of this process. For the purposes of this study, I conducted four individual interviews with participants including to a critical event timeline that indicate events and contexts that they believe are important to how they view themselves. Due to the small number of participants, I also collected additional data that helped to gain a better understanding about their home countries and institution in the United States. Finally, I explored and reflected on moments and insights during the course of the study that helped to understand my positionality.
Figure 3.2 Overview of Data Collection

**Online Questionnaire.** Based on the outcomes of two studies (See Kato, 1997; Tsang, 2002) that hoped to engage LGBT students online in order to collect data, I used an online questionnaire to help in the collection of the data and screened prospective participants for this study. After establishing a connection or interest, students were contacted to participate in the study (Kato, 1997; Tillapaugh, 2012; Tsang, 2002). The questionnaire was structured broadly so that no one was deterred from completing it. Therefore, any gay international student could have participated in the initial questionnaire regardless of how they might identify racially, however only students who fit the criteria were asked to advance in the study. Kato (1997) found that by not limiting
participants in her study, she was able to gain information that was used to support what other participants shared.

Tillapaugh’s (2012) electronic demographic form also was not restricted to his desired sample, that is, gay men. Individuals who decided to take part in the study exploring the experiences of gay men on campus, provided information that was limiting since follow-up questions were not included in this online data collection tool. The purpose of that online questionnaire was to collect demographic information and general responses regarding race, gender, sexual orientation, nationality, and overall climate or messages on campus around race and sexuality. Items on the questionnaire also asked potential participants their understandings of their performance and intersections of identity dimensions. Responses to the questionnaire were reviewed and invitations to participate in the interview process were sent to anyone who opted to continue in the study.

**Individual Interviews.** Students who enrolled in the study participated in four interviews. Interviews are the most frequent data collection sources in qualitative research (Creswell, 2007), and are conversational in nature that facilitate the exchange of views on a mutual topic of interest (Tracy, 2013). I utilized narrative interviews, which is consistent with narrative inquiry. This type of interview focused on specific and sensitive topics (Tracy, 2013). These interviews “usually consist of three interviews of about one to two hours each, moving from less sensitive and more descriptive to more sensitive and more focused on personal meaning and feelings” (Lapan, Quartaroli, & Riemer, 2011, p. 90).
Like Rumens (2008) who interviewed gay men in a study on their relationship with female co-workers, I used Oakley’s (1981) friendship model of interviewing. This approach provided a more humanistic approach to interviewing, where participants were not seen as just objects or sources of data. Participants and interviewer share power in this approach and the interviewer did not need to act in an unbiased way (Oakley, 1981). In many cases over the course of the study, participants also had the opportunity to ask me questions because I identified with the population being studied. This approach fostered sessions that allowed participants to be vulnerable and emotional.

However, Tracy (2013) cautions that this approach to interviewing requires interviewers to be cognizant of shifts in power that can occur during the interview. This approach requires interviewers to be prepared for ethical issues that can arise and should practice “special care” and “reflection” (p. 142). Therefore, as the researcher, I not only shared my positionality and developed rapport with the participants, but I also practiced reflective memo writing throughout the data collection and analyses phases. Building rapport is necessary given that most of the interviews will be executed remotely. Such interviews are described by Tracy (2013) as synchronous mediated interviews, where both parties meet for the interview session similar to a face-to-face interview. Tracy (2013) also contends that a mediated approach can foster a space where participants can feel safer. I arranged interviews with participants through Skype with one of the participants requesting the final three interviews be in-person or face-to-face. Consistent with queer and intersectional approaches, interview questions were open-ended so that
participants were free to indicate specific contexts, events, and overall experiences that reflected their personal narratives (Dilley, 1999).

In the first interview, I asked participants to choose a pseudonym that was used for the study and protect their identity. Questions in this interview were broad questions that prompt students to share stories about their lives in general. These questions also explored aspects of their lives that shaped how they understood their identities. Specific questions about their race and sexuality and how, if at all, were their identities performed differently depending on context. This initial interview allowed students to introduce and describe their campuses to indicate the level of support that were available to international students identifying as Black and gay. The final phase of the interview prompted students to describe other dimensions of identity or other aspects of their life that are important to who they are as a person. The protocol for the first interview was field-tested with three students who closely met the sampling criteria for this study. There were two cycles of revisions for this protocol. I used the same interview protocol with each participant for the first interview.

In preparation for the second round of interviews, I reviewed what was discussed in the previous interviews and asked participants if they would like to add anything else. Due to the focus on their lived realities, I asked participants in each round of interviews if anything significant happened over the course of the study that triggers or informs their sexuality and/or race. Participants were asked to complete a critical event worksheet (See Appendix H) prior to interview. There were two participants who completed the critical event worksheet during the second interview. Participants were asked to talk about each
event and its significance to them, while describing and paying close attention to the contexts in which they took place. Participants were given an opportunity to make changes to this worksheet and write any notes as the interview progressed. I chose to include this worksheet as a way of stimulating stories and to gauge the importance of events in shaping who an individual understands themselves holistically.

The third interview in this study focused on concepts such as masculinity, race, sexuality, and college experience. During this round of interviews, the participants referenced their critical event timeline to describe other identities that were significant to them during moments of discomfort or were salient at the time of conflict. I took this opportunity in all cases to discuss in lingering thoughts from the second round of interviews. I explored racial group membership during this interview. Participants in this study would be described as part of the same group, i.e. Black, and in many cases, African American (despite their non-membership). Although their experiences might be similar, they can also be markedly different. I described this form of identification as the reference group orientation for the participants. Cross (1991) describes reference group orientation (RGO) as the group identity of individuals based on their racial, religious, class, or socio-economic identity. This terminology highlights the fact that although Black gay international students can be identified in those ways, there are distinctions within the group that cannot allow generalizations to be made based on race or sexuality. Therefore, remaining consistent with the assumptions of Intersectionality and Queer Theory, this interview allowed for a discussion of differences within the group regardless of their common reference group orientation.
Critical Event Timeline Worksheet. As part of the second interview, participants completed a timeline indicating events that shaped their understanding of themselves and the cultural context in which the event occurred. This worksheet included a timeline where students identify specific events and a section for making notes. Although this worksheet is not aligned with practices in experience-centered narrative inquiry, I used it as a point of entry into the stories of their lived realities. Therefore, the focus is not on the event itself, but the identification and description of the contexts, power structures or patterns of discrimination, and other components of the story. The worksheet was e-mailed to the students in a follow-up e-mail after the first interview. The students were asked to identify at least five events. After completing the timeline, I asked questions focused on the participants’ race and sexuality, including concrete examples of how these identities intersect based on the timeline.

The fourth and final round of interviews was specific to the contexts that were significant to the participants in which their identities were salient. This interview was conducted almost two months after their third interview. During this interview, I also followed up with the students about points of interest from previous interviews. The participants shared stories about what informed their salient identities and how they understood them based on experiences in their home country or the United States, and in the case of one participant, another country where he resided prior to coming to the U.S. During this interview, I took the opportunity to ask participants to share more about their experiences in the United States specifically around participation in the United States and the fluidity of their identities in this context.
Other artifacts and field texts. Experienced-centered and culturally-oriented approaches to narrative inquiry allow for the inclusion of artifacts, which informs the researcher’s understanding of the topic, participant, or contexts. These artifacts include art (and other imagery), descriptions of services and courses offered at the participants’ institutions, critical events timeline, news stories aligning with critical events indicated by participants, and other non-oral media (Squire, 2008). I paid close attention to news stories including videos and article posts, blog posts, laws, personal and formal country histories and maps that provided me with more in-depth knowledge about host countries, higher education institutions, and activities that participants engaged in. These artifacts assisted in understanding the meaning participants associated with specific experiences and contexts in which critical events took place. In addition to artifacts, field texts/reflective memos played a significant role in the interpretive process as it defines the relationship between the researcher and the participant (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). These artifacts situated me within the context of the study as I reflected on triggering or significant moments for the participants that were usually generated concurrently, following interviews, or/and in the collection of artifacts. Field texts were also used to make note on significant social or political events taking place during the interview, since this can have an impact on what a participant may share.

Summary of Data

The data collected reflected my interactions with four Black gay international students over the course of six months. Each participant participated in four interviews that lasted between of about forty-five minutes and two hours. There were follow up
discussions with participants as I worked with them to construct narratives that make up Chapter four of this dissertation. While conducting the interviews, I journaled my interactions with them as a way of tracking my positionality and my reactions and interactions with each participant. Due to additional data needed to get a better understanding of context, I collected data from blog posts, legal documents, and news articles that documented incidents against homosexuality in home countries. Participants also completed the critical event timeline that gave a sense of what events, if at all, were significant to shaping the experiences and identities of participants in the United States and their home countries.

Data Analysis

All sources of data collection, including reflective memos and artifacts were included in analysis. Data analysis included organizing and reducing the data into themes through coding, reduction of codes, and representation of the data (Creswell, 2007). Consequently, I organized my files, constructed notes, and created a series of codes that were then be used to develop categories to establish themes (Creswell, 2007). This process of coding helped me, as the researcher, differentiate, combine, and further reflect on the qualitative data collected during the study (Miles & Huberman, 1994). “A code in qualitative inquiry is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data” (Saldaña, 2013, p. 3). To better organize and manage the codes I developed from the data, I used NVivo. However, there were times I felt manual coding was more appropriate due to restrictions of NVivo when including artifacts in the
analysis. Coding software allows for a better exploration of relationships between codes and constructing conceptual code maps, which is helpful when transitioning between coding cycles (Saldaña, 2013). I also made analytic memos, which I used to complement my coding of the data during the coding process. Analytic memos, as a tool in the research process, provide the means to record significant thoughts, reflections, and informal codes as they relate to what is being collected (Saldaña, 2013).

There are two broad methods of cycle coding as discussed by Saldaña (2013), namely first and second cycle coding. The first method occurs “during the initial coding of data” (Saldaña, 2013, p. 45), and these methods can be referred to as: grammatical, elemental, affective, literary and language, exploratory, procedural, and theming the data (Saldaña, 2013). The second-cycle coding process includes a more analytical approach where the data is then classified, prioritized, integrated, and better conceptualized to develop theories (Saldaña, 2013). For the purposes of this study, I conducted an analysis of the data which was grounded in Queer Theory and Intersectionality. This is essential to the study since Queer Theory would shift the focus away from specific identity categories, allowing for an analysis of specific subjectivities and underlying power structures. While Intersectionality would be effective in justifying the discrete categories that queer theory deemphasizes, and reveal the contexts that individuals experience marginalization. Both analyses will allow for the questioning of relationships in relation to power.

Based on findings from the current review of the literature and the tenets of queer theory and Intersectionality, there are four broad but mutually informing ideas that I am
concerned with when conducting data analysis and (re)constructing participant narratives. These are: 1) significance of context/environment, 2) performance of identity is influenced by past experiences, 3) performance of identity is also based on contextually based expectations, and 4) interpersonal and intragroup relationships are significant. Coincidentally, this aligns with Clandinin and Connelly’s (2000) formulation of human experience and its representation in the construction of narratives. Human experience occurs in specific contexts, is based on interpersonal and group interaction, and is grounded in the past, present and future. Therefore, my analysis is grounded in these tenets, which guided and bounded my analysis.

![Figure 3.3. Data Analysis Mapping](image-url)
This study used contradictory theoretical approaches for both a descriptive and critical analysis of the data collected. My pairing and application of these theories are not to find commonalities between the two, but rather to embrace their contradictions and attempt to learn new ways of knowing and understanding. Through this analysis, I move toward a critical approach that moves past describing identity and exposes the societal power structures that continue to define what is normal. Figure 3.3 shows how I reconciled the two theories in order to have a more fluid and unified analysis of the data. I continue this chapter with a description of the analysis process and trustworthiness.

**Queer and Intersectional Components of Analysis**

During this analysis, I am mainly concerned with the accounts of participants that relate to their expression or performance of identity and the ways this performance resists oppressive social identities. I am also concerned with the underlying meanings of identity based on subject positions, especially in relation to how social categories influence performance of identity dimensions at the center of this study. As a result, I also take into consideration how participants describe their relationships with others. These are consistent with the tenets of queer theory that focus on the fluid nature of identity positions (Talburt, 2000), performativity (Butler, 1990), and influence of oppressive social categories (Tierney, 1993) and interaction with subject positions (Abes & Kasch, 2007). Consistent with queer theory and narrative inquiry, I attempt to preserve participant voice whenever possible. Therefore, my queer analysis has three coding cycles to maintain participant voice, preserve individual narrative, and connect salient experiences of participants.
Intersectional approaches in qualitative research allow for the identification of contextual influences on the lived experience of individuals relying on rich description that qualitative research facilitates. Intersectionality assists in qualitatively revealing oppressions that marginalized people experience (Crenshaw, 1991), and as a critical theory intersectionality “theorizes the simultaneity of race and gender as social processes” (Nash, 2008, p. 89). Intersectionality, which is a critical theory, helps to reveal the structures that shape the subjectivity of marginalized individuals. An intersectional analysis will therefore help with understanding the ways Black gay international students experience identity and describe intersecting patterns of discrimination based on race and sexuality in relation to their nationality. This analysis will also help in beginning to explaining contexts in which discrimination takes place through participants experienced-centered narrative accounts.

Initial Hybrid Analysis: In Vivo and Narrative. In vivo coding uses a word or phrases that participants use during the study as a code. Strauss (1987) describes process of coding as assigning the actual language that participants use. The terms used by Black gay international students can give insight into how they understand or perform race and sexuality, and therefore frame advance interpretations of terms not derived from academic disciplines (Stringer, 1999). Using this form of coding preserve participants’ voices and gives insight into how this student population might understand expectations and social categories such as race and sexuality. This form of coding is used in some studies that explore particular marginalized populations and their culture and worldview (Saldana, 2013). “Narrative coding is appropriate for exploring intrapersonal and
interpersonal participant experiences and actions to understand the human condition through storying, which is justified in and of itself as a legitimate way of knowing” (p.132). Narrative analysis includes methods such as thematic, structural, dialogic, and performative analyses (Riessman, 2008). Additionally, my analysis of images can provide a better understanding of the political context in which race and/or sexuality operates. Saldaña (2013) asserts, “the researcher’s careful scrutiny of and reflection on images, documented through field notes and analytic memos, generate language-based data that accompanies the visual data” (p. 88). Using constant comparison method, I compare the categories and codes of new transcripts, paying special attention to diversity of the dimensions in each category until there are no new emerging themes, codes, or categories (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

**Second Cycle: Pattern Coding.** My second cycle coding method will encompass the use of pattern coding (Mile & Huberman, 1994; Saldaña, 2013), which entails the use of “explanatory or inferential codes” (Mile & Huberman, 1994, p. 69), which was used to identify emergent themes, configurations, or explanations (Mile & Huberman, 1994; Saldaña, 2013). Therefore, pattern coding was “used for development of major themes from the data; examining social networks and patterns of human relationships” (Saldana, 2013, p. 210). I will use the codes from the first cycle to group common initial codes and assigning them a pattern code. To find common codes from the first cycle, I searched the code list from the InVivo computer aided software (Saldana, 2013). To assist in this development of the pattern code in this cycle, I made use of my analytic memos to reflect on what attribute that is common among the codes from the initial cycle. Based on this
code, I developed a descriptive statement that I used as a theme. Significant themes generated from the cycle will be discussed in the findings section. Themes generated in this cycle were essential to constructing components of narratives related to individual experiences and the role the individual plays in shaping definitions of identity or resistance to oppressive social categories. Individuals are not passive observers, they also have an influence on relationships and the context (Abes & Kasch, 2007; Bronfenbrenner, 1999; Foucault, 1980). In this second cycle, I continued to look for pieces of data that were concerned with my tenets identified earlier, such as resistance and performance.

**Third Cycle: Focused Coding.** The second cycle of analysis lead to “the development of higher-level theoretical constructs when similar themes are clustered together” (Saldana, 2013, p.176). As a result, this third cycle focuses on developing themes across cases, combining common or similar themes that apply to all participants in the study. Therefore, focused coding was used in this analytical process to develop categories or broader themes from tentative categories developed from initial or previous coding/analytical cycles. In this cycle, I was concerned with themes that each participant has in common. Contradictory themes were noted and will be discussed in my thematic findings (Chapter 5). After completing this analysis, I also made note of interpretations that I did not foresee as I embarked on this study, which I will also discuss in the findings section.
Positionality

Moving forward in this study, it was important to revisit my positionality. Being aware of my positionality helps me understand how I interpret data, which makes up this study and how it comprises the findings of the research. As an insider, I have a unique perspective being a Black gay international student in the United States. Growing up in St. Lucia, there were many times I felt defined by my mother’s expectation of me. These expectations included being a man and what that meant, who would I be and how will the rest of my life played out. There were significant moments that made me realize that my actual path and mother’s expectations were divergent. A man had to be strong, competent, intelligent, athletic, a provider, unemotional, heterosexual, father, protector, and the list goes on. I could never quite get that right no matter how hard I tried. Growing up, I also realized the importance of complexion with friends and neighbors calling me yellow boy or red man. The intersections of being perceived to be a cisgender man who is masculine and being lighter skinned, located me in a position of privilege and access to opportunities that were available to my own brother.

Over time I learned how to challenge the teachings of my mother and the norms that commanded that I needed to be a certain way or be a certain someone. I was afforded many privileges that carried me through to my doctorate program. During my first year, I was challenged to reflect on my previous experiences. These reflexive exercises, prompted me to dissect my life and allow me to see how my educational experiences sort to assist me in conforming and deculturalization. Through this reflective process, I realized that me coming to the United States, provided me with additional privileges that
was an asset to my success in the U.S. Where my educational background, perceived
gender and sexuality played a is part in my continued effort to define wo I am.
Understanding these identities, has given me some cultural competency to assist in my
navigation of the spaces that I occupy in the context of the United States.

I thought this study could provide more insight into who I am. Rather, it showed
that even my experiences were different than other Black gay international students who
study in the United States. Being aware of this I was able make note of the diversity that
is present in this population under investigation. My experiences as a student-athlete
added a layer of difference that made my experiences look very different when compared
to my participants. Throughout my life, I had racialized experiences that made me ask
many questions about opportunities and ask the question, why was this my experience. It
was not until starting the doctoral program that I came to engage with these experiences
more deeply. I tried to find meaning within the interactions that I had, that seemed
significant to undersetting the scope of my experiences. This study not only gives the
opportunity to explore those experiences but also provides the opportunity to repetitively
construct or redefine my sense of self.

Trustworthiness

Several steps were taken to enhance the quality and trustworthiness that will
ensure the quality of the data and potential findings. Trustworthiness is the qualitative
equivalent of quantitative approaches to validation. Lincoln and Guba (1985) identify
four terms that describe the rigor and accuracy in qualitative research: 1) credibility, 2)
transferability, 3) dependability, and 4) confirmability. Credibility was achieved through

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member checks, and the forth interview, and additional correspondences with participants. To ensure transferability, I provided thick descriptions of participants experiences through their narratives and took into consideration their institutions and home countries. Therefore, readers can draw inferences and understandings of data collected and analyses. Narrative inquiry allows for information rich description of the lived experiences of participants, which was honored in the narratives (Chapter 4) that was constructed from the data collected. Dependability and confirmability was ensured through constant reflection of the research process and auditing of the research process and peer debriefings.
Chapter 4: Situating Participants

The narratives that follow is presented in ways that capture significant moments related to the lives of the Black gay international students in this study. We (myself and participants) were guided by the framework in the process of constructing, deconstructing, and reconstructing so that we make meaning of our experiences in the United States as it relates to race, sexuality, nationality, and gender. The framework helps to describe the contexts, experiences, and the intersections of identity dimensions and then to deconstruct the narratives being shared. I specifically use Intersectionality as a way of construction and normatively define the intersections of identity categories. That construction is then troubled after being observed with the use of Queer Theory to deconstruct normative ideals that reveal underlying notions of power that bare on the bodies of the subjects in the study.

It is important to note that although I use direct quotes from the interviews to construct the presented narratives, they do not capture the depth and richness of what participants shared in their interviews. These quotes reveal significant moments or events that participants shared were important to them and how they understand their identities and realities. I use salient quotes from participant interviews to open each narrative and present a critical event timeline for each participant, which helps guide the construction
of their narratives. Overall findings based on my analysis of the data collected during the study are presented in the following chapter.

“…when it comes to sexuality I feel that it’s a story, you know, it's everything that you are, everything everywhere, every way you feel about everything has to do with whatever happened in your life before…”

-- Casper

I anxiously settled in to conduct my first interview with Casper. I was excited since he was my first participant who made contact and it was difficult to schedule because he was travelling back to Brazil for the summer. After the first attempt at calling failed, I received a call back. He was very calm and introduced himself, sharing much of the information I needed without any prompts. Casper, a twenty something (27) year old man, grew up in Brazil and is currently pursuing a masters degree in Louisiana. Casper completed his undergraduate education in the United Kingdom before moving to the United States with his long-term boyfriend Landon; a significant figure in Casper’s life. Landon and Casper are international students studying in the United States and although they live almost 100 miles away in Louisiana, Casper continues to feel supported by Landon but wishes they lived in the same location. Despite feeling isolated at times, Casper who is introverted, has managed to develop a thriving social life but struggles to form meaningful relationships with other members of the LGBT and Black community where he lives.
The opening quote from Casper captures the lens in which he views his many realities. This quote is powerful and insightful because at the beginning of the study he expressed that he “never really thought about my various identities,” rather he viewed himself as having one singular identity that relied primarily on his sexuality despite where he resided. As the study progressed he viewed himself as an individual who was shaped by identity-specific experiences. Race has always been a salient identity to Casper but it is an identity that he “chose” to not acknowledge at times, however over the course of the study he shared multiple experiences that were racialized. His nationality served as an identity that shaped the way others would perceive his race and/or sexuality, and assisted in creating his international student identity. His narrative is
a representation of significant events in his life that he believes shapes the way he understands his race, sexuality and their intersections with other identities. It is important to note that his narrative is constructed based on his understandings of race, sexuality and even gender based on him residing in Brazil, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

**Raced in Brazil: “The only one…”**

Casper acknowledges that race is significant and is influential in his life. He deeply reflected on his racial background during the study, and the role it played and continues to play in his life. He introduces the community he grew up in, and shares some of the realities associated with some people in Brazil along the intersections of race and class.

I think that one of the most influential things in my life personally, independent of anything else, is the issue of race for sure. I come from a family that is interracial. My mom is Black and dad is White, but it wasn't a big issue because they were both from a low social standing. Brazil has a weird relationship with race. I feel like I was always sort of in the middle of that kind of struggle. So, I was born in a big town which was very sort of diverse, but I was raised in a less diverse city, like towards the south. In this town, there is this very strong European immigration so most people are White. So, I was sort of raised with this dynamic of being the only Black kid.

Although Casper positioned himself through his family, specially his parents, he situates his body in the context of his home country; Brazil. In Brazil, Casper is identified as Black. His description of being in the middle of a “struggle” and Brazil having a “weird relationship with race” reflects larger or macro issues related to race in Brazil. Based on
2010 census data, of Brazil’s 195,210,154 people, 47.7% identified as White and 7.6% identified as Black. Despite identifying and being identified as Black, Casper like 43.1% of people in Brazil are categorized as mixed race for census purposes (IBGE, 2013). Other sources of data capture narratives of Black and Brown (mixed race) people in Brazil parallel the experiences of Casper. In combination, they describe a country with interpersonal conflict on the basis of race, however promotes a unified nation that embraces racial diversity. Casper expressed feelings of isolation at times growing up in Brazil due to his race: “…for a long long long time, I had racial issues with myself and being sort of raised in a neighborhood and going to school when you’re the only black kid makes you feel like you’re not part of something.”

Feelings of being the only one, he believed produced a sense of dissatisfaction with himself, which led him to feel inferior to others who were White because he may not have been performing well academically or did not in some way fit the different characteristics that made his White peers seem successful. “…with the fact that I was the only Black kid in the White school, and that was like a big deal for me, I felt like I needed to excel…” These feelings did not relate to just his academic performance. Casper communicated that he often times felt unattractive, which resulted in low self-esteem. When he was prompted to explain why was the case or the root cause, he related it to racial stereotypes around who was considered attractive and intelligent. Many of the messages around skin color and perceptions of race were learned through media and their representations of White people (and non-representation of Black and Brown people).
I feel that I don't think well the thing about it maybe the race wasn't necessarily the problem but maybe my self-esteem was the problem but I sort of projected that into my race as in no one likes, no one wants me because I'm black and uh maybe it's true, maybe it's not.

Questioning his initial thoughts, Casper quickly implied that his thinking could be wrong. However, pervasive racial inequalities undergird the racial climate of Brazil. From an online source, one woman shared, “There is a hierarchy, and white is at the top” (Nolen, Andreoni & Ribeiro, 2015). Complicating his previous thought and acknowledging that it is a societal issue in Brazil, Casper shared in a later interview:

I feel society was still like a couple steps back when it comes to appreciating Black people for being beautiful and you didn't have like Black people on TV being beautiful. You didn't have examples of role models and stuff. And I think I’m an example of that. It’s the fact that I myself was only attracted exclusively to White guys for most of my sexual life and I feel that everybody else felt like I feel like I felt you know everybody wanted the same kind of guy, which was the guy that the kind of guy that I wanted but I wasn't the guy that people wanted so it was like a weird it was a weird situation to be.

He provided a very specific example shown above describing one way he learned particular messages and behaviors around race based on what was communicated through the media. He added that there is a “relationship between race and self-esteem” that negatively affects not only a sense of self-efficacy but also feeling sexually attractive. Casper’s narrative also reflected examples of internalized racism due to external
messages from people and the media that shaped his negative views on his race. Although race was a source of much dissatisfaction in Brazil, Casper perceived it as a unique identifier when coupled with his nationality in the United Kingdom. Casper lived in the U.K. for almost 3 years and describes it as a “liberating” experience where “race was different.” Being Black and Brazilian set him apart once again, a feeling that he learned to embrace within the gay community in the U.K.

**Sexuality… it's a story**

In the United Kingdom, Casper began to see other ways of viewing his body, which was more sexually-attractive based on his reactions with others. Exploring race and sexuality through Casper’s eyes highlights his realization of his social location in Brazil as being at the margins of society, where people who are identified as White are at the center. His positionalities vary when other identities are accounted for and Casper peeks into this at a young age through sexuality. Sexuality is central to what Casper describes as his “authentic self” and the way he views his realities. He constructs the meanings of his other identities and reconstructs their meanings continuously based on the ways he resists contextual definitions of these identities that are significant to him or as he experiences them. To Casper, his sexuality represents a dynamic and fluid object that he can use to create a storyline of who is as an individual. He creates intrigue, plots, and contradictions, using the tools of his identities to make his sexuality unique. As we discussed his significant moments of his constructed timeline (See Figure 4.1), I noticed that the majority of events involved his sexuality, and for each event Casper had a vivid narrative.
**Coming to know Casper’s authentic self.** Despite the messages from society that he struggled with and embraced, Casper shared more about the lens in which he viewed the world. He was adamant about his sexuality being very much like race, where he positioned himself in “a struggle” and especially his way of viewing his reality. Casper tied this feeling to being true to himself and shared that “not being authentic is something so wrong, it’s like lying to everyone and yourself.” During his interviews, I would learn much more about Casper and how he came to know more about his sexuality and why authenticity was so important to him. Casper shared that his life changing moments mainly happened when he came to know who he was. “It begins with a boy,” he said, as he discussed realizing that he was gay and went on to explain:

…And these guys, were like new guys in our class, and they were very attractive and I remember, like some kind of work of the universe or something like fate, we became friends and they were both like, they were both really sporty and jocky and things, White of course… And then this guy, it was like a sign sitting in my school, and the class was too big, they separated the desk in pairs and it was assigned seating so this guy ended up sitting next to me and I was obligated for the whole year, even if I didn't want to, I had to sit next to him and it was literally like my desk next to his desk like the desks were together and all the other kids had their pairs so to say and um that was assigned seating because we were too unruly and they sort of tried to mix and match people together. I don't know why the hell that happened or something. That meant that that guy would be with me. I would like help him a lot in like tests and stuff. I would give him information, he
would copy from my homework and I would get to hang out with him. That's like a fair trade in my opinion. And um yeah and then I remember this day like 6 months in the year, he was, we had to use uniforms and our uniforms was a white t-shirt and he was really big and his t-shirt was tiny and I remember seeing like muscles under the t-shirt and we were like teenagers so I guess we were sort of starting to develop, he was starting to develop earlier cause he was one year older than everybody and I remember he was talking to someone else and I could see the muscles move like through his shirt and I was staring at him, at his back for like minutes and it felt like hours and I was like really confused and was like what's going on? Why am I like? What's happening here kind of thing? And then when I got home I kept thinking about that and when I got home I realized that I was, that it was sexual attraction. I was attracted to that guy and I wanted him to like me. I wanted him to notice me. and that was a really weird kind of sensation but then I sort of got used to it pretty quickly. But I remember this, I have this image in my head of this time when I felt for the first time, I felt the attraction for another guy. And that was pretty intense.

Casper’s recollection of his process of naming his feelings for someone he was attracted to showed an easiness and genuine way of coming to know who he is through his sexuality. Using words such as “fate” and phrases that highlight a fluid and naturalness to those feelings contradict messages of what was normal and the secrecy that restricted his sexuality. Casper shared that his struggle around his sexuality was the fact that he could not share his thoughts about feelings of attraction for someone of the same sex. His
inability to speak openly about these feelings fostered a sense of inauthenticity. This resulted in Casper taking ownership of his sexuality and beginning the process of coming out.

I lived in Scotland for 2 years and for me it was great because first of all it was very much an eye-opening thing about my national identity. I was the only Brazilian guy in the whole like institution that I worked for and we all lived together and it was people from all over the world so we had this national identity thing but at the same time we were so close and we were doing the same thing all the time we were all working our asses off. we were all sort of suffering through the voluntary work and so on. And um I felt like that was more stronger than any kind of national identity thing so we were all very good friends. but at the same time, I felt sexuality wise I felt this that people were much more at ease than back at home with my sexuality. and you know for lots of them I wasn't their first gay friend you know, I wasn't the first gay person that they had ever met so that sort of changed my perception of what being gay in society can be because basically because it wasn't that much of a big deal anymore um as opposed to my life in Brazil where I you know even though I was hanging out in places where people were really supportive strangers and people like on tv are incredibly not supportive and it's like a hostile environment. People are violent. You hear stories of gay people being murdered for being gay and that's scary so I thing that's one of the reasons why I feel very yeah strongly about leaving my country.
Casper’s thoughts on sexuality are echoed through news reports that show a homophobic Brazil. However, tourism and government webpages paint an alternate picture of Brazil that are revealed by reported incidents and Casper’s narrative. A news article captured the murder of a teenager that Casper recalled in his interview. The teen was tortured and murdered by a group of men in Sao Paulo, Brazil, with his teeth being plucked out by the men (Pink News, 2014). Casper reveals how the treatment of others sends strong messages about what is acceptable by Brazilian society, and how that is tied to his family.

**Performance and penalization – My Dad is gay**

Casper describes his family, especially his mother and father, as people who have played an important role in the ways he understands himself because he was an only child. Casper’s relationship with his father was strained by the divorce of his parents and the role his father played in ultimately ending the marriage. Below, Casper revealed some insights into how he of his most significant events that shaped him as a person and the role his father played in that. As Casper embarked on his coming out process in Brazil, he described that his mother was angry and his father was unsupportive. The unwillingness of his family to accept his sexuality motivated him to show his parents that he was always gay and he was the same person. He received several messages from his father that he now sees as a way of being socialized to live in between two worlds; one that is heterosexual and the other same-sexed.

Casper shared intriguing thoughts that he described as lessons from society for gay men who live double lives. He described these lessons, directly as they related to his father.
you know, he's in poverty now, he's quite old, and he left the family for another guy and the guy just dumped him and he probably contracted HIV from this guy and it's like a really bad situation. So, like I think personally for me what I take from it, is just always be yourself and like just lying or masking or omitting who I am normally just brings more strain to my life than it brings benefits. So, after that, I saw my...not not...not even like trying, I don't think like even trying um consciously, but I saw myself being more open about who I am and what I like. And uh... in a way I had more power and more strength like to come out and for example, um cause you just have to, again and again. that's something they don't tell you.

Casper’s understanding of being his authentic self despite pressures to conform or change believes that he can be shielded from the consequences of being gay. Although Casper explained that he felt more empowered to “own” his sexuality, what he also shared were the guidelines of how he should behave in order to live and in some cases, survive in both worlds.

I came home and I told my dad like I need to talk to you and I sat down and told him and he was really quiet and it was very awkward and he didn’t say anything but like the only thing he said was that he loves me that he wants me to be happy and that I shouldn’t go too like flamey or something like that. In his mind, as long as I didn't go camp or acted too feminine it was fine. So, he said that like in passing very quickly and then he didn't speak to me at all for like 3 weeks or 4 weeks or something. I felt really bad but at the same time I also felt relieved that,
I felt like I couldn't have done anything else. and um and then like 4 weeks later he called me he said he wanted to talk to me and he repeated basically the same thing you know like I'm happy as long as you’re happy, take care of yourself, don't be too camp, don't start dressing like a girl or something like that. Don't act like a girl or something like that and that's it. and then he never mentioned it again.

Casper’s recollection provides some background of the heteronormative context of Brazil. Embedded in what he shared above, were far from subtle cues and messages about how he should perform sexuality, which at times intersected with the performance of gender and as a result masculinity. Specifically, Casper’s narrative provides glimpses of sometimes unspoken messages that aim to police and as a result, consequences for not performing sexuality in normal or traditional ways. Although Brazil’s laws against sodomy fell in the 1800s, there has been various homophobic incidents that send contradictory messages about homosexuality.

**Coming to America**

Casper’s journey to the United States is connected to his partner’s journey who received a funded-opportunity to attend and work at another institution in Louisiana. Casper’s transition to the United States was difficult as he navigated new systems, educational practices, and norms. Casper shared:

when I first came here the first difference that I felt, I mean I had lived outside from Brazil before, but still when I first came here I feel the first different thing, the most different thing was the fact that I wasn't from here. That I didn't speak
like people spoke and that I had different ideas, not different ideas, but I didn't know how some things worked in a way that people I assumed that I should know because everybody here does so like how the health care system works. I had a really hard time, a really huge problem with that. how even the university system works like I didn't know what you know I didn't know how finals work here and how you know so many like little things like I didn't know what a syllabus was cause we don't have that in brazil. like teachers don't make syllabuses, syllabi I guess. so, like these little things were things that were struggling much more than race or sexuality because I feel that I have struggled, I have always struggled with that with race and sexuality.

His most difficult transition did not focus on his race or sexuality. However, there were instances where he proposed creating awareness around being Brazilian, rather than coming out as gay or identifying as Black. Casper appreciated the international student office and felt like it was a key resource as he transitioned:

When I first got here, they were really helpful like they had transportation arranged so people could do, so like grad assistants can do like um go and do your social security number something like that, all these things and they had thanksgiving dinners for people who didn't have anywhere to go. so, on occasion, I was much more involved, I mean I would go on occasion like a couple years ago.

Casper used many resources that focused either on his sexuality or his international student status. He attended several discussion groups in the LGBT Resource Center as his
school. Although Casper had great experiences and connected with many administrators who provided services to students. Casper felt like the centers were under-staffed and did not think that they were fully equipped to serve students who identified as having multiple minoritized identities.

“There is this internal conflict within the core of myself. And I want to get through it but I don’t feel like those things can be or are in harmony with each other, and so there is just this conflict that may never end.”

-- Barabbas

This narrative begins with the final words shared by Barabbas in his final interview of this study. This quote encompasses the state of flux that he lives in and has lived for years. He describes himself as someone who poses conflicting identities that he is unable to reconcile. In the beginning of our first interview, I developed a genuine curiosity for learning more about this particular participant. Although willing to be a part of this study he displayed much hesitation in his actions and when answering question. Like every participant in the study, he was given the opportunity to choose a pseudonym. He strongly encouraged me to assign him one at the end of the study. After getting to know more about this particular participant, I called him Barabbas and he agreed to this pseudonym being used in the study.

So, who is Barabbas?

Jesus Barabbas, is described in the Bible as a criminal who was alongside Jesus Christ at the judgment festival for crucifixion. During this festival, Pontius Pilate would
spare the life of one prisoner that the crowd who convene selected. When prompted by Pilate, the crowd selected that the life of Jesus Barabbas to be speared and Jesus Christ to be crucified. It is said that Pilot’s men went out to the crowd and chanted the name of Jesus Barabbas, and the spectators joined in. Over the years there have been speculation as to exactly who Barabbas was, including emerging theories that assume that Jesus Barabbas is the same as Jesus Christ. Despite these theories, the name Barabbas represents someone who can be considered anonymous or a John Doe.

Over the course of the study, this participant communicated that one of his more salient identities was his religion. After discussing the significance of religion with him and the choice of pseudonym, we decided on Barabbas. Within the context of this study, Barabbas describes himself as a hard worker who is goal oriented and the thing that matters most to him is his family. Barabbas is a 26 years old man from the Caribbean who he is currently a doctoral student in Colorado, where he has resided for the majority of his adult education. He is currently a graduate student at a Predominantly White Institution in STEM. Barabbas’ narrative is laced with an internal conflict that the quote above hints at. Throughout, the study he describes a specific way of being who he is, being out and performing his identities. Barabbas also defines himself through his cultural beliefs and race.
Figure 4.2. Barabbas’ Critical Events

**Instilling fear and paranoia**

Within the context of this study and the Caribbean, the Bahamas is an important and unique case to include in the discussion of international students. The country is heavily influenced by American culture due to its proximity to the United States. Most importantly, the Bahamas is the only Commonwealth Caribbean island to have decriminalized homosexual or same-sex acts. Despite the progressive actions taken by the Bahamian government, homophobia and criminal acts against lesbian, gay and transgender individuals are rampant. Select newspaper editions, blogs and academic articles from 1989 through 2016 show emerging truths that dispel a systemic remedy to homophobia.
Underlying Bahamas’ progressive grand narrative of being LGBT friendly, are stories of scandal, sabotage, murder, politics, and interest convergence, being captured in their own Hollywood framed extended movie. The constant perversion of same-sex sexualities, primarily focused on men, are relentlessly practiced. The most notorious serial killer, Cordell Farrington a sexually conflicted man, featured in Bahamian history in 2002-2003 killed four young men; three being under the age of 15. His persecution led many to categorize all gay men as pedophiles and murders. A more mysterious and scandalous killing spree followed during 2008-2009 when the chief of police, well-known university lecturer, world renowned designer, and LGBT activist were all found dead in their homes. Panic followed in the Bahamas and flooded the streets as Bahamians were on high alert, preaching that “homos must change their ways.” All this undergird and intertwine the country’s mission to ThinkProgress, a national movement to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS. The country focused primarily on men who sleep with men as a target population, and therefore deployed campaigns that aimed to educate the public, but in doing so demonized these men. The narrative produced identities of men who might intentionally infect both men and women with HIV/AIDS, and therefore are threats to the island state. Despite the rumblings on the island about the LGBT community, following Trinidad and Tobago, Bahamas remains one of the more progressive islands in this new wave of establishing gay rights and protections in the Caribbean.

Establishing this portrait of the Bahamas is important to understanding the paranoia and fear that Barabbas and his parents experience about gay men. These feelings however, are compounded and legitimized by the preaching of their church, giving rise to
internalized religious homophobia. Barabbas’ experiences echo what newspapers and blogs capture around the intersections of religion and sexuality:

Well, it was really difficult because my religious identity conflicts with my sexual orientation. I would go to church and the pastor will preach out against homosexuality and especially in the culture that I come from they are very vocal against it. So, based on what I was shown in the bible this is an abomination and you know I felt like I was the biggest sinner. I tried my hardest to fight these feelings. At one point, I started to read the bible straight through but I didn’t know how to shake it and I felt like what I was doing was wrong and you know I was very active and involved in my church and if they only knew how much of a sinner I was and when my mom find out she was like how can you go up there in church and you know you're living a private lifestyle. And I’m like ok well I’m doing wrong so should I just ignore my religion or my sexual orientation or can I have both. The way I feel or the way they made me feel I can only have one or the other. If I am damned to go to hell for being gay then why not just live this lifestyle and go to hell but there has always been that conflict.

However, it was clear from the interviews that acceptance by family and friends was a yearning that Barabbas was yet to address. He discussed being unauthentic and unconnected to his close family members because he could not share who he was. He further shared that more details about his extended family, which has affected who he discloses his sexuality to:
Like I said I’m not out publicly, immediate family knows and so I don’t want to be I guess exposed. And then there's also the fact of me because I think I am not able to truly be myself with anybody that I meet. I guess with straight people, I’m always hiding a part of me, I wrestle with whether I should tell some of my co-workers who I am really close with that I am gay but I decided not to because I’m like yeah, I just don’t want that information out there and then I feel like I’m hiding a big part of me and certain things I really want to have conversations about, I can’t really or be free to. And so, I think once the topic of homosexuality came out and they, my friends, kinda talked positively about it because I just have that part of me under lock and key.

Despite the positive interactions following disclosure to his friends, he still treads lightly due to his socialization around sexuality, culture and gender. Where culturally, men should never talk about their same sex attraction regardless how many individuals are aware of this attraction and sexuality.

Sexuality – The conflicting Identity

Barabbas repeatedly shared throughout the study that his sexuality conflicted with his other identities and how he was “brought-up.”

I would say that it has cause me to always be engaged in internal conflict more than I would have liked. My sexuality has conflicted the cultural beliefs, religious beliefs and beliefs about morality that my parents and society tried to instill in me while growing up. I sometimes feel disappointed and ashamed of who I am,
although less so now that I have moved away from home. It has also caused me to be a very secretive, guarded and somewhat withdrawn individual.

Barabbas’ socialization was heavily based in the church:

because growing up there was always this conflict between my religion and my sexual orientation because my religion says that I... it was wrong for me to be gay but based on my feelings, I knew that I was gay. I knew that there was this war between what I wanted or to follow the teachings of my church or to swallow how I felt. Go against my natural tendencies.

Although he acknowledges that his sexuality and same sex attraction was natural, he explored ways of thwarting these feelings. One strategy was encouraged by his parents; to seek psychological help. He acquired the assistance of a therapist to aid him in curing his attraction to men. After being unable to cure him Barabbas shared “pretty much the counselor said I was not open to change.” This further strained the relationship he developed with his parents over the years, and he looked forward to embracing this conflicting dimension of himself.

Raced

The Bahamas has grown from a majority White population of 74% in 1722 to a new majority of 91% of the Bahamian population now identifying as Black according to the latest census data (Bahamas Department of Statistics, 2012). The country has an extensive history with colonialism under British rule and a volatile history of colorism that continues to unfold. Barabbas shared that he never had to pay attention to his skin color. He discussed in his interview:
You know growing up, my country is predominantly Black and I was kinda on the lighter side so they viewed me as different and I was the exception but the first time that I felt darker than everyone is when I went to a Predominantly White School, and so I would be the darkest person in the room.

Barabbas, in the Bahamas, occupied a privileged spaced as a lighter skinned man. This position of privilege allowed him to be unaware of some of the realities of darker skinned people in the Bahamas. Some Bahamians have shared experiences about skin bleaching and the negative impacts it has had on self-image in the country. However, they point to a more stratified view along the lines of race and skin complexion of people of color. Being in the United States he shared that he had little racialized experiences; throughout the study he contradicted this statement.

**Reconciling… the self**

Barabbas shared in the study, “I feel like we can learn something from all of our experiences.” This statement is a constant theme throughout Barabbas’ life, however the quote framing his narrative gives a glimpse into his inherent reality of these cumulative experiences he refers to: “There is this internal conflict within the core of myself. And I want to get through it but I don’t feel like those things can be or are in harmony with each other, and so there is just this conflict that may never end.”

In many ways, Barabbas seeks salvation or saving from his sexuality because of all the ways emerging solutions to curing his homosexuality have failed. He discussed at one point in his interviews that he “had a duty to follow the gospel and his savior and redeemer.” However, this view that is taught by his church leaders who possess
homophbic views found support for those views in the bible, which they delivered to congregates. Also, adding to the paranoia that was boasted by larger narratives he internalized. As the study went on, Barabbas was coming to the realization that the dissonance he experienced around his religious identity or Christianity originates from his family and the church.

His realizations come on the heels of a significant relationship that he has always longed for when stipulating what being “out” means. Barabbas has always dated Black hyper-masculine men who are usually categorized as “thuggish.” However, his new relationship is with a man who identifies as multi-racial and Hawaiian. Barabbas shared that he dates Black men because there are less questions around the nature of their relationship. It’s also important to note that his current romantic relationship is with someone who strays away from common notions of masculinity. However, Barabbas has shared that he admires this about this individual. Barabbas’ personal integration of his sexuality, religion, culture and race, although difficult, allows him to find some reconciliation with his conflicting identities. Being in the United States has allowed him to make meaning of his race and sexuality and the ways those identities intersect with his gender and notions of masculinity.
“So, I was kinda forced to choose what I wanted to be or who I wanted to be, because here [in the U.S.] I could have been anything, nobody knew me I was kinda starting my life over, but I chose to stick to the person I was, over who I grew up to be, the person my parents enabled me to be.”

-- Inkognito

The quote above was appropriate to framing this narrative because of what continues to be significant to Inkognito and how he views himself as an individual. We identified events that he thinks are the most significant to include in his narrative. In constructing this narrative, I have included additional contextual data gathered from blogs, news articles, etc. on the Caribbean.

Figure 4.3. Inkognito’s Critical Events
Inkognito is from a Caribbean country that cannot be disclosed in this study since he asked for the name of the country to be withheld. However, allows for an opportunity to discuss larger sentiments around race and sexuality in the Caribbean.

The Caribbean has had a long history with race and racialization due to colonization by the Dutch, French, British and Spanish. Furthermore, these realities or race and being race are accounted for by the prominence of slavery and free migration from Asian and African counties. However, many in the Caribbean believe that the region has moved past its tumultuous history around racism. This has given a way for more covert forms of racism to be produced that racial minorities in the Caribbean experience in present day. The hidden forms of racism and the denial of the significance of race in Caribbean life has constructed a narrative that deny the acknowledgment of the realities of people of color. The Caribbean as a whole continue to have difficulties overcoming colorism, which is in many ways a derivative of racism and a product of a hierarchical system that continues to favor those who are White. Inkognito in his interviews discussed knowing that he was Black but experienced his race differently depending on the context of colorism and even socio-economic status.

Overall, Inkognito was an interesting participant to speak with and get to know due to his current situation, moving from being an international student to a permanent resident. His narrative allowed me to interrogate at a deeper level citizenship, nationality, and democratic participation. Inkognito relies heavily on his personal interactions with others as ways of understanding who is and life in general. The people who have a
significant impact on how he perceives things are family and close friends. Inkognito made it a point to define who he considers a friend or friends:

The people I call friends and I consider friends, I can be myself with them. Like being openly gay. Whether they're gay or straight. I have straight friends too and if we are friends, if I consider you my friend, then you know that I am gay. So, then there is no reason to hide or pretend that I'm not when I am with you. So, I'll go back a little. There are people at work that I consider. I mean, I work with them but we laugh, we talk, but they do not know that part of me. I wouldn't consider them friends. So, let's just say that when I am with them there are certain things I would do or say that not necessarily means that I am hiding who I am, it’s just that I don’t feel comfortable enough to let them know. But like I said. If I consider you a friend, then you know all of me.

These thoughts parallel what he shares about family, except when he talks more about his father. His father and brother are the only immediate family members who he doesn’t discuss his sexuality with.

My brother and my father, they know, I haven’t said anything to them but they know. So, you can say that I haven’t come out to them too. Because I haven’t verbalized to them that I am gay. So, I guess I haven’t come out to them yet. And why I haven’t done? There is no big reason why I haven’t done it because I could tell my brother today if I wanted to… My father, I am a little more skeptical about, even if I know he knows and I know he doesn’t care, I think I would be a little more worried to actually tell him those words. I don’t know. I really don’t.
It’s not something I can pin point to say he will tell me X or he will kick me out of the house and he will banish me, and he will keep me out of his will. I don’t fear any of these things, because I know these things won’t happen. It’s just that... I don’t know, I really can’t say why I can’t tell him. Can I pick up the phone today and tell him? Maybe I can [laughter]

Inkognito felt that it was unnecessary for him to come out to the only male figures in his immediate family. Inkognito’s reluctance to openly discuss his sexuality contradicted his views of allowing both his friends and family know him holistically. However, this could be a cultural norm that gay and bisexual men should never discuss their sexuality or romantic relationships with other men. The Caribbean is notorious for having this unspoken Don’t ask ... Don’t tell understanding when it comes to sexuality or gayness. Another side to this is the disappointment of his father figure who affirms his masculinity and the moral values that accompany silence around sexuality. Inkognito saw sexuality as much more contested in his circles, while his race became the category he grew more familiar and nuanced way within the United States.

On Becoming Gay

Inkognito’s most salient identity growing up was his sexuality due to his questioning around it and how it did not align with what he observed in his household and community. During one of our final discussions, he processed out loud:

I’m beginning to think that I could have never separated being gay from what other people considered masculinity. I never quite fit into that. Even when I look back at growing up I’m thinking maybe me being gay was more about the girly
things that I did. Now, I’m not saying that this is the case for everyone, that was just for me.

Previously, he talked about his close relationship with his sister and how this could be the reason for him being gay. Inkognito discussed him processing his sexuality at the ages of 7 and 8:

I think that’s when I realized that I was different, I didn’t know what it was but I knew that there was something because, we lived on the coast, my older brother had gone away to the city to school. So, it was just my sister and I and my sister is only a year and a half older than I am. So, we were pretty close and whatever she did, I would do too. So, example, if she wanted to go out with her friends, my mother would always have me go out with her. I guess, she so she has some company or to take me out because I was so young. So, I found myself doing a lot of things that she and her friends did, like jumping rope, playing hopscotch and stuff like that, I wasn’t like doing boy things. So, I knew then that there was something wrong with that, I just didn’t understand what it was then I went away to school but the thing is all of my schooling was all boys.

Inkognito used the phrase of *something being wrong* quite a bit during his interviews. Given the harsh policing of masculinity and sexuality in Caribbean islands, Inkognito was socialize to think that anything else not fitting into these categories or behaviors meant that something was wrong with him. However, his questioning also came from a place of childhood trauma because he was sexually abused by a family member. He hesitantly shared this experience but shared that he needed to get it out:
It was definitely before I turned 9 and something happened and I am not so... I don’t think I’m gay but maybe it has to do with why I’m gay, I don’t think so, I think being gay is... you more born gay as opposed to becoming gay. I was sexually abused by a woman when I was between I would say 5 and 8.

As he went on he shared more about the incident and how his sister revealed a similar secret:

I don’t know how many times it happened but I remember distinctively remember that one time and it wasn’t something I grew up remembering it just came back to me. One day I don’t know what I was thinking of and I had this vivid memory of this woman wearing yellow lace panties, it was a Saturday afternoon and I know it was a Saturday afternoon because my grandmother lived in the south of the island and it was in the summer so in the summer when school was out we would go there to be with her and my aunt and uncle. And I remember it was the Saturday afternoon, and I remember that because she used to go to the market every Saturday, and that Saturday afternoon she came back some time in the afternoon and she called to say that she was here. That she had made it back and then the person was startled and the person was like umm... you need to put your clothes on, ummm... and she started putting her clothes on. And then she was like, don’t say anything... don’t say a word. That just came back to me one day, and as I said it wasn’t anything that I grew up remembering every single day, I never, I guess I blocked it out and it never came back until I was, I would probably say 15 or 16 and it just came back like... It just came back and I can’t explain how it
came back, why it came back, what triggered it but it just came back. I remember it happening and for a long time I'm like I only have this one memory and it just came back out of the blue, maybe it didn’t happen. But I’m like why at 15, why you remembering this, obviously, something did happen because you're not making it up and I was old enough, that what was going on, couldn’t have gone on because the person was my aunt, the person I couldn’t have had feelings for this person because of who she was, so I know it wasn’t something that had happened with somebody I liked or somebody I wanted it to happen with. So, it was later on, I was maybe close to 30, in my late 20s close to 30, and I was having a conversation with my sister, we were having a really candid conversation and I don’t remember how it started, and said that for a long time she was battling with her sexuality because she thought she was gay and I was like really? I never knew that and she knew I was gay, I came out to her like in my early 20s, and she's like I never knew that and she's like yeah because when I was growing up, So-and-So abused me. And I’m like what? She’s like yeah, and the So-and-so that abused her was the same person who abused me. So, at that point, I felt validated because I knew that this was not just a memory, this is what really happened to me. Because here she was telling me this happened to her for the first time and I had already become aware of it happening to me. And I was like... Oh there we go! So, I told her well, So-and-so did that to me too. She was like... reeeaaally? and then we had a little moment and then she said that for a long time she thought that she was gay because that happened because this woman did that to her. And I’m like well I

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kinda thought... well... I knew I was gay, she knew I was gay but my notion was that I was gay because of what this woman did and I didn’t like women because of that. So, I ended up liking men. But personally, I don’t think that was what it was. I think I had always been gay and I was born gay, so I was born gay so I couldn’t pay much attention to that notion.

I included this lengthy recollection for several purposes, including to create awareness around sexual abuse in the Caribbean as an issue that warrants further exploration, and to honor Inkognito’s courage to share something traumatizing that he at some point believed made him gay. Inkognito shared several narratives around sexuality that were also grounded in notions of masculinity. He talked about his struggles with those and how those in turn helped him to understand dynamics between people.

**On Being and Becoming Black**

“A-A. I always knew I was Black-ee,” Inkognito shared in his Caribbean twang as we talked about the significance of race in his life. He shared that his lighter complexion allowed him more preferred treatment alongside others who were darker than him. Inkognito, becoming uncomfortable with the conversation and addressing his privilege, which was based on his light skin then asked me about my experiences given that I was lighter than him. I shared:

I can see where you’re coming from. I do remember small things like staying out of the sun so I don’t get darker. Now, I can look back and I can identify some things. Have you thought about any of those things?

I shifted the focus back on him and tried to shift the focus back on him. He responded:
No, No. Because I guess luckily, I’m darker than you are. So, I could have stayed out in the sun. But I have heard that before. Even with Rhianna, either somebody said that she said herself, I don’t know, I’m sure there’s a magazine article somewhere. Rhianna said that when she was growing up she always, or her mother use to rub her skin with some cream, a face cream so she could seem lighter.

Although this process of seeming lighter was deeply embedded in colonial acts to rank and organize bodies, it did not quite get at the process of racializing that I was interested in understanding. I asked Inkognito to talk more about his experiences in the United States and on his campus. What he shared pointed to his race being more salient in his community:

Race... came more later on in life. Race came more between 26 and 30 when I first moved here. Because in the last conversation we had, I mentioned that I didn’t really care about race and it was never something that was on the forefront of my mind because I grew up Black in the Caribbean, and we were the majority so it really didn’t matter to me. Until I came here and then that's when I realized that there was a disparity between White and Black. That was kinda subtle, now because of those you know, Freddy Greys and Travon Martin and all that, that’s when the consciousness came about, like this deep consciousness of being Black in America that happen because of these things, like I said, when I go out jogging, if there's a White woman, I run faster because I don’t want for something to happen, and she's like "Oh it was the Black guy, wearing the Black shots" because
to them all Black people look alike. So, I’m not giving her any reason and I’m not saying that’s what she's thinking, I don’t know what she's thinking but at the same time she maybe thinking that or she may not be thinking that

While he constantly discussed his racialized experiences off campus, he described that on campus was much more welcoming.

**On Becoming “American”**

Inkognito was the only participant who was about to embark on this transitional phase. Inkognito was offered a position with a company that would sponsor his petition for an adjustment of status to legal permanent resident. This created an intriguing view of the world: “I don’t know… sometimes I feel like I am an international student but sometimes I get caught up thinking that I am American. But it hasn’t gone through yet so I feel like I am here and there.” Inkognito communicated that this was a stressful process that he describes as invasive. This added to his feelings of being overwhelmed as he was trying to finish school. He felt compelled to complete the process because it was the time he invested in it.

You know I just did it because it was a great opportunity. It so overwhelming and I just thought that I’m already doing it, I might as well just finish. I never thought about staying up here in the states but now that I’m doing it I feel like I need to finish and see. That wasn’t the plan but I like the idea of coming and going whenever without all the stuff I go through as an international student. I just feel more comfortable here but home will always be home.
Due to his experience in the Caribbean around his sexuality, Inkognito’s decision begins the conversation around citizenship and access to rights. These rights extend to employment but also based on our discussions, the fact that he feels like as a gay man, he is a second-class citizen on his island and do not have the same rights as his heterosexual counterparts.

“I think of myself as a survivor who has been through a lot. In fact, that shapes me into the person that I am today. Because we grow up in a society that basically hates you, taught to hate you, teaches you to hate yourself. And that's why I guess, I go back to seeing myself as a survivor.”

— Island Joe

Getting to know Island Joe was an eye-opening experience given the fact that we lived very different lives while growing up in St. Lucia, and although I could frame my experience similar to his, it would be framed in a different other due to the parts of the island we grew up and familial backgrounds. Island Joe was quite reflective and curious about this process. He asked many questions around the why of this project and his ultimate purpose as a participant. He used this time to be reflective of past experiences and how many of the components of the interview process. He frames his entire journey as one of survival.

Island Joe is from the Caribbean island of St. Lucia. St. Lucia, even after a revision to its constitution and penal code, still presents a law criminalizing homosexual acts. Although the law is not enforced, the island remains very conservative and uses the
law as a way of regulating behavior and creates an underground or hidden life of people who are lesbian, gay and bisexual. Even without the enforcement of the law, police are given the option to enforce it when they deem appropriate. Given that both Island Joe and I are from St. Lucia, our discussions revolved around people that we either knew personally or knew of. This quote is from a colleague, Kenita Placide (2012) as she shares more with a local newspaper:

We have had deaths of gay men that are still unsolved or unresolved. We had the death of Verne Romulus, the death of Germaine Nestor, the death of Marcellus Augustin, we had the death of Ethelbert ‘Romeo’ Evelyn in Dennery. These were openly gay people and these cases were not cases where they were just killed. These killings were brutal, with multiple stab wounds and beatings. There have been gay people who have been beaten in the street. Society targets the highly effeminate guys and the butch looking women. Some have been raped. They get verbally abused on a daily basis. And what works against them is the fear of reporting these incidents. People are internalizing things, instead of seeking help.

All of which is stated above, directs us back to Island Joe’s sentiments of being a survivor who continues to challenge traditional norms of being a man.
Figure 4.4. Island Joe’s Critical Events

**Fragmented Idols**

Although this was not mentioned as a significant event, Island Joe and I talked in-depth about his ideas and framing of what he saw as normal and how that was modeled to him. The extent of our conversations that focused on his parents, prompted further discussion of including it as part of his narrative that we collaborated on. Island Joe shared that his parents’ relationship had a significant role in his view of the world and his romantic relationships. During our second interview, Island Joe wanted to revisit moments that he believed was meaningful as it relates to his parents:

And I think for you to understand what shapes me as a man which parleys into me being gay, I think it is important to go back to my foundational relationships. My
mom and dad situation, which is what I think makes my situation unique. I dunno I haven’t spoken to many people along those lines, I maybe wrong but I think my mother's and father's relationship, the people that they are, affected and driven my whole life. And it’s funny because my mother thinks that her actions and what she's done do not affect her kids. But I know that to be the complete opposite and everything she has done has affected me in some way. Let me just give you the background. First off, my father is bisexual and the reason they... the marriage failed was because of infidelity issues, there were accusations of him having relations with other men so in my case, there is a genetic component and I’m sticking to my story. But what happened is that my father succumbed to the pressure of society, you know you not suppose to be gay so you try to just have a normal life but eventually, from the start the relationship was doomed for failure. But my mother had her own issues going in and my father obviously was not supposed to be married but they gave it the go anyway. So, my mother when she was younger abject poverty she was abused mentally, emotionally, physically. My mother up to this day has not dealt with these issues and you have my father who is gay boy from [the south of the island], pretty gay boy from [the south of the island], him mother died when he was 6 and his father was just on his own so he pretty much had to raise himself.

Although Island Joe kept searching for answers that informed the origins of his sexuality, I noticed the stock that he placed in the telling of the story to make meaning of the world around him. As we discussed throughout the study, Island Joe and I had many
conversations to re-center our meetings to that of being gay in the United States. He assured me that his life prior to coming to the United States was the most meaningful part that allowed him to take a chance to grow and also taught him how to live and survive as an international student.

Island Joe established a relationship with his father during his adult life and he has gotten to know more about his father’s struggles being a gay or bisexual man in St. Lucia. He has used his father’s experiences to navigate homophobic environments and his parents’ actions to establish a value system that reflect the opposite of what his mother and father experienced in their relationships. Island Joe shared that he looked to his mother often to develop standards of what being a man should be. He used his father’s absence in the early parts of his life as what he shouldn’t be. Island Joe correlated the volatility with their relationship with something deeper: “I think what it boils down to is the fact that my parents were not authentic. You have a man that is hiding who he is and a woman who wanted more than what this man could provide."

This lack of authenticity that Island Joe identified is a symptom of the larger context of St. Lucia that outlines what it is to be a man and a woman. The dualistic norms that are used to socialize young children in St. Lucia perpetuate heterosexist violence against the bodies of its people. This violence is further manifested by fear of non-conformity and further reflected through the deaths and torture of young gay men who threaten a normal sense of life. Island Joe expressed this through a critical event; *homophobic homo*. 

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Homophobic Homo

Island Joe shared that a significant moment that he believes shape who he was and how he viewed his experience is recognizing that he was homophobic. Despite him expressing that his life prior to the United States had a significant impact, it seems this was another moment of realization. What I noticed was that he was both homophobic and transphobic. He shared that he did not have the background or the appropriate education to think beyond what he was seeing at the surface and growing up. The education his mother provided about his father was a frame that he used to deconstruct his interactions with other gay men. This teaching was a way of reinforcing hegemonic notions of masculinity. He lived by this teaching and got involved in sports, which is one way that buys into hyper masculinity through sport. His process of realization started while he was in St. Lucia as he started to explore his sexuality. After being able to explore his sexuality more intimately in the United States, his views changed. Island Joe began to process openly with me as we discussed masculinity:

Our definition of masculinity is fluid and in some ways flawed. If someone transitions from being a man to a woman, I think they possess traits of both and that shows that we all can’t just be placed in a box. I am not ashamed of the feminine characteristics that I have. I am a good listener. I am a good guy, even if some times guys don’t like good guys. I am very affectionate. These things are not things that people would consider to be masculine. Okay?...
In the United States, Island Joe shared that at school many people were not out. He would meet other students when he went out to a club and he discussed being overwhelmed by the attention.

He further stated that men who identified as drag queens were brave. In many ways, he was in awe by the chances they took just to be free and who they are as people. He expressed growing into who he and now accepting his sexuality. Island Joe went into greater detail sharing his earlier transphobic stance. He reflected on messages that he received from his father sharing messages that challenged him to not be effeminate. He called attention to men in St. Lucia who he described as “queens” or a “fairy with snap crackle and pop.” Although he did not necessarily ask Island Joe to not be gay, he delivered messages that he learned from society.

**Meeting Mrs. Right**

Yes, I met her. She was perfect, the most beautiful woman and I met this girl, we worked at [the Utility Company] and we came into the company pretty much at the same time, there were all these orientation courses that we needed to take and everytime I went on one, she was there. So, we were both kids of employees so we had that in common but I would see her a lot and then we started talking and I just found this perfect woman for me and started, I wouldn’t call it dating, going out after work in town and at that time my ex had left already and went to the states and yeah.

During our final interview, we re-visited the critical event timeline and Island Joe shared, “I was thinking that this was the girl that I had to marry.” When he imagined what his life
would be like if he considered to play the role of a “straight man,” she would be the woman that would fit what he was told that he would marry. We delved deeper into the conversation and touched on why his time with her was a significant moment that shaped who he is today.

Island Joe shared that it was significant because he realized that he could do what his father did to his mother. His relationship with the woman progressed, which triggered how he was being an authentic person:

I loved her but it could not compare to what I was feeling for my first love. I loved her as a person and if I was straight I would probably get married to her but I wasn’t in love and I never fell in love with her. And she was way ahead of me, she was ready, she was like I love you, I want you and I never even kissed her because I just felt like I couldn’t do it. I would see her to this day, she has a 13 year-old, she has two kids now. When I see those kids, I’m like in my mind, you know those kids could have been my kids. I’m always saying that and then she still gives me the same currant, smile, the little, you know how it is when someone likes you. To this day and we still have a connection but I just never fell in love with her.

He shared that “it was a case of identity confusion in some ways” where he really wanted to but to hurt someone in that way is not what he wanted. He compared the way he felt with his feelings of this most significant relationship that as he describes it, “showed [him] what true love is.” Social norms and gender socializations are tightly linked to
masculinity and femininity, and have been further linked to the laws that shape identity and roles.

**Attending School in the U.S. and going back home**

As we concluded this study, Island Joe completed his move back to St. Lucia and he processed his transition back into “island life.” He expressed his content being back “home” but his worries about next steps, which he was not prepared for.

I’m happy to be back home but it’s hard when you should be worried about your safety and life. I don’t feel prepared to be back and I don’t think no one could help me get ready for that, you know? They wouldn’t know where to start they never had to think of their life being taken away walking down the street. They never had to worry about moving back to a place that literally is saying you better dead. But it nice to be back home where I can work and have some money in my pocket. You do what you have to to survive.

His transition back to St. Lucia triggers various points of struggles for international students in the United States. Finances were a concern for Island Joe and being in his home country allows him the ability to seek employment freely. Island Joe pointed out the lack of resources at his institution that would assist him in his transition back to St. Lucia. He discussed in one of his earlier interviews having to code-switch when he returned home some time before. As we worked together to complete his interviews, he was expressing frustrations with finding a job and moving back in with his mother.

It is important, however, to note that Island Joe did not want to remain in the United States due to feelings of isolation. When asked about moving back home and
changing who he was, he indicated that he would not change how he has grown from his experiences. Island Joe shared that he “…will continue to be who I am and I’m not going to let being gay be something that force me to change who I am. Sorry pal, not me.”
Chapter Five: Findings

The narratives of the participants provide an understanding that is distinctive to four Black gay international students attending universities in the United States. The narratives developed provided an introduction to the reader of each participant in this study, and forms the groundwork for having deeper discussions around notions of identity and their intersections. This chapter shows my exploration of themes that developed from the data to allow for more transferability of new knowledge to specific and similar populations. Although very different, the participants shared some experiences that allowed for the emergence of noticeable commonalities over the course of the study. In this chapter, common and divergent experiences, ways of knowing and resisting are reconciled to understand some realities of Black gay international students studying in the United States. Although there were many notable findings, those that are highlighted here contribute significantly to how we understand identity and Black gay international students in the United States.

In this study, I explored the racialized and sexualized experiences of Black gay international students using the lenses of Queer Theory and Intersectionality. This exploration also allowed for an interrogation of other identities significant to the participants, and the embodiment of multiple identity dimensions. My dissertation focused on the central question of, how do Black gay international students understand
their racialized sexuality? This question can be explored through the following questions that are guided by the framework:

a. In what ways do Black gay international students perform their race and sexuality?

b. What events or pre-determined factors are significant to how black gay international students understand or have come to understand race and sexuality?

c. What lived experiences highlight the intersections of race and sexuality?

d. What contexts, if at all, inform the intersectional experiences of Black gay international students?

In this chapter, I present the construction of personal counter-spaces produced by resistive performances by participants, the problematizing of race and the process of racialization, the tensions created by sexuality in the intersections of identity, and the positioning of participant bodies within liminal national spaces. In my concluding thoughts, I discuss how a notion of good Black men is mediated based on sexuality and nationality.

“Spaces Between Us”

There are bodies of research that inform our understanding of social and academic counter-spaces which produce a feeling of safety and inclusion for individuals from minoritized backgrounds (Brooms, 2016; Solórzano, Ceja & Yosso, 2000; Tatum, 2003). These spaces can take informal or formal forms that are social groups such as student organizations, or more physical spaces on campus such as “cafeteria tables” (See Tatum,
2003 as an example). Although these spaces exist for each participant in some way, the participants in this study shared explicitly and sometimes hinted at notions of personal spaces that they use to interact with the world around them. The idea emerged from a queer analytic that sought actions, which was a departure from what was normal in context where the subject was positioned (Abes & Kasch, 2007; Hall, 2003). This personal space was used to dampen the impact of social influences that would shape how participants perceive their identities, and therefore act as a point of resistance as they performed their identities in ways that strayed from the norm. Due to the resistive, power-laden, and individualized nature of the spaces described by the participants, I refer to them as personal counter-spaces. Although not visible or tangible, the participants described these counter-spaces as something that exist and used to their advantage at times. Participants described this personal counter-space as safe to an extent, where they cannot be fully protected by a group’s actions toward them. This notion of a personal counter space emerged during an interview with Inkognito as he discussed his race, and encouraged me to revisit the data collected:

This is who I am. So, I act the way I want to, I react sometimes out of my personal safety. All I know, people adjust because they see that I won’t. It’s like I am in a bubble, if I’m in danger it pops but when I act the way I do in my bubble it pushes on theirs or the bigger bubble around their group. I have to deal with the way things are at times, but they still have to deal with me. I can’t really explain it but it’s like there are spaces between us that react.
Inkognito’s quote of being in a bubble points at the concept of space in a more tangible way, but Casper’s experiences extend this concept to reflect the notions of power and control that we leverage in our interpersonal relationships. He also pushes the idea of fluidity of identities but he still implies that there is an existing personal counter-space that he operates within:

So, a White person from here [Louisiana] told me no, you aren't Black, you're Brazilian. They really wanted my race to be Brazilian. The reality is that I am Latino-ish but I am Black. I can stand in a room of African-American men and be just another Black guy… But I still have control of the little space I am in. But I feel that more and more we live in a world where we're understanding that this idea of having total control over things is an illusion. We don’t have complete control.

Casper’s reference to control, is his way of talking about power and subjective positionalities. His quote highlights some contradictory ideas about power and control, and we begin to see how the bodies of international students compromises the ways we view identity dimensions that we are socialized along in the United States. Supporting this, Weber (1990) explicitly contended that race, class, gender, and sexuality should be thought about as constructs that use power and privilege to order individuals. While processing openly, he describes the idea of power and control as an illusion, yet he shares that there is still some control over his personal space and what he engages in. There were other times in the study that Casper shared he had control over his personal identities and his performance of them. The notion of personal counter-spaces being
shared by Casper, when queered, reveal the interplay of power and resistance of Casper and dominant groups or thoughts that he interacts with. Casper’s thoughts align with his personal counter-space being vulnerable to infiltration and connects to what Inkognito shared about personal counter-spaces being disrupted based on how he might react.

Island Joe adds to this understanding of control and resistance:

> Sometimes I feel like I am broken because it doesn't seem like I have control over all the things that have happened to me and how people see me all the time… But if I act like who I am and authentic as I am they can eat it [laughter]. They can eat the pie I serving because it is my body, it is me [laughter]. I not going to wear a dress or make up, because that eh [isn’t] me. But I can challenge what they telling me, they cannot be all up in my face.

These spaces serve as sites of safety, reflection, experimentation, identity reconciliation, performance and resistance for the participants. Participants use their personal counter-space as a site for self-discovery as they attempted to present their authentic selves publicly, and negotiate conflicting identities. While frustratingly giggling about much of his predicament, Barabbas shared:

> My sexuality just doesn't fit. I see all my identities like circles that are in each other making a bigger circle of myself. My sexual orientation doesn't necessarily fit in any of those circles. I will put it right outside here. So, I have my nationality, culture, then my race, and then I have my religion at the center. But all of these tell me no. I can’t be gay.
Perplexed by what he was feeling and describing, I aimed to get a better sense of his frustrations and where they might be originating. I challenged Barabbas to block out the sexuality circle that he drew and asked what did he think then:

Well (long pause) Well (long pause) I won’t be me. This is so annoying, and this is why I live life as me. It’s like all of these people create these things and push them on me. Together all these things make me up. I have my space and I operate within my space. I don't feel like there is a problem. I don’t see a problem with myself. I am who I am. They find the problem. It’s my personal space. When they see this [as he points at the sexuality circle on the paper] that is all they see. When I embrace it, and be me, they just freak out!

Through an intersectional stance, this focuses on the dependency of one identity on another to provide a more concrete understanding of self. Reinforcing the idea that identities are intrinsically connected and as complex beings, we rely on their meanings to have a more holistic conceptualization of the self (Dill, McLaughin & Nieves, 2007; Jones, Kim & Skendall, 2012; Shields, 2008). Situating this confusion within the arena of personal counter-spaces, the frustration originated from his process of negotiating identity within heteronormative contexts. Within these contexts, he operates and experiences his sexuality within a personal counter-space, but at times he is unable to define his true or authentic self.

Contradictions of role and performance were more explicit around strict binaries such as masculinity and femininity, relinquishing power and control or claiming it, but as I reflected more and beyond distinct and intersecting identities, I saw that their use of
language produced spaces around and related to their bodies. This notion of personal space could simply be a cultural or psychological concept. However, in this study, this space was more than a place of safety, it was a space that was used to navigate contexts while troubling social and cultural norms.

**Merging Spaces: Interactions and Encounters.** Eluding to this concept of personal counter-spaces, the participants referred significantly to relationships with others to describe the space they create to distinguish themselves. In many cases, the participants described others, whether singularly or collectively as them or they. Although this might be a cultural nuance specific to the participants’ dialect, it was important to how each described others and when they constructed hypothetical spaces or barriers. Inkognito’s description regarding bubbles and the ways that he conceptualizes interactions with groups, helps to clarify the significance that inter- and intra- personal relationships with persons or groups have on a sense of safety and self.

As participants described their relationships with others in a positive manner, and describe feelings of comfort and safety, it was apparent that they were referring to formations of social and in some cases academic counter-spaces (Carter, 2001; Solorzano, Ceja & Yosso, 2000). One example from Island Joe highlights his social counter-space:

So, there are some people (long pause) international students, that I usually just hang out with. There is nothing wrong with hanging out with them [Black and White Americans] at the school. It’s just that I don't feel like I belong with them and the White people, well… mostly the White people. They have a lot just given
to them. So, the group of students that I hang with really do make me feel welcomed. They don't try to put nothing on me, I am just the guy from St. Lucia and we are all international students trying to survive.

Island Joe’s group membership with other international students allowed for a positive identity-affirming space. Island Joe also discussed having a close relationship with students from the Latin American student organization.

All the participants shared that relationships were significant to how they viewed themselves and also how they viewed both their marginalized and privileged identities. All participants discussed the relevance of their parents in understanding these identities, and also how they might navigate contexts where they are “the only one” or a minority. Inkognito stressed the importance of heterosexual family figures as parents:

I think it has a lot to do with my upbringing obviously. My parents, I was blessed to have both parents in the household so I guess the balance of having the male father figure and a female mother figure, obviously, kinda shaped me to be the person I am.

Throughout the study, he would stress the significance of his parents as he understood the perceptions of sexuality in his Caribbean island. However, the heterosexual figures that served as a way to understand sexuality in his country and assist in navigating hostile contexts, also nurtured self-doubt and identity instability around sexuality and its intersections with other identities and concepts like masculinity.

Similarly, to Inkognito, Island Joe shared that his parents and family were important to how he viewed his masculinity and sexuality. Island Joe also shared that
although he struggled through school and sports, those things taught him a lot about who he is as a person. Island Joe’s involvement in sports played a significant role in how he viewed gender roles, his sexuality, and establishing important friendships and intimate relationships. This socialization around sport and gender roles, is consistent with what many researchers have found as reinforcing heteronormative and heterosexist (Davis & Duncan, 2010; DiIorio, 1989; Duncan & Brummett, 1989; Kane, 1995; Sullivan, 1991). Island Joe discussed many of those relationships in the contexts they were significant and in what ways. He discussed a strained relationship with his parents due to his father’s infidelity with other men. His mother expressed openly her distaste for gay men and how it emasculated them and disgraced women. Due to these views and experiences, he shared a few times how his sexuality caused him to struggle, however helped define him as a survivor.

I think of myself as a survivor who has been through a lot. In fact, that shapes me into the person that I am today... I didn’t have the best childhood... I didn’t have the worst childhood but I didn’t have the best. And to compound it, being a gay person in a country that so oppressive when it comes to being gay. I grew up always in fear. So, it’s not the easiest or most comfortable way to grow up. And I mean you have all the family dynamics to deal with, you have parents getting divorced, the fighting, the quarrelling being terrified by all of that. School, I was a very quiet child, scared of adults most of my life so... I would say that it has been an interesting experience
In contrast, Barabbas shared that his family and his relationship with his church played a significant role in how he understood his sexuality. Barabbas’ strong duty to “family values” and his “savior and redeemer” complicated his views about his sexuality and at times he shared his dissonance around “homosexuality.” Barabbas’ relationship with his parents and family members take priority over intimate relationships that he also considered to be significant. The perceptions and beliefs of his family members have been internalized and as he resolved emerging tensions with his sexuality, gender, religion and culture, he at times distanced himself from intimate relationships with other men. Barabbas shared:

Umm well I mean so, I know like the world is so connected these days that I still am really hesitant about disclosing my sexual orientation too. So, I like somebody might post the wrong thing on Facebook or something and then pretty much everybody knows. And so, I’m very selective on who I share information with about my sexuality and so, some of my friends who are straight I kinda want to tell them but it feels so natural for me not to tell them because that’s the culture that I came from but it feels like they are really accepting here [United States] and so that kinda makes me want to tell them but I just hold off from telling them. Yeah... So, I can’t really share the entire person that I am with my friends here [United States].

He also avoided friendships with other gay men, especially those who could be identified as effeminate. Barabbas’ close relationships were focused on affirming identities that were privileged due to his transphobic and internalized homophobic beliefs. Barabbas
shared that friendships or intimate relationships with gay effeminate men and trans-men and women can be an indicator that he identifies with people who are LGBT. Despite being in the United States, he intentionally took steps to avoid visible relationships with other gay men through social media accounts such as Facebook.

Like the other participants, Casper discussed the significance of his parents throughout his life. He was the only participant where race was significantly impacted by his parents and socialization in his home country; other participants discussed the importance of colorism in interpersonal or intergroup interactions. Casper, like Island Joe, had parents who were divorced due to infidelity by his father who developed intimate relationships with other men. Unlike Island Joe, Casper quickly developed pride around his sexual identity and moved to embrace it, while cautiously expressing it in Brazil. The relationships he formed in the United Kingdom helped him achieve greater comfortability with his sexuality, and thus he renegotiated identity salience from race to sexuality. His residence in a country that provided a more welcoming environment around sexuality allowed him to explore this identity and gain some understanding and identity pride. His interactions with individuals in the United Kingdom, viewed him as exotic and he began to view himself as attractive and unique at the intersections of sexuality, race and nationality.

Casper’s relationship with members of his singing group in the United States moved him to perceive his racial identity as significant. In the United States, Casper’s identity salience seemed to oscillate between his racial identity and sexuality depending on the context. However, his fluid views on sexuality allow a more fluid approach with
more consistency in co-salience of identities. In many cases during the interview, Casper would intentionally problematize building racial group connections or the need to be grouped on the premise of identity as a whole. He developed tensions that would allow him to be more flexible and intentional about the relationships he nurtured so that he remains authentic.

My doctors are White, my, you know, my singing buddies are White, my running buddies are White and um my roommates are White, so I feel sort of when I in the U.S. I feel sort of detached from the Black community. I don't feel like I'm part of it. And I really don't know if I, I mean what I'm trying to say is that, without judgment, I don't know what I would do if I really wanted to be part of it [the Black community]. I don't know what it is that I'm doing that is sort of like putting me away from it. I don't know if there is such a thing as something I could do to be more part of it. But it's definitely a weird experience for me cause I'm sort of Latino here for some people and for some people I'm not… when it comes to sexuality, I think it's, like the odd social experience of being in like a group with a lot of guys and they’re talking about girls and you know, I'm not, I decided like I have this principle that I'm not gonna lie. I'm not gonna say yeah, she's really hot but also, I'm not gonna say I'm gay, I hate that kind of thing. My way of dealing with it is always being quiet. It's like taking myself out of it. I think I try to preserve some kind of integrity by not participating in that kind of conversation.
His interactions with others in the surrounding communities forced him to reflect on how he viewed people who belonged to the trans* community and how he revealed his sexuality to others. He constantly used words such as integrity and authentic when discussing how he wanted to be viewed by others. The relationships that the participants nurtured, interacted with or avoided helped them to learn what some of the identities they hold in the U.S. mean.

Through an intersectional approach, the contexts and identities that the participants find salient and discussed in their interviews, paint the image of contexts and bodies that are constantly evolving and metamorphosing. Further contextualizing this, queer theory implicates the movement of their positions within societies that are embodied in their identities or identifications. For each participant, this was markedly different, but the idea of navigating remained. The ways in which the participants described their identities or understandings of their identities differed from normalized ways of viewing identity. Each participant’s social location allows for varying ways of understanding processes that influence their performance and their interactions with others. As participants become more familiar with contexts and more critical about how policies and relationships affect their experiences, they perform discursive acts that challenge the norm as ways of resistance. The experiences of the participants also reflect their capacities to maintain resilience that was essential to cultural adjustment in the United States and when returning home. The participants communicated ways of navigating interactions with others depending on the context and who was part of the interpersonal interactions. Much of the experiences showed participants’ capacities to
code-switch or operate cross-culturally in situations where safety or tradition was a concern.

The very bodies of Black gay international students on campuses and in surrounding communities served as a point of resistance to the normative systems that govern them. In correlation with existing literature, participants shared experiences where they challenged stereotypes based on sexuality, gender, race, nationality and citizenship (Abes & Kasch, 2007; Hanassab, 2006). Participants in the study attempted to understand these identities due to the reactions that they received from people that they interacted with. As it will be continuously highlighted in this chapter, the very notions of race and sexuality collapse onto each other and seemingly, at times, did not exist.

**Nationality and Citizenships**

The nature of Intersectionality in this study as a lens of analysis restricted my interrogation of nationality as a construct that was layered, multidimensional, and connected to other concepts such as citizenship and immigration status. Juxtapose with Queer Theory, a complex view of nationality emerged through the data and was teased out to reflect the complexities with these structures and their weighted meaning with regard to democratic involvement and belonging. Nationality as a social construct was described by the participants as being connected to a country or territory that afforded democratic participation. However, the freedom to explore one’s sexuality in the United States or more liberal countries exhumed underlying tensions between citizenship, religion, and cultural beliefs. The concepts producing these tensions revealed how nationality and participation were limited. Where individual manifestations of inequality
along the lines of race and sexual orientation were intricately connected to collective representations of citizenship that only explicitly of face value promote equality. Furthermore, as participants navigated home and host countries, their performances and perceptions highlighted the liminality of nationality.

**Liminality of Nationality.** The concept of nationality is limiting when considering the experiences of the participants in this study and the ways they are perceived by peers and administrators on campus. Layering this with citizenship gives a better understanding of their experiences and these intersections with race complicates their positions once situated in the United States. This specific student population illustrate the ambiguous nature in which Black international students are positioned in American Higher Education when only considering nationality. Within the liminal space that they occupy, the participants at times elude categorization that normally locate the bodies of Black Americans in the context of higher education and society. As Ore (2006) contended, individuals who subscribe or ascribe to social identities navigate the product of social factors that shape these identities. This specific case of the misascription of Black international students, associate them to particular civil rights applicable to United States citizens. However, these civil rights are bound by legal factors, which are prioritized when proper credentials are scrutinized. Participants discussed their inability to participate in rights specific to U.S. citizens, such as voting, federal financial aid, and certain types/forms of employment.

For Barabbas especially, his ability to mask his accent afforded him an invitation to participate, however any further action that required him to show a form of
identification that confirmed citizenship hindered this participation. Island Joe and Barabbas had similar experiences when applying for scholarships and other forms of financial aid that were exclusive to legal permanent residents and citizens of the United States. Barabbas recalls an administrator encouraging him to apply for a scholarship, however when he submitted his application along with his social security number and copy of his visa, he received an email that explained why he could not qualify. Island Joe shared instances when he would find jobs off campus that he could not apply for because he did not have the necessary authorizations for employment. Inkognito shared an experience that involved voting at both the state and national level: “You know. I’m very frustrated… it’s all just very frustrating. I’m seeing all these things happening and I don’t have a say in it. I pay my money in taxes like people up here and I can’t vote or have a say in what that happening to me.”

Inkognito was however the only participant who was in the process of adjusting status through employment as he completed his degree. The agency displayed by Inkognito directly relates to his adjustment of status and as someone who can, to a point, participate in American society. His ability to gain “papers” or documentation affords him the capacity to participate to an even greater extent than the other participants in the study, however his position in American society shifts to a more permanent status as a resident. This shift from international students to resident reflects the ways that systemic power and control organizes and stratifies bodies, allowing a select few to be given civil rights in the United States.
In some cases, the participants described feelings of isolation and not belonging in their home countries and in the United States. In both of these cases, there were varying reasons, but the feeling of belonging neither here or there was constant. In a moment of frustration, Island Joe communicated: “It’s like you have no place. You cyah [cannot] be St. Lucian but you eh [not] American. It’s like I doh [don’t] have a place sometimes.”

This was echoed by Inkognito, “…I feel like my country doesn't want me sometimes.” However, these frustrations vary depending on the level of participation allowed in the United States. Compared to their experiences in the United States, some of the participants attempted to engage in processes or activities in their countries excluded them based on they perceived others in their home country viewed them. As participants in this study shared more about their feelings around nationality and participation, it gave rise for a deeper look into the ways they discuss participation. I focused these into a larger analysis of varying citizenships.

**Emergent Citizenships.** What became apparent based on the dialogue in the interviews and moving through data analysis was the varying manifestations of citizenship, which was bounded by U.S. immigration laws or legal factors. These emergent citizenships allowed participants to not only navigate within legal parameters but also feel a sense of belonging and dissonance with dominant ideologies and body politics in the United States. Although the participants at times spoke about issues of inequity affecting them at an individual level, they translated to challenges of larger narratives around equality. In some cases, these dominant ideologies were critiqued by participants, while in other cases upheld. In all these cases of emergent citizenship,
existing systems of power at the societal level were reproduced in various ways at micro levels, such as within the LGBTQ community, schools, and within racial groups. I identified these three categories as follows: academic or educational citizenship, racial citizenship, and queer citizenship.

**Academic/educational citizenship.** It is clear that the participants all developed a sense of citizenship either affiliated with their social groups on campus, academic discipline, on-campus employment, relationships with faculty/staff, and/or the institution as a whole. Although the participants shared some negative experiences on campus, in some cases they engaged in changing the situation or perceptions that made the situation negative. In other cases, the participants did not engage with some issues on campus that they disagreed with. However, despite engagement or non-engagement they maintained their affiliation around academic or educational spaces. These spaces could not be categorized as academic counter-spaces due to the fact that the participants still experienced discrimination in those settings. Barabbas discussed the place he felt the most sense of belonging:

So, in both this school and my last one, I felt like being a TA and being in the lab, I really felt like I am part of something and actually doing my part to change or find something new in science. Even when I didn’t my PI [Principal Investigator] would still encourage me to do more or would find something significant to say that is meaningful. But I don’t think my race or being an international student is ever a factor. They don’t see those things as a big deal.

Inkognito had similar feelings about the on-campus office where he was employed:
The place where I felt the most connected to on-campus wasn’t my program. I feel like there were too many business majors to really make a deep connection with. That would have to be where I worked. They always had my back and I would never mind going above and beyond what they wanted… Yeah, I felt a sense of responsibility and I didn’t think twice about anything I had to do there. It also made me a lot more vocal when I was at school, and since I was in a student services area, I could tell people more about the office and what the school was doing to make things easier for us.

In these cases, the participants expressed a sense of belonging and a need to contribute to making a difference in educational or academic spaces. Participants also felt like their minoritized identities, such as race and sexuality had no influence on how they were perceived. They focused heavily on their professional careers. However, this was not the case for everyone, Casper shared:

You know, I don’t want to say that people treat me differently in class. But… So… I’m at teaching assistant and there are times when my students do or say things that make me feel well oh I’m a Black guy or they must think because I’m not White then I’m not knowledgeable about stuff and I’m not supposed to be here. But then, a student says or does something that is respectful and I think well I’m just another person.

Although Barabbas and Casper experienced microaggressions in their fields, they also experienced interactions that shaped positive academic spaces. As will be discussed in
this chapter, the participants did challenge the stereotypes of others that allowed them to be treated differently from their Black American counterparts.

**Racial citizenships.** This form of citizenship was the most contentious, due to current events and the history of race in the United States. An intersectional result was the re-affirmation of the distinct interplay between race and ethnicity and the contention also encompassed the often-conflated categories of race and ethnicity. However, as I queered the two at the intersections, I found that embedded in an emerging understanding of race in the United States, American citizenship could be interchangeably used with a particular race—that is being White. While race is used to categorize minorities in the United States, it serves as a way to also categorize immigrants who are ancestrally similar to people from China, India, and especially predominantly Black African nations.

Findings already stated in this chapter shows that racism is an issue that participants face, and their racialization is not an uncommon occurrence due to the U.S. history. The shared experience of racialization, discrimination, and othering are shared between the participants and Black Americans. The unified narrative formed from these experiences can form the basis for establishing racial citizenship in the context of blackness.

Within this realm of racial citizenship exist the reality of cross-cultural realities of participants who are raced and racialized as Black in their home countries. These racialized experiences differ from that of their American counterparts. Due to these varying cross-cultural experiences, the Black international students in this study share some different experiences that causes confusion as they compare their experiences with that of Black Americans. For example, Island Joe’s consistent views of Black Americans
as “lazy” or who “do not work hard enough” are informed by white supremacist thought but also by his upbringing that also borrows from meritocracy. As a result, he constantly distinguished himself due to negative stereotypes and biases about all Black people, a narrative produced that uphold inequality against Black Americans and supremacist thought that positions them at the borders. Island Joe’s communication and practice of meritocracy was a (re)production and perpetuation of second-hand racism, which he internalized to only then (re)create as a basis for distancing from Black Americans.

Although participants in this study attempted to distance themselves from their Black American counterparts, they found solace in their Blacknesses that ran beyond skin-deep. Each participant described stronger arguments and pride for racial group membership around Blackness only when they discussed individualized notions of their Blackness despite geographical location. That is, participants possessed an affinity to Black group membership only if they could communicate appreciation for their Black identity. For example, when Casper talked about the beauty that Black people possessed in Brazil, it was at a time when he accepted himself at the intersection of being a Black gay man. As shared through his personal theory in his narrative (Chapter 4), the relationship between race, self-esteem and self-efficacy is dependent on the positive imagery that one can identify. This signal a space of a utopic ideal of racial citizenship that is achievable and reinforced when participants do not experience negative stereotypes, racism, and white supremacist thoughts around being Black and a strong enough sense of Black consciousness.
Queer citizenship. Queer citizenship describes the ways that Black gay international students were included or excluded from queer spaces in the United States. Representative of belonging to gay and queer spaces, queer citizenship was experienced in varying ways unlike race, which was described in similar ways. Due to a liberal discourse around diversity and narratives of being LGBTQ friendly, participants described the United States as a country where they could be free to explore sexuality. Each participant described the United States as this realm where they could explore themselves in more holistic ways around sexuality. However, their actual experiences did not match their expectations, where some still chose to remain in the closet. For example, Barabbas worried about people in the Bahamas and heterosexual circle in the U.S. finding out about his sexuality. This ideal of being positioned in a queer utopia was quickly thwarted in reality.

Inkognito viewed himself as an outsider in his home country due to his sexuality since he did not feel agency to advocate for equal rights for LGBTQ individuals in his Caribbean homeland. I care about those [LGBT] issues… but I am not an advocate. Who will listen to me? I am up here in the states so it doesn’t make sense for me to involve myself in island business. I think I would be a hypocrite cause I can leave at anytime. I have gone to Black Gay Pride in DC but that’s the extent that I will advocate. I think I can support by giving money but that’s about it.

While this can be seen negatively, Inkognito’s actions hint at how he participates in events that are meaningful to the LGBTQ communities in different countries based on
feelings of safety. Given that his home country is homophobic he considers other ways he can make a difference that challenges the hegemonic realm of heterosexuality.

What hinders these individuals, specifically, from fully participating in democratic activities in their home countries is a lack of affinity between the home country and the individual. Where the individual does not feel like he can truly contribute to the civic responsibilities outlined by the country due to either legal or non-verbal laws that oversee sexuality. Therefore, the participants sometimes felt unattached to their home countries and explains the expressions of not belonging in the United States or respective countries. This sense of belonging is dependent on a sense or level of security around salient identities in these respective cultural contexts. Interrogating this affinity to their home countries also forces us to do the same for the United States. When asked the reason for selecting the United States as a place to pursue an education, all the participants except Casper shared that it was a place where they could be themselves and explore their sexuality. However, it is important to note that all participants explored and shaped a new understanding of racial and sexual identity based on their previous experiences and salient national and cultural identities.

The participants in the study described their participation or lack thereof in spaces such as bars/night clubs, virtual sites/apps, sport clubs, and other LGBTQ sponsored events or organizations. Barabbas and Casper discussed in their interviews how their race could be a factor in forming intimate relationships and with groups of gay men who identify as White. Barabbas, although he shared that he only dates Black masculine men, he recounts seeing profiles on Grindr and Jack’d with racist language with the guise of
vocalizing dating preferences. Casper questioned several times why his partner was so successful at making friendships with members of the gay community versus him who is energetic and an extrovert. Inkognito reflected on conversations with his friend who identifies as being HIV positive, and his inability to create meaningful and lasting friendships and intimate relationships. Inkognito shared, “if you not White, young, rich and have muscles and healthy, then good luck to you if you want to be a mainstream gay…” as he described some of the “cliques” in Washington D.C. Queer citizenship was experienced in varying ways based on relationship status, race, masculinity, HIV status, being out or closeted, body image, and ability to navigate online spaces.

**The Troublemaker: Sexuality**

During the study, there was an undertone that sexuality complicated life for the participants. Although the participants discussed reconciling their conflicting identities, the overall findings suggest contradictory beliefs, which identify sexuality as a troubling dimension in their lives. Beliefs around homosexuality stemmed from socialization through the church, culture, political and the law. Even through school, the participants discussed the messages they learned, which may have led them to internalize the discrimination they experienced.

**Etiology of gayness.** There were several occurrences in the study where the participants attempted to find some type of causality for being gay. Based on this gay etiology and coming to acceptance appears to be, in part, an exploration of causality and gayness. Although this may seem problematic due to the need to attribute cause, it was a way for the participants to deconstruct a normalized or naturalized heterosexuality.
Casper and Island Joe had similar experiences with their fathers. In attempting to understand the cause of his sexuality, Casper shared: “You know I use to think that because my dad was gay maybe that’s why I was too. Like it was something that was like genetic…”

Casper gave more insight into his father and shared:

… he was married to my mom for appearance and he had several affairs with other guys... We only found out because my mom found a love letter by him to another guy and then she confronted him and then he left the house. I went like a good 2 years without talking to him but then recently now I’ve been trying to get back in touch with him and stuff. I ask sometimes about his life and so on and its pretty amazing I mean he's really old he's like in his 70s now and um it's pretty amazing how his life was different than mine as a gay man. But yeah, I'd say that coming out to my family and then finding out that my Dad was gay like a couple of years later than that was probably a big one.

Casper’s recollection provides some background of the heteronormative context of Brazil. Casper further shared that his struggle around his sexuality was the fact that he could not share his thoughts about feelings of attraction for someone of the same sex. His inability to speak openly about these feelings fostered a sense of inauthenticity. This resulted in Casper taking on ownership of his sexuality and beginning the process of coming out.

Island Joe shared similar sentiments about a genetic link to being gay, however attributed some of his perceptions to his parents:
Since our last discussion, I feel like everything we talked about was a trigger. And I think for you to understand what shapes me as a man which parlay into me being gay, I think it is important to go back to my foundational relationships… There were accusations of him having relations with other men so in my case, there is a genetic component and I’m sticking to my story… But what happened is that my father succumbed to the pressure of society, you know you not suppose to be gay so you try to just have a normal life but eventually, from the start the relationship was doomed for failure. But my mother had her own issues going in and my father obviously was not supposed to be married but they gave it the go anyway. So, my mother when she was younger abject poverty she was abused mentally, emotionally, physically. My mother up to this day has not dealt with these issues and you have my father who is gay boy

Island Joe later discussed the ways all of this possibly resulted in him being gay.

Inkognito attributed himself being gay to being sexually abused by a woman, however also gave some insight on how he reasoned being gay:

I had a moment with my sister and I told her so-and-so abused me… but my notion was that I was gay because of what this woman did and I didn’t like women because of that. So, I ended up liking men. But personally, I don’t think that was what it was. I think I had always been gay and I was born gay, so I was born gay so I couldn’t pay much attention to that notion.

His cause and effect views allowed him to deconstruct his experience and shifting blame to his perpetrator. This was his first step in accepting his sexuality, and he began to
deconstruct a cultural context that allowed victims of sexual violence to take on
ownership of the actions of others. Inkognito further shared his frustrations:

I feel like that is a problem in the Caribbean in general, because a lot of people
that I have spoken to they've been sexually abused and... And they don’t have the
avenues to express it openly and get the support that they want. Its either it’s your
fault or they just hush you up. Growing up every time you see the news or
anytime you heard something happen to someone they would always be like, oh
well they were somewhere that they didn’t have to be. Or they were acting vulgar
or something like that. So, I feel like there was always a sense of victim blaming
and I learned to block so many things because not only about the victim blaming
but you can’t talk about certain things

For Barabbas who believes strongly in his religion and the teachings of his church, he
constantly believed that something was wrong with him on a spiritual and psychological
level. His parents sought out the assistance of a therapist to help in his rehabilitation who
was also associated with his church:

So, me and my mother would get into arguments mostly everyday, sometimes we
even got into physical altercations about it, like she tried to attack me. Also, they
[parents] asked me if I would go to counseling to see if I could get help for my
condition, so I went to counseling and pretty much the counselor said I was not
open to change. And so, he never told me what the steps were to becoming
straight but he said that I was not open to change. He said he didn’t really want to
have me as a patient... it didn’t make sense to have me as a patient anymore… It
felt like... Well, it angered me. I felt like he knew that there wasn’t any cure for homosexuality and he was just... he couldn’t really help me because there wasn’t anything wrong with me and then he just made it seem like I was just resisting his, you know, professional care or whatever, which was not true. I was open and listening to what he had to say but he never really told me anything that was ground breaking. I pretty much heard it from my parents because he didn’t even bother to tell me... well okay, I don’t think I can help you. It was just like he doesn’t want to take their money anymore.

The description of Barabbas having this *homosexual condition*, proposes a cause and cure. His genuine curiosity to understand more about his, “lifestyle” as he described it, and the failed attempt of the therapist forced him to reflect about his “condition” and come to terms that it was not something he could cure, but instead accept.

The actual basis for questioning the validity of their gay identity is not uncovered through an intersectional approach. Rather, queering the need for an answer relates back to Barabbas’ experience as to having a “condition.” The very basis to question upholds and legitimizes normalcy, where being gay is perverse and heterosexual as the normal (Abes & Kasch, 2007; Sullivan, 2003; Talburt, 2000). This belief encouraged participants to seek answers that heterosexual counterparts would never question because there were no indications, laws, or actions that forced them to question their sexuality. The participants were able to explore questions about homosexuality, heterosexuality, and even bisexuality. The participants, through this journey to find causality, attempted to develop romantic relationships with women that ultimately failed. Due to their
unsuccessful attempts, and determining the cause of their nonheterosexuality, the participants began to embrace their sexuality. These findings infer tactical mechanism that the participants used so they would not be associated with homosexuality. The term homosexuality for the participants often seemed like a label that is used as a tool for shaming and emasculating.

_Diverging ideas: Being a man and being masculine._ Masculinity was discussed in a very strict way, while femininity was more multidimensional and diverse. Through troubling concepts such as masculinity and femininity, I was able to break down the strict notions of masculinity and question it while juxtaposing it with the varying concepts of femininity that participants discussed. What was increasingly obvious was that masculinity was absolute and there were multiple definitions of femininity. However, as the participants described themselves as masculine, their representations of their own masculinity were contradictory to their overall descriptor of it. Their definitions were also disparate across identity dimensions such as country of origin, culture, religion, and race.

Casper explained what he thought masculinity was:

> I think masculinity is a set of rules that we learn when we're kids and these rules are sort of passed down by society and you sort of like learn how to mimic them… I think with my experience of life, I came to realize that a lot of and I didn't know that, I came to realize that a lot of masculinity as I was taught when I was a kid is just fake… but I do feel like masculinity as is perceived in our society is basically power.

Island Joe shared that:
I think being masculine is being a man. I received those messages throughout my life and that was basically where things got disconnected for me. Being a man to love and know how to love. When he is in a position of power and how he treats the weak. Being a man for me is not being scared to see both sides of the coin.

Taking care of your family and being a provider.

Barabbas’ definition was very similar to that of Island Joe’s. He shared that,

“…masculinity for me is essentially being a man and providing for family. And all I can do is be as close to that definition as possible in order to be accepted by my family.”

The participants’ socialization around masculinity played a significant role in understanding identity as a whole. What is apparent, and aligns with previous research, is that the men internalized the messages they received growing up (Kimmel, 1994; McLauren, 1997). In continuing the conversation, it was clear that there was a continuous challenge and questioning of what being a man was. In trying to understand the dichotomous views of being masculine versus feminine, the men attempted to place themselves along a personally constructed continuum. Thus, also developing divergent ideas between being a man and being masculine as they noticed the women in their lives having masculine traits as defined by their socialization. Island Joe shared that:

Since my father was gone for a while, my mother became that father figure for us. She was the one provider and took care of us. But we live in a society that when we think of the cues to be a man. We also live in a society that give mixed messages about being a man and being masculine.
Inkognito added: “Well I kinda feel like when we hear masculinity we think of men and femininity we think of women. So, it’s like all of it is attached to the roles we have to play as men and women.”

In line with this opinion, Casper shared that much of what he considered masculine and feminine also arises from our “binary views of gender roles.” It was clear during conversations about masculinity, there was need to contradict this form of hyper-masculinity through action as they created their own way of being masculine. The participants also described that there was a traditional sense of femininity that reflected common stereotypes, and another that took on traits that of masculinity along the lines of familial responsibilities. This gave way to a new way of defining women who transgressed from normalized understandings of gender, and as Island Joe describes it, *female-masculinity* in relation to his mother. It was important to note that having traits of masculinity or female masculinity did not mean that women would have the same power as men. There emerged this eroding of boundaries by participants as they searched for ways to explain strict constructs such as masculinity linked to gender.

**Governed by Law and Church.** This sub-theme began to emerge from an In Vivo code from an interview with Inkognito as we discussed “things that impacted my [his] views of his sexuality”, and as he processed openly he said “the law and church and sexuality… and my parents.” Although I themed parents under “Upbringing and Socialization,” it seemed that what instilled fear the most was the church and laws regulating “homosexual” behavior. This sub-theme captures codes and categories that were salient to the participants and prior lived experiences in their home countries. This
sub-theme was based on the experiences that reflected institutions that attempt to regulate identity and performance of particular identity dimensions. There were two participants in the study who were from locations where homosexual acts were criminalized. In those contexts, the law and religion are tightly linked as they inform and shape the behaviors of its people.

*The Law.* Sodomy and buggery laws can be used as a tool to regulate sexuality in various ways including criminalization, privacy, and citizenship and democratic involvement. The participants in the study talked about the as one source of messages that being gay was “bad” and “unnatural.” Incognito and Island Joe shared experiences where they can remember their country’s laws shaped how they understood their sexuality at the time. Incognito shared:

As I said before, I can’t by choice be gay in *this country*. If I am having sex with a man in the privacy of my home, why is it the government’s business? I don’t have privacy, I am a pervert, and I can go to jail. If someone kills me then who cares.

Island Joe gave more context about when he thinks about the law:

I want to be married, I want to have kids, I want the life. It’s exactly the same thing. The only thing that is different is that I want it with a guy. But in my mind, that’s where my mind was, I was very serious about this guy. And I have only had this with two people; him and this other guy that it just didn’t work out with.

When you come across these things, you just go by your heart. I meet this person and I want this person and that’s where my mind was. I wasn’t thinking about
laws. If we had to go to Timbuktu to get married I would have done it. But that’s what it is. I wasn’t thinking about getting married was illegal, I was just thinking about I want you and I don’t care.

These two quotes reflect how messages are internalized by the participants and produced as they define themselves or being gay. Furthermore, these and other conversations with participants shows that the law is used as a tool to remind them who has authority of the land and the idea that homosexuality is a lifestyle of perversion together with sexual violence. I infer this because in the cases of Inkognito and Island Joe, the law is not enforced, therefore there is symbolism in sodomy and buggery laws. Even though the legal ramifications are not practiced, there is a stigma of being categorized as a criminal due on the basis of the legal statutes. As a result, embedded in the data is this overall message that it’s not the acts that are illegal but embodying the acts or vocalizing being gay in their countries criminalize who they are.

*Remnants of a Law:* During a conversation with Barabbas about his sexuality, he shared that the criminalizing of homosexuality was still “on the books” or in existence, but in collecting data on the Bahamas I found out that the law was removed in 1991. Barabbas, because of his age, should have grown up in the Bahamas after he law had fallen. Brazil’s buggery law had fallen in 1831 and as Casper shared, he described it as there still being attitudes that reflected the criminalization of homosexuality. This brought me back to a conversation with Inkognito as he shared: “It’s like all this is embedded in deeper things than we ask and when we think about how things are the way they are. It’s like it all lingers…”
Casper shared something even more interesting: “Even though it’s nothing illegal, it’s like you can still be punished for being gay. I look at my father and what I get from all that is, this is your lesson for being gay, and you… and you… don’t do it.”

His description was interesting because there was still a sort of policing happening and being practiced. The misfortunes that coincidentally happens is a form of punishment. Despite the difference in geographical context, Barabbas added that one “can’t escape the law.” The sense that the law is eternal and continuously existing, seemed to be a conflation of discrimination that is perpetuated by country-men and -women, and deeply embedded norms and beliefs. However, as stated previously, the symbolism of the law produces a discourse that stigmatizes gay men and lesbians. The participants gave insights that the laws had a part to play in the way that sexually was viewed and as a residual effect in how LGBT people are perceived by other members in their societies. What was apparent in what was shared by the participants in the study was the relationship between church and the law.

*The Church.* With or without the presence of a law criminalizing homosexual acts, the participants shared that religion played a role in shaping their ideas around sexuality. As stated previously, these two social institutions instilled some fear in the participants. Participants shared that the discourses used to actively discriminate against gay men and lesbians were fundamentally Christian. Barabbas, who has very strong religious beliefs, throughout the study shared his struggles as he continuously attempts to reconcile religion or sexuality:
…because of religion and sexuality, I am not able to share who I really am with other people and it feels like I want to be without those two… I feel like I've embraced my sexual orientation more than before and I have kinda strayed away from my religion. I haven’t been going to church that often in the past few years. And so, it hasn’t been, I guess, an issue because I felt like I really followed that practice of religion more but in the back of my mind I know this... I believe in Christianity but I just don’t know how to have both in my life. Either gonna try to be a Christian and try to I don’t know ignore a big part of me or I’m just gonna live my life and acknowledge Christianity.

In line with this experience, Inkognito describes why he hesitated and still hesitates to come out to a friend in his home country:

So, I have a friend of mine I grew up with, and I am so hesitant to come out to him because he is a Christian and very religious. So, every time I get close to telling him it’s like he says something super religious or super homophobic and sometimes I think he knows or he can sense that I am about to tell him, I don't know.

Island Joe shared a very similar experience as he ties some of his childhood experiences to going to church:

I mean. It’s like you go to church, and sometimes the pastor goes on a rant. Next thing you know, you twisting and turning in the spot that you sitting in. You see your family, friends and people that supposed to be there for you, clapping and cheering on the hate.
Also along those lines of using religious rhetoric as homophobia, Inkognito shared:

… I think all religions in the Caribbean, kinda practices that, so I wouldn’t just blame it on the Catholics, but I was raised Catholic so that’s all I know but I think you know now, knowing what I know, all the other religions basically said the same things about being gay but had I, I can’t describe something apart from Catholic that’s all I know, that’s all I can talk about. But I think of what I were taught… Children now growing up in the U.S., you hear about a 4-year-old little boy saying that I don’t feel like a little boy, I feel like a little girl so I think I was supposed to be born a girl and you have the parents accepting that and encouraging them to be who they are. Growing up in the Caribbean, if a little boy wen to his mother saying that I don’t feel like a little boy, I feel like a little girl, you think she would encourage him? No, she wouldn’t. Because, she wouldn’t instill that oh people are gonna laugh at you, people are going to hate you, God doesn’t like this, God doesn’t like that, God will punish you, you will burn in hell.

Homophobia cuts across every institution that these participants interact with including education, the church, and the legal system. Even in cases where a law was stuck down participants still described the insidious existence of homophobia and heterosexism. Members of the family had a significant role to play as participants began to explore their sexualities and other salient identities. As a result of these conversations, I was led to look deeper into the upbringing and socialization of the participants in their home countries. It was also important to honor the things they identify as significant for informing who they are as individuals.
Being Raced and (De)stabilizing Race

This theme highlights several individual sub-themes that were combined during the focused coding cycle in the analysis to capture participant experiences and understandings around race specifically. This finding in the study revolved around notions or conceptualizations of race that I felt demanded attention in this chapter. This theme was significant throughout the study and highlighted the ways the participants thought about race based on the varying contexts they resided. Three participants expressed that they were familiar with the category of race but did not feel it played a part in their lives until coming to the United States. One participant, Casper, discussed his race as something that is significant in both the U.S. and his home country of Brazil, which has an extensive and volatile history with race relations. It is important to note that all the participants except Casper did not express a heightened awareness of race prior to coming to the United States. Casper shared in his interview: “I feel it's a pretty much for me as an international student one of the most important things that I learn when I moved to the U.S. is how the racial system works and how for me that sort of helped shape my social relationships in the US.”

This provides an exemplary glimpse into his understanding of race in the U.S. However, it is important to note that all participants’ countries were at one point colonized by European nations, and all the participants are aware of their individual national histories, which includes slavery. The act of replicating a sort of racial stratification subjugates people who are considered darker skinned to the beliefs and actions of the past when African slavery was commonplace.
Based on the data collected which extends on what I shared above I have identified three sub-themes that describe the findings of this theme: 1) Racial Performativity, 2) Racial Confusion and Distancing, and 3) Materiality of Race. In the presentation of these sub-themes, I highlight instances where the participants transgress the positionings that are created in the crosshairs of social categories of race and sexuality. I incorporated another sub-theme that created more context to understanding the experiences of Black gay international students’ questioning of practices that relate to racial performance called Problematizing Racial Performance.

**Racial Performativity.** Due to the fact that participants did not recognize the significance of race in the United States, they had to re-learn what race meant to them in varying contexts and the contextual meanings of being Black. Coming to the United States, each participant communicated that they did not see race as something significant in the United States until either an event or experience pushed them to think more about being Black and what it meant in the U.S. For some it was a racial microaggression or an incident that was nationally televised. This sub-theme captures racial performance in the United States by the participants.

**Materiality of Blackness.** To first discuss the performativity of Blackness, we should establish its materiality in the confines of this study. Extant literature provided the basis of initial understandings of Blackness. Based on the intersections of extant literature and the emergent categories of the data, I identified the following to encompass materiality of international students being Black within the context of this study: Skin color and acting *Black*. The essentialist and most palpable characteristic of Blackness is
skin color. Due to skin color or phenotypical similarities, Black immigrants, including Black international students, have been presumed to be African American. The final construct to establish materiality of Blackness encompasses the use of stereotypes that discursively reproduce notions of being African-American in the United States, whether positive or negative. I labeled this construct acting *Black* to encompass attributes that can be used to characterize African Americans specifically.

*Skin Color.* All participants in the study stated that their skin color play a significant role in interpersonal interactions on and off campus. Island Joe shared that his professors and classmates treated him differently based on the color of his skin and applied negative stereotypes that they associated with being Black or African Americans. Island Joe also shared that before getting to know him as a person, “the first thing that people notice is my[his] skin.” Both Inkognito and Casper, shared similar thoughts when talking about their skin color. With Barabbas, sharing in his final interview, “I am Black, that is something that I cannot change and that is something that is constant throughout my whole life.” Barabbas also shared how his perception of race began to formulate in the U.S.:

…if I have to be truthful because I am kinda lighter than everybody else from my country. I was kinda like the white boy in my country, but now people... compared to white people, I’m not so white anymore. So, I guess I went from being more on the lighter side of things to more on the darker side.

Although all the participants expressed varying levels of racial awareness among the four participants, they all shared very similar sentiments that they are and identify racially as
Black. Acknowledging skin color as a material that assigns meaning to Blackness within this sub-theme helps to further discuss and complicate race. Furthermore, skin color helps to talk about acts of racial discrimination and the social positioning of people who embody blackness within a socially constructed hierarchy when discussing racial privilege and exclusion.

Learning race and Acting Black. The experiences of participants in this study align with extant literature, which illuminate a misperception that extends from the skin color of individuals who can be identified as Black and African-American. This comes at the intersections of race and nationality, where all Black people in the United States are identified as African American. In the United States, there are socio-cultural indicators that suggest that a Black culture exists that encompasses all Black people despite nationality. All the participants shared varying saliency around race (i.e. being Black), and were definitely did not have a contextual understanding of it in the United States. All but one participant had an in depth understanding of how race is used as a tool to position one group over another. However, in all cases, there was learning that took place of how Black people in the United States should act. The participants communicated that race was seen differently in their home countries than in the United States. Inkognito shared more about how he viewed his race growing up in the Caribbean, while hinting at some historical understanding of race in the United States:

I grew up where being black was the majority. So, I never really experienced racism, until I moved here [to the United States], and I didn’t even recognize it when it happened because I wasn’t use to it. I didn’t know how or what it is. I
knew obviously from watching TV and reading books and you hear about racism but being the majority where everybody is Black, the White people, they get along or appear to get along with the Black people.

Barabbas shared a very similar experience:

I am from a predominantly black country and so I guess I never really ran across issues of racism to my knowledge back home and I don’t at least to my knowledge, and I’ve never really had to deal with racial issues [in the United States].

In the cases of Inkognito, Barabbas and Island Joe, in lieu of the racial conflict within their countries, they had to contend with issues of colorism, class and religion. As a result, when coming to the United States, subtle and explicit experiences related to race was a new phenomenon. These new experiences in the United States with race was difficult due to the homogenizing of all Black people to mean African American. One of the participants in particular, Island Joe, voiced negative experiences related to what appeared to be racially-motivated on campus:

I don’t think the race card plays as much of a part in St. Lucia than in America. In St. Lucia, it might be more about how light-skinned you are. In America, take for instance my school, you would find issues of race as opposed to that in St. Lucia, everybody pretty much looks the same. It’s not really, as magnified as it is in America … There was a stereotype of the young Black man being considered lazy and stupid in America, my personal experience and I’m a good student, fairly good student... no, I’m a great student and these professors see me and they
expect me to be stupid, dumb, lazy and for a while I was offended by that.

Toward my senior year, I think I got over that but they really expect you to be stupid and its only when they start seeing you in their classes their minds are changed. So automatically just because of your race, people would expect that and I got that from students too.

Out of all the participants, Barabbas was the only one who communicated conflicting ideas of how being Black affected him in the United States, and acknowledges that “not all races are viewed equally,” he shared conflicting ideas throughout the study about how race can create disparate treatment in regard to him personally. In talking about recent racial incidents at the time, he shared:

I realize that there was an injustice from the get go and I just think in a way that it does raise more awareness [about race] but I realize that it was always existing. It’s not something new… I’m sorry for the families but especially... I guess Trayvon Martin wasn't really killed by a White person but I guess in the Ferguson case, and what was the name of the guy, the young guy? I didn’t agree so I feel for their families but I don’t know if I... Because I don’t or never had to face those issues or had to deal with those issues of race that I wouldn’t say I connect with what they are going through or identify with what they are doing because I never faced a similar experience to them.

Drawing from the literature, this is a common feeling that many immigrants who identify as Black express, but it’s an indicator of the fragility of the social category of race.
Problematizing Racial Performance. Overall, there is a tension in the ways that identity is discussed, described, defined, and lived because of the ways that identity itself is used, embodied and constructed. Identity categories like race, although fragile are immovable due to their very nature as tools that are used to discern. The (re)production of Blackness in the ways mentioned in racial performativity that can be used to describe the materiality of Blackness would suggest that individuals not only embody it but live being Black particularly in the United States and countries that have volatile race relations. In this sub-theme, I use the following to problematize the expectations around racial performance in this particular context as it relates to Black gay international student participants in the study. I used key indicators identified in the data that departs from what is considered normal for African-Americans.

The Accent. One indicator that fractures the misconception that correlates Blackness with being African American, the accent. Some of the participants said that they would speak with “less of an accent.” (as stated by Barabbas). To speak with an accent, means that one is not American and begins the process of othering. “Changing it [accent] is a way for me to survive and not draw attention to myself unnecessarily.” Barabbas, who is originally from the Caribbean, does not sound like he has a Caribbean accent. Barabbas shared during one of his interviews, as he discussed passing as American a survival and fitting in mechanism. One consequence of not fitting in for him related to feeling isolated or not being taken seriously in class. In the context of this statement, Barabbas further shared that:
During undergrad, I didn’t feel like people were looking at me differently so umm you know... When I first started... when I went to school my friends would make fun of the way I said certain things so then eventually I tried to use less of my accent. I had friends from the same country as me and they would not, some of them chose not to change their accent and you know I guess, people would always say that they liked their accent and they're like, y'all from the same place? How come you don’t talk like that person? I’m like, I guess, I don’t know

As the above quote highlighted, Barabbas’ accent was used as a tool for code-switching in everyday life. He further shared that he usually uses his accent when he speaks with friends and family or when he goes to his home country. The reaction of his peers when they found out that he was not American, reflected a departure from the social convention that they considered normal. Even when having conversations, participants in the study described the reaction from people on or off campus. This quote from Island Joe masterfully captures this:

So, I went out with the guy that I use to date and when I went to the club, I saw all these guys looking at me. One of them came over to talk to me. He started talking to me and I answered his questions briefly. So, when I started asking questions he interrupted me and started to jump around like he never saw a human being before. He was like, ‘you have an accent. Here I was thinking you were Black.’ I didn't think it was a big deal, cause I talk like this all the time, I mean why should I change the way I talk.
This quote I describe as masterful, because the reactions that are described by participants in the study are indicators of departures from who a Black person in the United States should be. Furthermore, this form of transgression provides the grounds to challenge the stability of race. In the context of this study, this category lead me to make a connection to another category that I grouped into this subtheme. This other category encompassed the institutional or campus structures and practices that were and are established around race.

**Institutional Racial Diversity.** Black international students contribute to the racial diversity of their respective higher education institutions. The master narratives of each institution present campuses that are racially diverse in relation to their surrounding communities, mission, or institutional goals. This narrative expansively produces distinct groups of students, where the emphasis is not on students of color as a whole, but one that organize students’ bodies along the lines of race. Organizing these bodies in such a way does not account for the diversity or richness within each racial group on campus. This is especially the case for Black international students and Black/African Americans. The participants shared experiences that showed that at times they felt grouped with their African American peers. Although I struggled a bit with Barabbas during the course of the study, I think there were moments where he unconsciously shared revealing information about the schools he has attended:

Yeah sometimes I feel like the race thing just isn’t a big deal. But at my last school I think they view diversity as just having all races represented. The thing is
I don’t think that diversity is for me as an international student. I think it’s for Americans. I just get caught up in it because of the color of my skin.

I consider this revealing, because Barabbas shared a point that the institution’s intention to highlight racial diversity, unintentionally organizes international students’ bodies into racial categories. This process of racial homogenization by institutions is also evident in the experiences of Island Joe who constantly resisted being identified as African American:

It just seems convenient to be Black when they want, and an international student when I’m in need. So, me and this guy were up for the same scholarship, and I finding out all of a sudden, I not getting it. So, I asked, and they told me well I can’t get it because I am not a U.S. citizen. I was so angry, I have a higher GPA than the boy and he getting the scholarship? … They’re the ones who told me to apply for the thing because I met the qualifications and then I don't get it.

Island Joe was told to apply for the scholarship but due to policies around financial aid and certain scholarships he was not eligible. This specific example highlights policies that can be misunderstood either by the international student or student personnel who take students at face-value (or as I would like to think, skin-value). Inkognito’s experiences adds to this:

I think there is more or less a hierarchy that we get placed on at our school. Visually it’s easier to place people. So obviously, I would be placed with the Black kids. But in the office, I work in, everyone knows I am not African American, but I also think it’s because they know me personally.
Without the personal aspect of a relationship, I perceived this as the administrators or his colleagues would group Inkognito with Black or African Americans. An intersectional analysis draws attention to highly racialized approaches that institutions take when viewing diversity-related activities. This results in decisions and processes that constrain educational participation, retention and success, and further essentialize and tokenize Black gay international students.

**Navigating or Distancing.** During the acculturation period of the students in the study, while being in the United States, students describe that during culture-shock, they experience confusion about their racial identity. More specifically, as participants tried to find their place on campus and negotiate fitting in they started to realize that they did not fit the idea of being Black in an African American. There were cultural and ethnic nuances that had to be considered in defining who they are. All the participants in some way worked against being perceived as African Americans, although in some cases they strived to be perceived as “American” as a form of survival. My analysis of the data reveals that the students actively worked to change their racial positionings in relation to African Americans. In any regard, this form of distancing was practiced in the following ways, which were coded as categories then themed in the analysis process: 1) dispelling stereotypes, 2) enforcing the use of accents, 3) highlighting a national or ethnic identity, 4) evoke the use of other identities (such as sexuality), and 5) thwart relationships with African Americans. I had two observations of this specific finding when considering the act distancing based on the theoretical lens. Through an intersectional lens, these were strategies that participants used to navigate or code-switch as they engage with others and
in various situations. A Queer reading of this finding led me to view these strategies as ways distancing from stereotypes or beliefs about Black/African Americans.

*Use of Accents.* Though the use of accents were evoked to transgress from what is considered a homologous group of Black people in the U.S., it was also used intentionally to distance participants from various peer-groups that identify or can be identified as Black. However, it seemed in most cases when discussing their use of accents, the participants used it to distance themselves mainly from African Americans. Inkognito shared more thoughts about appearing as Black or African American: “Me? I try to distance myself from all this as much as possible because of all the bad things happening to Black men here. So, any lil*[little]* chance I have to use my accent I taking it.”

There were sometimes unforeseeable consequences when participants evoked their use of their accents. One participant specifically, Island Joe shared one of his initial experiences in the United States and on campus:

I don't feel like I have to be something that I am not. But it is hard when you talk with your accent and people think you cannot speak English or you need to be in a ESL class. I speak English. All they have to do is listen. They think if you have accent you coming from some jungle in Africa where you speaking some other language.

Other participants in the study confirmed this where “heavy accents” could be considered an indicator of their language proficiency. This experience of Island Joe, conditioned him to use a lighter accent when appropriate. This is also connected to what Barabbas described in the classroom:
It would be much easier for people to understand. If I talked the way I would normally talk people would probably be saying why is he talking like that… But I mean they view Asians as being smart but I would say that they would view me as less competent and more motivated to change my accent to fit in.

Therefore, accents had implications during interactions in and out of the classroom. Island Joe connects this idea to developing fears around class participation and shared that: “In the beginning, I hesitated to participate in class because people could not always understand what I was saying. It was so frustrating. Is either you try but it seems they didn't even want to...”

For Island Joe specifically, he was forced to attempt to assimilate even though he worked against this acculturative phase. The use of accents was at times mechanisms for survival. The intentional distancing also gave the impression that all Americans had this inherent checklist for categorizing people of color in the U.S.

Dispelling Stereotypes. In troubling perceptions and ideas that many had about African Americans, the participants worked actively to challenge the stereotypes about African Americans. Early in this section, I highlighted Island Joe challenging the stereotypes that his peers and faculty had about Black people in America. This was one way of standing out and also distancing participants from their Black peers or African Americans in the United States. Casper thought it was important to stand out in the ways that should make everyone unique, either through dress or music and should not be bound by race:
I feel that it's much more segregated in the U.S. and you're expected to be like this like this if you're black there is this whole set of like you have to be a good dancer and you have to be brash and you have to like that kind of music and you have to dress like this. And those identifiers are just non-existent in Brazil. I mean racial tensions exist but the black person in Brazil does not have their own way of dressing or the way of listening to music

Barabbas would add to this in his interview as he shared: “It is not a productive use of time to generalize about all people. I have seen White people dressing with the pants sagging…”

Avoiding relationships. This form of distancing occurred when participants did not want to be associated with African or Black Americans as a mechanism to protect them from acts of racism. This tool of distancing, I consider, keeps a race-neutral lens on race-relations in the United States. These actions were very intentional by the participants. Island Joe further shared that:

I found... I don’t think I ever really cultivated a relationship with, I’m thinking back, Black students. Where I forged, relationships was with mostly international students like myself. Cause there was a kind of comfort and a kind of alienesque kind of like you're so different and I guess there was meaning in that kind of feeling different. That’s when I felt most comfortable finding friendships. To be fair there was a group at my school that felt really welcoming. These were American students... Latin American Students, they had a student association and they wanted me to be part of that and they were very welcoming. My experience
with Black students in passing yes but to forge a friendship which lasted 6 months
friendships have s shelf life was my experience.

Inkognito did this in some ways, he would avoid gay clubs that were predominantly
African American. He shared: “I don't really go out and I try to avoid clubs and
neighborhoods that people consider ghetto. I believe that there is a stigma associated to
them that I would prefer to not be associated with.”

Inkognito further shared more about his neighborhood as mostly White but still
very diverse. Casper went on to share that he hangs out with almost anyone. Majority of
his personal relationships has been with men in his singing group where he is the only
Black man. All the participants took intentional steps that showed them actively
dissociating from African Americans.

_Evoke a National or Ethnic Identity_. These were other ways that participants
practiced distancing so that they were not perceived to be African American. For
example, Casper continuously highlighted the fact that he was a Brazilian man. Although
this was also a way of sexualizing his body, the focus was to draw attention to his
national identity. Island Joe, had a heightened sense of national pride as he also
represented St. Lucia in sports. He e-mailed photos as artifacts for the study (for the
purposes of confidentiality photos cannot be shared) of taking part in competitions across
the Caribbean. This sense of pride extended to his self-expression on campus and wearing
gear with the St. Lucian flag was one way of distancing. Like Island Joe, Inkognito
demonstrated his national identity through symbols and artifacts like his country’s flag. It
was most difficult identifying ways that showed the ways that Barabbas attempted to
distance his self from African American, since out of all the participants he attempted to
*pass* or *assimilate* the most. However, the steps that he took to identify as Bahamian
assisted him to distance himself just enough when appropriate.

*Evoke more salient identities.* Like evoking a national or ethnic identity, the
participants found ways of creating awareness of their other identities so that they could
create greater distinction between themselves and African Americans. For Barabbas, it
was more important to evoke his religious identity as a way of connecting to his deeply
held cultural beliefs, which in many ways are informed by his nationality. Island Joe, as
previously stated, got involved with a gay sports team in New Jersey. This was not only
to connect to the LGBT community in his own way but highlighted that, “Black men in
the U.S., are not so involved in the gay community.” Though he tried to stay away from
the community at times, he leveraged those identities in very visible ways.

**Concluding Thoughts**

The findings in this chapter emphasize the complexities around the intersections
of identity possessed by Black gay international students. The varying contextual
experiences that participants in this study shape their understandings and views of
structures in the United States. However, my previous assumptions about the experiences
of Black gay international students were challenged by the findings. The participants in
this study developed the majority of their understandings of race, gender, and sexuality
prior to coming to the United States. Their experiences, while in the United States,
reshaped their formative notions of knowing and being along the lines of their
socializations. This chapter, presents concepts that now inform our understandings of
Black gay international students. A student population that current literature cannot inform directly, yet complements what exists around the international student experience, Black identity, and exploration/questioning of sexuality. These findings reflect the tension and complexity of identities, ways participants experience them and internalized ideas learned through informal curricula at respective higher education institutions. The findings also show the richness that exists in the conflict and confusion based on the theoretical approach.

Both queer theory and intersectionality, call attention to the impact that the institution or structural inequalities can have on the experiences of the participants. Participants shared feeling stereotype threat and at times communicated internalized racist-thoughts, this was especially prevalent when distancing or navigating institutional contexts. For non-American or migrant populations, these perceptions and thoughts can lead to decreased student success retention for students from marginalized communities (Gildersleeve, 2010a). The chapter that follows further discusses findings in the dissertation study and provides implications and recommendations.
Chapter 6: Conclusion – Discussion and Future Research

This study explores the intersections of race, gender, sexuality and nationality in the context of higher education. The intersectional and queer analysis of these Black gay international students, revealed the complexities of their intersecting identities when layered with spaces that extend beyond the United States. An overarching purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of international students who self-identified as Black, gay and a man. From a previous pilot study with international student advisors, it became necessary to explore the singular view of these individuals as solely international students (Hubain, 2012). As human beings, international students’ phenotypical characteristics allow their bodies to be organized within the context of the United States. With an increasing number of international students attending higher education, it is important to conceptualize their experiences in the context of systems of oppression that exist in the United States. International students who fit within categories that are marginalized based on race and sexuality face a host of challenges that adds to the already existing challenges associated with being part of an immigrant class in the United States. This study aimed to understand those challenges and explore the concept of nationality and citizenship, which complicates and problematizes the experiences of foreign bodies that are raced and sexualized within this liminal space.
The research question guiding this dissertation focused on *how do Black gay international students understand their racialized sexuality?* Integral sub-questions that help unpack this main question included:

a. In what ways do Black gay international students perform their race and sexuality?

b. What events or pre-determined factors are significant to how black gay international students understand or have come to understand race and sexuality?

c. What lived experiences highlight the intersections of race and sexuality?

d. What contexts, if at all, inform the intersectional experiences of Black gay international students?

These questions were tied to the conceptual framework that undergird this study. I used queer theory and intersectionality to explore the experiences of study participants and their understandings of the subjectification of their bodies. The use of these two theoretical approaches helped in naming and decoding experiences within given contexts that highlighted inequitable power structures, while emphasizing the significance of the narratives of the study participants. Exploring racialized and sexualized experiences at the intersections of marginalized identities, contextualizes the analyses of events that were so significant that it shaped participants’ sense of self. In addition, this form of analysis problematizes systemic and institutional structures or thoughts that aid in the marginalization of the participants in this study. Revealed in the analysis, was the striving for access to privileges related to American citizenship regardless of intersecting
marginalizations of their queer and raced bodies. Participants seemed to negotiate a Black identity that was influenced by ethnicity, nationality, and education. This negotiation of identity and power forms this complex environment or matrix that bounds participant experiences forming tiers of citizenship or access given the spaces they engage within.

Existing literature on the subjects of Black gay international students are slim, as a result, I conceptualize the experience of the participants to inform what would be relevant in Chapter 2. This conceptualization provided a restricted view of the experiences of Black gay international students, because it incorporated the experiences of Black or African American domestic students, and also the inclusion of the experiences of Black gay men on campus. Some of the studies operated in a manner that negated or limit prior experiences of their participants that influences how they perceived current experiences on campus or interactions where black men either played into or challenged raced, sexualized, or queered stereotypes (Bashi & McDaniel, 1997; Constantine, Anderson, Berkel, Caldwell & Utsey, 2005; Hanassab, 2006). Existing literature also highlighted the varied experiences of international students depending on racial background, nationality, and sexual orientation (Kato, 1997; Tsang, 2002; Hebert, 2003; Hanassab, 2006; Lee & Rice, 2007; Yoon & Portman, 2004). This provided a substantive platform for conducting this research study that would then inform practice, research, and understandings of the experiences of this student population.

Due to the nature and purpose of the study, number of participants, and goal of providing a descriptive account that still added to an effective study, I selected a qualitative approach. Four participants completed the study, with an additional two
participants dropping out of the study due to concerns about safety and self-awareness. One participant hailed from Brazil, one from the Bahamas, one from St. Lucia and the other from the Caribbean but did not want his country of origin disclosed. The remainder of this chapter will explore some findings from the previous chapter, implications for practice and research, recommendations for future research and my ending positionality.

**Discussion of Findings**

The findings of the study offer the foundation for establishing several conclusions. It is important to note that these findings are specific and could be different if it were four other Black gay international students or varied if they attended other institutions. The findings showed that Black gay international students perform and experience their race and sexuality as connected, even in cases when they experience some dissonance due to negative experiences. Reflected in what was shared by the participants, and echoed in previous research conducted by Abes et al. (2007), there are significant moments that shape how we view the world. These moments also help Black gay international students find ways of understanding who they are, interpersonal relationships, and the spaces that they occupy; sometimes out of a place of privilege. Furthermore, these experiences or critical events, are in many cases raced, gendered and sexualized. The spaces or contexts function to create awareness around identities that participants possessed and especially when they were conflicted about being their true authentic selves. Needless to say, these perspectives are unique but we can learn from them and use in ways that inform practice and research. The findings of the study included 1) construction of personal counter-spaces produced by resistive performances
by participants 2) the problematizing race 3) tensions created by sexuality and 4) the positions within liminal national spaces.

One of the significant findings in this study, which shapes the title of this dissertation relates to counter-spaces. These counter-spaces offer a way of understanding how international students go about navigating structures, and ways that they challenge traditional understandings of those structures that aim to (re)define them. When international students ascribe to a marginalized identity in the context of the United States, they define ways of operating at the margins and performing identity adapt to varying contexts. Findings in this study show that personal counter-spaces are used to lessen the impact of social influences that would shape how participants perceive their identities. Using personal counter-spaces as a form of resistance as they performed their identities in ways that may not be seen as normal. A key observation was that performance of identity was linked closely to the ways participants formally defined their sexuality, racial, and national identities.

The existence of a personal counter-space meant that power exists in the spaces that the participants occupy. This power, which is inherent in the norms through the underlying dominant discourse and institutional structures/processes that students participate within, can influence their behavior. Despite geographical location, participants shared various ways they attempted to navigate and in some cases as they continued performing in order to survive or conformed. This component of acculturating relies on dominant discourses to bound performance that is sometimes contradictory or in competition with participants’ counter-spaces. This echoes the sentiments shared by
Foucault (1990), “where there is power, there is resistance, and yet or rather consequently, the resistance in never in a position of exteriority in relation to power” (p. 95). Due to the components that factor into inter- and intra- group interactions, personal histories play a significant role in also understanding subjective locations or positions. As a result, personal counter-spaces work as mechanisms that allow for the understanding of not only relationships with individuals/groups, but also function as a way of making meaning of situations. For example, the way Casper connects with communities of color, is grounded in his cultural, historical, and familial experiences.

This is supported by Butler (1997), when she shares that “the body is understood to be an active process of embodying certain cultural and historical possibilities, a complicated process of appropriation” (p. 403). Butler discusses this in relation to gender, but I believe that this understanding can be transferable to other identities. Participants in the study define themselves differently over time, depending on forces (societal, institutional, cultural norms) that shape their definition of identities/positionalities and in turn the ways they present or perform their holistic identity. These identity-related performatives were also influenced by participants’ affinity to specific groups, stereotypes, or a non-traditional ideal. As participants in the study shared more about their lives in the first interview and then captured again threw the timeline worksheet, I realized that this reflected a re-telling and remaking of their identity. The reflective process and the sharing of their narratives was a way of reconstructing their performances, and I realized that performativity as a tenet of queer theory is not limited to the time and space that it occurs. As we reflect and share stories, it is the repetitive
nature of performativity of subjects but most importantly, as a process, performativity does not have a definite end or a complete process. As Butler (1988) believes, that performativity is reliant on ongoing repetition for identity stabilization to be self-realized, however, as subjects we are constantly attempting to construct our identities.

This now calls more attention to identity and identity dimensions as an unstable concept, where the ways we define them in the field of higher education are restrictive and inadequately capture people we are trying to serve, like Black gay international students. Participants constantly challenged stereotypes or others’ perceptions of them because of the nuanced or idiosyncratic way of self-defining. We see this paralleled in other studies on intersecting identities. The troubling fact as professionals and students alike encounter Black gay international students, they are reduced to a single international student identity. When this idea is challenged, their actions become a point of resistance to the normative systems that govern them. Participants challenged stereotypes that were grounded in notions of sexuality, gender, race, nationality and citizenship. While challenging these stereotypes in the context of the United States, they also attempted to understand the identities that were used to organize their bodies and position them in a marginal position.

Galvanized in the findings were snippets that captured a (re)defining of these international students who identify as both Black and gay, who by default possessed educational privilege and were very successful professionally. As participants discussed others’ changing views of them, there was a production of a new narrative that was partly imposed on them as being different from Black people (or in other words African
A retelling of a Black is bad narrative, which already existed, dichotomizes Black people, and therefore categorizing these Black gay international students as *good Blacks*. The characteristics of these Black gay international students is given value based on what is normal for White Americans. Although, these students experience privilege, it does not change their reality of experiencing discrimination if their other identities are not known. In some cases, the participants intentionally distanced themselves from their Black American counterparts. However, with a greater need to categorize due to human nature, others place value on their sexuality and nationality to mediate dominant ideas and stereotypes about Black people in the United States. As participants undermine racial stereotypes or beliefs, they were re-positioned as different or other, whom possess characteristics of whiteness or representations of a privileged class. This repositioning of Black bodies feeds on the fragility and dynamic nature of what is considered identity and therefore challenges how notions of identity are understood.

A common thread throughout the findings, was that singular identity dimensions could not adequately capture the range of experiences that the Black gay international student participants were experiencing. Casper and Barabbas struggled with this the most out of all the participants. They struggled to make sense of some of their racial, gendered, and queer experiences. However, they manipulated performative aspects of these identity dimensions. From a queer analysis, these identities seemed to not exist for the participants. In addition, these identities were just the embodiments of difference and seemed to be mutually destructive as the strict definitions of the identities they hold. This destruction is lynched on the prescriptive experience of respective identity dimensions.
should capture and would align with many of the experiences captured by research that focuses on domestic students, however international students experience these identities differently. Therefore, their lived experiences and bodies serve as artifacts of non-normative positionalities as it relates to the co-existence of sexuality, race, gender and citizenship status in a global society. It is important to call out this co-existence or intersection as each dimension mediates or informs understandings of another. Barabbas eludes to this when we discussed erasing his gay identity from his life. It is even more important to highlight that due to nationality, referring to norms that are linked to a larger, more globalized societies, emphasize the divisive forces that mediate the behavior of participants.

All the participants shared experiences around the policing of their identities, especially those related to being a man, which was intrinsically tied to masculinity and feminization. Feminization was used as a process to emasculate and other them. Policing was implemented when participants in the study deviated from the norm in their home countries and the United States. These acts can be described under the umbrella of disciplinary power (Foucault, 1977). Heteronormativity and the production of hegemonic gender roles displayed in spaces each participant occupied, enabled the internalization of many messages around hegemonic masculinity. A result of colonialism in participants’ home country, disciplinary power, have and in some cases, continue to have laws that criminalize homosexual acts. Due to the implications of these laws, they propagate homophobia and directly impacts the ways that Black gay international students express their sexuality on campus to student personnel who are tasked with supporting them.
Further complicating this is the institutional structures that cause further harm to their exploration of self.

A finding that is important as we consider supporting LGB international students, and especially Black gay international students, are the varying ways they define their sexuality. The participants shared the various ways that they were gay and even how they came out, which resulted in the conclusion that there was not one way to be gay or describe their sexualities. This is an important note, since students with these identities may not connect with programming that may stereotypically be used to represent what all gay men connect to. Many programs such as drag shows and pride parades may cause students to disengage. In part, this is due to the laws that regulate homosexual acts, but it has far reaching implications for student personnel in the United States.

Another significant finding that emerged from the analysis was the complexities of nationality, citizenship, and race. Despite being in positions of oppression, participants have navigated spaces where they have code-switched in order to be successful, and in some cases, to survive. The findings however, show that due to limited forms of residential citizenship, the international student population as a whole run into barriers that exclude them from participating fully in the United States. The participants therefore shared ways that they either were passing or code-switching. These actions of resistance produced informal forms of citizenship that allowed rights to participate and reflected the spaces that the study participants could manipulate to an extent. These forms of citizenships reflected were academic, racial, and queer. Even within those realms of
citizenship, being American (possessing American citizenship) is an embedded privilege that cannot be eliminated.

These findings open the door to continue to learn more about the international student population, especially those who identify with LGBTQ communities. As I shared in Chapter 1, I think it is always telling to investigate the reasons why some participants drop out of studies or choose not to take part in a study. One participant who dropped out of the study shared that they could not participate because they feared for their life and the other did not feel ready to participate. Both participants are from Jamaica, which has high incidents of hate crimes against lesbian, gay, and transgender communities. Many men in Jamaica live double lives. These findings through a queer analysis also serves as evidence in support of the complexity of identity. As we expand our understandings of identity and identity development, the findings of this study encourage the use of theoretical frameworks that contradict, challenge, and extend our ideas of how development can and should take place. The findings inform implications and recommendations for future explorations of the topic, policy, and practice.

**Implications and Recommendations for Policy**

Both Queer theory and Intersectionality heightens the awareness of identity and marginalization. These theories also warn against monolithic conceptualizations of the respective identities that people hold that may subject them to disparate treatment. This study provides further evidence against the homogenization of the international student population. Gay international students of color face many barriers that are often overlooked or unknown to many who work within higher education institutions.
For Higher Education Institutions. Some of the participants in this study critiqued the use of international students to achieve perceived-visible diversity by leaders at higher education institutions. Although this practice provides a visualization of diversity, it is misleading and are inauthentic. Focusing only on visual representations of diversity exclude other underrepresented groups on campuses, but further perpetuates existing racial inequalities at respective higher education institutions (Núñez, 2014; Zambrana & MacDonald, 2009). It is therefore important for institutions to create ways of knowing how international students identify. Organizations like the Institute of International Education (IIE) do not collect this information. As it relates to formal reporting, identifying or demographic information on race ethnicity, and sexuality are not reported or collected by the premiere reporting agency on international students; Open Doors (IIE, 2016). Due to this practice concerning the collection of key indicators of demographic data such as race, ethnicity and sexual orientation, higher education institutions do not have relevant data to make informed decisions regarding services for international students. The intent may not be to erase the identities or dehumanize international students, however, operating in this manner does not acknowledge the differences that are vital to categorization in the United States other than nationality.

Operating and serving international students in this way omits the experiences they may have on campus and surrounding communities, and dampen the ability of practitioners to address the needs of international students who identify as minorities in the context of the United States. Furthermore, many international students already navigate structures that organize their bodies in their home countries and they are already
familiar with similar categorizations such as colorism, heterosexism, ableism, and racism. Higher Education institutions in the United States are aligning with racial, gender, and LGBTQ-inclusive narratives and laws that are being incorporated in the protections of Americans. Therefore, institutions should develop policies that guide in the collection of relevant data that can inform how they serve international students. Furthermore, protections for these collected data should be explicitly stated in their “acceptable use of data” policies.

*For Professional Organizations.* Participants in this study either did not see the need to visit affinity-based resource centers or felt like administrators in those centers were not equipped to assist them. However, international students visit their respective international student services centers and therefore provide the opportunity for personnel to help students explore their marginalized identities in the context of the United States. Organizations such as NAFSA: Association of International Educators, set the tone for international student personnel who are affiliated with higher education and private sectors. The organization’s primary goal is to provide opportunities to share best practices around support for international students and scholars. The organization has an affinity group for LGBTQ issues in international education, but more can be done to develop competencies for all international student personnel. Organizations such as NAFSA, should develop policies that guide proficiencies for personnel who will one day work with international students who hold marginalized identities.
Implications and Recommendations for Practice

The results reflect the complexities of realities for each Black gay international student in the study. For many LGBTQ international students, identity exploration possesses a meaning that assists in discovering who they are and in some ways how they view the world. Administrators and faculty play a key role in the lives of students, and this was verified by the experiences of the participants in this study. Therefore, it is imperative that faculty and student personnel are able to identify institutional barriers that uphold systemic structures that influence behavior and shape negative perspectives of categories such as race, sexuality and citizenship. This can be done through professional development and education on identity development and cultural competency. In addition, these personnel will need a suitable foundation to understand the statutes, which affect the lives of international or immigrant students as a whole, as their identities misalign with some categories or identity dimensions in an American context. More importantly, personnel will need to apply what they know or have learned in order to reach and create inclusive spaces on campus.

Programming and Services. Leaders within higher education institutions should consider assessing how LGBTQ international students navigate and interact with their programs and services. This is especially important for institutions who might not have formalized programs that target gay international students of color. Focusing on the answers of this assessment may provide insight into the lives to Black gay international students specifically, LGBTQ international students of color. For institutions with no formal services for racial and sexual affinity groups, results from such an assessment will
allow for nuanced understandings of how student navigate and who they see as a resource on campus. Institutions can use this opportunity to also find out what processes and policies can be removed or made formal in order to encourage success and persistence.

It is also important that student personnel who have fully conceptualize the issues that Black gay international students experience, share best practices that promote resilience, retention, feelings of safety, sense of belonging and self-awareness. Due to transitions associated with acculturation, Black gay international students, can have additional hardships as they confront personal feelings and navigating the immigration system in the United States. Moving to the United States is a major decision for most international students, therefore institutions should develop inclusive recruitment plans and practices that considers LGBTQ international students and highlight services that will be helpful in retaining them. One of my observations was the lack of use by participants in the study of LGBTQ Centers or Services at their varying institutions. However, this aligns with similar research on international students and their use of health and counseling services at institutions. Therefore, a recommendation is to improve outreach initiatives so these services are more attractive or seemingly essential to students’ success at their respective institutions. It is also imperative that better collaborations are made with international offices/centers on campus because international student advisors may not have the resources to adequately support LGBTQ international students. Practitioners can also conduct a service and collaboration audit that can be used to measure the impact on LGBT international students’ engagement. All
participants in this study felt like offices were disconnected and did not know what the other was doing to support students.

A substantive knowledge base about these issues can be translated to students having the capacity to manage forms of racism, xenophobia and other forms of prejudice. As students from the lesbian and gay communities continue to explore their identities in the United States, it is important for international student advisors to have the necessary training to assist in the development of coming out plans. These plans will be roadmaps that allow international students to think deeply and critically about disclosing to family and the implications this action might have on their lives; financial or otherwise. Further development of critical thinking and sense making skills are crucial to international students as they establish their own definitions of their identities. Based on the findings, when participants were able to define their who they were, there was greater acceptance for identities that carried negative stigmas.

Evans and Broido (1999) and Draughn, Elkins, and Roy (2002) stress the importance of creating community on campus for students who might experience homophobia and heterosexism. Results from this current study indicate that the participants sought out community. Their access to various levels of citizenships across campus and beyond the international students. Furthermore, participants experienced their race very different from the sexuality. It is important to have intersectional spaces, where students can explore both race and sexuality, however it is also important for students to have spaces that focus solely one to create supportive community. These
groups can take the form of private dialogue forums, where students are given the opportunity to connect regarding their personal experiences and resources.

**Implications and Recommendations for Teaching**

Although practice can play a part in creating positive and inclusive environments for Black gay international students, findings around academic citizenship indicate that faculty can play a significant role in the lives of these students. Therefore, this gives rise to my thoughts on implications and recommendations for teaching. Educational spaces must honor the racial and cultural pride that international students of color can develop while in the United States or have already nurtured in their home countries. Findings reflect that racial consciousness is linked to racial pride, which is in turn linked to racial group membership. Tuitt, Haynes, and Stewart (2016) provide various pedagogies that affirm the identities of students in a global context that privileges their experiences as underrepresented minorities despite their geographical locations.

**Pedagogy.** “Inclusive Pedagogy 2.0” as posited by Tuitt, Haynes and Stewart (2016), incorporates students experiences and honors their holistic perspectives that they bring with them to the classroom. Based on the findings of this study, international students possess a host of experiences prior to stepping foot on campuses in the United States. Incorporating their lived experiences allows international students of color to contextualize their experiences in the United States and in their home countries. Linder, Harris, Allen and Hubain (2015) found that faculty who engage with students in critical and in-depth classroom dialogue allowed for the opportunity to explore concepts like
racism, and therefore validated experiences of people of color. International students’ experiences around racism, sexism, and other forms of discrimination are usually invalidated due to their immigrant statuses in the United States (Hanassab, 2006).

Discussions and exercises faculty use to engage students in the classroom matters can allow for reflection on issues that international students sometimes ignore. International students in this study had the opportunity to emotionally and cognitively connect around issues of identity, power, privilege, and marginalization. Participants in this study shared that the study was transformative because of the explorations that assisted them in personal reflection that contextualized what they were experiencing. No matter the field, faculty should approach pedagogical teaching practices being self-aware and authentic as it is essential to how they view their own cultural competence and capacity to deal with difficult situations in class (Tuitt, 2003; Tuitt, et al. 2016). Some participants communicated that their domestic counterparts on campus felt hesitant to engage with them because of fear of appearing insensitive. Casper shared an example:

I feel most people I don't know if it's a thing like here or the south because I'm in Louisiana, I don't know if that's the problem but most people that I encounter are incredibly dismissive or really scared of like making these sort of American stupid stereotype come true.

Faculty can engage in addressing these types of conversations or have guest speakers visit classes to provide students some helpful tools on how to engage in conversations with immigrant/migrant populations.
Cultural awareness and affirmation. Despite negative experiences of students on campus, students of color can still feel validated and included in their classes (Hubain, Allen, Harris & Linder, 2017). Barabbas’ experience in his program reinforces this and is evidence that faculty can practice teaching strategies that nurture inclusion. Although faculty cannot control every aspect of the classroom reality, they have capacity and scope to create an environment that affirms identity through an exploration of self and use personal experiences, technical approaches, techniques, and professional work to assist them in connecting to the material. This allows students to not only engage with what they are learning at a deeper level, but helps them unlearn negative aspects that can create violence against marginalized identities that can be embedded in structures, processes, procedures, and policies (Galtung, 1969; Spade, 2015). Students begin critical self-exploration of their identities and what is produced by their performance of those identities, thus building consciousness that sprouts cultural awareness.

Faculty should conduct syllabi audits to evaluate implicit biases that are engrained in their courses (Tatum, 2003; Tuitt, 2003). Syllabi audits will allow faculty to connect their pedagogies to varying topics and activities that structure the class. Doing so will encourage intentionality in incorporating student voices and perspectives. These practices are necessary to challenging heterosexism and complicating the phobias that are engrained in course curricula and pedagogy that may perpetuate known biases and stereotypes that appear in classrooms.
Recommendations for Future Research

A great deal can be gleaned from this study and its findings. Studying this subpopulation of international students fold in other areas to consider developing for higher education research. The limitations of the study provide opportunities to explore the possibilities that did not exist in this study. This study brings the field one step closer to understanding the experiences of Black Gay international students and possibly other subpopulations of international students.

Limitations begat opportunities. A limitation in this study was the number of participants. The recruitment goal for this study was six through ten participants from a variety of geographic locations. However, two participants chose to not move forward. It would be of benefit to open up exploration of this topic to focus on a broader net of queer international students.

Another limitation was the misunderstanding of the construction of the narratives due to directions being shared with participants. As the researcher, I should have changed the language and the process of constructing the narratives. Participants were not sure exactly what events would be used to construct those and at times struggled with ways of including their thoughts. The self-reflective component of the study was essential to participants learning more about their identity development, make sense of interpersonal interactions, and negotiated their identities. All participants shared that their involvement in the study was beneficial and two shared that it would have been a benefit to have focus groups. Therefore, one more possibility for future research is to incorporate focus groups in the process. One of the participants shared that observations or shadowing—
ethnographic approach—would have enhanced what he wanted to communicate about his experiences in the United States. This study was not funded and I was not able to travel to conduct a derivative of this research study. For this reason, I would recommend a study that utilizes an extended period of time in the field.

In the study of identity and the performance of subjectivities, we are at a point where we need to look beyond the traditional and singular dimensional identity development models. We are at a point in research to redefine how we study notions of identity and conceptualize theoretical frameworks that explain development and self-discovery in more holistic ways. Some of the literature used to inform our understandings of immigrants and international students’, position them in a manner where the process of racialization and similar processes occur when they make it to the United States (Alex-Assenoh, 2000; Berry, 1974 & 1980; Rogers, 2000; Devine & Waters, 2003; Johnson, 2006; Waters, 1994, 1999). We have seen an increase in the theories that are associated with more holistic views of student identity development, however more has to be done that connects existing theories used in the field. Results from this study suggests that although we attempt to operate within strict definitions of identity, we operate in more complex and fluid ways. Future research can find ways to capture more dynamic approaches as we understand the static and dynamic nature of identity dimensions.

Furthermore, existing studies have focused primarily on domestic students’ identity development. Given some of this study’s results, Black gay international student participants did not always feel like race was the main identity that defined them. Ethnicity at times emerged as an identity that was relevant to how the participants defined
their race. It would be appropriate to develop identity development models that captured the development for international students, especially those that identify as people of color. Utilizing queer theory assisted in my analysis to the benefits of blurring the lines or identity combinations such as race and ethnicity, nationality and citizenship, and even concepts that trouble normative ways of understanding gender and gender roles. Having such frameworks help us to unveil possible structures that shape who we are and varying ontological perspectives.

The findings from this dissertation project support the need to study the diversity within racial and ethnic groups of international students, and to compare when appropriate the experiences of other Black immigrants to the United States. Data from the Open Doors Reports (See Appendix A) and national data trends (Pew Research Center, 2015) indicate that the number of international students and Black immigrants are increasing. Future research can examine factors that attract students to the United States for a higher education, and how might their experiences be different from or similar to Black immigrants and Black Americans. Similarities in experiences with Black Americans and the endemic nature of race in the United States, drive the need to get a better understanding of international students’ racialized experiences and how those experiences exist or intersect with other identities. Future research should also examine how international students with other minoritized identities navigate life more broadly in the United States. Island Joe discussed his financial situation and not going back home because he couldn’t afford a plane ticket. Exploring these identities at their intersections
will give us a better sense of the role that barriers to degree completion translate in the real lives of international students.

The events discussed in interviews by the Black gay international students in this study, placed a great deal of importance on how prior experiences affect their lives in the United States. Future research should explore these events and how their experiences in home countries prepare them to participate or hinder their participation in American society. Future studies can also help inform us better to contextualize how do Black and/or LGBQ international students experience and navigate culture shock, acculturation, and overall transitions to higher education in the United States. Another layer to this is specific to students who are from countries that continue to criminalize homosexual acts, how do students cope with aspects such as code-switching and how might that differ from the LGBQ domestic counterparts? How might these phenomena seem when their respective cultural identities? Special attention should be given to trans identities and how to transgender international students discover and come to understand their true selves? Deeply embedded norms shared by participants can be traced back to colonization therefore, it is important for future research to explore a post-colonial analysis of the experiences of international students of color. Post-colonial theory is an analytical approach that problematizes the marginalization and subjugation of indigenous people or enslaved settlers (Gandhi, 1998; Loomba, 1998; Tikly, 2001). Furthermore, it is important to explore the experiences of Black gay international students through a post-colonial and queer lens (Hawley, 2001; Zabus, 2014) to subvert fixed and binary notions of gender, while explicating their relationship to race. This will help to further understand
experiences related to race, deconstruct laws that criminalize same-sex relations, and examine homosexuality/heterosexism as objects that mitigate emotional, physical and structural violence.

Future research should explore existing services offered to LGBT international students and how, if at all, is relevant to international students who identify with racial and ethnic minority backgrounds in the United States. Also, how might these programs create a more inclusive environment for international students of color who are at predominantly white institutions? How would engagement look for Black gay international students specifically at varying institutional types? These questions for exploration prompts the field to consider the best practices that engage Black gay international students and other international students of color. Future research should explore this notion of personal counter-spaces and draw research from the field of psychology to understand this notion and the deeper meanings around the concept. All of this knowledge can assist us in understanding whether international students of color can benefit from programs and workshops that focus on racial awareness and their identity development in the context of the United States.

**Evolving Positionalities of Researcher: Another Reflective Check-in**

Throughout this research project, I attempted to remain centered as a researcher while honoring my purpose for these narratives to be used as a transformative tool. As qualitative research continues to be an attractive mode of inquiry in educational research (Eisner, 1998), I wanted to explore a way to move beyond the didactic norms that are embedded some higher education literature. In many ways, my process of constant
reflection and the incorporation of my participants’ voices woven through my findings was out of fear to not cause harm to my participants. I had to consider a micro-ethical dilemma, which was to risk dehumanizing my participants or to be reflexive so that I move against master narratives that can shape understandings (Gildersleeve, 2010b) of Black gay international students. This positionality documents my struggle and how I grappled with the unknown terrain of the identities I attempted to excavate.

As a researcher, I struggled at times with the benefit of the data that I present as it correlates with me, an individual who navigates a liminal space of being and not being. Where my very words and thoughts that I share produce what was virtually unknown, and revisit to reinterpret the identities and subjectivities produced through my own eyes (Bloom, 1999). I struggle with the presentation of these identities that queer theory is used to disintegrate (Sedgwick, 1993; Talburt, 1999). I struggle with the work that goes into producing this work because thought leaders and practitioners alike, question the importance and existence of this group on campus. As a form of critical research, it is important to challenge these thoughts and messages that have been communicated to me. As I let go of the words of my participants, and my own, I relinquish power because in many ways I am laying myself bare and being vulnerable for the world to consume, critique and judge. As previously stated, I am a Black, gay, international student. I believe that it was important to restate, as it reminds me and the reader who *Who I am* and how I *experience* the world.

I have shared my positionality in the beginning of this dissertation study and in Chapter 3—my research design. It seems fitting in many ways to consider my
positionality as I conclude this study. Denzin (1986) stated that “interpretive research begins and ends with the biography and self of the researcher” (p. 12). As a researcher with similar identities to the participants, I found it was necessary to move through the study as a participant. Although I did not incorporate these data in the study, it is important to include it as an implication for research and contribution to the fields of higher education and qualitative research. In many ways, this study situated me on the outside looking in. This part of my study was auto-biographical but assisted me in in seeing the diversity that exists in our divergent and colliding realities.

This study was my way to engage in self-exploration and create awareness of issues that I experienced. It became imperative that I track my positionality throughout the study and as I experienced what I asked my participants to go through as part of this study. I realized that as I engaged in this reflexive process, I noticed that I was changing, as a researcher, as an insider, and as a Black-gay-international-student. It was important for me to be aware of my positionality, as it forced me to confront the privileges, power, and biases that I possess (Madison, 2005) as an insider who looked into the experiences of others like me. Therefore, this research required a great deal of navigating feelings and experiences that acted as either boundaries or bridges because they were familiar to me.

In cases where bridges were made, I found myself empathizing with what my participants shared that were similar to my own. In cases where they discussed, for example, colorism and homophobia and at times being on the margins as someone who did not quite understand the experiences of Black Americans due to history and associated trauma of slavery. There were also boundaries that became clear, when participants shared lack of
understandings of their own personal identities and nuances related to their various nationalities. Moments of sameness, I used as a way of understanding deeper the individualized experiences being shared with me, as I leveraged those moments so that participants would feel more comfortable with me. Indeed, there were moments where I could not connect with my participants and they ultimately pulled away. I attempted to reconnect with them out of curiosity and asking prompting questions about the experiences.

I think as researchers, as we attempt to connect with our participants, although having similar experiences, they may sometimes see us as imposters placed within different times and places or having privileges that may not allow us to connect. One of my participants, Inkognito, noted the fact that I was lighter skinned than him and pointed out how different our experiences were in relation to opportunity in his country:

*We cyah [cannot] have the same experiences. When they see you and me they will prefer you. I am sure when you were in school there were times when the teacher would tell you to come inside while she made us stay outside. Or people would think you are more attractive because that’s what everybody likes.*

Inkognito was hinting at the symptom of colonialism that exists in the Caribbean as colorism, where people who are darker skinned are not seen as equal. One observation with all the participants was the shift in using cultural-specific dialect to establish boundaries with me; the researcher. Growing up I had several opportunities that afforded me privileges, as I was referred to as *Shabin.* A name used to describe people with very light complexions. In Inkognito’s mind, there was no way that I could know what he
experienced because of the differences in our skin tone. I was uncomfortable by Inkognito’s words, and when it came to discussing skin tone dynamics in the Caribbean, I treaded lightly and making the determination that skin tone in the Caribbean was a site of tension and a boundary that partitioned our now divergent experiences. For the first time in my research, I began to feel like an outsider and not part of the population that I was researching.

As we embark on doing research, I think these experiences highlight the oscillations between the positionalities that we hold and do not acknowledge during the research process. These positionalities are complicated because they rupture this dichotomy of the insider and outsider in research. I believe that there are moments in research where we can or may hold positionalities similar to that of our participants but more often than not, we are reminded that our realities are different and we approach an outsider status. However, the awareness should not be done at the risk of (re)interpreting findings from my evolving perspectives. This awareness should account for my location in time and therefore the perspectives that I hold in that moment (Talburt, 1999). This is in contrast to knowing the boundaries of insider versus outsider and where I fall on that spectrum between. Queering my experiences blow apart the ways that I have constructed the understanding of myself. Queered positionalities reflect ones that are changed over time and place, and like queer identities—not static—we hold variations of our identities. These variations of identity are manipulated by our positionalities as subjects who experience the systems of power that shape how we perform and participate in society (Bloom, 1999).
I began this dissertation study seeing my identities as a benefit and a way of connecting with participants, however I risked using my narrative as a privileged master narrative and not realizing the complexity of the lived versus the real. As Talburt (1999) so eloquently states, “experience is no longer a straightforward account to be recounted but a narrative produced and interpreted in interdiscursive contexts” (p. 615). Having completed the actual study, I now wonder how these positions assisted me in gaining access to the lives of my participants. My experiences were beneficial in giving insight to experiences that were racialized and sexualized, but showed me ways that I have experienced privileges not afforded to my participants.

**Conclusion**

The experiences of international students along the lines of race and ethnicity, sexuality, gender, and nationality are virtually unknown. An increasing number of authors are exploring the experiences of LGB international students and the issues that affect them (Hebert, 2003; Kato, 1997; Yang, 2015), however in broader literature, their experiences are largely unknown and intentionally explored. Participants described several events that they believe influenced the ways they think about their sexuality and race. In some cases, participants describe moments in their lives and confusion around the identities that they hold. This study provides a strong foundation to continue the exploration of the lives of LGBTQ international students.

In this current political climate, we are witnessing swift changes to immigration policies that are taken into effect almost immediately. It is important to distinguish the
various sub-populations within the international student population and refine ways of having more individualistic approaches to support students based on their unique backgrounds and not solely on one characteristic. More importantly as international student populations are increasing from countries and that have laws that criminalizes acts of homosexuality, they could be experiencing isolation within the United States because they are not able to travel back to their home countries, while they experience discrimination such as Islamophobia. This complicates further the experiences of international students who also hold the identities at the center of this study. This study has already sparked new question for investigation as identities intersect with religious identities. This dissertation study assists us in getting a sense of the racialized experiences of international students who study in the United States. This study reveals knowledge about international students that we can leverage and that is transferable to those who possess multiple minoritized identities.
Appendices
## International Students: Regions of Origin

### TABLE 1
INTERNATIONAL STUDENT TOTALS BY PLACE OF ORIGIN
2009/10 - 2015/16

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AFRICA</td>
<td>37,062</td>
<td>36,890</td>
<td>30,046</td>
<td>30,585</td>
<td>31,113</td>
<td>33,593</td>
<td>35,364</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASIA</td>
<td>435,667</td>
<td>461,903</td>
<td>489,970</td>
<td>525,849</td>
<td>568,510</td>
<td>627,306</td>
<td>689,525</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EUROPE</td>
<td>85,084</td>
<td>84,296</td>
<td>85,423</td>
<td>85,823</td>
<td>86,885</td>
<td>90,625</td>
<td>91,915</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LATIN AMERICA</td>
<td>65,632</td>
<td>64,169</td>
<td>64,410</td>
<td>66,864</td>
<td>72,318</td>
<td>86,378</td>
<td>84,908</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MIDDLE EAST</td>
<td>33,797</td>
<td>42,543</td>
<td>56,664</td>
<td>71,170</td>
<td>92,618</td>
<td>96,615</td>
<td>100,926</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NORTH AMERICA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>28,145</td>
<td>27,546</td>
<td>26,821</td>
<td>27,357</td>
<td>28,304</td>
<td>27,240</td>
<td>26,973</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bermuda</td>
<td>429</td>
<td>395</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OCEANIA</td>
<td>5,091</td>
<td>5,610</td>
<td>5,697</td>
<td>6,104</td>
<td>6,292</td>
<td>6,471</td>
<td>6,917</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stateless</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WORLD TOTAL</td>
<td>690,923</td>
<td>723,277</td>
<td>764,495</td>
<td>819,644</td>
<td>886,052</td>
<td>974,926</td>
<td>1,043,839</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Open Doors Report on International Educational Exchange is published by the Institute of International Education. *Bermuda has been moved from North America to Latin America. Latin America includes the Caribbean.*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contribution from Tuition and Fees to U.S. Economy:</td>
<td>$17,702,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contribution from Living Expenses:</td>
<td>$14,715,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Contribution by Foreign Students:</td>
<td>$32,417,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less U.S. Support of 27.2%</td>
<td>(-) $8,815,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plus Dependents' Living Expenses:</td>
<td>(+) $393,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net Contribution to U.S. Economy by Foreign Students and their Families:</td>
<td>$23,996,000,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Derived from the *Economic Benefits of International Students to the U.S. Economy* reports by NAFSA, as calculated by Indiana University Office of International Services.
APPENDIX C

Exploring the experiences of LGBTQ International Students

Online Questionnaire
This online questionnaire will collect general information about your experiences as it relates to your race and sexual orientation. The questionnaire also asks broad questions about other identities such as age, religion, ethnicity, and nationality.

Your participation will help administrators, counselors, and educators to better understand important issues regarding LGBTQ international students studying in the United States.

Everyone participating in this study will have a chance win a $50.00 Amazon Gift Card. You will be taken to a separate form if you opt in to the raffle. NOTE: This entry form is in no way linked to your completed questionnaire. You will be asked to provide your name and e-mail address. This information will not be used for any other purpose and a valid e-mail address must be entered for the winner to receive the gift card. This information will be destroyed after the drawing.

Confidentiality:
The intent of this questionnaire is to be anonymous. Please note that the results of this questionnaire will be kept confidential and any identifiers that will compromise your anonymity will not be shared in the findings or any reports.
APPENDIX D

Note: This online questionnaire will look different on website and will be hosted in Qualtrics

LGBT International Student Online Questionnaire

The intent of this form is to be anonymous. Please note that the results of this questionnaire will be kept confidential. Any identifiers that will compromise your anonymity will not be shared in findings or reports.

Toward the end of the questionnaire, you will be asked to opt in to be a part of the interview process. You will be taken to a form that is not linked to this questionnaire, where you can enter your contact information.

Gender and Masculinity/Femininity

1. Gender
   a. Man
   b. Woman
   c. Transgender: _______________

2. Use the slider to describe where you think you fall on a Masculinity-Femininity continuum:

   (SLIDER)

Sexuality

3. How would you identify your sexual orientation?
   a. Gay
   b. Lesbian
   c. Bisexual
   d. Other: _______________

4. How would you describe your comfort level with your sexual orientation?
   (please select the number that best represents your comfort level;
   1=uncomfortable, 10=comfortable)
   uncomfortable 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 comfortable

5. Where were you when you came out?
   a. Home country
   b. United States
   c. Other

6. Who are you "out" to: (Select what applies)
   a. Any and Everyone
   b. All of my friends and family

223
c. Some of my friends and family
d. LGBT Friends
e. Roommate
f. None one

7. Have you experienced homophobia based on your sexual orientation? If Yes, please share your experiences or a situation in which discrimination has happened: ______________

8. How has your sexual orientation shaped who you are as a person?

9. Describe the role that your sexual orientation plays in your life.

10. Are you involved in the LGBTQ community in the United States? Why or Why not?

Race

11. How do you identify racially?
   a. Black
   b. Hispanic
   c. White
   d. Asian
   e. Middle Eastern
   f. Other:

12. How are you identified in the United States or more specifically at school?
   a. _________________

13. How would you describe your ethnicity?

14. Have you experienced racism based on your race? If Yes, please share your experiences or a situation in which discrimination has happened:

15. How has your race shaped who you are as a person?

16. Describe the role that your race plays in your life.

17. Are you involved in the Black/African American community in the United States? Why or Why not?

Other Demographics

18. What is your age range?
   a. 18 – 20
b. 21 – 23
c. 24 – 26
d. 27 – 30
e. Other: _____________

19. What state is your university located?
f. ____________________

20. Are you currently:
a. A first year/freshman
b. A sophomore
c. A junior
d. A senior
e. A graduate student (Master’s, J.D., Ph.D., Ed.D.)
f. A recent graduate (0 - 1 year out of undergrad)

21. What other identifiers are important you to you? (Select what applies)
a. Ethnicity
b. Religion
c. Social Class/Socio-Economic status
d. Ability/Disability
e. Age
f. Appearance and Body Image

Campus

22. How would you describe the overall campus climate? _________________

23. Does your campus or surrounding community have any activities, student organizations, or other resources for LGBT students?
   a. Are any of these specific to international students? Y/N
   b. How would you describe your level of involvement? __________

24. Does your campus or surrounding community have any activities, student organizations, or other resources for minority students or students of color?
   a. Are any of these specific to international students? Y/N
   b. How would you describe your level of involvement? __________

25. What resources, if any, on campus have you taken advantage of as it relates to your other identities?

26. Are there particular people at your university that have had an impact on who you are, especially as a gay man? Who are these individuals? How have they
played a role in your life?

27. How helpful is your International Student Scholar Services office at your school?

___________________________

Self-Perception

28. Tell me about a time or times you felt you could be your “true self.” *What is your true self?

29. Tell me about a time or times when you felt you could not be your true self.

30. Tell me about the relationship between your sexual orientation and the other aspects of your identity that can be identified on your timeline (This can be your race, religion, etc.).

31. Are there other ways that the different aspects of who you are relate to each other?

32. ANYTHING ELSE TO SHARE? __________________

Nationality and Ethnicity

33. Home country or nationality:
   a. ___________________

34. How would you describe your ethnicity?

35. Is your culture and ethnicity linked to your Nationality? If yes please explain how:
   a. ___________________

36. Have you returned home (home country) since being enrolled in school? If yes, describe how you performed your race and/or sexuality differently:
   a. ___________________

37. How would you describe the relationship between your ethnicity and race?
   a. ___________________

38. In what ways have you connected with your or an ethnic community in the United States and how did you develop this connection:
   a. ___________________

-----END OF QUESTIONNAIRE-----

---------INVITATION TO PARTICPATE IN STUDY---------
Will you like to participate in a future study? The study involves up to three interviews and one focus group. *The online questionnaire is not linked to this interest form*, where you will provide your name, e-mail address, phone number, and demographic information.

I will review all of the Interest Forms and then select the participants who meet the criteria for the larger study. Anyone completing their participation in this study will receive a gift card. I will contact you to let you know whether or not you are selected to participate. If you have any questions I can be contacted via e-mail at bhubain@du.edu.

**Would you like to participate in the future study?**

(YES)

Name:
Email:
Telephone Number:
Gender: Man Woman Transgender
Race/Ethnicity:
Home Country:

Would you like to be entered for a chance to win a $50.00 Amazon Gift Card for taking part in the Online Questionnaire? (There are two $50.00 Amazon Gift Cards to be raffled)

(YES) – Separate Window

Name:
Email:

(NO)

--------THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICPATION--------

(NO) – Separate Window

Would you like to be entered for a chance to win a $50.00 Amazon Gift Card for taking part in the Online Questionnaire? (There are two $50.00 Amazon Gift Cards to be raffled)

(YES)

Name:
Email:

(NO)

--------THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICPATION--------
Project Title: A Queer and Intersectional Analysis of the narratives of Black Gay International Students
Principal Investigator: Bryan S. Hubain
Faculty Sponsor: Ryan Evely Gildersleeve
DU IRB Protocol #: 658096-2

You are being asked to be in a research study. This form provides you with information about the study. Please read the information below and ask questions about anything you don’t understand before deciding whether or not to take part.

**Invitation to participate in a research study**
You are being invited to participate in a research study about Black gay international students in the United States. You are being asked to be in this research study because you expressed interest to move forward to the larger study on the online questionnaire. The purpose of this study is to explore these experiences of international students at the intersections of race and sexuality.

**Description of subject involvement**
If you agree to participate, your participation will include being interviewed by the researcher about your experience as a Black gay man and international student studying in the United States. Three interviews are anticipated to take approximately one to two (1-2) hours of your time each. You will also be asked to complete a timeline worksheet that will be used in the second interview to discuss your experiences.

**Possible risks and discomforts**
The researcher has taken steps to minimize the risks of this study. Even so, you may still experience some risks related to your participation, even when the researchers are careful to avoid them. These risks may include:

- Feeling some discomfort when discussing personal topics and experiences of sexuality and race. Please know that your participation is voluntary, and you will be given the option to discontinue.
- Being identified due to the information you have shared. Selecting a false name or pseudonym that will be used to protect your identity in transcripts and final report minimizes this risk. If any identifiers put your confidentiality at risk, it will not be reported.
- There is risk of your sexual orientation becoming known depending on your “Out” status. That is, participants who have not come out as being
gay for reasons that are not known to the researcher. However, this research study will add to our knowledge on why this might be the case for gay international students.

Possible benefits of the study

This study is designed for the researcher to learn more about the experiences of international students of color, specifically those who identify as gay. If you agree to take part in this study, there will be no direct benefit to you. However, information gathered in this study may enhance knowledge and inform institutions of higher education of the ways that they can best support identity development among these students.

This knowledge is especially important for institutions where homophobia continues to be an issue and other campuses offering services to all students who identify with the LGBTQ communities, but especially the LGBTQ international student communities.

Furthermore, this study is beneficial because it brings to light the experiences of a marginalized population. Given the fact that homophobia exists in many communities, more information will help to understand how these students negotiate their experiences, as well as the experiences that have shaped their holistic identity at the intersections of other identity dimensions.

Study compensation
You will be given a $5.00 electronic Starbucks gift card for participating in this study.

Study cost
You will not be expected to pay any costs related to the study. By agreeing to be in this study, you do not give up your right to seek compensation if you are harmed as a result of participation.

Confidentiality, Storage and future use of data
To protect your information, your name will not be attached to any data, but a session number will be used instead. The session numbers will be used as an identifier on all recordings to distinguish you from other participants. In addition, you will be asked to select a pseudonym, which will be used to identify you during the interview conversation.

Although a campus administrator may have referred you, they will have no knowledge of your participation in the study. Likewise, the name of your institution will not be identified in any documentation.
All data collected during the study will be kept on a password-protected computer and storage device using special software that scrambles the information so that no one can read it. The researcher will retain the data only until the completion of research activities.

The results from the research may be shared at a meeting. The results from the research may be in published articles. Your individual identity will be kept private when information is presented or published.

Who will see my research information?

Although we will do everything we can to keep your records a secret, confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. Both the records that identify you and the consent form signed by you may be looked at by others:

- Federal agencies that monitor human subject research
- Human Subject Research Committee

All of these people are required to keep your identity confidential. Otherwise, records that identify you will be available only to people working on the study, unless you give permission for other people to see the records. Also, if you tell us something that makes us believe that you or others have been or may be physically harmed, we may report that information to the appropriate agencies:

- Some things we cannot keep private: If you tell us you are going to physically hurt yourself or someone else, we have to report that to the police in your state or other applicable agencies. Also, if we get a court order to turn over your study records, we will have to do so.

Voluntary Nature of the Study

Participating in this study is completely voluntary. Even if you decide to participate now, you may change your mind and stop at any time. If you decide to withdraw early, the information or data you provided will be destroyed.

Contact Information

The researcher carrying out this study is Bryan Hubain. Any questions that you may have can be directed to him by email at bhubain@du.edu. If the researchers cannot be reached, or if you would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s) about; (1) questions, concerns or complaints regarding this study, (2) research participant rights, (3) research-related injuries, or (4) other human subjects issues, you may contact the Chair of the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human
Subjects, at 303-871-4015 or by emailing IRBChair@du.edu, or you may contact the Office for Research Compliance by emailing IRBAdmin@du.edu, calling 303-871-4050 or in writing (University of Denver, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, 2199 S. University Blvd., Denver, CO 80208-2121).

**Agreement to be in this study**

I have read this paper about the study or it was read to me. I understand the possible risks and benefits of this study. I know that being in this study is voluntary. I choose to be in this study:

Signature: __________________________  Date: __________

Print Name: __________________________________________

☐ Please initial this box if data from this research may be used for future research.

☐ Please initial here and provide a valid email (or postal) address if you would like a summary of the results of this study to be mailed to you: __________

**Consent to audio recorded**

Please sign below if you are willing to have this interview audio recorded. You may still participate in this study if you are not willing to have the interview recorded.

I am willing to have this interview recorded:

Signature: __________________________  Date: __________

Print Name: __________________________________________
APPENDIX F

First Interview: Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

Welcome participant, introduction of myself, discussion and completion of informed consent. Ask participants to choose a pseudonym that will protect their identity and will be used for the remainder of the study.

**Introductions:**
Tell me a bit about yourself.

As you know, what I am interested in learning more about through this research are stories from your life, which reflect how you understand your race and sexuality. Please let me know if you become uncomfortable at any time during the interview, and we can stop the interview or change some of the questions so that you are less uncomfortable. Do you have any questions before we start?

(1) In the first question, I just want to start getting to know you better as a person, so thinking about your life in general, tell me about the people, or places, or situations, or experiences, etc. that have been most influential in shaping who you are as a person.

(2) Tell me about a time or times you felt you could be yourself.

(3) Tell me about a time or times when you felt you could not be yourself.

(4) Thinking about where you are from, can you tell me how your race has shaped who you are as a person?
   a. Has your perception of race changed, since being in the United States?

(5) Thinking about where you are from can you tell me how your sexual orientation has shaped who you are as a person?
   a. Has your perception of your sexuality or sexual orientation changed, since being in the United States?

(6) Can you describe your campus and the services available to you as an international student who identifies as Black and gay?

(7) Do you feel as if you have conveyed to me the most important stories about who you are as a person? If not, what other stories from your life should I know?
APPENDIX G

Second & Third Interview: Semi-structured Interview Protocol

Some questions from the first interview that were not asked will move to the second interview if necessary.

Introduction:
- Since our last discussion, have you done any further thinking about your race or sexual orientation? If so, what have you been thinking about? Or what has been a trigger?
- Has anything significant happened in your life since our last meeting? (Follow up questions, as necessary.)

Critical Event Timeline Activity
- Using the worksheet provided, I want to know a bit more about events or significant moments that helped you understand your race and/or sexuality.
  OR
Did you complete the worksheet I sent? Do you have any questions about it? Please share with me the significant moments that helped you understand your race and/or sexuality.
- In the text box below, please describe for me how you would identify identities that are included above, but also others that you believe are significant.

Overall Questions:
(1) Tell me about how you filled in the timeline.
  *How did you decide which event was more important over another?
(2) Can you give me an example or tell me a story about what caused you to fill in the timeline the way that you did? Any other examples/stories?
(3) Do you consider the way that you filled in the model to be pretty constant or are there times when you might fill in the model differently?
(4) Tell me about the relationship between your race or sexual orientation and the other aspects of who you are that are included on your model (religion, nationality, social class, etc.).
Closing question: What was the experience like filling in this timeline?

Specific questions if more discussion needs to be generated
Masculinity:
- When thinking about your time in college specifically, what messages have you received about what it means to be a man?
- How have other men played a role, if at all, in how you think about your own sense of your masculinity? Has this shifted over your life? If so, how?
- How have women (and trans individuals?) played a role, if at all, in how you think about your own sense of your masculinity? Has this shifted over your life? If so, how?
Race:
- Do you identify with the struggles or issues of the Black/African American community? Why or why not?
- Can you give some instances where you were mistaken for an African American?
- How would you describe your relationships with Black Americans, and others not belonging to that racial group?

Sexuality:
- Do you have friendships with other gay or bisexual men? If so, can you describe your friendships with other gay or bisexual men?
- Do you have friendships with straight men? If so, can you describe what your friendships are like with them?
- In what ways have your relationships, as friends or intimate partners, with other men influenced your identity as a gay man? Explain your answer.

Intersectionality:
- Thinking back to your first year of college, how would you have answered the question "Who am I?" What has changed from then to now for you in terms of that answer? How do you account for that change?
- Have you experienced any shifts in understanding any dimensions of your social identities over your college years? If so, what has shifted? How do you account for that shift?
- How has your cultural background (i.e., race, ethnicity, religion) influenced your identity as a gay man?

College Experience:
- Tell me about what led you to attend this specific university? What were the reasons why you chose to attend here?
- What is your thought process like when you decide to "come out" to someone on campus? What feelings do you experience? How do you make the decision to "come out"?
- What have been some of the most significant (either positive or negative) experiences and/or events you have had in college? What made them significant? (If necessary, follow up regarding significant experiences and/or events related to their sexual identity and/or gender.)
- Have you been a part of a program, an organization, or a class during college that helped you explore your sense of gender? Your sexual identity? If so, what were the specifics of that experience?
- What resources, if any, on campus have you taken advantage of as it relates to your identity as a gay man?
- Have you found your campus to be a welcoming place for you as it relates to all of your multiple identities? If so, tell me more. If not, can you expand on this for me?
• Are there particular people at your university that have had an impact on who you are, especially as a gay man? Who are these individuals? How have they played a role in your life?
APPENDIX H

Critical Event Timeline Worksheet

Notes
APPENDIX I

**Forth Interview: Semi-Structured Guide**

Greet the participant and ask him if anything occurred since you last met that he would like to discuss. Share that the purpose of this forth interview is to review his narrative, critical event timeline and areas that you would like to discuss based on what you have found.

**Be sure to ask him about the process and what he would do differently given that you are co-constructing his narrative.**

- Which findings or quotes continue to resonate with you?

- What part of the constructed narrative would you change based on what you agree or disagree with?

**Based on what has been discussed so far, what do you think should be explored?**

- How do you view citizenship?

- How does citizenship shape how you view yourself?

**Ask participant:***

- Do you have anything to add to this narrative?

**Share:** After updating the narrative, I will send it to you so you can update and add. You will have two weeks to complete this. I will send you a reminder. Thanks, and talk soon!
APPENDIX J

Electronic Flyer

YOUR VOICE MATTERS!

BE A PART OF CHANGE

Share Your Narratives

If you are an international student who is gay and identifies as Black or believes he can be identified as Black, we are interested in your experiences and stories. Your story will be used to inform the ways that race and sexuality are discussed in higher education and the United States. It will also help to inform the practices of administrators who provide resources and services to international students identifying with the LGBT community. A $5.00 Starbucks Gift Card is guaranteed on completing the interview process. You can also enter a chance to win a $50.00 Amazon Gift Card. Interested in telling your story and sharing your experiences?

START HERE: jmp/is-study

For more information, Contact Bryan at bhubain@du.edu
Approved by the University of Denver’s Institutional Review Board
for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research
IRB – Protocol ID 658096-2

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