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The Conundrum of Both/And in a World of Either/or: An Interpretive Phenomenological
Analysis of Resilience and Intersectional Identities in Queer Women of Afro-Caribbean Descent

by

Stephane Danielle Louis

A Dissertation Proposal Presented to the
College of Arts, Humanities, & Social Sciences
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

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2020

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by

Stephane Danielle Louis


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Nova Southeastern University
College of Arts, Humanities, & Social Sciences


This dissertation was submitted by Stephane Danielle Louis under the direction of the chair of the dissertation committee listed below. It was submitted to the Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Philosophy in the Department of Family Therapy at Nova Southeastern University.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgments.....	iv
List of Tables	xi
Abstract	xii
CHAPTER I : INTRODUCTION	1
Being Queer Women of Afro-Caribbean Descent.....	1
Stress and Resilience.....	3
Juxtaposition of Cultural Contexts.....	3
Intersectionality of Various Identities.....	5
Statement of the Problem	6
Purpose of Study	7
Definition of Relevant Terms	8
CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE.....	10
Introduction	10
Positive Psychology	11
Resilience	12
Systemic Approaches to Resilience	13
Resilience in Queer Women of Color.....	15
Minority Stress	15
Queer Identities	17
Gender Identities	19
Racial Identities	21
Afro-Caribbean Influences	24

Intersectionality	26
Mental Health Implications	29
Summary	31
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY	33
Introduction	33
Qualitative Paradigm	33
Phenomenological Approach	35
Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis	35
Participant and Sample Selection	36
Recruitment	37
Informed Consent and Confidentiality	37
Data Collection and Procedures	38
Semi-structured interviews	38
Data Analysis	40
Reading and Re-Reading.....	40
Initial Noting	41
Developing Emergent Themes	41
Search for Connections Across Emergent Themes.....	42
Moving on to the Next Case	42
Looking for Patterns Across Cases	43
Ethical Considerations	43
Self of the Researcher	43
CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS	45

Sample Demographics	45
Emergence of Themes	46
Journey to Identity Formation and Acceptance	49
Grasping the Intricacies of LGBTQ Language	49
Acceptance	50
Coming Out and Being Out	52
Being Visible	52
Relief in Being	53
Self-expression Depending on Context	53
Selecting Supportive Environments	55
Selecting Safe Environments	55
Family Support	56
Friend Support	57
Queer Community	58
Advocating for Yourself and Community	59
Dismissal and Erasure of Sexuality	60
Dehumanization and Objectification	60
Undermining Cultural Misconceptions	62
Legitimacy of Relationships	62
Letting Go of Arguing My Humanity	64
Complexity of Faith	64
Contradiction of Faith and Sexuality	65
Enduring Belief	66

Complexity of Ethnicity and Race	67
Strong Black/Caribbean Women	69
Conflict of Race/Ethnicity and Sexuality	69
More Issues Being Black than Queer	69
Family Strain and Rejection.....	70
Isolation and Belonging	71
Longing for Parental Support	72
Self-care and Sustainability.....	72
Helping Others	74
Joy as Resistance	75
Hope Through Mental Health Struggles.....	75
Creativity as Survival	76
Reading and Learning	77
Importance of Intersectional Identities	77
Sexuality Racialized.....	78
Fear of Harm or Retribution.....	78
Importance of Other Identities	80
Authenticity	82
Hopes of Freedom.....	83
Changes in Acceptability.....	83
Wanting to Find Love and Be Happy	85
Living My Dreams Now	85
Hope for a Better Future	86

Summary.....	88
CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY.....	89
Meaning Making of the Study.....	89
Strengths and Limitations of the Study	92
Suggestions for Future Research.....	93
Implications of the Study	94
For Queer Women of Afro-Caribbean Descent	94
For Therapists	95
For Trainers, Professors, and Supervisors.....	97
For the Field of Family Therapy at Large	97
Concluding Thoughts.	98
References	100
Appendices	110
Appendix A: Informed Consent Form	111
Appendix B: Interview Schedule	116
Biographical Sketch	118

List of Tables

Table 1: Demographic information	45
Table 2: Superordinate and Subordinate Themes	45
Table 3: Identifying Recurrent Themes	47

Abstract

Queer people of color are more at risk for bias and brutality than other sexual or racial minority groups (Follins, Walker, & Lewis, 2014). Homophobic violence is embedded in Afro-Caribbean culture and even substantiated by some of those countries' laws (Calixte, 2005). While more research is being increasingly done on LGBTQ+ black lived experiences, studies have focused more on discriminatory trauma than everyday triumph. Movements like Black Girls Rock (Bond, 2018) and intersectional black feminism (Nash, 2018) celebrate women of color surviving and thriving the compound effects of racism and sexism. In addition to misogynoir, this research gave consideration to the intersection of homophobia and/or transphobia, and xenophobia to the West Indian female LGBTQ+ diaspora in North America.

Using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) in this study, four participants were interviewed to explore the lived experiences of queer women of Afro-Caribbean descent and the ways in which their cumulative identities contribute to resilience in their daily lives. Results of this study included the emergence of ten super-ordinate themes: “journey to identity formation and acceptance,” “importance of being out,” “selecting supportive environments,” “advocating for yourself and community,” “complexity of faith,” “complexity of ethnicity and race,” “family strain and rejection,” “self-care and sustainability,” “importance of intersectional identities,” and “hopes of freedom.” The study findings helped narrow the gap in the existing research on resilience and intersecting identities in queer women of Afro-Caribbean descent.

Keywords: Resilience, intersectionality, queer, Afro-Caribbean, women of color

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Being Queer Women of Afro-Caribbean Descent

In a paradoxical sense, once I accepted my position as different from the larger society as well as from any single-sub-society—black or gay—I felt I didn't have to try so hard. To be accepted. To look femme. To be straight. To look straight. To be proper. To look "nice." To be liked. To be loved. To be approved. What I didn't realize was how much harder I had to try merely to stay alive, or rather, to stay human. How much stronger a person I became in that trying. (Lorde, 1982, p. 157)

Novelty has complex effects on humanity; it can spark excitement for the new yet incite fear of the unknown. Differences are observed and studied, in nationalities, art, and nature. When those differences are celebrated, it is considered pride, but when sexual or cultural variations are found in the collectives of society, a break in continuity can be perceived as a threat to a community. Though, as Lorde (1982) reflected, a greater risk is posed to the well-being of the minority by the majority, than that of the general population from those whom have been labeled “other.” African American women are afforded membership in both black and woman groups, but because of their differences from their white females and black male cohorts, they are often denied belonging (Crenshaw, 1989; Nash, 2018).

In terms of cultural inclusion, the physical terrain presents quite differently than the theoretical map of its ideals might suggest (Bateson, 1972). For normative as well as marginalized groups, coexistence is uncharted territory. Sexual, racial, and ethnic minorities are left to navigate not only prejudice but also bias from multiple directions (Calixte, 2005). Unconscious bias towards queer women of color can generalize unfavorable stereotypes and limit the full expression of one's personhood in society beyond the expectation of said tropes

(Nash, 2018). Conscious bias is an overt demonstration of internal prejudice, privileging one group while systematically oppressing another, and attributing negative outcomes in their lives to them being (Riggio & Garcia, 2009).

Beale (2008) describes the experience of *misogynoir* (Bailey and Trudy, 2018), the coined expression of misogyny against black women, as “Double jeopardy” to highlight implications of the heightened danger that are coupled with layered marginalized identities as they coexist in one body. Misogyny can not only take place physically, in which black bodies are dismissed as less than male or white female counterparts, but also socially, where women of color's words, emotions, and contributions are silenced as irrelevant or inconsequential and then often renamed as someone else's. One way this occurs is through what Bailey (Bailey & Trudy, 2018) refers to as *racial visual violence*, denoting the dangerous stereotypes about black women promoted in educational settings and popular culture which affects their standing in society as it relates to their various aspects of their relationships, livelihood, and well-being.

Bias may seem innocently personal, but when shared among group members, it smears guilt on the negatively perceived, often staining their experience in the world and sometimes threatening their safety. Biased based victimization due to the simultaneous affects of racism, misogyny, and homophobia are disclosed in higher numbers from black members of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual (LGBTQIA+) community. These multi-layered hardships can be complicated but also assuaged by cultural or environmental factors which can contribute to further challenges and/or boulder resilience (Calixte, 2005; Follins et al., 2014).

Stress and Resilience

For queer women of Afro-Caribbean descent, stress can come in many familiar forms. Differentiating stressors as stimuli that prime a response to any kind of duress, Selye described stress as a response to any strain or requirements (Kabat-Zinn, 1990; Selye, 1978). The demands of day to day life are intensified by the additional challenges of discriminatory practices based on immutable identities in the US (Bailey & Trudy, 2018; Black & Jackson, 2005; Kaduvettoor-Davidson & Inman, 2013). Racism, sexism, homophobia, and xenophobia are forms of stressors that seek to oppress marginalized populations into submission, often limiting rights, questioning personhood, and ultimately threatening lives (Beale, 2008; Calixte, 2005; Crenshaw, 1989).

Resilience is the will to survive in spite of all it (Luthar et al., 2000). The cumulative effect of these particular stressors occurring simultaneously have caused queer women from the West Indian diaspora to become malleable and adapt to multiple societal standards while maintaining a sense of their culture (Calixte, 2005). James Baldwin (1998) addressed his journey of resistance in the black LGBTQIA+ community, stating, “It took many years of vomiting up all the filth I’d been taught about myself, and half-believed, before I was able to walk on the earth as though I had a right to be here” (Baldwin, 1998, p. 636). Survival, and furthermore, joy, in the face of systematic oppression (or structural inequalities) is an affront to sociological degradation and a radical act of resilience (Lorde, 1982; Baldwin, 1998).

Juxtaposition of Cultural Contexts

In the United States, the main cultural divides tend to be race and gender, but when considering the African Diaspora in the West, ethnicity plays a large role in group identity and inclusion (Black & Jackson, 2005). When the LGBTQIA+ Caribbean diaspora are underrepresented in research, they are often rendered voiceless but whispered about in

immigration and acculturation studies. The limited representation in the literature was largely due to the population being perceived as both illicit in nature and present, yet negligible in number (Wahab & Plaza, 2009). This mirrors the double consciousness of pervasive homophobia woven deeply in West Indian cultures with a rise in anti-gay violence efforts in the Caribbean influenced by North America (Attai, 2017). To be queer and black from the Caribbean is to persist within a people in spite of traditional customs of that deem them unfit of their rightful space in that society. Resilience therefore is lifelong pursuit (Lorde, 1982).

The collective nature of Afro-Caribbean communities can seem almost juxtaposed the individualist societies of the West. Similarly, the ambiguity of queer female identities in the Caribbean can be considered the other side of the same coin shared by the expectation of visibility in LGBTQIA+ people in the United States. In a heteronormative society, same sex attraction can be seen as an indiscriminate deviance or lesser opposition to traditional straight relationships, instead of an equal alternative (Calixte, 2005). Afro-Caribbean lesbian identities may be seen as diminished or invalidated by their North American queer counterparts because of their intentional sexual relations with men, as opposed to being complex or multilayered (Ellis, 1998). Even within the LGBTQIA+ community, people of color are often othered, pushing them to the fringe of an already marginalized group. In addition to ethnic bias, disparities based sexual orientation and gender identity exist within the very population fighting inclusion (Black & Jackson, 2005). Honoring ethnic differences within the globalized idea of what it is to be queer in the West can shed light through different cultural lenses to view a myriad of colors and experiences the rainbow flag is comprised of and more accurately represents (Calixte, 2005).

In attempts to attend to the multiple cultures they ascribe to, queer women of Afro-Caribbean descent often exist in a tireless state of duality. Being black while female, queer yet

West Indian involves an ability to code switch or easily alter diction, colloquialisms, and even language in order to foster a sense of belonging with which ever group is in the immediate vicinity to move comfortably through North American society (Lorde, 1982). This also serves to bolster connections with multiple communities, which has been found to be a contributor of well-being. Maslow (1943) theorized that belonging is a basic human need and motivating factor to move forward. Therefore, acceptance and relationships are central to a person's ability to survive in their communities and thrive in society at large (Brown, 2012).

Intersectionality of Various Identities

Race and gender are often looked at as separate identifiers representing different groups with no margin of overlap (Crenshaw, 1989). Sexual orientation and gender identity are constructs often confused for one another. Such a myopic view of people's cultural individualities "sets forth a problematic consequence of the tendency to treat race and gender as mutually exclusive categories of experience and analysis" (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 139). A more comprehensive understanding of queer people of color can begin with an exploration of intersectionality. Coined by Kimberle Crenshaw (1989), intersectionality can be described as the observation of the phenomenon of two or more marginalizing identities creating a multilayered experience of oppression, different from hardships of those who might experience bias based on one of those minority statuses in isolation.

To be black and a woman in the US, is to be inefficiently categorized, often afforded one partial identity at the expense of any other classification an individual may concurrently qualify to claim (Crenshaw, 1989). When factoring in the added complexity of ethnicity and sexual identity to an already marginalized racial group, the exposure to discrimination of each classification is not only stacked upon one another, but fosters a conglomerate bias from the

unique interactions of them combined. If compartmentalized, the options of being either a gender, ethnic, sexual or racial minority leaves a discontinuity of understanding into the existence of LGBTQIA people of color, who live their daily lives in multiple disenfranchised groups at once (Calixte, 2005; Nash, 2018). These dangerous and complex circumstances provide an opportunity for markers of resilience to emerge.

From the oppression of black women was born womanism and intersectionality; those marginalized based on of sexual orientation and gender identity produced resistance and pride. The mistreatment of immigrants and mocking of their nationalities calls forth an inherent sense of patriotism. When identities collide, they form a multilayered human being. A shape shifting individual who can navigate the world with code switching to assimilate in whichever culture she may need to at the time. Dropping the sounds of an accent and adopting particular (or expected) diction, in spaces where her existence is often rendered invisible (Crenshaw, 1989) or fetishized, can be considered life's price of association for queer women of color. This marginalization can also be a tool for a black LGBTQ+ women to forge a path fitting their own complex way of being. Embodying all of their identities at once in a society determined to overlook black women in their entirety (or each of them) is a revolution with in itself (Lorde, 1988).

Statement of the Problem

Research on marginalized sexual identities has in large part, been conducted through a generalization of a North American paradigm (Calixte, 2005). When the western ideals of queer sexual orientation are seen as pervasive, the richness of diverse cultures in the LGBTQIA+ community is obscured, and the local is lost in the global. The universal gay narrative overlooks the complexities of homophobia through the lens of nationalism and sexism. Quite literally, these experiences are spoken in a different language. In Caribbean nations, indigenous cultural aspects

such as religion and sexuality were judged through colonization and deemed different from the new western-influenced norm (Calixte, 2005). Even when addressed, there is a gap in the research of Caribbean sexuality that is not primarily focused on ideas of gender (Kempadoo in Calixte, 2005). Exploration of the LGBTQIA+ community in the West Indies are often dominated by discussions of homosexual men and violent heteronormative responses to them (Atluri in Calixte, 2005). Queer women of color contend with more cumulative stressors such as potential violence and socioeconomic disparities, than sexual minorities of ethnic majority groups, but report similarly high rates of mental health issues. This suggests increased levels of resilience while encountering multiple sources of distress (Balsam et al., 2015). There is a need for further investigation of discrimination faced based on race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation, but also on resilience while enduring those injustices (Follins et al., 2014).

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to explore how the intersection of race, cultural background, and sexuality may affect resilience in the lives of women of Afro-Caribbean heritage who identify as members of the LGBTQIA+ community. A generalized view of what it is to be queer in this day and age is underdeveloped and misses the influence overlapping cultures may have on life experiences (Das Nair & Butler, 2012). “These identities and their implications for people’s experiences have been the focus of substantial scholarly attention individually but have received relatively less empirical attention in combination” (Bowleg 2008, in Parent et al., 2013, p. 639). This research aims to increase visibility and representation in the literature, from the perspective of intersectionality, particularly underscoring resilience. Evidence supports that cultural and linguistic competency is vital to providing effective inclusive care for diverse populations (Black & Jackson, 2005; Goode et al., 2006). For clinicians in particular, the goal of this investigation is

to improve cultural competency in Marriage and Family Therapists by expanding the understanding of the lived experiences of queer women of Afro-Caribbean descent. This study will enhance best practices for psychotherapists and add to the body of intersectional research on resilience in sexually and ethnically marginalized groups.

Chapter one introduced the topics of resilience and intersectionality as it relates to the population of queer women of Afro-Caribbean descent. Chapter two began with a review of the literature on intersectional identities and resilience. Various topics affecting Queer women of Afro-Caribbean descent were discussed broadly with a focus on what can be added to the field of marriage and family therapy. Cultural and relational implications of intersectionality and resilience in this population were explored. Building on the literature, chapter three discussed the use of interpretative phenomenological analysis as the method to explore the phenomenon of resilience and intersectionality within of queer women of Afro-Caribbean descent. Chapter four discussed research findings and chapter five discussed study and implications for future research.

Definition of Relevant Terms

Queer

Formerly a derogatory term for gay or lesbian person, the word queer has been embraced by the LGBTQIA+ community as an umbrella moniker.

LGBTQIA+

The acronym for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual individuals often described as a community whose identities differ from heteronormative ideals of sexual orientation and gender expression.

Afro-Caribbean

“A person of African descent, living in or coming from the Caribbean” (New Oxford Dictionary).

Gender

Typically assigned at birth, gender is the spectrum of masculinity and femininity indicated by biopsychosocial features (APA, 2013).

Race

As described by the US Census Bureau (2017), race is a classification of self belonging to one of the following groups: White or Caucasian, Black or African American, American Indian or Alaskan Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, or a mix of more than one race.

Ethnicity

Ethnicity denotes a person’s sense of shared folklore, faith, language, and history passes down from generation to generation from one’s country of origin (McGoldrick, Giordano, and Garcia-Prieto, 2005).

Resilience

Resilience is the ability to survive, adapt, and thrive in the face of menacing adverse circumstances (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000; Follins, Walker, & Lewis, 2014).

Sexual Orientation

Refers to the gender an individual is sexually or romantically attracted to (APA, 2008).

Intersectionality

Intersectionality can be defined as the overlapping and interrelating of different identities through which societal events are formed, interpreted, and experienced (Crenshaw, 1989).

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

So, for an inanimate object, the quality of never breaking despite exposure is a good definition, but for a person, perhaps it is better to conceptualize resilience as a process of moving forward and not returning back. When a watch is dropped, it doesn't improve. But people who are traumatized sometimes do actually end up in a better place than they started in many respects. In light of that, my current definition of resilience as it applies to people would involve a reintegration of self that includes a conscious effort to move forward in an insightful integrated positive manner as a result of lessons learned from an adverse experience. The idea of moving forward is an important component of resilience for me because this notion recognizes that some of the most resilient people, at least that I know, may have had or still have very severe PTSD that they struggle with every day. But they don't succumb to its negative effects. To me, resilience involves an active decision, like sobriety, that must be frequently reconfirmed. That decision is to keep moving forward. (Southwick et al., 2014, p. 3)

The mental health field has long approached the LGBTQ+ community from a heteronormative perspective, often limiting the research to hardships or exceptionalities influencing diagnostic factors. Such generalizations about a specific population may allow for oversights such as positive characteristics germane to the queer experiences to be missed (Lytle et al., 2014). In addition to sexual minorities, black populations in social sciences have been repeatedly studied from a marginalizing vantage point. This gap in the research invited more inclusive work to come from interdisciplinary scholars as it relates to issues of race, gender identity, and sexual orientation (Johnson & Henderson, 2005). A thorough review of the

literature on resilience as well as the complex intersection of non-normative sexual identities in women of Afro-Caribbean descent is further explored in depth here.

Positive Psychology

For most of the 20th century, psychological studies and practices have focused primarily on curative measures of mental illnesses. While privileging treatment promotes healing, it can often minimize psychosocial quality of life and the systems which support dynamic well-being. Prior to World War II, mental health efforts were geared towards intelligence testing, treating mental disorders, and enriching people's lives. Due to the financial strain and traumatic effects of war, research funding and clinical practice prioritized illness over wellness and strengths. During World War II, while reading the works of Jung and Freud and considering the poverty and pandemonium in Europe at the time, Csikszentmihalyi began to question the nature of resiliency. Humanistic approaches, like those of Maslow and Rogers, later offered a framework to encourage strengths and explore the human experience (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Simultaneously, the field of Family Therapy empowered clients to view their relationships with themselves and others through a systemic lens. In the 1990s and toward the 2000s, Martin Seligman invited mental health researchers and clinicians to pivot their focus from strict pathology to resilience, happiness, optimal functioning, and flourishing (Bolt & Dunn, 2016).

The three major tenants of positive psychology are exploring positive feelings, characteristics, and societies (Seligman, 2013). Amid studying fulfillment, strengths, and communities, the realization of resilience often emerges in relation to these developments: authentic sense of security, awareness and attunement to surroundings, and openness to new possibilities (Csikszentmihalyi, 2008). Despite having limited representation of queer populations in this new field of research, lived experiences of gender expression and identity as

well as sexual orientation can be richly varied. Positive psychology, namely resilience, can help shift the conversation from perceived deviance from socially constructed norms to strength-based qualities emerging from LGBTQ+ realities (Lytle et al., 2014).

Resilience

It can be difficult to clearly define resilience as researchers and practitioners have not settled on one distinct description of the concept (Follins et al., 2014). Most interpretations state that “resilience refers to the quality of being able to survive and thrive in the face of adversity. It includes anything that can lead to more positive adaptation to minority stress and thus, mitigates the negative impact of stress on health” (Meyer, 2015, p. 210). Adequately meeting challenges can be facilitated by 3 types of support: exterior assistance given by individuals, communities, or large systems, mental and emotional strengths, and coping techniques used to quell tension or strain (Csikszentmihalyi, 2008). While coping skills are the application of energy used to protect one from the deleterious consequences of stress on physical and emotional wellbeing, resilience can be described as endurance and flourishing despite precarious conditions (Meyer, 2015). Two things are necessary for resiliency to be observed. One is the experience of a challenging stressor and the other is the successful adjustment to the survival of said stressor (Luthar et al., 2000). Though it appears to leave clues of its existence, resilience may be more present in some areas of life than others. For example, someone could thrive in stressful work environments but struggle to manage interpersonal conflicts (Southwick et al., 2014). For queer women of Afro-Caribbean descent, often marginalized identities create multi-dimensional experiences, perhaps inviting resilience to meet where they intersect.

Systemic Approaches to Resilience

Hope is a prerequisite for resilience. In psychological terms, resilience is based on strain and survival, but from a Family Therapy perspective, resilience can be centered on possibilities (Walsh, 2017). An evidenced-based (Kim & Froerer, 2018) systemic model like Solution-Focused Brief Therapy (SFBT) does not avoid discussions about troubled histories, but intentionally anchors itself in the client's preferred outcome. This allows for the present to not be driven by the traumas in clients' pasts, but rather steadied by the optimistic inevitability of an improved experience (Connie, 2018). Using language as the primary tool, SFBT clients and therapists collaboratively make empowering meanings and inspire plausibility of healing and moving forward (Kim & Froerer, 2018).

The utilization process found in Ericksonian informed models like Solution-Oriented or Relational Therapy, makes use of whatever is in the client's life, including the maladaptive competencies developed from the presenting problem (O'Hanlon & Martin, 1992).

We use the skills, resources, and abilities that people already have and consider what they are already doing a potential resource... Instead of finding out what function their problems serve or why they are messed up, we are looking for what capabilities they have and stimulating those resources and abilities to help them in the healing process.

(O'Hanlon & Martin, 1992, p. 143)

This systemic lens is appropriate in researching queer women of Afro-Caribbean descent as it would look at the biased based instances they experience as well as the strengths and abilities that emerged as a result of them. Similarly, Narrative Therapy examines the very stories people tell themselves. Using externalization, the Narrative Therapy approach works to separate the person from the problem. This posture frees their identities to exist outside of the dominant

discourse society has marginalized them into. Options or possibilities can come forward when the opportunity presents itself because moving the problem out of the self has made room for them. Seeing people in a broader light beyond problems, allows others to re-author their unique experiences of resilience and re-member or reintegrate the role vital individuals have played in the construction of their lives (White, 2007).

In Bowen theory, anxiety in a system is examined and awareness is increased, making way for the differentiation of self. From individual and nuclear family issues to societal emotional processes, when stress goes unidentified and unchecked, it can threaten the system's survival (Moran, 2008). Exploring emotional systems with attention to triangles, multigenerational transmissions, and the duality of emotional cutoffs, can speak to the intricacies of adaptation, relationships, and resilience (Titelman, 2008; Smith, 2008).

Across various systemic approaches, the common denominators are hope and relationships. Work with ethnic and sexual minorities does not automatically equate to addressing problems with those specific identities, but from a SFBT perspective as well as other systemic approaches, therapy does start with the assumption of client expertise, interconnectivity, resourcefulness, and resilience (Meyer et al., 2011; Ouer, 2015). Though resilience is personal, it often does not happen in isolation. Vicarious resilience can be described as the beneficial influence of witnessing another person's plasticity from stressful or traumatic circumstances. This can be encountered by close members of one's family or support system who has sustained a trauma directly, and in mental health research it is studied in clinicians who witness the growth experienced in clients after withstanding traumatic experiences (Froerer et al., 2018; McCormack et al., 2011). If hope is communicable or contagious, it is quite possible that resilience in multiple minority populations can be inspired and co-created, not only in

psychotherapy and community, but also through awareness and visibility (Follins et al., 2014; Froerer et al., 2018; Ouer, 2015).

Resilience in Queer Women of Color

In non-normative groups, microaggressions and daily displays of prejudice can be considered commonplace yet significant stressors. Concurrently, the same identities that are often used to discriminate against individuals in shame, can unite groups of people in pride (Meyer, 2015). Research has shown that supportive spaces where queer identities are welcomed and embraced help foster resilience (Lytle et al., 2014). Yet, “there is a lack of knowledge of the cultural realities, strengths, and protective factors of Black LGBT populations” (Follins et al., 2014, p. 191). Bowleg et al. (2003) apply Kumpfer’s (1999) six indicators of enduring elasticity to the lived experiences of black lesbians in the following order: Troubles stemming from misogyny, homophobia, and prejudice trigger a response. Social supports soften or aggravate these systematic blows. Then, intentional engagement with surroundings serve to foster safe spaces. Personal attributes like faith, hope, playfulness, flexibility, and overall enjoyment reveal themselves. As more problems put a demand on developing coping skills, greater abilities to decipher difficulties are discovered. Ultimately, resiliency muscles are torn and rebuilt, allowing for elevated plasticity to become one’s norm (Kumpfer, 1999 as cited in Bowleg et al., 2003). To explore resilience is to interrogate the connections in problematic circumstances (Meyer, 2015). When survival and optimal functioning is studied in oppressed populations, sociological challenges are exposed. The unlikely occurrence of thriving is observed and given voice.

Minority Stress

In the 1930s, Physical stresses such as extreme temperatures and strained environmental conditions were observed by Walter Cannon, in nature to be tolerated in lesser degrees but

proved to be detrimental when experienced for long periods of time or at elevated quantities (Hobfoll, 1998). The biopsychosocial view of stress was extensively studied in the 1950s by Dr. Hans Selye while he was observing the experience of animals in pain or duress (Kabat-Zinn, 1990; Selye, 1978). Stress can be described by situations causing great strain demanding forced malleability and adjustment to a new status quo based on the force of recent events. Examples of such situations may range from significant traumas or life altering events to insidious pervasive pressures or daily annoyances. Stress can directly affect an individual personally or socially. Marginalized groups can be particularly vulnerable to societal pressures (Meyer, 2003). Populations with co-existing non-normative identities may experience compounded challenges in addition to common daily stressors or traumas (Crenshaw, 1989).

Minority stress describes the systemic stressors of prejudice and discrimination that negatively impact marginalized groups typically in the form of socioeconomic and physical oppression, and induce physical and mental ailments (Frost et al., 2013; Meyer, 2015). “Resilience is an essential part of minority stress. Indeed, resilience really has meaning only in the face of stress, and therefore, it is an essential part of understanding minority stress” Meyer, 2015, p. 209). Bias, in large part, establishes added constraints to the agency of those already oppressed by systematic hardships. Discriminatory practices in this light, become stressors that perpetuate prejudicial victimization and can furthermore disenfranchise people from using whatever means or strength they do have access to. Stigma can serve to undermine resilience in oppressed people by not only compounding external circumstances designed to hold them back, but it turns the pervasive bias inward and makes sense of their debasement as the social order of the times (Hobfoll, 1998). In one study among almost 80% of African American homosexual women interviewed, systematic oppression based on their skin color was reported as the most

pervasive obstacle in their lives, while 37% of the women in the same study described being one of few if any people of color in predominately white neighborhoods or institutions as a notable strain (Bowleg et al., 2003). When impending discrimination becomes anticipatory for a marginalized person, hiding identities, and ultimately humiliation, are often adopted as internal dialogue in an attempt adapt. This understanding of being classified as less than or non-normative and therefore less deserving of common consideration can be reinforced by small dismissals of one's humanity, including lack of visibility in history or legal documents and positive representation in neighborhoods or mainstream media (Meyer et al., 2011).

The black queer population experience high levels of emotional stress and higher cumulative prejudice of multiple minority stress. These factors can in turn contribute to increased likelihood of fatalities from life threatening illnesses (Bowleg et al., 2003; Follins et al., 2014). Meyer (2003) found that minority stress also produces atmospheres conducive to mental illness as well. Continuing Beale's (1970) work exposing the intersecting complexity of discrimination in the lives of black women as both black people and women as "double jeopardy." Bowleg et al. (2003, p. 87) study this phenomenon described by Greene (1995) as "triple jeopardy," when the layering of anti-Blackness, homophobia, and sexism combined create a different problem all together. These stressors combined can also serve to inspire different solutions.

Queer Identities

The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual community includes people whose gender identities and sexual orientations present outside of the heteronormative or traditional binaries of sexuality (APA, 2015). LGBTQIA+ individuals live all around the world, some more openly than others, but Caucasian financially stable gays and lesbians and "urban LGBT people" are largely regarded as their prototypes (Meyer, 2015, p. 212). Expressions of

sexual and romantic relationships as well as gender, exist on a spectrum, but when explored in numerous cultures and languages, the queer experience is vast and varied (Kumar, 2018; Meyer, 2015). This questions the validity of the “out gay identity” (Calixte, 2005, p. 131) movement of Western American spheres, more specifically, its resonance in Afro-Caribbean communities. When these socially constructed ideals of homosexuality are mainstreamed as universal expressions of what it is to be queer in the world, diverse groups of people are confined by cultural ideas that cannot adequately define them. For those of Afro-Caribbean descent living in the West, there may be a clash of identities creating a tug of war between the unspoken understanding from a communal upbringing with overt proclamations or closeted orientations in an individualist society. Both world views have their set of cultural norms and expectations of same gender attraction, but when differing influences exist in one person as they do in those the Afro-Caribbean diaspora, what becomes of them? Can their sexual identities be as blurred while clearly labeled (Calixte, 2005)? Can they be both/and (Bateson, 1972)?

In a study of African American queer women, heterosexism posed a significant problem for at least 20% of the participants (Bowleg et al., 2003). Heteronormative stressors reported included: 21% fears of backlash for publicly embracing their paramours, 37% having to carefully manage conversations about their personal lives within their communities where being out is not safe, and 26% being barraged with generalizations and assumptions about their sexual orientation from others (Bowleg et al., 2003). As dangerous as being a minority can be within a heteronormative culture, a queer identity can offer access to and acceptance in likeminded groups with similar lived experiences. In research about positive possibilities, queer participants reported that stigmatized hardships ushered them into groups primed for impassioned activism and intentional visibility (Meyer et al., 2011). This is by no means a celebration of the benefits of

oppression, but rather the honoring of the personal accomplishments of the oppressed in the face of harrowing discriminatory practices. The research acknowledged the juxtaposition of participants listing the negative impact of biased based instances while also highlighting the positive traits they grew out of those experiences (Meyer et al., 2011). The intricacy involved invites a different kind of both/and (Bateson, 1972), one where trauma and thriving can co-exist.

Individual resilience is not a privilege afforded to all. It is heavily influenced by one's social class, economic mobility, and racial/ethnic background, and dismissing that reality can disproportionately hinder underserved communities. However, when identity is found in a group with a shared experience like within the LGBTQIA+ population, *community resilience* can emerge including support systems, mentoring, affirming medical care, socioeconomic means (Meyer, 2015). Unfortunately, such aid does not reach all corners of the queer body (Bowleg et al., 2003). "Racism, classism, sexism, biphobia, and transphobia, among other exclusions, will limit many in the LGBT community in identifying and affiliating with the community and, by extension, will deprive them of community resilience" (Meyer, 2015, p. 212). Barriers to equality exist, but as the resilience of marginalized populations would suggest, they are not impossible to survive or surpass. The LGBTQIA+ umbrella cannot be global if it is not also intersectional. When the queer community is accepted as inclusive instead of myopic, multicultural not seemingly universal, it can be powerful.

Gender Identities

Black people assigned female at birth have historically experienced discrimination simply because of their gender and skin color under the systems of sexist power and racist subjugation in place (Walker-Barnes, 2017). In homes, workplaces, and social movements, women are expected to soft and complementary to men, as if they have no plight of their own (Hobfoll,

1998). Even as times are evolving in the individualistic West, the communities that include men and sometimes women, are prioritized above the needs of a woman. Research on black lesbians in America shows 26% of participants viewed happiness as less material or fairytale-like, but as freedom from the confines of gender stereotypes and expectations (Bowleg et al., 2003). This may help to understand as Ellis (in Calixte, 2005) explained, that queer Afro-Caribbean women's lesbian identities are often seen as diminished or invalidated by others in the West because of their sexual relations with men, as opposed to being seen as complex. Black women are held to a different standard of support and fidelity, even in their intimate relationships.

Sexism was prevalent in the early development of African American studies, beginning in the 1960s. Issues related to the plight of black women were deferred to the prioritized racial struggle which was characterized by adverse experiences facing cis gendered straight black men. (Johnson & Henderson, 2005). Prominent figures in history as well as in television, film, and pop music have reclaimed the likeness of African American women from reductive images of subservience to the *Strongblackwoman* archetype (Walker-Barnes, 2017).

No one description can encapsulate what it is to be a black woman in America, but two damaging stereotypes are often unfairly perpetuated about them: they have superhuman “strength” and therefore able to endure inhumane amounts of strain, and they are “sassy” or reactive and therefore threatening (Evans et al., 2017). She does not have permission to show displeasure without being considered “angry,” her compliance is owed as even her facial expressions are monitored and censored (Seales, 2019).

Strongblackwoman is a construct that has been forced upon black women even in weakness, making enduring the insurmountable an expectation instead of a hope. For gender and racial minorities, surviving and looking great while doing it, becomes customary. This

heightened anticipation puts a demand on thriving while simultaneously adding undue strain on somatic and mental wellbeing (Meyer, 2015, Walker-Barnes, 2017). Walker-Barnes' (2017) StrongBlackWoman theory described its 3 main facets as: self-containment, self-sacrifice, self-sufficiency. Black women are socialized very early to respect and mirror these traits as a badge of honor, almost as a rite of passage into a graduated role with their mothers, mentors, and peers (Walker-Barnes, 2017).

When their personal identities do not fit their cultural norms, many sexual and gender minorities reported wanting to escape judgement of their biological families. But across various studies, multiple minorities also reported feeling deeply supported by their chosen family (Meyer et al., 2011). Friendships, sisterhoods, and circles that extend beyond the bonds of DNA have been shown to help bolster emotional wellbeing in Black women. Movements like #MeToo or #Blackgirlmagic have served to visibility and solidarity for different forms of victimization common to Black women in America. With the advancements of the internet, supportive groups can transcend social media platforms from group chats to hashtags and connect women in the African diaspora and create resilience in community around the world (Harden Bradford, 2017; Meyer, 2015).

Racial Identities

Nonetheless—and at the risk of seeming to create divisiveness when unity and community are the overriding goals, we believe that the term ‘black queer’ Captures and, in effect, names the specificity of the historical and cultural differences that shape the experiences and expressions of ‘queerness....’ Further, we believe that there are compelling social and political reasons to lay claim to the modifier ‘black’ in ‘black queer. Both terms, of course, are markers or signifiers of difference: just as ‘queer’

challenges notions of heteronormativity and heterosexism, 'black' resists notions of assimilation and of absorption. And so, we endorse the double cross of affirming the inclusivity mobilized under the sign of 'queer' while claiming the racial, historical, and cultural specificity attached to the marker 'black.' (Johnson & Henderson, 2005, p. 7)

Unique identifiers may come across as separatist or exclusionary, but when added to generalized group experiences, they can serve to pique curiosity about their complexity and bring different points of view to the broader discussion. As female concerns were less than equal on the totem pole of black social justice and LGBTQIA+ interests even lower, they did not emerge as equitable topics of study for decades (Johnson & Henderson, 2005). Over half a century later since its inception, one could argue that queer women's issues are still fighting for a place in the African American studies agenda.

Black women, though sparsely represented in the curricula, have found themselves populating post-secondary education classrooms across the United States. Racial, sexual, heteronormative marginalization has been reported to limit options of education or cost minority students their ability to attend and remain in school (Meyer et al., 2011). In defiance of pervasive cultural stereotypes of hostility, sassiness, or laziness, African American women not only attend undergraduate and post graduate programs but also complete these degrees at higher rates in relation to other identity groups (Katz, 2020; U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). This begs the question of upward mobility and hardiness. Resilience studies point to a correlation between national and ethnic influences and familial and communal bonds in African American populations, but rarely consider the nuances that sexuality or gender expression may contribute to those experiences (Follins et al., 2014).

In a study about resilience in black lesbians, racism is described as a repetitious and arduous frame through which homophobia and misogyny color their day to day lives. Yet, notwithstanding heteronormative bias, 21% of these women reported prioritizing a connection within their African American institutions, including the black church, as a layer of protection from the effects of racism (Bowleg et al., 2003).

Faith traditions have been shown in the research to boost resilience (Walsh, 2008). Specifically, in the African diaspora, shared experiences based on race and familial bonds are intimately acquainted with communities of worship (Follins et al., 2014). Study participants also expressed feeling loneliness in their own circles and society at large, which inspired travels to LGBTQ+ conferences to find others like them, and exploration of written or media content discussing queer black feminine experiences (Bowleg et al., 2003).

In light of this social inaccessibility in racial, sexual, and gender minority populations, there appears to be a longing for one's roots, for any historical indications of stories reflecting her hue or voices that sound like her mother tongue within a socially constructed, globalized identity that was not formed with her in mind (Calixte, 2005). While holding on to African diaspora tic cultures, new skills such as *code switching*, which can be described as altering communication methods like language, gestures, facial expressions, or colloquialisms based on multiple audience's cultural context are forged by necessity (Bowleg et al., 2003, p. 97; Webster.com, 2020).

Contending with racial and gender bias in the US, the LGBTQIA+ community did not always foster the widespread belonging to everyone in the universal sense it has come to claim. In this dearth of inclusivity, queer women of color, particularly of Afro-Caribbean descent look for representations of themselves in their own national histories (Calixte, 2005).

Afro-Caribbean Influences

The field of Black sexuality studies in the US can acknowledge the depth and breadth of influence that have come from the lived experiences of the African diaspora (Johnson & Henderson, 2005). Afro-Caribbean is an ethnic identity describing people of Caribbean descent with African lineage. Blacks in America and in the West Indies have the common history in their African roots of ancestral displacement and enslavement in new countries as well as the cultural shared experience of colonialism and racism (United States. Congress. House. Committee on Foreign Affairs. Subcommittee on Africa, 1970). Their Pan-African connection is strengthened with the emigration of Afro-Caribbean people to the United States.

Sexual minorities in the West by way of the Caribbean, have an intimate relationship with perceived deviance and widespread non-acceptance due to the systematic homophobia instituted in their national laws (Attai, 2017). Some collective cultures lean more towards an understanding rather than a naming of attraction and intimacy between women. Operating outside of defamed classification allows for a certain anonymity against categories that stain their way of life in a negative light. Instead, Afro-Caribbean cultures can hold “...known yet unspoken experiences, that are at one time understood, but for outsiders seem murky and unreadable, (that) shapes the existence of the women’s sexual relations with each other” (Calixte, 2005, p. 131). The elusive being without a label can provide safety in that it creates a way to acknowledge multi-faceted relationships between women free from the Western construct of a queer identity that can be polarizing at best and lethal at worst (Ghisyan, 2016; Kumar, 2018). So, for women who have an affinity for other women, “self-preservation starts very early in West Indian families” (Lorde, 1982, p. 22). Coming out is not considered necessary or practical in this

context, though it might be expected by American LGBTQIA+ circles (Calixte, 2005; Kumar, 2018). Some women remain cautiously in their countries of origin, and some seek refuge abroad.

For those in the diaspora, the notion of home and the sense of identity that stems from it, are literally neither here nor there; Home is both a country left behind and a new land of dwelling, each with their own criteria for belonging. To be queer and at home in the Caribbean, can often necessitate a blurring of sexuality in heteronormative contexts, while immigrating to the US poses threats of misogynoir (Bailey & Trudy, 2018) layered upon homophobia. Travel between the different lands may require some recalibration from the various ways the sexuality and personhood of LGBTQIA+ women of West Indian descent are policed (Calixte, 2005). In the African diaspora, “homophobic kinds of mentalities are very rampant...and being gay is like an affront to your Blackness” (Bowleg et al., 2003, p. 96).

Resilience from a cultural standpoint may vary depending on national values as well as historic and political climates. In the face of civil unrest, violence, anxiety, or oppression, creating a narrative of bravery and possibility may lay the groundwork for buoyancy in the resolve of a people (Panter-Brick & Eggerman, 2012, as cited in Southwick et al., 2014). Afro-Caribbean ancestry may speak to a latent determination to exist because their ancestors set a precedence for survival of slavery at any cost.

Faith in African culture is customarily passed down from one generation to the next, so in the diaspora, religion flows in socialization like language or communal customs. Examples of belief systems in Afro-Caribbean nations include: Haitian Vodou (Haiti), Hinduism (Trinidad and Tobago), Comfa (Guyana), Kele (Saint Lucia), Rada (Trinidad), and with the introduction of colonialism, Christianity and Roman Catholicism became most prominent across the West Indies. The Christian sects in the region, other than some Anglicans and Roman Catholics, have

either been quiet or loudly opposed to the abolishment of homophobic violence and discrimination. Some faiths like the Rastafari in Jamaica adamantly denounce the rights of queer people while the Anglican Church in the Bahamas approved of legalizing homosexuality even if they did not approve with same-sex acts morality (Taylor & Case, 2013).

Studies propose that faith correlates with optimal functioning (Follins et al., 2014), but when linked with heteronormative ideals, it contributes to a negative sense of self (Wright & Stern, 2016). Coming from a context in which the criminalization of their relationships is in a dominant theme in their music, institutionalized in their society through violence, religion, and multiple nations' laws, danger and trauma are common experiences (Attai, 2017; Wahab, 2016), Women who love women in the West Indies can be justifiably murdered and still choose to love (Kumar, 2018). The praxis of resistance and resilience is in the basic feat of survival.

Intersectionality

Researchers and activists study the relationship between marginalized differences as intersectionality (Cho et al., 2013), systemic thinkers know this as context. Grounded in womanism or Black feminist theory, intersectionality explores the meeting place of co-occurring social identities, how they garner bias, and how they impact a person's lived experience. The works of writers such as Beale (1970) and Crenshaw (1989), among others, held space for discussions of class, gender and racial inequality in social, legal and political contexts. Black Feminist thought ushered in a hands-on practice by which the complexities of various injustices against black women could be unearthed and studied (Nash, 2018). Depending on the population observed, intersectionality can include discussions of class, gender, sexual orientation, cultural background, socioeconomic status, and other identifying features that may be discriminated against (Cho et al., 2013).

Ethnicity plays a large role in the perpetuated narrative of universal queer identities. White homosexuality is often portrayed as the dominant discourse in queer spaces, leaving those with non-normative gender expressions and sexual orientation on the fringes of their own communities (Johnson & Henderson, 2005). “The focus on the most privileged group members marginalizes those who are multiply-burdened, and obscures claims that cannot be understood as resulting from discrete sources of discrimination” (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 139). When groups stand against prejudice, unspoken loyalties to preferred identities may emerge. For example, the plight of white women superseded those of black women in the suffrage movement (Jones & Shorter-Golden, 2004).

Homosexual men were the face of the struggle for gay rights, while black, brown, and transgender activists were pivotal in the Stonewall riots but have been silenced from historical accounts (Stein, 2019). Similarly, the Black Lives Matters movement is repeatedly called upon to protest injustice against cis gendered black men yet was founded and continues to be run by black lesbians (Green, 2019). Queer woman of color are sometimes not represented by feminist agendas, anti-racist movements, and LGBTQIA+ initiatives as the co-mingling of co-existing cultures cannot be neatly packaged in the expectations of a given group’s prototypical story (Crenshaw, 1989). Multiple minority individual identities must be taken into account in when included larger communities’ interests. Only in most recent decades was blackness acknowledged in queer theory’s exploration of international engagement. Large parts of global queer lived experiences are erased when the African diaspora is not adequately considered (Allen, 2012). When realities go unnamed, it allows homogeny to establish superiority, making room for prejudice to go unchecked.

As an example of the blurring of different discriminatory practices, research on black lesbians in the United States reported that often at work, it can be difficult to decipher whether they are being marginalized based on their gender, race, or sexual orientation, and that uncertainty about the nature of their biased based experiences stress-inducing (Bowleg et al., 2003). This ambiguity speaks to the nature of intersectionality, because when multiple minority identities are present in a group of people, new problems and injustice erect against them that are different from the biases that may already exist for each of those identities individually (Jones & Shorter-Golden, 2004; Meyer et al., 2011).

Interestingly, intersectionality not only describes the meeting points of several discriminatory generalizations, based on co-existing bias against multidimensional communities, but also the various exceptionalities of strength, perspective, and perseverance that have been birthed because of bigotry and precarious hardships experienced. Studies also showed that people who have endured marginalization have been forced to grow in spite of systematic oppression, emotionally, politically, globally, and interpersonally, in ways they might not have had to otherwise (Meyer et al., 2011).

For Queer women of Afro-Caribbean descent, the intersection of culture, race, gender, sexual orientation, along faith, family, and class result in distinct yet cumulative aspects of self (Allen, 2012). Discussions of multi-layered identities are often written off as identity politics but prove necessary to adequately explore the conditions experienced by multiple minorities (Crenshaw, 1989).

To follow the routes of black/queer/diaspora is to interrogate dynamic, unsettled subjects whose bodies, desires, and texts *move*. Our methodologies must therefore be supple, our communication polyglot, our outlook wide and open, and our

analysis nuanced. This multiple, luxuriant, and subtle approach is intellectually generative (if not also a bit unsettling for some). In any case, we find that this is more useful and more pleasurable than attempting to fit complex, contradictory, and perhaps fugitive experiences and imaginings into the staid desensitized and sterile boxes of “race,” “sexuality,” “nationality,” discipline, or genre. (Allen, 2012, p. 215)

One experience that is common in both Western and post-colonial Caribbean contexts is the naming of their communities from those outside of them. To combat the derogatory epithets, some queer people have taken back and assumed regional labels meant to insult them. In doing so, they have been able to unseat the power of the names, while also bridging the gap between one’s sexuality and culture of origin. Major voices in the diasporic camp disagree on repurposing such labels or whether to verbally identify sexual aspects of their lives at all. Women of color, particularly of Caribbean lineage are an anomaly to the universal queer persona as they cannot be neatly placed in its western prototype (Calixte, 2005). So, the different identifying aspects that influence how a person walks through the world, must be honored as well as the cumulative experience that makes up the sum of each of its parts (Crenshaw, 1989).

Mental Health Implications

Implications for culturally competent mental health care must begin at the level of training, honoring ethnic diversity along with non-normative sexual and gender identities (Lytle et al., 2014). This can begin with attending to the duality of suffering often encountered by black women. Harassment and abuse are significant occurrences, but when experienced by women in the African American community, multiple hardships must be acknowledged that can easily go undetected.

There are the traumatic events to process and heal from, and then the psychological toll of being pressured to quietly swallow the atrocity in order to protect the aggressor from racist treatment from the justice system or protect herself from being viewed as hyper-sexualized, some how calling mistreatment upon herself, or like her body was something others were entitled to (Jones, Shorter-Gooden, 2003). Awareness of the expectation for black women to protect everyone before themselves, their race before their femininity, their people before their personhood, may offer Family Therapists insight into their multi-layered experiences (Evans et al., 2017). Superhero tropes in the media of black women being all things to all people perpetuate the narrative that because they have been conditioned to look fine that they actually are. Television producers Mara Akil Broch and Shonda Rhimes are among the first to create characters who address topics like suicide, depression, anxiety, and abuse head on, within the context of the expectation to withstand consistent criticism from society at large (Burton, 2017). One psychological intervention is the BREATHE model, which invites the courage to be fully seen into the established narrative of strength in Black women. The acronym stands for: “Balance, Reflection, Energy, Association, Transparency, Healing, and Empowerment” and centers acknowledging the strains of being a gender and racial minority to build healthy coping skills and live an emotionally and physically sustainable lives (Evans et al., 2017, p. 4). This treatment approach can help queer women of Afro-Caribbean positively manage experiences with “racialized heteropatriarchy” (Allen, 2012, p. 220), as they navigate different degrees of xenophobia in the West.

Colonization and immigration may have created a skewed sense of “home,” and whet an appetite for belonging that the African diaspora may have a difficult time satisfying (Calixte, 2005). Understanding how sexuality and ethnicity play a role in the complex socialization of

Black women from birth, may help bring clarity to what legal and ethical dynamics may inform their decisions (Jones, Shorter-Gooden, 2003). Also, attending to the bonds of sisterhood created among black women and promoting self-care may serve to mitigate the stressors plaguing black women of various sexual and cultural backgrounds (Harden-Bradford, 2017). The hope is to support clinicians in becoming “better equipped to help LGBT clients accept their gender identity and sexual orientation as positives – distinct, worthy, valid and sources of courage and transcendence– while helping LGBT individuals experience themselves and their abilities from a position of affirmation, celebration and strength” (Lytle et al., 2014, p. 2). Gaining a better grasp on stressors and factors that contribute to resilience in queer women of Afro-Caribbean descent while also centering their hopes and resources, can inform best practices and intersectional approaches for practitioners and researchers to better serve this population (Follins et al., 2014; Ouer, 2015).

Summary

“In human behavior, what is most intriguing is not the average, but the improbable.” (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, p. 7). Resiliency in the face of multiple minority stress in queer women from the West Indian diaspora is a curious dynamic. While there is some research available about stress and resilience in LGBTQIA+ populations, there is a gap in studies exploring resilience and intersectionality in queer women of the Afro-Caribbean diaspora (Allen, 2012). This research aims first to give a name to individual prejudices and the cumulative hardships created at their intersections as well as voice to their survivors. Secondly, it serves to shed light on the hope and strengths that often emerge in the wake of said oppressive circumstances. The study acknowledges and then shifts the focus from this population’s expected injuries and systematic disadvantages to the resilience that has been found in their place. In

Chapter 3, I introduce the qualitative methodology for this study and detail the steps of recruitment and data analysis in this phenomenological exploration.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

In researching the topic of resilience and intersecting identities in queer women of Afro-Caribbean descent, I wondered, “where are the stories of how West Indian Black women not only survive but thrive while facing layered amounts of minority stress?” As a researcher and clinician who not only works with this community but is a visible member of it, I set out to examine this phenomenon. Toni Morrison explained that if there is some narrative that you would like to read but cannot find, you should write it (Schappell et al, 1993). With that imperative in mind, my curiosity about these cumulative experiences led me to review the current literature on resilience and intersectionality within this population and add more qualitative work to the existing body of research. This chapter includes the framework I used to conduct the study including: The Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach, along with details of participant selection, recruitment, data collection, and data analysis.

Qualitative Paradigm

This study sought to gain a better understanding of resilience and intersecting identities of queer women of Afro-Caribbean descent. A qualitative method of inquiry best suited this exploration as it is the framework that studies the significance humans attribute to a collective experience (Creswell, 2009). Unearthing details from underreported and often dismissed stories from first-hand accounts of women can allow readers to peer into biased based instances from an intimate vantage point. Because of the delicate nature of victimization and healing, it may be difficult to access such intricate perspectives otherwise.

The survey or experimental essence of quantitative studies investigates theories by probing for connections among variables, while the exploratory nature of qualitative approaches attends to the richness of the participants' experiences (Creswell, 2009). Influenced by an advocacy worldview (Creswell, 2007), it was important to center the expertise of Black women on own their lives. "Not wanting to further marginalize the individuals participating in the research, advocacy/participatory inquiries collaborate with research participants" (Creswell, 2007, p. 22). At the intersection of constructivism and advocacy, a qualitative method was chosen to facilitate a co-creative process between the researcher and those participants sharing their stories.

The qualitative tradition has five main branches of research: phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, case study, and narrative. Ethnography focus primarily on observing a specific culture in its corresponding context. The creation of a theory based on the unique perspectives of participants would constitute a grounded theory. Case studies offer an intensely focused exploration of a distinct occurrence or group. Narrative research involves the researcher compiling accounts from participants' lives and the flavoring the ordered stories with both the subject and observer's interpretations together. Phenomenology hones in on the experiences of a few participants, closely studying patterns that emerge and gleaning whatever meanings the participants make (Creswell, 2009). Due to the displacement of the Afro-Caribbean diaspora, the idea of "home" or original context for this population is relative. Phenomenology would clear a path for the interplay between individual ideas and societal influences that allows them to systemically affect one another, to be richly explored (Creswell, 2007).

Phenomenological Approach

Phenomenology was born out of the philosophy that people observe details of life occurrences, free of judgment, and make sense of them. From a social constructivist perspective, that meaning-making process transpires through examination of self, societal norms, and engaging with others in light of the world around them (Creswell, 2007). “A phenomenological study describes the meaning for several individuals of their lived experience of a concept or a phenomenon...describing what all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon, (Creswell, 2007, p. 58). For interviewees of the population, this qualitative method held space for queer women of Afro-Caribbean descent to expound on their pervasive encounters of bias and buoyancy and the get to the heart of implications they draw from those experiences.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is a phenomenological research method that focuses on the ways in which people assign significance to critical and often complex moments in their lives (Smith et al, 2009). Phenomenology pulls at the common thread of an event and teases out the fundamental human understanding of that experience (Creswell, 2007). IPA’s interest in interpretation is intimate and isomorphic. The researchers invite participants to draw meaning from their own life occurrences as they are making connections out of the participants meaning making experiences (Smith et al, 2009). “IPA is committed to the detailed examination of the particular case. It wants to know in detail what the experience for this person is like, what sense this particular person is making of what is happening to them” (Smith et al, 2009, p. 3).

Generalization becomes an option after this thorough excavation of queer women of Afro-Caribbean descent’s lived experiences takes place. As participants recount distinct

incidences at the intersection of injustice and resilience, IPA provides a framework to garner a wealth of data from intentional focus on a small sample of the population (Smith et al, 2009). A nomothetic study provided empirical statistics on an understudied group. This type of method yielded valuable information about similarities within a given population. With disenfranchised sects of people, theorizing about them often happens by those outside of the group who do not center their interests (Allen, 2012; Calixte, 2005). IPA can give voice to scientists challenging the dominant discourses of those on the margins of society, as examining particular cases “provides a means of troubling our assumptions, perceptions and theories” (Smith et al, 2009, p. 30). The detail gathering element of IPA was a fit for this study as it allows the researcher to add idiographic insights to the body of Family Therapy research on which quantitative inquiries could be based on in the future.

Participant and Sample Selection

Sample selection in an IPA study is typically done through purposeful sampling or the intentional choosing of research participants, to ensure philosophical congruence with the qualitative approach. Participants are limited to a small sample size to facilitate as much attention to detail as possible. This allows for deep appreciation of nuance in lived experiences of a specialized occurrence in a specific group. This study used purposeful sampling to gather a homogenous group of the recommended 3-6 participant sample size in order to catch an optimal amount of rich data (Smith et al, 2009). Participants were selected on the basis that resilience and multiple minority status are meaningful phenomena to them personally and they met the following inclusion criteria: Identifying as a Black woman, of Afro-Caribbean lineage who lives in North America, being at least 18 years old, speaking English, and disclosing sexual or

romantic attraction to other women or identifying as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, or Queer. Exclusion criteria included not meeting the full inclusion criteria.

Recruitment

The researcher used approved social media and emails to invite self identified queer women of Afro-Caribbean descent to participate in the study and also refer others who meet the inclusion criteria to participate as well. These communications included my name, role in the research, contact information, study purpose statement, information about the study, and scope of participation. Because of the taboo nature of this phenomenon in the social context of Afro-Caribbean culture, securing participants was difficult. General as opposed to pointed information about the research topic may be offered initially and a reiteration of a commitment to participant confidentiality to communicate strong ethical practices, were employed (Smith et al., 2009).

Informed Consent and Confidentiality

Participant confidentiality is a priority of the researcher, so measures to protect their identifying information were taken and clearly explained to them. An informed consent form outlined the structure and details for study participation as well as institutional review board contact information. Portions of an interview were represented in data presentation, so each person interviewed was assigned a pseudonym for their information to be linked to (Smith et al, 2009). Electronic documents, recordings, and transcripts were secured on a password-protected computer and stored in a locked filing cabinet in my home office. The only people who were able to access their information were myself, my research chair, and the institutional review board, as a measure to ensure their safety.

Data Collection and Procedure

Potential participants who expressed interest in being a part of the study and met full inclusion criteria, were invited to be interviewed. Upon understanding and approving the research agreement, the participant signed, giving the researcher written informed consent for study participation. Further explaining informed consent, participants were also told that they were allowed to suspend involvement in the study at any moment if they so desired (Creswell, 2007). Then researcher went over possible benefits and risks of discussing subjects as sensitive as intersecting minority stress and discussed any questions participants may have to make sure they felt comfortable sharing their experiences.

Semi-Structured Interview

When "...devising a data collection method, IPA is best suited to one which will invite participants to offer a rich, detailed, first person account of their experiences...These facilitate the elicitation of stories, thoughts, and feelings about the targeted phenomenon" (Smith et al, 2009, p. 56). In-depth interviews with a semi-structured format were advised for this particular IPA study as they allowed for enough room between questions for meanings to be thoughtfully discussed and enough emotional safety for implications to be openly explored between researcher and participants. I used the semi-structured interview format to encourage such free exchange of information within the estimated schedule of one to one and a half hours. This was comprised of several carefully thought out open-ended questions that may or may not have been asked depending on the course of the interview (Smith et al., 2009). These interviews were recorded and transcribed in order for me to center building a connection with the participants in the moment and mindfully attending to experiences they are sharing. I kept a journal of my thoughts and observations throughout the process (Creswell, 2007).

The research question that framed the follow up questions in the interview schedule is:
 What is the lived experience of resilience and intersecting identities in queer women of Afro-Caribbean descent. Questions from the interview schedule include:

1. How do you describe yourself in terms of gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation?

Possible prompts: What is that like for you? Do you identify more with some demographics than others? If so, which one(s) and why?

2. When did you realize that you were a queer woman from an Afro-Caribbean culture?

Possible prompts: How did you feel? Who did you tell? Why?

3. What does it mean to be “out” to you?

Possible prompts: How important is that to you? Is there a sense of naming or un-naming of your sexuality in your Afro-Caribbean community?

4. What role did family, faith, and community play in the development of your identities?

Possible prompts: Where did you draw support from? Where did you wish that support would have come from?

5. What struggles, if any, do your identities pose for you?

Possible prompts: How do you feel about them? What were some ways you have learned to adapt or survive? What strengths or resiliencies did those situations bring out in you?

6. What was a defining moment for you as a black woman or a West Indian woman who loves women?

Possible prompts: What happened? Which of your identities do you think has impacted you the most?

7. How do think other people see you?

Possible Prompt: Society, strangers, co-workers, family, friends, partners?

8. How do you make sense of the layering of those intersecting identities?

Possible prompt: What context do you feel the most comfortable and accepted in as your full self? How do you feel about yourself in that context?

9. What would it look like to live your best life as a queer woman of Afro-Caribbean descent?

Possible prompts: What were you hoping for growing into the person you are today?

What are you hopeful for in the future?

When exploring personal experiences, it is recommended to begin with questioning topics that are not difficult to discuss, and then to move to deep concepts like identity or making sense of social patterns. The semi-structured nature of the interview was managed with some tractability as I attended to the rhythm, comfort, or need for probing for more detail of the participants (Smith et al, 2009).

Data Analysis

Once all the interviews were conducted, reviewed, and transcribed, the data collected were analyzed through the delineated steps of IPA. This served to describe participants' lived experiences of resilience and intersecting identities, the meanings they drew from them, and the researcher's second order interpretation of the participants' meaning making (Smith et al., 2009).

The steps were as follows:

Reading and Re-reading

The initial step of the process can be likened to diving into the content of the interview and swimming in the details. Reading and re-reading allows the analyst to become intimately

acquainted with the data by reading their transcribed words and hearing their expressions and tone (Smith et al., 2009).

Initial Noting

The second step involves a deeper level of intensity, where the researcher pays the most attention to detail and a significant amount of time. Smith et al. (2009) explain that while suspending judgement, the analyst notes whatever piques curiosity, looking very closely at word usage, sentence structure, and meanings represented by particular phrases used. “This process ensures a growing familiarity with the transcript, and, moreover, it begins to identify specific ways by which the participant talks about, understands and thinks about an issue” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 83). Different forms of annotation are used to make sense of the content and process in the data offered by the participants’ stories. The descriptive comments discuss the content of the personal accounts, while linguistic comments speak to the significance of the way in which content is communicated and pieced together. When an analyst makes conceptual comments, they are addressing the meaning-making process that is implicit in the details the participants have chosen to share (Smith et al., 2009)

Developing Emergent Themes

This step relies more on the inductive reasoning of the researcher as the focus of the analysis goes from gathering data to honing in on relationships and repetition across notes. As annotations are added, the data expands tremendously, offering more information to be considered. “Themes are usually expressed as phrases which speak to the psychological essence of the piece and contain enough particularity to be grounded and enough abstraction to be conceptual (Smith et al., 2009, p. 92). The iterative process of rereading and annotating can allow themes to emerge (Smith et al., 2009).

Searching for Connection Across Emergent Themes

Increasing one level of abstraction, looking at the relationships among the themes takes place when all themes are listed, and connections are drawn between them. When linked themes are grouped together, they can produce a super-ordinate theme to represent them. Through subsumption, one existing theme may doubly emerge as the super-ordinate theme if it can serve to make sense of a set of common themes. Inversely, polarization involves linking some themes by their opposition to one another. Contextualization is a way to analyze ways that several themes fit together in the participants' stories. Numeration takes into account how often a theme comes up in the data, while paying close attention to the function of certain themes can illuminate ideas the participant is trying to communicate or interpretations of their narrative they hold or would like to inspire. These themes should be organized on a table and notes about this process can be kept in journal (Smith et al., 2009).

Moving to the Next Case

Themes from the initial case are not forgotten, but it is important to approach each new case with a posture of curiosity and with as much attention to detail as was offered to the first case. Husserl's idea of epoche, also known as bracketing, involves the suspension of personal perspective to look at new situations with an unpolluted view. This can be very difficult to carryout, but the process of compartmentalizing past knowledge or experiences may help to mitigate the influence of interpretations of the present analysis. (Moustakas, 1994). While information cannot be unlearned, measures are intentionally followed to hold space for new ideas to be explored in each new case (Smith et al., 2009).

Look for Patterns Across Cases

After each interview has been conducted and given the necessary focus, previous thoughts about other cases can be erected and similarities between cases will be drawn. Completing the last step of IPA, common themes are compared across participants and reorganized in new tables (Smith et al., 2009).

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are of utmost importance in both quantitative and qualitative research. Institutional review boards and codes of ethics set and enforce standards to ensure that research is carried out in a way that protects participants and the studies they are involved in. Ethics must pervade every portion of a proposal from inception onward to set the tone for why the topic is being explored and how the study will be conducted. When working with queer women of Afro-Caribbean descent, their multiple minority identities were considered to prevent continued marginalization of their lived experience (Creswell, 2009). Space was held for participants to be the experts of their own lives. They were interviewed in a thoughtful manner that was meaningful for them and will add valuable data for others. Various concerns like ownership of content, mandated reporting, purpose of the study, and protection of participants' identifying information were explained on the informed consent agreement (Creswell, 2009).

The Self of the Researcher

...Steeped in the relational and resource-based foundations of his field, as well as experience as a therapist and supervisor, encouraged counselors to balance their attention to risks with a curiosity about resources, and he stressed the importance of grasping the clients' experience within the context of their relationships with significant others. (Flemons & Granlik, 2013, p. xv)

My approach to research is informed by this Ericksonian strength-based clinical perspective in that I studied a phenomenon by attending to the population's burdens as well as appreciating their protective factors while exploring intersecting identities. Highlighting both the risks and the resources (Flemons & Granlik, 2013) of those being studied offers the study a fullness of engagement with the phenomenon in context. Descriptive analysis allows the reader to taste, see, smell, and touch the data as described by the participants. The relational nature of family therapy lends itself to a closer look at conversation and context. The array of human experience is full of vast complexities and rich emotions, making descriptive qualitative research a prime language in which to study it. In this paradigm, the subjective meaning-making process is privileged (Smith et al, 2009), while the researcher bracketed her biases as much as she could and analyzed and interpreted whatever data emerged from the inquiry. I was a queer woman of Afro-Caribbean descent exploring resilience and intersecting identities in the same population I was a member of. I practiced epoche (Moustakas, 1994) and bracketed my own experiences in order to prioritize the participants' stories. As a scientist practitioner, I also de-centered my clinical responsibilities and privileged the role of researcher with participants in the study. I did, however, use my therapeutic sensibilities to remain curious and explore the data that emerged in the study.

CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH FINDINGS

This study explored the lived experiences of queer women of Afro-Caribbean descent, centering the accounts of resilience that come to light at the intersection of their identities. The participants interviewed shared personal insights about their gender identity and sexual orientation in relation to their race and ethnicities in society. Rich details were gathered from these layered experiences and their corresponding significance through Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (Smith et al., 2009) . This chapter presents the themes that emerged from the data, organized into superordinate themes and subordinate themes. Participant observations and interpretations of events shared were explored. Field notes were taken during the transcription and reading and reading processes. Then meanings were drawn case by case, and relationships among themes across interviews were discussed. Examples of each theme were supported by participants voices, found in direct quotes of their descriptions and perceptions. Their stories frame by data analysis aim to shed light on the systemic resilience of queer women of Afro-Caribbean origin and expand the existing research about their lived experiences.

Sample Demographics

The lived experiences of the queer women of Afro-Caribbean descent population were explored through interviews with a sample of 4 women. Demographic information was collected prior to study participation to ensure inclusion criteria was met. The participants were each assigned a pseudonym and disclosed their age, sexual orientation, and ethnic background as listed in Table 1.

Table 1***Demographic Information***

Table 1	Demographic Information		
Pseudonym	Sexual Orientation	Age	Ethnicity
Yellow	Queer	25	Haitian
Blue	Lesbian	33	Jamaican
Green	Bisexual	34	Haitian
Grey	Lesbian	40	Jamaican

Each woman expressed having a sexual orientation that included attraction to women. The sample was comprised of participants of Haitian and Jamaican lineage who currently reside in North America.

All 4 participants were asked the same set of questions with additional follow up questions from the possible prompts in a semi-structured format. In this chapter, passages from these interviews will be presented and prominent themes and sub-themes emerging from the data will be considered in light of the existing research on the population. Data analysis will include meaning-making of participant experiences and understandings formed from their recalled life events.

Emergence of Themes

During the analysis of the interview transcripts, ten superordinate themes emerged with corresponding subordinate themes. Themes are described below in Table 2.

Table 2***Superordinate and Subordinate Themes***

Superordinate Themes	Subordinate Themes
Journey to Identity Formation and Acceptance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grasping the Intricacies of LGBTQ language • Acceptance • Coming Out

Importance of Being Out	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relief in Being Out • Self-Expression Depending on Context • Being Visible
Selecting Supportive Environments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Selecting Safe Environments • Visibility of Others • Family Support • Friend Support • Queer Community
Advocating for Yourself and Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dismissal and Erasure of Sexuality • Dehumanization and Objectification • Undermining Cultural Misconceptions • Legitimacy of Relationships • Letting Go of Arguing My Humanity
Complexity of Faith	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contradiction of Faith and Sexuality • Safety of Church • Intertwining of Faith and Nationality • Belief
Complexity of Ethnicity and Race	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong Black/Caribbean Woman • Conflict of Race/ethnicity and Sexuality • More Issues Being Black than Being Queer
Family Strain and Rejection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Isolation and Belonging • Longing for Parental Support
Self-care and Sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helping Others • Joy as Resistance • Creativity as Survival • Reading and Learning

Importance of Intersectional Identities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fear of Harm or Retribution • Importance of Other Identities • Authenticity
Hopes of Freedom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changes in Acceptability • Wanting to Find Love and Be Happy • Living my Dreams Now • Hope for a Better Future

Among all themes observed in this study, 10 met the suggested criteria of being present in at least half of the sample (Smith et al., 2009). 80% of the superordinate themes were found in all participant interviews. 20% of superordinate themes, including: Importance of Being Out and Hopes of Freedom were expressed by 80% of the participant sample as shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Identifying Recurrent Themes

Table 3				
Superordinate Themes	Yellow	Blue	Green	Grey
Journey to Identity Formation and Acceptance	x	x	x	X
Importance of Being Out	x	x		X
Selecting Supportive Environments	x	x	x	X
Advocating for Yourself and Community	x	x	x	X
Complexity of Faith	x	x	x	X

Complexity of Ethnicity and Race	x	x	x	X
Family Strain and Rejection	x	x	x	X
Self-care and Sustainability	x	x	x	X
Importance of Intersectional Identities	x	x	x	X
Hopes of Freedom	x		x	X

Journey to Identity Formation and Acceptance

Throughout the interviews, participants looked back on the evolution of their self-development and walked the analyst through key moments in their identity formation. Each members of the sample elaborated on aspects of their various sexual, racial, ethnic, and gender identities and conveyed the connections they made between their self-concepts, personal experiences, and the societal ideas that frame them.

Grasping the Intricacies of LGBTQ Language

Research suggests that expressing non-heterosexuality at any age can pose a host of inherent stressors, in addition to meeting developmental milestones across the lifespan (Meyer, 2015). Participants discussed how queer individuals try to navigate fitting in with their peer groups while making sense of how they relate to the queer community. For example: Blue described how important language was to her sense of belonging within the LGBTQ+ community and identity formation.

Blue: There was a point when I would have to say about 2012-2013, when I didn't understand the language in the community, so I felt out of place and I started to wonder if

that out of place feeling was connected to a gender dysphoria. So, I researched that and stepped out into that. So, there was a time period when I went by them/their.

Feeling “out of place” with the LGBTQ+ labels she understood at the time, led Blue to question her gender identity. In solidarity with those who could not yet benefit from the present evolution of language, Yellow described framing her sexuality in terms that queer people before her did not have access to.

Yellow: My gender, I socially constructed it to have a first and last name: First is Nonbinary and the second is Woman. Nonbinary is name that I found for myself when I had the ability to figure out language and woman connects me to folks who did not have access to words like nonbinary, transgender, or whatever. So especially Audre Lorde for example, they didn’t necessarily, or even like Marsha P. Johnson. She called herself a transsexual at the time. We don’t use that language anymore. So, woman, I feel like kind of functions as a last name would.

In both cases, there was an expression of grappling with how one orients themselves in a sexual minority group and society at large. These conversations suggest that though labeling may have been disempowering at one point, negotiating self-descriptive language can call forth a sense of agency within a person to categorize themselves for themselves.

Acceptance

Consistent with the American Psychological Association’s (2015) stance that sexual orientation exists on a spectrum with multiple categories and varying degrees of intensity, participants reported different experiences of coming to terms with their individual non-normative sexualities. Green expressed observing her attraction to other girls at a young age and

dismissing it as children interacting with each other. But as a teenager, when those feelings resurfaced for her as a teenager, she began to think about her sexual orientation differently.

Green: I think like 6th grade. We used to have sleepovers in Miami, and we'd have all the girls in the neighborhood over and play games and I always felt like attracted to one or two. And doing other things and I was like "oh this is a good feeling." And I never thought anything of it, like oh we were just kids. You know. And the next year was like the same thing and then I think I maybe grew out of it. And then in high school, there was another field trip with a bunch of girls. One thing led to another and well I think I'm really attracted to girls.

While it took time for Green to view her attraction to women as legitimate, Grey expressed that she was able to identify her sexuality definitively at an early age, even though she knew what that acceptance might cost her.

Grey: And for a long time, I knew I was gay. I just came from a country that you were cursed or threatened if you live your truth. So even though I knew about my sexual orientation, I did not tell anyone, only close friends knew.

Similarly, Blue reported watching others struggle for validation from their loved ones and decided it was not a plight she was willing to suffer. Though she too acknowledges that self-acceptance was a process, she credited the affirmation of her own sexuality with the willingness to risk rejection to fully express it. Each participant acknowledged the dominant discourse of perceived deviance instituted by the laws in their countries of origin (Attai, 2017), yet pursued acceptance for themselves regardless of the repercussions. Study participants' acknowledgement of the possible backlash and persistence nonetheless suggests that acceptance is a valued part of identity formation in multiple minorities.

Blue: Well. I had observed other people fight for acceptance and I always despised that process that they had to go through: this rejection and this feel of needing to prove that you were worthy of love and that you were still supposed to be cared for. And I had seen too many of my friends be shunned or rejected by their friends or family. My process of acceptance for myself was getting to a place where I was willing to lose everything to be myself. And once I got to that point, I felt I owed no one an explanation. No one needed dare ask me about it, like it was not a topic for discussion.

Coming Out and Being Out

Coming out or communications of non-heterosexuality for study participants occurred with some trepidation but ultimately a resolve to live as a fully expressed human being. Being forthcoming about identifying as queer in the Afro-Caribbean diaspora while living in America is as much a shift in context as it is in opportunity. The danger of living an openly queer life was explicitly clear in her country of origin, but Grey noted that when in the United States, the possibility of being “out” was plausible because she saw others achieving it.

Grey: When I came to America, after a few years of being here and seeing more gay people than what I usually see in Jamaica, people living out and living their truth, I realized that that was the life I wanted. I did not want to hide anymore or lie anymore about who I loved and with whom I’m with. So, after being here for a few years, I came out.

Being Visible

While Grey spoke of being empowered to live in the truth of her sexuality after seeing others express their sexual orientations and gender identities openly, Yellow described what being out meant for her in terms of visibility.

Yellow: I don't think it always means; I don't know. I think it just means being yourself. It is not always about waving around a rainbow flag. You know. In the beginning, when you're first queer, it can kind of be like about the rainbows, aesthetics, and being visibly out. But I think for me it's like, can I wear a suit when I want to wear a suit, and no one is going to say anything to me? Like if I wear a dress the next day, are people going to be like what the fuck? More so, do I feel comfortable being all of myself, do I feel comfortable having my partner at events I go to for my college for example.

Yellow expanded the idea of visibility from the symbolism of a rainbow flag to those around her not being surprised by her gender expression or whom she might date in public. Participants discussed the importance of feeling "comfortable" despite stigma around their lifestyles. This support's Meyer's (2003) assertion of stigma being a social stressor for sexual minorities and adaptation to stigma as a way to ease discomfort.

Relief in Being Out

Like Yellow expressed under the subordinate theme of Being Visible, Grey also discussed her own visibility after coming out and described the relief that freedom in expression allowed her.

Grey: Oh my God. It felt like the world was lifted off my shoulder when I did. I could be me. I could dress the way I wanted to dress, date whomever I wanted to date without hiding. Hold hands with who I want to hold hands with without hiding. It's like a burden being lifted off my shoulders.

Self-Expression Depending on Context

Most participants made mention of some way in which they discovered that it was necessary for them to adjust their actions or presentation in order to maneuver in certain

surroundings or when the situation called for it. For example, Yellow explored how she may have to verbally out herself if her clothing allows her to pass as heterosexual and she is in a context where she would rather her queer identity be protected from conjecture.

Yellow: Depending on how I dress, it may be straight passing or not, in cases when I'm looking like a heterosexual woman, then I have to identify, I have to out myself in a way, so people do not make certain assumptions. So, it really depends on the audience that I'll have to label myself depending on how I present myself. It is complicated. It is not that I identify more with anything, I identify with being me more than anything, but for people to not define me for themselves I have to choose certain ways to identify myself.

Green discusses the fluctuation of her sexual orientation when she is spending time with groups of different genders. The American Psychological Association (2012) describes sexual orientation as fluid. This suggests that expressions of participant's sexual orientations could also be flexible as well.

Green: Being around the boys, it makes me feel like I'm a lesbian. I don't know if that makes sense, because you have to be so tough. And just being around all of the guys and watching them like "oh look girls" and I'm like "oh look girls!" And then with my girlfriends, like friends, I gravitate towards boys. I don't know. But like right now I feel like I'm more lesbian.

Yellow abstracts the "need" to be labeled or categorized in any manner as a social construct, imposed upon marginalized groups. This idea coincides with Meyer's (2003) conjecture that sexual minorities are often pressured to comply with societal norms or successfully navigate them, lest their character come in question and they are vilified for their victimhood.

Yellow: It depends on the space that I'm in. When I'm by myself, I don't need to identify as anything. Because I do not need to be legible to other people.

Selecting Supportive Environments

Maslow described belonging as a fundamental need (1943), so it makes sense that study participants highlighted the desire and pursuit for environments that felt supportive to them. Participants expressed seeking spaces that fostered freedom from judgement and belonging. This superordinate theme is particularly salient as selecting supportive environments is the foundation on which other themes of resilience are built.

Selecting Safe Environments

Every participant made mention of the need to be mindful of who they were around and what environments they were exposed to. There was a very clear concern for safety, both physical and emotional presented in the interviews. Grey discussed how careful she felt she had to be about who knew of her attraction to women.

Grey: So even though I knew about my sexual orientation, I did not tell anyone, only close friends knew. People who I hung out with, that also identified as gay or bisexual, those were the people who knew about my sexual orientation.

Grey highlighted the sense of safety that nondisclosure offered in public. Similarly, Green discussed how keeping her relationships private in the military offered her protection from gaze and gossip of others.

Green: They know that I date but it was never like bringing my partners around. There's this whole thing where you try not to bring your partners to military gatherings because everybody will just go crazy and gossip. So yeah. I was never into the whole- they never witnessed me like doing my lesbian thing I guess (laughing).

Continuing the discussion about safety in the general and professional spaces, Blue asserted that she makes it a practice to screen potential employers for fit and comfort.

Blue: I've also come to realize that I'm very selective now about where I go and what I choose to do right now. Even in job selections, I look at job interviews in a very different way. I am the one interviewing the firm, it's not them interviewing me. I need to know if I fit there, if I'm going to be happy there or be able to be myself there. So, I kind of take a different approach in interviews. I take a different approach in new friendships. I feel them out first to figure out if they're a good fit for me and not- because I might be a good fit for a lot of things, that does not mean that they're a good fit for me. So, I might just be pouring out and not getting anything back. I've learned early that that's not good. You can't pour from an empty cup. So, I go in spaces that pour back into me.

Yellow not only discusses community selectivity, but also that of time. Yellow describes restorative activities like “rest or art” as a means of survival, elucidating protection from systematic oppression as a contributor of wellbeing.

Yellow: I just try to be like very selective on how I use my time for productive things like rest or art. I think that is going to be the way that I survive this. Just by like recognizing that I am going to have to be kind of cliquish. Because I really have to screen the people that are in my life to make sure that they're safe people and that they can be valuable members of my community. I'm not for everybody and everybody is not for me and I'm really fine with that.

Family Support

An overwhelming amount of research shows that queer people of color often do not receive solidarity from their biological families (Follins et al, 2014). However, participants

shared how meaningful shows of support from their families of origin have been for them personally. Grey reported that she drew great comfort from her relationships with her family members.

Grey: I don't know, just being somebody's daughter, being somebody's mom. Having- That would be the place, being someone's family member, being someone's sister. I feel comfort being at home, being around my family.

Blue acknowledged that homophobia does exist in parts of her family tree. She, however, went on to explain that her family supported her by insulating her from homophobic reactions of other family members.

Blue: But as far as my family, they've been very accepting, very open, very honest. I have not felt rejection within my own family. Like don't get me wrong, there's family members the family doesn't deal with because they are homophobic. It's not that it didn't exist, it's that I never had to deal with it. I felt I was more protected from it.

Friend Support

Sister circles and chosen family have long provide sources strength and connection for Black women (Harden Bradford, 2017). This is consistent with the participant accounts as Grey explains:

Grey: My friends were very supportive. When I came out, my friends were super supportive.

Green's comments continue the sub-theme of friend support, by describing her friends as family. This is consistent with Meyer's (2011) work supporting that marginalized groups often extend the criteria of family beyond blood relation to include chosen family.

Green: The support I have is good enough. I do have friends. Like their mom, dad, or second mom, second dad I have, and can go to if I need like motherly love or fatherly love that I need to talk to about a relationship. I can go to them. Your family is who you make, so it's not always like blood.

Queer Community

An important aspect of the queer community is the visibility of others having a shared experience (Meyer et al., 2011). Participants discussed being positively impacted by seeing others live openly despite risk of persecution. This is supported by current research that stating that queer affirming spaces support resilience (Lytle et al., 2014). Blue reported being awestruck and inspired by LGBTQ+ youth enjoying themselves and each other.

Blue: That just blew my mind, like I saw other gay kids in Jamaica that looked like me, sitting there in Kingston, not hiding somewhere in the country. No, they were in broad daylight. The party started at 6pm and we were just out there playing dominoes, just eating and drinking, and it was just amazing for me. It was ground-breaking because at that point I just took another step forward, that no matter where I went, I was going to be me.

Green discusses the advantages of gathering with people who can relate to one another based on being sexual minorities. This suggests the importance of building community among marginalized populations.

Green: there's a lot of lesbians and gays in the military. We have our own little community, that we can go to, talk to each other about anything we're going through.

Advocating for Yourself and Community

Due to the dangerous nature of compound marginalization for multiple minorities, support as well as safety may be harder to come by (Meyer, 2015). This suggests that queer women of color often spend large amounts of time defending themselves to family, friends, and society, ensuring their voices are heard and rights and ultimately lives are preserved.

Participants expressed having to advocate for themselves and their communities. For example, Yellow explained having to request educational sources that reflect her minority identities and receiving backlash for pointing out a lack of representation on her class reading lists.

Yellow: It's super important to me. And it costs me a lot. I'm a doctoral student now and whenever I ask for queer authors or stuff about gender and sexuality especially since I study education policy. Identity is core to how you teach people. Especially when you have people like Gloria Ladson-Billings talking about culturally relevant curriculum and especially in studying education policy. When it is stripped, that means that all I study are white men and those problems affect me very differently. And so, it's difficult to always have to advocate for what you need to learn so I think that has been the biggest thing. Trying to advocate for being seen as a function of all of my identities, not just like human. I think for me when I'm by myself, I can be just human but I'm trying to do advocacy work and research and there is a very clear gap with Black bodies and the diaspora and queer bodies and disabled folks, then I have to be vocal because there is an act of violence that is happening. But by countering the act of violence, you get labeled Sapphire. And so, it's kind of just like balancing what am I trying to prove here. So if I've trying to make a point, like look I'm not included, I don't feel seen and it's not actually going to benefit me, and it's going to hurt the situation more, then I will rather

disengage from a lecture and read Gloria Anzaldua on my computer for the lecture and get what I need to get without causing a riff between a professor who thinks I'm just trying to make things difficult when I'm really just trying to feel seen in the work or make sense of it in my own complex identity. And so, I think, even in the academy, it is very difficult to do so.

Dismissal and Erasure of Sexuality

Homosexuality in the Caribbean has been legally targeted and policed since colonization (Attai, 2017). Interviews revealed participant experiences of dismissive attitudes toward their sexual orientations by their cultures and communities. This supported Calixte's (2005) discussion of erasure in Afro-Caribbean societies.

Blue: Well I know a lot of them do not acknowledge it because it's been taught so much in a hateful way that we don't belong, that we're basically an abomination so they don't acknowledge it.

For Yellow, she expresses that there is a sense of dismissal and embarrassment of her parents by her admission of non-heterosexuality, almost as if this reality were something to be left unsaid or silenced.

Yellow: My mom, when I came, she was like "don't say that." Like she just didn't want to hear it. Like it was the first time in my life I embarrassed her.

Dehumanization and Objectification

One participant discussed dehumanization repeatedly, describing her experience of being treated like an image or caricature, but not as a person with a life beyond the cause of equity.

Yellow discussed the difficulties of being overlooked as actually having the humanity she finds herself needing to fight for.

Yellow: I don't think they see me as a human being. To be honest with you, I think they are so busy seeing me as a product of the things that I do to survive that they often do not see how many doctor's appointments I have to go to or the nights I'm so allergic to things I'm doing breathing treatments for hours. Police follow me at the park for no damn reason or like I think a lot of times people see me for the things that I've done or the successful things and where I'm at. But because it's so far removed from my community, I'm the only person getting a doctoral degree, I don't think they see me like a person having struggles, that has to cook and clean or like just the things that make me human. Like that I have bad days sometimes. I think people think that I'm just a radical crusader just on my shit like all the time. It's like no I'm really a person. I'm a person and I don't always want to have to combat hegemony because honestly or school people on what they should be saying or set some kind of community standards among us. I don't want to do that. I don't do that because it's fun for me.

Yellow continues discussing dehumanization, pointing to Meyer's thought that minorities will often be framed as having moral failings if they respond to mistreatment and do not superhumanly rise above it (2003).

Yellow: But I'm so busy trying to explain to you that I'm a human being. And that black people don't have moral deficits or any kind of deficits.

This suggests that there is this pressure that black and queer women have to represent well because they are often not allowed to be merely human or flawed. Blue's thoughts convey this very sentiment:

Blue: I always think I have to be on my "A" game no matter what. Like I don't get to have a "B" game day, because I feel like they're just going to align my lack of 120%

performance and say it's because I'm gay and I don't ever want the community to be reflected in anything less than amazing. I always feel this pressure to do and be and go above and beyond.

Undermining Cultural Misconceptions

Participants of Haitian descent discussed experiencing their culture being written off because of stereotypes or colonization of history. Yellow discussed being “damaged” by the negative way education portrayed her ethnicity and how she was able to reframe the narrative of literacy and limitation with an acknowledgement of multiple intelligences.

Yellow: I talked to them about how what I learned about Haiti damaged me, but I knew it was worth something. I knew that even though my grandmother couldn't read or write, she's very smart. And it forced me to think outside of the box about is education and what is decolonization and what am I actually doing.

Yellow also expressed her frustration with limited reading representing multicultural voices and with her cultural background being presented poorly. She discussed the difficulty of excelling beyond her peers in course work but still being considered a member of a disadvantaged group.

Yellow: I really read a paper in college that coded Haitian as an ethnic disadvantage. I almost lost my shit literally. Because of course I am the only Haitian person. This is the first time we read about Black people and Haitians at that. And you're coding it as a disadvantage as I'm whooping everybody's ass in the classroom. Like that is very very very hard for me.

Legitimacy of Relationships

Continuing in the vein of dehumanization and dismissal of queer sexuality, participants expressed noticing their relationships being delegitimized as well. Some participants noted trying

to shield their partnerships from said dismissal avoiding discussing them with people who do not support them. Others reported allowing family to engage with their partners so they could see the depth of their relationships firsthand. Green felt very strongly about enforcing the former approach.

Green: It was hard to let my family know. Like I said, to this day, I don't think they realize— like realize okay this is me. They still think this is like a phase. So, I can't go to them and talk about relationships and I refuse to.

Yellow, however, took on an advocacy approach and invited her parents to witness the true nature of her and her partner's bond.

Yellow: At my second graduation, my partner is really charismatic so like her and my dad were best friends by the end of the night. Once my partner bought my family lunch while shopping at the mall. And my mom was like "oh she really does care about you and all of us" and I was just like "Yeah! Yeah, like it's not crazy. It's really not weird. Like she'll open the doors or fold clothes. My brother has a disability, so she goes out of her way to make sure he's included and all that stuff. And so, my mom can see, based on her actions that she's genuine and that she does want to make sure that I'm fine. And if that's not what you want for your kid then there's other things that we need to work out in therapy. Because that's what somebody needs out of a partner. Like being accepted.

Yellow expressed her frustration with the sense of non-normalcy Meyer (2003) discussed in sexual minority populations, like the inability for same-sex couples to get married as straight couples could prior to the passing of the Marriage Equality Act. These expressions support Meyer's description of stigma and prejudicial delegitimization as contributors of minority stress (2003).

Letting Go of Arguing My Humanity

Minority stress has been found to wear on an individual both emotionally and physically. This has serious implications for wellbeing in Black and queer populations (Meyer, 2015). For the sake of her mental health and spirituality, Yellow explained that she had to “let go” pushing for acceptance from people who may never be open to offering it. Meyer’s work suggests that Yellow, in fact, could not “afford” to continually expose herself to the stress of combating prejudice without some sort of respite or delegation of the educational burden.

Yellow: So, the hardest thing is like translation which honestly, I make less and less time for that because I can't afford to constantly translate my humanity. And so, I had to let go of the idea of being understood and being legible I feel like people who get it are just going to get it and people who don't like it, it's just probably not their lesson. And the Universe and karma and Jesus, will make sure that you learn the lesson if it's meant for you to learn. But it's not my job to teach it to you. So, I've had to identify my own ego in trying to save people or teach people or try to make them better. I had to recognize that as kind of colonizing and be like the Universe got you because the Universe got me, so I just had to let go of like trying to make people accept me.

Complexity of Faith

Froma Walsh (2008) spoke to the paradox that faith can offer comfort in distressing times, yet also induce shame and inspire condemnation for controversial decisions and identities. Participants shared their struggles with finding a way for the teachings of their faith traditions to coexist with their sexual orientations. This suggests that for queer women of Afro-Caribbean descent, issues of faith can be both deeply important but incredibly difficult to navigate.

Contradiction of Faith and Sexuality

Participant accounts authenticate Wright & Stern's assertion that heteronormative ideologies can have damaging effects on self-acceptance in queer populations (2016). Grey touches up on the internalized homophobia she battled with which was instilled by Christian ideologies in Jamaica.

Grey: Growing up your whole life, you hear being gay is a sin among all the other stuff that are shunned. You know, so growing up there and being gay, it's like in my mind I'm like "God please. I pray every day, let me - help me to feel differently. Help me not to be this person. Help me not to like who I like." You know I'm trying to pray away the gay, but it doesn't work. It's not going anywhere.

Grey's excerpt acknowledged the non-acceptance of her sexuality by her religion as well as her deep desire to comply with the spiritual teachings against homosexuality. She also poignantly admits that no matter how earnest her desire to alter her sexual orientation, "the gay" would simply not go away. Green echoed Grey's knowledge that her attraction to women would not be welcomed by her religion.

Green: Well I think I'm really attracted to girls, to women but because of my culture, I'm going to go ahead and put this to the side because I'm Catholic and we don't play that. They don't play that.

Yellow, however, was able to find herself reflected in records of queer people existing in the early history of Christianity.

Yellow: I think the Christian queer contradiction always throws people off. And I'm like do your research! I really want to pull the Midrash out with them and look through it and

talk to them about it. Like that it's actually not as weird as you think. That there've been gay people who have been Christians since the dawn of time and like I don't know.

Enduring Belief

Like the other participants, Blue also discussed negotiating her faith in light of her sexual orientation. Blue shared about her experience with the church at large and how it has cause her to “step away” from religious spaces for a number of years, yet she continues to pray privately.

Blue: Faith is still a battle that I deal with now. Technically I baptized Catholic and I re-baptized as an Anglican in my teenage years. I was Christened a Catholic baby I re-baptized as an Anglican in my teenage years. In the sense of— Catholicism is not welcoming of homosexuals and a whole bunch of other things; they seem to harp on making sure that homosexuals are reminded every now and again that they are not welcomed. So, I had to deal with that and with that I stepped away from religion for a very long time. I think it's going on probably I'd say about 6 years I haven't consistently gone to a church. To mass, I have not gone in like 6 years. I do however go to the chapel. I still pray in the chapel privately. I still get holy water from the church, but I am not as connected to the religious aspect anymore because of that type of feeling. Because remember I said I don't put myself in spaces where I don't feel I genuinely belong. I don't feel like I belong in the Catholic church.

Grey spoke to the strength that she has internally and her faith that endures beyond anyone's judgement or rejection. Her belief, much like her strength remain resilient. This suggests that faith can be as much a resource as it can be a deterrent.

Grey: So, I don't sit and dwell on who's not going to talk to me because of this and what I'm going to do with my life because of this. Because I feel like I'm this person with this

amazing strength that can overcome almost every and anything thrown my way. So, if you don't talk to me because of this little part that makes me me then I will not sit down and die. I will move on. So that little thing, there's so much more, so I drew strength from within. I have faith. I still have Christian values. I still pray. I still listen to sermons, go to church when I can.

Complexity of Race and Ethnicity

Though race is socially constructed, it can serve as an indicator of potential shared experiences, particularly oppression and bias in Black or African American people (Crenshaw, 1989). Participants expressed different ways their lives and sexuality were nuanced by their cultural background. This suggests that race and West Indian heritage add layers of complexity to identity in queer women of Afro-Caribbean descent. Yellow described how she oriented herself growing up in a multicultural location as well as when she felt the need to disclose her Haitian roots in the African American community.

Yellow: But when I'm around other people, they can see that I'm Black. They don't always know that I'm Haitian. Some people can. Some people walk up to me and say, "You must be that spicy Black or that foreign Black." And I'm like "I'm Haitian. I guess I don't know (laughing)." I grew up in a place where people did not say they were Black. I grew up in New York City where instead of people looking at you and asking, "what are you," thinking of a state, because it is such an international place. And so, in Haitian churches, I don't have to identify myself as Haitian but in African American spaces, I may need to identify myself as Haitian.

Strong Black/Caribbean Woman

Current research has found the expectation of being impenetrably strong for Black women to be a liability for their physical and mental wellbeing (Evans et al., 2017).

Black womanhood has become virtually synonymous with strength. But the performance of this strength comes at an enormous cost. The paradox of the StrongBlackWoman is that while it was developed as a defense against structural oppression, its embodiment predisposes Black women to a wide range of mental and physical health problems.

(Walker-Barnes, 2017, p. 43-44)

Two participants, however, reported finding inspiration in the cultural identity of strength and resilience rather than encumbrance as the research suggested. Grey described herself in terms of strength, race, gender and centered these identities over her sexual orientation.

Grey: Just being a strong Black woman. As I said being gay is just a small part of what makes me me. Being Black is more so a bigger part of me than what my sexuality is. So being a Black woman who has overcome poverty, who has been able to afford a lifestyle that is comfortable. This is not very rare in America because the opportunities are here, but it's just that you can break glass ceilings and be who you are, get whatever career you need, be driven, see others driven individuals and be around other driven individuals. Doesn't--You won't just lay down and say because I am gay or because I am Black, I cannot do this or that. But just being able to do and to be.

Like Grey, Green too credits her resilience to her cultural identity. Green specifies that her experiences being raised in Haiti helped her to develop strength that would serve her in the future.

Green: Being like a survivor, like being able to take it on. And then I think growing up in the Haitian culture helped me to be able to build that strength to be a survivor. Cause like I lived in Haiti for like 10 years, so I've witnessed many more struggles than what I'm

dealing with here. Like I've survived that so it helped be very resilient to anything anyone can throw at me.

Conflict of Race/Ethnicity and Sexuality

Attai (2017) explored the systemic homophobia that permeates throughout the African Diaspora in the Caribbean. The socialization of intolerance against queer people conveys a message of nonacceptance in West Indian cultures and threat of violence if discovered. Participants spoke to the conflict this created between their sexualities and ethnicities. Grey discussed the judgment and harm that could be anticipated for non-heterosexuality.

Grey: I just came from a country that you were cursed or threatened if you live your truth.

Green described the religious and familial difficulties of coming out in the Haitian society. Religion compounding the understanding of local anti-queer sentiments, Green noted that living openly with another women romantically would simply not be a possibility.

Green: Since I was born over there and raised in the Catholic school, so it was hard to come out and say, "well I like girls." Cause it's really frowned upon in Haiti, so it was not easy to.

She continues:

Green: I think in the Haitian culture, there's always like that little thing like you know if I go to Haiti will I be able to bring my girlfriend with me and just walk around? No. I already know.

More Issues Being Black than Being Queer

Participants reported experiencing more hardships due to racism than to homophobia in the United States. This is consistent with previous research stating a study with Black lesbians

reported involvement in Black churches as a shielding community from racism, despite known homophobia (Bowleg et al, 2003).

Grey: I've had more issues being black than being gay. I've never missed out on an opportunity because of my sexuality. As I said it's a part of me. It doesn't make up the whole me. So even if I'm being criticized or judged for that one part of me, I have never seen or heard it. It has never stopped me from getting raises or stopped me from getting a promotion. But I have been walked around, watched when I go into a store, not because I am gay but because I am Black. So, I have never really experienced, since I've been here in the states, never experienced any bashing for my sexual orientation. I have gotten more criticized and bashed for being Black than for being gay.

Yellow expressed how long systemic racism has been studied and discussed, as well as how deeply painful and wearisome it is to experience.

Yellow: Black people have been writing about these experiences for over 100 years in the academy, let alone outside of the academy. So, it's just hard for me to- I don't think people realize how difficult it is for me to have to deal with it and how much distance I have to put between them. It's not like I'm too cool for school, it's that I can only take so much. And I can't be in those spaces because it is so violent. I don't think they see the violence, or I don't think they see the impact of the violence.

Family Strain and Rejection

Every participant in this study disclosed experiencing family strain as a result of sharing their sexual orientation with their relatives. Some cited family rejection as their primary concern with expressing their sexual orientation. Such fears are consistent with the research expressing

multiple minorities fearing judgement from their biological families (Meyer et al, 2011). Grey poignantly described this fear.

Grey: My only issues with being gay was fear of not being accepted by my family. And at the end of the day telling your family and trying to make sure that they don't break ties with you because of you being who you are.

Isolation and Belonging

Yellow disclosed thinking of home as a place to be fully accepted but acknowledged that she does not have a "space like that." This suggests that having a home where parts but not all of yourself are accepted can feel incredibly isolating.

Yellow: What's hard is not always, like my home is the place where I could be all of myself with people who accept all of me. But I don't have a space like that.

Yellow discussed how she aimed to soothe this loneliness by seeking community. She also acknowledged how strange it was that she felt she had to cross an ocean to not feel as isolated or alone.

Yellow: I was going to go to the James Baldwin conference in France for community, but it was also kind of crazy to think that I would have to leave the country to find people who think what I study is valuable. That's kind of a hard thought to swallow too. So, I guess the loneliness of it, the isolation of it.

Grey also acknowledged the isolation in relational strain and empathized with older more traditional family members as they struggled toward acceptance of her queer identity. She ultimately stated she would also manage if they could not accept her.

Grey: Some people you know you can't just get up and say hey this is who I am and expect that people who have different beliefs than yours or grew up hearing a certain thing that they're going to be open and accepting. You just have to give people time. And

if they come around then it's absolutely wonderful and if they don't or can't, then as I said I'm strong.

Longing for Parental Support

Building on the sub-theme of isolation and belonging, each participant interview expressed a longing for parental support after revealing non-heterosexuality. Some received the support eventually after first being rejected from their homes. Others reported their parents are still trying to manage parental support of their queer identities.

Grey: Initially my dad. But at the same time, it's something that, you know, I didn't tell him because of being fearful of how he would take it. And then him finding out about my sexuality the way that he did came as a surprise to him as well. So, it took him awhile to get over it. And at the time I was very upset. But we got passed it. We're in a great place now.

Yellow also reported a desire to engage with her parents more intimately about her romantic partnerships.

Yellow: I wish I could tell my parents more about my relationships. Like I think that it's just something that they don't ask about necessarily. With my dad he'll ask about my girlfriends, like he honestly— he likes all my girlfriends whether he knew it or not that they were my girlfriend, but he's always been like “how are they doing and what's going on with them” and always interested. Versus my mom who doesn't ask at all about it or if I mentioned it, she just kind of quiets up.

Self-care and Sustainability

The introduction and literature review of this study highlight the perils of racism, sexism, homophobia, and xenophobia faced by queer women of Afro-Caribbean descent. When violence and marginalization are commonplace occurrences, stamina becomes a valued commodity. Self-

care and sustainability were explored in the interviews as participants discussed ways, they insulated themselves from the barrage of intersectional problems they are exposed to regularly. Lorde (1982) expressed that safeguarding for Afro-Caribbean people begins at a young age. Yellow brought up the concept of sustainability as it related to preserving her wellbeing and that of her community.

Yellow: I'm hopeful for the ability to make contributions to folks, to impact them in a way that people's contributions have impacted me. Sustainability is the biggest thing for me. And I'm into the environment, but I think that sustainability has a lot to do with relationships and people, and like what are we doing to make sure that people in the future have things? What are we doing to make sure that the next generation has opportunities? I think my vision is just that students that are sitting in classrooms I'm in 30, 40 years from now aren't still looking at the white ass syllabus I'm looking at this year. That's like a start and that's something that hopefully I change if I become a professor because that's not what they will be reading in my class. Like I hope to share more information about eating and ways that we can improve our bodies because our bodies are our homes at the end of the day. The things that I want to do, they're kind of unclear. But my vision for the future is just like more community responsibility, more interconnectivity, more empathy hopefully. That's the biggest thing, I think. Empathy and compassion can go a long way. Just diversifying different boards or political regimes. Just making sure that different people are represented.

Yellow likened sustainability to creating environments for underrepresented people to be included and thrive. In this vein, both self-care and sustainability are rebellious efforts (Lorde, 1988) to humanize and hold space for the resilience of generations to come.

Helping Others

Studies report that “relational lifelines with extended kin and social networks can provide practical assistance, emotional support, and vital community resources” (Walsh, 2017, p. 76).

This coincides with participants explaining the importance of their desires to assist as mentors or chosen family to members of their communities. This suggests that relationships are central among women in queer Afro-Caribbean communities and the resilience of others is a shared priority. Grey discusses her goal of having monetary and emotional capital and hope to share the wealth.

Grey: Financial freedom. Being with my person. Travel with my person. Help out with nonprofit organizations. Give back to the community. Mentorship. Being a mentor to someone that’s going through any kind of difficulties or overall just somebody who wants to grow. I don’t feel like I am there yet, but I want to get to that place where I could possibly be a mentor to someone, be able to give back to someone. Live out so loud and so proud of my ethnicity and my sexual orientation and just be a role model to somebody.

Green expresses her willingness to share her experiences and accounts of resilience to inspire others.

Green: I think they look at me as an inspiration to be honest. I don’t know why. Like my experience, and what I’ve been through in life. I’ve always been opened to share my growing up, they’re always very surprised of what I’ve been through. Like at such a young age growing up, I’ve been kidnapped twice, almost died in a fire, just living through the 90s in Haiti with the whole thing and surviving. And having to join the military, going to two wars, Iraq and Afghanistan, being so resilient. In 2005 being in

Iraq and going through so much stuff and not being bothered by it. Like how you can be so resilient, and this doesn't bother you. And I'm like well because I've seen worse. You know and I'm always like, I'm going to get through this. It was nothing. They always look at me like man you're so inspiring and brave and I wish I could be like you. So, I think they look at me as an inspiration from what I can tell and from what they've expressed to me.

Joy as Resistance

Thriving is a key component of resilience (Luthar et al., 2000). If the goal of oppression is to demoralize and conquer, then joy is certainly a way to resistance. This suggests that a potent antidote for dehumanization and humiliation might be affirmation and enjoyment. Yellow discussed her thought process as she shifted her focus toward survival from martyrdom to joy.

Yellow: People have already martyred themselves for this cause I don't need to be another. The best resistance I can have is my joy, my life. It's like family. So that's kind of how I've been shifting the focus.

Hope through Mental Health Struggles

In Solution-Focused Brief Therapy work with LGBTQ+ populations, Ouer (2015) suggests inviting queer clients into questions about their preferred outcomes, even when futures are difficult to imagine. In this excerpt, Blue describes that getting out of the “dark hole” of suicidality was linked to her ability to orient herself toward a future, even one as basic as being alive tomorrow. This speaks to the role hope may play as a driving force of resilience.

Blue: I was just hoping to live because I went through very dark periods of even suicidal attempts at once. Back then, the only hope I had was to live, be alive tomorrow. Once I got out of that dark hole, it was like okay you're living, so what do you do next? So, then it was like ok let's see.

Grey spoke about wanting to be able to still her mind, but not yet being able to achieve that sense of peace.

Grey: Being able to be still. I mean I feel like I'm not there yet because I don't know necessarily how to be still. I want to be still (laughing), but I don't really know how to acquire that stillness. And knowing that I have the—and I'm not still because of my mind, it's just very always on overdrive all the time.

Creativity as Survival

“Suffering can be transcended through creative expression, as in writing, music, or the arts” (Walsh, 2017, p. 225). Yellow reported that she taps into her gift as an artist and writer and uses creative forms of expression to process her emotions and withstand the woes of bigotry. This suggests that survival and sustainability may both be supported by using creativity as forms of emotional and social self-care.

Yellow: And that's honestly how I survive: writing books writing poetry sharing different pieces of media my paint sometimes I'm selling some masks now I'm gonna send some to Haiti but I'm also trying to like give them to the homeless people that I see on the side of the road 'cause they need masks too and not be able to afford them. So, I try to create-to create opportunities for people who are like me in different ways that they may not even see or know that I'm feel connected to and just like provider resources. If I can write these books, I sell them on Amazon, or I do readings and talks, and I talk to people about what it means to be yourself and like why it's so important to be yourself.

Reading and Learning

This subordinate theme came out of a discussion on how to deal with isolation. Yellow explained that being one of the only members of her marginalized communities, she turned to reading classic texts that represented her experiences.

Yellow: By accepting the contradiction. By reading Emilie Townes and Gloria Anzaldua, and Toni Morrison. Like I am determined to finish her collection this year. If I didn't read those books and see myself, like James Baldwin *Just above my Head*, *Tar-baby*, *Sula* especially *Sula*. If I hadn't read these books in the last couple months. If I hadn't read those books, I would not be okay because to like to explain this to a Westerner or a colonized mind, it has to be linear. And to really get the layers, they don't get the multi-dialogical framework. They don't get the quilting that is inherent to how we make sense of things. If I wasn't able to find a mirror, if I wasn't able to find a curriculum, for my own humanity, I would die. Straight up (laughing). Like I would die. I don't know what I would do. And maybe not physically die, but metaphysically. I would not be okay because I would walk through the world feeling like an anomaly and no one likes that. Like you can be different but to know that there are other people thinking similar things who are valuing those things.

Yellow explained the loneliness of being an outlier and the comfort she drew from the books that made her feel seen and understood.

Importance of Intersectional Identities

Kimberle Crenshaw (1989) wrote on intersectionality as the relationship between societal factors and their effects on the lives of multiply oppressed populations. This superordinate theme and corresponding subordinate themes explore the multiple facets of the sample's lived

experiences, including the unique struggles and resiliencies born out of their multiple minority identities. This suggests that queer women of Afro-Caribbean descent meet themselves at the intersection of their own identities.

Sexuality Racialized

Yellow expressed experiencing a sense of being used or fetishized when dating interracially in the past. She reported these occurrences as her first time experiencing the intersection of racial bias with her sexuality.

Yellow: And throughout college, I was the only out black queer person so that was the first time that my sexuality was racialized. And so, I continued to date more I guess specifically queer women but then like only black queer woman after a point because it just I dated like two white girls' kind of just—I felt like there was a lot of racial fetishization or like rebellion in it.

Fear of Harm or Retribution

Fear of rejection from family, friends, and others due to faith supported homophobia, is a common experience in West Indian queer women. This form of prejudice is deeply rooted in the culture and instituted in the fabric of day-to-day interactions in society (Allen, 2012). Grey acknowledged the legitimacy of the risks, but also discussed her desire to live with her partner and not in fear of the judgement or rejection that her truth may elicit from religious onlookers in her life.

Grey: When I'm living here and my partner is living over there because we're afraid of coming out or retribution from our peers or family members who feel like it's a sin to be gay, then you're not living your truth for them. So, it is very important to be able to come out and you know, be shunned if your truth hurts other people. But just live your truth.

Blue was descriptive about the fear of bodily harm for being masculine presenting lesbian at home visiting in Jamaica. She expresses how her mother's fear for her wellbeing was absorbed by her and that fear became her own.

Blue: I think a defining moment— I can think of a couple. One was going back home. My mom was afraid of me traveling back home by myself. Anytime I went to Jamaica since migrating here, I always had to travel with her. And that fear had translated to me for a very long time. I became afraid of home because I thought somebody would hurt me, somebody would kill me. That they would go out of their way to target me because I am masculine presenting. So, it's kind of a little easier to pick me out of a crowd well that person might be a lesbian. So, for years that fear had translated.

Yellow also shared her concern for her life, but expressed her fear was also related to overt shows of racism possible with partners' families in areas proudly displaying confederate flags. She reported having lost a friend who was shot by his white girlfriend's family.

Yellow: Like some girl tried really to bring me to Appalachia to meet her family and I wasn't really comfortable doing that because they have rebel flags everywhere there. There's just certain ideas that even if you don't feel like your family specifically believes in that but when you're in an environment where those kinds of ideologies are rampant, so public, you don't actually know what your family believes. And so, one of my friends, he was dating a white girl and he got shot.

These sub-themes suggest that the of fear of retribution and bodily harm that exists for queer women of Afro-Caribbean descent at the intersection of nationalized and religiously instituted homophobia and unchecked racism, are different than the experience of those threats

individually. The multi-layered context of these problems combined produce specialized conditions and nuanced forms of oppression for those exposed to them.

Importance of Other Identities

Intersectionality can form novel cumulative problems, but it also has the opportunity to create new resiliencies. Allen (2012) incorporates Black Caribbean and queer influences with discussions about identity and expressed encounters. Participants of this study highlighted how their intersecting identities made for diverse experiences and richer resiliencies. Green appeared to enjoy a range of identities from the military to lesbian to Haitian survivor.

Green: I always felt that it's good to have so many things going on. Like I'm so grateful to be of the Haitian culture. Like just being able to celebrate the independence. Like I'm so impressed with being able to tell someone my country was the first Black freed country because we fought for our freedom and it's great to be able to share the stories, I know about it. And then just like being in the military, when you start talking and you let the know that you're in the military. They're like oh my God, that's so awesome. Then I'm a lesbian, they're like oh my God you're kidding. You're too pretty to be a lesbian. What does that mean?

Stephane: What does that mean?

Green: I don't know. I get the best of both worlds. Like all the worlds. I love it. I think it's great.

In addition to Black queer woman from the Caribbean, Yellow drew her identity from her studies and what she feels like she could and could not accomplish with that identity.

Yellow: Yeah for the most part I think school has shaped my identity as a scholar and an academic.

Yellow continues, using humor to make her point how much strength and money she would need to take on the wide scale problems of systemic oppression in the world. Yellow, instead, focused on the ways in which smaller changes have already occurred like her receiving a scholarship and strategizing ways to utilize her graduate training that can be used in service of her non-normative identities.

Yellow: What are ways that we can use the fact that I had advanced knowledge in a lot of areas to like make micro level changes. 'Cause I got a big scholarship to Vanderbilt, that was a micro level change. So, I can keep doing little things to have big impacts, that would be good enough for me. I'm not trying to change the world. That's not what God intended for me. I would be a lot stronger (laughing). Maybe wealthier, if that was the case. I would be Jeff Bezos.

Grey also discussed the strength she drew from being a Black Jamaican woman who happens to be gay and prospers in her career. Grey reported that she does not feel that any of her identities have held her back in any way, but still acknowledges how racism could affect her not getting hired over someone of another race.

Grey: Being all of those things is just. I wouldn't change any of them. I wouldn't want to change any of them because none of the above have made me be less of who I am. I want to do more as a Black woman. I want to be more academically, career-wise. I want to get back my time by being more financially free. But I don't think any of them have stopped me from achieving anything. Or any of those things have- have- I won't say any of those things have not helped me. Jamaicans, if you know or heard, are usually very hard workers. They are not people who just sit around and wait for handouts or anything like that. I mean you have differences in every culture. I mean you have some lazy ones and

then you have some strong ones who go out there and work for what they want. But with all of those combined, I wouldn't want to be anything else and none of those have stopped me from being anything. Being Black of course, you maybe will not get a job that you apply for that someone of another race would get, but I've never-I've gotten into a career that has never stopped from getting a job or getting a promotion because of my Blackness or my gayness or me being a woman.

Authenticity

Racial, ethnic, and sexual minorities are often subjected to pressures to cope with biased-based exclusions and conform to heterosexist ideals (Meyer et al., 2011). Participants expressed a need to tell the truth about themselves and live authentically. This suggests that after being relegated to social hiding, participants prioritized living in the fullness of their identities. For example, Grey discussed how important it was to be open about her life partner and allow her life to embody that truth.

Grey: It's very important because living a lie and telling lies about what you're doing, who you're with, your love, the person you want to grow old with.- It's very important to live the truth.

Yellow's excerpt spoke to the selective ways in which society often accepts one part of her but rejects another. She discusses how she incorporated various aspects of her identities and made sure to include the ones that may be less palatable to some, because those parts are no less her. And she refuses to "parcel" herself out.

Yellow: I think there is like an un-writing of that identity, but I don't fully let it happen like I wrote a book and the cover is literally the Haitian flag, like I'm Haitian. You can't take that away from me, but in there I'm very very vocal about being queer. And I'm

very- because it still is just, I don't know, it's just a part of me that you can't really erase. You can try, but if you support any of my stuff, you're going to know that you're supporting that gay shit, like it or not. And so, I just try to be like it's all of me or none of me. You can't parcel me out into pieces and be like “we just want the black Christian scholar; we don't want any of the other radical queer stuff.” That I'm just like, but I'm just me so take it or leave it.

Hopes of Freedom

Hopes of freedom emerged as the final superordinate theme in this study. While emancipation occurred some time ago in American history, there is an understanding in the lived experiences of the participants that queer Black women are not completely free. This is consistent with the research revealing that marginalized populations are often regarded as second class citizens in the North American social caste system, yet, they dare to dream of freedoms (Meyer et al., 2011). Grey discussed having the hope to one day “just be” in the totality of her personhood. She acknowledged the opportunities she has been given while addressing the mental clamor she must contend with to simply “be” in peace.

Grey: Just being able to be. I have the opportunity to be. So, I'm just hoping to come to a place where I can quiet my mind and just be. Be Black. Be African American. Be Afro-Caribbean. Be gay. Just to be.

Changes in Acceptability

The passing of the Marriage Equality Act and Don't ask, Don't Tell Repeal Act were described as impactful to participants as they provided legal rights and protections previously only available to heterosexual individuals. For Green, changes in the legislation made it

acceptable for her express her sexual orientation openly while making it possible for her to secure her career in the military simultaneously.

Green: Well it wasn't open, it was under "Don't ask. Don't tell." So, it was like hidden but no one really cared that you were a lesbian or gay.

Green continued, describing the shift in her posture in the military after Don't Ask, Don't Tell was repealed. This suggests that legal protections offered some relief from the hiding that was previously mandated.

Green: Now that it's open— Obama said it was okay to be who you are and so I'm always like "hey."

Grey reported that Marriage Equality was meaningful to her because she previously did not think partnerships recognized by the law or community would ever be a reality for her. Grey's perspective suggests that changes in acceptability can make dreams once unfathomable possible.

Grey: Hmm. So, the difference is growing up in Jamaica, I'd never think I'd be able to live with a partner and I've had the opportunity to have that experience. That's something that I never thought that I would have back home. So, the thought of being able to be with my person, marry my person in a place it is currently legal. I mean that is, the day when it became legal, that is, I don't know, at the top of the spectrum. It's like, okay, you can actually live a life with your person. You can actually marry your person. Marriage is not one of the things I ever aspired to do or to be. But it has, given the opportunity to, if I feel like that's something I want to do down the road and I find someone, then the opportunity is there to do it.

Wanting to Find Love and Be Happy

Like the sentiments conveyed in the previous sub theme, participants reported wanting to the constitutional right of pursuing happiness. Happiness was listed alongside romantic and familial desires. Green boils down her hopes to relationships and happiness.

Green: I was hoping to be happy. Be happy, find love. Get married one day, hopefully.

Crossing fingers. Start a family, just being happy.

Green included a partner and a family in her ideas of happiness, but Blue focused on what happiness might look like specifically for her. This suggests that while humans are relational creatures, for some, happiness can be individual.

Blue: Happy. Just me. It makes everything else a little bit easier. The more comfortable I am, the better version of me you get. So, I can problems in that comfort zone. I can deal with anything in that comfort zone

Living my Dreams Now

Despite the social disparities they contended with, participants were able to frame their current experiences as living their best lives or dreams now. Walsh (2017) notes that resilience is not only built on strive and survival, but also upon interconnectedness among the people in our lives. Participants discussed that operating under new levels of freedoms feels like the realization of a dream. Green reporting that she has been able to forge a new openness in her relationships regarding her sexuality suggests that openly existing maybe considered an expression of resilience.

Green: I didn't care what anyone else thought, you know. Just me being me and like right now I feel like I'm living the best me and being open. Like hey you only have one life to live. So, Let's live it and I'm living it right now. Right now, this is the best. This is the

happiest I have ever been, just being open and being able to just let people ask me questions like before I wouldn't do anything like that. You especially like being in the military, I used to be like, I don't want people to get so involved into my personal life. Now I'm like whatever, it's my life.

Blue added personal achievements in the face of multiple obstacles or global difficulties as her own examples of thriving.

Blue: I just realized I was living all the goals, dreams, and plans, I have had. And I had to start making new ones because I ran out of a check list. So, it was like yeah, I need new things now, new challenges and stuff. And so, my best life right is this, where I'm at right now. I'm practicing law. I'm serving my community. I get to teach at my Alma mater. That still blows my mind everyday. I bought a home, something I never thought I would be able to do. I did. My family and friends are okay; We get to hang out and talk. Even in the pandemic, like I had a get together for the family. I don't know— this is my best life, even in the worst times in the world. I'm still at my best point.

Hope for a Better Future

In this final subordinate theme of this study, participants discussed their hope for conditions to improve for marginalized populations, individually and collectively. Participants address their visions for the future and what they believe those preferred outcomes might consist of. Blue highlighted the hope of maintaining “energy and mental stability” for approaching whatever is next for her.

Blue: Now I want to do other things. I want to develop other passions or pay more into those other passions so that's what I'm hopeful for: The ability to have enough energy

and mental stability to do that, to transition, and to still be able to find my happy place in all the chaos.

Yellow spoke to a broader perspective of systemic problems and her hopes and fears about their possible outcomes.

Yellow: But my vision for the future is just like more community responsibility, more interconnectivity, more empathy hopefully. That's the biggest thing, I think. Empathy and compassion can go a long way. Just diversifying different boards or political regimes. Just making sure that different people are represented and not just colonizers with brown skin, or queer colonizers, folks who are actually invested in the humanity of individuals in this country, especially those individuals who are at the margins. I hope that there is a day when trans women aren't killed at such a high rate in this country. But those are things that I hope that they happen, but they are really out of my control. I can only do so much. Not talk to people who engage in transphobic violence whether it is language or if it's not. Or just staying true to my values listening to my intuition. I hope that there is- I don't know. It's hard to have hope when I really don't think that the system is going to change. And I hope that people figure out ways to live outside of the system in ways that are valuable and safe for them.

In this excerpt, Yellow addressed a desire that many people have for a more equitable society. She also held space for the possibility that society may not change but hope that people might find ways to live in a manner that is safe for them or at the very least survivable. Her response may seem fatalistic but at its core it speaks to the practice of radical acceptance (Brach, 2003) and a possibility of thriving that is not dependent on anyone else's actions. This is consistent with Walsh's assertion "Resilience involves mastery of the possible with acceptance

of that which is beyond control” (2017, p. 224). This suggests that systemic resilience is possible not only in opposition to structural and societal barriers, but also in spite of them.

Summary

The findings of this study support much of the data of found in current research on LGBTQ+ women of West Indian origin. In addition to expanding the volume of analysis on an understudied population, systemic resilience and intersecting identities offered an added layer of complexity to the existing body of research. The transcripts were rich with details of participants’ lived experiences, allowing 10 superordinate themes and corresponding subordinate themes to emerge. Though participants were candid about the hardships they face due to racism, xenophobia, homophobia, and misogyny, they also spoke extensively about their protective factors, strengths, and hopes for the future. These stories of resilience were told from each participant’s unique vantage point and can serve to enhance a multi-faceted understanding of queer women of Afro-Caribbean descent.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Meaning Making of the Study

This study was designed to examine the lived experiences of queer women of Afro-Caribbean descent, centering on resilience and intersecting identities. Interviewing four queer women of the Afro-Caribbean diaspora allowed me to gather intimate information from their personal lives about how they made sense of their multiple marginalized identities. The hardships and hallmarks of thriving despite white supremacy, homophobia, xenophobia, and sexism were explored through Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. Ten super-ordinate themes emerged from the transcripts: Journey to Identity Formation and Acceptance, Importance of Being Out, Selecting Supportive Environments, Advocating for Yourself and Community, Complexity of Faith, Complexity of Ethnicity and Race, Family Strain and Rejection, Self-care and Sustainability, Importance of Intersecting Identities, and Hopes of Freedom. Additional sub-themes were organized by the superordinate themes and descriptively represented by interview excerpts in the data.

Each of the participants had rich and varied points of view on different things Afro-Caribbean and queer but were also able to add viewpoints from other communities they are apart of like the military, law, healthcare, and education. Participants brought up so many aspects of life revealed at the intersection of their identities, but ultimately recurrent themes were included in the analysis. The subordinate themes in the study findings were consistent with much of the existing literature on queer women of Afro-Caribbean descent. Participant transcripts in this study, however, were able to offer context to topics less covered in the current research like resilience.

Audre Lorde stated “Caring for myself is not self-indulgence. It is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare” (p. 131, 1988). During the current climate of Coronavirus and global outcry against racism and police brutality, self-preservation actually seems more timely than unprecedented. The recent literature describes intentional care for Black women as modern shows of resistance against invisibility and the superhuman/Strong Black Woman tradition (Goler Blount, 2017; Evans et al., 2017). Participant excerpts in this study both acknowledge the biased-based instances and express ways they combat oppressive social norms with resilience in their own lives. These accounts support assertions in the mentioned research, but also expand the current scope of the literature by highlighting discussions of sustainability and self-care. Centering surviving and thriving, participants reported how themes of “Helping others” fulfill a an altruistic sense of responsibility to community and other themes such as “Joy as Resistance,” “Creativity as Survival,” and “Reading and Learning,” were specific mechanisms used to also contribute to the maintenance of their physical and mental wellbeing.

Systemic issues plaguing queer and Black women’s wellbeing have long been insidious and disparaging. In the last several years, some important strides have been made. The legalization of Marriage Equality and repealing of Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell as well as the increased visibility of Black women in substantive roles on television marked that the tide had been shifting (Burton, 2017). Participants’ experiences resonated with the literature and legislation, exemplified in the emergence of “Changes in Acceptability” as a theme. Current cultural adaptations made it conceivable for Grey that she would be able to live with her partner or get married. Changes in legislation made it possible for Green to comfortably date whomever she wanted and preserve her 18-year military career. Meyer (2003) discussed the social pressures sexual and racial minorities often face to conform to normative ways of being, no matter how

confining they might be. The cultural shifts in the last decade have created more opportunities for thriving to visibly occur despite the dominant discourse of victimhood and heteronormative deviance.

Also consistent with the current research is the superordinate theme of “Selecting Supportive Environments.” Communities of faith were found that they could be both supportive and/or conflicting for multiply marginalized populations (Walsh, 2008). Bowleg et al. (2003) found that Black lesbians engaged in the Black church as it provides a buffer from racism, despite its homophobic ideology. Participants conveyed being careful about the environments in which they enter as to protect themselves from “Fear of harm or retribution,” which is a sub-theme also referenced repeatedly in the transcript. This intentionality about creating safe and supportive spaces underscored the previous literature that also speaks to the sub-themes of “Visibility of others,” “Family support,” “Friend support,” and the “Queer community” (Ouer, 2015; Meyer et al., 2011; Follins et al., 2014). Participants shared how they cultivated gardens of support that protected and sustained them. This suggests that queer women of Afro-Caribbean descent masterfully repurpose unfavorable conditions allowing them and others to thrive.

Family struggles were very present in the extent research, so they were predictably mentioned in the interviews. A departure from the research, was the emergence of a longing for parental support, even in adulthood. LGBTQ+ literature widely discusses queer people drawing support from their community or chosen family and often shielding themselves from rejections from their biological family members (Follins et al, 2014, Meyer et al, 2011). Participants in this study however disclose deeply desiring their parents’ support of their sexual orientation as adults or discuss how important it is that they now have that support.

Strengths and Limitations of the Study

The timing of study is a unique strength. This research was conducted during a period where white supremacy is being protested, xenophobia is being called out, queer rights are being celebrated, the proverbial clock is running on egregious sexism. These movements co-exist simultaneously across the globe but are experienced as survived cumulatively in the lives of queer women of Afro-Caribbean descent. Minority stress has deleterious affects on mental and bodily health, yet Black women continue to thrive while caring for themselves and others (Bell, 2017; Evans et al., 2017; Meyer, 2015). The intersection of these humanitarian failings and this moment in history where they are being challenged, hold space for resilience to be openly displayed and discussed.

The use of IPA as a method was also a strength, in that it inspired a level of detail that may not have been generated with a method that did not center the participants' firsthand experiences or the meanings they were able to make of the them. IPA yields significant amounts of data by focusing very closely on a homogenous sample of the population.

Other limitations of this study include the sample having 4 participants from only 2 Afro-Caribbean countries. I would have appreciated representation from more countries in the West Indies. Diversity within the LGBTQ + community is wide and vast. Participants in this study identified as: lesbian, bisexual, and queer. The voice of transgender women is vital in the LGBTQ+ community and its absence in an exploration of queer women of Afro-Caribbean descent is a clear limitation.

The sample size recommended for IPA is 3-7 participants (Smith et al., 2009). While the sample of 4 women was enough to meet the criteria for the methodology and garner a healthy

amount of data, having more participants from additional sexual orientations and ethnic backgrounds may have added more perspectives to the conversation.

Suggestions for Future Research

The limitations of this study invite a new layer of exploration to the existing body of work. New directions for research on the population of queer women of Afro-Caribbean descent could include an exploration into family dynamics between parents and children of women expressing non-heterosexuality. Since intersectional identities were reported to be important to participants, further investigation into what other identities, professional or personal, are significant for queer women of color could be enlightening. A limitation of this study was having representation from 2 Caribbean islands Haiti and Jamaica. Future research could gather valuable perspectives by also including the voices of queer women from other Afro-Caribbean nations.

A sub-theme in the study that was particularly salient to me was “Hope through mental health struggles.” Though it did not emerge as a superordinate theme specifically within this sample, so much of the interviews eluded to a constant striving for mental wellness. There seemed to be an undercurrent of the emotional toil it takes just to get through each day, from obstacle to obstacle, hope to hope. Future research exploring mental health issues in queer women of Afro-Caribbean descent would add valuable information to the literature on contextual risk factors as well as supportive influences that may contribute to systemic resilience. Qualitative methods help gather large amount of detail, but a quantitative approach to studying resilience in this population could offer generalizable data, upon which new studies could be built. So, research with a more generalizable approach would be suggested to add to this study’s contribution at a later time.

Implications of the Study

This study has implications that speak to queer women of Afro-Caribbean descent as well as to the people who love them and the therapists who serve them. Participant accounts in this study can offer insight into the cumulative hardships of their intersecting identities and the resilience that emerge from it. Analysis of these firsthand encounters illuminate cultural experiences to be discussed further in research, training programs, mental health work, clinical supervision, and the Family Therapy field at large.

For Queer Women of Afro-Caribbean Descent

Black queer women are often the instigators of social movements, yet the casualties of unchanged perspectives. For example, Patrisse Khan-Cullers and Alicia Garza were among the co-founders of the Black Lives Matter organization dedicated to inclusion and protection systematic racial violence yet were labeled terrorists by tens of thousands of people. Marsha P. Johnson was a primary figure in inciting the Stonewall riots for gay and trans equality but did not receive much acknowledgement for her role in it (Khan-Cullors, 2018; Stein, 2019). This study adds to the body of work that challenges harmful narratives often affixed to the advocacy work of queer Black women or the erasure of their significance from history.

Much like Audre Lorde accomplished with her writing, speaking, and existing, these queer women of Afro-Caribbean descent in the sample embodied the importance of visibility with their personal stories. The implication of this study pervading from the title all the way through to the discussion is that resilience permeates the lives of queer women of Afro-Caribbean heritage.

Narratives about superhuman strength or superwoman status in Black women are both relatable and weighty. 2 out of 4 participants reported drawing power from their identity as a

“strong Black woman” or attributing her strength to how she learned to thrive in multiple circumstances “growing up in the Haitian culture.” Expectations of strength or feeling as if they had to be perfect align with the research as being stressful (Evans et al., 2017; Walker-Barnes, 2017), but a self-concept including a resilient cultural identity like a strong Black or Caribbean woman can impact how struggles are processed and survived. Stories of hardship and resilience are so often muted in this population, they are not adequately discussed in society or in the research. The results of this study indicate that when harmful experiences are internally coded as defining moments in queer women of Afro-Caribbean descent, their significance changes. These situations can go from deleterious in nature to obstacles with the potential to be overcome, all with a shift in meaning.

Participants spoke directly to the importance of queer women of Afro-Caribbean descent seeing each other and being seen by the world at large. Visibility was noted in each participant interview as deeply impactful for normalcy and inspiration of new possibilities for them. This suggests that more research on vicarious resilience in the LGBTQ+ community could extend beyond therapists and explore how queer West Indian women stimulate resilience in each other just by existing in the view of others.

For Therapists

“As helping professionals, we cannot heal all others’ wounds suffered in major trauma and humanitarian crisis. We can create a safe haven where family and community members are able to share deep pain and renewed strivings.” (Walsh, 2017, p. 263)

Silence about mental health struggles and suicides of black women is deafening (Bradford, 2017). Jamaican people, comparable to many other Afro-Caribbean ethnic populations, tend not to acknowledge mental health concerns, let alone discuss them publicly

(Brice-Baker, 2005). The range of experiences in this study encourage multiply marginalized identities in clients to be conceptualized through the lens of intersectional disparities and systemic resilience. Particular attention to stressors expressed by participants like “fear of harm or retribution,” “dehumanization and objectification,” and “longing for parental support” can be taken into account by clinicians as mental health considerations for this population.

Black, LGBTQ+, women, and West Indian identities have distinctive strengths that meet at the intersection of queer women of Afro-Caribbean descent. This population is multi-dimensional, their experiences reach far beyond the stereotypes that mainstream media often tries to limit them to (Burton, 2017). As their interests, careers, cultures, and sexual orientations differ, so do their sources of strength. Green reported growing up in Haiti in the 1990s prepared her to adapt to the life-threatening conditions she faced serving in Iraq and Afghanistan and describes being a leader in the military as an important identity for her. Grey also depicted her Jamaican heritage as the source of her work ethic and drive to be financially independent. Brice-Baker (2005) supports the value participants placed on their cultural backgrounds with the suggestion that being transnational or having roots in different countries, may contribute to resilience by offering varied support systems and experience adapting to different surroundings. Cumulative disparities may also be met at the intersection of meaningful identities. The significance Yellow’s identities pose to her as an author and researcher, along with Blue being a lawyer and professor, Grey’s pride as a mother, person of faith, and health care worker, and Green’s position as a leader in the military, all serve as representations of other important identities in the lives of queer women of Afro-Caribbean descent that support their ability to thrive. This study’s findings can help inform approaches tailored to promote mental health in Black women, highlighting LGBTQ+ and Afro-Caribbean identities.

For Trainers, Professors, and Supervisors

First generation children from the diaspora often have instilled in them pride in their mother tongue, cultural histories, and belief systems (Walsh, 2017). Yet, being taught colonial versions of history about minority populations can strip away the esteem they may have been raised with related to their culture. Yellow's experience of reading that her race and ethnic identities were being taught as "less than" was difficult to bear, let alone argue with, even though she was a model student among her peers. Incomplete history and culturally incompetent research taught to students can perpetuate falsehoods about some of the very students being trained and ultimately the clients those students will serve. Excerpts from this research can help begin conversations about various identities from a multicultural perspective. If we are to instruct MFT student therapists to triangulate culturally relevant teaching with client experience, (Ladson-Billings, 2014; McWey et al., 2005), we must expand the research available for them to learn. This study helps to fill the gap of understanding and representation in the literature and invites more scientist-practitioners to do the same.

For the Field of Family Therapy at Large

The field of Family Therapy is relational by definition. Context is the currency through which we trade perspective. This study helps to advance knowledge of the experiences of queer women of Afro-Caribbean descent in the Marriage and Family Therapy (MFT) profession by supporting clearer understandings that may not be easily accessible to clinicians outside of experiencing those situations first hand. The details in the data give language to circumstances often affecting Black women, the African West Indian Diaspora, and members of LGBTQ+ community and attention to intersectionality approaches the specific set of adverse conditions

cumulatively created when these identities co-exist in a single person at once. Participants spoke to the dangers of being multiply marginalized, but also highlighted the strengths that their multiple identities have produced in them. Understanding this duality in the data of biased based instances incurred and diverse sources of resiliency can serve to improve cultural competency while serving ethnic and sexual minorities. Application of this information from a both/and perspective, could help move the MFT field forward by building upon its relational foundation and considering the intersection of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation while centering systemic resilience.

Concluding Thoughts

Within the new context of a worldwide pandemic coinciding with LGBTQ Pride Month, and anti-racism protests inspiring an international conversation about racial and sexual oppression, more space may have been held for this kind of study now than was perhaps possible in times past. This exploration builds upon previous advocacy work done with multiply marginalized communities that allowed for a focus on population resilience in addition to hardships endured. As this dissertation was being written, health protections against transgender discrimination were removed from the Affordable Care Act within days of the Supreme Court ruling that LGBTQ+ communities are protected from employment discrimination by the Civil Rights Act (De Vogue & Cole, 2020). Most recently, the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, shielding minors from being deported who immigrated to the United States with their families (De Vogue et al., 2020). Race, sexuality, and ethnicity have emerged as urgent social discussions in this present time. MFTs can be uniquely positioned to offer systemic resource-based approaches to discussing these problems contextually (Walsh, 2017). The lived experiences of queer women of Afro-Caribbean descent can offer insight into explorations of

intersectionality as well as intricacies of adaptation and thriving. I am hopeful that the obstacles and triumphs brought up in this study will be continuing to be a part of larger conversations in our field for generations to come.

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Appendices

Appendix A

General Informed Consent Form

NSU Consent to be in a Research Study Entitled

The Conundrum of Both/And in a World of Either/or: An Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis
of Resilience and Intersectional Identities in Queer Women of Afro-Caribbean Descent

Who is doing this research study?

College: College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences, Department of Family Therapy

Principal Investigator:
Stephane Louis, M. S.
10240 SW 12th Street
Pembroke Pines, FL 33025
954-224-7283

Faculty Advisor/Dissertation Chair:
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954-262-3044

Co-Investigator(s): N/A

Site Information: N/A

Funding: Unfunded

What is this study about?

The purpose of this study is to explore how the intersection of race, cultural background, and sexuality may effect resilience in the lives of women of Afro-Caribbean heritage who identify as members of the LGBTQIA+ community. For clinicians in particular, the results of this investigation may potentially improve cultural competency in Marriage and Family Therapists by expanding the understanding of the lived experiences of queer women of Afro-Caribbean descent. This study can enhance best practices for psychotherapists and add to the body of intersectional research on resilience in sexually and ethnically marginalized groups, potentially benefiting Marriage and. Family Therapists and their clients.

Why are you asking me to be in this research study?

You are being asked to be in this research study because you identify as a Black woman, of Afro-Caribbean lineage who lives in North America. You are 18 years of age or older, and you also identify as a member of the LGBTQIA+ community. You indicated an interest in sharing your experiences of resilience and intersecting multiple minority identities.

This study will include about 3 to 8 people.

What will I be doing if I agree to be in this research study?

While you are taking part in this research study, you will first be screened for eligibility for study participation. Inclusion criteria includes: Identifying as a Black woman, of Afro-Caribbean lineage who lives in North America, being at least 18 years old, speaking English, and disclosing sexual or romantic attraction to other women or identifying as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, or Queer. Exclusion criteria included not meeting the full inclusion criteria. Potential participants who express interest in being a part of the study and meet full inclusion criteria, will be invited to be interviewed. You will be asked to review, sign, and submit the signed informed consent form to the researcher. Upon retrieval of signed consent form, a meeting time will be scheduled, and you will be considered a participant of the study.

Research Study Procedures: - as a participant, this is what you will be doing:

You will be emailed a link for a Zoom meeting for an agreed upon on time. At the scheduled time, you will meet with me on an online video conference on the Zoom meeting platform. You will participate in a sixty to ninety-minute interview, with a second follow up meeting, lasting up to 30 minutes, in an online video conference meeting to review the analysis of the transcription from the initial interview. The follow up interview is elective and will consist of questions based on the information you provided in the initial interview. During the interview sessions, you may take a break whenever you wish. Information from the interviews will be recorded and transcribed. You are allowed to suspend involvement in the study at any moment if so desired.

Could I be removed from the study early by the research team?

If it appears that you may be in danger or no longer meet the inclusion criteria of the study, your participation may be terminated by Ms. Louis. Any data obtained by Ms. Louis will be destroyed according to the guidelines below.

Are there possible risks and discomforts to me?

This research study involves minimal risk to you. To the best of our knowledge, the things you will be doing have no more risk of harm than you would have in everyday life. Physical risks are minimal as we will be meeting remotely on an online videoconferencing platform. Psychological or emotional risks are minimal as well. Though recalling personal information may be uncomfortable at times, if you experience elevated levels of distress, you may take a break, decline to answer, or withdraw participation from the study. Discussions about multiple minority stress may be experienced as bothersome to some participants or mundane to others. The questions will be framed in the context of resilience and will focus on the accounts of thriving and meaning making in the face of structural and societal barriers. Privacy risk are minimal as no legal names will be used to identify your information and you will be assigned a pseudonym for the study. Ms. Louis privileges your confidentiality and will follow a strict protocol to ensure that your identifying information is protected and stored safely as explained below.

If you have any concerns about potential risks of study participation, please contact Ms. Stephane Louis, or Dr. Christine Beliard at the contact information listed above.

You may find some questions we ask you (or some things we ask you to do) to be upsetting or stressful. If so, we can refer you to someone who may be able to help you with these feelings. You will be responsible for the full costs of those services.

What happens if I do not want to be in this research study?

You have the right to leave this research study at any time, or not be in it. If you do decide to

leave or you decide not to be in the study anymore, you will not get any penalty or lose any services you have a right to get. If you choose to stop being in the study, any information collected about you **before** the date you leave the study will be kept in the research records for 36 months from the end of the study but you may request that it not be used.

What if there is new information learned during the study that may affect my decision to remain in the study?

If significant new information relating to the study becomes available, which may relate to whether you want to remain in this study, this information will be given to you by the investigators. You may be asked to sign a new Informed Consent Form, if the information is given to you after you have joined the study.

Are there any benefits for taking part in this research study?

There are no direct benefits from being in this research study. We hope the information learned from this study will allow you to see explore your intersecting identities and the examples of resilience in your life.

Will I be paid or be given compensation for being in the study?

You will not be given any payments or compensation for being in this research study.

Will it cost me anything?

There are no costs to you for being in this research study.

How will you keep my information private?

Information we learn about you in this research study will be handled in a confidential manner, within the limits of the law and will be limited to people who have a need to review this information. Each person interviewed will be assigned a pseudonym for their information to be safely represented by. Electronic documents, recordings, and transcripts will be secured on a password-protected computer. The only people who would be able to access their information would be myself, my research chair, and the institutional review board, as a measure to ensure confidentiality. This data will be available to the researcher, the Institutional Review Board and other representatives of this institution, and any regulatory and granting agencies (if applicable). If we publish the results of the study in a scientific journal or book, we will not identify you. All confidential data will be kept securely and stored in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's home office. All data will be kept for 36 months from the end of the study and destroyed after that time by deleting recording and password protected files.

Will there be any Audio or Video Recording?

This research study involves audio and/or video recording. This recording will be available to the researcher, the Institutional Review Board and other representatives of this institution, and any of the people who gave the researcher money to do the study (if applicable). The recording will be kept, stored, and destroyed as stated in the section above. Because what is in the recording could be used to find out that it is you, it is not possible to be sure that the recording will always be kept confidential. The researcher will try to keep anyone not working on the research from listening to or viewing the recording.

Whom can I contact if I have questions, concerns, comments, or complaints?

If you have questions now, feel free to ask us. If you have more questions about the research, your research rights, or have a research-related injury, please contact:

Primary contact:

Stephane Louis, M.S., LMFT can be reached at 954-224-7283.

If primary is not available, contact:

Christine Beliard, Ph.D can be reached at 954-262-3044.

Research Participants Rights

For questions/concerns regarding your research rights, please contact:

Institutional Review Board

Nova Southeastern University

(954) 262-5369 / Toll Free: 1-866-499-0790

IRB@nova.edu

You may also visit the NSU IRB website at www.nova.edu/irb/information-for-research-participants for further information regarding your rights as a research participant.

All space below was intentionally left blank.

Research Consent & Authorization Signature Section

Voluntary Participation - You are not required to participate in this study. In the event you do participate, you may leave this research study at any time. If you leave this research study before it is completed, there will be no penalty to you, and you will not lose any benefits to which you are entitled.

If you agree to participate in this research study, sign this section. You will be given a signed copy of this form to keep. You do not waive any of your legal rights by signing this form.

SIGN THIS FORM ONLY IF THE STATEMENTS LISTED BELOW ARE TRUE:

- You have read the above information.
- Your questions have been answered to your satisfaction about the research.

Adult Signature Section

I have voluntarily decided to take part in this research study.

Printed Name of Participant

Signature of Participant

Date

Printed Name of Person Obtaining
Consent and Authorization

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent &
Authorization

Date

Appendix B

Interview Schedule

1. How do you describe yourself in terms of gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation?

Possible prompts: What is that like for you? Do you identify more with some demographics than others? If so, which one(s) and why?

2. When did you realize that you were a queer woman from an Afro-Caribbean culture?

Possible prompts: How did you feel? Who did you tell? Why?

3. What does it mean to be “out” to you?

Possible prompts: How important is that to you? Is there a sense of naming or un-naming of your sexuality in your Afro-Caribbean community?

4. What role did family, faith, and community play in the development of your identities?

Possible prompts: Where did you draw support from? Where did you wish that support would have come from?

5. What struggles, if any, do your identities pose for you?

Possible prompts: How do you feel about them? What were some ways you have learned to adapt or survive? What strengths or resiliencies did those situations bring out in you?

6. What was a Defining moment for you as a black woman or a West Indian woman who loves women?

Possible prompts: What happened? Which of your identities do you think has impacted you the most?

7. How do think other people see you?

Possible Prompt: Society, strangers, co-workers, family, friends, partners?

8. How do you make sense of the layering of those intersecting identities?

Possible prompt: What context do you feel the most comfortable and accepted in as your full self? How do you feel about yourself in that context?

9. What would it look like to live your best life as a queer woman of Afro-Caribbean descent?

Possible prompts: What were you hoping for growing into the person you are today? What are you hopeful for in the future?

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Stephane Louis, LMFT is a therapist, writer, qualified supervisor, and instructor. As a queer woman of Haitian descent, she explores different ways the intersectionality of culture, family, identity, and sexuality can impact our lives. Stephane is fascinated by stories of vulnerability, always looking for strengths and solutions. She helps people feel safe to be themselves and authentically go from where they are to where they can be.

Stephane studied Psychology and Biblical Studies and earned a Bachelor of Science degree from Palm Beach Atlantic University. She went on to pursue her Master's degree and Ph.D. in Marriage and Family Therapy from Nova Southeastern University. In 2020, she was featured in Forbes for completing her study on resilience and intersecting identities of queer women of Afro-Caribbean descent during COVID-19.

Throughout her career, she has worked as a community-based therapist and Bilingual Mental Health Assessor. In higher education, she served as Coordinator of Academic/Doctoral Affairs for the Center for Psychological Studies and then Psychology Instructor at Broward College. Stephane currently provides mental health services to undergraduate and graduate students as a Lynn University Student Counselor. Outside of the school setting, Stephane has a private practice and also coaches members of the queer community through issues of faith and sexuality at The Christian Closet. Her Marriage and Family Therapy training and further experience have provided her with in-depth insight into how multiple systems and important relationships can influence the course of a person's life. As a therapist and instructor, she has helped children, teens, and adults navigate life transitions as well as academic success leading up to their careers. She enjoys working with clients and helping them move forward through their

goals. Her research interests are mindfulness, self-of-the-therapist, sexuality, race, ethnicity, gender, spirituality, intersectionality, and resilience.