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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
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“Why Couldn't I Have a Different Experience that Felt Free?": A Critical Narrative
Inquiry on the Impacts of Plantation Politics on the Social and Academic Experiences of
Black Transgender Students in Higher Education

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Education

by

Tori A. Porter

June 2024

Dissertation Committee:

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Dr. Dylan Rodriguez

Dr. Rican Vue

Dr. Michael Moses

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Tori A. Porter
June 2024

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DEDICATION

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Because you are, I am...

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

“Why couldn't I have a different experience that felt free?”: A Critical Narrative Inquiry on the Impacts of Plantation Politics on the Social and Academic Experiences of Black Transgender Students in Higher Education

by

Tori A. Porter

Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate Program in Education
University of California, Riverside, June 2024
Dr. Raquel M. Rall, Chairperson

This critical narrative inquiry examined the social and academic experiences of 20 Black transgender students currently or formerly enrolled in 4-year colleges and universities in the United States. Employing AntiBlack transness and plantation politics as my analytical framework, I demonstrate the insidious impact of plantation politics on Black transgender students' social and academic lives, which animate in both the processual and structural interactions within the plantation university. By problematizing the presence of plantation politics in both the processual and structural aspects of higher education, my study contributes to empirical understandings of how power dynamics operate within postsecondary institutions and the specific challenges faced by Black transgender students. The narratives shared by Black transgender students highlight the lack of representation, increased vulnerability, and the burden of educating others within the campus community. Furthermore, my research uncovers various issues, such as

isolation, rejection, and marginalization, that lead some Black transgender students to abandon their educational pursuits.

Despite examples of exclusion, my study also reveals how Black transgender students demonstrate a deep understanding of the expansiveness of their identities, fostering connections and communities within and beyond institutional spaces. Black transgender students create and sustain communities of care that provide vital support, recognition, and understanding, offering a safe and reliable space to be themselves without explanation. Battling institutional pushback and lacking formal support, these communities thrive; students meet one another's basic needs and facilitate their well-being and success. Black transgender students are actively creating spaces of Black trans futurity and transformation, where they (re)claim their life, (re)gain their agency, and embrace nonconformity. I offer practitioners the urgency in their willingness to resist and challenge the status quo, even in the face of significant obstacles, to support Black transgender students. Supporting these students will require disruptive logic, realigning solidarity, and shifting paradigms to meet Black transgender students where they are.

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GLOSSARY

List of Terms and Definitions

AntiBlackness

AntiBlackness refers to the set of beliefs, attitudes, actions, practices, and behaviors exhibited by individuals and institutions that undermine, belittle, and exclude Black individuals who are visibly or perceived to be of African descent. It involves the deliberate devaluation and marginalization of Black people, denying them their rightful place in society. By denying the humanity and dignity of Black individuals, AntiBlackness effectively restricts their access to full citizenship. Rather than acknowledging the extensive and diverse history of Black people across the African diaspora, the AntiBlackness paradigm portrays Blackness as inherently problematic. This paradigm fails to recognize that Black communities in the United States and around the world have suffered significant disadvantages due to both historical and ongoing systemic racism.

Bisexual

A person whose primary sexual and affectional attraction is toward people of the same or other genders or towards people regardless of their gender. Some people may use bisexual and pansexual interchangeably .

BlaQ/Blaqueer

Folks of Black, African descent, and from the African diaspora who recognize their queerness/LGBTQIA identity as a salient identity attached to their Blackness and vice versa.

Cisgender

A gender identity or performance in a gender role that society deems to match the person's assigned sex at birth. Cis means "on the side of" or "not across." A term used to highlight the privilege of people who are not transgender.

Cissexism/Cis-Genderism

The pervasive system of discrimination and exclusion is founded on the belief that there are. It should be only two genders, and one's gender, or most aspects of it, are inevitably tied to assigned sex. This system oppresses people whose gender and gender expression fall outside of cis-normative constructs. Within cissexism, cisgender people are the dominant group, and trans/ gender non-conforming people are the oppressed group.

Cisheteropatriarchy

Cisheteropatriarchy is a socio-political system where (primarily) cisgender (same gender as assigned at birth) and heterosexual males have authority over women and people with sexual orientations other than heterosexual and gender identities other than man. It is a term that emphasizes that discrimination against women, transgender and LGB people is derived from the same sexist social principle.

Coming Out/Out

Coming out is the process of voluntarily sharing one's sexual orientation and gender identity with others. This process is unique for each individual, and there is no right or wrong way to come out. The term "coming out" has also been broadened to include other potentially stigmatized personal information. Terms also used that correlate with this action are: "Being out," which means not concealing one's sexual orientation or gender identity, and "Outing, " a term used for making public the sexual orientation or gender identity of another who would prefer to keep this information secret .

Diversity

The standard definition of diversity is the practice or quality of including or involving people from various social and ethnic backgrounds and of different genders, sexual orientations

Down-Low/DL

Down-Low is a Black slang term used explicitly within the African American community that typically refers to a sexual subculture of Black men who usually identify as heterosexual but actively seek sexual encounters and relations with other men, practice gay cruising, and frequently adopt a specific hip-hop attire during these activities.

Fungible/Fungibility

The dictionary defines fungible as something (such as money or a commodity) of such a nature that one part or quantity may be replaced by another equal part or quantity, paying a debt or settling an account. For Black people, fungibility in how their bodies are perceived as interchangeable and profitable, which Hartman (1997) says exploits "the vulnerability of the captive body as a vessel for the uses, thoughts, and feelings of others" (p. 19).

Gay

A sexual and affectional orientation toward people of the same gender.

Gender

A social construct is used to classify a person as a man, woman, or some other identity. Fundamentally different from the sex one is assigned at birth.

Gender Identity

A sense of oneself as trans, genderqueer, woman, man, or some other identity, which may or may not correspond with the sex and gender one is assigned at birth.

Gender Nonconforming (GNC)

Adjective for people who do not subscribe to societal expectations of typical gender expressions or roles. The term is more commonly used to refer to gender expression (how one behaves, acts, and presents oneself to others) as opposed to gender identity (one's internal sense of self).

Genderqueer

A person whose gender identity and gender expression falls outside of the dominant societal norm for their assigned sex is beyond genders or is some combination of them.

Heteronormativity

Attitudes and behaviors that incorrectly assume gender is binary, ignoring genders besides women and men, and that people should and will align with conventional expectations of society for gender identity, gender expression, and sexual and romantic attraction. For example, someone assigned female at birth is expected to 1) have a body that is considered "female" by the dominant culture, 2) identify as a girl or woman, 3) act feminine and fulfill the roles associated with girls and women, and 4) be romantically and sexually attracted to men.

Heterosexism

The assumption is that all people are or should be heterosexual. Heterosexism excludes the needs, concerns, and life experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer people while it gives advantages to heterosexual people. It is often a subtle form of oppression that reinforces realities of silence and erasure.

Heterosexual

A sexual orientation is when a person feels physically and emotionally attracted to people of a gender other than their own.

Lesbian

Usually, a woman whose primary sexual and affectional orientation is toward people of the same gender. However, some nonbinary people also identify as lesbians, often because they have some connection to womanhood and are primarily attracted to women.

Microaggressions

Brief and subtle behaviors, whether intentional or not, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or harmful messages of commonly oppressed identities. These actions cause harm by invalidating the target person's identity and may reinforce stereotypes. Examples of microaggressions include a person who is not White being told they speak "good English" or someone saying something is "gay" to mean they think something is terrible.

Misgender/Misgendering

Attributing a gender to someone incorrect/does not align with their gender identity. This can occur when using pronouns, gendered language (i.e., “Hello ladies!” “Hey guys”) or assigning genders to people without knowing how they identify (i.e., “Well, since we’re all women in this room, we understand...”).

Nonbinary

A gender identity and experience that embraces an entire universe of expressions and ways of being that resonate for an individual, moving beyond the male/female gender binary. It may be an active resistance to binary gender expectations or an intentional creation of new unbounded ideas of self within the world. For some people who identify as nonbinary, there may be overlap with other concepts and identities like gender expansive and gender non-conforming.

Pansexual

Terms describe people with romantic, sexual, or affectional desire for people of all genders and sexes. It has some overlap with bisexuality and polysexuality (not to be confused with polyamory).

Passing

In the context of gender, passing is when someone is perceived as a gender they identify as or are attempting to be seen as rather than their biological sex. The appropriateness of the term passing and the desirability of blending into society are both debated within the transgender community. A trans person who is perceived as cisgender may face less prejudice, harassment, and risk of violence, as well as better employment opportunities. This is sometimes termed passing privilege.

Pronouns

Linguistic tools are used to refer to someone in the third person. Examples are they/them/theirs, ze/hir/hirs, she/her/hers, he/him/his. In English and some other languages, pronouns have been tied to gender and are a common site of misgendering (attributing gender to someone incorrectly).

Plantation/Plantation Systems

Durant (1999) defines slave plantation systems as “orderly and systematic social unity composed of identifiable and interdependent parts (social structures) and social processes” (p.5).

Plantation Politics

Plantation politics are defined as:

- a. The psychological warfare Black people experience in educational institutions whose histories make it clear that they were not made for us.

- b. The creation of an active (but sometimes elusive) machine of racist rhetoric, policies, and procedures that fuel the academy.
- c. The exploitation of Black people and Black labor helps universities appear diverse enough for the sake of profit while devaluing Black voices when it comes to institutional change and
- d. Recognizing the emotional and pedagogical labor marginalized people offer daily, especially during campus rebellions, which universities view as branding or reputation crises (Williams et al., 2021, p. 17).

Queer

One definition of queer is abnormal or strange. Historically, queer has been used as an epithet/slur against people whose gender, gender expression or sexuality do not conform to dominant expectations. Some people have reclaimed the word queer and self-identify in opposition to assimilation (adapted from “Queering the Field”). For some, this reclamation celebrates not fitting into social norms. Not all people who identify as LGBTQIA use “queer” to describe themselves. The term is often considered hateful when used by those who do not identify as LGBTQIA.

Race

A social construct that divides people into distinct groups based on characteristics such as physical appearance, ancestral heritage, cultural affiliation, cultural history, and ethnic classification based on the social, economic, and political context of a society at a given period.

Racism

The systematic subordination of people from marginalized racial groups based on their physical appearance, ethnic or ancestral history, or cultural affiliation. Racism is considered a profoundly pervasive, systemic issue perpetuated by members of the privileged racial group holding dominant social power over others. Discrimination, prejudice, or xenophobia may be more accurate terms for describing individual acts of oppression. While these individual acts likely stem from systemic racism, at the individual level, the power dynamics that enable racism are not at play in the same way.

Respectability Politics

Harris (2003) defines respectability politics as a set of behaviors, actions, or attitudes that reproduce dominant norms as a strategy to produce a counter-narrative to negative stereotypes of Black people.

Same Gender Loving

a term used by some African American people who love, date, and have an attraction to people of the same gender.

Sex

a medically constructed categorization. Sex is often assigned based on the appearance of the genitalia, either in ultrasound or at birth.

Sexism

The cultural, institutional, and individual set of beliefs and practices that privilege men, subordinate women, and devalue ways of being that are associated with women.

Sexuality

The components of a person include their biological sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, sexual practices, etc.

Spirituality

Having to do with deep feelings and convictions, including a person's sense of peace, purpose, connection to others, and understanding of the meaning and value of life, may or may not be associated with a particular set of beliefs or practices.

Trans/Trans*

The term trans acts as a more inclusive term than transgender for gender non-conforming and non-binary folks.

Transantagonism

Active hostility, opposition, aggression or violence towards trans people. Transantagonism reflects a hatred of those who do not fit easily into the gender binary. The language has shifted from the use of "phobia" (as in transphobia) to the use of antagonism to encompass better the violence that is perpetrated.

Transgender

An adjective used most often as an umbrella term and frequently abbreviated to "trans." Identifying as transgender, or trans, means that one's internal knowledge of gender is different from conventional or cultural expectations based on the sex that person was assigned at birth. While transgender may refer to a woman who was assigned male at birth or a man who was assigned female at birth, transgender is an umbrella term that can also describe someone who identifies as a gender other than woman or man, such as nonbinary, genderqueer, genderfluid, no gender or multiple genders, or some other gender identity.

Transition

Transitioning is taking steps to live as one's true gender identity. Transitioning is different for each individual and may or may not involve medical interventions like taking hormones or having surgery. Some people may not choose to transition in specific ways for a variety of reasons. The extent of someone's transition does not make that person's gender identity any less or more valid.

Transitioning may include socially transitioning, such as going by certain pronouns or going by the Lived Name that affirms one's gender identity. Transitioning may involve making changes to one's physical appearance, such as wearing certain clothing, wearing one's hair in a different style or length, or more complex changes such as medically transitioning through hormones or surgery. Transitioning can also involve changing legal documents to match one's authentic sense of self.

Transnormativity

Johnson (2016) describes transnormativity as a set of standards used by both cis and trans people to evaluate the authenticity of a person's transness by putting their experiences and expression of gender in a hierarchy of legitimacy (p. 466).

Two-Spirit

An umbrella term encompassing sexuality and gender in Indigenous Native American communities. Two Spirit people often serve integral and important roles in their communities, such as leaders and healers. It may refer to an embodiment of masculinity and femininity, but this is not the only significance of the term. There are a variety of definitions and feelings about the term two-spirit – and this term does not resonate for everyone. Two Spirit is a cultural term reserved for those who identify as Indigenous Native American. Although the term itself became more commonly used around 1990, two spirit people have existed for centuries.

Whiteness

Whiteness is a normative structure and social concept (Leonardo, 2009) in society that marginalizes People of Color (POC) and privileges White people (Feagin, 2006, 2010; Omi & Winant, 1994; Cabrera et al., 2016) Other scholars argue that whiteness is just AntiBlack racism, in that whiteness creates a collective worldview that believes you are human if you are not Black (Robinson, 1983). White people, their customs, culture, and beliefs operate as standard to compare other racial and ethnics groups (*Whiteness*, n.d.).

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviation	Definition
AANAPISI	Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander Serving Institution
ANNH	Alaskan Native and Native Hawaiian Serving Institution
DL	Down Low (see glossary for definition)
FERPA	Federal Educational Rights and Privacy Act
GNC	Gender Nonconforming
HBCU	Historically Black Colleges and Universities
HIP	High Impact Practices
HSI	Hispanic Serving Institution
LGBTQ	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer
MSI	Minority Serving Institution
PWI	Predominantly White Institution
UC	University of California (followed by corresponding city)

Chapter I: INTRODUCTION

Dissertation Overview

Latisha King, a Black transgender 15-year-old girl, was killed on Thursday, February 14, 2008, after being shot twice in the back of the head by a classmate while participating in a classroom assignment. A few months leading up to her death, Latisha began expressing her gender in a feminine manner, wearing dresses and make-up, which emboldened ridicule and bullying from her peers and teachers. Latisha's gender expression sparked much debate and attention amongst her campus community, inspiring administration to send out a mass email that stated:

We have a student on campus who has chosen to express her sexuality by wearing make-up. It is her right to do so. Some kids are finding it amusing, others are bothered by it. As long as it does not cause classroom disruptions she is within her rights. We are asking that you talk to your students about being civil and non-judgmental. They don't have to like it but they need to give her her space. We are also asking you to watch for possible problems. If you wish to talk further about it please see me or Joy Epstein (Seetoodeh, 2008, para. 21).

Students and administration remembered her gender expression and sexuality as disruptive and distracting to the normal functions of the school.

Following the murder, school members began circulating a petition to have the murderer charged as a juvenile, which hundreds of teachers, administration, and students from the school signed, declaring that they “failed [the murder’s name].” Latisha’s former school community even went so far as to claim that “[The murderer] was terrorized” (Seetoodeh, 2008, p. 21). The distorted narrative surrounding Latisha's tragic

death, with her former school community blaming her for her murder and even suggesting that her perpetrator was terrorized (Seetoodeh, 2008), serves as a stark contemporary illustration of the entrenched plantation politics¹ that perpetuates the protection of White violence against Black transgender individuals in educational settings. It is crucial to recognize that Latisha's untimely death transcends the conventional lenses of gun violence, bullying, and institutional misunderstandings, revealing a more profound and systemic issue rooted in the hypervisibility and dehumanization of her Black transgender identity. Latisha's murder is a symptom of the plantation system (which exploits, abuses, murders, and dehumanizes Black bodies, especially those that are queer) and its effects trickle into every social structure of the United States, including its educational system.

According to the Centers for Disease Control's (CDC) Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) national survey, there are about 1.4 million adults in the United States who identify as transgender (Flores et al., 2016). Of the total population of transgender adults in the U.S., 16% of the participants identified as Black or African American. Black transgender people live in extreme poverty, with 40% of the respondents reporting an income of less than \$24,000 per year (Choi et al., 2021); this is about three times greater than the general Black population poverty rate of 17.4%

¹ Plantation politics are defined as: The psychological warfare Black people experience in educational institutions whose histories make it clear that they were not made for us; The creation of an active (but sometimes elusive) machine of racist rhetoric, policies, and procedures that fuel the academy; The exploitation of Black people and Black labor that helps universities appear diverse enough for the sake of profit while devaluing Black voices when it comes to institutional change; and a recognition of the emotional and pedagogical labor that marginalized people offer every day, but especially during periods of campus rebellions, which universities view as branding or reputation crises (Williams et al., 2021, p. 17).

(Statista Research Dept., 2022). In this same study, 49% of Black transgender respondents reported that they had been discriminated against in their school or place of work. Similar to Choi and others' (2021) findings, a study more than ten years prior reported that:

Discrimination was pervasive for the entire sample, but anti-transgender bias coupled with structural racism meant that transgender people of color experienced particularly devastating levels of discrimination, with Black respondents often faring worse than all others (Grant et al., 2011, p. 2).

Surveys in the United States highlight the educational, economic, and health disparities impacting the lives of Black transgender people. It is crucial to deepen our empirical understanding of the educational and social experiences of Black transgender students in higher education (Bilodeau, 2005; Nicolazzo & Marine, 2015; Nicolazzo, 2016a, 2016b; Renn, 2010). From my particular viewpoint, I understand Black transgender peoples' educational, economic, health, and other social disparities as directly connected to historical processes and investments of the United States, particularly those rooted in ideologies and practices of enslavement. To explore the experiences of Black transgender students, I centralize higher education's historical foundations and investments to understand how those processes shape contemporary Black transgender students' social and academic experiences.

Utilizing AntiBlack transness as my analytical framework, I illustrate the insidious impact of plantation politics on the social and academic lives of Black transgender students. To delve into the profound experiences of Black transgender students within the confines of the plantation university, I embarked on a comprehensive

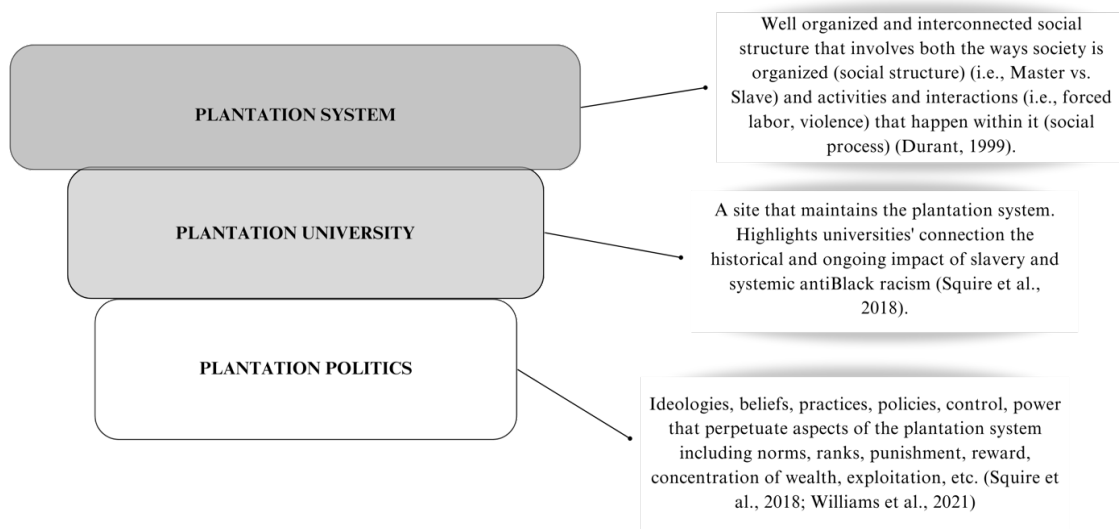
research endeavor, gathering narratives from Black transgender students who are either currently enrolled or have graduated within the last five years from a higher education institution in the United States. These narratives specifically focused on their interactions with administration, faculty, staff, peers, the campus environment, and surrounding communities. Through a meticulous examination of these findings in the context of the plantation system, plantation university, and the overarching concept of plantation politics (see Figure 1.1, Layers of Plantations), I put forth a compelling argument that plantation politics permeate every facet of all students' higher education experiences, but particularly Black transgender students' social and academic interactions throughout their college journey. Black transgender students' interactions with plantation politics are distinctly tied to their racialized gender identities.

Throughout this dissertation, my central contention revolves around the perpetuation, preservation, and enforced subjugation of Black transgender students within the higher education system, all in the pursuit of projecting a façade of diversity on campus. I aim to unveil the impact of plantation politics on the social and academic experiences of Black transgender students while simultaneously documenting the resilience and survival strategies that persist despite the universities' oppressive practices and ideologies. Thus, the questions that guided this dissertation are:

1. What are the experiences of Black transgender students when interacting with faculty, administration, and peers in institutions of higher education?

- To what extent do plantation politics impact the educational and social experiences of Black transgender students on college and university campuses?
2. What is (re)created amongst Black transgender students in higher education while experiencing Black transgender exclusion?

Figure 1. 1 Layers of Plantations



This introductory chapter establishes a comprehensive backdrop by delving into the historical context of higher education and plantation systems but also critically examines its role as a plantation university. Through this critical lens, I articulate my research objectives and offer a glimpse into the subsequent sections of the study.

Background and Context

Plantation Systems, Plantation Politics, and the History of Higher Education

Plantation Systems. The enduring impact of the plantation on the United States' economic, political, educational, and social dynamics persists despite the belief that the slave economy is considered a thing of the past (Woods, 1998). Woods' (1998) outlines the historical and contemporary impacts of the slave economy and plantation system on Black communities in the Mississippi Delta that ultimately spread throughout the United States. As defined, plantation systems are a structured and systematic social process with identifiable and interdependent parts based on social, demographic, economic, ecological, and cultural factors, as well as the type of organization, number and status of enslaved people, economic goals, period, geographical size, and dominant cultural patterns (Durant Jr., 1999). Whites in plantation systems also import, control, and sell Black bodies to grow White wealth and power (Durant Jr., 1999; Squire et al., 2018; Woods, 1998). According to Woods (1998), three plantation system traditions emerged during the debates over the development of the Mississippi Delta that sought to restrict the mobility of Black communities.

First, plantation bloc leaders, usually politically and economically wealthy Whites, asserted their domination over agriculture, manufacturing, banking, land, water, and education while committing to eliminating federal programs to reduce ethnic and class exploitation (Woods, 1998). Their leadership and system of domination and power ensured the expansion of poverty, erosion of human rights protections, and the highest mortality rates of Black communities in the South (Woods, 1998). The first tradition

reduces the likelihood of mass prosperity and social mobility of Black people in the United States by structuralizing antiBlackness. This first tradition replicates within higher education as executive administration, whose demographic makeup is predominately White, maintains power and control over academic policies, institutional tenure review boards, and executive boards (Squire et al., 2018).

The second tradition, the New South bloc tradition, developed out of predominantly White areas integrating into the Northern economy. Rail centers, or shops surrounding railroad systems, expanded in predominantly White regions in the South at the decline of ports and urban centers designed to support the slave economy. In response to combat agricultural decline and diversification, in the 1920s, Mississippi created a program that provided subsidies for Northern manufacturers moving to the South to preserve White rural areas, which was later adopted by all fifty states (Woods, 1998). To maintain its competitive advantage, the New South bloc employed legal and illegal measures characterized by a disorganized labor force and uncontrolled exploitation of natural resources (Woods, 1998). The economic struggles in the rural New South continued despite its efforts to maintain a competitive advantage, which was exacerbated by plant closures and farming crises, leading to perpetual turmoil (Woods, 1998). Due to the economic crisis in the South, Whites misplaced blame on Black communities, emboldening Southern leaders to seek increased regulatory authority for state social structures and a resurgence of White supremacist influences (Woods, 1998). This plantation system tradition ensures the exploitation of Black people in the labor force, neglect of predominantly Black neighborhoods, endorsements of Black Codes, and White

supremacist violence directed at Black communities. Black students, staff, and faculty experience restrictions in their social, physical, and intellectual mobility when it is deemed counter-productive to the function of higher education. This tradition becomes even more present in higher education when we consider the reduced investments in Black resources and retention, institutional responses to campus rebellions, and wage gaps between White and Black faculty and administration.

Woods's (1998) third tradition centers on the resistance to the monopoly of the plantation system. He (1998) says this tradition:

...emerged from the Native American communities, which experienced both genocide and exile as the plantation complex moved south and west. It emerged from the new African American communities trapped inside the boundaries of the plantation complex. It also emerged in a less consistent manner from the impoverished White farmers and workers who tried to confront plantation power. These encounters have shaped traditions of solidarity, affirmation, and resistance, which view the plantation system as an evil abomination whose strength is dependent upon the repeated destruction of community after community, family after family (Woods, 1998, p. 28).

Native American, Black, and impoverished White farmers and workers learned early on that slavery and plantations are integral to capitalism, as highlighted by the plantation's role as a military form of agriculture and a capitalist settlement institution with extensive land, capital, and labor requirements (Woods, 1998). Woods (1998) explains that the plantation complex, exemplified by the Mississippi Delta, adapted through slavery, sharecropping, mechanization, and other forms of evolved manufacturing while maintaining resource monopoly and intense ethnic and class polarization as its fundamental features whose goal was to reduce solidarity amongst various groups. This tradition of the plantation system draws familiarity in the landscape

of higher education, where resistance to its traditions and monopoly are embedded in the historical foundations of academic institutions.

In higher education, the organization of its structures and goals draws parallels to the dynamics of the plantation system, which impact the structures, policies, and interactions with Black students, staff, and faculty. Subsystems of the plantation, like higher education, mimic plantation traditions and practices. Higher education mimics plantation system traditions and practices by preserving distinctions between members and creating boundaries between those subjected to systemic control and those deemed exempt (Squire et al., 2018). For example, higher education maintains plantation system traditions through the relationship and power dynamics of executive leadership and board of directors (overseers) to administration and faculty to students. These distinctions become essential in maintaining control over Black mobility both within the plantation system and higher education as they seek to uphold power dynamics and hierarchies. The plantation system's overarching goal of preserving a social hierarchy that restricts the upward mobility of Black individuals is reinforced by a strict governance system (i.e., Board of Regents, University of California Office of the President, etc.) (Durant Jr., 1999). For the plantation system and higher education to remain a powerful force in limiting Black mobility, its structural framework (i.e., policies, practices, ideologies) necessitates the ongoing adaptation to internal and external forces (Squire et al., 2018). In other words, how the plantation and the university function, practices, and even where it is situated must evolve with the changing socio-economic and political landscape. The ongoing adaptation can be exemplified by forming student governing associations

representing large student bodies, creating a façade of power distributed to populations under control by the overseers (Board of Regents/Directors).

As higher education continues to adapt and wield power that seeks to limit Black mobility, it becomes imperative to examine the exploitative and dehumanizing dynamics within the institution. In higher education, Black students, staff, and faculty are exploited and dehumanized, all while contributing to the economic prosperity of the institution (Squire et al., 2018). The various forms of exploitation and dehumanization of Black people in higher education, similar to those in a plantation system, are expressed through the structural and procedural elements of the institution (Squire et al., 2018). In a plantation system, structural elements include knowledge, sentiment, goals, norms, status, rank, power, sanctions, and facility (Durant, 1998; Squire et al., 2018) (see Table 1.1 *Structural Elements of Plantations and a Nonexhaustive List of Modern Higher Education Parallels*). Structural elements in higher education that are parallel to the plantation system include mindsets that lead to neoliberal action, the use of bodies of color for capital gain, over-regulation of spaces for marginalized groups, and increasing bureaucracy, to name a few (Squire et al., 2018) (see Table 1.1 *Structural Elements of Plantations and a Nonexhaustive List of Modern Higher Education Parallels*).

Furthermore, the processual or procedural elements of the plantation system include communication, boundary maintenance, systematic linkage, socialization, social control, and institutionalization (Durant Jr., 1999; Squire et al., 2018) (see Table 1.2 *Processual Elements of Plantations and a Nonexhaustive List of Contemporary Higher Education Parallels*). In higher education, the parallels of processual elements to the

plantation system include negative interactions between deans and faculty of color, the ostracization and removal of people of color who resist, faculty control of graduate students, etc. (see Table 1.2 Processual Elements of Plantations and a Nonexhaustive List of Contemporary Higher Education Parallels). The identified parallels of the structural and processual elements to the plantation system highlight a pattern that suggests that higher education as a plantation system relies on the enforcement of politics and ideologies to sustain itself. To unravel the complexities inherent in the United States' historical legacies and higher education's contemporary manifestations within academic institutions, we must look closely at plantation politics and the history of higher education.

Plantation Politics. Researchers describe plantation politics as the psychological and political warfare Black people experience and are subjected to in White institutions (Squire et al., 2018; Williams et al., 2021). Within this framework, plantation politics acknowledges the connections between historical slavery and its contemporary iterations exemplified in the disparities in education, health, economics, and housing for Black people. These connections are visible in higher education policies, practices, and discourses (Williams et al., 2021). Slavery's violence emerges within current global conditions of Black life and is represented in the economic, educational, psychological, health, and judicial disparities of the Black/African diaspora (i.e., the afterlife of slavery) (Sharpe, 2016). Williams et al. (2021) expand this understanding by specifying the plantation's role in Black people's social and academic experiences in higher education. Racialized inequities inherent in plantation life, encompassing economics, spatiality,

social relations, and surveillance, persistently echo within the physical structures and daily operations of higher education (Dancy II et al. 2018; Wilder, 2013; Williams et al., 2021). Furthermore, they contend that plantation politics permeate the policies, practices, and everyday interactions involving individuals, the environment, and activities within higher education (Squire et al., 2018; Williams et al., 2021). These politics render Black students, staff, and faculty invisible while simultaneously exploiting their labor for profit and benefit (Dancy II et al., 2018; Williams et al., 2021). When the labor of Black students, staff, and faculty is deemed disrupted, the enforcement of plantation politics seeks to dismantle the —education, healing, escape, and resistance—spaces created by Black communities (Nicolazzo, 2016a; Patton & Simmons, 2008; Williams et al., 2021).

Institutional actors (e.g., administration, faculty, staff, campus police) reinforce plantation politics every day, but especially when met with Black resistance and campus rebellions (Williams et al., 2021). When institutions are met with Black resistance and campus rebellions, they react by exuding the plantation politics and systems traditions, which manifest as police violence, carcerality, and surveillance (Williams et al., 2021). Examples such as the University of California, Davis pepper spray incident (Golden, 2011), the arrest and imprisonment of Monica Jones during a co-curricular opportunity (Stewart & Nicolazzo, 2018), and the removal of a Black woman student at Winston Salem University by police for disagreeing with a White professor, underscore the impact of these dynamics (Sutton & Jackson, 2022). Black students, staff, and faculty experience restrictions, exploitation, and marginalization through the reinforcement of plantation politics by institutional actors. So, it is hard to disagree that plantations continue to

influence Black people's futures by limiting the capacity for Black people to be free (McKittrick, 2013). Higher education's everyday functions enmesh plantation politics through espoused inclusive values of diversity to sustain the campus economy while the climate for Black and Black transgender students on campus remains unhealthy (Ledesma, 2016; Williams et al., 2021). Conversations of plantation politics within higher education encourage us to explore its historical foundations to understand better the relationship between the plantation system and the contemporary mistreatment of Black people within the academy.

History of Higher Education. From the buildings we walk into to the land we walk on, higher education institutions hold multiple, overlapping, intersecting, and competing histories of genocide, oppression, and violence that were perpetuated when the institution was in its founding stage. In the historical continuum of exploitation, violence, and control, the systemic abuse of enslaved Native people, stolen African individuals, and Indigenous Americans served as a dark foundation upon which the institution of slavery (and higher education) was built, ultimately safeguarding White knowledge, perpetuating the growth of White supremacy, and generating wealth for those who benefited from the institution and its entrenched power structures (Dancy II et al., 2018; Wilder, 2013; Williams et al., 2021). Higher education is an extension of the slave plantation. Higher education's establishment-maintained colonies in the Americas. This connection to the colonies allowed higher education to procure funds from the trans-Atlantic slave trade which continues to endow institutions today (Wilder, 2013).

The first documented case of an enslaved Black person in the academy was in the late 1630s (Wilder, 2013). A servant to the first students at Harvard, a man known to the campus community as “The Moor” arrived aboard the *Desire* to serve Harvard’s constituents (Towner, 1998). Archives show that Harvard’s presidents enslaved Black people as early as the 1630s, at least until emancipation in 1865 (Brown-Nagin et al., 2022).

The first universities institutionalized racism and intertwined the slave economies with the pursuit of higher learning. To ensure that the doors remained open, colleges attached themselves to the Transatlantic slave economies during the American Revolutionary War (Wilder, 2013). The institution of higher education bred Ivy League educated White men into enslavers who leveraged the institution of slavery to grow wealth.

We continue to see the names of White men who benefitted from the slave economy on our campus buildings—for example, the recently renamed Ryland Hall at the University of Richmond in Virginia (Llanos & Fitzgerald, 2022). Robert Ryland was the first president of the University of Richmond and served as the first pastor of the First African Baptist Church of Richmond. Ryland, also an enslaver, believed that slavery was the best way to convert African people to Christianity (Leveen, 2017). Public universities such as those in California have similar historical foundations and connections. The visibility of enslavement in public universities is particularly troubling, given that most of their missions are to provide a more welcoming, diverse, and equal education for all (Wilder, 2013). For example 1868, Governor Henry Huntly Haight signed the Organic

Act, which established the University of California’s public education system. The signing set “in motion the audacious idea that California should have a great public university — one that would serve equally the children of immigrants and settlers, landowners and industrial barons” (University of California Office of the President website, 2018, para. 4). However, in Haight’s inaugural speech on December 5, 1867, he proclaimed his opposition to Reconstruction, declaring African and Asian people as *inferior races* (Henry H. Haight, *UC’s 150th Anniversary and the Erasure of History in Public Spaces*, 2019). He put fear in the minds of White men, asserting:

Reconstruction takes from White people of 10 states their constitutional rights and leaves them subject to military rule and disenfranchises enough White men to give political control to a mass of Negroes just emancipated and just as ignorant of political duties as beasts of the field (California State Library, n.d.).

Haight’s speech also shows evidence of resistance to the Fourteenth Amendment, which would have granted citizenship and equal protection to formerly enslaved African people. While the University of California system remains a public institution for all, we must acknowledge the ways public higher education historically and contemporarily perpetuates AntiBlack rhetoric and excludes Black people.

And It’s Not Just Them: HBCUs and AntiBlackness. AntiBlackness, Black exclusion, and plantation politics are not just perpetuated in predominantly White Institutions (PWIs). The function and structure of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) are also the plantation. The creation of HBCUs was to increase access to higher education for Black people and foster racial uplift (Miller, 2016) which “have provided undergraduate training for three-fourths of all Black persons holding a

doctorate; three-fourths of all Black officers in the armed forces; and four-fifths of all Black federal judges” (United States Department of Education, 2016). However, even though the roots of HBCUs differ from those of predominantly White institutions (PWIs), their investments in respectability politics² for the palatability of White culture places HBCUs in direct opposition to all (queer, disabled, trans, poor, fat) Black liberation (Gray, 2016).

Black respectability at HBCUs creates the expectation that espouses and perpetuates putting your “best Black self” forward (Gray, 2016, p. 193) and the values of heteronormativity and strict gender roles, which punishes and displaces those who do not adhere to conformity (Lewis & Erickson, 2016; Njoku et al., 2017; Patton & Simmons, 2008; Squire & Mobley, 2015). Scholars have found that institutional actors in HBCUs also oppose Black imaginative spaces, which is indicative of the complacency of whiteness, patriarchy, misogyny, and heteronormativity that is perpetuated within higher education (Njoku et al., 2017). Institutional actors at HBCUs are gatekeepers and enforcers that maintain structures of whiteness (Njoku et al., 2017). Like plantations, institutional actors (owners, overseers, business managers) maintain the normalcy and function of the institution. Therefore, I argue that regardless of the population an institution serves and its origins, because whiteness is embedded within every cell of the United States, higher education as a structure remains a plantation.

² Respectability politics is defined as a set of behaviors, actions, or attitudes that reproduce dominant norms as a strategy to produce a counter-narrative to negative stereotypes of Black people (Harris, 2003)

Table 1. 1 Structural Elements of the Plantations and Examples of Parallels to Higher Education

Structural Elements	Higher Education Examples of Parallels
<p>Knowledge: Owners believed that slave labor was practical and profitable, that slaves were property and that slaves should be subordinate</p> <p>Sentiment: Master(s) expressed paternalism and superiority; slaves expressed victimization, resistance, and powerlessness</p> <p>Goal: Profit through use of slave labor</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mindsets that lead to neoliberal action and the use of bodies of color for capital gain • Over-regulation of spaces for marginalized groups • Increasing bureaucracy • Athletics • International graduate student education • Commodification of bodies of color in campus advertisement
<p>Norms: Slaves not allowed to leave and expected to be obedient</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broad cultural college-going expectations • Rhetoric on lack of possibilities for success without college degree
<p>Status: Owner, manager, overseer, driver, house slave, and field slave as titles</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Board of trustees • President • Chief Diversity Officer • Students
<p>Rank: Titles of slaves were given differential power through hierarchical order and wealth, power, and prestige</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “At-risk” • “Remedial”
<p>Power: Owner vs. slave as a continuum</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Control of enrollment, persistence, college success • Hierarchical control of university structures
<p>Sanctions: Slaves punished for dis-obedience and rewarded for good behavior</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Threatened adjudication of people of color and upholding of whiteness (e.g., campus speaker protests) • Continued promotion of “good” students of color to public-facing opportunities
<p>Facility: Slaves’ work tools, and owners’ land, labor, capital, and production strategies and techniques</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Campuses, resources, publications, grants, and other normative university facilities that promote the plantation economy

Note. Adapted from Squire et al. (2018) Structural Elements of Plantations and a Nonexhaustive List of Modern Higher Education Parallels.

Table 1. 2 Processual Elements of the Plantation and Examples of Parallels to Higher Education

Processual Elements	Higher Education Examples of Parallels
Communication: Orders and commands communicated from owner or overseer to slaves	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Campus emails • Individual meetings between executive administrators & staff • Negative interactions between deans & faculty of color
Boundary maintenance: Attempts to preserve and protect the solidarity of the system; stopping runaways	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Removal of troublemakers • Reduction of tenured faculty who hold power • Reduction of freedom for student athletes & others on scholarship • Increasing fear of litigation • Involuntariness of membership
Systemic linkages: Mutually supportive linkages between systems; exchange of slave labor; police control	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outsourcing of campus safety, housing, transportation, dining • Militarization of campus police • Relations between corporation and university programs and policy
Socialization: Teaching and learning of rules, skills, roles, status, and culture of plantations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Orientation programs & other transition programs that set norms for behavior • Faculty control of graduate students
Social control: How deviancy was eliminated, reduced, or rendered harmless; slave codes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incremental changes related to diversity and equity • Removal or underfunding of cultural centers • Ostracization & removal of people of color who resist
Institutionalization: Process by which organizations are made stable, persistent, and predictable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reproduction of education as an oppressive structure • Repetition of nonworking equity & justice measures • Creation of diversity task forces

Note. Adapted from Squire et al. (2018) Processual Elements of Plantations and a Nonexhaustive List of Contemporary Higher Education Parallels.

Study Objectives

By shedding light on the pervasive influence of plantation politics within the higher education environment, I bring attention to how institutions perpetuate and endorse systems of oppression while simultaneously claiming to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion (Williams et al., 2021). I examine the current experiences of Black transgender students to understand what barriers exist to abolish the plantation university. Williams et al. (2021) offer their framework to explore the obstacles to humanizing higher education and how understanding plantation politics might help us obtain emancipatory futures. I add to plantation politics research by providing a perspective focusing on how gender, specifically how trans*³ gender identities, may impact the ways plantation politics manifests in the lives of Black students with multiple marginalized identities on campus. By examining the processual and structural elements of the plantation system (Durant Jr., 1999) within Black transgender students' experiences, my study aims to expose the systemic barriers, marginalization, and harm these students encounter. By revealing the presence of plantation politics in both the procedural and structural aspects of higher education, I aim to contribute to the understanding of how power dynamics operate within higher education and the specific challenges faced by Black transgender students.

I aim to expand previous research by providing detailed insights into the experiences of Black transgender students and underscore the urgent need for

³ the * (asterisk) is used as a blank for one to fill in with a gender. For example, trans (women) or trans (nonbinary).

transformative change in the higher education system. I affirm and build upon previous research in higher education that acknowledges the formation of self-organized groups and communities by Black LGBTQ students (Nicolazzo, 2016a; Simms et al., 2020), including Black transgender individuals. I contribute to the growing archive of research and literature on the Black transgender student experience in higher education (Garvey et al., 2019; Jones, 2020; Jourian, 2017; Nicolazzo, 2016a, 2016b; Simms et al., 2021; Stewart & Nicolazzo, 2018). My research adds to empirical perspectives that expressly acknowledge the racialized gender experiences of transgender people who are Black. The Black transgender perspective that has gone unnoticed or hidden amongst generalized analyses of LGBTQ student populations and findings in higher education research.

Furthermore, I expand our empirical understanding of how Black transgender students resist their current conditions in higher education and what survives incessant Black trans exclusion. By centering Black transgender student communities, I aim to affirm the existence and resilience of these communities, even in the absence of institutional support (Blockett, 2017; Goode-Cross & Tager, 2011; Simms et al., 2020).

Finally, I broaden campus climate research by providing insight into how Black transgender students experience the impacts of plantation politics in higher education. I fill a void in campus climate research by documenting how Black transgender students experience campus life, the implications of historical violence, and the ways Black transgender students resist exclusion and other institutional violence. I add to the existing literature and empirical research and provide valuable insights for researchers, educators, and institutions aiming to create more inclusive and supportive environments for Black

transgender students. Ultimately, the significance of my study is in its critical examination of plantation politics, the history of higher education, and their contemporary impacts on Black transgender students' lives. My call for transformative and abolitionist approaches to higher education research that center on the experiential knowledge and verbalized, actual, and consensual needs of marginalized communities is also notable.

Roadmap

To lay a robust foundation, I introduce relevant literature on plantation politics, followed by an extensive review of existing campus climate research on the experiences of Black LGBTQ students. I then provides an overview of my theoretical framework of AntiBlackness and a breakdown of the methodological approach to understanding how plantation politics impact Black transgender students' experiences in higher education. Drawing from the insights gleaned in the literature review, I employ the lens of AntiBlack transness to analyze the narratives shared by a diverse cohort of 20 Black transgender students currently enrolled in or formerly associated with a higher education institution. Results of the study indicate the presence of plantation politics in both processual and structural interactions for Black transgender students. The narratives uncover various issues, including isolation, rejection, and marginalization, leading some Black transgender students to abandon their educational pursuits.

Despite those experiences, the study reveals how some Black transgender students demonstrate a profound understanding of the expansiveness of their identities, fostering connections and communities within and beyond institutional spaces. Narratives

emphasize that Black transgender students actively create and sustain communities of care that offer crucial support, recognition, and understanding, providing a safe and reliable space for self-expression without the need for explanation. Despite facing institutional pushback and lacking formal support, these communities thrive, meeting one another's basic needs and contributing to their peers' well-being and success.

Concluding the study, I comprehensively discuss the findings against the backdrop of plantation politics, their implications, and their broader significance. Ultimately, I present a (un)conclusion, provoking contemplation on the impact on the future of higher education, urging the abolishment of the plantation university, commitment to an Afro-Trans Future, and meeting Black transgender students where they are.

Chapter II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Plantation Politics and Campus Climate

Plantation politics emerges as an apt framework to view the university's climate because it captures the systemic power dynamics, hierarchies, and modes of oppression that mirror the historical plantation system (Williams et al., 2021). Just as plantations are characterized by the exploitation and subjugation of Black bodies for economic gain (Durant Jr., 1999), the dynamics within universities often perpetuate similar patterns of power and control (Squire et al., 2018; Williams et al., 2021). By viewing campus climate through the lens of plantation politics, we can better understand how universities perpetuate exclusionary practices, invisibilize Black identities, particularly Black transgender identities, and maintain power imbalances amongst institutional actors.

Scholars have described campus climate as essential to students' experiences because of its impacts on student success and persistence (Mayhew et al., 2016). Campus climate is measured by the attitudes, behaviors, and standards institutional actors uphold, and students' needs, abilities, and potential to succeed and be retained (Hurtado, 1992; Rankin, 2005). The campus environment is a configuration of external factors, structural characteristics of institutions and group relations, and institutionalized ideologies, and no one single element can determine racial [and gendered] tensions on college campuses (Hurtado, 1992). There are many elements to consider when looking at campus environments. Campus environments are determined by outside factors such as the community surrounding the campus, structural and group relations of the institution (how

students are treated by staff, faculty, and administration), campus demographics (class, race, gender), and the beliefs that the institution espouses.

Many higher education institutions market their campus climates and environments as diverse or inclusive. The plantation politics framework critiques the use of diversity in higher education and discourse surrounding campus climate, suggesting that diversity initiatives create dissonance between what Black students experience, how institutional actors think they treat Black students on campus (Williams et al., 2021), and what is externally marketed. Diversity does not absolve an institution of its reproduction of AntiBlack racism and White supremacy (Williams et al., 2021). Diversity is believed to be how we discuss race without discussing it (Berrey, 2015). Diversity makes White people and White institutions feel comfortable about the interactions they have with non-White people. Maintaining comfort within racial discourse allows higher education institutions to maintain White comfort zones, which are weaponized against people of color (Leonardo & Porter, 2010). White comfort zones are defined as the demand for conversations around race to be safe, where Whites feel comfortable, and there is no risk of being seen as racist (Leonardo & Porter, 2010). For example, discussions surrounding race and racism marketed as *safe spaces* are often structured so that the dialogue and pedagogy are guided and targeted at the least competent person in the room (Leonardo & Porter, 2010, p. 154). Another example of how universities protect White comfort zones is in university's responses to violence against communities of color and the university's desire to maintain the privacy of the perpetrator. University responses often cite FERPA and other campus privacy policies as to why the campus community and greater public

remain out of the loop despite the violence happening in and on public platforms (i.e., AntiBlack LGBTQ incident at the University of California, Berkeley, see Public Affairs, 2019).

While diversity initiatives aim to create a campus environment inclusive of all racial identities, dialogues surrounding race can gaslight⁴ people of color who want to engage in racial dialogues or interrogate current hostile campus environments (Leonardo & Porter, 2010). Said differently, institutions externally promote themselves as diverse and catering to diverse populations. However, when marginalized students resist discriminatory practices on campus, resistance, and rebellion are ultimately frowned upon and met with a doubling-down effect by campus administration and administrative practices (Hurtado et al., 1998). Administrative doubling-down effects look like physical violence and militarized forces who pepper spray student activists (Golden, 2011), threats of restraint and arrest of students (Sutton & Jackson, 2022), refusal to provide food and water to protesters, and the removal of students through suspension and expulsion (Williams et al., 2021).

Furthermore, plantation politics is a crucial framework to view campus climate when considering how Black transgender students experience higher education. Campus climate research analyses tend to focus on the experiences and “fit” of marginalized groups in higher education (Ledesma, 2016). However, in a world that is inherently AntiBlack Trans racist, there is no social location in which a Black transgender existence

⁴ Gaslighting: Psychological method of manipulation of someone into questioning their own sanity, power of reasoning, and experiences over an extended period of time (Merriam-Webster, n.d.)

“fits.” Viewing campus climate through a plantation politics framework acknowledges society's reliance on the notion of humanity that has a collective worldview that believes you are human as long as you are not Black (Robinson, 1983). Campus climate research provides no acknowledgment of this notion and reality for Black transgender students at the limits of the plantation university. A plantation politics framework acknowledges that Black trans students' total climate (i.e., on campus, off campus, in their neighborhoods, homes, places of work, in media, etc.) is always mitigated through the contemporary manifestations of chattel slavery.

Review of Literature

Campus climate research often overlooks the experiences of Black transgender students. These students exist at the margins of the university. It becomes clear that to understand their experiences, a plantation politics framework is essential. Such a framework acknowledges that the total climate for Black trans students is perpetually influenced by the enduring manifestations of chattel slavery within the higher education system. Consequently, as a Black transgender scholar in higher education, I have personally encountered the all-too-familiar manifestations of plantation politics in my experiences with isolation from the campus community and exclusion from the curriculum and on-campus support services. The experiences of being the only one or one of few have shaped my understanding of how the institution functions and my passion for supporting Black transgender students in college. Despite living in LGBTQ-affirming housing, working in the LGBTQ community and campus leadership and retention centers, and even participating in off-campus opportunities, my experiences working and

learning in college have led me to the overwhelming conclusion that Black transgender students go under-acknowledged, supported, and validated.

My retention in the academy is solely a by-product of Black transgender spirituality, care, and students who affirmed my existence while navigating an institution that caused so much harm. Despite experiencing an institution that was explicitly and implicitly AntiBlack trans racist, I co-created pockets of affirmation, acknowledgment, care, and love with Black transgender peers that sustained and continue to sustain generations of other Black transgender scholars in the academy. The majority of research in the field of higher education centers on a deficit and highlights the exclusion, isolation, and vulnerability that LGBTQ students broadly experience (Angeli, 2009; Evans, 2000; Linley et al., 2015; Daley et al., 2007; Rankin, 2004; Renn, 2010; Yost & Gilmore, 2011; Ritchie & Banning, 2001; Woodford, 2014) with no centering of the resistance practices and endless possibilities that Black transgender students can generate.

Moreover, while there is a vast amount of research on lesbian, gay, bisexual, and, to some extent, transgender students in higher education (Bilodeau, 2005; Blockett, 2017; Evans, 2000; Gomez, 1999; Nicolazzo, 2016a, 2016b; Renn, 2010; Seelman, 2014; Woods, 1993), the research conflates sexual orientations (gay, lesbian, bisexual) to gender identities (transgender, nonbinary, man, woman) which is reductive and overlooks the marked experiences of transgender students (Nicolazzo, 2016b; Renn, 2010). Additionally, while there is sizable research on transgender students in higher education (Bilodeau, 2005; Blockett, 2017; Duran et al., 2019; Evans, 2000; Gomez, 1999; Nicolazzo, 2016a, 2016b; Renn, 2010; Seelman, 2014; Woods, 1993), there is a more

modest, yet growing, archive of research and literature on the Black transgender student experience (Garvey et al., 2018; Jones, 2020; Jourian, 2017; Nicolazzo, 2016a, 2016b; Simms et al., 2020; Stewart & Nicolazzo, 2018).

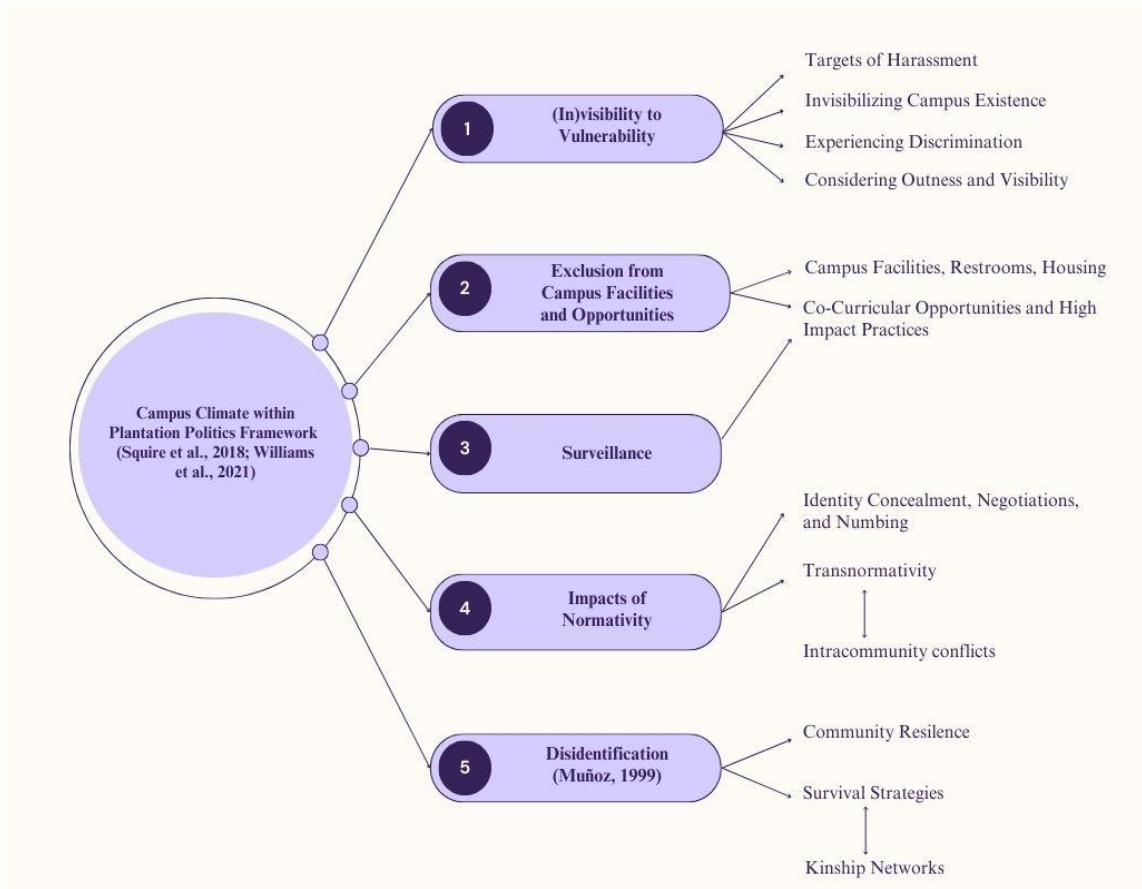
Through my review of the literature, it is even more apparent the need to expand our understanding of the ways the politics of the plantation manifest in the contemporary experiences of Black transgender students in higher education. To be clear, the experiences shared in the literature and my experiences of exclusion are not just a consequence of the institution's misunderstanding of our identities. The marginalization that has become synonymous with our college and university experiences is historically rooted in the relationship between higher education institutions and the plantation regime of the United States. While whiteness would deny it, the plantation remains central to the iconography of the U.S. (Woods, 1998). The exploitation of the labor, knowledge, and skills of Black transgender people continues to be central to the economy of higher education (Williams et al., 2021), which made me curious about what meaning the research on Black gays and lesbians and, more specifically, Black transgender students in higher education might take on when viewed through a plantation politics lens.

In this literature review, I explore two strands of prior campus climate research: the Black gay and lesbian student experience and the Black transgender student experience. Despite the exclusion of transgender identities and experiences in the research on Black gay and lesbian students studies, findings show how intersecting identities of Blackness, gender, or sexual orientation can influence campus life for Black transgender students. I use research on the experiences of Black gay and lesbian students

because studies show that the intersection of Blackness coupled with a marginalized gender or sexual orientation creates a complex, specific, and otherwise complicated experience for students in higher education, which suggests that Black transgender students may also undergo due to their gender and race.

The research introduced in the following sections focuses on the experiences of Black students who identify within the lesbian, gay, queer, or transgender community. While exploring the research, I use plantation politics as an analytic lens to understand the possible power differentials created amongst plantation politics practitioners (faculty, administration, staff, students) and the Black transgender student experience (see Figure 2.1 for concept map). When research on Black lesbian, gay, and transgender students is viewed through plantation politics, I acknowledge the ways that the experiences of these students are not just isolated consequences of institutional climates but are historically connected to AntiBlack homophobic rhetoric that ties back to higher education's investments in plantation structures, practices, and boundaries. The application of plantation politics to Black transgender student experiences suggests that higher education's maintenance of White norms and attempts to preserve solidarity with the institution results in isolation and sometimes even the removal of Black transgender students.

Figure 2. 1 Literature Review Concept Map



Five themes arose from the literature amongst the Black gay, lesbian, and transgender student research in higher education: (in)visibility, which can lead to vulnerability, exclusion from campus facilities and opportunities, surveillance, impacts of normativity, and disidentification (Muñoz, 1999). In the following subsections, I go into detail about each theme while highlighting studies from Black gay and lesbian populations, aligning them to those of the Black transgender student populations.

(In)Visibility to Vulnerability

Targets of Harassment. The intersection of Blackness and other marginalized gender or sexual identities influences campus experiences and perceptions (Truong et al., 2020). Higher education's connection to the slave plantation contributes to unhealthy campus climates for Black students. These connections manifests in invisibility, violence, and harassment in their encounters with academic and social life. In a survey of 1,534 Black LGBTQ students between the ages of 13 and 21 in the United States, except Wyoming and territories such as the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands, researchers examined the experiences of Black LGBTQ students concerning indicators of hostile school climate and their impact on academic achievement, educational aspirations, and psychological well-being (Truong et al., 2020). Black LGBTQ students who experienced—race, gender, or sexual orientation—victimization also had the lowest levels of school belonging and skipped school because they felt unsafe (Truong et al., 2020).

Over half of Black LGBTQ students from the sample experienced harassment or assault based on personal characteristics, including sexual orientation, gender expression, and race/ethnicity (Truong et al., 2020). Black LGBTQ students in the sample tend to have poor school belonging and high rates of assault and harassment in schools which are linked to consequences of enslavement through contemporary forms of AntiBlack LGBTQ rhetoric and practices. The findings from the study also illuminate the violent encounters faced by Black transgender students in higher education. For example, Truong and others (2020) study also found that Black transgender students experienced greater

levels of school harassment than their cisgender Black lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer peers.

Invisibilizing Campus Existence. In a similar study on the extent to which Black lesbians are supported in HBCUs, Patton & Simmons (2008) found that Black lesbian students face an invisibilizing existence filled with threats of violence and fear of prejudice leading to confusion and feelings of rejection. Respectability politics played a role in the continued invisibilization, isolation, and harassment experienced by Black lesbian students at HBCUs (Patton, 2014; Patton & Simmons, 2008). Respectability is “putting your best Black self forward” (Gray, 2016, p. 193), which produces strict boundaries of acceptable gender presentations, sexual orientations, and conformity (Lewis & Erickson, 2016; Njoku et al., 2017; Patton, 2014; Patton & Simmons, 2008; Squire & Mobley, 2015). For Black transgender students, this may look like ascribing to cisheteronormative⁵ or hegemonic relationship structures, gender presentations, and sexual practices. These rigid boundaries created intra-community conflicts and dynamics amongst the greater Black, Black lesbian, and potentially Black transgender communities in college, further invisibilizing and isolating those who do not conform to cisheteronormative respectable Blackness (Patton, 2014; Patton & Simmons, 2008). The upholding of respectability politics can essentially separate Black transgender people from expressing their outward affirming gender presentation to appease the larger Black community on campus. This study highlights the strictness and complacency perpetuated

⁵ Cisheteronormative refers to the assumption that heterosexuality and being cisgender are the norm, which plays out in interpersonal interactions and society, and furthers the marginalization of queer and gender-diverse people

within Black communities, contributing to an unhealthy campus environment for Black lesbians. This strictness and complacency emulate the boundaries formed by plantation politics, also impacting Black transgender students.

Experiencing Discrimination. Black gay and lesbian students not only experienced more significant levels of invisibility and isolation but were also disproportionately represented in the data on being targets of discrimination and harassment in college. In a focus group study of six lesbian and gay students and thirty faculty at an HBCU, Lewis and Erickson (2016) found that Black lesbian and gay students shared stories of harassment and bullying from peers. Black gay and lesbian students also highlighted faculty's avoidant behavior towards lesbian and gay issues, leading them to feel a lack of support and isolation from on-campus resources and the community (Lewis & Erickson, 2016). The intersection of Blackness and marginalized sexual orientation complicated and brought a complex experience of on-campus harassment and bullying for Black LGBTQ students, which can highlight similar results for Black transgender students. Higher education institutions entice Black transgender students with diversity and inclusion support initiatives while they perpetuate isolation and exclusion (Williams et al., 2021). This discrepancy shows the power embedded in diversity marketing strategies that effectively promote inclusion while isolating Black transgender students from support services. The maintenance of a White normative institution, even in HBCUs, represents the plantation politics that are embedded in the resources, functions, policies, and practices of higher education broadly.

Considering Outness and Visibility. Visibility differed slightly for Black transgender students in the research. Outness amongst Black transgender students also was differently experienced as opposed to their White transgender peers (Patton, 2011). The community often relates someone from the LGBTQ community's gender or sexual orientation to their knowledge of a student's outness. For Black transgender people, a *sense of coming in*, can be defined as a student's internal sense of self in response to external influences that impact their identities (Garvey et al., 2019; Patton & Simmons, 2008). For White transgender students, their gender identity is salient because it is often their most marginalized identity (Clark, 2005). Black transgender students experience marginalization that is attached to both their racial and gender identity, impacting their ability to be out comfortably (Garvey et al., 2019). Black transgender students experienced forms of vulnerability attached to their sense of outness to the campus community due to AntiBlack racism and transgender oppression, highlighting the differences between their White transgender peers (Garvey et al., 2019).

To circumvent and "eliminate any sign of deviation from gender and sexual norms that are dominant in a heteronormative society," (Bailey, 2013, p. 58) those who maintain power dynamics forced Black transgender students to align themselves with normative cis-passing gender presentations (Garvey et al., 2019). Black transgender students, as per Nicolazzo (2016a), often experienced greater encounters with violence, harassment, and exclusion when seeking visibility, limiting their access to on-campus resources and communities of support. Analyzing this research through the lens of plantation politics reveals that the policies and practices of the institution embed

structures of whiteness. These structures explicitly express that the campus is not designed for Black transgender students to exist comfortably, making them vulnerable when they choose to be out among the campus community. This level of exclusion is historically rooted in the foundation of higher education and continues to animate in the data on Black transgender student experiences.

Exclusion from Campus Facilities and Opportunities

Campus Facilities, Restrooms, Housing. Research on the experiences of transgender students in higher education highlights similar results of campus climate to those of Black gay, lesbian, and queer students in previous sections. For example, research on transgender students' experiences shows they undergo violent, exclusionary, isolating campus climates (Bilodeau, 2005; Blockett, 2017; Evans, 2000; Gomez, 1999; Nicolazzo, 2016b; Renn, 2010; Seelman, 2014; Woods, 1993). In a study of transgender students concerning access to gender-affirming housing and restrooms in higher education, Seelman's (2014):

Data indicate[s] that a notable proportion of transgender people who have attended higher education are not allowed to access gender-appropriate housing (19%) and/or appropriate bathrooms and other facilities (23.9%) while they are students (p. 198).

Access to appropriate and safe gender-affirming restrooms and housing is essential when talking about the inclusion of transgender students in the campus environment (Nicolazzo, 2016b; Seelman, 2014). Failing to accommodate transgender students in campus facilities prevents the proclamation that they belong in the campus community. The lack of access to these resources contributes to the hostile campus

climate for transgender students. Studies also show that transgender students' inability to engage in campus environments without barriers to opportunity creates a hostile campus climate, which leads to low student retention (Coleman et al., 2020). Transgender students who could engage authentically in campus life had more positive perceptions of the campus environment and higher retention rates (Renn et al., 2005). The exclusion from campus facilities and opportunities illuminates how campus environments shape physical barriers for transgender students.

Co-curricular Opportunities and High Impact Practices. Whiteness and AntiBlack Trans racism shape the physical boundaries of higher education for Black transgender students. Stewart and Nicolazzo's (2018) study illuminates the boundaries embedded in the structure of higher education through access to co-curricular/extra-curricular opportunities for Black transgender students. The institution of higher education enacts plantation boundaries to prevent the movement of Black transgender students. In the case of Black transgender student Monica Jones, Stewart and Nicolazzo (2018) examine the ways whiteness embedded in high-impact practices (HIPs) in higher education undermined Black transgender student success. *HIPs* are defined as co-curricular/extra-curricular programs implemented by university departments designed to increase student engagement, such as off-campus internships, study abroad, living-learning communities, to enrich educational experiences (Kuh et al., 2005). However, as Stewart and Nicolazzo (2018) point out, the Kuh et al. (2005) study did not acknowledge "the effects of oppression on student outcomes from such practices, and institutional capacities informing the structure and delivery of HIPs" (Stewart & Nicolazzo, 2018, p.

134). Monica Jones, a Black transgender student, faced arrest on manifesting prostitution charges while participating in Project ROSE, an anti-prostitution diversion program collaboration between Arizona State University School of Social Work, the Phoenix Police Department, and Catholic Charities. Jones' case highlights the need for an intersectional analysis of racialized transgender oppression within High-Impact Practices (HIPs). It also exposes the collusion between higher education and state and federally sanctioned policing of Black transgender students (Nicolazzo et al., 2015; Stewart & Nicolazzo, 2018), illustrating the interconnectedness of these issues with the plantation.

The current framework of HIPs is deeply problematic as they place Black transgender people as inherently deficient in comparison to their cisgender White peers (Stewart & Nicolazzo, 2018), which directly impacts Black transgender student experiences of campus life. Stewart and Nicolazzo (2018) write:

The continued promotion of HIPs without regard to its investments in whiteness as an ideological container further reproduces the maintenance of college campuses as dangerous spaces for trans students, especially those at the intersections of interlocking systems of oppression (Stewart & Nicolazzo, 2018, p. 134).

Neglecting to address how societal and institutional contexts are embedded in High-Impact Practices (HIP) will persistently hinder Black transgender students from achieving externally validated metrics of success, including awards, scholarships, grants, internship opportunities, and job offers (Stewart & Nicolazzo, 2018). Without these metrics of success or access to them, Black transgender students have the potential to continue to struggle economically in a society that is profoundly capitalistic and meritocratic.

Surveillance

Stewart & Nicolazzo's (2018) case above study not only highlights the ways HIPs exclude Black transgender students but also how they are hyper-surveilled and become high profile (i.e., Monica Jones). In a dissertation study on the experiences of Black transgender femmes and women in college, Jones (2020) found that participants were hyper-aware of their surroundings, expressed feelings of being watched, and were vulnerable to public scrutiny. Similar to formerly enslaved people on the plantation, Black transgender students feel a constant sense of surveillance, limiting their ability to exist and move freely on campus (the plantation). This level of surveillance aligns with what Foucault (1977) describes as the Panopticon. The Panopticon illustrates critical aspects of the role power plays in surveillance. The Panopticon prevents those being watched from seeing into its structure, leaving a permanent sense of visibility and surveillance, ultimately allowing the observer to remain robust. Black transgender students become hypervisible to campus police, administration, and their peers, which ultimately generates more power to those who are not hyper-visible. Higher education as a plantation site reproduces structures of surveillance, knowledge systems, ideas, and rhetoric (Durant, 1999; Foucault, 1977; Williams et al., 2021), which continues to marginalize Black transgender students on campus. Transnormativity perpetuated within transgender spaces in higher education can influence the hypervisibility of Black transgender students (Nicolazzo, 2016a). This prevents Black transgender students from fully accessing community and support on campus.

Impacts of Normativity

Identity Concealment, Negotiations, and Numbing. Black gay and lesbian students used identity numbing and concealing as a form of protection from outside, personal, and academic ramifications (Patton, 2011). In a qualitative study of fifty Black gay men in schools, Hunter (2010) found that Blackness coupled with a marginalized sexual orientation drastically reduced on-campus support opportunities for Black gay students, leading to identity concealment and numbing. There are three identity negotiations that Black gay students engage in: interlocking identities, up–down identities, and public–private identities (Hunter, 2010). Hunter (2010) characterizes interlocking identities as a unifying of race and sexual orientation, up-down identities as one identity over another, and public-private identities as race being public and sexuality as private. These negotiations are taken up depending on the environments in which the participant is engaged. The intersection of multiple marginalized identities creates a compounded experience for Black gay students, which reduces their opportunities for support services and community engagement (Hunter, 2010).

Normative institutional structures and AntiBlack homophobic rhetoric in higher education ostracized Black LGBTQ students based on their race, gender, and sexual orientations. In a similar study, Squire & Mobley Jr. (2014) examined factors contributing to college choice between HBCU and PWI for Black gay men. Participants negotiated their identities based on access to institutional support, which became a factor in Black gay students' college choices (Squire & Mobley Jr., 2014). Black gay students' perception of access to campus resources and inclusive campus climate for their racial

and sexual identities was also a factor in college choice, with participants choosing PWI over HBCU for being perceived as being more inclusive of both gay and racially/ethnically diverse students (Squire & Mobley Jr., 2014). Considering the challenges faced by Black LGBTQ students in navigating limited intersectional resources in higher education (Squire & Mobley Jr., 2014), research further underscores the troubling trend of erasure in discourses surrounding their experiences (Coleman et al., 2020), both in terms of Black student retention and on-campus support services (Goode-Cross & Tager, 2011).

On-campus support was crucial for Black lesbian, gay, and transgender students to persist in academic and social life (Goode-Cross & Tager, 2011; Nicolazzo, 2016a; Simms et al., 2021). In a study of Black queer men at a PWI, Goode-Cross & Tager (2011) found that students created both complex and dissonant relationships among peers and other non-LGBTQ Black communities on campus. By only disclosing queer identity only to a few trusted peers, Black queer students built extended support networks with the greater Black community perceived as anti-queer (Goode-Cross & Tager, 2011). All participants from the study experienced some form of racism while enrolled at the PWI, which made their involvement in the Black community crucial despite the risk of LGBTQ prejudice (Goode-Cross & Tager, 2011). While attending PWIs, Black lesbian and gay students experienced more acute harassment linked to their sexual orientation, gender, and racial identity (Henry et al., 2011; Hunter, 2010; Rankin, 2003). The study suggests that Black gay and lesbian students compartmentalized and concealed their identities, which can prove detrimental to a student's identity development processes.

In a more recent study, Garvey et al. (2019) found that queer and transgender students of color navigate their complex intersectional identities in nuanced and unique ways. Queer and transgender students expressed that they lived invisible lives while on campus (Garvey et al., 2019; Squire & Mobley, 2015). Queer and transgender students of color's complex identities meant that they consistently negotiated their levels of outness while in college (Garvey et al., 2019). Transgender students of color in the study often had to navigate decisions of disclosure and outness. Navigating disclosure meant that some of the transgender students chose to *pass* in order to remove any signs of not adhering to gender norms and expression (Bailey, 2013; Garvey et al., 2019). Research indicates that many Black transgender and transgender of color students, while enduring toxic campus climates, resisted and transgressed their campus culture by being unapologetically out and visible (Garvey et al., 2019).

In an earlier study on exploring the intersectional experience of Black gay men in college, Strayhorn and Kelly (2013) found that students navigating multiple marginalized identities felt alienated from both identity categories while engaging in campus life (race and sexuality). The feelings of isolation led Black gay students to seek underground or otherwise concealed environments that engaged in unsafe practices (drug and alcohol abuse and unprotected sex) (Strayhorn & Kelly, 2013). Black gay students often hide their gay identities out of fear of retaliation, safety, family appeasement, and to pass⁶ as cisgender or heterosexual (Strayhorn & Kelly, 2013; Woods, 1993). Also, when Black

⁶ The term to denote the phenomenon of passing within the Black queer and transgender community is "DL" or "living on the down-low" (Strayhorn & Kelly, 2013)

gay students did not receive support from campus communities, they sought out communities in online forums, extracurricular activities, and community organizations off campus (Mayo, 2018). Passing due to campus climate was found to be linked to lower self-esteem, gender role conflicts, unsafe sexual practices, depression, and suicide ideation for Black gay students (Gomez, 1999; Strayhorn & Kelly, 2013; Strayhorn & Mullins, 2012).

Like Black transgender students, the creation of gay and lesbian normativity contributed to their need to negotiate identities to access campus resources and support (Nicolazzo, 2016a). Some Black lesbian and gay students, especially when most on-campus services are inadequate for supporting LGBTQ students (Blockett, 2017), appreciated and preferred maintaining an underground lifestyle due to personal ramifications (Patton, 2011). Seeking concealed environments and spaces led Black gay students to create their own spaces to resist unhealthy campus environments (Blockett, 2017; Means et al., 2013). Research also showed that transgender students often go through the concealment of identity phase, where to survive their current environments, they do everything they can to hide their true identities (Cavanaugh & Luke, 2021; Nicolazzo, 2016a, 2016b). Their concealment of identity is due to needing to be safe, the anxiety of coming out, fear of reaction from others, and the feeling of being unsure how to express their identity. The concealment of the identity phase forced transgender students to adapt to the environments around them as a means of survival (Cavanaugh & Luke, 2021).

Transnormativity. For Black transgender students, transnormativity impacted their abilities to engage authentically in the greater transgender campus community. Jackson (2021) describes transnormativity as situating White transgender people in the discourse surrounding trans activism, education, and politics as the right kind of transgender person (Jackson, 2021). Some researchers also describe transnormativity as the alignment of transgender issues to the medical-industrial complex, making transitioning the main component of transgender identity (Johnson, 2016). The reduction of transness to only medical transitions is particularly troubling because there is a social structure that influences the ways transgender people identify. There is no requirement for one to undergo medical transitions. This assumption that all transgender people undergo medical transitions is deeply problematic. Gender identity is a deeply personal and internal sense of one's gender identity (see glossary). Many transgender people undergo a social transition long before they seek to undergo medical transitions. The assumption that all transgender people undergo medical transitions exemplifies how transnormativity⁷ impacts the misunderstanding of transgender people. Transnormative discourses perpetuated amongst LGBTQ and other communities in college exclude Black transgender students from accessing support services fully (counseling and health services, co-curricular programs, Title IX, victim advocacy).

Intracommunity conflicts. For example, in a study of two nonbinary Black transgender students in higher education, Nicolazzo (2016a) found that Black transgender

⁷ “Transnormativity [is] a process shaped by adherence to respectability politics, heteronormative standards, and class privilege” (Glover, 2016, p. 340).

students have a complicated and complex experience while engaging in on-campus resources aimed at supporting LGBTQ students. Tensions amongst higher education's implementation of transnormative best practices led Black transgender students to feel isolated from the campus community. One participant shared, "I am both identities [Black and trans*]. I am not just dealing with one [identity], I am dealing with both" (Nicolazzo, 2016a, p. 1181). The participant's acknowledgment of their intersectional identities highlights the whiteness embedded in LGBTQ spaces that effectively leave Black transgender students to fend for themselves (Nicolazzo, 2016a) but also the ways plantation structures seek to isolate those who do not assimilate to the norm, even amongst other marginalized students. This elusive structure of policies and practices contributes to the AntiBlack transgender exclusion in higher education and further highlights the plantation politics embedded in its structure. However, transnormative ideas were also emancipatory for these two Black transgender students. For example, because Black transgender students did not fit into the norm, they were able to generate possibilities of what Black transness could look like for themselves (Nicolazzo, 2016a).

Disidentification

Community Resilience. While research that focuses on Black gay and lesbian student populations overwhelmingly emphasizes isolation, discrimination, invisibilization, and alienation, there is a wealth of evidence that points to Black gay and lesbian student resistance and counterstrategies (Blockett, 2017; Evans, 2000; Follins et al., 2014; Nicolazzo, 2016a; Shange, 2019a; Strayhorn & Kelly, 2013). Black gay students, for

instance, found involvement in a ballroom⁸ culture off campus when lacking support from campus communities (Strayhorn & Kelly, 2013). House in this culture are utilized as a space “where members are accepted, affirmed, celebrated, and socialized to involvement” (Strayhorn & Kelly, 2013, p. 251), creating a sense of community and belonging that extends beyond the boundaries of the institution. Resisting campus isolation, Black gay students created kinship networks that acted as sources of support to rely upon (Strayhorn, 2012). These kinship relationships were often peer-to-peer mediated and facilitated, which were vital to Black gay students' academic and personal perseverance (Blockett, 2017; Goode-Cross & Tager, 2011).

Survival Strategies. In a study of the sense of belonging for Black gay men in college, Strayhorn (2012) found that Black gay men in college have the desire to fit in on campus. Participants, similar to the studies above, expressed feelings of alienation and isolation in academic and social settings, which were tied to forms of anti-LGBTQ discrimination and racism (Strayhorn, 2012). An unhealthy campus climate led Black gay and lesbian students to feel lonely and disengaged in campus life, which had an immense impact on students' sense of belonging (Rankin, 2004). Black gay students who did not feel affirmed in single-identity spaces sought communities outside of higher education (Strayhorn & Kelly, 2013). Kinship networks help sustain Black gay students in education and form networks of support against hostile campus environments. Like Black

⁸ Black and Latinx underground LGBTQ subculture originated in New York in the 1980s. Ballroom groups usually are attached to "Houses," which provide shelter for Black and Latinx LGBTQ people who were ostracized and ex-communicated by their families. Houses were often run by "mothers" who were either Black transgender women or gay men. These houses were considered families for Black and Latinx LGBTQ folks who participated in the culture (Baker, 2011).

gay participants in these studies, Black transgender students also formed networks of support that build resilience and resistance strategies to counter hostile campus environments against trans oppression (Nicolazzo, 2016a) and AntiBlackness.

Black transgender students practice survival strategies to navigate an AntiBlack transgender public sphere and spaces within higher education, which Múnoz (1999) coins as *disidentification*. In other words, Black transgender students navigate higher education spaces in a particular way to move through or even beyond the boundaries of the institution to survive them. Viewing through plantation politics suggests that Black transgender students take up labor that generates survival and community amongst their peers. This labor often goes unacknowledged and is sometimes punished by the institution. In a study on transgender students of color in college, Simms et al. (2021) explore how students find ways to navigate White supremacy and transphobic narratives within higher education through their online identities. While the internet spaces perpetuated some of the racist and transphobic discourses of society, transgender students of color were able to use the internet to refuse the [Black] queer and transgender (im)possibilities of life (Simms et al., 2021).

Like Black transgender students, transgender students of color can generate possibilities through the spaces they navigate through the process of disidentification. For example, in Jones' (2020) dissertation study on Black transgender femmes, one participant expressed that while the LGBTQ spaces were often White and transnormative, they also had positive experiences within the dominant LGBTQ spaces, which was like what the participant shared about the Black Student Union. Among the sample

disidentification meant it neither harmed nor helped when student accessed support (Jones, 2020). Disidentification often keeps Black transgender students safe from harm but also lowers their expectations of receiving support from the campus community. Essentially, Black transgender students create ways to move through their current positions in the institution of higher education.

Limitations of the Literature

Viewing research through a plantation politics framework suggests that there are specific encounters Black transgender students experience while in college; therefore, the failure to disaggregate by race is reductive and erases the complex identities and experiences of Black transgender students. While the research on the campus climate for transgender students is vital in illuminating how campus spaces, access to campus opportunities, and exclusionary practices impact transgender students, the research failed to acknowledge the ways race intersects with transness to inform how Black transgender students may experience campus climate with regards to exclusion from campus facilities and concealment of identity. Additionally, while the research provides insight into important aspects of campus climate for Black gay, lesbian, and transgender students in higher education, there remains a need to expand our understanding of plantation politics' impact on the academic and social experiences of Black transgender students in higher education.

Every study I explored did not analyze the campus climate data from a plantation politics perspective or a perspective that situates the consequences of histories on contemporary campus life. Furthermore, studies that I found lacked a substantial sample

size, for example, two Black nonbinary participants (Nicolazzo, 2016a), four Black transgender participants (Jourian, 2017), two Black gender fluid/gender expansive participants (Pierre, 2022) or discussed the trans experience with no Black transgender participants (Coleman et al., 2020). Other studies I explored were site-specific to HBCUs, which can alter data by participants showing more gender and sexual orientation salience than race (Lewis & Erickson, 2016; Patton, 2011; Patton & Simmons, 2008; Squire & Mobley, 2015). I also found one study whose entire sample was from one institution, which limits the capacity to generalize the experience more broadly (e.g., Nicolazzo, 2016a, 2016b). While qualitative methods only focus on generalizability based on the researcher's analysis, I fill these gaps by documenting the experiences of 20 Black transgender students currently or formerly enrolled in 4-year higher education institutions in the United States. I highlight how plantation politics animate in their academic and social experiences.

Summary of Literature & Expanding the Field

I used a plantation politics framework to view the campus climate research on Black LGBTQ and Black transgender student experiences. Several studies suggested that Black LGBTQ students in higher education broadly experience an invisibilizing existence on campus, filled with threats of violence and harassment, leading students to unenroll from school. In those studies, Black LGBTQ students felt that because they were juggling multiple marginalized identities, they were isolated from the campus community (Patton & Simmons, 2008; Truong et al., 2020). Navigating multiple marginalized identities created feelings of alienation and isolation for race and gender identity categories for

Black LGBTQ students (Strayhorn & Kelly, 2013). Black LGBTQ students' complex identities meant that they sought out concealed, often unsafe, environments where they found a sense of belonging away from campus (Strayhorn & Kelly, 2013). The hiding of their transgender identity for students was out of fear of retaliation, safety, family appeasement, and passing as cisgender or heterosexual (Strayhorn & Kelly, 2013; Woods, 1993). The necessity of Black LGBTQ students to pass is linked to lower self-esteem, gender role conflicts, unsafe sexual practices, depression, and suicide ideation (Gomez, 1999; Strayhorn & Kelly, 2013). However, when Black transgender students could participate authentically in campus life, they had more positive perceptions of the campus environment and greater levels of school retention (Renn et al., 2005). While research heavily suggests adverse outcomes such as isolation, harassment, and exclusion, studies also highlight the resistance practices of Black transgender students. Research also highlighted that Black transgender students created new ways of being and community despite their social locations, which moved them away from notions of individualization (Janak, 2022).

The research in the field does not explore the ways the history of enslavement impacts current experiences and climate in higher education for Black transgender students. I used limited research on Black transgender students as a starting point and drew upon existing literature focused on other marginalized groups to supplement my understanding and analysis. My project explores the lived experiences of 20 Black transgender students in higher education, unraveling the manifestations of plantation politics in their daily encounters. More importantly, it aims to illuminate the resilient

survival and (re)creation that persists amidst perpetual exclusion. Central to my argument is the notion that higher education, akin to a plantation, perpetuates a system of AntiBlack trans exclusion, thereby profoundly shaping the social and academic landscape for Black transgender students.

In the subsequent chapter, I critically examine the limitations of prevailing campus climate theories, underscoring their inadequacy in capturing the nuanced realities of this project. Instead, I situate my work within the rich tapestry of Black and abolitionist scholarship, drawing inspiration and insights from these transformative frameworks. This positioning not only deepens our understanding of complex connections and the influence of historically rooted investments on the experiences of Black transgender students and what is needed to interrogate those processes but also informs the methodology and methodological choices employed throughout the study.

Chapter III: THEORY AND METHODOLOGY

Reframing AntiBlackness: An Emphasis on Anti-Trans Oppression

I employ a lens that accentuates the multifaceted manifestations of AntiBlackness, recognizing its intertwining with patriarchy, cissexism, heteronormativity, and trans-antagonism. While acknowledging the well-documented reality that Black transgender students face heightened racialized gendered violence and harassment (Truong et al., 2020), I seek to transcend mere documentation. Instead, my focus extends to how AntiBlackness, deeply rooted in history, erects and sustains formidable barriers to the retention, success, and overall campus experience of Black transgender students and their peers of color. This reframing encourages us to move beyond the repetitive discourse concerning the dissonance between the needs of Black transgender students and their actual experiences (Grant et al., 2021). The landscape of higher education research often overlooks the ambiguity inherent in the existence and community (re)making of Black transgender individuals within the boundaries established by enduring exclusionary practices. By entering the concept of the indeterminacy of Black trans existence, we can begin to question how a shift in perspective, which scrutinizes disparities, violence, isolation, and exclusion faced by Black transgender students, might open up innovative solutions that guide us toward a path of transformation. Such a shift necessitates an exploration of the distinct structures of AntiBlack transgender racism (AntiBlack transness) that permeate various social constructs in the United States.

AntiBlackness (AntiBlack Transness) as a Foundational Reality

It is imperative to acknowledge that AntiBlackness constitutes an inherent and structural facet of both historical and contemporary global societies (Vargas, 2018). AntiBlackness encircles the total global environment in which Black individuals navigate a perpetual climate of hostility that our societal systems, including education, are unwilling to relinquish (Sharpe, 2016; Vargas, 2018). AntiBlackness yields discrimination, violence, and premature social and physiological death for Black people (Sharpe, 2016). Within this overarching AntiBlack climate, Black transgender individuals inhabit a unique intersection. Within this overarching AntiBlack climate, Black transgender individuals uniquely inhabit an intersection. Post-slavery legacies compound Black transgender collective experiences, further complicated by forms of trans-antagonism that defy straightforward categorization (Snorton, 2017). Understanding how Black transgender people experience this distinct form of AntiBlackness is essential. It is through this understanding that we can unveil the vital role of AntiBlack transness in sustaining the hegemonic regime of oppression tied to class, gender, race, sexuality, and more.

AntiBlack transness is the lifeblood that sustains cisheteropatriarchy, sexism, cisgenderism, whiteness, and other structures of oppression, systematically denying the humanity of Black transgender individuals. Specifically, it draws attention to how able-bodied, heterosexual, cisgender individuals are positioned as the creators of knowledge and power and beacons of humanity, actively contributing to the social and physiological degradation of Black transgender individuals on a global scale. The prospects of

achieving Black liberation and emancipatory futures remain elusive without confronting and interrogating the pervasive influence of AntiBlack transness across macro and microstructures.

Distinguishing Experiences within the Black Community

AntiBlack transness further accentuates distinctions within the non-queer/trans Black diaspora, emphasizing the complex interplay of gender, race, and sexuality in shaping economic, educational, psychological, health, and judicial disparities within the Black trans community. As evidence, Black transgender people live in extreme poverty, with 40% of the respondents reporting an income of less than \$24,000 per year (Choi et al., 2021); this is about three times greater than the general Black population poverty rate of 17.4% (Statista Research Dept., 2022). In this same study, 49% of Black transgender respondents reported discrimination in their school or place of work. Similar to Choi and others' findings, a study more than ten years prior reported that:

Discrimination was pervasive for the entire sample, but anti-transgender bias coupled with structural racism meant that transgender people of color experienced particularly devastating levels of discrimination, with Black respondents often faring worse than all others' (Grant et al., 2011, p. 2).

Furthermore, studies indicate that Black transgender participants were also more likely to report that their overall health was fair or poor (Choi et al., 2021). These economic and health disparities stem from the overarching framework of AntiBlack transness.

Targeting Vulnerability: Violence and Illegibility

AntiBlack transness emphasizes the distinct ways in which violence, premature death, and the precariousness of Black trans existence become focal points of state-directed oppression. This oppression derives from the inability of Black trans individuals to conform to normative structures of gender, sexuality, or culturally respectable expressions of Blackness. The hyper-visibility of Black trans individuals emerges as a symptom of their illegibility within societal norms, rendering them exceptionally susceptible to violence, criminality, and even genocide. The overrepresentation of Black transgender women in the mortality rates among non-Black LGBTQ populations underscores the urgency of recognizing this issue (Robinson & Cooper, 2023). For example, in 2023, at least 30 transgender people have been murdered. 87% of the transgender individuals murdered in 2023 were people of color, and 50% of the total deaths were Black (Robinson & Cooper, 2023). The overrepresentation of Black transgender people in the reports on murder deaths for LGBTQ people illuminates how AntiBlack transness compounds the vulnerability of Black transgender individuals, exposing them to a heightened risk of violence and mortality within the broader transgender community.

Additionally, statistics revealing that one in two Black transgender individuals has experienced incarceration, compared to one in six among transgender individuals at large, demonstrate the heightened vulnerability of Black transgender people to both legal and extra-legal forms of policing (Frazer et al., 2023). While AntiBlackness acknowledges the disparities encountered by Black individuals, a shift in focus to center the Black trans

experience allows us to appreciate the resilience and adaptability of Black trans individuals as they navigate the boundaries imposed by the plantation university perpetuating AntiBlack transness.

Methodology and Methods

Research Questions

Higher education's investment in diversity overshadows the need to tend to the issue of violence against students who make up a diverse campus community (Hurtado et al., 1998). Higher education has always been rooted in exclusion and meritocracy and is now relabeled as diversity and inclusion (Ahmed, 2012; Williams et al., 2021). Williams et al.'s (2021) analysis helps us understand how universities uphold White supremacy while pledging diversity and inclusion initiatives to remedy campus rebellions. Plantation politics asks us to think about how institutions of higher education use Black bodies, knowledge, and labor as assets while treating Black students, staff, and faculty as liabilities. Black being is both a disruption and required for a diverse campus population and economy (Williams et al., 2021). What does this mean and look like for Black transgender populations? How does the over-reliance and focus on diversity initiatives use and abuse then discard Black transgender students? And what survives?

While the research describes plantation politics embedded in the structures of higher education and its impact on Black student activists, it fails to explore how the structures impact Black transgender student populations. The research questions for this study aim to understand how plantation politics impact the social and academic experiences of Black transgender students in higher education and what exists and is

(re)created at the limits of the boundaries maintained by the institution. The following research questions guide this dissertation:

1. What are the experiences of Black transgender students when interacting with faculty, administration, and peers in institutions of higher education?
 - o To what extent do plantation politics impact the educational and social experiences of Black transgender students on college and university campuses?
2. What is (re) created amongst Black transgender students in higher education while experiencing Black transgender exclusion?

Critical Narrative Inquiry

To explore these research questions, I used a critical narrative inquiry approach. This approach involves a rigorous and systematic data collection and analysis process, which can include interviews, focus groups, and textual analysis (Clandinin et al., 2007). Critical narrative inquiry is suitable for answering questions about participants' creation of meaning within their lives as narratives (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Narrative-centered methodologies focus on social constructivist assumptions about "storying lives, relationships, and experiences (Larsson & Sjöblom, 2010 as cited in Hickson 2016, p. 383) and provide useful ways to explore the richness of people's experiences" (Elliot, 2005 as cited in Hickson, 2016, p. 383). Lived and told stories illuminate how individuals create meaning in their lives and enlist others to help in building their lives and communities (Clandinin, 2006). Narrative inquiry methodologies allow researchers to understand the relationships of the environment that shape how individuals tell and make

meaning of their stories and experiences. Researchers identify patterns and themes in the data and analyze how these patterns relate to larger social structures and power dynamics (Saldaña, 2013).

Critical narrative inquiry seeks to understand how power relations shape individuals' experiences and identities through storytelling (Pino Gavidia & Adu, 2022). This methodology is beneficial for exploring the experiences of marginalized communities, such as Black transgender students in higher education, who may have limited opportunities to tell their stories and have their experiences externally validated. Critical narrative inquiry allows us to understand how plantation politics within higher education environments impact Black transgender students' academic and social experiences. Critical narrative inquiry enables us to hear their stories and derive meaning from how they tell them. My study will provide a perspective that incorporates macrosystems of whiteness, cissexism, and AntiBlack trans racism to explore to what extent plantation politics shape the academic and social experiences of Black transgender students in higher education.

I am particularly interested in what happened and what meaning or relationships participants have to the story (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Howie, 2010). Stories shared by Black transgender students illuminate crucial aspects of how they use reflection and make sense of their environments within higher education through language, discourse, experiences, and perceptions (Bruner, 2002; Hickson, 2016). Thus, my responsibility is to be ready, respectful, and reflective of my role as a researcher while connecting my worldviews and cultural notions to the study to engage in more valuable and meaningful

research for my communities (Archibald et al., 2020). The stories highlight to what extent plantation politics shape the social and academic experiences of Black transgender students and what survives the incessant Black trans-exclusion.

Participant Selection Criteria

Anyone who self-identified as both Black and transgender and was a former or current student enrolled in a 4-year college or university in the United States was eligible to participate. Participants indicated their gender and racial identity in recruitment and informed consent Google link. My research was only interested in Black transgender students' college experiences; and therefore, my participant pool only consisted of those who met that criterion. My initial criteria only included Black transgender students currently enrolled in college. However, I made an intentional decision to expand the criteria to former college students regardless of how long ago they graduated for three reasons:

1. They had years of experience with academic and social life in college.
2. The participant recruitment process came to a complete halt.
3. They have had more time to reflect on their experiences in college and would be able to share their experiences from a broader perspective.

Recruitment

After obtaining IRB approval on October 17, 2022, I recruited participants using a combination of snowball sampling (resulting in 8 participants) and purposive sampling (resulting in 12 participants) (Bailey, 2007; Creswell & Creswell, 2017). I used my former leadership and engagement in Black LGBTQ university spaces and networks to distribute information regarding recruitment for this study. I have memberships in the

NASPA Black LGBTQ Professionals, BlaqOUT University of California Riverside, BlackOUT University of California Davis, and Zawadi University of California Berkeley groups. I am also a member of numerous Black LGBTQ higher education and university student Facebook groups. I recruited by sharing flyers within these groups (see Appendix A). As someone with shared identities with the participants in the study, I was mindful to ask consent to share recruitment documents in spaces I engaged in for pleasure as a form of relational accountability (Reo, 2019).

A Participant Criteria and Informed Consent Google form (see Appendix B) was circulated along with the recruitment flyer to begin the recruitment process. I created the recruitment flyer using the online Canva platform. I recruited participants of different genders and sexualities from various universities across the United States using the National LGBTQ Consortium database to contribute to the narrative and develop a richness of the data (Hickson, 2016). The recruitment flyer, Participant Criteria, and Informed Consent Google form were distributed via Instagram, Twitter, and email listservs (see Appendix C for recruitment email). The call for participants stated the purpose of the study was to “document the stories of Black transgender students as they navigate social and academic life in a higher education institution to understand the impacts of White supremacy, AntiBlack racism, and transantagonism on their identity, resistance, and experiences.”

Sample Information. Of the 22 eligible people who filled out the Participant Criteria and Informed Consent Google form, 20 responded to my follow-up emails, scheduled a time to interview via Zoom, and completed the interview. Two others filled

out the Participant Criteria and Informed Consent Google form but were not eligible to participate in the study because they needed match one or more characteristics of the participant criteria. Two participants were eligible to participate in the study but needed to follow up to schedule a time to interview. The sample consisted of 20 Black transgender students, two transmasculine students, seven nonbinary students, three transgender men, two transgender women, one gender-fluid student, two genderqueer students, one student who identified solely as transgender, one gender diverse student, and one two-spirit student (See Table 3.1).

All participants identified as Black but described their racial identity differently, as shown in Table 3.1. The sample consisted of four undergraduate and 16 graduate students. Eight students in the sample graduated from their institution, and 12 of the participants were currently enrolled at the time of the interviews. Of the 20 participants, 19 consented to audio/video recording the Zoom interview. I used the transcription feature on the Zoom meeting to transcribe the interviews and marked moments when the program made errors. For the participant who did not consent to record the interview, I took notes in a Google document describing their experience and downloaded the transcript generated from the meeting. Participants were not aware of the pseudonyms they were provided. After the interview, all files with identifying information were renamed to their assigned pseudonyms, and transcriptions were edited to remove any identifiers such as their names, names mentioned in stories, and names of institutions.

While qualitative methods do not require generalizability, my participant pool represented 16 states in the United States (see Figure 3.1) and over 20 higher education

institutions across the United States. Seven Black transgender students in the sample attended universities in states that passed anti-LGBTQ legislation and laws that particularly impact transgender people into law (see Figure 3.2). These laws remove protections for transgender people, impact transgender students' access to gender-affirming spaces, care, sports, public accommodations, and restrooms, and increase vulnerability to abuse, hate crimes, and harassment (Mapping Attacks on LGBTQ Rights in U.S. Legislatures | American Civil Liberties Union, 2023).

Interview Protocol

A semi-structured (Mason, 2002) interview protocol was tailored to explore the impacts of plantation politics on the social and academic experiences of Black transgender students and what survives incessant Black trans exclusion. Three topical areas were included in the interview protocol (see full interview protocol in Appendix D): 1) Black Trans Identity Construction and Exploration, 2) Experience with Peers and Institutional Actors (admin, staff, faculty), and 3) Campus and Community Engagement. These topical areas were chosen based on my research questions. In order to understand how they engage with their gender identity and how that shows up when they are engaging in the campus community, I chose to explore their construction and exploration of their Black trans identity. To understand their campus community's climate campus, I explored their experiences with peers and institutional actors such as faculty and administrators. To also engage how plantation politics impact their total academic and social lives in higher education, I wanted to know their level of engagement in campus community as well as outside of campus. These topical areas provided a holistic

understanding of how plantation politics showed up in their social and academic experiences in higher education.

During interviews, participants were encouraged to share cultural artifacts, such as songs, videos, emails, social media handles, and pictures, that added dimension to our conversation and supported the construction of their stories. Most cultural artifacts shared were Instagram handles, podcasts, names of social clubs, and songs. I also collected introspective data through reflective and reflexive journaling and memos to encourage self-awareness.

Data Collection. I aimed to have participants share stories about their experiences in college to provide insight into how plantation politics shapes their academic and social lives. Although my protocol was defined, participants guided the majority of the interview and determined what was most important for me to know. Graduate students in the sample tend to focus on their undergraduate experiences with little acknowledgment of their current circumstances without me redirecting them. After interviewing multiple graduate students, I prefaced interviews with graduate students with encouragement to share both their undergraduate and graduate student experiences.

Table 3. 1 Participant Demographic Information

Name	Pronouns	Gender	Race	Enrollment Status	Class Standing	Institution Type
Dream	They/Them	Trans Masculine	Black American	Enrolled	Graduate	PWI
Magik	He/They	Nonbinary	Black / Pan-African	Graduated	Graduate	HBCU
Radiance	He/They/She	Two Spirit	African American & Native American	Enrolled	Graduate	PWI
Matisse	They/Them	Gender Diverse	African American	Enrolled	Undergraduate	PWI
Tatum	He/They	Trans Masculine	African American	Enrolled	Undergraduate	PWI
Vision	They/Them	Gender Fluid	Third Culture Black & African	Enrolled	Graduate	PWI
Saint	She/They	Trans Woman	African American	Enrolled	Graduate	ANNH
Wonder	He/Him	Trans Man	Black American	Enrolled	Undergraduate	HSI
Riri	They/Them	Nonbinary	Afro-Caribbean / Mixed	Enrolled	Graduate	AANAPISI
Lavender	They/Them	Nonbinary	African American	Graduated	Graduate	PWI
Brixton	They/Them	Nonbinary	Black	Enrolled	Graduate	PWI
Bentley	They/Them	Nonbinary	Black	Enrolled	Graduate	PWI
Tayo	They/Them	Genderqueer	Black	Graduated	Graduate	PWI
Monique	She/Her/Hers	Trans Woman	Black American	Enrolled	Graduate	PWI
Rome	He/Him/His	Trans Man	Afrikan Black	Graduated	Graduate	PWI
Jelani	They/He	Nonbinary	Black American	Graduated	Graduate	PWI
Bliss	Ze/Zir/Zirs	Transgender	Black American	Graduated	Graduate	PWI
Kai	E/Em/Eir	Genderqueer	Multi-Generational Black American	Graduated	Graduate	PWI
Remi	He/Him/His	Trans Man	Black/African American	Graduated	Undergraduate	PWI
Lex	She/They	Nonbinary	Biracial, Black & White	Enrolled	Graduate	PWI

The encouragement allowed them to create a lineage of stories and a catalog of where to go next in their storied timelines. Before each interview, I wrote memos on the student's institutional racial demographics and history, how they identify themselves by pronouns, gender, and race/ethnicity, and wrote down any thoughts or questions I may have. Memos helped significantly in interviews when constructing follow-up questions or questions to provoke elaboration, especially when I felt the student increasingly had less to say. After each interview, I wrote memos on my reflection on the interviews, questions I may still have, cultural artifacts for me to investigate (e.g., "Sistas Who Kill Podcast," Instagram accounts), and a theme that arose in the interview.

On average, the interviews lasted about 60 minutes, with the longest being 97 minutes and the shortest being 54 minutes. The interviews were conducted in private, unique Zoom meetings and were audio/video recorded with the Zoom function on the meetings. I used the same interview protocol for each participant to ensure the questions were identical. However, follow-up questions were different and dependent upon what was shared in the interview. The follow-up questions were open-ended and designed to elicit the participants' experiences and perspectives on their interactions with faculty, administration, peers, and other institutional actors. Zoom recordings were downloaded onto my computer and immediately transferred to my secure University of California Google Suite account. Once transcripts were edited to reach maximum accuracy, they were downloaded into Dedoose, a data management system, to begin coding.

Data Analysis. Following each interview, I wrote reflective memos about the defining moments of the participants' experience, similarities or differences compared to

other participants' stories, or insights that may have influenced my interpretation of the stories. After each transcribed interview, I analyzed the data using a thematic and inductive approach. I used Dedoose, a data management application, to code and analyze the data collected.

I took notes of themes, patterns, or significant statements guided by Saldaña's (2013) narrative coding process. I began the coding process with preliminary codes developed thematically based on the literature on Black transgender students' experiences in chapter two. The key themes included visibility to vulnerability (Garvey et al., 2018), exclusion from campus opportunities (Stewart & Nicolazzo, 2018), surveillance (Jones, 2020), transnormativity (Nicolazzo, 2016a), and disidentification (Jones, 2020; Jourian, 2017; Simms et al., 2020). These codes were guaranteed to appear in the data. I then took notes of themes, patterns, or significant statements to develop codes from the data; these codes were descriptive and captured the essence of the narratives shared.

I then defined codes from my interview protocol. These codes represented more significant categories guaranteed to arise in the data. Codes developed from the interview protocol were: Black Trans Identity Construction and Exploration, Experience with Peers and Institutional Actors (admin, staff, faculty), and Campus and Community Engagement. All codes were organized and descriptively defined in my codebook developed in Dedoose. I then applied the coding scheme to the narratives, using the codebook as a reference. I highlighted the relevant sections of text with the appropriate code label. Relevant sections of the text were considered to be those that aligned with my code definitions. After applying the initial codes from the literature, I refined my codes

and again applied the appropriate code label to the text. This iterative process resulted in 33 defined codes and 282 distinct excerpts from participant interviews. I analyzed the coded data by looking for patterns and themes across the narratives. Finally, I interpreted the findings by reflecting on how the codes contribute to our understanding of how plantation politics impact the social and academic experiences of Black transgender students in higher education, considering how the analysis challenges or reinforces dominant narratives and power structures embedded in higher education's investment in plantation politics.

By comparing participant experiences within and across the thematically coded excerpts, I would be able to analyze across and within institutional settings (PWIs, HBCUs, MSIs) and institutional actors (staff, faculty, administration, students) within the stories (i.e., the negative experiences with all institutional actors) for Black transgender students across all (PWIs, MSIs, HBCUs) institutional settings did not differ, all students experienced some form of AntiBlack Trans Racism. Doing so illustrates how Black transgender students' interactions with institutional actors and social and academic experiences were influenced and impacted by higher education's investment in plantation politics regardless of institutional setting. In the discussion, I trace how AntiBlack trans exclusion and higher education's investments in plantation politics animate in Black transgender students' stories on their social and academic experiences in college.

Trustworthiness. Throughout the process, it was essential to maintain a critical stance and be reflexive about my positionality and biases (Saldaña, 2013). I was aware of my social position as a Black transgender scholar and how those experiences have influenced the interpretation, coding, and analysis of the narratives. During the data collection process, I completed pre/post-interview reflexive memos (Creswell & Poth, 2018), member checks (Candela, 2019; Freeman et al., 2007), peer debriefing (Maxwell, 1992), audit trails (Bailey, 2007), and relational accountability (Reo, 2019; Wilson, 2008). Before each interview, I took reflexive memos on how I felt that day, which new concepts and themes have arisen based on previous interviews to further ask in the following interview, participant demographic information, including their pronouns, class standing, and information of the institution(s) they enrolled in or graduated.

After each interview, I wrote reflective and reflexive memos based on what concepts or themes were validated during the interview, any significant stories and timestamps of where it is in the interview, questions I may still have, and any notes or thoughts I took. Member checks took place during the interview process. For example, when participants shared their stories or experiences, I asked questions reiterating what they had said to ensure that I was correctly interpreted their experience. Member checks can also be considered a data triangulation technique, which sparked further in-depth detailing of participants' stories, resulting in richer data.

I engaged in peer debriefing during the process with my dissertation committee members and classmates to incorporate feedback and understand others' interpretations and critiques of emerging and defined codes and themes. Discussions with my

committee, classmates, and others outside of the field added theoretical depths, supported refining themes and definitions, provided insight into my analysis, and were an added check to my interpretations. In addition, my research included audit trails, which provided evidence of my choices and decisions that pertained to methodological and theoretical issues that arose during the process (Nowell et al., 2017). Audit trails, documented in a journal, ensured that I remained reflective of the research process. I documented daily logistics, decisions, and rationales and tracked my reflections on my values, interests, and insights as I viewed and reviewed the data (Nowell et al., 2017).

Furthermore, throughout the study I acknowledged my power first as a researcher and second as a community member. The participants in my study were aware of my identity as a Black transgender person. At the beginning of each interview I introduced myself and my pronouns. To ensure that I acknowledge my power as a researcher, I made sure to reflect on how my membership in the Black transgender community does not make me any less accountable; rather, it underlines that relationship building and maintenance take time and balance. I maintained respect and integrity throughout the process, a form of relational accountability. Relational accountability refers to the belief of the Indigenous community that people are dependent on and related to everything and everyone around them (Reo, 2019). We are connected to water, plants, air, rocks, animals, and spirit. Relational accountability explains that as a researcher, I am responsible for nurturing and maintaining community relationships (Reo, 2019).

An important aspect of relational accountability is acknowledging my position with the study participants and the inherent power dynamics within that relationship

(Reo, 2019). As such, I situated myself alongside the Black transgender community in higher education and used conversational and personal demeanor without language alteration or code-switching when conducting interviews. Participants stayed connected with me through social media and email because many shared the desire to do so and some participants struggled to find community with other Black transgender people in their communities. My goal was to co-create a narrative that emphasized the distinct experiences of Black transgender students while also acknowledging that I am part of this community. I validated their experiences by telling them my story if I had a similar story within the interview process.

Limitations of the Study

The research defines *limitations* as constraints to the generalizability, practice, and utility of findings related to my overall research design (Price, 2004). However, “Settler colonial knowledge is premised on frontiers; conquest, then, is an exercise of the felt entitlement to transgress these limits” (Tuck & Yang, 2014, p. 225). In honor of a refusal within research, I offer a (re)framing of limitations as the knowledge that may not be up for grabs and containment (Tuck & Yang, 2014). Any stories not shared may not be for the institution to hold onto and archive as property.

I intentionally refused to document the pained and overwhelmingly violent experiences of my participants to justify a need for institutional change (Tuck & Yang, 2014). The spectacle of Black suffering and scenes of subjection render the Black body a nonsubject, which familiarizes us with Black dehumanization (Hartman, 1997). In no way do I want this study to generate toxic empathy. There are some forms of knowledge

the academy does not deserve because of its community of practice in the “propagation and promulgation of (settler colonial) knowledge” (Tuck & Yang, 2014, p. 232). Higher education has a track record of stockpiling trauma and injustice while making no explicit commitment to shifting towards social justice or equity-centered change, containing intellectual and financial capital, and claiming neutrality while steeped in cisheteropatriarchal structures of violence (Tuck & Yang, 2014). I refuse for participants in my study to become (re)enslaved by the academy, even if that means acknowledging that there are some forms of knowledge that the university does not deserve. The purpose of this study was not to convince people of the deserving nature of my participants. Instead, this research is an affirmation for the Black transgender communities and a documentation of their lived experiences in higher education.

Traditional limitations may arise from the absence of disaggregation by class standing (i.e., graduate or undergraduate) or enrollment status (enrolled or graduated). Additionally, some students who also identify with specific gender identities (i.e., nonbinary, genderqueer, two-spirit, trans-masculine, trans man, trans woman) under the transgender umbrella may experience their racialized gendered encounters in ways that differ from others. Some students were out as transgender before undergrad, some were not out until graduate school, and some were not out at all while attending college, which can shift how they perceived the Black transgender student experience during their college careers. However, I did not find that disaggregating across those lines provided a more expansive understanding of how plantation politics impact Black transgender

students' social and academic experiences in higher education since the plantation is the academy's former and contemporary identity.

It is also important to acknowledge that Black transgender populations are not a monolith, and therefore, this is a limitation of my study because I did not disaggregate across gender identities and expressions. However, I am interested in the collective experiences of Black transgender students in higher education. I am particularly interested in how historically rooted AntiBlack transness is perpetuated in their experiences while attending institutions of higher education. However, I do acknowledge that Black transgender women and trans femme students may experience more violence or hypervisibility on campus than Black transgender men and trans-masculine students. At the same time, Black transgender men, trans masc students, nonbinary, and gender nonconforming students may experience greater levels of invisibility and erasure. I understand that not analyzing through those axes can limit our insights as those intersecting perspectives are an essential distinction within the Black transgender community and experience. Furthermore, some students had graduated within five years of the study, which could be considered a limitation. However, I found that those students had more time to reflect on their experience and provide a more robust analysis of their time in higher education.

Looking Ahead

Before I introduce the narratives of the Black transgender students in the study, I pause to make a note of using pronouns. Many participants use various pronouns that are diverse, valuable, and central to their identities. I ask readers to engage in use pronouns

intentionally and aim to use pronouns they are unfamiliar with correctly and accurately. Following the note on pronouns, I present the narratives of Black transgender students in the sample, which contend with various themes that arose. Keeping plantation politics and AntiBlack transness in mind, I structured the findings into three themes, each with sub-themes that provide a comprehensive concern, concept, or topic addressed in the narratives. The first two themes, (a) *Processual Elements* and (b) *Structural Elements*, centralize the narratives, illuminating how the plantation university's structural or processual elements influence Black transgender student stories. The third theme, (c) *Black Trans Identity & Culture*, situates the narratives of Black transgender students that express their understandings of their identity and the function or practices of their communities.

A NOTE ON PRONOUNS

You will be introduced to a wide array of pronouns in reading the narratives of the Black transgender student participants in this study. Please be mindful of the importance of pronouns in affirming these students' identities. You can view participant pronouns in Table 3.1. Transgender people intentionally select their gender pronouns to align with who they are, how they express their genders, and how they want others to perceive them. There are all kinds of pronouns. You will be introduced to some common pronouns you may be familiar with (she, her, hers, he, him, his, they, them, theirs) and others you may have never seen or used before (ze, zir, zirs, e, em, eirs). Here is a quick lesson on how to use pronouns:

Pronouns are often used in discourse to speak about someone in the third person. When using pronouns, you are referring to someone else. For example, "Tori is writing a dissertation on Black transgender student experience. They did an amazing job". The pronoun "they" is a gender-neutral pronoun. Other gender-neutral pronouns you may notice in this dissertation and your communities are "ze, zir, zirs" and "e, em, eirs," and also keep in mind that there are many other gender-neutral pronouns out there. I cannot go on without mentioning that all gender-neutral pronouns are grammatically correct. When meeting someone new, it is essential not to assume someone's pronouns. When introducing yourself, you can say, "Hi, my name is [insert name]. My pronouns are [insert pronouns]. What is your name and pronouns?". Using someone's correct pronouns is an acceptable way to build intimate and affirming relationships with not only transgender people but everybody.

Chapter IV: BLACK TRANS STUDENTS' NARRATIVES

This chapter of findings is organized into three sections: (a) *Processual Elements*, (b) *Structural Elements*, and (c) *Black Trans Identity & Culture*, followed by sub-themes that are illustrative of the narratives told by the Black transgender students in the sample. The narratives you will read affirm that universities and institutional actors invoked various structures and processes of plantation politics that impact the social and academic experiences of Black transgender students. This took form within the interactions of faculty, staff, and peers, the expectations of increased labor to educate the campus community, vulnerability to mental and physical harm, isolation from campus engagement, reduction of individual freedom, and removal from educational opportunities. The narratives also indicate that administrators and faculty used key practices of positive-coded reinforcement, which rewarded Black transgender students for behaviors deemed appropriate despite students having previously endured rejection and threats of removal, adjudication, and theft by the institution. The narratives will also reveal the philosophies and practices of how the Black transgender community inspires, guides, and feeds one another, contributing to a shared sense of empowerment, identity, and recognition.

Processual Elements

The procedural aspects of the plantation encompass communication, boundary maintenance, establishment of systematic connections, socialization of individuals, implementation of social control, and institutionalization of practices (Durant, 1999; Squire et al., 2018). As I introduce the findings of this study, the processual elements

within the educational landscape unravel. Ostracization and hypervisibility emerge as mechanisms of social control, influencing student behavior and campus engagement. In contrast, specific instances like restroom dynamics and faculty/student relationships shed light on the relationship between boundary maintenance and socialization.

Hypervisibility and Ostracization

Black transgender students experienced hypervisibility from being the only ones in their classrooms, social groups, and places of work. Hypervisibility often meant that they were met with questions about their gender identities, feelings of vulnerability, and ostracization. Being the only Black transgender person also brought up feelings of difference, otherness, and anxiety surrounding their safety. All participants expressed constantly worrying about their safety because of how people may perceive them and their identity expressions. Wonder (He/Him) succinctly put it, “I think about my safety a lot.” Black transgender students experienced hypervisibility inside and outside of the classroom environment, which impacted their ability to engage in campus life, hold steady campus employment, attend office hours, and even use the restroom. The awareness of how visible their identities were on campus also impacted what they wore to campus, ultimately influencing their behavior.

In the Classroom. Being the only Black transgender student in classroom spaces impacted Black transgender students’ feelings of safety. Riri (They/Them) shared that they had begun to feel unsafe with the ways people responded to them in class early on in their transition:

I did also have experiences that felt unsafe, and a lot of that was kind of just in the way that other people would respond to me being in class. I think I was just hyper

aware of, like what everyone else was thinking about me, or like, felt really self-conscious a lot, especially early on in my transition, when my body started to change. I just kind of felt like a freak all the time...

Riri's sense of feeling like a 'freak' echoes the isolation experienced when interacting with classmates. This sentiment resonates with Bentley's (They/Them) struggle upon returning to a less diverse campus post-COVID shutdown. Bentley, having previously lived in a supportive community of transgender Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), found themselves back in an environment where the lack of understanding and representation was palpable:

I had to move back to [college] because school opened back up and it was no longer virtual since the pandemic. And then I came back into a space in which I didn't know any trans people like for real. And it just was like going back to being in a world where like the difference is already different

Similarly, Matisse (They/Them) encountered a challenging situation in a classroom setting. Matisse was accompanied by a Black transgender friend when a professor, lacking awareness or cultural competency, subjected them to unwarranted scrutiny about their use of gender-neutral pronouns:

On the first day we were just going around and introducing ourselves with our names and pronouns. This is another class that Jada and I were in as the only two people of color (POC). We weren't the only queer people there. There was like a White gay man in that class, too. So, you're like, "Oh, look! We're not alone." But you know, basically [we're alone] because of how and they [White gay men] be acting. But when it got to me and Jada like we were the only folks who didn't introduce ourselves with like binary pronouns. I was just like, "oh, like my name's Matisse like I use they, them, theirs pronouns"...but she was just like, "why is that?"

These instances highlight the ongoing struggles faced by Black transgender individuals, particularly when navigating less inclusive spaces. Matisse had become visibly mad during the line of questioning from their professor in class. They expressed

confusion about why the professor felt empowered to interrogate them on their use of pronouns in front of the class. Matisse believed the professor could not distinguish the difference between gender identity and gender expression, as Matisse and their friend Jada dressed femme-presenting:

So, I was just like I use [gender-neutral pronouns] because they're what feels right, right now. And she was equating gender expression with gender identity, like those were some of the questions she asked. When she asked my friend Jada. It's because Jada was just like "I use any pronouns", and [the professor] was like, "Really you do?" Cause like Jada's more femme presenting. And Jada was like "Yup" and [the professor] was like, "so you'd respond if somebody used, *he* pronouns for you."....And so like just this unnecessary interrogation that would happen in her class, like around gender and because we were already kind of singled out as like the only like POC folks in the class it was just like so annoying and unnecessary and frustrating.

Being put on the spot as a Black transgender student was a prevalent experience for the participants in the sample. Many of my participants shared stories surrounding incidents where a professor singled them out in the middle of the classroom, resulting in them feeling ostracized. For example, when Bliss (*Ze/Zir/Zirs*) confided with zirs professor on the pronouns ze uses, the professor outed zir to the entire class:

When I was in undergrad at [institution] I took a sociology of gender class, and I told the professor and the TA that I was trans like I always do that. I was just like "I'm trans and these are my pronouns." Their trans unit came about in the class, and I said, like, "Hey, I don't know if this would be helpful", but I shared the book *Transgender History* by Suzanne Striker and a couple articles, and the professor and the TA were like, "Oh, my God! this is really sweet, and we'll see you in class." The teacher outed me to my entire class...I disassociated basically for the rest of that semester.

The professor violated FERPA⁹ guidelines by outing Bliss in front of the class. When Bliss had asked for support from other campus administrators and the ombudsman, they had told zir to have a conversation with the professor, who ultimately weaponized her White woman's tears against zir. Bliss did not return to the class and took the lowered attendance score. Bliss's story about being outed to the class resulted in zir feeling unsupported by the institution and ostracized from zirs' peers.

At Work. Black transgender students were sometimes forcefully removed from environments because they were not considered a good *fit*. Black transgender students did not receive equal access to spaces due to their dress and the ways that others perceived their gender and actions. Kai (E/Em/Eir) had been working for diversity programs as a graduate assistant at a private Jesuit university. E had many stories to share about this hostile work environment. Kai's desire to stay working in the program was because e had a commitment to marginalized students and believed in the program's mission. When Kai signed on to work for the program, Kai thought eir supervisors would be open to eir gender identity. However, Kai believed that because of eir body type, height, weight, and clothing of choice, the supervisors waged war to get em terminated from the position:

She was very animated and she cussed a lot. Even in the office at [Jesuit institution] of all places, as a Latina woman. But I remember one time I think I said "shit"...That's basically what I said that I remember. Later, she called me into a meeting with the other supervisor....and had mentioned, "as a woman, I felt offended that you cursed."

⁹ FERPA, the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act. FERPA protects students' right to privacy of their educational and disciplinary records.

Kai had felt like this meeting was targeted based on a previous encounter em had weeks prior about Kai wanting to use gender-neutral pronouns and putting them in the signature of eir email:

But it's just like, wait, you cuss all the time like, what are we doing here? And I honestly feel like that was like a sense of retaliation towards me because of the fact that I put "they them their" in my signature when I would send emails....I also had other incidents with my black male supervisor where I had a problem with him calling me sir, and I told him like, "Don't call me sir. These are my pronouns". I remember we actually had a conversation where he actually apologized for not using my pronouns one time.

This meeting catalyzed other issues as Kai worked for this summer program. Kai ran into issues with eir other Black male supervisor, who continued to misgender them.

Throughout the summer, Kai felt that eir supervisors looked for anything to write em up.

Moreover, even after Kai's Black male supervisor apologized, he continued to misgender em, even on the day the office terminated Kai from the position:

I remember he actually terminated me at the end of that summer, because basically I just wasn't a good fit for him and her person, her personality, the other supervisors, personality. And because of that I remember the last thing he said to me, "be well, sir," that's what he said to me and I was mad that he terminated me and for a lot of different reasons. But that right there, after I told you not to call me, sir, was definitely a case of misgendering.

Kai lost funding for the summer and was unable to find another position. Kai reflected on wishing e had reported it to the institution, "You know, I should have reported. I should have wrote it up...But I didn't report it because I just felt like I was fatigued. That sense of battle fatigue was there."

Office Hours. Black transgender students were not provided equal access to support services such as office hours. Radiance (He/They/She) shared a story about first coming into their transgender identity and playing around with the clothing that they

wore. Radiance had worn a kilt to campus and needed to seek support with an assignment and attend office hours with their professor. Once arrived at office hours, Radiance was removed from the office because of what they were wearing:

I remember there was one professor that I went to [during] office hours...I think at that point I was wearing a kilt. I went to his office hours. And then basically, he said, "you can't enter my office. If you were in a skirt."

Radiance was confused by what the professor said because she had registered the clothing garment as a traditional piece that was also worn by men:

I was very confused because It didn't really register that what I was wearing was a skirt. Because kilts are traditionally worn by men, and then I was like, "well, I'm not gonna take it off to enter your office." and he was like, "Well, you can't come to office hours"

Radiance was removed from accessing a resource every university student can access.

When the problem escalated, Radiance was also removed from the class:

[It became] a huge problem and I told them I was like, "well, this is how I feel comfortable expressing myself."... he's like "well, if you wear a skirt like that, you can't come into my office and don't come to the class anymore."

Similar to Kai, Radiance had limited energy to fight against the professor and was dropped from the class. She concluded the story, "At that point I didn't really have the resolve to fight against that. And I was like, "Okay, whatever." So, I just left the class, or I left his office."

Reduced Campus Engagement. While Lavender's (They/Them) story differs from Radiance and Kai's, it shows how certain ideologies perpetuated within an environment maintain boundaries that essentially force Black transgender students to remove parts of their identities in order to engage in community. Lavender attended a

predominantly upper-class White university with a culture that focused heavily on sport.

Lavender participated in the NCAA Division I baseball at their university during their undergraduate career. And as Lavender said, “the bigger D1 school, the more a lot of toxic masculinity, a lot of achievement, a lot of just bullshit.” Lavender felt that they had to choose between their love of the sport or to identify as a Black and transgender person:

Baseball. God, I loved it...I always enjoy playing sports...But also there was a lot of stuff I almost had to deal with. “Am I going to show up as dead names like dead gender, like all of that?” Or “am I gonna say, no, this is my stance and who I am, and if the team doesn't take me, then are these really my brothers, is this really my team?”

Lavender essentially chose to remain in the baseball program and remove their trans identity in order to engage in an opportunity to play for a division one baseball team:

But I don't think I was in that frame of thought yet. I was still thinking I wanna be liked. And I wanna be supported, that I wanna take on this privilege of being a part of a division.”

Lavender choosing to remove their transgender identity in order to feel supported, liked, and have an opportunity speaks to how certain spaces exude practices that remove Black transgender people and identity. Lavender also believed that being out about their transgender identity meant that they would lose scholarships which would impact their livelihood so they put up with interesting incidents in the locker room.

I was on scholarship too so I was also kinda like, “I gotta walk my tightrope a little bit differently because if I say the wrong thing that's money I needed. So the locker room situation was always interesting.

Lavender's reduced freedom as a student athlete exemplifies the boundaries that are being maintained by the institution and its actors. Lavender did not feel comfortable

being out as transgender person while engaging in sports. Feeling uncomfortable in campus environments for Black transgender students meant that they were unable to engage fully with their peers, supervisors, or in campus events. For example, Dream's experience while attending a college in Massachusetts:

I was living on campus. [The institution] is notoriously a frat party school. It's very much like a White upper middle-class moderate to conservative space. I just didn't feel safe walking or being a black person on that campus at all. So, moving and working in that space where, like I felt like people were constantly looking at me, or trying to avoid me like I was the law....I would lightly engage to the point where my supervisors would be like. "You don't come to things." I'm like, "Yeah, I'm not gonna go to the Young Business Association event. I have no interest in business, first of all, and second of all, I don't want to be stared at like this the entire time."

Sometimes the hypervisibility of Black transness stemmed from others not knowing how to gender them. This meant that Black transgender students were the center of attention when spaces were binary gendered (man vs. woman). When Remi (He/Him/His) was a member of a Black STEM organization, he felt others did not know where to place him and were hyper curious about what sub-group he would choose to join:

I was like early in my transition and starting to be more visibly trans compared to how I had presented before and I was in one of these meetings and they were talking about there were these other clubs as well. that were hosted by the like Black Resource Center. One was called Black Women's Alliance, and the other one, Black Men's Alliance and they were talking about those clubs. And I could just feel that everybody was looking at me and they were trying to decide what group I was gonna go to. And I was just like, "oh, right like, even though I'm here with a bunch of Black STEM majors like I'm the only trans person in the room. And nobody knows how to navigate that."

Even amongst other Black people, Remi felt that they were very visible and othered in that space. The way that the campus spaces, such as the LGBTQ Campus Resource Centers, were organized also impacted Black transgender students from

engaging the campus community. For example, Lex (She/They) shared that she was not able to go into the LGBTQ resource center because it was in the center of campus and she did not want to be outed. Overall, their experience in the LGBTQ space was unwelcoming because of the whiteness but a large part of it was that having the multicultural spaces in the center of a majority White campus for Lex meant they were vulnerable:

I mean [campus] is a very White school, so I'd never felt super included I think, with the resource center overall...the LGBT resource center was tucked away in the multicultural building, and the multicultural building was like right in the center of campus.... It's like, it's very visible. And only certain people walked into that building right? So, it's like I didn't want to out myself.

Lex's feelings of not wanting to be vulnerable and out themselves were warranted as they shared that the multicultural center had been targeted many times before:

There was a lot of targeted attacks at that entire building with people's windows getting broken half the time. Right across the street...there's like the public speech area so religious folks would come with the huge abortion signs that were like 10 feet tall. It was just a very popular area and I would have been so visible. So, I think that aided me not getting involved as much because that would have been really my only community and even when I did go to things. It was still a very White space.

The visibility coupled with whiteness within the LGBTQ spaces meant that Lex did not engage in affirming transgender spaces while in undergrad. Similar to Lex, Rome (He/Him/His) also did not engage in LGBTQ spaces because they did not feel welcomed because of their Blackness in those spaces. Rome shared that they were a discreet person and the way that the LGBTQ center was located in the middle of a high traffic area contributed to their desire to stay away:

It wasn't a comfortable space for my blackness, you know I feel like that was enough for me to feel like I'm excluded....I would have wanted it discreetly, too.

Because I wouldn't want to like be able to come to the understanding myself. Of like, you know, without outside interference because I feel like everybody has an opinion to it especially when you're transitioning.

Rome would have preferred to receive resources surrounding their Black transness that did not require them to have to go into the LGBTQ center. Black transgender students often avoided certain areas of campus if that meant it lessened the harm that they experienced while on campus.

Using the Restroom. To reduce the possibility of experiencing harm, Black transgender students often avoided areas of campus. For example, Black transgender students had horrible interactions in on campus restrooms which led some to hold their bodily functions altogether. Using the restroom facilities on campus for Black transgender students made them a target of violent interactions. Being Black and transgender in campus restrooms made them extremely vulnerable when using the facilities. Most administrators, faculty, staff, and students take for granted access to public restroom facilities. Black transgender students in this study shared stories of feeling hypervisible when accessing on campus facilities such as the restroom.

Access to safe and affirming restroom facilities improve the health and well-being of transgender students (American Medical Association & American Medical Association, 2019). The American Medical Association & American Medical Association (2019) reported that exclusionary restroom policies and facilities result in transgender students avoiding restrooms altogether increasing their vulnerability to medical consequences including “recurrent urinary tract infections and constipation, as well as the possibility of more serious health complications, including hematuria and

chronic kidney disease” (para. 13). When telling a story about a campus event she had attended at her school, Saint (She/They) shared a triggering experience she had while using the restroom:

I'm having a good time. I go to the ladies room and while I'm in there this other girl comes in and says, “Hey, the security's waiting outside for you.” ...I go out there and the guy is like “you need to leave. “I was like, “why?” he goes, “you don't belong in here.” And I was like “Whoa! You show me a policy, or something like that. Show me where it's written.”...but by then everyone in the whole little space was looking at me, all eyes on me... I had to walk through the crowd. It hurt my heart so bad.

Saint’s experience with discrimination while using the restroom, is similar to Remi’s experience while they were cleaning the women's restroom at work:

I was like really further along in transition and like very visibly masc¹⁰ and had a lot of weird interactions with people...There was a time when I was like closing. I was trying to clean the restrooms, or something like that. And this woman, just like starts berating me, and she's like, “I can't even tell like what bathroom you're supposed to be in...you shouldn't even be in the women's bathroom”...And I was just like, “Oh, Whoa!”...That was a moment where I like... my transness was made really visible to me...I hadn't like been met with outward hostility up until that point.

Black transgender students were hyper aware of how visible their transness was on campus. Their hyper awareness of how they were perceived on campus impacted the ways they used campus restroom facilities if they did at all. The fear of experiencing a violent interaction in the restrooms on campus impacted the bodies and health of Black transgender students. With Riri sharing a story about getting diagnosed with pelvic floor dysfunction after consistently holding their urine while working and attending classes on campus:

¹⁰ Abbreviation for masculine

There was a good 2 years where I legitimately had pelvic floor dysfunction from holding my pee. And not being able to pee on campus anytime except for in one particular bathroom at the [redacted] center...I had this really intense experience of like every single time I would go home psychologically, my brain was like, "Oh, it's safe to pee now". And so even if I had like just peed on campus before walking home, I would just need to pee so fucking bad as soon as I would get home and it was my body realizing that it was like, "okay, we're safe now". And I like there was a good number of times that I literally peed myself because of that. And was just like, "Oh, like, there is so much shame wrapped up in that". And so, I'm just thinking, "Wow! What would my life have been at that moment if there wasn't people before me who really advocated to have that one [gender-neutral] bathroom.

Campus bathroom facilities were important to Black transgender people as they were aware of how being in non-gender affirming restrooms made them vulnerable to harm and hyper visible. Dream (They/Them) shared their story of feeling good when a faculty member supported them in getting a gender-neutral restroom within the building they worked in during their master's program:

There was one person...she was an adjunct faculty member...she was maybe the only faculty member who didn't flinch when I said I was trans...I brought up the whole issue of like not having a space to use the restroom in my department, and then having to go up two floors to use a single stall restroom. And she was like, "I will take this on" and so she was the only person who lobbied to change those two restrooms...she was the person who did that for me so I could at least use the restroom that didn't have a gender attached to it. Now, did I want to walk up two flights every day? No, so I often didn't. But if I needed to, I could.

While Needing Safety. Hypervisibility for Black transgender students meant that they were unable to engage in social events like the rest of their peers. The negative perception of a Black transgender person meant that students were more vulnerable to criminalization and both legal and extra-legal policing. Lavender shared a story about being body slammed by the police when needing help to find their way home. The experience left Lavender feeling vulnerable, lost, and unsafe in the neighborhood. After

attending a football celebration where the entire city prepares days in advance to riot after winning a game, Lavender was left intoxicated by a group of their White friends and was unable to get home. Lavender had been stranded by a group of people they thought were their friends. Intoxicated, forgotten phone passcode, and no ride, Lavender began to look for help:

I got to a gas station and I had to ask the clerk behind a counter if they could call a Lyft for me cause I was so drunk I did not know the passcode to my phone. They're like, "Okay, your Lyft is here." But it was so close to [the] street that there were already [police] squad cars around and I was so drunk that I thought the Lyft was the cop car because it was just parked in a random spot...so I went over to open the door. But before I even get the chance to like, do anything, there's a cop coming up from behind, puts my face in the ground, and gets me in handcuffs...All I remember was they let me up and I was in handcuffs. I tried to explain [that I'm lost], and then [the police] let me out, and I was like, "Hey, I'm actually really desperate. I don't know where my house is right now. Can you help me get home?" And then I remember them pushing me to like, "No get the fuck on."

The dehumanization that Lavender experienced in that moment from campus police highlights the ways that Black transgender students experience dehumanization and criminalization across a variety of situations while in higher education. Lavender was not given the opportunity to receive help from appointed workers who are tasked with keeping the campus community safe. The police's assumption that Lavender had criminal intent when mistaking the police vehicle for their Lyft exemplifies the ways Black transgender students are perceived by not only their campus communities but society at large.

Mitigating Visibility. Black transgender students' awareness of being hypervisible to the campus community meant they participated in actions that would mitigate being the vocal point for others' gaze. Half of my participants stated that they

started their days by overthinking about how they can dress in order to protect themselves from how institutional actors perceived them. Vision (They/Them) shared, “At my current institution the day begins with a crisis around getting dressed...it really matters how I look because how I'm going to be perceived by the outside world is going to really impact me.”

For folks who may not be transgender, this experience of taking extra time to decide whether clothing will leave them vulnerable may not be familiar. For Black transgender students in the study, the perception of their outward gender experience coupled with their racial identity as Black, meant that they employed tactics to camouflage themselves to the campus community. Black transgender students' being forced to camouflage for protection can be considered higher education's socialization process. For example, when Black transgender students' dress was not easily camouflaged, they were vulnerable to questioning by peers, administrators, and others in their campus communities. Radiance felt as though they often got questions about things that they wore and were conscious about their dress while on campus:

I style myself in terms of my fashion, causes people question like, “what are they doing?” I had many moments of like wearing a dress or wearing heels, or like usually I have my braids and they're really big and colorful. And it gets a lot of stares and looks, and there's students who come up to me and they're like, “Oh, why are you wearing that?” And I'm like “this is what I feel like wearing”, and some people think it's a performance like, “oh, you must be putting on a costume for something” and I'm like, “no, this is just me sort of the everyday. “ And I feel like the constant reference to what I'm wearing as a costume is a way of invalidating my own experience.

Radiance's dress was perceived by campus community members as a costume when their dress is just something they want to wear to affirm their identities. The line of

questioning made Radiance feel as though their identity as a transgender person was being invalidated. It is also important to remind you that when Radiance's dress was deemed not gender appropriate, she had been prevented from accessing office hours for a class. Black transgender students in my sample experience incidents of violence and abuse at the hands and mouths of various institutional actors. When Radiance was unable to camouflage into the campus environment she feared for her life and had been a subject of attack. Radiance shared that they were concerned about walking around their campus at night because of the campus communities' history with lynching of Black people and the multiple murders of Black transgender women:

One of the things that I'm very aware of is that Texas is one of the last places to abolish slavery. There's a lot of like lynching cases that that happen here. So when I'm walking around at night, I feel uncomfortable because there's a bunch of like White [students] who will be in their pickup trucks sitting in the back of their truck yelling things at people....one day when I was walking home...this big pickup truck, 6 men [students], who were all drinking and yelling at me basically cat calling me...and I felt like something kind of swipe over my head in that moment, so that kind of scared me. This is dangerous to exist in this place.

Radiance's experience with White men students berating her because of how she was presenting exemplifies the plantation's university's investment in maintaining norms, or the expectation that as a dehumanized subject be obedient and remain within the boundaries of the plantation (Durant, 1999).

Black transgender students were acutely aware of others' perceptions of their gender expression, gender, and racial identities. Some students in the study tried to make sense of why they are constantly under the spectacle of others. Like Radiance, Monique (She/Her/Hers) feeling vigilant around how she is perceived in the world after what was

happening politically around transgender identities in the United States during the covid-19 pandemic:

As I'm getting older and my identities are shifting continuously in these non-normative ways, that sense of vigilance is just kind of ramped up more nowadays. I think the pandemic also impacted kind of what going out into the world, and like all that kind of stuff. But right leading up to that, like my first couple years of graduate school, especially getting used to a new city like Ann Arbor.

Monique's sense of hyper vigilance impacted how she dressed but began to wear whatever she wanted. Many students in the sample shared experience having an initial pause to question how they would dress their bodies before stepping out on campus. This pause usually lasted momentarily and resulted in the student deciding to wear whatever they wanted that felt good to them. They already knew how they would be perceived on campus when they decided to wear whatever they wanted to wear but unapologetically decided to do so anyway. When Monique wore whatever, she wanted, she was cat-called by members of the campus community and told that she was dressed unprofessionally by her supervisor:

I remember being like, "Okay, I gotta you know, either being like, I'm gonna wear what I want, and you know something happens." Something happens and something happening was literally just being like I get cat-called, or...messages I was dressed unprofessionally.

Monique continued:

I did experience some harassment. I can say from people who were on campus, who are also students or staff....So the older I got the more known around campus I was at the time....they were kind of weird times where I was more consciously like, "okay, I'm on campus. Where am I on campus? What do I need to do?" I became a little bit more conscious about when I need to be in the house, or and even for a bit, what am I wearing cause that's where I was in my consciousness. So, thinking, like prioritizing safety, and being aware of my surroundings.

Monique expressed feelings of being overly conscious about her surroundings and how others may interact with her. Monique's feelings confirm the hypervisibility that Black transgender students feel in spaces as the only ones.

For Lex, mitigating their visibility on campus meant they forced themselves to repress their Black transgender identity after a violent experience with on campus counseling services. Lex resisted her transgender identity after having a horrible experience with counseling services while in undergrad. Lex had sought to get resources to figure out their gender identity and feel affirmed in the process. They had been thinking they identified as transgender but were unsure because they were conflicted about how they felt in their body. Definitions that they sought out online differed from how they felt. She ultimately scheduled an appointment at counseling services and met with a counselor who supposedly specialized in LGBTQ communities. When meeting with counseling services, she became overwhelmed:

So I went to counseling folks on campus and they had one person on the lowest part of their website that had anything that was like LGBTQ. So, it's like, I guess that's the person I'm gonna go to and I had the worst experience. I was still finding my language but this was a person that I had to like teach the word [transgender]...I remember they immediately started talking about surgeries and hormones before I really accepted [my transness]...they started going on a rant about how the results for surgery are just not good. And then you're not gonna find someone who's gonna date...they started to talk about bottom surgery. And there's all these complications...

Lex cried when recounting this story because they realized they had not told anyone before. Lex remembered disassociating from the conversation with the counselor:

I remember just shutting up in the meeting. And I was like, Okay, I'm just gonna wait for this to be over and hold it together. I remember I even left my car at the place immediately.

After the experience with counseling services Lex shoved away any feelings surrounding their gender identity and removed transness from their life for 6/7 years:

I really just shoved it away. Transness. Anything related to gender! I started to force myself to be a bit more feminine for the rest of college and I just anytime I thought about gender or feeling dysphoria, I just shoved it away and because it was easier for me to just not address it.

Lex's experience with counseling services exemplifies the plantation university's desire to maintain boundaries and socialization structures that impede the ability for Black transgender students to feel safe and free from ostracization.

Some participants in the sample decided to change their majors or even remove themselves from a certain environment when mitigating their visibility did not work. For example, Riri shared a story of why they decided to change their undergrad major from Viticulture and Enology to African American studies:

I was a Viticulture and Enology major which meant that most of my classes were pretty far out, like some of them, were not even on campus. I would have to bike kind of a long distance to go all the way to the other side of campus to be in this sort of like area of campus that was really quiet and fancy. I just had so much weird angst about being in a place that felt like I didn't really belong...I feel like I was the smartest person in a lot of my classes but I felt like nobody saw me that way. And I just kind of melted to the background. Then I took an African American studies class that was like the...intro class mostly because I grew up in a super White place. I was now on this really White campus, and there was this part of me that was like, "I need to be around other black people."

Riri shared that changing their major to African American Studies was the first time they began to feel invested in their classes. Black faculty ended up making Riri feel more welcomed and present on campus. For Black transgender students, leaving an environment is a form of self-preservation. While Black transgender students voluntarily opt out of remaining in their programs, at their institutions, or within their majors;

interactions with peers, staff, and faculty, access to safe and affirming housing, sense of belonging, and lack of support contribute to their leaving.

Structural Elements

The plantation university's structural elements include knowledge, emotions, objectives, norms, social standing, authority, consequences, and facilities (Durant, 1999; Squire et al., 2018). The structural elements underlying participants' narratives in the educational realm come into sharp focus. Black transgender students' narratives detail their decisions to abandon their educational pursuits which emerges as a manifestation of power dynamics between themselves and various institutional actors. Simultaneously, the expectations of increased labor is central in their stories, all occurring amid threats of adjudication and sanctions from the institution. The sentiment within the poignant question asked by Riri, 'If we can't go to the Center, then where can we go?' unveils the insidious intricacies of institutional actors' desire to over-regulate spaces for marginalized people which is illuminated in various participants' stories.

Increased Labor

“I ended up being basically like an academic advisor because their advisors were not helping them” – Bliss (Ze/Zir/Zirs)

Black transgender students were engaged in many functions of the institution, whether they were in campus athletics, presidents of student organizations, led campus protests, worked in offices of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), residential life, were graduate student researchers, or teaching assistants. Black transgender students expressed concerns surrounding being the only one when engaged on their campuses. Being the

only one within their departments, jobs, or in student housing for some Black transgender students meant there was increased labor for them to educate institutional actors such as their peers, administrators, and faculty. Black transgender students felt compelled to use their identities to make sure that others on campus did not have to experience the same levels of harm they had experienced.

Bliss recounted zirs experience living with all White cisgender women in student housing while ze was an undergraduate. As a Black transgender student living in student housing, Bliss did not feel comfortable with the roommates ze had been assigned, making zirs living situation unsafe. Bliss sought out campus support. When discussing zirs undergraduate experience in student housing, Bliss shared when ze realized ze needed transgender affirming housing but the campus was unprepared to support transgender people on campus because ze was the only one:

I realized that there was so much work that needed to be done to support me as a trans student on campus. I was like the anomaly a lot of the time...but at the time I was like, "Hi, I'm trans like I need to live with someone who is like trans affirming", [the institution's] solution was just, "Oh, we're just gonna put you in your own room at the end of the hall. So, you'll pay for a double, but it's a single, you'll have your own private bathroom" which for most folks was a dream but...I became very isolated, and so my mental health like tanked because of it.

Bliss was acutely aware of the disparity of Black transgender students on zirs campus which emboldened zir to do something about it. This awareness shifted the ways Bliss viewed zirs institution and encouraged Bliss to "make something out of nothing".

I was the only black trans person. There were other black people but they were all cis and so I think in the sense of how I view the institution...I think it was like, "I know that I don't have anything but like, how can I make something out of nothing?"

This acute awareness led Bliss to develop a philosophy of taking care of others so that others within zirs communities do not experience what Bliss had gone through while engaging in student housing, the medical center, and other areas of the institution:

I took on the philosophy of I don't want anyone else to experience what I've experienced here, and so for me, I realize that there's a lot of emotional labor that I did, and like a lot of harm that I had experienced. But I put that into my activism.

Bliss's philosophy made zir a popular student leader on zirs campus, where peers and community members sought out support from them to move through the institution. Bliss began to take on unpaid roles so that zirs community would have access to information because ze was not seeing it in zirs community.

I ended up being basically like an academic advisor because their advisors were not helping them try to figure out their majors and figure out their pathway. Information was being inaccurate, and so I was able to help more students in 10 minutes than some folks who get paid on campus were able to do in the years that students had been there. And I know a lot of it is the limitations of systems. But it's also because they don't know a lot, and they don't know how to communicate that to folks who don't know anything about these systems. And so, I had to. I feel like I sacrificed myself as a student for the betterment of others...

The increased labor to support others took a toll on zirs academics:

You feel like you're the only one doing that work, and that's exactly how I felt throughout my entire collegiate experience. I was like I'm the only one doing this work because I didn't see folks doing it... I was like no one else is gonna do it. It's gonna be me. So, I made that decision at 19 years old that was what I had to do. So, a lot of my experience in undergrad was not just supporting my academic prowess. It was being that support to other people who didn't get it.

Bliss felt that ze made many sacrifices and that many Black transgender students must in order to be within collegiate spaces because there is no one else doing the work, and if they are, it is not done properly. Bliss expressed concern that Black transgender students

were unable to just be students like their other peers but were forced to take on other roles amongst their communities in college.

I felt like I sacrificed a lot as a student, and I don't think that black trans people are able to just be students like other folks can. Like we have to be therapist... We have to be mental health professionals. We have to be advisors. We have to be student affairs professionals. We have to be siblings, partners, and everyone's support system.

Bliss's stories are similar to Brixton's (They/Them) where at their institution they felt that if they were not doing the work there would be no representation of Black transness, or Black queerness within the campus cultural programming or the creation of spaces that affirm Black transgender identities:

I just feel like if I wasn't doing the work, it wouldn't get done. If I wasn't creating the safe spaces, there'd be no safe spaces. If I wasn't, you know, hosting the difficult dialogues, there would be no difficult dialogue. There would be *pause* no yeah...there'd be no culture. Almost like there'd be no black queer presence, if it weren't for me.

Black transgender students anticipated being the only one within their departments, programs, and places of work to identify as a Black transgender person. This is similar to Black students' experiences (Harper et al., 2011); however, it is especially laborious when they were asked to be the speaker for both the Black and transgender community. For example, Wonder (He/Him) stated, "I'm just used to being the token black trans person in the room at this point." When talking about attending their first graduate school program, Dream expected to be the only Black transgender person and take on extra roles and tasks because of their identities. Knowing this as an expectation, Dream used their tokenism to be strategic about getting what they needed and wanted out of their peers, faculty, and the institution:

I went to graduate school, and there I was like, “Oh, you don't have any trans people. You want me? Black Trans person. Let me be your token.” To be honest, I was a little strategic about it and the fact that I'm like, “Look, I'm the only person in this room who can speak to this experience. So, we will pick me and you will listen and I will be right.” ...There was just a way that I could use that to shorten up having to negotiate with some people.

While Dream strategically navigated the dynamics of their graduate school experience, leveraging their unique position as the sole Black transgender person to advance their objectives, Saint faced a similar reality on her campus. As the only well-known Black transgender individual, Saint took on the responsibility of activism and educating the community about the issues affecting Black transgender lives. Despite the different contexts, both Dream and Saint shared the experience of being pioneers in their environments, using their visibility to address and advocate for the unique challenges faced by Black transgender individuals. For Saint tokenism meant that she became the face for a lot of campaigns both within her institution and community in Alaska. Saint expressed that this tokenism erased other identities and interests that they held:

...every time there's an issue going on with transgender folks they will call me on the news, or [the institution], or for the newspaper article, or something like that... I'm there but I do other things though too, other than being a social justice activist.

Like Saint, Dream began to reject the expectation of having to be the sole speaker for the Black transgender community without monetary compensation:

...as I got into my Ph.D. program, now I very much went in with the understanding of, “I have done this labor and this is like constant education for other students, other faculty, others, that I've been doing since I was 22 years old.” I was 30 at the time, so I was like, "I'm not [educating others] unless you're paying me. I am no longer doing this work.”...particularly in my graduate program I would be put in these positions where I was expected to do the labor.

Additionally, Radiance was also used as a poster child for anything gay related, which made her feel like he was unable to enjoy their life:

I was the poster child for gay black people, which was fun at first, but then annoying cause I'm like, "I'm just trying to live." And now I felt like I was constantly working all the time instead of just enjoying my life.

Tayo (They/Them) shared similar feelings surrounding doing work to support Black transgender people on campus and having their identities being central to that work.

Upon graduation, Tayo reflected on the lasting impact their labor to support Black transgender community on campus took on their capacity to continue the work:

I think my engagement actually kind of exacerbated me by the time I finished, I was like, "I need a break. I can't do it." and I had to kind of reevaluate and reshape where my focus was. So, in many ways, I feel like the work that I was doing was like good work, but it was exhausting, and I was tired and I still get tired of having to...put my identity on the line in order...to like justify "we need x, y, and z because I'm black and trans right?" That shit is exhausting, and I wish I had found other ways to hang up my identity while also advocating....So when I left [college]...I had to take a step back and reevaluate like how much of a pedestal I put my like identities on.

Tayo felt that being Black and transgender was the only way they were able to receive funding for certain scholarships, programs, and projects within their school: "It's like when you apply for colleges, when you apply for a fellowship or scholarship, they want to hear the sobs stories, or they want to hear you piece apart your identity". This ultimately led to Tayo's desire to figure out how to advocate for Black transgender community without having to put their identity on a pedestal for the institution to leverage and tokenize. Lex and Tayo had similar feelings surrounding the use of their identities as a token for scholarships, grants, and other monetary compensation from the institution. Lex felt that her White cisgender man academic advisor and dissertation chair

used Lex's Black transgender identity to apply for diversity grants/scholarships and for his reputation as a conscious and inclusive professor:

I'm the only student of color he has. The only queer student he has. The only trans student he has ever had...I feel like he only sees me as a black trans person to get something out of it and that means scholarships...That means special grants that are only for students of color, which is like a good thing, of course, that your advisor, sending that to you. But I've noticed that he uses [Lex's Black transness] to obtain things or to make himself look better. I remember my second year... I had still never gotten close with this guy but one of our professional societies that's big [our field] does like a big teaching and mentoring award. And he needed letters of recommendation. He could have asked all of his students but he's always asking me for a letter of recommendation. And I talked to other lab mates about it, and it's funny because I feel like I have the least close relationship with him. But he's wanting me to vouch for him as a black, queer, and gender nonconforming or trans student. So, I feel like it impacts our closeness...Our one-on-one meetings turn into him trying to prove himself so that we're not actually talking about the things I need help on. And then also he's using it [Lex's identity] to his advantage at times to almost say that like, "Look, I have a Black trans student."

When asking for a letter of recommendation in return, Lex's advisor was unable to speak to their skills and knowledge but centered Lex's Black transgender identity to why they should receive the scholarship:

Some of the language he uses in [the letter]. It's like, man you're really wanting them to know that I am hitting some of these diversity boxes and it's a lot of yeah loaded terms of saying, like, "Lex has unique diversity that is underrepresented.

Feeling as though her advisor hyper-focused on Lex's identity coupled with feeling like she had to hide her identity in other aspects of navigating her Ph.D. program, Lex developed a desire for making their Black trans identity casual for others:

It's a lot of masking and trying to attend to other people's feelings... [I'm] always trying to think of, "How can I make my black transness seem so casual?"...like seem so casual that I'm me but also black and trans. But like, that's not what we're thinking about right now.

The Black transgender students in the sample expressed being the only one within their departments, student housing, or college, which led them to take on extra work to ensure that others who had similar identities did not have to experience the same level of harm that they had experienced. This often meant that Black transgender students became tokens forced to use their identities to educate institutional actors to make their campus experience a little better. The increased pressure from the extra labor made Black transgender students exhausted and tired, which impacted their academic success. Black transgender students felt that others' over reliance on them to be the face of the Black transgender people in their campus communities prevented them from enjoying life and embracing other hobbies and interests. All but one participant (Rome) in the sample experienced feeling like a token in the spaces they inhabited. None of the Black transgender student participants in the sample were compensated for the labor they had been expected to perform.

Abandoned Educational Pursuits

I ended up dropping out because of a lot of reasons but a big part of it was I realized how my identities are so salient in that environment. – Bliss (Ze/ Zir/Zirs)

Out of the 20 Black transgender participants in my sample, 16 of them were graduate students or graduated from a master's or doctoral program. Out of the 16 of the Black transgender graduate students, 8 of them had been enrolled into a graduate program and left and either re-enrolled into another institution, or never returned. Black transgender students experienced many push factors that forced them to leave programs, institutions, jobs, and organizations. Push factors highlight the stories that contributed to

Black transgender students' desire to leave. Push factors are conflicts, culture, and experiences that are recognized by the individual that encourage them to decide to leave. For example, Jelani (They/He) left his Ph.D. program in African American studies due to many factors including, poor mentorship, criminalization, respectability politics, and whiteness that impacted their ability to succeed in the program. Graduate school programs are especially isolating but coupled with a Black transgender identity, this meant that those experiences were exacerbated. Jelani felt that the people who ran and were peers in the program could not holistically support them due to their Black transgender identity. He was aware of the disconnect he felt from his faculty members due to his identity when he was approaching key milestones in his program. He described the Ph.D. program as:

So, debilitating for me, even being in a black studies, African diaspora studies Department. It's got the most black professors. Now, this is also where I'm experiencing for the first time. True representation, and my face fo' real fo' real. Even of black trans people because there were black trans professors there and that was significant.

Jelani shared that even though there was a lot of representation, including Black transgender faculty in their department, the experience was still impacting his health. As a Black transgender person Jelani felt that he would have been fully supported in his program because there were faculty members who had similar identities to him. The representation for Jelani was important and one of the main reasons he decided to join the program but the people ended up being harmful:

They're juxtaposing the fact that even those black trans professors were very harmful and because of all types of things and then just the different violations that come from being in a grad school program. I ended up not finishing.

I asked Jelani to continue to tell me about their story about why they left the program and what transpired before they made the decision to ultimately leave. He went on to talk about the exploits of being underpaid for the work he was doing as a graduate student, “You're working for a multi-million-dollar company, [the university]. Like the football department itself is a multi-million-dollar company.” Jelani discussed how professors would essentially tell them there is no way for graduate students in their program to get a higher pay. Professors in the department would tell graduate students that they make more than other administrators and staff on campus and invalidate their experiences with not having a living wage:

I'm like it's one thing for you to tell us like “Oh, you actually don't have access to these things for the reasons that we may think of or no, and that we could try to support you and support each other in that” but they would make it seem like we were just being unfathomable or unreasonable and like, “Oh, you guys, make more money than these people.” And I'm like, “Okay, like, that still doesn't take away the fact that none of us can afford to live here right now.” ...By the first year I was totally depressed, totally disconnected.

Jelani felt that his Black transness coupled with his involvement in advocacy for graduate students made him particularly vulnerable in the program. Jelani began to experience moments where he felt like he did not belong or was being targeted or excluded. Jelani talks about feeling like meeting his milestones was a massive obstacle for him to overcome because he was not receiving similar support from his faculty like others in the program:

It wasn't until I got into this situation where I'm supposed to be like ABD by year 3, like you get your masters too by year 2. By then I should have known that this wasn't the space for me because getting to that part of it, man, It was so wild I can't even like... I remember it was just like getting the papers done and I just couldn't do it...it just like no true support. And yeah, I think they didn't really know what to do when people are actually struggling mentally to process that

they're asking us to do so. It wasn't until leaving and having them try to kick me out first.

Jelani discussed struggling through the process of getting to the master's degree milestone and feeling as if they had no true support while struggling through it. This was the first time in the interview when Jelani mentioned that their program had directly targeted them in the hopes that they would leave, so I asked them to tell me more about that experience:

I submitted a draft of my dissertation proposal. It was already super late like a lot of people in my year were like a year behind essentially. So, we were all feeling the pressure. We're like, "we gotta get this done." So, I had originally sent in a bunch of stuff. We were supposed to have my defense the day before. My committee, 1 or 2 people, were like, "We don't think this is ready" even though my chair had signed off on it. I'm like "what the fuck like the day before [my] defense like that's a huge, huge curve-ball"...the defense ends up being a conversation about what needs to be done now to get it ready.

Jelani's story highlights the consequences of having program mentors who do not fully invest in the success of Black transgender students. Jelani continued:

Fast forward, I'm still trying to get this thing done and I send in a draft that's jumbled. I just have ideas here, ideas there like that. Nothing is put together because I'm like, "What can you help me to organize?"....They took it. I don't have citations in some places, I'm just pulling from people's papers like here. This is for the literature review....I'm gonna talk about this person...I'm pulling things from my master's thesis. They're like, "Oh, you plagiarize then I go through this whole process, even though I'm like it was a draft like I wasn't submitting this as my work."

Jelani felt that the misunderstanding of submitting a draft for support and help with organizing led to their dissertation chair reporting him to student conduct where they had to do a private legal proceeding to determine whether or not he had plagiarized. Jelani had felt betrayed by their dissertation chair and that the continuing disconnect from their advisor because of being a Black transgender student advocate made him a target. The

legal process of plagiarism essentially criminalized Jelani for seeking support from their mentors. The automatic reporting of Jelani emphasizes his isolating experience while in the program. Jelani was ultimately suspended for a year but was able to retain all but dissertation (ABD) status. Upon their return to the program, Jelani was assigned a new Black queer dissertation chair who began to reproduce a hierarchical and power differential relationship with Jelani:

I had a new committee. I had a new chair that was Black and queer....He was saying, "I got your back", but not really like the energy was always off and was always saying, "I still have to reprimand you." I felt small. Even though he keeps showing up trying to be like my hero.

Jelani underscored the nuanced dynamics in his relationship with his new dissertation chair, a Black queer individual who espouses support for Black queer and transgender students but concurrently sought to replicate power imbalances. Jelani acknowledged the hypocrisy in the words that his dissertation say and the actions and demands that he exudes towards Jelani:

He's telling me, "if I don't send it to you in 24 hours. If it's 1 min late I could find a new chair.", and of course, knowing that having to find a new chair would mean total demise, like there's no way that I've finished having to try to find a new chair after all of that.

The threats were not the last straw for Jelani. Jelani's final interaction with his dissertation chair determined just what he needed to leave the program for good:

He tried to pull one more thing with me where we didn't talk for a year, the pandemic has started. He calls like let's have a conversation about progress... I sent him my stuff. He was like, "well, it looks like nothing has been done since the last time we talked...we were gonna get on the phone call." and he wanted to be on facetime...He was like, "I'll give you an hour to get ready or whatever. So, we can get on facetime." Like he had control over my life right now.

Jelani did not regret their decision to leave their Ph.D. program. They felt that faculty control over students proved too debilitating for their mental health and created an unwelcoming environment for them to thrive in the program. Despite the program being heavily populated with Black queer and transgender faculty members, and a majority Black student population, Jelani felt that the faculty's desire to uphold respectability, whiteness, and hierarchical relationship dynamics contributed to their desire to not continue with the program despite winning many battles against the institution and those aiming to remove them.

Dream, an aspiring theater design artist, put away their dream of getting an MFA in theater design after experiencing a hostile environment amongst their peers and advisor. Since the writing of this dissertation, Dream has graduated with a doctoral degree in education and continues to do research that centers on Black transgender people in higher education and advocacy. Here is Dream's story of leaving the MFA program:

So, for me to get into [this prestigious MFA program] was a really big deal for folks and they were like, "Oh, you're a Black woman!" And then I showed up and was a Black trans masculine genderqueer, human, and nobody knew how to respond to my gender. The moment I showed up in class I sent an email to all the technicians and folks that I was going to be working with, I was like, "Hey, my name is Dream. I'm trans. Please use these pronouns for me. Don't use the old name like it's gonna show up da da da," and the response slash rejection was almost immediate.

There had been an assumption based on Dream's name that they identified as a Black woman. When they introduced themselves, they felt immediate rejection from their peers. Dream felt that other were making a big deal out of their identities:

I was like, "I've not really changed, it'd literally be like my art is either gonna be the same or influenced by this but like that shouldn't matter." But people and my

classmates had a really hard time interacting with me as a trans person. They were very standoffish and even my advisor.

Dream was experiencing isolation and their advisor was not creating a welcoming environment for them.

He didn't know what to do with me...I think some of it is also just his ego. As a theater person he showed up and he was cool. "Nice to meet you. I'm going to Germany for 2 months. Have fun, figure it out." And so, I was just kind of left to swim in waters I had no understanding of. It had never done anything like large scale professional theater before. And I was like, "Okay, I'm coming to grad school to get this experience and very quickly I realized that that was not how people were gonna treat me in that program."

Dream had no support academically from their advisor. Generally, graduate programs are typically isolating (Filho et al., 2021), but the experience of isolation coupled with multiple marginalized identities exacerbated this reality for both Dream and Jelani. For example, Dream had joined the MFA program to learn more about the field but because no one knew how to interact with them as a Black transgender person, Dream was left to fend for themselves. This overall isolating climate prevented Dream from wanting to continue in the program.

I think the meeting that I had with my advisor...before I told him I was leaving. He was like, "you've got some stuff going on that you need to figure out and I don't know what to do with it. So like can you take care of that". Essentially, what he was referring to was me being trans. And I was like, "Okay, cool"...I realized in that process of the space, which was academia which I thought for so long, let me be trans. Let me be queer. I could find those spaces in and out of classrooms and suddenly there was this giant wall where I could not actually access those things from my classes anymore. And other people were having a really hard time trying to negotiate [their identity].

Dream had been very connected with queer and transgender spaces while in undergrad. So, it was a culture shock to have people not understand his Black and transgender.

Dream began to seek out transgender and queer affirming spaces outside of their program, “I moved out slowly from my office to spaces to only hang out in the queer spaces on campus as I had before cause I knew they were comfortable.”

Dream and Jelani’s stories are comprehensive of the experiences Black transgender students have while at any level and institutional type. Institutional actors create unwelcoming environments, and obstacles that ultimately contribute to the push factors of Black transgender students. Bliss (ze, zir, zirs) also shared a story of leaving a master’s program because it was unwelcoming to their identities. Bliss had been heavily involved in supporting marginalized students on campus while in undergrad. Bliss was acutely aware of being the only Black transgender person, and one of few transgender people on campus. Bliss had shared that the increased labor began to impact zirs academic work and ze were soon falling behind. Bliss’s reputation as always being willing to support became too much to bear and wanted to be surrounded by people who looked like zir. Bliss ended up transferring to another undergraduate institution and starting over, where ze had a better experience until enrolling in a master’s education program:

I didn't last the semester. I ended up dropping out because of a lot of reasons but a big part of it was I realized how my identities are so salient in that environment. I was the person that came the furthest away from my program...as well as I was the only out black trans person in my entire program. There wasn't even another trans person in my program.

Bliss was not completely aware of the disparities in diversity in the program. Bliss had joined that program to specifically work with other Black queer student affairs

practitioners at that institution and was promised a position but it was given away to a

White transgender person:

The director of the LGBT Center at the time was a Black queer woman, and I specifically moved there so that I can work under her. But she gave that position to a White trans person that went there, and so she promised me something that she couldn't keep. And I emailed her a lot asking like, "Hey, like, I applied. I got in. I really want this assistantship." And then she told me that she gave it to someone else and that was really hard because she was the only reason why I moved out there.

The lack of diversity in Bliss's program coupled with no job prospects contributed to zir actually leaving the program. Bliss was also struggling with housing and as a graduate student, the institution had little resources to offer:

I lived with two White queer people. An incident happened in the house that I was really afraid to step back in...And I was really reluctant to ask for help... It made me realize how isolated I was as a Black trans grad student on campus because there were no resources for me...I ended up being homeless in that program...They had a policy where graduate students could not live in the dorms on campus, in the residence halls, unless you were a whole director, like a graduate hall assistant.

Over-regulation of Black Trans Mobility

"If we can't go to the center, then where can we go?" -Tayo (They/Them)

Spaces, ideas, and autonomy for Black transgender students were over-regulated from the institution, faculty, and their peers. Over-regulation for Black transgender students manifested in the limitation of their freedom and the erasure of their value and knowledge that benefited their greater communities. Many of the narratives expressed the power of maintaining a Black transgender affinity group that sustained their retention in the institution. However, a common thread emerged that highlighted the denial of access,

theft, and increased bureaucracy that ultimately led to the over-regulation of spaces designed by and for Black transgender students. The institution and its actors steal from, reject, underfund, and invalidate Black transgender student spaces and communities. For example, Tayo shared a story of institutional actors stealing ideas from the Black LGBTQ organization during their presidential tenure:

I just remember there was an event or an idea that [the organization] had to put on an event to raise money for a Black queer elder and that event was stolen. The entire idea and concept. And it turned into a larger issue around the co-opting of Black queer and trans ideas. That conversation was just coming up. And so, it was an event that these White trans folks put on and didn't consult [Black LGBTQ organization] at all, didn't consult me, or the folks that came up with the idea and the money didn't even get donated to the individual we had intended it to. So that actually ended up sparking a larger conversation of developing AntiBlackness training, and like telling the I forget, like what the leadership was. The time. But tell [the director] like, "each year will need to ensure that your staff, or whoever gets hired, takes this AntiBlackness training", just out of that experience alone because it was so disheartening to see so many folks within [the organization] and myself included have our idea taken.

Having ideas stolen by the institution was a common experience within the sample. The ideas were often initially rejected by institutional actors, then co-opted to make the institution appear more diverse or to gain profit. For example, Bliss's story of receiving pushback for wanting to start a trans of color support group within the center at zirs institution:

I got a lot of pushback when I was at [institution]. I was trying to advocate for a trans of color group at our center and the director at the time, who identified as a woman, said that no, that's not a need on campus. And so, it's really interesting to hear another queer person say that trying to hold a trans of color group in our space was not a need. And they basically told us to go to the resource center in town. But that crowd was a lot of older folks like the age gap was a minimum of 20 years. So, it's really hard for us to connect as trans folks of color on campus, and I wanted to use my job to do so And I was told "no" which is very interesting.

Bliss eventually started the trans of color support group on campus. Before the establishment of the trans of color support group, Bliss had experienced many forms of rejection from campus administration and peers. The trans of color support group was not implemented until LGBTQ administration were all on board, which can be interpreted as taking the credit for the ideas. The work done by Bliss was eventually recognized post-graduation with the establishment of an endowed scholarship in their name:

When I left my undergrad, the person that took over the queer and trans People of color collective reached out to me 2 years later, and was like, “Hey, we want to cement the work that you did here. We wanna put a scholarship in your name.” And they did and it's the Bliss scholarship that supports queer and trans folks of color. It's an emergency grant supporting the longevity of queer and trans folks on my campus.

Bliss's story is evident of the power the institution has to over-regulate the spaces, ideas, and autonomy of Black transgender students. Often the work done by Black transgender students and their communities goes unnoticed and/or stolen. However, despite the continued pushback, over-regulation, and ostracization, Black transgender student communities thrive.

When spaces, ideas, and even identity for Black transgender students is over-regulated they felt like they were limited to where and how they can engage on campus. Tatum (He/They) had very little to share with me as a second-year undergraduate student at their university. He was a very shy and soft-spoken person, who was interested in participating to see how a research study was conducted. After loosening them up, he shared with me that he only participated in his place of work because it was the only space, he felt comfortable and safe in, “[The DEI] space, I go to a lot... because if there's gonna be a space I go to a lot, it needs to be a space that I can trust or I feel safe in.”

When I asked Tatum to tell me what was preventing them from going into other spaces on campus they shared, “This campus has always been White, and also right down the street there's like a statue for a confederate soldier and that used to be a slave trading site too....It's like a reminder to me that you don't belong here.” For the sake of confidentiality, I will not disclose the name of the institution or the name of the soldier. However, I did my own research on the location of the statue and found that Tatum’s institution still has a building named after the confederate soldier as well.

Tatum felt that some places exuded an unwelcoming energy which impacted the spaces they accessed while on campus, “There are times where I would shut down because of the energy of the room... or I am not comfortable. I just get that feeling that I don't feel safe anymore like I wanna leave now.” The omnipresence of AntiBlack and trans-antagonist figures on campus centralize sentiment of AntiBlack transness embedded in campus environments. The sentiments of AntiBlackness that are present in the depictions of valued figures regulate how and where Black transgender students feel safe or comfortable enough to engage in. Tatum’s felt energy of AntiBlack transness when encountering different areas indirectly regulated how engaged (or not) Tatum was able to be on campus. The campus environment for Black transgender students regulated how comfortable they felt engaging in the campus community and where they can go. Similarly to Tatum, Lavender shared a story of fighting campus administration to remove an AntiBlack and misogynist depiction of Black people from a campus building:

there's this giant mural before you go into [the memorial union]. Actually, there is some hella racist imagery but I think there's literally one depicted image of some settler like cowboy type shit spearing what looks like a black person.

These sort of unchecked and continuing depictions and outward expression of AntiBlack transgender rhetoric contribute to the over-regulation of Black transgender students' spaces, freedom, and autonomy in higher education.

Black transgender students often felt that LGBTQIA specific resources and centers were not welcoming to their Blackness. When LGBTQIA centers and programs exuded sentiments of transnormativity and AntiBlack transness Black transgender students either avoided those spaces or engaged with caution. After asking Rome about how they felt regarding the larger LGBTQ community at his institution, Rome shared that the spaces made him feel uncomfortable:

The LGBT spaces for me at [the university] were not very welcoming. Oftentimes it's easy to encounter and experience racist statements, ideologies, and things.

You know, and so it was like, if I was willing to kind of put up with, or be ready to count on those things, then I then it was like, "Okay, I could be in those places.

Rome continued by discussing why he did not go to the LGBTQIA resource center at his institution, "It wasn't a comfortable space for my blackness, you know? So I feel like that was enough for me to feel like I'm excluded".

Black Trans Identity & Culture

Black transgender students defined their identity in a variety of ways but expressed a common understanding of expansiveness embedded in their Black transness. When asked about how they were defining their identities they used similar key words such as expansive, spiritual, beyond, undefinable. Their common understanding of their Black transness highlighted a common sense amongst the community. For Black

transgender students the common sense represents a shared acknowledgement, recognition, and understanding of the communities responsibility to inspire and guide each other, contributing to a shared sense of empowerment and identity affirmation. This common sense led Black transgender students to recognize and connect with other Black transgender peers and develop communities of care within their institutional spaces, online, or their surrounding communities. This chapter provides data of the expansive nature of Black transgender students identity, the common sense that is developed amongst them, and communities of care that are formed on campus, off campus, and in virtual spaces.

Expansiveness

I really value the ability of black transness to kind of evade the capture of White language and perceptions” -Riri (They/Them)

Black transgender students defined their identities beyond the physical and all-encompassing of the spiritual and the energies that flow through the universe. These definitions reveal the expansive natures of Black transgender identity. Within the context of higher education Black transgender students' expansive understanding of their identities also bring up similar findings surrounding the rejection of whiteness, White supremacy, capitalism, patriarchy and other social structures that aim to label, box, and categorize people. Some Black transgender students believed the words and language we had did not fully encompass the expansiveness of their Black trans identity but tried their best using the language they had. When asked how they would define Black transness, if they could, how would they, Bentley (They/Them) beautifully said:

I'm thinking about the great void like before the universe came to be the total blackness that it was which for me is like in that nothingness there's an infinite, an infinite amount of possibilities that can be born from that nothing...I think black transness is an infinite possibility, like a disruption what is known and I think about it in such a theoretical sense because the ways that I see black transness embodied is so vast. Like my Black transness, which I can't really articulate, looks different than other people's embodiment of what black transness means... To pin it to a definition. "A disruption. A disruption of the colonial imaginary. It's a disruption of patriarchy. it's a disruption of gender binaries. It's a disruption of AntiBlackness, anti-indigeneity. Anti-categorization.

Similarly, to Bentley, Magik (He/They) also defined their Black transness as expansive, undefinable, and even as a rejection to requirements of binaries and what currently exists:

Black transness is expansive, holy, sacred, powerful. It's amazing. When I think about Black transness, I think about a sky with stars, and I think about the universe, I think about all of these highly esoteric things. I just really mainly think about freedom and liberation, and how we get to define it for ourselves. In a way that, like, when we existed in the binary, it was more like a "you need to meet these requirements in order to be a part of this gender", but I feel like Black transness is the exact opposite, we don't owe anybody Ken or Barbie what we owe is the truth to ourselves, and if we want to share it with other people, we can.

Similar to Magik's definition, Riri explained that Black transness is expansive and resists boundaries and functions of whiteness:

Black transness is more expansive than many other identities. And that's because of the function of whiteness's need to categorize and put labels and put people into certain boxes. And so, I think that within [whiteness] framework you could look at Black trans identity being like a minority or being marginalized. But for me black transness is everything that I am after.

Riri acknowledged the limitations and the reductive nature of whiteness that marginalizes and minoritizes Black transgender people and identity. Riri continued their argument:

I like stripped away like what I was like, raised and socialized, to want to be or think of myself, or to value being like whiteness, like aspire towards whiteness, and be like as like cis as possible, and so that to me is like the really small like cramped like fit into this tiny box, and then, my black transness, this is me like exploding out of that, and experiencing everything outside of that.

Riri argued that their Black transgender identity is beyond and more expansive than the tiny boxes that whiteness tries to trap their identity in. Riri felt their definition of Black transgender did not fully encapsulate the nature of Black transness and says, “I really value the ability of black transness to kind of evade the capture of White language and perceptions.”

For Black transgender students their identity was a direct rejection of whiteness and White supremacy and came up in 19 out of the 20 interviews I conducted. For Black transgender students their identity was antithesis to whiteness’s project to systematically label, categorize and box people (Scott, 1998). Similar to Riri’s note on the evasion of capture of White language and perceptions, Jelani defined Black transness as:

...undefinable, I mean for me. I’m really into the idea that beyond these boxes there was a time where these things just did not exist and/or they existed differently. Like how we align ourselves with people and communities... And I think I'm really presenting the idea that the definitions are always fluctuating.

Jelani continued to try to define Black transness:

I guess you simply reject the binary. You reject...White supremacist ideology colonialism, and capitalism...I'm rejecting these systematic ways that my personhood has been controlled and contained, like historically and at the very present moment and that try to control the future.

For Black transgender students their understanding of Black transness rejected a lot of White notions of how to live a gendered life. These rejections speak to the transgender conformity that is upheld in transgender spaces that impacted the ways Black transgender students identify. For example, Lex (she, they) recognized the expectations to conform that is rejected when identifying as a Black transgender person:

Black transness to me is both equally literally about race and gender but also as much as a rejection of what you're expected to be or conform to. Which would be some acceptable version of a trans person in a White person's eyes or a cis person's eyes... There is a rejection of what you are expected to be and a realization that you can't be defined at all.

For Black transgender students their Black transness is defined as expansive. The expansive nature of their identities also incorporated an inherent rejection of whiteness and the expectations that are maintained by White logics such as the gender binaries. The existence of Black transness according to the definitions provided, inherently disrupts the notions of conformity. In Magik's definition, they talked about the esoteric nature of Black transness, which is confirmed by the students' narratives that there is a common knowledge, common sense, amongst themselves.

Common Sense

Black transgender students spoke about a common understanding amongst their Black transgender peers where there was no need to explain themselves, hide their identities, or erase experiences in order to fit into the community. Black transgender students expressed a form of common sense where they were able to see and acknowledge one another in spaces, sometimes without even speaking to one another. For Riri being a Black transgender student meant they were able to recognize other Black transgender students wherever they went:

There's kinda like knowingness inside among us that doesn't need definition. I think there is a certain feeling that I share with other black trans folks that feels really mutual and it gets expressed in the way we can relate about certain things or a look that we give each other, or it could be like a total stranger on the bus but we make eye contact for a second and there's just like we know each other on a certain level that nobody else around us is seeing. And I think it's impossible to put words to that. But that is also very real to me.

Moments of recognition amongst Black transgender students meant that they were able to find each other in spaces when they sometimes felt like they were the only ones. Riri felt that the common sense of Black transgender students stretched beyond just recognition but was also illuminated in how Black transgender students react to social issues:

I'm remembering 2016 when [45¹¹] won the Presidential election, and how everybody just freaked out. And I mean for a good reason. But I also really had this sense at the time that all these people around me who were pretty comfortable like in their identity and their access to resources in like feeling affirmed and celebrated and not so like terribly stereotyped that it was like especially hard for them because suddenly they were like “oh, my God I'm Asian like my President doesn't want me in this country”. Black transgender students were kind of like, “Oh, y'all caught up. We've been feeling this forever”.

Riri made it clear that they did not want to minimize the experiences of others who were under attack during 45's administration. Riri's acknowledgment of this moment in time speaks to a great knowledge and common sense that Black transgender students have amongst themselves that allowed them to move through such a difficult time in U.S.

history with each other. Riri continued:

This is not like an oppression Olympics, but I think that when that moment happened, we had, and when I say we, I mean, like me and my black trans family on campus had a lot of skills and social intelligence to get ourselves through that moment in a way that other people didn't have. And [other people] fell apart.

Riri continued to talk about the skills set that Black transgender students have while moving through moments that are especially difficult for marginalized people. They discussed that in academic space when someone is unable to articulate an experience, the

¹¹ Student named “45” when referring to Donald Trump. The United States' 45th presidential elect.

experience is not validated. This articulation was not a necessity to receive support and affirmation amongst their Black transgender peers:

Inside of academia if you can't articulate something then it's not real. I was constantly feeling kind of gaslit at the same time. Our kind strengths were our ability to affirm ourselves and each other. To find joy, to cry, and laugh at the same time. To create spaces for one another that felt safe.

Riri went on to discuss how their coping strategies are a skill set and a common sense that Black transgender students have helped them find joy, access institutional resources, and recognize each other's needs:

Cooking really damn good food, feeding each other, and finding a way to make the university pay for it. Even all of our coping strategies...are a skill set in a way of like, "how do we just get ourselves through day to day? What do we need to do to feel okay?" ...I think we had a real kind of attunement to one another's needs and emotional experiences and being able to kinda like see each other and be there for each other in these ways. Just like having the kinds of conversations that I would never even have with my therapist.

Riri's story of Black transgender students surviving through a tough time during the [45] administration speaks to a common sense that is developed amongst the community.

They also showed how resourceful Black transgender students are able to be amongst themselves because of their common sense. Similar to Riri, Remi commented on Black transgender students' resourcefulness, "there is definitely a level of resourcefulness that exists in the black trans [community] that does not exist as strongly in other communities".

Black transgender students felt that they also had a common sense surrounding their understanding of their transgender identity and it being connected to the ways that

they were raised. Bliss realized that zirs identity is attached to zirs socialized gender and was similar to zirs Black transgender peers:

I realized recently going back from my experiences of growing up socialized as a black woman and as a black girl, I was like” no, this is a part of my experience and like my life and that is important to my transition. It informs my identity”. And I've been able to connect with other black trans and not binary folks and they felt very similar. Some of them still identify as black women but also, they're like, “I'm trans and non-binary”. And I think that we really are not constrained by the conventionality of like Western society. And we're really trying to go beyond that.

Similar to Bliss, Tayo mentioned their transgender identity being attached to the gender they were socialized in growing up and that being part of how they hold their Black transgender identity:

When the conversation of pronouns comes up, I use both they and she pronouns but when I explain why I use both. I prefer “they, them, theirs” and it's a lot more comfortable. But I also am okay with “she” because I acknowledge that the experiences that I had are directly tied to Black womanhood. And like that's something I can't take away.

Tayo continued by saying when in spaces with Black transgender people there is no need to explain because there is a common reason why they are all there:

I could be at an event where I know it's gonna be exclusively like Black Trans folks, I feel at home. I feel at peace. There is no need for me to over explain myself in that space because we're all here for the same reason.

For Black transgender students common sense also showed up in the ways they recognized each other in spaces and drew connections based on seeing each other. Before coming out to herself and to others, Monique talked about her experience attending a freshman preview event where her now Drag mother, recognized her transness before she recognized it in herself. This recognition made Monique explore more of her gender identity. After building a large community, Monique began to perform in Drag:

I performed in drag like 2 years later. It was a drag show and one of the local Drag queens from my hometown, a beautiful Black Trans woman, my drag mother, performing. She saw me and had connections like “oh somebody else black”. And then we talk a bit after the show and she did the thing that trans women love to do to each other which was [ask], “So when you getting your stuff together? What's your timeline?” And she's like, “Okay, you just let me know. I'll keep up with you. We'll see where you are... You hang around these kids a little bit longer. We'll see. We'll see what's going on.”... and then realized, “oh, I see what she meant. Okay, here we go.” There was a destiny that she can see for me that just again took some time for me to have my own experiences and then see what she meant.

Monique’s drag mother saw her Black transgender identity before she was able to recognize it in herself. Lex shared a similar story about a Black transgender person seeing their transgender identity within them before seeing it in themselves:

Once I got to college...it was great cause there's always like a fall welcome for undergraduates and I remember going to the LGBTQ resource center and they had like a fall welcome barbecue and [redacted] was there at the same time as me, a big trans activist now, and she was like the first black trans person I met in person and saw and she also like pointed me out of the crowd which was kind of nice and I think she could tell almost before I was like open about my queerness or genderness.

Black transgender students have the ability to spot each other in a crowd which speaks to a common sense amongst their community. This recognition is similar to the recognition experienced by Radiance while attending a fellowship dinner and being spotted by other Black queer and transgender people in the room:

I got a fellowship to go here, so I was invited to a dinner. It's a very fancy dinner and the entire time I was like, “Oh, my gosh! I feel so uncomfortable. I don't know what I'm gonna do”. And I remember going to the store and looking like this is the perfect outfit of how people want me to look. But this is not who I am at all. This doesn't feel comfortable, so I went back home. and I'm like, “Well, I'm just going to wear exactly what I want and I'm not gonna care what people think.” So, I dress in a way that would be more traditionally feminine with my long hair and my heels, and even like a skirt. And I felt extremely uncomfortable walking out the door going to the event but when I got to the event, I didn't realize there were majority black people there. So, it was a diversity scholarship dinner which I

didn't know about and there were other trans people there and so the second I walked in before I turned the corner to the event there were like 6 like black trans people that were hollering. They're like, "Oh, my God! You're wearing those heels. You look so good in this outfit".

Black transgender students recognize, see, acknowledge, and affirm one another through a shared understanding of their identities. The connections formed through shared common sense led Black transgender students to create communities of care within, outside of the institution, and in online spaces that affirmed their identities holistically. Common sense for Black transgender students meant they were not required to compartmentalize their identities. Black transgender communities of care for students allowed space for reprieve from institutional barriers and AntiBlack transness, as explained further in the following section.

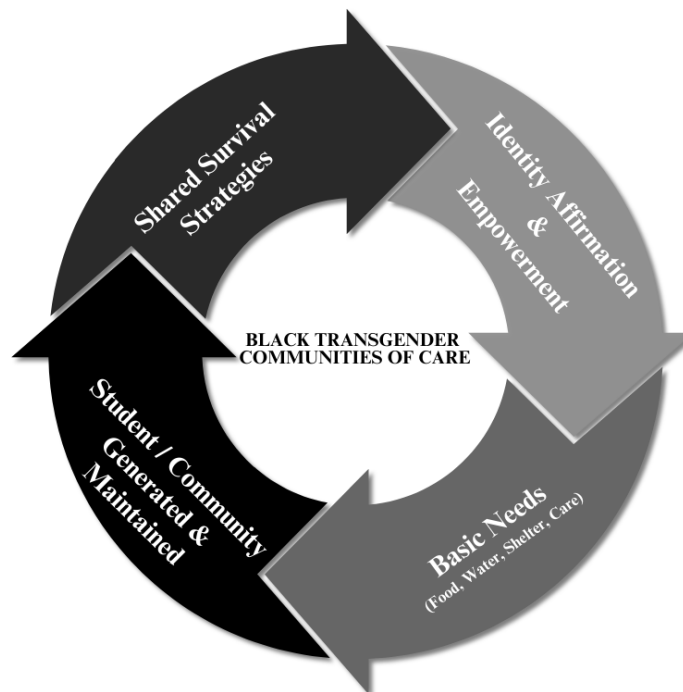
Communities of Care

I feel like the Black trans community is...like creating something from scratch. [T]here are common elements among Black trans people but it's like you're forging your own path in a lot of ways. -Remi (he, him, his)

Black transgender students create communities of care through their shared understandings of identities and the acknowledgement of common needs, experiences, and recognition. These relationships and connections support Black transgender students in navigating the institution and help maintain their survival as they move through institutional barriers. Communities of care amongst Black transgender students acted as separatist spaces that shaped their understandings of themselves, and how to overcome institutional obstacles. Like Remi's comment above, many of the communities were formed from scratch, often without institutional buy-in, support, or acknowledgement. These communities of care are spaces where Black transgender students care for one

another within and outside of the institution of higher education. The survival and thriving of Black transgender community in higher education is a by-product of Black transgender communities of care (See Figure 4.1 Communities of Care Diagram).

Figure 4. 1 Communities of Care Diagram



As previously mentioned by Riri, Black transgender communities of care were spaces where Black transgender are, “feeding each other”. Communities of care micro-structurally support Black transgender students in higher education where they are able to receive support for their identities as well as their basic needs. The basic needs for Black transgender students were often met within these communities of care, for example, Riri (they, them) reflected on their experience accessing Black transgender communities of care while in undergrad:

I'm unendingly grateful for having those spaces particularly BlackOUT. And that being a weekly space. That was also an everyday space cause we were normally just hanging out. But then, there was also this structure to being there together on Tuesdays and having a Ritual of that together, where we would check in and talk about what was going on in our lives and a lot of things that kind of bubble up that we didn't necessarily talk about outside of that [space].

At Riri's campus, BlackOUT is a student organization that supports Black lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer (LGBTQ) students. There are California statewide conferences for BlackOUT that take place where 100s of Black LGBTQ students come together to build community. All of my participants who attend college in California mentioned BlackOUT or an adjacent organization that supported them while in college. For Riri, this space was a ritual that they were able to access with ease. It was reliable and the safest place they felt on campus:

And so that felt really safe and it's dependability and reliability and also the ease of accessing it. Because it happened where we would already hang out, it was free and there would be snacks, and there would be no one else around at that time. I think having that kind of privacy was also really important. That's where I felt safest. And then I also simultaneously was definitely growing in my relationship to myself.

Traditionally BlackOUT is student run and mediated. Many Black transgender students facilitate their own organizations with little institutional support and investment. Tayo also talked about their experience supporting the Black LGBTQ organization at their institution:

We were a small but mighty group, and I think it was a necessary space to have on campus because there were a lot of issues. I felt within [redacted] where our presence was neglected and so we had to do a lot of advocating, for black, queer, especially, black trans experiences and voices paved the way.

Tayo continued to talk about the importance of their organization was in making sure Black LGBTQ students had support especially during holidays or times when students are expected to be away from campus:

I will say, having [the organization] there, above all else, was important because it brought community. It brought folks who were like me, who didn't know what to do, or how to navigate...once they went back home right. They don't know how to navigate, Gender and sexuality with parents who might not be as accepting. And so, we knew that when they would come back here this was their home, this is a place where they can be. And I wanted to kind of reflect that every single time we had a meeting and that was always my motivation when I transitioned from being a member to the director of the org for 3 years. And now it's just taken off so much so I see a lot of longevity because there's so much care. And a mutual understanding that there are no other safe spaces on that campus for Black queer and trans folks except.

Off Campus Communities

For some Black transgenders students, they were unable to access communities of care on campus and created spaces for themselves off campus. For example, Dream shared that they have been able to create a space where their Black transgender identity and religious identity are held and supported:

I go to a Black Trans Torah study. So, all black people, all trans people and we're all Jewish. And so, there's a way that we have built this really interesting community. Some of us have converted. Some of us were born Jewish. We're all trans. And so, this is a really lovely way that those experiences we get to engage with the text in a particular way. And I remember going to something....There was a Jewish History museum in town and I remember going to an event meeting some people who are younger, more lefty in their understandings of Judaism and politics and anti-Zionism practices, and whatnot beliefs, I should say, and I was like cool you're gonna be my people and then over the last 4 years we've just gradually built like a space where we regularly have shabbat dinners together.

Communities of care for Black transgender students take shape in all forms. These communities often share a common understanding where they are seeking extra support while they navigate institutions. Dream's Shabbat dinners are similar to Bentley's (they,

them, theirs) desire to share their home space with other Black transgender people and do mundane average things:

If on a day I can drink water and hang out with my people, It's a good day. And I think that says a lot about how little that is. I think that says a lot about how massively neglected we are as a people.

Similar to Bentley, Matisse (They/Them) felt held and supported by their Black transgender community that was formed over the COVID-19 pandemic, away from the institution, and was forged through making sure everyone was safe and healthy:

My really good friends, who are all Black, queer, and trans or not cisgender, and just being able to go over and kick it with them in their apartment...Just to be in a place where it's like you don't have to have all of this figured out and just being so unapologetically ourselves and blasting like *nigger* music being loud and smoking on the porch. It's very important when I feel safe in all aspects of my identity and ...I can talk about gay shit. I can talk about gender shit. Like anything kind of goes and I know that I'm not going to be judged or chat challenged in a way that makes me feel rejected.

Many of these communities of care were spaces where Black transgender students felt whole and did not have to compromise any of their identities. These spaces were often disconnected from the institution where they did not have to mask themselves.

Communities of care for Black transgender students were also spaces where they can learn and grow in themselves. For Rome they used their communities to teach and learn how to love:

I learned how to love. How do you love other people? And I feel that's very important because our experience was as terrible as they are, and the experiences of our parents and how they've parented us and stuff. Sometimes those experiences lack love, right...I feel like that to me really feels like a space where I continue that work showing someone how to love. It's unconditional.

Black transgender students communities of care exude unconditional love and support.

These spaces are safe spaces for Black transgender students to engage with one another

and support each other's growth and ability to move through the obstacles created by the institution.

Some Black transgender students were unable to create communities of care within their institution. Some students sought out virtual spaces in order to access their communities of care that kept them surviving through their life while in college. For example, Radiance discussed the importance of visiting her virtual Black transgender friends since her community at college does not exist:

I make it a point to visit people on their birthdays, or if they get a promotion, or certain moments in their life, I make it a point to go visit them and spend a day with them and talking with them and doing whatever. Cause I find that in-person community being able to hold each other and embrace and cry and all of that is really helpful. So, one of my love languages is quality time. So, I think I'm fulfilling my own love language by going out and seeing and hanging out with them.

Radiance's community is mainly online but makes it a point to travel to see them whenever she can. The demographics of her institution prevented her from forming a solid Black transgender community on her campus. She used her community online to talk about in-depth conversations about safety, spirituality, identity, and issues impacting Black transgender people. Having her Black transgender community online allowed her the ability to connect with Black transgender people all over the world:

We talk about safety, talk about spirituality. It's all about spiritual development. So, we have great conversations and practices, and then we do really cool things together. And it's nice, because I have people that are in places like Egypt and Greece, China, in the U.S., Canada, Mexico. People are from all over and they make time in their schedules to come together for these special [online] events, these healing events that I put on. And so, I love spending my time on that because they're great people and it gives me a chance to also travel the world and meet them and their communities.

For Lex she was able to build community with other Black transgender graduate students at other institutions in California:

My closest friends are at [institution], it's a virtual space, half the time...whether you know, like texting or facetime, or whatever that. I feel like my identities have been praised in that space.

Major Takeaways

I presented the narratives of Black transgender students through three main sections: (a) Processual Elements, (b) Structural Elements, and (c) Black Trans Identity & Culture. Each section delved into sub-themes that vividly portrayed the narratives recounted by the Black transgender students in the study. The narratives underscore the profound impact of plantation politics within universities, where institutional actors, including faculty, staff, and peers, employ various structures and processes that significantly shape the social and academic experiences of Black transgender students.

The stories conveyed in these narratives illuminate a complex web of interactions, encompassing faculty, staff, and peer dynamics, increased educational labor expectations, vulnerability to mental and physical harm, isolation from campus engagement, loss of individual freedom, and limited access to educational opportunities. Furthermore, the narratives shed light on administrators and faculty utilizing positive-coded reinforcement practices, rewarding Black transgender students for conforming behaviors despite their prior experiences of rejection, threats of removal, adjudication, and theft by the institution.

Most importantly, the narratives also unveil the inspiring philosophies and practices within the Black transgender communities in higher education. Their stories

showcase how individuals within the Black transgender community motivate, guide, and support one another, fostering a shared sense of empowerment, identity, and recognition. Essentially, the narratives collectively emphasize the intricate interplay of power dynamics, institutional practices, and community resilience in shaping the experiences of Black transgender students within the university context.

In the following chapter, I first discuss the results and implications of the study illustrating the impacts of plantation politics on the social and academic experiences of Black transgender students. I also discuss what survives amongst Black transgender communities in higher education despite plantation politics manifestations in the structural and processual elements of the university. Lastly, I provide readers with a (un)conclusion and recommendations for the future.

Chapter V: DISCUSSION, (UN)CONCLUSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

I critically examined the profound effects of plantation politics on the social and academic lives of 20 Black transgender students enrolled in or formerly associated with a higher education institution in the United States. By centering on the experiences of AntiBlack transness, this study reveals how higher education institutions and their institutional actors perpetuate, invest in, and endorse plantation politics while simultaneously exploiting, marginalizing, and mistreating Black transgender students under the guise of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Through compelling narratives shared by Black transgender students, this research sheds light on the pervasive influence of plantation politics within the higher education environment. These narratives highlight the lack of representation, resulting in hyper-visibility among the campus community, increased vulnerability to harm, self-doubt, and the burden of educating peers, administration, and faculty. This study further illuminates the push factors such as isolation, rejection, and marginalization that ultimately compel Black transgender students to abandon their educational pursuits, spaces, and employment opportunities. The findings of this research expose the presence of plantation politics in both the procedural and structural aspects of higher education, which significantly impact the social and academic experiences of Black transgender students.

According to emerging research, Black transgender students in college face many challenges, including heightened visibility that exposes them to vulnerability, exclusion from campus opportunities, surveillance, transnormativity, and disidentification (Garvey

et al., 2018; Jones, 2020; Jourian, 2017; Nicolazzo, 2016a, 2016b; Simms et al., 2020; Stewart & Nicolazzo, 2018). Black transgender students' intersectional identities often result in marginalization, impacting their ability to express their true selves openly. Furthermore, AntiBlack racism further compounds their vulnerability when choosing to be visible within the campus community. The findings of this study enhance comprehension of the social and academic journey of Black transgender students within higher education.

This study's findings confirm and extend existing knowledge by shedding light on the absence of representation, which amplifies their visibility among the campus community, increases their susceptibility to harm, fosters self-doubt, and burdens them with the responsibility of educating their peers, administration, and faculty. For example, Bliss, Wonder, Saint, Dream, Radiance, Tayo, and Lex's stories of feeling like they are the only Black transgender students in their community and needing to do work to support, educate, and promote inclusivity for other transgender people on campus. Especially Bliss's recounting of zirs experience living in student housing and making it a point to create a gender-inclusive housing floor for other queer and transgender students. It is also important to acknowledge that representation is never enough, especially when we look at the narrative of Jelani, who decided to remove themselves from their doctoral program that was made up of primarily Black queer and transgender faculty after having been criminalized and under-supported.

This research sheds more light on the experiences of Black transgender students who often face isolation, rejection, and marginalization from institutions and institutional

actors. These negative experiences can push them to give up on their education, spaces, and employment opportunities. For instance, Dream had to leave their Master of Fine Arts (MFA) program due to negative encounters with their advisor and peers. Moreover, the results of this study not only validate the assertions made by Williams et al. (2021) regarding the pervasive influence of plantation politics within higher education, particularly during times of campus rebellions, but also provide a comprehensive examination of how Black transgender students inherently engage in acts of rebellion through their defiance of normative gender structures, attire, community building, and practices. These findings underscore the profound and omnipresent impact of plantation politics in every facet of Black transgender students' social and academic interactions within the higher education system.

The narratives of each Black transgender student powerfully underscored the profound presence of processual and structural elements of the plantation system within their lived experiences while in higher education. In the subsequent sections, I delve into these notions, providing deeper insights and connecting them with relevant literature. This chapter is thoughtfully structured to examine the outcomes within the framework of plantation politics, delving into the nuanced processual and structural dimensions vividly portrayed through the narratives shared by Black transgender students and followed by a discussion of what survives and is (re)created amongst Black transgender students in higher education. By carefully analyzing their stories, we gain a comprehensive understanding of how plantation politics shape their lived realities, revealing the complex

dynamics at play within higher education institutions and what survives and (re)created amongst Black transgender students who are impacted by the plantation university.

Plantation Politics Shaping Black Transgender Students' Experiences

Squire and others (2020) draw parallels between slave plantations and modern universities, highlighting how neoliberal ideology perpetuates an "oxymoronic social existence" for White people in higher education (p. 9). They argue that neoliberalism functions as a contemporary slave code, controlling and commodifying bodies of color for economic gain. We can extend the analysis of Squire et al. (2020) to include the experiences of Black transgender students who undergo dehumanization, exploitation, and marginalization within universities. The results of this dissertation align with Squire et al. (2020) economic interests and societal expectations drive universities, maintain oppressive structures that undermine the well-being and rights of Black [transgender] students, and replicate historical power dynamics in a modern context. The findings of this study extend the argument put forth by Squire et al. (2020) by illuminating the emergence of plantation politics within the social and academic realms for Black transgender students. The institution perceives Black transgender students as defiant, even when they do not participate in campus rebellions, simply because these students proudly identify as both Black and transgender, advocate for their rights, take care of themselves, use the restroom, or express their preferred pronouns. The fundamental structure and functioning of the institution have ingrained AntiBlack transgender perceptions of Black transgender students within its practices, policies, and interactions, so much so that one can compare the perceptions to similar aspects found in a plantation

system (Durant, 1999; Squire et al., 2018). While all elements of the plantation system show up in the narratives of Black transgender students, for this dissertation study, I will discuss in detail the three major processual elements (i.e., Boundary Maintenance, Socialization, Social Control) (see Table 5.1) and three major structural elements (i.e., Knowledge, Sentiment, Sanctions) (See Table 5.2) that impact their social and academic lives while in higher education.

Processual Elements of the Plantation University

Boundary Maintenance. Boundary maintenance within the plantation university, aiming to uphold system solidarity, involves involuntary membership tactics for marginalized groups (Durant, 1999; Squire et al., 2018). Students, like the plantation context, may face coercion and endure oppressive conditions (e.g., academic hazing, low-paid student appointments), exploitation (e.g., appropriation of knowledge), and limited personal autonomy (e.g., restrictive gender and racial norms) due to their non-consensual affiliation with the plantation system. Nonconformists challenging the system are often labeled as troublemakers and expelled from engagement within the institution (Williams et al., 2021).

Previous research has documented the isolation and harassment experienced by Black transgender students and other Black LGBTQ+ individuals, leading to college dropout rates among this population (Lewis & Erickson, 2016; Nicolazzo, 2016a; Patton, 2014; Patton & Simmons, 2008; Truong et al., 2020). By affirming their Black and transgender identities, Black transgender students are viewed as inherently resisting the plantation university's pursuit of solidarity. The institution of higher education expects all

students to (in)voluntarily conform to established norms concerning gender, race, and compliance with White comfort (Leonardo & Porter, 2010) and obedience (Squire et al., 2018).

Institutional actors, including students, staff, and faculty, fulfill the institutional duties to protect and sustain solidarity within the plantation university. For instance, Radiance, a Black transgender student, was denied access to office hours by a professor who disapproved of their choice to wear a kilt and even suggested that they stop attending the course if they persisted. The identity of Black transgender students fundamentally contradicts the institution's promotion of solidarity, as they consistently resist the institutionally imposed constraints on their freedom by prioritizing their Blackness (opposing whiteness) and transgender identity (opposing cissexism and gender norms). Findings indicate that institutional actors respond to Black transgender identities as incompatible with compliance and solidarity, leading to actions aimed at exclusion, marginalization, and the expulsion of Black transgender students despite the institution benefiting from their enrollment.

Socialization. The socialization element within the plantation university involves the process of teaching and learning the rules, skills, roles, status, and culture of the institution (Durant, 1999). While the institution introduces and upholds these socializing processes, institutional actors, including students, staff, and faculty, maintain and enforce them. In the context of the plantation university, socialization manifests in faculty members' control over graduate students and the establishment of transition

Table 5. 1 Processual Examples from Black Transgender Student Experiences

Processual Elements	Higher Education Examples of Parallels	Processual Examples from Black Trans Student Experiences
<p>Boundary maintenance: Attempts to preserve and protect the solidarity of the system; stopping runaways</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Removal of troublemakers • Reduction of tenured faculty who hold power • Reduction of freedom for student athletes & others on scholarship • Increasing fear of litigation • Involuntariness of membership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regulation of students' manner of dress • Removal from campus restrooms • Anti-Black Trans classroom environments • Legal and extra-legal policing of Black transgender students' gender expression and mobility on and off campus
<p>Socialization: Teaching and learning of rules, skills, roles, status, and culture of plantations</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Orientation programs & other transition programs that set norms for behavior • Faculty control of graduate students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculty avoiding students who identify as Black & transgender or topics related to their identity • LGBTQIA spaces, programs, and centers in Higher Education as White-centric spaces
<p>Social control: How deviancy was eliminated, reduced, or rendered harmless; slave codes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incremental changes related to diversity and equity • Removal or underfunding of cultural centers • Ostracization & removal of people of color who resist 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Black transgender students deemed rebellious when not assimilating to institutional actors' ideas of how one should dress, act, and respond

programs that dictate behavioral norms (e.g., summer bridge programs and Special Transitional Enrichment Program).

Among the 20 Black transgender students in the sample, 16 were graduate students or had completed a master's or doctoral program. Of the 16 Black transgender graduate students, eight had either left their original graduate program and enrolled in another university or program or never returned due to negative interactions with faculty that targeted their Black transgender identity. The narratives of Black transgender graduate students in this study indicate that faculty members significantly impact their academic and social experiences in higher education, which is a similar finding in research on graduate student experiences (Wright-Harp & Cole, 2008). Previous research has already suggested that faculty often exhibit avoidant behaviors when it comes to addressing issues faced by Black transgender students in higher education (Lewis & Erickson, 2016). The findings of this study not only reaffirm such behaviors but also shed light on how faculty members contribute to and perpetuate the socialization element of the plantation when interacting with Black transgender students, potentially explaining why students experience avoidance.

According to the experiences shared by Black transgender graduate students, faculty members serve as their primary source of community and greatly influence their sense of belonging within their programs. These relationship dynamics compel Black transgender students to comply with faculty demands. Lex's interactions with their faculty advisor exemplify avoidant behavior concerning discussions about their Black transgender identity, highlighting the significant control that faculty members exert over

graduate students. Lex often took on personal tasks for their advisor that deviated from the academic expectations imposed on other non-Black transgender graduate students, driven by the faculty's ability to impact their success in the program. Orientation programs perpetuate toxic power dynamics between faculty and graduate students, as indicated by the results. In these programs, faculty impose expectations on students, often reinforcing the prevailing institutional culture. Students are compelled to accept these expectations without contradicting or resisting existing power dynamics.

Social Control. The plantation system's social control element refers to deviance's elimination, reduction, or harmless rendering (Durant, 1999). An example of social control is the use of slave codes, which were employed to diminish deviant behavior and maintain social control over Black individuals in the United States after emancipation. In the context of the plantation university, social control takes the form of ostracizing and removing people of color who resist institutional expectations, defunding or removing cultural centers on campus (such as LGBTQIA centers, Cross Cultural Centers, Women's Center, Black Resource Center, Undocumented Resource Centers), or implementing superficial changes related to diversity and inclusion (Durant, 1999; Squire et al., 2018).

Consistent with previous research in higher education, the findings of this study demonstrate that Black transgender students experience ostracism due to their gender identity and Blackness within classrooms and among their peers (Hunter, 2010). This study further expands this research by illustrating how ostracism can lead to the removal of Black transgender students from on-campus employment opportunities. Institutional

actors perceive Black transgender students as deviating from institutional-cultural norms and expectations, thereby implementing institutional processes to exclude them from classrooms, community spaces, and workplaces. For example, Kai's story at a Jesuit institution highlights the retaliation experienced when e added eir pronouns to eir email signature.

The study's results also indicate that Black transgender students are acutely aware of the social control exerted by the institution, often undergoing a process of disidentification in order to survive within it. This finding aligns with previous studies on Black transgender students in higher education (Jones, 2020; Muñoz, 1999; Simms et al., 2021). Lavender, for instance, chose to conceal parts of their identity to remain on the NCAA men's baseball team at their university and maintain access to institutional scholarships. The findings demonstrate how the institution's social control affects Black transgender students' ability to fully embrace their identities when accessing resources and communities on campus. These findings echo previous studies that reveal the challenges Black transgender students face in navigating their complex intersectional identities and accessing comprehensive support and on-campus services (Squire & Mobley Jr., 2014).

Furthermore, the narratives highlight that higher education lacks a comprehensive understanding of the needs of Black transgender students, especially at the faculty, staff, and administration level, resulting in underfunding of resources and support for this community. The social control element of the plantation system is particularly intriguing and compelling, as the narratives of Black transgender students indicate a self-policing of

their identities in order to involuntarily conform to the institutions' expectations and survive within its confines.

Structural Elements of the Plantation University

Knowledge. As a structural element, knowledge in the plantation system refers to the masters' beliefs that slave labor was practical and profitable and that enslaved Black people were property and should be subordinate (Durant, 1999). In the context of the plantation university, knowledge encompasses the mindsets that drive neoliberal actions and the exploitation of bodies of color for economic gain (Squire et al., 2018). This element encompasses the dehumanizing attitudes projected toward Black people in higher education.

The findings of this study reveal that Black transgender students are particularly susceptible to increased labor due to their experiences of being the only ones within their community. This finding aligns with previous research on Black transgender students, which indicates that they often take on labor to create spaces for themselves and their peers (Nicolazzo, 2016a). The results suggest that higher education institutions profit from the increased labor and tokenism of Black transgender students within their departments, classrooms, and workplaces. This profit-driven motive leads universities to implement initiatives that offer "just enough leeway for Black people to breathe and have a sense of humanity...but only just enough room to maintain order" (Squire et al., 2018, p. 13). For example, Bliss's narrative illustrates feeling burnt out after working to establish transgender-affirming housing, health, and counseling services on campus. Bliss's work benefited the institution, contributing to its image of inclusivity.

The narratives of Black transgender students consistently indicate an expectation that they will engage in labor for the institution to create transgender-inclusive spaces. This expectation becomes normalized within the institution, as Saint felt the campus community marginalized her other interests and hobbies. The institution values and accepts the labor of Black transgender students as long as it enhances its diverse and inclusive public image. However, when Black transgender students resist or challenge hostile treatment and practices, their membership in the institution becomes problematic for the institution's financial gain. Bliss's story exemplifies this dynamic, as zirs professor weaponized Bliss's vulnerability and concerns about being outed in a lecture despite Bliss having shared multiple resources on transgender identities. The results indicate that when Black transgender students resist, their labor and membership in higher education become a hindrance to the institution's capital gain. Bliss's experience of having a scholarship named after them for their work in establishing a support group for queer and transgender students of color echoes this finding. Even though they faced expulsion threats when participating in on-campus protests alongside other students of color. The narratives suggest that Black transgender students' labor and membership in the institution are only profitable as long as they do not become "abrasive to public harmony or divisive in civil affairs" (Wilder, 2013, p. 267).

Sentiment. Within the plantation system, sentiment refers to the masters' expressed paternalism and sense of superiority, as well as the expressed victimization, resistance, and powerlessness of enslaved Black individuals (Durant, 1999). In the context of the plantation university, sentiment is evident in the over-regulation of spaces

Table 5. 2 Structural Examples from Black Transgender Students' Experiences

Structural Elements	Higher Education Examples of Parallels	Structural Examples from Black Trans Student Experiences
<p>Knowledge: Owners believed that slave labor was practical and profitable, that slaves were property and that slaves should be subordinate</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mindsets that lead to neoliberal action and the use of bodies of color for capital gain 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Theft of Black transgender student ideas, work, and experience for institutional profit and benefit • Expected intellectual, physical, and emotional labor of Black transgender students to generate a more inclusive campus environment and education peers, faculty, and staff
<p>Sentiment: Master(s) expressed paternalism and superiority; slaves expressed victimization, resistance, and powerlessness</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Over-regulation of spaces for marginalized groups • Increasing bureaucracy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hypervisibility of Black transgender students in classroom and extra-curricular spaces • Reduced privacy over ones identity through questioning, gaze, and targeted supervision
<p>Sanctions: Slaves punished for dis-obedience and rewarded for good behavior</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Threatened adjudication of people of color and upholding of whiteness(e.g., campus speaker protests) • Continued promotion of “good” students of color to public-facing opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institutional rewards given after experiencing rejection & threats of adjudication from administration • Black transgender students deemed “unfit” to engage in community

for marginalized groups, such as centralized cultural centers and the minimal funding of Black organizations (Squire et al., 2018). Increasing bureaucracy, characterized by multi-level approvals, also contributes to this sentiment (Squire et al., 2018). Additionally, the surveillance that Black transgender students experience while engaging in higher education communities can be understood as part of the sentiment element of the plantation system. The narratives of Black transgender students in this study affirm previous research in higher education, indicating that they often face high levels of surveillance and are hyper-aware of their surroundings, constantly feeling watched and scrutinized (Jones, 2020; Stewart & Nicolazzo, 2018). For instance, Riri's experience of feeling like a "freak" when their transgender identity became more visible in the classroom illustrates the impact of surveillance on their sense of self.

Others frequently questioned the identities of Black transgender students, leading them to feel inferior and invalidated in the face of others' perceptions of their knowledge about their own identity. When Matisse's professor questioned them and their friend about their pronoun usage, the professor displayed paternalism and superiority by restricting their autonomy in defining their identity. Paternalistic sentiments were deeply embedded in the narratives of Black transgender students, as their superiors consistently limited their freedom of expression, speech, access to resources, and autonomy. At times, these paternalistic sentiments also came from their peers. For example, Tayo's idea of funding a scholarship was rejected. The rejection of the scholarship came after they were denied access to institutional actors who had previously expressed pride in supporting the project. Nevertheless, White transgender individuals adopted Tayo's idea, securing the

funds to launch the project without acknowledging the efforts that Tayo and other Black LGBTQ students had previously invested. This example not only highlights how paternalistic ideas manifest in interactions with Black transgender students but also illustrates the normalization of sentiments that target Black transgender individuals within the classroom, work, and social spaces, often rendering them powerless.

Furthermore, sentiment encompasses the over-regulation of Black transgender identity and ideas, aiming to limit their freedoms and autonomy. This over-regulation can manifest as transnormativity within support services, community engagement, and LGBTQIA resource centers in higher education. Consistent with previous studies in higher education (Nicolazzo, 2016b), Black transgender students in this study experienced high levels of transnormativity, which affected their ability to access resources that holistically affirmed both their Black and transgender identities. The sentiment element also became apparent within the LGBTQ community itself, as Black transgender students did not always feel completely safe when non-Black LGBTQ individuals were present. For example, during the incident when others were questioning Matisse about their identity, the White LGBTQ individuals in the class did nothing to support them. This example not only highlights how paternalistic ideas permeate interactions with Black transgender students but also demonstrates how classroom, work, and social spaces normalize the sentiment of targeting Black transgender individuals, often leaving them feeling powerless.

Sanctions. Sanctions, as a structural element of the plantation system, serve to punish enslaved Black individuals for disobedience and reward them for good behavior

(Durant, 1999). Similarly, in the plantation university in the plantation university, sanctions are employed by the administration and other institutional actors to threaten people of color with adjudication, thereby upholding whiteness. thereby upholding whiteness. One example of this is the administration's reactions to protests led by Black students (Squire et al., 2018). The institution utilizes sanctions to promote compliant students of color to public-facing campus opportunities, motivated by financial considerations and the commodification of diversity and inclusivity for the institution's reputation (Squire et al., 2018).

In this study, institutional actors threatened the membership of all Black transgender students in the institution, course, or place of work for resisting or disobeying the norms and expectations imposed on them. For instance, various institutional actors forcibly removed Saint from a public restroom designated for (cis)women, fired Kai from his job for not fitting into the culture, referred Jelani for student conduct for plagiarism after seeking support on a rough draft, and threatened Bliss with expulsion for participating in a student protest. Black transgender students also received rewards for exhibiting desirable and profitable behaviors and were granted public-facing opportunities that benefited their campuses. For example, despite Saint's negative experience in the restroom, their university portrayed them as the go-to representative for transgender issues, and Bliss had an emergency scholarship named after him for queer and trans people of color. However, even the rewarded behavior of Black transgender students was susceptible to the threat of adjudication when their resistance was deemed disobedient. Black transgender students deemed disobedient exemplify the fungibility of

Black transness (Snorton, 2017), wherein their actions determine how they are perceived and codified by the institution and its actors. Black transgender students can transition from being perceived as obedient to disobedient depending on the interpretation of their actions and their interactions with individuals within higher education institutions. It is essential to acknowledge that institutional norms often perceive Black transgender students as inherently disobedient solely based on their Black and transgender identities.

The institution can easily revoke the rewards for good behavior among Black transgender students. However, to attain these rewards, Black transgender students must demonstrate exceptional levels of engagement, action, labor, and institutional buy-in, surpassing the expectations placed upon the average [White cisgender non-disabled] student. Despite previous research indicating that institutional programs that fail to interrogate whiteness and AntiBlackness can reproduce "the maintenance of college campuses as dangerous spaces for trans students, especially those at the intersections of interlocking systems of oppression" (Stewart & Nicolazzo, 2018, p. 134), Black transgender students in this study actively participated in various campus opportunities. The examination of sanctions alongside the narratives of Black transgender students is particularly significant, as it reveals how the institution and its actors weaponize their involuntary membership (akin to enslavement) against these students. It seems as though Black transgender students have to constantly perform, justify, and prove their worthiness to remain within the harmful and violent plantation university.

Summary of Plantation Politics Shaping Black Transgender Students' Experiences

Discussion and Implications

Black transgender students face multiple forms of oppression and discrimination, including coercion, exploitation, limited autonomy, isolation, and harassment. The institution's pursuit of solidarity and conformity to established norms disregards the identities and needs of Black transgender students. The narratives reveal a systemic marginalization and exclusion pattern perpetuated by institutional actors and structures. There is an overwhelming need for higher education institutions to recognize, address, and take accountability for the unique challenges faced by Black transgender students. It is crucial to create inclusive and affirming environments that value and support the intersectional identities of all students, especially Black transgender students relegated to the dustbin of higher education institutions. One should make efforts to challenge and dismantle the processes and structures that uphold the plantation university, including enforcing boundaries, social control, and exploiting labor. Comprehensive understanding, funding, and resources specifically tailored to the needs of Black transgender students are necessary to promote their well-being, success, and sense of belonging within higher education.

Moreover, it is essential to recognize the agency and resilience of Black transgender students in navigating oppressive systems. Their narratives demonstrate their ability to resist and challenge the status quo despite facing significant obstacles. By centering the experiences and voices of Black transgender students, higher education institutions can work towards creating more equitable and inclusive spaces that prioritize

justice, liberation, and the empowerment of Black transgender students and, ultimately, all marginalized students. In the following subsection, I discuss what survives and what is (re)created amongst Black transgender students in higher education regarding the narratives presented in *Black Trans Identity & Culture* section in chapter 4.

What Survives, and What is (Re)created?

Despite the prevalence of plantation politics across the processual and structural spheres of higher education that impact Black transgender students' social and academic experiences, this study reveals instances where Black transgender students exhibit resilience and a deep understanding of the expansiveness of their identities. This awareness fosters peer connections and develops caring communities within institutional spaces, online platforms, and external communities beyond the campus boundaries. The exploration of plantation politics becomes especially compelling when delving into the intricate social and academic experiences of Black transgender students, whose mere existence inherently defies normative gender structures, challenges conventional attire, and establishes alternative forms of kinship.

Kinship networks play a crucial role in supporting Black gay and lesbian students within the education system and establishing a network of assistance to combat unfriendly campus environments (Strayhorn & Kelly, 2013). Kinship networks for Black LGBTQ are vital for individuals excluded or disowned by their families. Just as Black gay and lesbian students in previous studies benefitted from such networks, Black transgender students also developed support networks to enhance their resilience and resistance strategies against campus environments that perpetuate trans oppression

(Nicolazzo, 2016b) and AntiBlackness transness. This study further validates the development of kinship networks amongst Black transgender students in higher education and expands previous research to acknowledge the generative nature and underground sociality of kinship networks (Moten, 2013; Moten & Harney, 2004). My research findings indicate that Black transgender students utilize diverse survival strategies to navigate an AntiBlack transgender public sphere and spaces within higher education, providing evidence that they employ disidentification (Muñoz, 1999) to maneuver through spaces uniquely, surpassing or transcending institutional limitations in order to ensure their survival within the system.

Expansiveness: The Multi-Dimensions of Black Trans Identity

Previous research on Black transgender students focused on the deficit nature surrounding their identities by centralizing the ways they hide, conceal, or even avoid coming out to others within their communities (Goode-Cross & Tager, 2011; Strayhorn & Kelly, 2013; Squire & Mobley Jr., 2014), the results from this study differ by demonstrating creativity in their understanding of identity despite the limitations of language and the empowerment embedded in claiming Black transness. Black transgender students' narratives reveal that they define their identities in expansive terms, going beyond physical aspects to encompass spiritual and universal energies. Black transgender students' narratives reveal that their identities also involve a conscious rejection of whiteness, White supremacy, capitalism, patriarchy, and other social structures that aim to label and categorize individuals. While they acknowledge that

existing language may not fully capture the expansiveness of Black transgender identity, students use the available language to articulate their experiences.

Black transgender students describe Black transness as an infinite possibility, a disruption of the colonial imaginary, patriarchy, gender binaries, AntiBlackness, anti-indigeneity, and anti-categorization. Students perceive their Black transness as expansive, holy, sacred, powerful, and synonymous with freedom and liberation. They reject the requirements of binaries and emphasize the importance of defining their identities. Think back to Riri's exclamation that *Black transness* is defined as exploding out of White imposed boxes. Alternatively, Magik shared that identifying as Black and transgender allows for infinite possibilities of being and existing. These findings are similar to the arguments developed in Black scholarship that attest that Black gender exists outside of the conventional understanding of gender within society and that attempts to conform to traditional gender roles and norms are ultimately futile and reinforce violence against Black people (Snorton, 2017; Vargas, 2018; Ziyad, 2017).

Black transgender students' narratives reveal that whiteness seeks to categorize (Scott, 1998) and limit identities, while Black transness exceeds those boundaries. These findings support Spillers' (1987) argument that gender has historically highlighted how Black people are perceived to deviate from conventional notions of womanhood and manhood. Findings expand this argument by showing that claiming a Black transness acknowledges this incongruence and celebrates the notion that "Black gender is always gender done wrong, done dysfunctionally, done in a way that is not normal" (Ziyad, 2017, para. 6). All Black transgender students in this study were okay, satisfied, and

empowered by living and existing outside of conventional notions of gender, sexuality, and even race.

According to the narratives, Black transness is a direct rejection of whiteness, White supremacy, and societal constraints, reflecting the rejection of cisnormativity and the desire to exist outside of prescribed boxes. This understanding is shared by multiple Black transgender students, who view Black transness as undefinable, fluctuating, and constantly evolving, which is similar to Janak's (2022) argument that Black transgender geographies refuse simplistic categorization. Black transgender students reject the binary, as well as ideologies of White supremacy, colonialism, and capitalism that seek to control their personhood. Their definitions of Black transness encompass both race and gender and emphasize the rejection of societal expectations and the realization that others cannot define them. These definitions highlight the expansiveness of Black transness and the inherent rejection of whiteness and conformity within transgender spaces.

Common Sense. Shange (2019) conceptualizes the Black queer common sense, which builds on Keeling's (2017) notion of common sense. Shange (2019) points to the capacity of Black queer individuals to forge kinship within highly surveilled spaces of neoliberalism and emphasizes the complexity and transformative potential of Black queer common sense in navigating and subverting normative gender orders. Similar to Shange's (2019) findings, narratives in this study reveal that Black transgender students share a common knowledge and connection with their peers, allowing each other to be themselves without explanation or hiding. Findings show that amongst mixed company, Black transgender students can recognize each other in spaces, even without speaking.

During challenging times, such as the 45th presidential election and the COVID-19 pandemic, they heavily relied on their skills and social intelligence to navigate difficulties unfamiliar to other marginalized groups. Black transgender students' narratives show that they have resourcefulness and coping strategies that are unique to their community. In spaces with other Black transgender individuals, there is a sense of belonging and no need for excessive explanation. Black transgender students have a remarkable ability to spot and support each other, even before individuals fully recognize their own identities. This shared recognition creates a sense of community and care that transcends institutional barriers and provides holistic affirmation of their identities.

According to research on Black transgender students in higher education, transnormativity impacts their social experiences in college with regard to access to campus resources, co-curricular programming, and engaging with non-Black transgender peers (Glover, 2016; Jackson, 2021; Nicolazzo, 2016a). Findings from this study affirm that transnormativity impacts their social lives while in college and influences how Black transgender students build community and seek out and care for one another in various spaces in higher education. For example, gender for Black transgender students in this study differed from their White transgender peers, where they shared that the importance of their transgender identity linked to their upbringing and socialized gender, which allow these communities to sustain one another through validation of a collective experience.

Contrastingly, White transgender spaces for Black transgender students often romanticized a social death, emphasizing the need to sever ties with one's former identity, creating a dichotomy between their former and current selves, and negating the

experiences of their former gender. For Black transgender students' that normative transgender narrative caused tensions with their understanding of their transness where they shared stories of their formative socialized gender influencing their current knowledge of themselves and their identities. Narratives underscores that Black transgender students are already intimately familiar with existing at the margins of society (as socially dead), existing at the end of the world. Yet, in this space of marginalization (social death), Black transgender students' narratives reveal that they have always found ways to create possibilities and generate new futures.

Black transgender students collectively embrace their former selves as spiritually and energetically connected to who they have become, recognizing that the potential for growth and renewal lies beyond the transformation of their former lives and identities. This perspective aligns with Black futuristic notions of life after death, recognizing that there is something beyond death that can build, sustain, and survive despite the systemic oppression faced by Black lives (Alexander, 2005; McKittrick & Woods, 2007). For example, the enslaved who were thrown or thrown themselves overboard during the Middle Passage imagined there was something better beyond enslavement (Alexander, 2005). Further evidence supports this Black futurist notion when Christina Sharpe asks her colleague about what happens to Black bodies in the ocean. Her friend, Anne Gardulski, says:

Nobody dies of old age in the ocean...because nutrients cycle through the ocean (the process of organisms eating organisms is the cycling of nutrients through the ocean), the atoms of those people who were thrown overboard are out there in the ocean even today. They were eaten, organisms processed them, and those organisms were in turn eaten and processed, and the cycle continues (Sharpe, 2016, p. 36).

Nothing truly dies at the bottom of the ocean but is instead regenerated and nourishes other forms of existence. Transnormativity prevents this notion of futurity in that whiteness encourages a violent stopping of generative structures, possibilities, and transformation by creating boundaries for identification. For Black transgender students in higher education, their common sense embraces the notion of futurity. While occupying their current temporarily at the end of the world, they develop, facilitate, and maintain communities of care in their “undercover, underground, submarine sociality” (Moten, 2013, p. 742)—a hidden yet powerful force that sustains institutions, organizations, movements, and cultural expressions within the Black transgender community.

Communities of Care. Affirming previous studies in higher education (Simms et al., 2020), this study's findings show that Black transgender students establish communities of care in physical and virtual spaces based on shared identities and everyday experiences, allowing them to support one another through navigating institutional barriers. These separatist spaces provide support and understanding, even without institutional support. Findings support previous studies that show Black LGBTQ students often develop, facilitate, and maintain their groups in higher education (Blockett, 2017; Goode-Cross & Tager, 2011). Black transgender students’ communities of care foster the well-being and success of Black transgender students and their peers within and beyond higher education spaces, ultimately contributing to their retention and matriculation, which is similar to findings in Nicolazzo’s (2016a) study on two nonbinary Black students in college. Black transgender students create communities of care to

provide support and recognition while also facing rejection, lack of funding, and invalidation from institutional actors. As shared by Tayo and Bliss, instances of stolen ideas and resistance to establishing trans-of-color support groups highlight institutional pushback. However, despite these challenges, their communities continue to exist and thrive.

The power of Black transgender student communities of care is evident in their ability to meet one another's basic needs, use institutional bureaucracy for their benefit, and provide a safe and reliable space for Black transgender students. Examples such as the BlackOUT and other Black transgender organizations demonstrate the importance of student-run initiatives in supporting Black LGBTQ students, advocating for their experiences, and providing a sense of community and belonging. These communities of care serve as crucial spaces in higher education where Black transgender students can find support and connection. Findings from this study affirm previous research on Black transgender students that acknowledges the formation of kinship networks that help sustain students and decompress from institutional harms (Nicolazzo, 2016a, 2016b; Strayhorn, 2012; Strayhorn & Kelly, 2013).

Summary of What Survives and What is (Re)created? Discussion and Implications

Black transgender students exhibited resilience and strength in higher education despite the pervasive influence of plantation politics and transnormativity. These students demonstrate a deep understanding of the expansiveness of their identities, fostering connections and communities within and beyond institutional spaces. They reject normative gender structures, challenge societal expectations, and establish alternative

forms of kinship. Black transgender students (re)define their identities expansively, going beyond physical aspects to encompass spiritual and universal energies. Their understanding of Black transness goes beyond binary conceptions, disrupting colonial imaginaries, gender binaries, and AntiBlack Transness. They perceive their Black transness as expansive, holy, sacred, powerful, and synonymous with freedom and liberation. The narratives of Black transgender students reveal their ability to create and sustain communities of care within and beyond higher education. These communities provide vital support, recognition, and understanding, offering a safe and reliable space for Black transgender students to be themselves without explanation or hiding. Despite facing institutional pushback and lacking formal support, these communities thrive, meeting the basic needs of their members and facilitating their well-being and success.

Implications

James Baldwin, a Black queer author and poet, once said, “The great force of history comes from the fact that we carry it within us, are unconsciously controlled by it in many ways, and history is literally present in all that we do.” It is imperative to recognize the interconnectedness of different disciplines, historical contexts, and narratives that intersect with the subjects of study and an individual’s contemporary lived experience. Findings from my study indicate that higher education’s historical investments in slave economies continue to permeate and reanimate into the structures and processes of the university. Plantation politics are deeply ingrained in the fabric of higher education and impact both macro and micro-interactions for Black transgender students. Knowing this, practitioners should consider that supporting Black transgender

students will take more than the development of training, cross-cultural programming, and increasing representation of Black transgender administration, staff, and faculty. Practitioners should consider that in order to make higher education a better place for Black transgender students is, to put an end to it all.

This project is deeply abolitionist. I see the generative possibilities after what we know ceases to exist. This undertaking requires an imagination to envision a future where Black transgender life is celebrated. As educators who seek abolition, we must embrace the desires that:

Seem crazy and unimaginable: we must, on behalf of this alignment, refuse that which was first refused to us and in this refusal reshape desire, reorient hope, reimagine possibility and do so separate from the fantasies nestled into rights and respectability (Halberstam, 2004, pp. 11-12).

To support Black transgender students in the plantation university will require disruptive logic and the disowning of solidarity in alignment with the institution. It takes a commitment to resist and challenge the status quo despite facing significant obstacles and pushback. Considering the findings, this could mean speaking to students before reporting issues to the university, actively developing mutual aid for Black transgender students when emergencies arise, and skipping bureaucratic steps if it means reducing the restriction to access and freedom of marginalized students. It takes stealing away and making the impossible possible. Abolition requires a unique perspective, vulnerability, and willingness to put your “reputation, home, and life on the line for other people’s children” (Love, 2019). It also takes a commitment to celebrating and meeting Black transgender students where they are. Moten (2013) writes:

This is not because celebration is supposed to make us feel good or make us feel better, though there would be nothing wrong with that. It is, rather, because the cause for celebration turns out to be the condition of possibility of Black thought... Celebration is the essence of Black thought, the animation of Black operations, which are, in the first instance, our undercommon, underground, submarine sociality (Moten, 2013, p. 742).

In embracing Moten's (2013) perspective on celebration as the essence of Black thought, it becomes imperative to heed Williams and colleagues' (2021) call for a paradigm shift in our thinking and actions. Recognizing the condition of the possibility of Black thought, rooted in celebration, lays the groundwork for reimagining and transforming the educational system to acknowledge and confront the historical and ongoing influence of White supremacy, the plantation, and AntiBlack Transness in higher education. This transformation demands practitioners to critically examine their allegiance and determine where they stand regarding solidarity. Do you support and care for Black transgender student success and life? Or not? This study compels educators from all backgrounds to contemplate whether they are prepared to support and engage with their Black transgender students, fellow educators, and administration within the marginalized spaces of the university.

Black transgender students' communities are rupturing and disrupting traditional academic frameworks, fugitive, queer, and reclaiming of stolen life embedded in their spaces of communal empowerment and transformation. Black transgender students embody autonomy within the academic setting by challenging and transcending societal norms (race, gender, sexuality) and creating their own spaces of futurity and support. Narratives from the study reveal that Black transgender students are conscious of their

shared goods, resources, and spaces and understand the common cause of their positionality within the institution and the disruption it causes to the power and economy of the institution (Harney & Moten, 2013). Black transgender students have divested from institutional modes of support. The study asks abolitionist educators whether they are willing to divest from traditional support methods (i.e., counseling and health services, LGBTQ resource centers) and invest in support mechanisms that center Black transgender students' cultural and community practices.

The narratives of all Black transgender students unequivocally demonstrate their heightened awareness of the oppressive nature of the university and the profound solace, protection, sanctuary, and support they find within their peer-maintained communities, even in the face of institutional resistance. Their very existence and lived experiences on campus challenge and subvert conventional norms of gender, race, sexuality, and even the paradigms of teaching and learning entrenched within academia. However, the power of their knowledge and abilities to subvert conventional norms and paradigms of teaching and learning does come at a cost. Black transgender students' narratives reveal that they are expected to perform an astronomical amount of intellectual, physical, and emotional labor with little to no compensation, replicating the economic structures of the slave plantations within the boundaries of higher education. I ask educators to reflect on how they replicate this element, the mind, back, and heart—breaking labor element, within their classrooms and education practices. Are there ways to mitigate the expectation of Black transgender students to educate their peers, administration, and faculty surrounding topics of their identities? What can you do as an educator to compensate Black

transgender students when you require their labor? Are you willing to hire them?

Addressing these questions of responsibility and labor allocation within educational settings is crucial, especially in the context of Black transgender students facing the contemporary manifestations of the plantation system. It is essential to examine ways to alleviate the burden on Black transgender students, including reevaluating expectations and considering opportunities for compensation and equitable and alternative employment within educational institutions.

Until we abolish the plantation university, Black transgender students will continue to experience the contemporary manifestations of the plantation system within the university through the perpetuation of plantation politics. Plantation politics will continue to affect their social and academic lives profoundly. Despite this fact, Black transgender students will remain active in their fugitive planning. It will require a keen sense of awareness to notice the fugitive undertaking of the Black transgender community. This acknowledgment prevents the institution and those in solidarity with it from denying our existence, power, and collective liberatory imaginary and maybe even fear what is coming.

Where Do We Go From Here?

Further research is necessary to comprehensively assess historical events lasting impact on marginalized individuals' contemporary experiences in academic settings, with a particular focus on Black and transgender students, staff, and faculty. I urge educators and researchers to contemplate the pivotal role that integrating historical awareness into studies on race, gender, sexuality, and education can play in enhancing how we interact

with, teach, and support marginalized students, staff, and faculty. This thoughtful approach is crucial for improving the overall experiences of marginalized individuals in higher education.

In the context of my research, I have established a theoretical framework that provides a lens through which to examine the intersections of Blackness and Transness, tracing their historical roots in U.S. history. I encourage practitioners and researchers to adopt an AntiBlack Transness framework in future investigations. This framework can be instrumental in expanding our understanding of how AntiBlack Transness is embedded in policies, practices, and everyday interactions within higher education, providing a more holistic and all-encompassing lens that prevents the erasure of the most vulnerable and targeted in our Black communities. By incorporating this perspective into research endeavors, we can contribute to a more nuanced and informed approach to addressing systemic issues and fostering a more inclusive educational environment.

(Un)conclusion

Narrative restraint, the refusal to fill in the gaps and provide closure....as is the imperative to respect Black noise—the shrieks, the moans, the nonsense, and the opacity, which are always in excess of legibility and of the law and which hint at and embody aspirations that are wildly utopian, derelict to capitalism, and antithetical to its attendant discourse of Man (Hartman, 2008, p. 12).

The narratives of Black transgender students highlight the significance of deliberately leaving gaps and uncertainties, which Hartman (2008) calls narrative restraint. These gaps challenge traditional storytelling norms, emphasizing the need to respect “Black noise” within their experiences—expressions such as the emotional weight of shrieks, moans, the ambiguity of nonsense, and the indeterminacy of their

unique identities (Hartman, 2008, p.12). Just as Hartman (2008) suggests that Black noise exceeds legibility, institutional bureaucracy, and even the law, the narratives of Black transgender students surpass conventional understandings and legal and educational frameworks, revealing a complex tapestry of experiences that defy easy categorization.

Embedded within Black transgender students' unconventional expression of their stories lies a profound and aspirational quality. Their narratives hint audaciously Afro Trans-Futuristic aspirations, invaluable to a system or institution that may not fully acknowledge or support Black transgender identities, movement, culture, and expansiveness. Black transgender students' refusal to conform to traditional norms, as seen in how they maintain their communities and express their Black transness, serves as a form of resistance that embodies aspirations beyond the confines of mainstream institutional discourse. In embracing the complexity of Black transgender student narratives, my perspective challenges prevailing ideologies and encourages a more nuanced understanding of their experiences, acknowledging the richness found in their deliberate withholding of neat closures and their celebration of diverse, queer, unapologetically Black, and often deemed unconventional forms of expression.

In delving into Black transgender student narratives and honoring the deliberate withholding of neat closures as well as celebrating our diverse forms of expression, my perspective lays the groundwork for understanding the nuanced impact of plantation politics on college and university campuses for Black students with multiple marginalized identities. With that said, I sought to explore how these dynamics perpetuate AntiBlack Transness, whiteness, transnormativity, and racial hierarchies,

influencing the social and academic lives of Black transgender students. I also asked what is (re)created while Black transgender students navigate AntiBlack Transness in higher education.

I found that plantation politics exerts a profound and pervasive influence on the social and academic lives of Black transgender students, as it permeates through the processual (Maintenance, Socialization, Social Control) and structural (i.e., Knowledge, Sentiment, Sanctions) aspects of higher education. Furthermore, despite the pervasive influence of plantation politics, Black transgender students have an expansive understanding of their identities that transcend the limitations of AntiBlack Transness and the plantation university. Black transgender students also have a deep common sense amongst their Black transgender peers, where they recognize and affirm one another, which enables them to develop communities of care. Black transgender students' communities of care foster the well-being and success of Black transgender students and their peers within and beyond higher education spaces, ultimately contributing to their basic needs obtainment, retention, and matriculation.

The narratives of Black transgender students exude the Afro-Trans Futuristic essence of their lived experiences, culminating in an intentionally (un)conclusive stance that challenges the conventional White and gatekeeping academic requirements to address perceived gaps and tie it up with a neat conclusion. The power of Black transgender students to exude futurity serves as a foundational fact of their existence and operation, which has immense and unwavering potential to “produce the absolute overturning, the absolute turning of this motherfucker out” (Moten, 2013, p. 742).

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Appendix A: RECRUITMENT FLYER

 **The Experience of Black Transgender Students in Higher Education**

I Want to HEAR YOUR Stories

The purpose of this study is to document the stories of Black Transgender students as they navigate social and academic life in a higher education institution to understand the impacts of white supremacy, antiBlack racism, and transantagonism on their identity, resistance, and experiences.

PARTICIPANTS NEEDED

You are invited to participate in a 60 minute interview via Zoom.

Open to students currently enrolled in a 4-year higher education institution in the United States that are:

- 18+ years old
- Black, African-American, or from the African Diaspora

AND

- Identify as Transgender or under the Transgender umbrella (including, but not limited to, FTM, MTF, agender, nonbinary, genderqueer, trans*)

INTERESTED? PLEASE FILL OUT THIS FORM! 

<https://bit.ly/BlackTransStudy>

GOT QUESTIONS? FEEL FREE TO CONTACT TORI PORTER AT TPORT012@UCR.EDU

IRB#: HB-133
APPROVAL DATE: 10/17/2022
EXP: N/A



Appendix B: PARTICIPANT CRITERIA AND DEMOGRAPHICS FORM

Informed Consent

Title of research study: What survives? Plantation Power, Resistance, & Black Transgender Student Experience in Higher Education

Principal investigator: Tori Porter, Ph.D. Candidate, Higher Education, School of Education, tport012@ucr.edu

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Rican Vue, Assistant Professor of Higher Education, School of Education, ricanv@ucr.edu

Dear participant,

Key Information about the Research Study

This section provides highlights of this research study to help you decide whether or not you should participate. Carefully consider this information and the more detailed information provided below the section. Please ask questions about any of the information you do not understand before you decide whether to participate.

Purpose:

Procedures:

Risks:

Benefits:

Alternatives:

Compensation:

Voluntary Participation:

What happens if I say yes, I want to be in this research?

If you decide to participate in this research study, the researcher will ask you to:

The researcher will interview you for about an hour in a private Zoom meeting. The researcher will ask you to share stories about your experiences in college, about your friends, organizations you are a part of, the experiences you have with faculty and administration, or any stories you want to share regarding your time in college. The researcher will record the Zoom meeting. After the interview, the researcher will edit the Zoom transcriptions that will be downloaded after the meeting. I will remove any mention of names. Once finished, the recordings will be destroyed.

Study location: All these procedures will be done via Zoom.

Is there any way being in this study could be bad for me?

We do not anticipate any foreseeable risks or discomforts to you participating in this study other than those encountered in day-to-day life.

Will being in this study help me in any way?

We cannot promise any benefits to you or others from your taking part in this research. However, possible benefits to you include having your experiences documented in a publish dissertation and your experiences informing the field of higher education research and practice.

What happens to the information collected for the research?

Information collected for this research will be given pseudonyms, coded, encrypted, maintained in an online data platform, Dedoose until January 1, 2025. Digital recordings will be stored in an encrypted external hard drive with a password that will only be known by the principal researcher. If you choose to withdraw your participation, your data will be wiped from the Dedoose platform and destroyed from the external hard drive, as well as, removed from the excel sheet that is created from this document.

Identifiers will be removed from the identifiable private information. After such removal, the information could be used for future research studies or distributed to other investigators for future research studies without additional informed consent from the subject or the legally authorized representative.

Will information about me be kept private?

We will do our best to make sure that the personal information gathered for this study is kept private. However, we cannot guarantee total privacy and if required by the law, your personal information may be disclosed. If information from this study is published or presented at scientific meetings, your name and other personal information will not be used. Authorized representatives from the following organizations may review your research data for the purpose of monitoring or managing the conduct of this study:

*The Institutional Review Board (IRB) that reviewed this research

*Representatives of the University of California

Can I be removed from the study without my OK?

The person in charge of the research study or the sponsor can remove you from the research study without your approval. Possible reasons for removal include:

*Not meeting research criteria

*Missing interview(s)

The study will notify you if this occurs.

Can I stop being in the study at any time?

You can stop taking part in the study at any time. If you would like to stop, please contact Tori at tport012@ucr.edu

Whom can I talk to?

If you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or think the research has hurt you, talk to the research team at tport012@ucr.edu or ricanv@ucr.edu. If you have questions about your rights or complaints as a research subject, please contact the IRB Chairperson at (951) 827 - 4802 during business hours, or to contact them by email at irb@ucr.edu.

1. ***I agree to participate in the research project under the conditions described above. ****

Mark only one oval.

- Yes, I agree to participate.
- No, I do not wish to participate.

2. ***Please enter your full name ****

Signature

You will type your electronic signature below.

3. ***Please enter your full name (this will constitute your electronic signature for agreeing to participate in the research study). ****

Participant Criteria Questionnaire

4. ***Name ****

5. ***Pronouns ****

6. ***Email ****

7. **Do you identify as Black, African American, African, or from the African Diaspora? ***

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
 No
 Other: _____

8. **How do you describe your ethnicity or cultural background? ***

9. **Do you identify as Transgender, Genderqueer, Gender nonconforming, nonbinary, and/or another identity on the Transgender spectrum? ***

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
 No
 Other: _____

10. **Are you currently enrolled in a four-year college or university? ***

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
 No

11. **What school do you attend? ***

12. **Where is your school located? (city and state) ***

13. **Are you available to participate in an interview(s) via Zoom? ***

Mark only one oval.

Yes

No

Other: _____

14. **Please list your availability (i.e. M-F, 1-3pm) ***

15. **Will you need any accommodations?**

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Google Forms

Appendix C: RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Hello Community,

My name is Tori Porter (they/them/theirs) & I am a Black nonbinary PhD Candidate at the University of California Riverside working on my dissertation research study that focuses on the experiences of Black Transgender students in higher education and I need your support!

My goal for the study is to interview about 20 Black Transgender (18+) college students formerly or currently enrolled in a 4-year higher education institution in the United States. I want to share the stories of Black Transgender students in higher education to highlight what survives within our communities despite institutionalized exclusion. Would you like to help? To see if you or anyone you know are eligible, please read the requirements below.

- **Must identify as Black, African American, or from the African Diaspora**
- **Must identify on the transgender spectrum (genderqueer, nonbinary, FTM, MTF, etc.)**
- **Must be a former or current undergraduate or graduate student in a higher education institution in the United States**
- **Must be 18+**

If this is you or anyone you know, please fill out this form
<https://forms.gle/Tu8KLXfGfdhKzoSq5>

IRB# HB-133

Approval date: 10/17/2022

Exp: N/A

If you have any questions, please contact me at any time tport012@ucr.edu.
I have also attached a recruitment flyer to this email, please feel free to distribute it.
Thank you.

In community,

Tori Porter (they/them/theirs)

Appendix D: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Experience as a Black Transgender Student in Higher Education

Introduction:

Hello, my name is Tori Porter, and my pronouns are they/them/theirs. Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview with me today. I will be asking you a few questions about your background and experience as a Black transgender student in Higher Education. I am interested in learning about your academic and social experiences as it pertains to your identity as a Black transgender student. I want to hear stories about your experience learning, living, and working as a Black transgender student and how you resist forms of oppression that may impact your experiences while in college.

Procedures:

Before we begin the interview, I want to remind you that your participation in this interview is voluntary, and you have the right to withdraw your participation at any time for any reason. Your name and any other identifying information will be assigned pseudonyms to ensure compliance with confidentiality and to protect your privacy as a participant.

With your permission, I will video audio-record our interview with the Zoom recording function. Audio-recording allows me to capture your exact words and be able to come back to the moments within the interview. If you prefer not to be recorded, I will take notes in a Google document that is in my secure UCR Google Account then will download a copy into my secure encrypted USB drive.

Before we begin the interview, **Do you consent to have me record our interview?**

Do you have any questions for me?

Thank you. Now, let's begin.

A.) Black Trans Identity Construction and Exploration

Black Transness: Do you identify as being transgender? If so, describe for me/tell me about/how do you claim that identity?

How would you define Black transness?

How do you express your Black transness?

Tell me about the first time you came to realize that you were transgender, what was that experience like?

Blackness: Do you identify as being Black? Can you describe for me/tell me about/how you claim your Blackness?

B.) Experience with Peers and Institutional Actors

What is your day-to-day experience in higher education?

Can you tell me a memory, story, experience you had in college that made your Black transness more apparent, more salient, more visible to you or even others?

Do you have a memory, story, or experience where your Black transness was a target of either praise or violence?

Do you have an on-campus center or organization that supports Black transgender students on your campus?

- Are you connected with the center or organization? Why or why not?

C.) Campus and Community Engagement

Can you tell me about an experience you've had where you believe your race and gender have impacted your engagement in activities on campus? Who was involved? What happened? How did you feel? Was there any resolution?

Can you tell me about how you found a community on campus with people of your same race and gender identity?

- What did it feel like to find your community?
- What are some things you have done with your community to stay involved with campus life?

Despite the end of the world: Are there ways that you document your own histories and experiences?

Can you tell me what keeps you surviving and thriving through the institution?

How do you disconnect from the institution? How do you self-care? How do you find ways to celebrate who you are and other Black Trans peers?

Do you know any other Black transgender undergraduate or graduate students who would qualify for this study?