Research Article

Journal of Trauma Studies in Education
Volume 3, Issue 3 (2024), pp. 96-119
ISSN: 2832-1723 (Print), 2832-1731 (Online)
http://doi.org/10.70085/jtse.v3i3.6852

We all we got: Black Queer Womxn's Experiences at Religiously Affiliated Institutions

Tolulope Taiwo
Highline College

JD Dantzler
California State Polytechnic University, Pamona

ABSTRACT

Within higher education, specifically religiously affiliated institutions (RAIs), the voices and experiences of Black queer womxn are undervalued, scrutinized, and at risk. Black queer womxn constantly face a particular blend of racism, sexism, homophobia, and transphobia in these places—which may lead to religious trauma—and are punished for being our authentic selves. Our questions are "What are the experiences of Black queer womxn at a religiously affiliated institution?" and "How do Black queer womxn begin to heal from the racism, sexism, and homophobia present at RAIs?" We attempt to answer this question by using both the methodology of surrender and Sista Circle methodology, two radical practices that center Black womxn's narratives. We believe that discussing our experiences in community will lead to greater healing and understanding of how we navigate our multiple oppressions at religiously affiliated institutions.

Keywords: Black queer spirituality, Black queer womxn, religiously affiliated institutions

As divine beings, Black queer womxn have the right to exist, live, and be. Within higher education, specifically religiously affiliated institutions (RAIs), the voices and experiences of Black queer womxn are undervalued, scrutinized, and at risk. Black queer womxn constantly face a particular blend of racism, sexism, homophobia, and transphobia in these places—which may lead to religious trauma—and are punished for being our authentic selves (Bailey & Miller, 2015). Our multi-layered oppression

This article is published under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC-ND).

also means we create unique tactics to survive in religiously affiliated institutions (Dantzler & Taiwo, 2024). This study focused on the individual and shared experiences of Black queer womxn within religiously affiliated institutions and where we found healing. We explored the methodology of surrender and Sista Circle methodology, two radical practices that center the narratives of Black womxn as we deepened our understanding of how we foster healing (Dillard, 2008; Johnson, 2015). The Sista Circle revealed three themes: 1) My Spirituality Can Not Be Contained; 2) Red Flags Come In All Denominations; and 3) What's Thicker? The Blood, The Water, or Both. Overall, we found that as we explored ways we have fought against oppression and isolation, healing occurred when we centered self-discovery and community building (Dean, 2020).

We All We Got: Black Queer Womxn's Experiences at Religiously Affiliated Institutions

Black queer womxn, simply put, are nothing short of divine. From Marsha P. Johnson's co-creation of the Gay Liberation Front and the Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries (STAR) to Charlene Carruthers fighting against police brutality and the murder of Rekia Boyd, we have always been at the forefront of liberation movements (Njoroge, 2024). Even more important than what some of us have done for freedom movements is the magic of who we are as a community and individuals—melanated, hydrated, phenomenal, brilliant, and fiercely protective of the culture and each other.

We, as authors, deeply understand the joy and life-givingness of being Black queer womxn. We are also intimately aware of the systems of oppression that keep us from living as our fullest selves. One of these ways that we experience oppression, unfortunately, is in church and spiritual spaces. Many of us are not allowed to be our whole queer selves and our religious communities often punish us for bringing all of our queerness to the table (Bailey & Miller, 2015; Dean, 2020). Black queer womxn also feel this exclusion at Religiously Affiliated Institutions (RAI) or colleges and universities that have ties to religious denominations (Boston College, n.d.; Dantzler & Taiwo, 2024). As two Black queer womxn who are currently navigating targeted forms of racist heterosexism at our religiously affiliated doctoral institution, we are curious about how other Black queer womxn navigate the multiple oppressions that are especially highlighted in religious spaces (Dean, 2020). Our first research question was: "What are the experiences of Black queer womxn or gender-expansive adults* (students, staff, and faculty) that study or work in religiously affiliated colleges and universities?" As we began to dig deeper into the literature, create new relationships with our collaborators, and reflect on our experiences as Black queer graduate students at RAIs, another research question emerged: "How do Black queer womxn begin to heal from the racism, sexism, and homophobia present at RAIs?" We believe that making meaning of our experiences as Black queer womxn (individually and collectively) and pushing against the multiple intersecting oppressions we face at RAIs and in other religious spaces is in itself a form of radical

healing, healing that allows us to acknowledge “the pain of [multiple] oppression while fostering hope for justice and freedom” (French et al., 2020, p. 36).

In our research endeavors, we looked at the words "womxn" and "gender expansive adult" to include folks who are trans women, cis women, non-binary folks who identify as assigned female at birth (AFAB), folks who identify as a "femme," or other ways of conceptualizing gender that may align with the words "womxn" or "gender expansive." Additionally, when we use the term “Religiously Affiliated Institutions (RAI),” we specifically discuss Christian denominations. We recognize that other religions may cause harm or bring joy to Black queer womxn, but we focus on Christian faiths so we can speak within the scope of our own lived experiences.

We wrestle with our research questions by first exploring the current landscape of RAIs, Black queer womxn’s complicated relationship with spirituality and religion, and a discussion of religious trauma and healing. We then dive into how our frameworks (intersectionality theory and Black queer feminist theory) and methodologies (methodology of surrender, individual interviews, and Sista Circle methodology) guided us to individual and Sista Circle interviews with our collaborators. Finally, we discuss the possibility of a spirituality that is Black, womxn, and queer-centric. For us, we believe this type of spirituality can be a powerful tool for Black queer womxn struggling with religious trauma from their experiences at RAIs.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Our literature review focuses on the impact of RAIs on queer communities and Black womxn, the effect of religious trauma on Black queer womxn, and Black queer womxn’s relationship to religion and spirituality. There are limited articles in the higher education sphere about Black womxn’s experiences with RAIs, and we know that Black womxn’s experiences and stories, in general, are frequently excluded from academic spaces (Collins, 1990; Montgmery, 2019). Thus, we also explore articles from counseling, Black feminist, and LGBTQIA+ fields. We hope this review of the literature inspires “Black future researchers to enhance the literature and amplify the voices of Black queer womxn” (Dantzler & Taiwo, 2024, p. 188).

Religiously Affiliated Institutions, Queer Communities, and Black Womxn

Currently, over 400 United States higher education institutions are affiliated with Catholic or Protestant denominations (Boston College, n.d.). The first European-centered United States universities, such as Harvard, Yale, and Williams College, began with ties to religious institutions (Wilder, 2013). Modern-day policies, such as George W. Bush’s Faith-Based Initiative, or court cases, such as Hosanna-Tabor Evangelical Lutheran Church and School v. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (2012), have continued to offer strong legal protections to RAIs (Goldenziel, 2002; Robinson, 2014). Unfortunately, many RAIs have utilized these protections to condemn LGBTQIA+ community members (Russell & Fish, 2016). This action, in turn, creates negative experiences and negative mental health effects

on queer and trans individuals (College Pulse, 2021; Russell & Fish, 2016; Victoria State Government, 2021; Waling & Roffee, 2018). This type of bigotry is especially true for our trans siblings—22 percent of all gender minority students at RAIs, for example, are five times more likely to experience bullying than cisgender students (College Pulse, 2021).

As a community that is no stranger to fighting for our right to exist, LGBTQIA+ individuals at RAIs constantly fight for change through advocacy and activism (Porta et al., 2017). And many queer and trans community members can connect their gender and sexuality identities with their spiritual identities and find or create LGBTQIA+-centered spiritual communities (Rosenkrantz et al., 2016; Slater, 2019). But when RAIs choose homophobia and transphobia in their "ongoing struggle between a commitment to love and show compassion toward [their] LGBTQIA+ students and communities and a commitment to hold on to traditional perspectives of human sexuality," they do not provide an equitable or safe learning environment for queer and trans community members (College Pulse, 2021; Slater, 2019, p. 7).

Many higher education articles and resources about Black womxn, religion, and higher education center Black Christian womxn in all types of higher education institutions or suggestions of using spirituality to navigate and thrive amidst the misogynoir in colleges and universities. In addition, there are a few articles about our direct experiences with RAIs. For example, in a study with nine Black womxn faculty members at predominately white RAIs, 70 percent of them reported racialized sexism as their biggest challenge (Montgmery, 2019). While these experiences occur in RAI and non-RAI PWIs, Montgmery (2019) stated that because the student population skewed more "sheltered," or less aware of perspectives of Black queer individuals, at RAIs, this leads to an environment where "misconceptions start to develop" (p. 13). Additionally, conservative ideas around gender limit our community's imagination around who we see as a leader, which often means Black queer women are undervalued, especially in RAI spaces (Danztler & Taiwo, 2024; Montgmery, 2019).

Religious Trauma

According to Stone (2013), religious trauma is "pervasive psychological damage resulting from religious messages, beliefs, and experiences" (p. 324). Often related is religious trauma syndrome, which is "the condition experienced by people who are struggling with leaving an authoritarian, dogmatic religion and coping with the damage of indoctrination" (Winell, 2011, p. 17). The trauma occurs both because the religious teachings are harmful to the individual and because of the stress of leaving a familiar environment (Stone, 2013; Winell, 2011). Religious trauma is also when religious environments create lasting adverse effects on emotional, physical, or mental well-being (Religious Trauma Institute, 2022; Macnaughton, 2024). Between 20 to 33 percent of adults in the United States have experienced religious trauma, and LGBTQIA+ individuals experience religious trauma at higher rates—in fact, queer and trans people with religious trauma are at "increased risk for suicidality, substance abuse, homelessness, anxiety, and depression" (Slade et al., 2023; Macnaughton, 2024, p. 3).

Religious trauma deeply impacts Black queer and trans communities, especially as churches convey messages that God does not love us in our entirety (Simpson, 2022). Morrison (2021) described how religious trauma impacts Black queer communities and used examples such as experiencing abuse from church leaders because of our sexualities and genders and suggesting we experience illnesses (such as HIV or cancer) because of our lack of faith. While Morrison (2021) centered on Black queer men, these examples of religious trauma—and the negative impacts on our mental health—are also true of the Black queer womxn's experiences. Pruitt (2020) also discussed the effects of religious trauma and violence on Black LGBTQIA+ folks and specifically examined the intersections between religious and racial trauma. As Pruitt (2020) stated, the compounding nature of religious abuse and anti-Blackness makes it almost impossible for Black queer and trans folks to find safety and acceptance in church spaces.

In a qualitative grounded theory, Coffy (2023) interviewed 11 Black queer womxn about their mental health and decision-making process. Coffy (2023) found that Black womxn were not only taught toxic ideas of gender, sexuality, and race from Christianity, but "conservative iterations of Christianity had an inverse relationship regarding the women having positive mental health" (p. 41). These attitudes were imparted because of the religious trauma brought by their churches' bigotry, although some discussed trauma from sexual assault in the church. 80% of participants were currently not Christian at the time of the study. Although this article focused on church culture, we wonder if working or attending an RAI steeped in homophobia or transphobia may cause religious trauma or bring back old experiences of religious trauma for Black queer womxn.

To be clear, it would be irresponsible for us to say that "all churches," especially "all Black churches," lead with homophobia and transphobia and cause religious trauma. To say so would erase the healing and liberatory work of amazing Black LGBTQIA+ lead churches and churches with strong Black LGBTQIA+ accomplices. However, at least 43 percent of Protestant Black adults and 22 percent of Black Catholic adults believe that queer and trans people should not be accepted into society (Mohamed et al., 2021). Twenty-nine percent of religiously affiliated Black adults do not believe combatting sexism is essential to their faith (Mohamed et al., 2021). For those of us who sit in the intersections of racism, sexism, transphobia and/or homophobia, this stings, especially those of us who currently engage or formerly engaged in church communities and church labor such as singing in the choir, teaching Sunday School, or leading small groups (Dean, 2020; Johnson, 2018) Additionally, these views contribute to the religious trauma that many of us wrestle with after leaving church spaces (Coffy, 2023; Pruitt; 2020; Simpson, 2022).

Religious Healing for Black Queer Communities

In his piece reflecting on James Baldwin's relationship to the Black church and Black queerness, Dean (2020) detailed how Baldwin's journey of self-discovery as a Black gay man came in conflict with many of the Black churches' homophobic and transphobic ideologies. Dean (2020) stated:

> [Baldwin] resisted buying into the ideologies of gender and sexuality informed by white patriarchal and puritan heteronormativity that the Black Church had adopted. So, he walked away from the church, from saving himself and others, in order to be and live in his truth…Baldwin loved his people deeply, and he chose to be profoundly in love with them. But, more importantly, he loved himself.

As Black queer people, this concept of "choosing" ourselves is not a selfish act, but a reclaiming of one's value. This act of self-love offers us opportunities to reflect and use multiple tools to heal from religious trauma. For example, Pruitt's (2022) discussed tapping into indigenous African spiritualities and using Black and African cultural creativities (ritual movement, storytelling, music, etc.). Pruitt (2022) is not arguing for Black queer people to stay where we are not celebrated, nor are they maintaining that Black queer people identify with one specific religion. Rather, Pruitt (2022) argues that self-defined spirituality, along with creative expression, can be one way to resist how "religion and spirituality were weaponized as forms of domination" over Black queer communities (p. 5). Simpson (2022) also named creativity, particularly African indigenous dance and movement, as a way to tap into ourselves and heal from traumas. Simpson (2022) stated that the "power of pleasurable movements" allows us to "reimagine our GOD - on a communal, geographical, and ancestral level" (p. 26). And Johnson's narrative study on Black queer Southern womxn revealed that Black queer womxn turn to alternative sources of spiritual nourishment than the church community, such as poetry or literature groups with other Black queer womxn and community organizing (2018). Johnson (2018) noticed even when Black queer womxn did go into traditional church communities, "they found ways to devise transgressive strategies to affirm their sexuality" (p.166). In these ways, we can acknowledge the intersections of our spirituality and sexuality, as opposed to hiding our true selves (Johnson, 2018).

In Dantzler and Taiwo's (2024) duoethnography, they discussed the unique experience of being Black queer womxn and graduate students at an RAI and stated they constantly feel the pressure to "fix" and change RAIs with homophobic and transphobic campus climates. They concluded that this is an unnecessary stressor for Black queer womxn. Healing from the particular religious trauma that occurs in RAIs, for them, means Black queer womxn should focus on setting boundaries, building community, and centering joy as a protective measure that allows us to "make it out of our institution alive" (Dantzler and Taiwo, 2024, p. 202). In this way, we can intentionally focus on individual and community spiritual healing instead of saving spaces that fail to see our humanity.

Frameworks and Epistemology

For our frameworks, we utilized both intersectionality theory and Black queer feminist theory. Intersectionality is the phenomenon of overlapping oppressions, such as racism, sexism, and homophobia (Collins, 2000). Whenever we name and shape

how intersectionality theory applies to research, we acknowledge that multiple Black feminist scholars contributed to our understanding on how Black women exist in intertwining identities of "Black" and "womxn" (Harris & Patton, 2019). Sojourner Truth's "Ain't I a Woman?" speech described her experiences with racialized sexism as an enslaved woman (Haynes et al., 2020). The Combahee River Collective (1977), a radical Black lesbian feminist socialist collective, described the "manifold and simultaneous oppressions that all womxn of color face" (p. 210). Crenshaw (1989) examined intersectionality from a legal perspective and described the theory to simultaneously name anti-racism and anti-sexism practices and behaviors. Crenshaw (1991) also defined three dimensions of intersectionality: structural intersectionality named how gendered racism impacted Black womxn's daily lives, political intersectionality named how gendered racism erased Black womxn from political and policy agendas, and representational intersectionality named how gendered racism negatively situate Black womxn in public discourse (Haynes et al., 2020). Finally, Collins (1990) discussed the intersecting and interlocking oppressions of race, gender, and class. Collins (1990) also urged us to remember that this "legacy of struggle" among Black womxn gives us the tools to combat sexism, racism, and classism (p. 12). These four theorists guided us in naming the multiple oppressions of being Black/queer/womxn in our context of attending RAIs. Just as important as intersectionality theory are the current Black feminist readings and critiques of the framework. Nash's (2019) work urged Black feminists to let go of strict ownership of intersectionality, remember the multiple origins of the theory, and re-imagine how we could embody intersectionality. ~~And~~ Harris and Patton~~'s~~ (2019) created three considerations for stronger usage of intersectionality in higher education research: a) approach intersectionality from the understanding of the purpose of the theory and its history, b) cite and honor the womxn of color who created and contributed to intersectionality research, and c) remember intersectionality's roots in social justice work and use intersectionality to "critique structures of power and domination, produce transformative knowledge, inform praxis, and work toward social justice" (Harris & Patton, 2019, p. 354).

To enrich our addition of intersectionality theory, we utilized Black queer feminism, a theory that expands on feminism, LGBTQIA+ activism politic, and Black feminism. (Sullivan, 2019). Black feminism is a "set of approaches to thought, expression, and political action that critiques structures of racism, sexism, heterosexism, classism, and several other forms of oppression" (Sullivan, 2019, p. 1). Pairing this theory with intersectionality is important, as Black queer feminism inherently is an intersectional approach to name and resist homophobic racialized sexism (Sullivan, 2019). Utilizing Black queer feminism also aided us in queering, or making intentionally visible, the discussions around sexuality and Black queer womxn's experiences in RAIs (Marshall et al., 2015, Greene-Hayes, 2019). Finally, we acknowledge that Black queer feminism's roots are both in the academy and activism spaces in order to reach various people (Carruthers, 2018; Sullivan, 2019). With this knowledge, we hope that this paper is utilized as a healing tool for Black queer womxn in all spaces, and we are proud of our commitment to identify and fight against religious trauma in our communities.

Methodology

To answer our research questions, "What are the experiences of Black queer womxn at religiously affiliated institutions?" and "How do Black queer womxn begin to heal from the racism, sexism, and homophobia present at RAIs?"), we utilized a) methodology of surrender, a spiritual qualitative process that aids researchers in reconceptualizing research and approaching interview spaces with a foundation of love, compassion, reciprocity, and ritual, and b) Sista Circle Methodology, a communal qualitative process that allows Black womxn to gather, process collective experiences, and begin healing processes (Dillard, 2006; Johnson, 2015). We grounded our methodological approach in Womanist and Abolitionist praxis. We were mindful of nurturing the concepts of connection, surrender, and imagination that center on healing, revisiting, relearning, decolonizing, and disrupting (Benjamin, 2024; Dillard, 2006; T. Jones Jolivet, personal communication, May 9, 2024). In our approach, we stopped "punishing ourselves" about our experiences and revisited the stories we and others tell about us (T. Jones Jolivet, personal communication, May 9, 2024).

Dillard (2006) curated a methodology of surrender "that seeks to embrace a research space that is both intimately meditative and faith-filled" (77). A methodology of surrender is a deep and spiritual engagement that prioritizes the voices and experiences of the researchers and collaborators (Dillard, 2006). This reconceptualization is a call to explore and share the lived experiences of our collaborators and the sisterhood of radical imagination and radical healing (Benjamin, 2024; Dillard, 2006; French et al., 2020). Our research space encouraged collaborators and researchers to surrender their truths in a safe, supportive, and trusted environment where their narratives are centered and honored. Researchers are encouraged to experience, embody, and curate a research space using the four guiding principles: (a) love, (b) compassion, (c) reciprocity, and (d) ritual. Each principle is framed around the intention and capacity to offer or transform; love offers joy and happiness, compassion offers relief and transforms suffering, reciprocity offers equality, and ritual transforms to connect us and the spirit (Dillard, 2006). Engaging in a methodology of surrender requires "becoming a story listener" (Toliver, 2022, p. xxv) and nurturing a space that is not confined to the respectability politics or linear nature of research and scholarship. This study of surrender does not strive to be scripted or to stay on track; this opportunity for surrender leans into dialogue, connection, and synergy as we encourage ourselves and other Black womxn to just be.

As we explore the experiences of Black queer womxn at religiously affiliated institutions, we liken our data collection approach to developing a choir. We listened to each collaborator's story through individual interviews and gained an understanding of their unique sound, tone, pitch, volume, and needs. Individual interviews established a safe and trusted space for collaborators to express themselves freely and on their terms. Next, collaborators and researchers engaged in Sista Circles, which provided space for harmonizing our voices, experiencing one another's unique

voices, and lending one's voice when another collaborator was vulnerable, fearful, or unable to tell their story in the moment. Developed by Johnson (2015), the Sista Circle methodology emphasized the significance of communal and culturally relevant spaces where Black women could engage in dialogue. The Sista Circle methodology differs from traditional focus groups as it fosters a sense of community and shared understanding. Three distinct features of Sista Circles are (a) communication dynamics, (b) centrality of empowerment, and (c) researcher as participant (Johnson, 2015). Utilizing the methodology of surrender, individual interviews, and Sista Circle methodology created a holistic and empathetic framework for understanding the complex and multifaceted experiences of Black womxn at religiously affiliated institutions.

Data Collection and Analysis

On Juneteenth 2020, Director Oge Egbuonu released (In)Visible Portraits, a documentary celebrating and honoring the stories of Black women in America. Egbuonu strived to understand and capture Black women's narratives by building community before she requested the privilege of documenting and sharing their stories with the world (Egbuonu, 2020). Throughout the documentary, Black women shared their stories of struggle, joy, connection, community, and resilience. According to Dillard (2006), we must "render the researcher responsible to the members and the well-being of the community from which their very definition arises: To know something is to have living relationships with it, influencing and being influenced by it, responding to and being responsible for it" (p. 20). Egbuonu's (2020) approach to her documentary and Dillard's (2006) charge to researchers hold us answerable and accountable to our collaborators and ourselves (Patel, 2016; Tuck, 2009). Providing Black womxn with spaces to speak individually and collectively enriched the data collection process and the connections between researchers and collaborators.

To honor the voices and experiences of Black womxn, a key component of site and collaborator selection was intentionality. To align with the purpose and significance of the study, the most fitting focal collaborators are Black queer womxn with experience as students, staff, or faculty at religiously affiliated institutions. After receiving IRB approval, we conducted site selection within social media community spaces such as Black Student Affairs Professionals (BLKSAP), Black Twitter, Black Women in Higher Education, and Student Affairs and Higher Education Professionals (SAHEPros). Utilizing a site within a technological ecosystem increased potential and interested collaborators. Collaborators who are closeted or have not disclosed their sexual orientation may not feel comfortable participating in this study. We used snowball sampling to establish a connection with potential collaborators, which laid the foundation of trust and resulted in genuine responses from collaborators.

From these efforts, we identified six collaborators–Zora, Toni, Alice Assata, Audre, and Octavia– who all identify as Black queer womxn and who all currently live on the Pacific Coast area of the United States. In alliance with Sista Circle methodology, we included our own narratives as researcher-collaborators, and we are

two of the six collaborators. Five of the six collaborators currently work or attend an RAI; one collaborator recently left RAIs and higher education completely to work in the technology field. Four collaborators attended RAIs as undergraduate or graduate students, and all six collaborators, at one point in our professional careers, worked at RAIs. We first interviewed four collaborators in sixty-minute individual interview sessions, which were vital for understanding individual journeys with religion and experience with RAIs based on the institution's denomination. As researchers, we also answered our personal interview questions through journal reflections about our stories and challenges with RAIs. Afterward, we hosted a two-hour Sista Circle session with four of the six collaborators (Zora, Octavia, Audre, and Assata) to reflect on our experiences as a community and gave Toni and Alice space to contribute thoughts via a follow-up conversation.

For data analysis, we reviewed the interview audio first separately, and then together so we could make meaning of the stories as a team. As Dantzler & Taiwo stated, "themes are determined by what resonated with us and what we believe Black queer womxn need and deserve to hear" (p. 193). We were able to use the themes created for the first individual interviews to shape the questions and tone of the Sista Circle interview, which allowed us to make meaning with collaborators around our individual experiences and create a Sista Circle experience with the data analysis.

FINDINGS

In the first section of the findings, we will highlight collaborators' stories (which include our own stories) gathered from individual interviews. Afterward, we will highlight the Sista Circle discussion, the collective experience where we engaged in dialogue and storytelling and reflected on the themes highlighted in individual interviews. Throughout this imagination and wondering space, we removed the title of researchers and considered ourselves all collaborators in building community and providing an authentic space for Black womxn. Our voices will be present, the voices of two Black queer womxn who are navigating a complex relationship with our religiously affiliated institutions while learning more about our identities and what spiritually grounds us (Dantzler & Taiwo, 2024).

Individual Narratives: Who Are You? What Makes You, You?

The following section is the participant overview that describes the individual narratives of our six stories. These stories came from the individual sixty-minute interviews, and focus more on individual experiences with religion, religious trauma, and RAIs through our lens as Black queer womxn.

Zora's Story

Zora identifies as a Black womxn who is nonbinary and gender non-conforming. She attended a private liberal Methodist institution and serves as an Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) professional at a four-year Jesuit Catholic institution. Her

mother's openness and spiritual curiosity nurtured and influenced Zora's spiritual open-mindedness and exploration. Zora's family's involvement in organized religion ensured that younger generations understood and connected to Black church culture. Currently, her spiritual practices are informed by various practices such as meditation, astrology, tarot cards, ancestral veneration, and spending time in Christian spaces. Zora shared the rareness of finding a church she is comfortable attending consistently due to a lack of Black congregants, oppressive stances on gender roles, discriminatory practices and policies, and music selection.

Zora recounted an initial experience of identifying as queer, a "major barrier" that she believed would never allow her to be religious again. She noted the irony of this initial experience since she has only worked at religiously affiliated institutions. At a previous job, Zora worked in the same office as the University Chaplain and spent considerable time helping students pursuing religious vocations. Her current experience at a Jesuit institution has been positive; she works with the LGBTQIA+ campus community and feels the campus is pro-LGBTQIA+, and religiously inclusive. However, the institution's stance on contraceptives and abortions is in misalignment with Zora's values and the prioritization of student safety. Although the campus is pro-LGBTQIA+ there is a lack of accountability and additional grace granted for those who are homophobic and transphobic, such as consistent misgendering and improper resident placement. She noted a gay individualism culture, which has made it difficult to build community, and attributed this to White dominant gay culture.

Toni's Story

Toni identifies as nonbinary, queer, Black, child of an African immigrant, and Rastafarian. They serve as a full professor and academic director at a four-year Catholic institution run by the Holy Cross order. Toni shared their dedication to Rastafarianism and the absence of a unified doctrine, which can be complicated within a Christian society. Even among believers who are conservative surrounding gender and sexuality, there is a belief that individuals must decide their truth for themselves. To those of the Christian and Catholic faith, Rastafarianism may appear complicated; however, "it's less complicated than trying to be a Queer Christian because there's a kind of respect for individual decision and autonomy, even among people who don't agree with you." They came to Rastafarianism through music and community. Throughout their interview, they noted a lack of harm and retaliation within the Rasta mindset and religious approach.

Toni was raised Catholic and attended school at a convent from kindergarten through high school. They recounted how acts of violence toward their family and a "series of bad decisions" led to their current position at a Catholic institution. Their knowledge and familiarity with Catholicism made them a fitting candidate. Toni noted red flags within the institution, which they later named as racism, anti-Blackness, and homophobia. They reflected on religious harm and noted that Catholic learning environments are triggering due to the harm they experienced being educated in a convent. Toni shared there are not many Black, openly queer, and/or nonbinary

faculty who are not their direct reports, which makes it difficult to build and maintain community. Although they reside in a progressive queer city, the university community is holding on tight to their traditional values, which can make for an "extremely lonely existence and not one that I've faced in other jobs or locations."

Alice's Story

Alice identifies as a Queer Black American womxn, and as she recognizes her romantic and sexual attractions, she is engaging in an exploration of her bisexual and pansexual identity. She attended a four-year Jesuit Catholic institution for graduate school, worked at a four-year Jesuit Catholic institution, and currently works in the technology field. Alice was raised as a Jehovah's Witness, and she experienced tension with her faith as she became more familiar with feminist discourse and non-patriarchal ways of learning. She reflected on stepping away from Christianity after a visit to Elmina Castle in Ghana, "what fucked me up was seeing a church in the space and knowing it was sitting under a person's bedroom, where enslaved people were being harmed, sexually, they were being raped." She acknowledged her complex and nuanced relationship with Christian spaces, and stated, "you can be anti-religion while simultaneously feeling a call for community, specifically with Black people." Alice periodically attends an openly queer church with a queer pastor, which is grounded in Black Liberation Theology and believes there is an "energy you get among mostly Black parishioners." She considers herself a spiritual person and believes there are various ways to commune with God, such as using tarot cards, communing with ancestors, praying, meditation, and manifesting.

During Alice's graduate school search, she was drawn to two religiously affiliated institutions and felt a draw to the city where the Jesuit institution was located. She shared the support she received from her community as she wrestled with and navigated her queerness. Although she did not feel religious limitations as a graduate student, she noted conversations and ideologies surrounding contraceptives were moments of pause and tension. Alice appreciated that religious life created space for Muslim and Hindu students, she called attention to the potential neglect student populations such as undocumented, Black, and queer students may experience. When considering a utopian Black, queer, inclusive space, Alice shares that Black, queer, womxn leadership is necessary and should not align with "what White supremacist leadership looks like."

Assata's Story

Assata identifies as a queer, Black, cisgender woman of color and is intentional about the use of woman of color to "demonstrate solidarity with other women who hold racialized minoritized identities." She attended a four-year Jesuit Catholic institution for graduate school and currently serves as an assistant professor and academic director at a four-year Jesuit Catholic institution. Assata's love and passion for community drew her to Jesuit education. To ensure she and her siblings had community, her parents made a concerted effort to find a Black church in their

predominately White town. She shared that the connection between Blackness and Christianity can be beautiful while simultaneously being challenging, isolating, and oppressive. Assata's church provided reassurance and reinforced messaging of her worthiness, leadership potential, and excellence, which was the antithesis of her experiences in White spaces. As she entered higher education and identity development work, she reflected on how her sexuality was policed growing up and wondered about the possibilities if she had been "allowed to dream or if there was room just to be who I really was."

As Assata reflected on her experiences, she noted feeling "protected and guided" and has only known Jesuit education to be inclusive because of who was "teaching me, growing me, and modeling for me how to use Jesuit education to our advantage." Although she did not experience explicit racism or homophobia, she observed racism toward a Black Senior Student Affairs Officer (SSAO) and noticed her unit received immense support surrounding advocacy work, unlike other units. Assata shared how a promotion felt like a spirit breaker. She wanted more agency and compensation that reflected the quality of work she was creating. As burnout and exhaustion became commonplace, she left the institution to pursue a tenure-track faculty position. When Assata entered the new role, she recognized that "work can no longer be the source of worth." She understood that she could no longer overextend herself and needed to set clear boundaries, which has made room for her to become more spiritually grounded and better understand the trauma she has been carrying. As she navigated suppressed trauma and mental health issues, she knew she needed community, although she was challenged by the sentiment of "lean on God" and "don't tell people your business." Being in community is a spiritual practice; staying grounded in loving, protective, and restorative connections allows her to "move through hardship and still come out, untouched."

Octavia's Story

Octavia identifies as a Black queer womxn, she is a daughter, auntie, sister, partner, and educator. She is in "the middle of the gender expression spectrum…sometimes I'm very feminine. Sometimes I'm very masculine. 99.9% of the time, I'm just wearing what I want to wear." She is currently a doctoral student at a private evangelical Christian institution—the same institution where she went for her master's program—and serves as an EDI professional at a public state institution. Octavia's mom was an usher, and her dad was a deacon in their Baptist church, so Octavia grew up involved in her church community. Octavia's family went to church for a connection to Black culture as well as a connection to Christian spirituality. As Octavia started to become comfortable with her sexuality and her desire to build a family as a queer womxn, however, she knew she would never "be accepted, celebrated, or even tolerated" in her church. Because of that, she disconnected from the church and focused on building her family with values rooted in love and spirituality.

Although Octavia worked at religiously affiliated institutions before, they did not realize "I never realized how different, like, evangelical Christian and Jesuit Catholic

was, until I left undergrad and went to my graduate program." COVID-19 started right as Octavia began her Ph.D. program, so for Octavia, "learning from home, during the pandemic, for me, it was very safe, it felt nice, I could still say what I wanted to say and needed to say, and have like these really deep and rich conversations, but I can, I could also unplug." However, once she had to go back in person, the number of racist and homophobic things she heard from her cohort skyrocketed. She found a faculty member in the program who protected her and kept her safe, "Dr. Denise knew the environment we were in and the harm we would experience. She was committed to protecting us; she saw me and kept me close. Without her, I would've left the program." Regarding her spiritual life outside of the Ph.D. program, Octavia shared it can be difficult to find a Black church. She believes in God but has learned, "My God looks different than the God of the church that I grew up in. Like, there's [similar] tenants, but my God, you know, has an afro and is a Black womxn."

Audre's Story

Audre identifies as a Black pansexual queer womxn. They are currently on a journey to figure out their gender identity and are comfortable with "she" and "they" pronouns. As a child of Nigerian immigrants, they were raised in a very strict Nigerian household and went to Pentecostal churches since birth. Audre's mom was the Sunday School director for their church, and Audre remembers their mom dragging her along and "volun-telling" them to teach Sunday School. However, they moved away from the church due to the constant shaming of sexually active and queer folks. Currently, they are in a space where they want to "be a Christian on my terms" and blend Christian elements with Yoruba spirituality. It is hard for Audre because "there's a lot of guilt because in Southern Nigerian, the Christian religion is tied to culture, and when I want to have aspects of the culture, I have to take aspects of the religion. And sometimes, I feel like I can't do that." While this process and reflection bring some anxiety, they also feel joy in being able to self-define what spirituality looks like to them.

Audre shared that they attended their private evangelical Christian institution for their Higher Education Ph.D. program because of the strength and justice-oriented curriculum. However, they quickly realized that not only was the university not for them, but the experience brought up religious trauma, particularly from the school's homophobic values and policies. What kept Audre from dropping out were the close connections they either had or built with Black womxn and womxn of color, particularly Octavia, a few folks from their cohort, their mentor, and their dissertation chair. Today, Audre constantly dreams of a university that is created just for Black queer community members and wants to create multiple spaces for Black queer womxn to discuss spiritual trauma and healing.

Collective Narratives: Where Black Womxn Gather, A Time and A Discussion Will Be Had

In partnership with the individual narratives, the Sista Circle gave breath to three main themes: 1) My Spirituality Can Not Be Contained; 2) Red Flags Come In All Denominations; and 3) What's Thicker? The Blood, The Water, or Both. The first theme discussed the power of self-definition and agency Black queer womxn hold in relationship to spirituality. In the second theme, we wrestled with the idea that there are "safer" RAIs based on their particular denominations, a notion that does not fully match our overall experiences. Finally, in "What's Thicker? The Blood, The Water, or Both?" we reflected on how our blood and chosen family impacted our spiritual journeys, for better or worse.

My Spirituality Can Not Be Contained

Many of us were in the process of re-creating what spirituality and religion meant as queer Black womxn. As Octavia said, "we shouldn't allow other people and their lack of imagination to diminish and limit the God that has created all of this." Octavia's quote best explains all of our journeys with spirituality, and the intentionality to embody a faith that honored all parts of our queer selves.

For Zora, their faith is about learning and creating a blend of worship and reflection:

> I'm…Christian adjacent, I think is the best lingo I can use to describe my faith background. And my current existence, tarot card reader, a general reader, I guess, person, learner, I think that's a big part of my, like, understanding of the world learning.

Although none of us attend church services consistently, we are intentional about the churches and congregations we fellowship with. Finding a church community that is Black, affirming, and inclusive is a source of tension and has led to disappointment. For Assata in particular, past Black church experiences have been rife with homophobia and sexism:

> When I came out, my dad came out, and learning how the church treated my mom really left me angry. They kind of put it on her to fix the family or keep the family together… I was offended and upset about the fake-ass leadership, like, for a church that I found so much joy in growing up as a child; it was like a world that was smashed from underneath me…it was interesting, like holding, like, anger at religion as this like organization or institutional establishment.

Assata and Alice connected healing to community and shared their experience with finding a Black and queer affirming church with a queer pastor. In addition to the Bible, that particular church engaged in "bell hooks, Black feminism, Black and queer theory," which created an environment that was expansive and lacked the confines many Black queer womxn experiences within religious environments.

Red Flags Come in all Denominations

Unsurprisingly, as two authors who have attended and worked at multiple types of RAIs, the type of institution greatly impacted our experiences. For example, those at more "liberal" institutions, such as Jesuit institutions, have more freedom to question spiritual practices, form authentic relationships with clergy, and discuss topics that benefit the LGBTQIA+ community. Zora referred to Jesuits as the "social justice nerds" of Catholicism as they strive to make changes for their community. Even with numerous "green flags," Zora noted a red flag that troubled her when Planned Parenthood was removed from campus resource lists as universities worked to realign themselves with the Catholic Church surrounding contraceptives and abortion.

However, those at more "conservative" RAIs experienced overt attacks on queer identities. Toni shared her initial experiences at a Catholic institution and two major red flags that were a precursor to her experience:

> One of the things they told me that I should have seen as a red flag, but I didn't, was that they said that we're Catholic with a small c. But in reality, they're Catholic. They should have said they're Catholic in all caps. Religious harm is real, and I haven't really reflected on the fact that being in Catholic learning environments had been pretty harmful to me growing up. A lot that happens is pretty triggering, especially dealing with queer students and trans students, it's been pretty rough. There's a ton of homophobia. I forgot about the misogyny; that's part of Catholicism. The anti-Blackness is staggering. This is probably the hardest institution I've worked out.

Regardless of the type of institution, however, all of us still experienced the intersections of racism, sexism, and heteronormativity. The labels of "liberal" or "conservative" do not save us from microaggressions, emotional labor, or the loneliness of being one of a few Black queer womxn at our institutions. They also do not hide policies that go against our Black feminist beliefs. As Alice said:

> There were moments of, like, pause, you know, so for instance, the one that I can think of, right way, I think, like around condoms, right? Like, we can't give out condoms. I forgot how the conversation went about or you know what we're talking about, but we can't give our comments because it's a Catholic institution. So that was like, okay, you know, like, you know, we're over here just acting like these students are abstaining from sex, and maybe some are. But you know what I'm saying. That was a bit frustrating.

What's Thicker? The Blood, The Water, or Both

During the Sista Circle session, we discussed our family upbringing and spirituality more than our experiences at RAIs. This discussion reveals an obvious conclusion that our families' have significant impacts on our formative and current experiences with religion. For some of us, this includes family members who are still

wrestling with the churches' judgment around LGBTQIA+ communities. Assata reflected on her past experiences with church and her current relationship with spirituality and her family.

> I grew up in church. My dad was a deacon. Actually, this is how I really tell it: I literally was in the womb, going to choir rehearsals. So, like singing is a huge part of my spiritual practice. …there's the joy part of [that] life, that spiritual formation. I grew up in a very Black church. But, like, I always heard that message of, like, if you're gay, you're going to hell, and some of my memories and growing up, like, I was policed in that way.

However, the shorter discussion around RAIs at the Sista Circle also speaks to a different need. Because many of us do not see Black queer womxn in our work, we spent most of the time getting to know each other and affirming our stories. This does not diminish our research questions; rather, it shows the immediate need for Black queer community discussions, especially Black queer community discussions around religious trauma and religious agency. Most of us created our chosen family, composed of other Black queer womxn or LGBTQIA+ folks of color, because of the higher education field. As Octavia said:

> I don't think I really realized that my chosen family came from LGBTQIA+ culture. But now reflecting back on it, it was a lot of, like, folks, either my age or a little bit older in higher education that would say like, 'I don't want to go home because I'm the only one that stood up at the table and said, racism is bad." …I didn't realize that there was a group of us. And now, I'm, like, registering that we all started coming out at the same time. And then we were all that we had.

All three themes allowed us to not only discuss our experiences as Black queer womxn at RAIs but allowed us to authentically discuss religious trauma and reflect on how we perceive spirituality. We created a healing circle in our Sista Circle group and could affirm and lean on each other when discussing the joys and harm of religion and spirituality in our lives. We also constructed a collective meaning of what "spirituality" may look like for Black queer womxn as a whole. In the discussion and implication sections, we discuss further why these healing spaces and self-definition are vital for our well-being.

DISCUSSION

All six collaborators mentioned some level of religious trauma in their lives, especially as we reflected on church environments that were dedicated to homophobia and transphobia (Stone, 2013; Winell, 2011). Our experiences mirror Macnaughton's (2024) claim that LGBTQIA+ individuals experience a higher rate of religious trauma, particularly because of many churches' commitments to anti-queer and trans sentiments. For us, it was helpful to invoke intersectional and Black queer feminism

as a way to reflect on our unique experiences with homophobia, racism, and sexism at RAIs in the church (Collins, 1990; Sullivan; 2019).

Our levels of current religious trauma varied depending on the denomination type of our RAIs. Toni's Catholic institution and Audre and Octavia's evangelical Christian institution consistently bring up older religious trauma wounds because of the schools' conservative views on queer and trans communities. Alice's, Zora's, and Assata's more liberal Methodist and Jesuit Catholic institutions allowed them to better support queer and trans communities and themselves. However, all of us experienced constant racism, sexism, and homophobia at our RAIs—regardless of how denominations publicly discussed LGBTQIA+ community members, we were still Black womxn, at the end of the day (Montgmery, 2019).

As Johnson (2018), Pruitt (2022), and Simpson (2022) discussed, all collaborators were able to self-define spirituality and engage in various ways of worship that felt comfortable for us. Although none of us explicitly engaged in the creative arts and dance movements suggested by Pruitt (2022) and Simpson (2022), all of us are currently engaged in multiple ways of worship, including tarot cards, ancestor veneration, nature walks, and connection to self. These acts of self-definitions allowed us to reclaim spirituality into a practice that included our full selves and begin the healing process from religious trauma.

Finally, it was impactful for all of us to gather together in a Sista Circle space and collectively listen to each other, center joy and laughter, and start the process of building community with other Black queer womxn (Dantzler and Taiwo, 2024). In this space, we engaged in the methodology of surrender and co-constructed meaning around our experiences and created collective strategies for healing from religious trauma, racism, sexism, and homophobia (Dillard, 2006). More broadly, we were able to build stronger connections with other Black queer womxn, which is often rare for us. Although we cannot pinpoint the exact percentage of Black queer womxn that work in RAIs, time commitments and distance keep us away from each other. Additionally, there are very few spaces for Black queer womxn to process their experiences in higher education and church settings. As authors who were the only two visible Black queer womxn in our Higher Education program, it was wonderful to witness a Zoom room of Black queer womxn dedicated to the group's collective healing from religious trauma.

Implications

In multiple higher education research articles, it is customary for authors to offer implications that benefit higher education institutions. In this case, we would use this section to offer one or two solutions for RAIs to better support Black queer womxn. However, we want to pause and remember Morrison's (1975) words:

> The function, the very serious function of racism, is distraction. It keeps you from doing your work. It keeps you explaining, over and over again, your reason for being…None of this is necessary. There will always be one more thing.

We, as authors, higher education practitioners and students, and Black queer womxn, have spent our lifetimes explaining racism, sexism, and homophobia to higher education leaders and institutions that refuse to see our humanity. Instead of wasting more breath convincing RAIs to do right by us and digging deeper into our religious trauma, we are more interested in discussing the unique nature of Black queer womxn spirituality. Just as Pruitt (2022) named the reimaging of a queer God, we get to discover a way that our spirituality is Black, queer, and womxn, and that is a tool that can heal us from religious trauma. The findings in the individual and collective narratives lead us to imagine what an inherently Black, queer, and womxn-centered spiritual practice could look like:

- A Black, queer, and womxn-centered spiritual practice is a full embodiment of the spirit with our values. Although we may be at institutions that see us as unequal, we must maintain agency over how we define spirituality. Audre is currently wrestling with this ("I'm working on not believing, like, if you aren't Christian, you're going to be dragged to the depths of wherever"), but she also discussed how she is learning how to blend Christianity and her indigenous spirituality, particularly through prayer and daily check-ins with her ancestors. This practice got her through her dissertation phase at a particularly conservative RAI.

- A Black, queer, and womxn-centered spiritual practice is a refusal to exist in this world alone. As Assata stated, she leans on her chosen family, a group of other Black queer womxn across the United States so she "never felt like underresourced, or like that [she] had to overcompensate or shrink [her]self." Part of chosen family and community for Black queer womxn can also include other Black women, queer or not, who are accomplices at RAIs and who affirm our identity. Octavia shared that she feels more connected to her faith because of a colleague who is strongly grounded in her faith and active in her church community. "During a critical time in my spirituality, a Black woman who walks by faith, who I watch her morals and actions consistently align treated me with such care. I didn't realize how far I felt from church and God until we started having more in-depth conversations. I don't think she even realizes the impact she's had. Like for real, she got me to pray out loud again. She's forever the homie! She reminded me that there was nothing wrong with me, who I loved, and the family I was building. Her mentorship, friendship, and camaraderie have brought me to grateful tears because it's brought me closer to God and I am forever grateful for Black women who show up and are still."

Additionally, we wonder what an institution that centers Black queer womxn could even look like, especially in this global landscape of anti-Black, sexist, homophobia, and transphobic policies. As Toni said, "Religious institutions are too flawed to provide a utopian space at all. For me, an inclusive, religiously affiliated campus would have to be something away from traditional religious institutions. Alice also affirmed this and mentioned that it would be great to have a queer Black-

only or centered university space "in which people are able to learn about different spiritualities and religions and be able to wrestle with and question and experiment with." We joked that it would be a "magical, magical place, like a queer HBCU." While a full university is a grand dream, we encourage Black queer womxn to start these information conversations with other higher education staff, faculty, and students who are tired of the same oppressive conversations at RAIs. We are open, in fact, to hosting these conversations with any Black queer womxn reading this article.

In reflecting on Black queer womxn spirituality as a concept of healing from religious trauma, we are excited for this research to expand further, both from us as a writing duo and from other Black queer researchers. We recognize that most of our collaborators are Millennials (between the birth years of 1988-1996), and we know that a range of Black queer womxn from different generations might tell a complete story about our experiences. Additionally, we are curious to know the experiences of Black queer womxn who work at or attend non-Christian denomination RAIs, as well as the experiences of Black queer womxn who currently live in various regions in the United States.

CONCLUSION

When Black queer womxn gather
we rest, we imagine, we create.
We are love.
We learn and unlearn.
We rage and we soothe.
We heal and we are healed.
We marvel in one another's curls, smiles, joy, and aliveness.
We love and we are loved.
From this we learn, we all we got!
-Octavia

We intentionally adopted an intersectional and Black queer feminist approach to answer our research questions "What are the experiences of Black queer womxn or gender-expansive adults* that study or work in religiously-affiliated colleges and universities?" and "How do Black queer womxn begin to heal from the racism, sexism, and homophobia present at RAIs?". In utilizing the methodology of surrender, individual interviews, and Sista Circle methodology, we were able to have joyful, transformative, and healing conversations with other Black queer womxn. The poem written above by Octavia describes our experiences with this process perfectly, especially since this article, for us as researchers, is our contribution to our individual healing journeys.

Initially, this topic was borne out of rage after experiencing mistreatment by our university's administration. As we traveled and grew our shared community, we understood that other Black queer womxn were having similar experiences and felt isolated and alone. As we gathered, we also heard stories of joy, healing, rest, trauma exploration, and feeling whole again. The answer to our research questions land on a

wide spectrum, but the lifeline has remained the same: healing comes from community. We hope that other Black queer womxn find communities and are emboldened and equipped to remake, reencounter, and rejoice in the fact that our identities and ways of embodying spirituality are not only valid, but they are divine.

REFERENCES

Bailey, M., & Miller, S. J. (2015). When margins become centered: Black queer women in front and outside of the classroom. *Feminist Formations, 27*(3), 168–188. https://muse.jhu.edu/article/607298

Benjamin, R. (2024). *Imagination: A manifesto* (First edition.). W.W. Norton & Company.

Boston College (n.d.). Religion & the academy: A brief history exploring the Jesuit and Catholic dimensions of the university's mission. Boston College—Office of Mission and Ministry. https://www.bc.edu/content/dam/files/offices/mission/pdf/PDFLinks/Religion%20the%20Academy.pdf

Carruthers, Charlene. *Unapologetic: A Black, Queer and Feminist Mandate for Radical Movements*. Beacon Press, 2018.

Coffy, D. (2023). Decision-Making And Christianity: Black Queer Women's Mental Health. *Honors Undergraduate Theses. 1339*, 1-56. https://stars.library.ucf.edu/honorstheses/1339

Collins, P. H. (1990). Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment. Routledge.

Collins, P. H. (2000). Gender, Black feminism, and Black political economy. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 568*(1), 41–53. https://doi.org/10.1177/000271620056800105

Combahee River Collective. (1977). The Combahee River Collective Statement. BlackPast. https://www. blackpast.org/african-american-history/combahee-river-collective-statement-1977/

College Pulse (2021). *The LGBTQ+ student divide: The state of sexual and gender minority students at taxpayer-funded Christian colleges*. Religious Exemption Accountability Project (REAP). https://reports.collegepulse.com/lgtbq-student-divide

Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A Black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics. *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 139–167.

Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review, 43*(6), 1241–1299. https://doi.org/10.2307/1229039

Dantzler J. D. & Taiwo, T. (2024). IYKYK: Black Queer womxn's experiences at religiously affiliated institutions. In A. Herridge & K. Prieto (Eds.) *Perspectives on transforming higher education and the LGBTQIA student experience* (pp. 187-204). IGI Global. https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-6684-9914-6.ch010

Dean, T. (2020). Don't forget about us: James Baldwin, the Black church, and Black queer identity. *Palimpsest: A Journal on Women, Gender, and the Black International, 9*(2), 19-25. https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/pal.2020.0019.

Dillard, C. B. (2006). *On spiritual strivings: Transforming an African American woman's academic life*. State University of New York Press.

Egbuonu, O. (Director). (2020). *Invisible portraits.* [Film]. OWN.

Goldenziel, J. I. (2005). Administratively Quirky, Constitutionally Murky: The Bush Faith-Based Initiative. *NYU Journal of Legislation and Public Policy, 8*, 359-388. http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:29429748

Greene-Hayes, A. (2019). "Queering" African American religious history. *Religion Compass, 13*(7), 1-17. https://doi.org/10.1111/rec3.12319

Harris, C. J., & Patton, L. D. (2019). Un/doing intersectionality through higher education research. *The Journal of Higher Education, 90*(3), 347-372. https://doi.org/10.1080/00221546.2018.1536936

Haynes, C., Joseph N. M., Patton, L. D., Stewart, S. Allen, E. L. (2020). Toward an understanding of intersectionality methodology: A 30-year literature synthesis of Black Women's experiences in higher education. *Review of Educational Research, 90*(6), 751-787. https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654320946822

French, B. H., Lewis, J. A., Mosley, D. V., Adames, H. Y., Chavez-Dueñas, N. Y., Chen, G. A., & Neville, H. A. (2020). Toward a Psychological Framework of Radical Healing in Communities of Color. *The Counseling Psychologist*, *48*(1), 14–46. https://doi.org/10.1177/0011000019843506

Johnson, E. P. (2018). Black. Queer. Southern. Women. An oral history. University of North Carolina Press.

Johnson, L. S. (2015). *Using Sista Circles to examine the professional experience of contemporary Black women teachers in schools: A collective story about school culture and support* [Doctoral dissertation]. University of Georgia.

Macnaughton, S. (2024). Religious trauma still haunts millions of LGBTQ Americans. *NBC News*. https://www.nbcnews.com/nbc-out/out-health-and-wellness/millions-lgbtq-americans-religious-trauma-psychiatrists-want-help-rcna135728

Marshall, D., Murphy, K. P., & Tortorici, Z. (2015). Queering archives: Intimate tracings. *Radical History Review, 2015*(122), 1– 10. https://doi.org/10.1215/01636545-2849486

Mohamed, B., Cox, K., Diamant, J., & Gecewicz, C. (2021). *Faith among Black Americans: Gender, sexuality, and religion*. Pew Research Center, Washington, D.C. (February 16, 2021) https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2021/02/16/gender-sexuality-and-religion/

Montgmery, Z. (2019). Here's the Tea: The Challenges Faced by African American Female Faculty in Predominantly White Christian Institutions. Retrieved from https://scholarworks.harding.edu/mcnair-research/6

Morrison, D. (2021, September 30). *What is religious trauma (in Black churches)?* [Video]. Instagram.https://www.instagram.com/p/CUdzq1-gFb7/?utm_source=ig_embed&ig_rid=0f7aff30-7e57-46aa-9119-f7df26b4cd81

Nash, J. C. (2019). Black feminism reimagined: After intersectionality. Duke University Press. Morrison, T. (1975, May 30). *A Humanistic View*. [Speech audio recording]. Portland State, "Black Studies Center Public Dialogue, Part Two. https://soundcloud.com/portland-state-library/portland-state-black-studies-1?fbclid=IwAR1eh1xHKqm3zvG9Y4NMAMvWkFTle4-4uFhY4dahEFJQUrA2wCwjLVtwBNc"

Nash, J. (2019). *Black feminism reimaged.* Duke University Press.

Njoroge, S. (2024, March 28). Celebrating Black queer women: Amplifying voices and legacies in LGTBQ+ history. *GLAAD.* https://glaad.org/celebrating-black-queer-women-amplifying-voices-and-legacies-in-lgtbq-history/

Patel, T. (2016). *Decolonizing educational research: From ownership to answerability.* Routledge.

Porta, C. M., Gower, A. L., Mehus, C. J., Yu, X., Saewyc, E. M., & Eisenberg, M. E. (2017). "Kicked out": LGBTQ youths' bathroom experiences and preferences. *Journal of Adolescence, 56*(1), 107–112. https://doi:10.1016/j.adolescence.2017.02.005 PMID:28212504

Pruitt, B. (2022). Spirituality & wellness in the Black LGBTQIA+ experience: A literature review. *Expressive Therapies Capstone Theses, 620*, 1-32. https://digitalcommons.lesley.edu/expressive_theses/620

Religious Trauma Institute (2022). *A trauma-informed approach to religious trauma*. Religious Trauma Institute. https://www.religioustraumainstitute.com/#:~:text=Religious

Robinson, Z. (2014). What is a "religious institution?" *Boston College Law Review, 55*(1), 181-234.

Rosenkrantz, D. E., Rostosky, S. S., Riggle, E. D. B., & Cook, J. R. (2016). The positive aspects of intersecting religious/spiritual and LGBTQ identities. *Spirituality in Clinical Practice, 3*(2), 127–138. https://doi.org/10.1037/scp0000095

Russell, S. T., & Fish, J. N. (2016). Mental health in lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) youth. *Annual Review of Clinical Psychology, 12*(1), 465–487. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-clinpsy-021815-093153 PMID:26772206

Simpson, R (2022). The queer God. *Expressive Therapies Capstone Theses, 607*, 1-37.https://digitalcommons.lesley.edu/expressive_theses/607

Slater, I. (2019). *Finding a way forward: Predictors of thriving for LGBTQ+ students in U.S. Christian colleges and universities* (Publication No. 22585432) [Doctoral dissertation, Azusa Pacific University]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

Stone, A. M. (2013). Thou shalt not: Treating religious trauma and spiritual harm with combined therapy. *Eastern Group Psychotherapy Society, 37*(4), 323-337. https://doi.org/10.13186/group.37.4.0323

Sullivan, M. J. (2019, May 31). *Black queer feminism*. Oxford African American Studies Center. https://doi.org/10.1093/acref/9780195301731.013.78530

Toliver, S. R. (2022). *Recovering black storytelling in qualitative research: Endarkened storywork*. Routledge.

Tuck, E. (2009). Suspending damage: A letter to communities. *Harvard Educational Review, 79*(3), 409-427. https://pages.ucsd.edu/~rfrank/class_web/ES-114A/Week%204/TuckHEdR79-3.pdf

Victoria State Government. (2021). *Education and training: Homophobic behaviour.* Victoria State Government. https://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/bullystoppers/Pages/adviceh omophobia.aspx

Waling, A., & Roffee, J. A. (2018). Supporting LGBTIQ+students in higher education in Australia: Diversity, inclusion and visibility. *Health Education Journal, 77*(6), 667–679. https://doi.org/10.1177/0017896918762233

Wilder, C. S. (2013). Ebony & ivy: Race, *slavery, and the troubled history of America's universities.* Bloomsbury Press.

Winell, M. (2011) Religious trauma syndrome. *Cognitive Behavioural Therapy Today, 3*9(2), 6-18. https://www.journeyfree.org/religious-trauma-syndrome-articles/

TOLU TAIWO, Ph.D. (she/they) is the current Associate Director of Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Campus Climate at Clover Park Technical College in Washington state. They recently graduated with a doctorate in the Higher Education program at Azusa Pacific University, and their dissertation was on Black womxn educators' activism practices and the decolonization of institutional spaces in South Africa. As a Black queer feminist scholar, Tolu's research interests include Black women and Black queer experiences with campus and community organizing, Black student experiences at dominantly white colleges, and liberation pedagogy.

JAZMIN "JD" DANTZLER (she/her) serves as the Coordinator for Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI) and Black Scholars in Residence (BSR) in University Housing Services at California State Polytechnic University, Pomona. She is a doctoral student in the Higher Education program at Azusa Pacific University (APU). As a Black queer womanist scholar, JD's research interests include Black queer women's experiences at religiously-affiliated institutions and Black women's experiences with anti-Blackness and technology during the COVID-19 pandemic. JD is passionate about the liberation and freedom of Black people and nurturing Black college students.