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"Wa Ya See?": An Autoethnographic Exploration of The Nuanced Experiences of a Black, Quare, Afro-Caribbean, Asylum Seeker in the United States Higher Education.

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By

Travis Chavez Alfred Richards

A dissertation presented to the Faculty of the School of Education,
Loyola Marymount University,
in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree
Doctor of Education
2024

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07/02/2024

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DEDICATION

I am currently feeling the weight of the world. I feel the pressure to excel beyond human-like exterior. I have severed ties to people who truly showed up for me. I am sorry; however, your departure was a lesson. Traditionally, for an acknowledgment section within a dissertation, you praise the people who stood beside you; however, I want to acknowledge the people who left. Their departure was a blessing that I had to learn to grow up in ways I couldn't fathom. I acknowledge the growth I had to endure over the past decade. I embrace the periods where I felt broken and disarray. I stand firm in knowing that there are some strong people behind me, and that they themselves serves as a staple in my life for purposefully growing into self-awareness and prosperity.

Who I really want to acknowledge is the young island boy, sitting on the bus listening to Jasmine Nicole Mans (2021), dreaming of a day where he can be more than what he's been given. He was not the smartest in the bunch, he tried so hard to make his dream a reality. Walking in the mud, meeting with a business tycoon in Nassau, with hopes that someone will listen to his proposal and plea, I acknowledge that boy. The boy who wanted to cry himself to sleep but would never release the tears that constrained him. No matter which way he turned he was an outsider, waiting for the moment he could find peace.

Today, I find peace in knowing people like me are looking for spaces to be their authentic selves I did this for you! I always wanted someone who I could look up to, until I realized I became the person I needed. As the tears tap my keyboard and I whisper subtle words of complete transparency and radical honesty, I see the need, the frustration, and the desperation to be seen. I needed to be seen. It is my hope that you see yourself in this body of work.

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To the people who loved me since birth, God only knows how much I have missed you over the years. My decisions have separated us; however, I have grown tremendously. The Travi you formerly knew, has grown into a young man capable of anything he sets his mind to. He knows his worth because of you, and he knows how love feels because of you. Thank you for keeping me grounded, even when my education and stubbornness clouded my judgement, you stood beside me. Demarco, Danielle, and Aunty Ella thank you for adopting me.

There are so many beautiful souls who have joined me in this journey called life. For the last decade, I have been hustling, producing, finding ways to do better, become better, striving. What I needed most was to be seen, celebrated, loved, and appreciated. My community gave me that. The best gift I could give them is by paying homage to them through this work. UBUNTU, I am because we [we was originally you] are. My community produced an amazing man. I thank you for showing up for me. It's because of you that, I am here. Thank you.

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"Wa Ya See?":

An Autoethnographic Exploration of the Nuanced Experiences of a

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In the 2022-2023 academic year, nearly one million international students from over 200 countries enrolled in U.S. higher education institutions, marking a 12% increase from the previous year (Martel & Baer, 2022). Despite representing 5.6% of the total U.S. higher education population, asylum-seeking students remained an overlooked demographic, underscoring the challenges faced by marginalized groups within academia (Buchholz, 2023). This research focused on the experience of a Black, Quare, Afro-Caribbean, asylum-seeking doctoral student, employing autoethnographic methods to examine the complex intersections of race, sexuality, and transnational identity. Grounded in Intersectionality Theory (Crenshaw, 1991), Critical Race Theory (Bell, 1995), Quare Theory (Johnson, 2001), Transnational Identity (Esteban-Guitart & Vila, 2015), and Nigrescence (Cross, 1991), the study contextualized the student's experiences and identity development, highlighting a population often neglected in international higher education research.

The study underscored resilience's pivotal role in navigating academia's intricate landscape, particularly regarding visa issues, limited work opportunities, and the intersectionality of identities, exemplified by being a Black, Quare, Afro-Caribbean, asylum seeker. Thematic analysis of data—including photos, journal entries, and artifacts revealed key themes of

Intersectional Identity Struggles in Education, Community and Support Systems, and Internal and External Conflicts. Autoethnography, combined with an intersectional framework, provided a powerful, nuanced approach to exploring these complexities. This research contributed to the discourse on intersectionality in education by amplifying marginalized voices and advocating for systemic transformation. It called for higher education to embrace inclusivity, equity, and empathy, fostering an environment where all individuals could thrive, free from discrimination and marginalization.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

When will they see us? [Unpublished Poem]

Dear White America,
I see what you did there, created this Blackness to taint your shoe.
Caressed your "curiosity" and forget to mention your fear of the unknown.
Utilized your power to dominate the world. Highlight your kindness as a way to
show your empathy.
You did that!

You took culture and forced assimilation. Altered my Blackness to the point of
acculturation.
This is beginning to be the worst, documentation of the truth when they found out,
that they don't see us.
400 years of slavery meant nothing, disrupting the psyche of your Black and
brown babies. Raise them up to become your weapon of choice, taking away
ethics, morals, and agency.
This is a chance to hear us roar dismantling a system that's been around for ages.
Creating policies, merging red tapes, blurring the lines of justice.
 I can't be the only one concerned when they see us.

No sirens, no amber alerts, just detention camps, dolla per bodies,
dehumanization, ingesting all of your fog.
 I guess we deserve that, the world is too big to hold accountability.
Reminding me that freedom comes with a price. A price so steep, that mustered
up trauma.
Is this what you want? I get it now, your CRT, is it for the world.
You want us to fit this finite box, without first seeing your wounds.
Are you finally free?
Are you able to let the world see?
Your taste of power, your lust for fame. Your ego is hurt! If you're
uncomfortable, stay there. It will only take five minutes so beware. you did not
win, you did not steal our joy, our struggle does not define us, our resilience
continues to defy all odds, our history continues to show up. We will take up
space. You will always see us, even when you try to erase. (Richards, 2023a)

I have always expressed my truth in creative ways, and this poem spoke to who I am in a

country where I often felt overlooked. Poetry confronts social structures to engage audiences and

activate poetry's political potential; poetry engages a "political voice" (Orr, 2008, p. 416). As an Afro-Caribbean, Black person in America, I had been forced to assimilate and found ways to cope. On a Thursday afternoon after work, I took the bus home through the usual Los Angeles (L. A.) traffic, using the time to think about how to incorporate my storytelling into my dissertation. Words would start to flow from my mind to my notes, and vivid memories from Nashville would clear the fog of forgetfulness. The creative juices would start flowing on the L.A. metro, and I could not wait to get home to practice this new piece. The one-hour-and-twenty-seven-minute ride was filled with excitement. The rhythm of the bus provided a unique soundtrack, inspiring a poetic melody for my piece, "When Will They See Us" (Richards, 2023a). Poetry like "When Will They See Us" matters because it can waken us to realities that fall into the realm of the political (Parini, 2009). Faulkner (2017) stated that poetry has the power to highlight slippery identity-negotiation processes and present a deeper nuanced perspective of marginalized and stigmatized identities which can then demonstrate embodied experiences and to be social research and autoethnography. The above poem paid homage to a closing chapter in my life, capturing moments from my unique experience as a Black, Quare, Afro-Caribbean asylum seeker in U.S. higher education. Using the method of autoethnography, "When Will They See Us" (Richards, 2023a) explored an experience that began not at the end of my educational journey, but in the fall of 2013.

In fall of 2013, at 21 years of age, I left the Bahamas in hopes of creating a better life for myself in Nashville, Tennessee. This memory specifically feels fresh, like a wound left unattended. The day I left home, I was on the plane crying due to fear, growth, and the unknown. I can recall thinking to myself as the engine revved up and took off into the sky, my family was

right. What I am doing was stupid. In no way, shape, or form I can survive in a foreign country alone. As the tears fell down my cheek I chuckled, smiling through the pain of letting go of something that felt comfortable, felt safe. Though safe it may have been, I found new solace in knowing that my late mother would be proud to see me with my head held high, running after my dreams.

Figure 1

A Picture of My Neighborhood Back in The Bahamas.

Two years before my mother's death in 2010, grammy[1], mummy[2], and I held cookouts in front of my grandmother's front porch. The aroma of my grandmother's cooking would spread across the neighborhood forcing people out of the comfort of their beds on Saturday mornings to get some good food and support my goal of attending college. Our menu consisted of the best of Caribbean food, like baked macaroni and cheese, sheep tongue souse, chicken souse, conch fritters, fried fish, and so much more. My mother and grandmother did the best they could do. I saw the strain it put on a single mother when she saw her son having a dream with a 2.3 Grade

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[1] Grammy- a Bahamian term used for grandmother.
[2] Mummy – a Bahamian term used for mother.

Point Average (GPA) and a leaving certificate[3] from high school to push for something no one was willing to invest in. Family played as if they saw potential while all my mother saw was her child and his dream. I never wanted to be a super student. I have always envisioned myself sitting behind a computer desk, creating graphic design, and getting paid to do what I love. Regardless of where life had positioned me currently, God is intentional, and life's journey is intentional. Getting on that plane in 2013 drastically changed my life not only for the better, but also for how my experiences can serve as an indication that other transnational identities can achieve beyond the racialized systemic cycle.

Invisibility

Invisible: Adjective: Unable to be seen; not visible to the eye (Merriam-Webster, n.d.).

For over a decade, I had battled with the idea of being seen—not for my skin complexion, but for the person I am. As an Afro-Caribbean international student in U.S. higher education landscape, I as well as many other Afro-Caribbean international students can be rendered invisible, which also amplified the unique experiences of a marginalized population with no legal protections ensuring our safety (Louis et al., 2017).

What makes me invisible was the unmet concerns of diverse curriculums and the lack of representation. Assumptions about my cultural background often reduce me to stereotypes, like being referred to the *Shottas*[4] boy franchise (Silvera, 2022). This invisibility was also due to gaps in educational research that fail to incorporate all facets of our identities, forcing us to compartmentalize who we are (Asante et al., 2016). As we progressed in our educational

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[3] Leaving certificate is an acknowledgment of attending the institution, but not graduating.
[4] A movie of about two drug dealers, deported from the United States, travel to Miami Florida and continue their violent ways (Silvera, 2022).

journey, we become more isolated and pay more for that isolation. Adding asylum seeker to my

identity compounded these challenges. Seeking refuge became my beacon for visibility, but also

highlighted the harsh realities of my situation. In the Caribbean, Quare identities are often

marginalized, as exemplified by the "Boom Bye Bye[5]" (Banton, 2001) song, which showed the

reality of such identities can be harmfully treated both physically and mentally (Chunnu, 2020).

Afro-Caribbean International students are a part of 5.6% of the international student population

in higher education. With the stern labeling of transnational identities as "international students,"

newly enrolled individuals face external factors that limit and restrict them. These students are

assigned numerical identifiers, integrated into pre-existing socioeconomic structures, and forced

into categories that do not align with their identities. This experience leaves them feeling that

their cultural backgrounds do not matter (Adida & Robinson, 2023). Navigating higher education

and the immigration system was a grueling process. This dissertation depicted the challenges that

a racially charged system posed for BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color)

international students. Due to these harsh realities, international students with multifaceted

identities, as addressed in this work, tend to struggle to find employment and safe spaces that

embraced all aspects of their identities, including being Black, Quare, Afro-Caribbean, and

asylum seeking. International students are often overlooked and their identities are questioned

daily—not based on culture, but on international students' relevance to the African American

experience (Boafo-Arthur, 2013). Coming from a small island, I never knew I was poor until I

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[5] Buju Banton- Boom Bye Bye song: "Boom bye bye, Inna batty bwoy head
Rude bwoy no promote the nasty man
Dem haffi dead, Boom bye bye
Inna batty bwoy head, Rude bwoy no promote no nasty man
Dem haffi dead (Banton, 2001, Lines 56-63)."

came to America. Growing on the islands, Bahamians tend to live a simple life. Simplicity, and community has been a staple throughout my life. My grammy was a prime example of how she fostered community and created a future for her family. My grammy had a brother who did carpentry and built their house. I also had family members who lived in shanty houses[6], had their own personal wells, and lived comfortably. On the islands, natives would knead dough from scratch, catch, season, and cook their fish. They would then sit on the porch and watch the sun go down while the youth sat at the feet of their grandparents. The simple life I was introduced to as a child overshadowed the reality of being impoverished. Stepping onto American soil placed me within the poverty line. As a result of being within the poverty category, navigating the immigration system became a gruesome experience.

. The normalization of "it is what it is" clouded daily judgment, leading to over-analyzing every situation and preemptively trying to stay ahead, like in a chess match.

The social significance of this work lies in the power of storytelling and representation of a Black, Quare, Afro-Caribbean, asylum seeker adding to the canon of higher education. Research showed that over 30,000 applicants apply for asylum each year (Lozano, 2024). Traditionally, asylum seekers are either in their home countries facing persecution for their sexual identities or in detention camps, living in poor conditions and waiting for their chance to speak their truth and attain refuge. I am privileged to be the first to write from the perspective of a Black, Quare, Afro-Caribbean, asylum-seeking doctoral candidate in U.S. higher education. Due to the dearth of research on Black, Quare, Afro-Caribbean, asylum seekers within education,

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[6] Shanty house—a small, badly built house, usually made from pieces of wood, metal, or cardboard, in which poor people lived in.

this dissertation highlighted the experience of navigating both immigration and higher education. Of the 5.6% of Black international students in higher education, how many are asylum seekers (Buchholz, 2023)? Due to the extreme sensitivity for this marginalized population, there is a scarcity of data. The existence of Black, Afro-Caribbean, Quare, asylum seekers exist, but amongst a crowded room, they cannot be identified. Which also offers a deeper look in the hierarchy of academia. The academic climb within higher education is steep, the numbers grow even smaller for Afro-Caribbean students as they further pursue greater degrees, which then exposed the lack of representation, support, and safety for this marginalized community. Thus, the question arises: What is it like to be a Black, Afro-Caribbean, Quare, asylum seeker in U.S. higher education? Using intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991), I explored experiences of Black, Afro-Caribbean, Quare, asylum seeker in U.S. higher education. By focusing on overlapping identities, this research aimed to understand the unique challenges and experiences faced within the complex system of U.S. higher education.

International students make up 5.6% of the Black student population in higher education (Buchholz, 2023). Being pushed into categories that do not align with our identities leaves us (international students) feeling that our cultural backgrounds don't matter. Navigating higher education and the immigration system was a grueling process. This dissertation diversified academia's demographic reach while challenging a racially charged system posed for BIPOC international students.

Identity Development

Over the past decade I experienced such a peculiar journey, one of which highlights being Afro-Caribbean, Black, Quare, and asylum seeking. Prior to coming to America, I had one

identity, being a Bahamian; however coming to America, my identities have been expanded. Today, I have added Afro-Caribbean, Black, Quare, and asylum seeker to my individual identity. I have chosen Afro-Caribbean due to applications (work/non-work-related) where the identity marker was either Black or African American. Afro-Caribbean is a term used to describe people who are of African descent and are born or live in the Caribbean (Cambridge Dictionary, 2024). My Bahamian identity in America cannot stand on its own at a private, liberal arts higher educational institution in the Western United States. As a result of being a part of a small population, I have used Afro-Caribbean as an umbrella for my Caribbean community, connecting my research to my ancestorial background (Bahamian; Jamaican). In my culture we are the majority, we are Bahamians. Coming to America my Bahamian identity was taken away from me; I was forced to assimilate to an identity established by America: Black. To me, Blackness is another experience, one rich in history, culture, and identity. Though it is beautiful, it is filled with trauma, hurt, and a different cultural experience from my experience. Blackness in America is an extension of who I am; however, Afro-Caribbean embodied the duality of being doubly marginalized.

My journey in America may be peculiar; however it allowed me the opportunity to document my experience through my dissertation. Thus, presenting the opportunity addressed two dualities of existence: being an Afro-Caribbean and being Black in America. Very little research highlighted the experiences of Afro-Caribbean, Black, Quare, Asylum-seeking students in U.S. academic institutions. Thus, this population has rendered me invisible and doubly marginalized due to a lack of understanding of the different identities in the false notion of monolithic Blackness. There is a lack of targeted support (Warren, 2021) for this population,

specifically LGBTQ+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual, and Questioning) people of color (Beemyn, 2019). In addition to the need for the experiences of this demographic to be explored, there continues to be an ongoing issue regarding a gap in scholarship and support as presented by increased numbers of asylum seekers.

Asylum Seeking in Higher Education

For the sake of this research, I am not the stereotypical asylum seeker. I came to America as an F1-visa student and transitioned into asylum-seeking status. While an F1 visa offered some security and safety. There continued to be numerous issues arised that question the level of protection on U.S. college campuses. Students from different countries and regions experience varying degrees of discrimination, as seen with African students at U.S. institutions (George Mwangi et al., 2019).

Articles focused on higher education for international students often highlighted gaps within U.S. higher education. A common issue was the burdensome cost of studying in the United States as a foreign citizen, with higher education institutions increasing tuition without offering significant financial support for international students (Li & Lee, 2017). Coate (2009) mentioned how higher education institutions "treat them [international students] as economically important but academically deficient" (p. 277). Other scholars noted that while promoting integration, many viewpoints placed the responsibility to adjust solely on the newcomer, often discounting the cultural value that international students offer in enriching the host environment (Lee & Rice, 2007).

In this autoethnographic dissertation, I addressed the privilege higher education has given me. This privilege provided a platform to share my narrative and empower voices that contribute

to this research. With asylum-seeker status, the question of safety and security were further diminished as international students advance in their academic journey. The asylum-seeking element introduced an additional layer of systemic racism, amplifying the use of intersectionality to highlight overlapping oppressions that incorporate multiple identities (e.g., Afro-Caribbean and Quare). The nuances of these issues are complex, creating a gap between U.S. higher education and international students. Research on international college students primarily appeared within counseling literature, indicating the psychological challenges they face related to their adjustment.

The reality for asylum seekers in U.S. higher education is that they are often cut off from essential services such as social workers, counselors, health practitioners, and educators. This disconnect arised from various complex barriers. Punitive asylum policies in Western countries, the structure of social services shaped by neoliberal welfare logic, and the unstable status of asylum seekers all hinder meaningful engagement with support systems. As a result, asylum seekers have few opportunities to claim their rights and access the help they deserve (Boccagni & Righard, 2020; Robinson & Masocha, 2017). Asylum seekers are mostly left to fend for themselves, often operating outside formal systems of support. Many of which experienced detention camps and homelessness, among other systemic challenges in societies where immigrants and asylum seekers are racialized and excluded" (Green, 2019; Greer, 2013; Pascual, 2020).

There was scant research from the United States on asylum seekers' access to higher education. A recent analysis by the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (2019), the Institute of International Education (2016), and University

Alliance for Refugees and At-Risk Migrants (UARRM) (Streitwieser et al., 2018) of emerging initiatives in the United States aimed at including refugees in higher education identified (HEI) many gaps in HEI policies and efforts (Popescu et al., 2022). This analysis noted that organized outreach efforts mainly targeted resettled refugees and other refugees with more stable immigration statuses, often excluding or not addressing asylum seekers and their unique challenges. Higher education institutions (HEI's) play various roles in society, from producing knowledge to educating professionals and non-governmental societal actors (Jungblut et al., 2020; Toker, 2019), as well as facilitating the effective integration of immigrants in their host countries (Batalova & Fix, 2019). However, asylum seekers are often excluded from these institutions, highlighting a significant gap in the support and inclusion of this marginalized community.

Since 2020, there have been 30,113 new asylum applicants, of which 12,611 were placed in the "fear found" category in their application, while 16,028 were not (Biden, 2021). Nearly 5,000 asylum applicants' files were closed, leaving 913 pending by the end of the 2021 fiscal year, according to the United States Department of Homeland Security (Biden, 2021). Within the asylum application process, applicants was placed in different categories based on the evidence provided for their claim to seek asylum. It is important to note that valid fear based on United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) policy included religious persecution, rape, murder, or torture. Personally, I joined this pool of asylum-seeking applicants in Spring 2022. The statistics provided by the Biden (2021) Administration showcase their tracking of asylum seekers and how homeland security presents specific arguments deciphering if these individuals' arguments are valid or frivolous (i.e., if evidence is not sufficient).

These numbers were the lowest for asylum applicants compared to 2019, which had 105,300 new receipts (Biden, 2021). Safe spaces for asylum seekers are scarce, but adding another layer of Black, Quare, and international student to the mix for this explorative research brings another layer of complexity. To be an asylum seeker not only brings past and present trauma but also addressed an even more severe issue: the fear of being a part of an LGBTQ+ community in a third-world country. With 82.4 million forcibly displaced persons worldwide at the end of 2020, and with an increasing number of refugees and asylum seekers registered each subsequent year, migration is a dynamic of the modern world that will continue (Grasser, 2022). Furthermore, individuals with diverse sexual orientations, gender identities, or expressions (SOGIE) experience persecution in many countries, encountering safety risks including physical and sexual violence, abuse, and discrimination from institutions. The concealment of identity is a form of protection for those seeking refuge. With such criminalization and hate, displaced individuals with SOGIE are the result of the lack of humanitarian ideology, love, and respect for others, especially when people are seeking refuge as asylum (Yarwood et al., 2022). With the continuous systemic cycle of hate crime, racism, xenophobia, and homophobia running rampant today, history showed the urgency of safety for these marginalized communities.

Educational praxis and immigration policy remain contentious issues for international students, particularly concerning safety, security, and support. The pursuit of migration as a means to escape harsh environments and seek refuge in countries like the United States underscores the gravity of these concerns. Through migration, hope presented itself to an invisible population seeking refuge. It should be noted that migration itself is not a foreign topic. According to the article "Definitions Matter: Migrants, Immigrants, Asylum Seekers, and

Refugees" (Douglas et al., 2019), migration had always been a part of human history and has long been related to livelihoods, cultures, and disasters. Some of the earliest recordings was demonstrated through 10,000-year-old petroglyphs, which depict humans on the move, in Azerbaijan (Douglas et al., 2019). Today, more than 40 million people living in the United States were born in another country, accounting for about one-fifth of the world's migrants (Budiman, 2020), and among those are 60,014 asylum seekers (Center for Disaster Philanthropy, 2023). Asylum seekers' migration to America has been a contentious issue for decades. The reasons for seeking asylum are varied and complex but generally involve fleeing persecution, violence, or other forms of harm in their home countries. The United States has historically been a destination for those seeking refuge and protection, and the number of asylum seekers continues to grow. The process of seeking asylum in the United States can be arduous and lengthy, involving multiple screenings and interviews, as well as a formal court hearing. Asylum seekers must provide evidence of their claim, which may include documentation of past harm, medical records, or witness statements. The burden of proof lied with the asylum seeker, and the process can take months or even years to complete.

Despite the legal protections afforded to asylum seekers, the political climate around immigration in the United States has often been hostile. The Trump administration made strident efforts to restrict immigration and limit access to asylum, implementing policies such as family separation and the "Remain in Mexico" program (American Oversight, 2023). According to Salem (2019), the Remain in Mexico Policy is an outlined procedure under which the U.S. government returns certain asylum seekers to Mexico to wait through the duration of their cases pending in the U.S. immigration court system. Policies like Remain in Mexico are harmful to

vulnerable populations because they force asylum seekers to wait in dangerous, unsafe circumstances, including those in which their lives may be at risk. Others may not have access to proper healthcare services and humanitarian aid, in addition to facing deportation. Asylum seekers are faced with harsh conditions, many of which are directly impacted by policies such as the Remain in Mexico policy.

These anti-immigrant policies have been widely criticized by human rights organizations and immigration advocates, who argued that they violate international law and the basic principles of human dignity. In response, many activists have called for increased awareness and education around the issue of asylum seekers' migration to America and for more compassionate and humane policies that prioritize the safety and well-being of those seeking refuge.

Research Question

This study addressed the research question: "What is it like to be Black, Afro-Caribbean, Quare, and asylum-seeking in higher education (U.S.)?" Utilizing an intersectional framework grounded in Intersectionality Theory (Crenshaw, 1991), Critical Race Theory (Bell, 1995), Quare Theory (Johnson, 2001), Transnational Identity (Esteban-Guitart & Vila, 2015), and Nigrescence (Cross, 1991). This research aimed to uncover the unique challenges and resilience associated with these intersecting identities.

Research Framework

Using a social justice lens, I have utilized five critical theories in social science that are applied to this research, however amongst them all, Intersectionality Theory became the anchor of this project. The first theory was Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991), a conceptual and analytical tool used to understand the complexity of the world and in human experiences (Hill

Collins & Bilge, 2016). The second theory, Critical Race Theory (Bell, 1995) recognized race as a social construct and examines how social structures can be inherently racist. The third theory, Quare Theory (Johnson, 2001), is a theory for gays and lesbians of color that acknowledges different standpoints among LGBTQ+ people of color, conditioned by class and gender. The fourth theory - Nigrescence (Cross, 1991), referred to the re-socializing process of becoming Black. The fifth theory, Transnational identity (Esteban-Guitart & Vila, 2015), described individuals who have cross-cultural living experiences, particularly those who move from their home country to another country. Each theory has been used to create the framework centered on Black, Quare, Afro-Caribbean and asylum seeker. These theories intersect and interact within the context of my individual experiences. Black acknowledged the historical and contemporary experiences of anti-Black racism and discrimination. Quare alluded to the specific challenges and perspectives of being both Black and Queer, including issues related to identity, community, and social justice. Afro-Caribbean considered the cultural, social, and political dimensions of Afro-Caribbean identity, including the impacts of colonization, slavery, and migration. Asylum seeker addressed the experiences of being displaced, wrongful prosecution, and seeking refuge, particularly within the context of asylum-seeking due to factors such as political unrest, violence, or discrimination.

These theories together created the framework (Black, Quare, Afro-Caribbean, Asylum seeker) that allowed me to explore how these intersecting identities shape various aspects of my life, including the limitation to resources, experiences of discrimination, community support, and continuous display of resistance and resilience (Bell, 1995 Crenshaw, 1991; Cross, 1991; Esteban-Guitart & Vila, 2015; Hill Collins & Bilge, 2016; Johnson, 2001).

In this study, autoethnography (Holman Jones et al., 2013) was used as a method to explore my personal journey through U.S. higher education. Highlighting the jarring experiences to educate about the nuances of being an Afro-Caribbean, Black, Quare, asylum seeker in predominantly White spaces intended to fill the gap within academia. I addressed the layers of oppression through the experiences within the asylum process and the barriers put in place to prevent access to resources, opportunities, and adulting fundamentals that aid individuals to be "productive, law-abiding citizens" (Dong & Zeb, 2022). The personal experience broadened the peripheral of this controversial topic and opened a new insight for readers through the use multiple cultural lens.

Limitations

One of the main limitations of this study was its reliance on autoethnography (Holman Jones et al., 2013). While this method provided deep personal insights, it might not offer the broad generalizability that some academic research seeks. Since the study is based on my personal experiences as a Black, Quare, Afro-Caribbean asylum seeker in U.S. higher education, the findings might not apply to all international students or asylum seekers. Additionally, the focus on a specific cultural and academic context may limit the relevance of this research to different educational systems or cultural backgrounds.

Another limitation was the potential bias that comes from my dual role as both the researcher and the subject. My personal involvement may have affected the objectivity of data collection and analysis. The emotional and psychological impact of reliving traumatic experiences may have also influenced the depth and breadth of my narrative.

Delimitation

To maintain a focused and manageable scope, this study was delimited to the experiences of Black, Quare, Afro-Caribbean asylum seekers within U.S. higher education. By narrowing the research to this specific demographic, I provided a detailed and nuanced exploration of the unique challenges and experiences faced by individuals within this group.

The study was also delimited to qualitative research methods, specifically autoethnography (Holman Jones et al., 2013). This approach allowed for a rich, in-depth examination of personal and cultural narratives, which was essential for understanding the complex interplay of identity, education, and asylum seeking. By choosing this methodology, I intentionally focused on subjective, lived experiences rather than attempting to quantify or generalize findings across a broader population.

In terms of temporal scope, the research covered the period from my arrival in the United States. as an F1-visa student to my status as an asylum seeker over the course of seven years. This timeframe allowed for a comprehensive analysis of the progression and evolution of my experiences and identity development within the context of U.S. higher education.

My dissertation was structured across five chapters, each serving a distinct purpose in exploring the experiences and challenges faced by marginalized communities in higher education. Chapter 1 set the stage for the study by addressing the problem statement, conceptual framework, operational definitions, limitations, and the significance of the study.
In Chapter 2, I delve into the existing literature, providing an understanding of the cultural history of Bahamian culture. This chapter includes a rich description of the place of queer communities in the Caribbean and discusses the importance of migration, asylum seekers, and

relevant theories. In Chapter 3, I outline the methodology used in my research, focusing on thematic analysis and intersectionality as the foundational framework. I detail the research design, describing how I collect and analyze data. The process of thematically coding the data to identify common themes is explained step-by-step. I also highlight how intersectionality informs my analysis, ensuring that the overlapping identities and unique experiences are thoroughly examined. Additionally, I mention the tools used during this process, providing a comprehensive overview of my methodological approach. Chapter 4 documented the asylum process and its psychological implications. Following the analysis plan from Chapter 3, it organized the data, transforming it from raw, unorganized, to structured, and polished. It is structured around common themes that emerge from the data. In the final chapter, Chapter 5, I delved into the discussions of my research findings, interpreting them in relation to the research questions and objectives. I connect these results to the existing literature, emphasizing their significance and implications. Additionally, it concludes by offering suggestions for future researchers to expand upon this body of work.

This research illuminated the struggles faced by individuals like me and inspire advocacy, allyship, and meaningful change within higher education and beyond. By centering marginalized voices and blending personal narrative with intersectionality, I strove to create a space for authenticity and inclusivity, fostering a more equitable academic landscape.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

In my quest to deeply understand Afro-Caribbean history and explore the concept of Blackness within U.S. higher education, this study seeks to answer a critical question: "What is it like to be a Black, Afro-Caribbean, Quare, and asylum seeker within U.S. higher education?" This research filled a gap in scholarly discourse, providing a holistic understanding of Afro-Caribbean history and the multifaceted nature of Blackness in academia. It aimed to amplify my voice and experiences as a Black, Afro-Caribbean, Quare, asylum-seeking student, whose story is often overlooked in academic settings.

Martel and Baer (2022) noted that during the 2021-2022 academic year, nearly one million international students from over 200 origins studied at U.S. higher education institutions —a 12% increase from the previous year. However, specific data on asylum-seeking students are scarce. Black, Quare, asylum-seeking students are particularly underrepresented in higher education research. Information on the race, gender, or status of the 30,000+ new asylum applicants (Biden, 2021) was limited or restricted to government use, marginalizing those with limited access to this information.

To shed light on the experiences of being Black, Quare, Afro-Caribbean, and asylum seeking, I adopted an interdisciplinary approach, using Intersectionality Theory (Crenshaw, 1991) as the foundation. This theoretical lens integrated Critical Race Theory (Bell, 1995), Nigrescence theory (Cross, 1991), Transnational Identity theory (Esteban-Guitart & Vila, 2015), and Quare Theory (Johnson, 2001). By synthesizing these frameworks, I provided a clear,

comprehensive analysis of the lived experiences of Black, Afro-Caribbean, Quare, and asylum seeking individuals in U.S. higher education.

My research addressed a significant gap in the literature and contributes to the broader discourse on diversity, equity, and inclusion in educational settings. Through this evocative autoethnography, I amplified the voices and experiences of marginalized populations. This dissertation aspired to foster greater awareness, understanding, and advocacy for the rights and well-being of these communities within the U.S. educational landscape.

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory examined the relationships among race, law, and education to reveal the oppression under which African Americans suffered in U.S. society (Ingram Willis, 2023). Critical Race Theory has six tenets. According to Matthias (2022), the six tenets are as follows: First, race is socially constructed, not biologically natural. The biogenetic notion of race—the idea that the human species is divided into distinct groups based on inherited physical and behavioral differences—was finally refuted by genetic studies in the late 20th century (Sussman, 2014). Second, racism in the United States is normal, not aberrational: it is the ordinary experience of most people of color (Matthias, 2022). Third, "interest convergence" or "material determinism" are legal advances (or setbacks) for people of color that tend to serve the interests of dominant White groups (Matthias, 2022). Fourth, members of minority groups periodically undergo "differential racialization," or the attribution of varying sets of negative stereotypes (Matthias, 2022). Such stereotypes are often reflected in popular culture (e.g., in movies and television) and literature as well as in the news media, and they have even influenced the content of history curricula in public schools. Before the mid-20th century, for example, Black people

were widely conceived and depicted as simpleminded, childlike servants and laborers who were content in their subordination to (and segregation from) whites (Hotchkins & McNaughtan, 2021). Fifth, according to the thesis of "intersectionality" or "anti-essentialism," no individual can be adequately identified by membership in a single group (Matthias, 2022). Sixth, and finally, the "voice of color" thesis holds that people of color are uniquely qualified to speak on behalf of other members of their group (or groups) regarding the forms and effects of racism (Matthias, 2022).

Critical Race Theory served as a potent tool for analyzing the racialized experiences of African Americans and other people of color within the oppressive hierarchies prevalent in the United States (Freeman, 1995). According to Ledesma and Calderon (2015), the application of Critical Race Theory within the realm of education involved a meticulous examination of various educational components, including curriculum design, pedagogical approaches, teaching and learning methodologies, broader institutional structures, policy formulation, and community engagement strategies, thereby offering a comprehensive perspective for analyzing and addressing racial disparities within educational systems. However, to a much lesser degree, the theory captured the racial and ethnic nuances of the Black experience; thus, CRT has limitations. Critical Race Theory struggled to fully express Black experiences of racism because it lacks the language to capture how anti-Blackness shapes and positions Black people in society and law (Dumas & Ross, 2016).CRT impacted this research by viewing laws and policies through a U.S.-centric, Black racialized lens, which then limited itself as it pertained to some variety of experiences of Blackness. The laws, which apply specifically to America, bordered its tendencies, which limited how Blackness from an Afro-Caribbean stance showed up in

American culture (Dumas, 2015). The tenet that underscored intersectionality directed the researcher to reject an essential notion of Blackness and recognize the various cultural experiences of people of African descent.

Intersectionality

The term intersectionality was coined by a Black female legal scholar, Dr. Kimberle' Crenshaw, in 1991. Crenshaw created Intersectionality theory to describe various ways in which race and gender interact to shape the multiple dimensions of Black women's employment experiences (Crenshaw, 1991). Historically, there was a lack of representation of Black women at the forefront of Black movements in the United States. According to African American Civil Rights Network (n.d.) Black movements were essentially led by Black men who prioritized Black men prioritized Black men's issues in pursuit of equity with White men. In addition, simultaneously, women's movements led by White women were racist, prioritizing White women's pursuit of equality with White men (hooks, 1981).

Crenshaw (1991) further explained that, due to the alienation by both Black men and White women in major progressive movements, Black women developed their own ways of conceptualizing social identity structures—not as independent axes of demographic classification but as interlocking matrices of privilege and oppression. Crenshaw's construct of intersectionality served as an ideal theory for this research. It brings social identity to the forefront and finds ways in which the social construction of identities along the axis of race, gender, class, sexuality, and other social identities at unique intersections shape the human experience. Intersectionality recognized that people are shaped by their simultaneous membership of multiple interconnected social categories, a recognition of inequality of power,

and structural inequalities that address the disadvantages and privileges of marginalized populations that intersect with class, race, and gender. Intersectionality Theory was indispensable for analyzing the experiences of marginalized populations and addressing the complex interplay of various systems of oppression, such as racism, sexism, homophobia, and xenophobia (Hill Collins & Bilge, 2016; Few-Demo, 2014). In this dissertation, Intersectionality Theory was employed to examine the intersecting oppressions faced by individuals holding identities as Quare, Black, Afro-Caribbean, Asylum seeker, and doctoral candidates. This analysis extended to educational praxis, which reveals deficiencies in curriculum development and the lack of diversity within educational frameworks. This framework was crucial in understanding how power dynamics and structural inequalities impacted the lived experiences of marginalized individuals. Intersectionality reveals the complexities of multiple intersecting identities and the resultant overlapping systems of oppression that influence my life as an Afro-Caribbean, Black, Quare asylum seeker in higher education in the United States. The education settings are rooted in critical discourse (Watson-Vandiver & Harris, 2020). Abusing power, projecting dominance, and continuing inequality at the hands of marginalized populations. This discourse can provide insight into how the United States is structured by race and racism (Watson-Vandiver & Harris, 2020). Apart from using intersectionality, it brings about a critical conversation about how it is applied within education. Intersectionality assisted educational scholars in being intentional and thorough with their research and being mindful to include any explanation about overlapping systems of oppression, psychological, social, or otherwise (Harris & Leonardo, 2018). Powers and Duffy (2015) stated that intersectionality offers an intersectional educational analysis that maintains validity. Consequently, inspiring Afro-Caribbean researchers to work hard to avoid

siphoning off the "race problem" to forge a single-axis explanation, intersectionality enjoys engagement as a way to explain how racism and sexism and others as co-systems constitute systems of subordination and reinforce each other (Carbado et al., 2013). In this research, intersectionality was used due to the variation of Blackness. Blackness is a mythical category that schools fill with nationality, race, class, language, and gender, but a site of their simultaneity (Watson-Vandiver & Harris, 2020).

Critical Race Theory (CRT) (Bell, 1995) served as an analytical tool that addressed the systemic nature of racial inequalities in institutions, including higher education. CRT elucidates the racial biases evident in the legal system, as seen in cases like *B.S.L. v Garland* (2022), where a Black LGBTQ+ asylum seeker's plea was denied despite clear evidence of persecution. Additionally, Quare Theory extended the analysis of intersectionality by focused on the specific experiences of Black and Brown LGBTQ+ individuals, critiquing the heteronormativity and respectability politics that often silence or marginalize these identities within broader discourses on race and sexuality (Johnson, 2001).

Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991) lent itself particularly well to autoethnography as a research method, allowing me to use self-reflection to explore my personal experiences and connect them to wider cultural, political, and social meanings. This inherently intersectional approach allowed the researcher to critically examine how multiple identities interact and shape experiences within larger systemic structures (Ellis, 2023). By using autoethnography, I was able to vividly illustrate how my intersecting identities impact my experiences in higher education, bringing to life the abstract concepts of intersectionality. This method provided the depth needed to explore the nuanced ways in which different aspects of my identity interact with each other

and with societal structures. Furthermore, both intersectionality and autoethnography have strong

ties to advocacy and social justice, raising awareness about the unique challenges faced by

marginalized individuals and potentially inspiring social change. Through this method, the

personal became political, and individual stories became powerful tools for advocacy and

systemic change (Boylorn & Orbe, 2013).

Transnational Identity Theory

Transnational identity describes people with cross-cultural living experiences between

the home and host countries (Esteban-Guitart & Vila, 2015). A transnational status is typically

associated with education, with international students pursuing professional training and

academic degrees outside their original birth or citizenship context. Four distinct features

characterize the foundational concepts for transnational identity: intercultural competence,

reconstruction of locality, diaspora consciousness, and mixed senses of belonging (Jin & Wang,

2022). Intercultural competence refers to language, cultural knowledge, and awareness that one

possesses, which helps to bridge the gap interculturally; reconstruction of locality refers to the

recreation of social spaces transnationally (Tedeschi et al., 2020). Furthermore, the concept of

diaspora consciousness refers to "a broader and critical reflection toward the US and Others" (Jin

& Wang, 2022). Lastly, the mixed sense of belonging referred to where an individual would

draw the line between the U.S. and others (Jin & Wang, 2022)

To understand the experiences and identity formation of Black international students –

and specifically Afro-Caribbean students—one must consider the history and role of the United

States and other colonizing countries in creating conditions of oppression. Following the

accidental "discovery" of the United States in 1492 by Christopher Columbus, scholars have

described the relationship between the history of slavery and the Caribbean by showing the evolution and the remote mythological and archaeological past which connects itself to the "discovery" of the Bahamas in 1492 by Christopher Columbus (Cohen & Bedini, 1993). Udofia (2013) highlighted Naipaul's (1969) thoughts on how "History is built on creation and achievement, and nothing was created in the West Indies" (p. 39)." Udofia (2013) further agreed with Naipaul's (1969) notion that exemplified how history was formed in the Caribbean. During this discovery came slavery. The enslavement of African peoples was initiated by the king of Spain on September 3, 1501, and began with the transportation of several enslaved African Christians from Spain to the West Indies (Olschki, 1941). The European-driven slave trade followed suit shortly afterward. Under slavery, the humanity of Black people was progressively eroded, especially with the arduous work hours, stringent penalties for absenteeism, and the promulgation of slave codes that gave legal sanction to slavery.

Slavery in the Caribbean was a period when the extraction of human labor resources was the main objective of the enslavement of Black people. The colonizers acknowledged how profitable the cane industry would become once resources from their mainland reached the shores of the island (Johnson, 1989). As a result of such traumatic experiences, Black people within the Caribbean were impacted by cognitive dissonance. Cognitive dissonance is when an individual's attitude and actions do not match up (Fanon, 1952). Dissonance refers to tension experienced when certain cognitions are contradictory or inconsistent with each other (Goldstein & Naglieri, 2011). Author Nakuma (1999) further broke down cognitive dissonance, stating that people have cognitions, thoughts, or knowledge about their beliefs, values, attitudes, and behaviors. This trauma engendered an isolationist outlook and an endemic and crippling sense of

provincialism, all of which are difficult to eradicate from the 21st-century Caribbean mentality. Slavery within the Caribbean not only dehumanized Black Afro-Caribbean people but aided the trauma of ripping cultural existence while taking agency away from people who were essentially free until colonizers positioned themselves to enact slavery. Furthermore, due to the traumas experienced by Caribbean people, there is a consistent need to explore the findings of self.

Education has been a pivotal tool for transnational identities by exploring who they are through experiences and cultural exploration (Esteban-Guitart & Vila, 2015). The experience of navigating U.S. higher education permits transnational identities to have the opportunity to discover who they are. Experiences shaped their reality, although the experience as a transnational identity has been met with some challenges. Afro-Caribbean students must negotiate their Black identities in the United States to make sense of their shifting subject position as Black from their country of origin to the United States (Asante et al., 2016). Blackness is more than skin color; it is a contested terrain of memory, identity, culture, and politics (Asante et al., 2016). Blackness is a space of transnational cultural construction, an ongoing formation with multiple axes/intersections in which historical narratives, local politics, and self-identifications are enunciated and debated (Gilroy, 1993). It was noted that Afro-Caribbean students who have access to U.S. higher education often find themselves in a position of upward mobility while simultaneously being restrained by institutional racism and cultural bias. Thus, the use of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991) as an analytical tool provided a critical assessment of how the shifting and the contextual structural privileges expropriated to Afro-Caribbean students influenced their Black experiences in relation to gender, class, and religion (Campbell, 2017; Howard, 2013; Rogers, 2006). Transnational identities (Esteban-Guitart &

Vila, 2015) would not exist if it were not for the migration process put in place. The migration process adds another layer to the complex duality of Blackness. With such multifaceted nuances, Transnational identities challenge the cultural norm in higher education in the United States and pose a new construct of Blackness in American culture. This wave of Blackness intersects with nationality, gender, and religion. Nationality, gender, and religion are used to shape how Afro-Caribbean students negotiate their African/Black identities (Asante et al., 2016).

Nigrescence Theory

Nigrescence theory explored the Black racial identity development (Cross, 1991). Researcher Christopher Campbell (2017) described Cross's (1991) theory of racial identity development as a way of understanding the process of one's racial identity development across four linear stages of development: (a) pre-encounter, (b) encounter, (c) immersion/emersion, and (d) internalization (Lott, 2016; Spurgeon & Myers, 2008). The first stage is pre-encounter, in which one sees their Blackness as inferior to Whiteness. Race plays an important role in the daily lives of people at this stage because they have developed anti-Black tendencies because of internalized racism (Reid, 2013). The second stage is called the encounter stage, where people no longer see themselves as just as human, unassociated with a racial group (Campbell, 2017). The third stage is immersion/emersion, in which one starts to distance oneself from White culture and ideologies to engage with Black culture and one's Black identity (Reid, 2013; Wade & Rochlen, 2022). The final stage is internalization, which focuses on individuals who have gone through the emersion stage, reaching a stage when one starts to assess or reexamine, through a more balanced and focused lens, the coalescence of the affective and cognitive aspects of Black identity (Campbell, 2017). These stages address the idea that Nigrescence (Cross, 1991) supports

the development of Blackness in America for Afro-Caribbean identities acclimating to American culture.

Since the idea of "race and ethnicity are not zero-sum entities" in Afro-Caribbean cultures, individuals can live a racially fluid indemnity, easily assuming multiple identities depending on the context or social groups they are situated in (Malcolm et al., 2014, p. 596). Campbell (2017) highlighted that there is a rare chance of racism being experienced within Caribbean countries. In the Bahamian community, the majority comprises Black people, while non-Blacks form the minority. Personally, I identify as a Bahamian, Afro-Caribbean, and Black. Growing up, our cultural identity centered around being Bahamian above all else; ethnicity took a backseat. However, within Bahamian culture, colorism is a prevalent issue. There is a clear preference for lighter skin tone, with darker complexion often deemed less desirable. In fact, having a "mango skin" complexion—fair and untouched by the sun—is often idealized. Being part of this minority group comes with its own set of challenges, shaped by the intersections of race, ethnicity, and beauty standards.

In America, I have learned that a strong, positive, Black identity has been associated with higher levels of self-esteem (Allen, 2001), a greater number of friends in school (Datnow & Cooper, 1997), improved interpersonal functioning (Bonvillain & Honora, 2004), and increased life satisfaction (Byrd & Chavous, 2009). Additionally, other factors included reduced levels of depression and anxiety, academic self-efficacy (Shin, 2011), greater optimism about the future (Caldwell et al., 2002), better-coping skills and evidence of resilience, reduced numbers of drunks and alcohol problems and fewer symptoms of extreme psychological distress, such as depression, paranoia, or hallucinations (Carter, 1991). In U.S. education institutions, the

development of the Black identity is spoken of traditionally in a negative light based on racial prejudices. However, Zirkel and Johnson (2016) stated that racial identity development (the Black identity) is linked to improved educational outcomes and higher academic achievement.

In summary, Nigrescence theory (Cross, 1991) was useful for the variation of Blackness within this research. Nigrescence expanded upon the nuances of Blackness in higher education, highlighting the complexities of black identity formation, thus recognizing that individual experiences of race were influenced by multiple intersecting factors. Nigrescence conveys the experiences of an Afro-Caribbean Black student in higher education in the United States. It provided a critical cultural lens that addresses the need and the lack of support these students encounter at a private, liberal arts higher education institution in the Western United States.

Our identities are profoundly influenced by our surroundings, with race, ethnicity, and culture played a pivotal roles in their development. Ethnicity, in particular, referred to identifying a group based on perceived cultural distinctiveness that transforms the group into a "people" (Achiever IAS Academy, 2022). According to Matthias (2022), this distinctiveness was expressed through various facets, including language, music, values, art, literature, family life, religion, rituals, food, naming conventions, public life, and material culture.

Culture refers to the pattern of human activity and the symbolic structures that give these activities significance and importance (LaMorte, 2016). Harris and Leonardo (2018) defined culture as encompassing all the ways of life, including arts, beliefs, and institutions, passed down from generation to generation, such as folklore tales and generational bibles. For individuals with transnational identities, culture is essential to who they are. Transnational identity applied to people who live cross-culturally between their home and host countries (Esteban-Guitart & Vila,

2015). Culture provides a background for understanding how individuals with transnational identities were raised in their home country, shaping their behavior, traditions, and beliefs.

Though terms like race, ethnicity, culture, and transnational identity share commonalities, they also have distinct differences. Race divides people into groups based on physical characteristics and the social meanings attached to these groups (Greer, 2013). Ethnicity described the culture of people in a specific geographic region, including their language, heritage, religion, and customs (Suyemoto et al., 2020). Culture encompasses a group's shared ideas, customs, traditions, beliefs, and practices (Holt, 2023). Transnational identity (Esteban-Guitart & Vila, 2015) specifically refers to individuals transitioning from their home country to a host country and their experiences navigating the new environment. This research explored the variations of Blackness through these four specific terminologies.

According to Morrison and Bryan (2014), Afro-Caribbean students have experienced acculturative stress from the impact of adapting to the new American culture. Acculturative stress was described as "feelings of isolation, anxiety, and depression, identity confusion, difficulty making friends, and behavioral family problems," which manifests in poor psychological well-being (Morrison & Bryan, 2014). Edwards-Joseph and Baker (2014) supported this claim, noting that students often experience various stressors related to academic and social interpersonal adjustment, financial concerns, and language barriers. Researchers (Desmore et al., 2016) found that adjustment and assimilation into America were hindered by experiences with racism, classism, and discrimination. The narratives of Afro-Caribbean students in the study were characterized by both subtle and blatant prejudice and discrimination. Furthermore, assumptions and stereotypes complicated the multifaceted nature of assimilation

into any new culture, and these participants' lived experiences provided evidence of powerful forces still at work in American culture that continue to present barriers to their progress.

A new generation of international students has been referred to as the students of the new global elite (Vandrick, 2011). Researchers noted that these students have often attended international schools, have lived, studied, and vacationed in various places around the world, and have desired the prestige of a U.S. college degree (Brown, 2000; Kim, 2011; Marginson, 2008; Marginson & Sawir, 2005) making them consumers of a global cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Within the realm of higher education, a profound sanctuary is cultivated, fostering an environment where transnational identities are empowered to traverse the intricate landscapes of selfhood, exploring the rich tapestry of their multifaceted existence with vigor and purpose. Higher education is a rite of passage and space of transformation, personally, professionally, and politically, albeit within conditions of privilege and precarity (Berzonsky & Kuk 2000; Mountford 2014).

Higher education, though oppressive for some, cultivates a space of self-discovery. From an Afro-Caribbean perspective, this explorative notion of self is limited, especially in the midst of campus culture and academia (Renn, 2010). The culture that exists in the Afro-Caribbean countries tends to have a traditional value of how life should operate. According to Crawford (2019), since the Caribbean colonial encounter, sexual taboos established by European puritanical values have left an indelible mark on the region in constructing hegemonic notions of gender and sexuality. Differently positioned racialized, sexed, and gendered bodies have been intimately connected, whether through pleasure or violence, within colonial and post-colonial power structures in the region. With colonization's influence on the societal structure within the

Caribbean, the expectation of those who fit outside of the social realm of normal suppresses their identities not only for survival but also for the peace of mind where family members are tainted by public ridicule. However normalizing this may be, some specific minority groups are treated maliciously (Wong et al., 2022). Thus, a unique experience transcending the traditional wavelength of life from a cultural context limits how Black men appear in modern times. The expectation of Black masculinity through the lens of Afro-Caribbean culture became an attack on self, an attack on empathy, and disrupts the idea of inclusivity, which extends its hate crimes and discrimination to Quare communities (Ellis, 2023).

Research on homophobia within communities of color is plentiful and highlights how distressing this form of discrimination is for racial/ethnic minority LGBTQ+ people (Battle & Lemelle, 2002; Constantine-Simms, 2001; Crichlow, 2003; Dalton & Howell, 1989; Griffin, 2000; hooks, 2001; Thomas, 1996; Ward, 2005). Research found that religion, family, and traditional understandings of gender roles may hinder the coming out process of LGBTQ+ youth of color and may lead to negative identity formation (Diaz, 1998; Loiacano, 1989; Martinez & Sullivan, 1998; Savin-Williams, 1996). Scholars argued that homophobia within the Black community is due, in large part, to conservative notions of sexuality, which is often rooted in the history of sexuality-based oppression that Blacks have experienced (Battle & Lemelle, 2002; Hill Collins, 2000; Harris, 2010; hooks, 2001; West, 2001). In addition, this work indicted social and cultural notions of sexuality, masculinity, and femininity (Hill Collins 2000; hooks, 2004; West, 2001), as well as overall gender role issues as being progenitors and perpetrators of homophobia (Battle & Lemelle, 2002; Hill Collins, 2000; Harris, 2010; hooks, 2004). In the article "The Sociopolitical Involvement of Black, Latino, and Asian/Pacific Islander Gay and Bisexual Men,"

Harris et al. (2013) examined how Black LGBTQ+ men are perceived by cisgender population and the non-black LGBTQ+ community. Black gay men have reported experiencing more forms of discrimination within predominantly White LGBTQ+ spaces—bars, clubs, organizations, events—and within interpersonal relationships than Black lesbians (Battle & Lemelle, 2002). Black Quare men should always have a space to be their authentic selves without fitting into a prehistoric narrative that perpetuates self-hate, homophobia, and xenophobia. As stated previously, LGBTQ+ spaces are predominantly White, and for a Black Quare man to exist in these spaces with a stereotype projected onto them results in psychological constraint. This is a prime example of the constant fight for visibility, which continues to be an ongoing theme within this research.

Kristen A. Renn (2010) noted that it can no longer be said that there is a "gap in the literature" on lesbian, gay, and bisexual college student identities. However, there remains a dearth of research on transgender students and LGBTQ+ students of color. As of 2024, it has been more than a decade since Renn's (2010) powerful statement, and since then, there has been a rise of Queer Scholars enriching the Queer canon. Despite this remarkable growth in scholarship, research in higher education has yet to fully embrace queer and trans perspectives, with scholars failing to bridge crucial connections to practice (Duran et al., 2019). Scholars like Johnson (2001) and Ferguson (2003) are lending their theoretical frameworks to queer academic communities, aiming to shift away from the dominant White queer framework. Duran et al. (2020) posed an important question: Is this progress genuine upward mobility or just a fleeting trend? The need persists to actively mobilize these frameworks and elevate the voices and work of Black and Brown LGBTQ+ researchers.

This research included and amplified a Queer voice, specifically focusing on the experiences of Black, Quare, Afro-Caribbean, and Asylum seeker communities. It aimed to educate, inform, and address systemic issues affecting these often-overlooked marginalized populations. There was a need for more empirical research that foregrounds the voices of students of color to deepen our understanding of the impacts of anti-Black and anti-immigrant policy and educational praxis in U.S. higher education. Afro-Caribbean students are forced to assimilate into this monolith of Blackness, which now adds another intersectionality that blocks access to resources, opportunity, and, most importantly, their voices. The Black identity/identification is classified as hybrid, contingent, and relational. Black is a useful term for describing many individuals' historical, political, and affective ties to one another. Yet, we do not attach mystical, transhistorical, or essential biological valence to this term (Allen, 2012). To further expand this Afro-Caribbean experience in America, George Mwangi (2014) stated that Black African international students may be different from the experiences of White international students (Warren & Constantine, 2007). This is in part because, in the United States, African international students are considered racial/ethnic minorities who are exposed to racism, nativism, and other discrimination (Hanassab, 2006). To further expand upon the transnational experience, one must be willing to empathize and find ways to relay the experience of navigating the transnational identity.

Roderic R. Land (1990) argued that Black identity emphasizes differences to challenge the idea that being Black is just a deviation from being White. By doing so, it aims to challenge White dominance in areas like art, money, and law. This challenges the idea of fixed beauty standards and promotes the idea of different perspectives and experiences (Diawara, 1990).

Blackness as a discourse added to the literature what has historically and systematically been omitted. It was an initiative to tackle the problem of perspective. This research argued that traditional fields like literature, psychology, sociology, and religion often fall short in addressing issues faced by African-descended people in America and the Diaspora. This gap led to the creation of Black Studies, which offers the necessary comprehensive approaches and perspectives. Okafor (2014) pointed out that Black Studies filled these gaps with multidisciplinary insights. The rise of Black Studies programs in the 1960s and 1970s, driven by student activism, further highlighted how traditional disciplines have failed to address these important issues (Biondi, 2012; McClure, 2013. In and outside the field of higher education, colleges and universities are considered both a reflection and an engine of racial hierarchy wherein White supremacy is central (Harper et al., 2009). In addition, Harper et al. (2009) called out U.S. higher education institutions that promote anti-Black policymaking, which is used to destabilize linear progress over racial injustices. Though these fields of study are imperative to the construct of Blackness, this educational research served as a foundation for understanding the American immigration system, tethering itself to racism.

Quare Theory

Mainstream Queer Theory often fails to critically interrogate notions of selfhood and agency, especially as experienced by gay and lesbian people of color embedded in racist communities or social contexts. Johnson (2001) is one of many Black scholars who redefine what it means to be Black and Queer within academia. Johnson's Quare Theory addressed the connection between race and queer identity. According to Johnson (2001), Quare studies acknowledge the different conditions by class and gender found among lesbian, bisexual, gay,

and transgender people of color. The exploration of Quare refines queer theory to give complete context to the Black LGBTQ+ student experience in higher education in the United States (Alexander, 2010).

In higher education, LGBTQ+ centers struggle to accommodate Quare students and to be cognizant of campus sites that inflict harm due to racialized violence (Ellis, 2023). The constant controversy surrounding safety raises concerns for Quare students due to the ongoing violence against Black LGBTQ+ students (Bradley, 2020). Queer spaces often erase Quare people, defaulting to whiteness as a baseline for understanding queerness (Ellis, 2023), thus prompting universities to reconsider how they support their Quare students. Quare students tend to create and build their own communities because of the lack of support from university officials, Black Cultural Centers, and LGBTQ+ centers. With robust uniqueness, the Quare community has its own culture, needs, and priorities (Ellis, 2023).

Often, Quare students are included in larger conversations about either Blackness or queerness, but rarely in tandem. This disregard for the experiences of Quare students leads to the secondary marginalization of Black Cultural Centers and LGBTQ+ identity centers (Ellis, 2023). Considering not only Queer Theory (Jagose, 1996) but also race, gender, and class was imperative to gain a comprehensive understanding of the intersection of identities and the uniqueness of the Quare experience. Quare Theory illuminates invisible, oppressed, and marginalized identities, contextualizing how the world views this minority group (Boylorn & Adams, 2016).

The American Dream

The American dream has long served as a powerful magnet, drawing Caribbean individuals towards higher education opportunities in the United States. Over the years, educational institutions have crafted strategic marketing campaigns to attract prospective international students, thereby bolstering America's economic standing. The allure of the "American dream" is often intertwined with the hopes of immigrant communities. It embodied the belief that one's success is determined by one's own efforts and perseverance, transcending barriers like socioeconomic status or race/ethnicity (Mays et al., 2023).

Driven by the prospect of a better life through U.S. higher education, Lorenzi and Batalova (2022) shed light on the 2020-21 academic year, reporting that approximately 11,200 Caribbean students were enrolled in U.S. higher education institutions, comprising around 1% of the total 914,100 international students in the country. Among the top countries of origin for these students were Jamaica (2,700), the Bahamas (2,300), and the Dominican Republic (1,200). The relatively small size of this population, constituting only about 1% of the international student body, is significant because it often leads to these students being overlooked, isolated, or lumped together with larger populations under generalized racial categories such as "Black" (Lorenzi & Batalova, 2022). Research by George Mwangi and Fries-Britt (2015) highlighted that Black immigrant students, including those from the Caribbean, frequently experience a lack of recognition of their unique cultural backgrounds within U.S. higher education, which can contribute to feelings of marginalization and isolation.

Representation and identity are crucial factors in addressing these issues. According to Jones and Abes (2013), supporting the multifaceted identities of students is essential for their

academic and social well-being. This was echoed by Tinto (1993), who emphasized that social and academic integration is vital for the retention and success of minority students. Constantine et al. (2005) also provided evidence that tailored support systems are necessary to help Caribbean students navigate cultural adjustments and foster a sense of belonging. Therefore, recognizing and amplifying the voices of Caribbean students is imperative in bridging the gap within U.S. higher education and ensuring these students are included and thrive academically and socially.

My journey from The Bahamas to the United States, driven by the pursuit of higher education, marked the beginning of my personal narrative—a story familiar to many Afro-Caribbean immigrants. This cultural transition embodies the essence of the American dream, encapsulating the hopes for better opportunities, financial stability, and educational attainment. Before diving into the core framework of my research, it is essential to provide readers with a glimpse into the complex experience of relocating to a new country.

Migration has been a major influence on Caribbean life, tracing back to forced movements during the slave trade and worsening by monumental events like the Haitian Revolution[7] 1971-1804 (Ferguson, 2003). After slavery was abolished, inter-island mobility increased, and America emerged as the top destination due to its economic growth and labor shortages. America became the ideal space for immigrants to thrive. James Ferguson (2003) focused on the push-and-pull factors driving migration. Push factors, like poverty and conflict,

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[7] The Haitian Revolution, spanning from 1791 to 1804, was a significant event in history, leading to the overthrow of French colonial rule and the establishment of Haiti as the first independent Black republic. It was a complex and violent struggle, marked by slave uprisings, battles between colonial powers, and the leadership of figures like Toussaint Louverture and Jean-Jacques Dessalines. The revolution challenged the institution of slavery and colonial domination, inspiring movements for freedom and independence worldwide (Ferguson, 2003).

force people to seek better opportunities elsewhere, while pull factors, such as economic prosperity, draw them to areas promising a brighter future. However, it is crucial to recognize that these opportunities often come with risks, like undocumented status, which can leave migrants vulnerable to exploitation despite the allure of a better life. Also, migration exposes migrants to racism, even within predominantly Black communities, as poverty intersects with racial discrimination. Xenophobic attitudes manifest greatly in policies restricting immigration, perpetuating a cycle of cheap labor, anti-immigrant sentiments, and struggles against racism for those seeking a "better life. "The American Dream" is riddled with external factors that can be identified as oppression. International students are often unaware of this harsh reality until it is too late. International students from the Caribbean must be informed about the cultural climate before entering U.S. higher education institutions. To equip this marginalized population, we must protect them before integrating international students into the cultural climate of both the institution and the host country.

The American Dream Versus the American Nightmare

In the 2022-2023 academic year, international student enrollment in U.S. higher education surged by 14%, reaching 298,523 applicants (Public Affairs, 2023). This growth, which follows an 80% increase from the previous year, indicates a strong recovery and thriving state for U.S. higher education post-pandemic (Public Affairs, 2023). However, the experiences of international students remain complex and multifaceted, often characterized by systemic challenges perpetuated by U.S. immigration policies.

International students bring significant economic benefits to their host countries, yet research often overlooked their financial difficulties. Robertson et al. (2000) and Shah et al.

(2019) highlighted that the primary financial challenge for these students is the high tuition fees. Additionally, the mental health of international students has deteriorated, with many reporting symptoms of low mental health and severe psychological issues (Collishaw et al., 2010; Stallman, 2012; Twenge et al., 2010). Homesickness and loneliness are among the earliest emotional challenges international students encounter (Shah et al., 2019). The psychological implications of being in the U.S. higher education as a transnational identity musters troubling barriers that impact the academic success of these marginalized communities.

Academic challenges are also more pronounced for international students compared to their domestic peers. Grayson (2008) and Deuchar (2022) reported that these challenges, stemming from the academic environment, often reflect in their academic performance. Increased stress levels are particularly notable during the first and second years of their studies in the host country (Iorga et al., 2020; Kristiana et al., 2022). Other common sociocultural challenges include homesickness, loneliness, isolation (Cowley & Hyams-Ssekasi, 2018; Shah et al., 2019), stress (Russell et al., 2009), absence of cultural food (Forbes-Mewett, 2018), social living conditions (Newsome & Cooper, 2016; Sivtceva, 2016), climate and environmental differences (Nieto & Zoller Booth, 2010; Sherry et al., 2010), unequal treatment, and language discrimination (Dovchin, 2020; Lee, 2010). These challenges collectively shape the experience of F1-visa students in U.S. higher education, highlighting the need for a more supportive and inclusive environment for international students.

F-1-Visa Status

According to Andres Meyers (2015), different immigration statuses offer various perspectives on how individuals integrate into American society. U.S. citizens, who constitute

about 86% of the U.S. population as of 2022, are born in the country and cannot be deported

(United States Citizenship and Immigration Services [USCIS], 2022. Those seeking

naturalization[8] must typically be permanent residents for three to five years before applying,

depending on individual circumstances such as marriage to a U.S. citizen (USCIS, 2022). In

Fiscal Year (FY) 2022, approximately 967,400 individuals were naturalized, reflecting the

significant transition of permanent residents to full citizenship (Center for Disaster Philanthropy,

2023). With about 9.2 million lawful permanent residents eligible to naturalize as of 2021

(Baker, 2022), studies showed that naturalized citizens often achieve higher employment rates,

incomes, and civic participation compared to non-citizens, indicating a higher degree of

integration into American society (Hainmueller et al., 2015). Permanent residents, or green card

holders, can work legally, access public benefits, and petition for family members. However,

conditional residents who married less than two years before obtaining a green card must jointly

apply to remove conditions within two years to avoid deportation. Stakes are critical in moments

of status in America.

Immigration status in the United States can be quite complex, with various categories

carrying different legal implications. Non-immigrants, for instance, are those who are here

temporarily for reasons like tourism, education, or work. On the other hand, undocumented

individuals, lacking legal authorization, face immense challenges—they cannot work legally,

access public benefits, and live under constant fear of deportation.

In this research, the researcher navigated between two distinct statuses: asylum seeker

and F1-visa student. Both come with intentional constraints aimed at national security. Asylum

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[8] Naturalization—a non-citizen becomes a citizen of another country.

seekers fleeing persecution seek refuge here (United States), while F1 students like me come for educational pursuits. Despite the differences, we all navigate intricate legal processes and unique challenges tied to our status.

Table 1

Immigration Statuses in The United States

Immigration Status	Description
Citizen	Individuals who are born in the United States, naturalized, or born abroad to U.S. citizen parents (Center for Public Policy Solutions, Immigration and the State Courts Initiative, & State Justice Institute, 2013).
F-1 Visa	The F-1 student visa is a non-immigrant visa that allows international students to enter the US and study at institutions certified by the Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) (U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, 2001) (Center for Public Policy Solutions, Immigration and the State Courts Initiative, & State Justice Institute, 2013).
Law Permanent Resident (LPR)	Also known as Green Card holders, authorized to live and work permanently in the United States (Center for Public Policy Solutions, Immigration and the State Courts Initiative, & State Justice Institute, 2013).
Asylum Seeker	Individuals who are granted protection in the United States due to persecution or fear of persecution in their home country (Center for Public Policy Solutions, Immigration and the State Courts Initiative, & State Justice Institute, 2013).
Refugee	Individuals who are granted protection in the United States due to persecution or fear of persecution in their home country (Center for Public Policy Solutions, Immigration and the State Courts Initiative, & State Justice Institute, 2013).
Temporary Protected Status (TPS)	Individuals from designated countries that are experiencing temporary conditions preventing their safe return (Center for Public Policy Solutions, Immigration and the State Courts Initiative, & State Justice Institute, 2013).
Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA, 2012)	Individuals who were brought to the United States as children and meet certain criteria for temporary relief from deportation (Center for Public Policy Solutions, Immigration and the State Courts Initiative, & State Justice Institute, 2013).
Nonimmigrant Visa Holder	Individuals with temporary visas for specific purposes such as tourism, education, work, or family visits (Center for Public Policy Solutions, Immigration and the State Courts Initiative, & State Justice Institute, 2013).
Undocumented Immigrant	Individuals who are present in the United States Without Legal authorization (Center for Public Policy Solutions, Immigration and the State Courts Initiative, & State Justice Institute, 2013).
Special Immigrant	Individuals with special circumstances, such as certain religious workers, translators for the U.S. military, or victims of trafficking (Center for Public Policy Solutions, Immigration and the State Courts Initiative, & State Justice Institute, 2013).
Victims of Crime	Individuals who have been victims of certain crimes and are assisting law enforcement (Center for Public Policy Solutions, Immigration and the State Courts Initiative, & State Justice Institute, 2013).
Humanitarian Parolee	Individuals granted temporary permission to enter or remain in the United States due to urgent humanitarian reasons or significant public benefit (Center for Public Policy Solutions, Immigration and the State Courts Initiative, & State Justice Institute, 2013).

Identity Development

The Veto of the Afro-Caribbean Students

Education have been pivotal for transnational identities, allowing individuals to explore their identities through cultural experiences. Afro-Caribbean students must negotiate their Black identities in the United States to make sense of their shifting subject positions (Asante et al., 2016). Blackness is more than skin color; it is a contested terrain of memory, identity, culture, and politics (Asante et al., 2016). Blackness is a space of transnational cultural construction, with multiple intersections where historical narratives, local politics, and self-identifications are continuously debated (Gilroy, 1993).

Afro-Caribbean students in U.S. higher education often find themselves in positions of upward mobility while facing institutional racism and cultural bias (Campbell, 2017). These populations can be identified as Transnational identities (Esteban-Guitart & Vila, 2015). Transnational identities challenge cultural norms in U.S. higher education, introducing new constructs of Blackness that encompass nationality, gender, and religion. These factors shape how Afro-Caribbean students negotiate their African/Black identities (Asante et al., 2016).

Asante et al.'s (2016) research shared the story of a Nigerian student, Ajoke, who spoke about being the only Black person in her class and using both terms Black and African to assert her identity. She emphasized that she wanted her classmates to know Africans are not dumb (Asante et al., 2016). This narrative highlights how she navigated her identity by reclaiming negative perceptions and emphasizing her African-ness. Additionally, Asante et al. (2016) noted that Connie from Liberia also discussed the difficulty of identifying as Black in the United States due to the negative perceptions of Blackness. She stressed that while society labels them as

Black, they see themselves as Africans, highlighting the complex negotiation of identity (Asante et al., 2016). The experiences of Afro-Caribbean students in U.S. higher education reveal the unique challenges they face in preserving their cultural identity while navigating a constructed Black identity often equated with African American identity. These students must balance their rich Afro-Caribbean heritage with the predominantly African American cultural framework prevalent in the United States

Afro-Caribbean students bring with them diverse traditions, languages, and histories that differ from those of African Americans. However, upon entering U.S. higher education institutions, they often find themselves assimilating into the broader category of Blackness, reflecting African Americans' experiences and cultural expressions. This assimilation can overshadow their unique cultural backgrounds, creating a sense of invisibility or pressure (Adida & Amanda Lea Robinson, 2023; Rahming, 2019).

The U.S. framework of Blackness often includes historical contexts like the Civil Rights Movement and systemic racism experienced by African Americans, which might not fully encompass the distinct experiences of Afro-Caribbean students, who have their own histories of colonization and migration. Consequently, Afro-Caribbean students must navigate their complex identity, honoring their heritage while adapting to the dominant African American norms and narratives (Waters, 1999).

The balancing act of maintaining their cultural practices while integrating into the African American cultural framework can be both empowering and challenging. It involves embracing the broader Black community in the United States while asserting their unique Afro-Caribbean roots. This process of negotiating identity underscores the dual identity many Afro-

Caribbean students must reconcile in their educational and social environments (James &
Renville, 2012).

Research supported these claims, illustrating that Afro-Caribbean students often face
cultural and linguistic challenges and experience invisibility as they develop new identities in the
U.S. educational context (Louis et al., 2017). They also deal with stress-related acculturative
experiences and the pressure to fit into a homogeneous African American cultural lens
(Rahming, 2019). These dynamics highlight the need for a more nuanced understanding of
Blackness, including the diverse experiences of Afro-Caribbean students in higher education
(Baptiste et al., 1997).

Neo-racism introduces a modern form of discrimination, departing from traditional
notions of biological race to target groups through new categories like immigration (Lee & Rice,
2007). Studies showed that students from Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East
experienced some form of neo-racism (Lee, 2015). This phenomenon reinforces the structures of
dominant groups and offers "an increasing rationale for marginalizing or assimilating groups in a
globalizing world" (p. 389).

In higher education, the identity of Afro-Caribbean students remains vulnerable. They
face ongoing challenges, whether through micro-aggressions, lack of support, or a failure to
grasp the cultural context of classroom discussions. A prime illustration of neo-racism manifests
in the predominant language of U.S. higher education: English. The emphasis on critiquing
perpetuates hurdles for international students who adhere to traditional English language norms.
With its inherent biases, English tends to exclude elements perceived as "foreign," even when
those elements stem from varieties of English used by non-native speakers (Smith, 2022). The

intricate interplay of language, identity, and status creates significant complexities within the U.S. higher education landscape. These overlapping barriers compound the frustrations experienced by international students navigating the educational system.

A significant distinction exists between being Black in America and Black from America. The construct of Blackness is subjective, and shifts based on politics, location, history, and upbringing. Hall (1997) stated that the boundaries of difference and Otherness are always repositioned in relation to global power dynamics, affecting how one experiences Otherness (p. 269-270). This creates a hierarchical difference within the same racial category, impacting how Blackness is negotiated in U.S. higher education. Asante et al. (2016) noted that some African students can negotiate their Blackness due to their relative privileges as students in U.S. colleges. Their ability to self-identify and navigate the U.S. racial hierarchy creates an illusion that their African-ness is outside the U.S. racial discourse, which can undermine anti-racist efforts. Black migrants must join the fight against the dominant cultural constructs of Blackness and the racist structures that continue to oppress people of African descent (Asante et al., 2016).

LGBTQIA+ International Students

It is a privilege to express to the world one's identity, how one identifies, and whom one loves. Generally, Quare identities from the Caribbean are not permitted to the privilege of expressing their sexual identities. Most Quare-identifying students have not come out by the time they enter college, but most self-disclose by age 21, often coming out during their college years (D'Augelli, 1991a, 1991b; Drazenovich, 2015; Noack, 2004). Imagine being in a third-world country where one's sexual identity is problematic and demonized. There is no space for expression of one's authentic self. The only escape is through education. Quare students often

come to campus from homophobic households; thus, disclosing (typically a trustworthy community/tribe) one's sexual identity helps end self-denial and self-punishment (Draughn et al., 2002; Rhoads, 1994). The reality of this marginalized population comes to college campuses needing to heal mentally and to find a level of acceptance of their identity.

The acceptance of the LGBTQ+ population in the Caribbean has created hysteria for years. The prevalence of homophobia and homophobic abuse in Jamaica and other Caribbean islands has been linked to high rates of family disownment, homelessness, and loneliness within local LGBTQ+ communities (Bourne et al., 2012). As a result, many same-sex couples remain in the closet or seek refuge to live authentically. Research on this marginalized population was limited. Beyond Jamaica, there were few published peer-reviewed academic or other research on Caribbean Quare communities, making it difficult to understand the experiences of Quare-identifying individuals outside this Anglophone Island (Kempadoo, 2009; Melles & Nelson, 2010; Sharpe & Pinto, 2006).

In the Bahamas, Green (2010, as cited in Thompson, 2010), a Bahamian activist from the now inactive Rainbow Alliance of the Bahamas (RAB), offered insight into homophobia. Green stated, "Homophobia in these colonial communities is complex, but the starting point could be when American southern Baptist churches started coming in; you started seeing the homophobia" (as cited in Thompson, 2010). Christian fundamentalist discourses are often used as a rationale for discrimination against homosexuals throughout the Caribbean. This is especially true in the Bahamas, even after the decriminalization of same-sex intimacy. For instance, a group known as "Save the Bahamas" formed in early 1998 to protest the arrival of a cruise ship carrying gay passengers (BBC News, 1998). Though a devastating experience for the

Bahamian population, homosexuality is a crucial topic that needs ongoing conversation of support and safety for this marginalized population.

While homosexuality is legal in the Bahamas, gay marriage is banned. There is a semblance of tolerance for Quare-identifying individuals in the Bahamas, but it is fraught with spite. The late Bishop Neil Ellis told his congregation that the Bahamas was plagued by three demons, one of which was the "demon of sexual immorality" (Brown & Johnson, 2009). According to Gaskins, Jr. (2013), Bishop Ellis demonized the Quare community by claiming they were responsible for the rise in HIV/AIDS. Adding to this rhetoric, Jones (2011) stated that "Homosexuality . . . is anti-family, and it goes against what God has ordained." The legalization of same-sex intimacy has not translated into legal protection against the physical and mental discrimination and hate crimes faced by Bahamian Quare individuals (Lucas & Itaborahy, 2011).

Afro-Caribbean Masculinity

Afro-Caribbean masculinity is performative. Scholars Couzens et al. (2017) provided an example of how masculinity in the Caribbean is viewed: young men's performance of masculinity centers on disguising desires and vulnerabilities that contradict expected male behavior by actively engaging in dominant male sexual practices. According to Shefer et al. (2015), young men use sex and getting a woman pregnant to negate any homophobic inquiries.

Homophobia affects a large percentage of the Quare communities in the Bahamas. The intersecting identities of being Bahamian, Quare, and male play a significant role in this research. Each identity intersects and highlights how external factors of oppression impact the physical and mental well-being of this marginalized population. The Caribbean is often viewed as the "most homophobic region of the world" (Padgett, 2006; Rowley, 2011), and past research

demonstrates that homophobia in the region has profoundly negative impacts on the psychological health and well-being of the region's Afro-Caribbean LGBTQ+ populace (e.g., White et al., 2010). The performative action of masculinity has been around for centuries. What makes it progress is that masculinity is subjective. Quare identities expand upon the nuance of what Afro-Caribbean masculinity looks like.

Asylum Seeking Students in Higher Education

Traditionally, students under the umbrella of F1 status come to America with one initial status F1-visa. Asylum seekers are rarely placed together for enrollment into U.S. higher education. In this research, F1-visa status was the first to be obtained by the researcher, followed by asylum status.

Asylum

According to The United Nations Refugee Agency (2018) asylum is a form of protection that allows an individual to remain in the United States instead of being deported to a country where he or she fears persecution or harm. Asylum is a term few Americans know of due to lack of exposure. Though the idea of asylum is considered "common," the act of migrating from another country due to persecution, hate crimes, and mental trauma has been around for ages. In 1892, the U.S. Congress created the Bureau of Immigration to oversee the admission of immigrants, including those considered "refugees" (*Refugee Timeline | USCIS*, 2020). Since early U.S. immigration laws didn't limit the number of immigrants accepted, there were not any specific laws for refugee admissions. Refugees could resettle in the United States if they met the regular requirements for immigrant admissions. The *Immigration Act* of 1917 was a great example of how stringent U.S. admissions requirements were. The *Immigration Act* of 1917

required all immigrants aged 16 years or older to demonstrate they could read (USCIS, 2020). However, Congress exempted all those seeking admission to the United States from this new literacy requirement to avoid religious persecution. Though these acts are courageous and brave, the objective of this act did not provide the context of who is being exempted. The USCIS refugee timeline does not include the context of which race or minority group is a part of that benefit.

The context of asylum brings about a challenging navigation process for both asylum and refugees. The asylum application is free; however, the exploitation of the applicant's experience is the price being paid to get admittance. Immigration lawyers are highly recommended when dealing with any immigration case. However, the starting price for immigration attorneys begins at $5000.00. Once the evidence is submitted to Homeland Security, a waiting period is expected to have an answer by the 180-day mark since application submission. Cases can be unanswered for years, thus positioning asylum seekers in limbo, unable to work legally, disrupting housing and financial security, and producing negative implications mentally (Hornfeck et al., 2022).

Asylum Process

Every year, people come to the United States seeking protection because they have suffered persecution or fear that they will suffer persecution due to race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, and political opinion. This application can only be filed if you are physically present in the United States and you are not a U.S. citizen (USCIS, 2022). In addition, to apply for asylum affirmatively or defensively, file Form I-589, Application for Asylum and Withholding of Removal, within 1 year of the immigrant's arrival to the United States. Upon initial submission for the Affirmative Asylum-seeking process, a decision should be

made 180 days after submission; however, it can take months or years to receive a verdict. Many individuals are shelved and placed in a data system that leaves them in the space of "pending." Asylum seekers are not allowed to work unless granted the opportunity to do so, possibly taking out loans to pay off lawyer fee debt and find basic necessities such as food, water, and shelter if that has not been offered in a detention camp. The asylum process is bigger than what is provided by the United States Homeland Security (USCIS) as it is another form of incarceration. It does not address the implications of being an asylum seeker in America as it lacks evidence of how detention camps are the home for these vulnerable populations, where they wear color-categorized jumpsuits, assigned bed numbers, and offered nine-digit alien numbers that replaced their birth names (Okporo, 2022).

In Mercado et al.'s (2022) article "Trauma in the American Asylum Process: Experiences of Immigrant Families under the Migrant Protection Protocols," their findings state how complex and contradictory emotions often shared by immigrant parents: waves of relief, guilt, doubt, and hope. While the valued role of parents motivates many to flee their homes in search of a better life and opportunities for their children, the consequences associated with restrictive immigration policies often challenge their perceived self-efficacy and competence. According to Mercado et al. (2022), policymakers often miss the long-term impact on individuals, children, and families who lack an appreciation for the human beings affected by these decisions. Mental health providers who engaged with this community are uniquely poised to not only deliver culturally affirming therapeutic interventions but also to educate and influence policy that has the potential to affect generations to come. With a clear historical understanding of how the asylum-seeking

process operates in the US, it is a reminder that anti-immigrant policies must be addressed to make migration more inclusive.

My status at the time of writing in America was an F1(Student Visa) and Asylum seeker. I filed for asylum in March 2022. As of July 2024, the status of my application was waiting for a court hearing; I had also received a notice from USCIS that since my application has exceeded the 180+ days since submission, I could apply for a work permit. March 22, 2024, marked the year since I submitted my application, and I had no idea at the time when I would be summoned to court to plead my case. Without an immigration lawyer, I had decided to refrain from applying for a work permit to ensure my asylum status was not in a space of deportation during my doctoral program.

Grounding Intersectionality as a Framework

Racialized, heteronormative, and xenophobic experiences encountered at private liberal arts institutions in the Western United States are highlighted in this study, shedding light on the experiences faced by individuals from marginalized backgrounds directly impacted by administration, staff, and faculty. Each identity is separate; however, with intersectionality, all identities are combined to address the overlapping nature of systemic oppression. Highlighting the experiences and analyzing the complexity of these identities in the world through a social and political lens (Hill Collins & Bilge, 2016).

Intersectionality Theory is an essential framework for exploring the complexities of identity, particularly in understanding how various axes of identity—such as race, class, gender, and sexuality—intersect to shape individual experiences. This theory is foundational for my research as it allows for a nuanced examination of how multiple social identities and forms of

oppression interact (Crenshaw, 1991; Hill Collins & Bilge, 2016). By synthesizing intersectionality with Transnational Identity Theory (Esteban-Guitart & Vila, 2015), Nigrescence theory (Cross, 1991), Quare Theory (Johnson, 2001), and Critical Race Theory (Bell, 1995), I can comprehensively analyze the overlapping systemic oppressions encountered in higher education.

Figure 2

Visual Illustration of Theories Grounded in Intersectionality
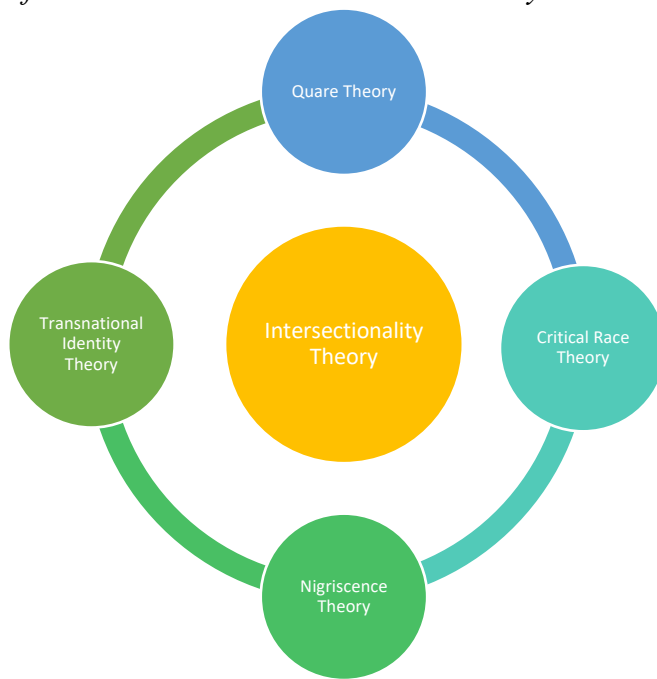
Note: Adapted from "Who's Afraid of Critical Race Theory," 1995, by D. A. Bell, *University of Illinois Law Review*, *1995*(0276-9948 , 1942–9231), 893., copyright 1995 by University of Illinois Law School; "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color," 1991, by K. Crenshaw, *Stanford Law Review*, *43*(6), 1241–1299, https://doi.org/10.2307/1229039, copyright 1991by Stanford University; *Shades of Black: Diversity in African-American Identity,* 1991, by W. E. Cross, Temple University Press, copyright 1991by Temple University; "The Voices of Newcomers. A Qualitative Analysis of the Construction of Transnational Identity," 2015, by. Esteban - Guitart, & I. Vila, *Psychosocial Intervention*, *24*(1), 17–25, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psi.2015.01.002, copyright 2015 by Colegio Oficial de Psicologos de Madrid; and "'Quare' Studies, or (Almost) Everything I Know About Queer Studies I Learned From My Grandmother," by E. P. Johnson, *Text and Performance Quarterly, 21*(1), 1–25, https://doi.org/10.1080/10462930128119, copyright 2015 by the National Communication Association.

Transnational identity theory helped illuminate the complexities of identity formation in the context of multiple cultural, social, and political spheres (Esteban-Guitart & Vila, 2015). This

perspective was particularly relevant for individuals like myself, navigating intersecting identities that cross national borders. Nigrescence theory further deepened this understanding by focusing on the stages of Black identity development, recognizing the influence of intersecting factors on the Black experience (Patton & Croom, 2017). Quare Theory (Johnson, 2001) added another layer by emphasizing the interconnectedness of race, sexuality, gender, and other social identities, while Critical Race Theory provided a lens to examine how racism intersects with other forms of oppression (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

These theoretical frameworks grounded my research by offering comprehensive lenses through which to analyze the intersectional experiences of marginalized groups in higher education. Higher education research often overlooked the unique challenges individuals face with intersecting identities, creating a significant gap in the literature. My research aimed to fill these gaps by providing insights into the experiences of Black, Quare, and Afro-Caribbean asylum seekers in a private liberal arts institution in the Western United States.

The use of autoethnography as a methodology aligned seamlessly with Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991). Autoethnography allowed a deep, personal exploration of lived experiences, capturing the complexities of intersecting identities through rich, evocative storytelling (Denzin, 2013. This method was suggested by IRB school representatives due to the ethical sensitivities involved in researching asylum seekers. It provided a way to use my own story as a primary source, thus addressing the challenges of reaching a larger participant pool and ensuring the ethical integrity of the research. By employing autoethnography, I can highlight the intersections of my identities—being Black, Quare, Afro-Caribbean, and an asylum seeker—within the context of higher education. This approach enriched the academic discourse with unique,

personal narratives and demonstrates the applicability of Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991), as

an analytical framework. Autoethnography, anchored in Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991),

offers a powerful method for exploring and articulating the nuanced experiences of marginalized

individuals, contributing valuable insights to the field (Crenshaw, 1991; Denzin, 2013).

CHAPTER 3

METHOLODGY

This body of work served as a reminder that education is a landscape where ideas, creativity, and scholarship are combined. As a qualitative research method, autoethnography has enabled the exploration of the research phenomenon of what it is like to be a Black, Quare, Afro-Caribbean asylum seeker in U.S. higher education. Scholars described autoethnography as a self-reflexive research genre in which the multifaceted and fluid self of the researcher becomes a lens through which to study interrelationships between personal histories, lived experiences, and broader educational and sociocultural matters (Pillay et al., 2016a; Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2017). I am the researcher who is researched. To understand my journey as the researcher, I posed the following research question: "What is it like to be Black, Quare, Afro-Caribbean, and asylum seeker in U.S. higher education?"

An intersectional framework was used to describe how different social identities (like race, gender, class, sexuality, and ability) intersected to create unique experiences of both oppression and privilege. As discussed in Chapter 2, this framework included five theories: Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991), Quare Theory (Johnson, 2001), Nigrescence (Cross, 1991), Critical Race Theory (Bell, 1995), and Transnational Identity (Esteban-Guitart & Vila, 2015). This approach showed that these identities didn't exist separately but interacted to shape people's experiences in complex ways. For this research project, intersectionality helped challenge institutional norms in higher education. Hill Collins and Bilge (2016) emphasized that intersectionality helped in understanding and analyzing the complexity of the world, people, and

human experiences. With the combination of the intersectional framework and autoethnography creates a powerful analytic took to explore this researcher's phenomenon.

Autoethnography

Autoethnography as a research method in the context of higher education presented multiple challenges. Autoethnographic methods "could leave students feeling exposed by revealing their personal feelings and experiences" (Holman Jones et al., 2013). These complexities demanded intellectual and emotional commitment and time from those who chose to bring autoethnography into higher education. The demand for radical honesty and vulnerability by autoethnography was scary, specifically when considering the ethical concerns of using autoethnography as a method. However, Ellis et al. (2011) once said, "Think of the greater good of the research—does it justify the potential risk to others?" The only risk implicated in this research was towards self. Through this research, the researcher was at risk of exposure. The reward was worth the risk. Reading, researching, and writing about autoethnography in and of higher education has assisted me in understanding differences in personal approaches and work as academics, globally, dialogued with and against the neoliberal ideology of technical rationality as ethical work (Grant & Radcliffe, 2015). Disrupting the way research was created motivated researchers like me to create. For this reason, traditional academic writing could often be dreary, depersonalized, and homogenized. This can inadvertently mute the academic's sense of self as dynamically shifting and relational to structural and material realities (Badley, 2009; Ritchie & Wilson, 2000).

Rationale for Autoethnography

The researcher opted for autoethnography combined with an intersectional framework as it provided a powerful and nuanced approach to exploring the complexities of personal experiences within the context of U.S. higher education. This methodological combination was particularly suitable for my research for several compelling reasons.

Autoethnography offered a unique platform to amplify voices that are often marginalized within academia. Focusing on personal narratives allowed for an in-depth examination of how social constructs and institutional structures impact individuals. Coming from The Bahamas, the researchers journey to the United States for education highlighted the intersection of transnational identity, setting the stage for a rich exploration of theories such as Critical Race Theory (Bell, 1995), Quare Theory (Johnson, 2001), Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991), Nigrescence (Cross, 1991), and Transnational Identity (Esteban-Guitart & Vila, 2015). This method enabled researchers to describe and systematically analyze personal experiences to understand cultural dynamics (Ellis, 2011; Holman Jones et al., 2005). This approach is particularly effective for examining the intersection of multiple identities, such as race, gender, and nationality, and how these intersecting identities shape experiences within higher education. The exploration of my own narrative, informed by over thirty years of navigating trauma, sexual assault, decolonization of thoughts, and the restructuring of my idea of Blackness, was enriched by this methodological approach, allowing for a deeper understanding of these complex dynamics. The autoethnographic approach empowered me through self-discovery and liberation facilitated by this research (Cone, 1970). It provided a reflective tool that disrupted Eurocentric perspectives and promoted transformative justice within education (Linn et al., 2016).

Autoethnography challenged traditional research norms and emphasizes the healing power of narrative by confronting personal trauma and fears head-on and inviting readers to join this journey of self-awareness.

Creativity is the human capacity to use one's imagination and to create solutions for complex problems (Welch & McPherson, 2012). Navigating through creative media like poetry, journaling, and blogging allowed researchers to move beyond traditional writing, capturing intersectional experiences in a rich, multifaceted way. Poetry's vivid imagery and emotive power, journaling's personal and introspective narratives, and blogging's dynamic video documentation contributed unique insights. Together, they created a vibrant, authentic portrayal of the human experience, reflecting its non-linear, complex nature. These media was chosen for their ability to convey deep emotions—joy, frustration, pain—providing a holistic and true depiction of our identities shaped by diverse experiences. Additionally, creative mediums like journaling, poetry, and video blogs, autoethnography captured the intersectional experiences of racism, homophobia, xenophobia, colorism, and asylum seeking within U.S. higher education. Creative mediums was imperative to projects like this by disrupting traditional writing. Holman Jones et al. (2013) stated, "Rather than produce inaccessible, esoteric, and jargon-laden texts, autoethnographers work to connect with multiple and diffuse audiences by writing and performing in clear, concise and engaging ways" (p.42). Autoethnographers use "literary, poetic and aesthetic conventions for creating engaging texts" (Holman Jones et al., 2013, p. 25). I followed Hirshfield's (1997) lead: "Poetry has historically been defined as particular ways of organizing thought through sound" (p. 7). This methodological approach examined the dialectical relationships in education, such as those between higher education staff and faculty,

as well as the agentic relationships between individual and collective experiences, oppression and emancipation, and privilege and disadvantage (Spring et al., 2001).

Autoethnography served as a call to action within academia, urging researchers to bridge the gap between theory and practice and critically examine scholarly research outcomes. It emphasized that education research should have served academic interests and address the pragmatic demands of education (Starr, 2010). Integrating an intersectional framework provided a disciplined inquiry highlighting individuals' lived experiences and struggles, informing theory and practice. This approach went beyond simply recounting personal stories; it involved an in-depth analysis of the complexities of lived experiences and the emergent identity in relation to others and the cultural context (Starr, 2010). Autoethnography, as both a process and a product (Ellis et al., 2011), allowed educators like myself to acknowledge the pragmatic demands of teaching and everyday life, facilitating a deeper understanding of the lived experiences that shape our identities and actions.

In summary, the combination of autoethnography with an intersectional framework was highly suitable for my research as it captured the multifaceted nature of personal experiences shaped by multiple intersecting identities. This approach provided a comprehensive understanding of the cultural and institutional dynamics at play, promotes transformative justice, and bridges the gap between theoretical and practical applications in education.

Data Collection Methods

For this dissertation, the researcher have opted for a varied approach to data collection, utilizing autoethnography as a method. The process of gathering data was not straightforward,

but Penzu[9] provided a platform that captured my train of thought. Each journal entry prompt began with "How was your day?" and then delved into specific memories intentionally crafted to evoke emotions and experiences.

Table 2

List of Data Types

Data Type	Methodological Definition	Reference
Journal N=91	Journal entries record personal reflections, experiences, memories, and emotions. They serve as a platform for capturing qualitative data by documenting thoughts and feelings spontaneously or spontaneously in response to prompts.	Ellis, C. (2005). *The Ethnographic I: A Methodological Novel about Autoethnography*. AltaMira Press.
Poetry N=14	Poetry is utilized as a creative medium for expressing emotions, ideas, and perspectives through language. It enables individuals to explore themes and experiences in a non-linear, imaginative manner, often playing with sounds, rhythms, and meanings.	Richardson, L. (2000). "Writing: A Method of Inquiry." In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (2nd ed., pp. 923-948). Sage Publications.
Photography N=4	Photography involves capturing moments in time through visual imagery, conveying emotions, perspectives, and narratives. It serves as a medium for storytelling, freezing significant moments and offering insights into personal and contextual experiences.	Pink, S. (2013). *Doing Visual Ethnography* (3rd ed.). Sage Publications.
Artifacts(tbc)	Artifacts encompass physical objects shaped or used by humans, providing insights into historical, cultural, and social contexts. They range from ancient tools to modern artworks and hold personal, communal, and symbolic significance, offering connections to heritage and identity.	Hodder, I. (2000). "The Interpretation of Documents and Material Culture." In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (2nd ed., pp. 703-715). Sage Publications.

Note: Adapted from *The Ethnographic I: A Methodological Novel about Autoethnography*, (2005), by C. Ellis, AltaMira Press, copyright 2005 by AltaMira Press; "The Interpretation of Documents and Material Culture," 2000, by I. Hodder, in N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (2nd ed., pp. 703-715). Sage Publications, copyright 2000 by Sage Publications; *Doing Visual Ethnography* (3rd ed.), 2013, by S. Pink, Sage Publications, copyright 2013 by Sage Publications; and "Writing: A Method of Inquiry," 2000, by L. Richardson, in N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (2nd ed., pp. 923-948), Sage Publications, copyright 2000 by Sage Publications.

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[9] Penzu is a private online diary-hosting website. www.penzu.com/

Data Collection and Organization

All data, including photos, journal entries, and artifacts, totaling 91, were printed out. Each submission was reviewed using thematic analysis, and outstanding themes were highlighted. The data was organized based on type: pictures, poetry, journal entries, quick blurbs, and vignettes. The vignettes were initially coded, assuming they would offer deeper insights into the experiences of being an Afro-Caribbean, Black, Quare, asylum seeker in higher education. However, these vignettes provided more of a summary than the richer emotional content in other journal entries. Consequently, only five vignettes were coded before moving on to the remaining data set. A system of category piles was created: "yes" for journal entries adhering to intersectionality, coded vignettes, and poetry. Each journal entry in the "yes" pile contained specific notes or underlined mentions highlighting overlapping identities and their connections to education. The first coding wave placed five pages in the "no" pile. To further refine the selection of journal entries, three highlighters (green, purple, and pink) were used to identify themes. Common themes that emerged in the first coding wave included education, Quare identity, Afro-Caribbean identity, and Blackness. In the second wave, the yes pile was further examined to provide clarity of what recurring themes popped up from the yes pile based on identities. Once the overlapping identities was created, the thematic analysis approach further assisted with organizing the data based on the themes provided below.

A detailed breakdown of the researcher's data can be found in the Appendix, Table 4, which provided a comprehensive view of the data types, the total journal entries, entries used for analysis and the selection criteria for analysis.

Data Analysis Procedures

      The researcher employed the thematic analysis process to analyze the data, which

involves identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within the data. Thematic

analysis is primarily described as a descriptive method that flexibly reduces data, complementing

other analysis methods (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018).

Table 3

Thematic Analysis Frame for What is It Like to be Black Quare, Afro-Caribbean, Asylum Seeker in Higher Education United States

Themes	Representative Codes	Illustration of Codes
Intersectional Identity Struggles in Education	Quare Theory: The experience of being Black and Quare in educational settings often involves navigating spaces that may not fully accept or understand these identities. For example, the author expresses feeling unseen and undervalued, reflecting a lack of recognition for their full identity in academic environments.	"I've been scared for so long to embrace my femininity and masculinity. I've been scared for so long to tell people how I feel and call shit out for what it is."
	Critical Race Theory: Systemic racism in education can limit opportunities and create hostile environments. The author's struggles with financial aid and institutional support highlight these barriers.	"I am trying to change my life consistently and there is something or someone always in my way. I need to bulldoze people out of my life because I can't deal with it anymore."
Community and Support Systems in Education	Transnational Identity: Support systems that bridge cultural gaps are vital for transnational students to feel included and succeed.	"I keep contemplating about going home. Dropping everything, and just leave. I need a cultural reset."
	Nigrescence: Building a supportive community that fosters positive Black identity development, particularly in predominantly white institutions (PWIs).	"My case manager actually showed up for me in ways I did not see coming. She gave me the remaining funding for my rent $30.00."

Note: Adapted from "Who's Afraid of Critical Race Theory," 1995, by D. A. Bell, *University of Illinois Law Review*, *1995* (0276-9948 , 1942–9231) 893, copyright 1995 by University of Illinois; "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color," 1991, by K. Crenshaw, *Stanford Law Review*, *43*(6), 1241–1299. https://doi.org/10.2307/1229039, copyright 1991by Stanford University; *Shades of Black: Diversity in African-American Identity,* 1991, by W. E. Cross, Temple University Press, copyright 1991by Temple University; "The Voices of Newcomers. A Qualitative Analysis of the Construction of Transnational Identity," 2015, by. Esteban -Guitart, & I. Vila, *Psychosocial Intervention*, *24*(1), 17–25, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psi.2015.01.002, copyright 2015 by Colegio Oficial de Psicologos de Madrid; and "'Quare' Studies, or (Almost) Everything I Know About Queer Studies I Learned From My Grandmother," by E. P. Johnson, *Text and Performance Quarterly, 21*(1), 1–25, https://doi.org/10.1080/10462930128119, copyright 2015 by the National Communication Association.

Intersectional Analysis

After the first wave of coding, the researcher organized the journal entries into categories based on intersecting identities. One category included entries with two intersecting identities (e.g., Black and Queer), while another included entries with more than two identities (e.g., Black, Quare, immigrant, doctoral student). The researcher narrowed down the poems based on their relevance to my research question, focusing on identity development and situations that elicited emotional experiences over time.

In the second wave of coding, the researcher re-read the selected data and reviewed the themes, ensuring they aligned with the overarching concerns of the dissertation. The primary research question guiding this analysis was: **"What is it like to be Black, Quare, Afro-Caribbean, and asylum-seeking in United States higher education?"** Once the researcher solidified which themes best addressed this research question, the researcher then produced the report.

Thematic Analysis

To analyze themes in the data, I undertook a thematic analysis based on the process outlined in Figure 3.

Figure 3

Thematic Analysis Process
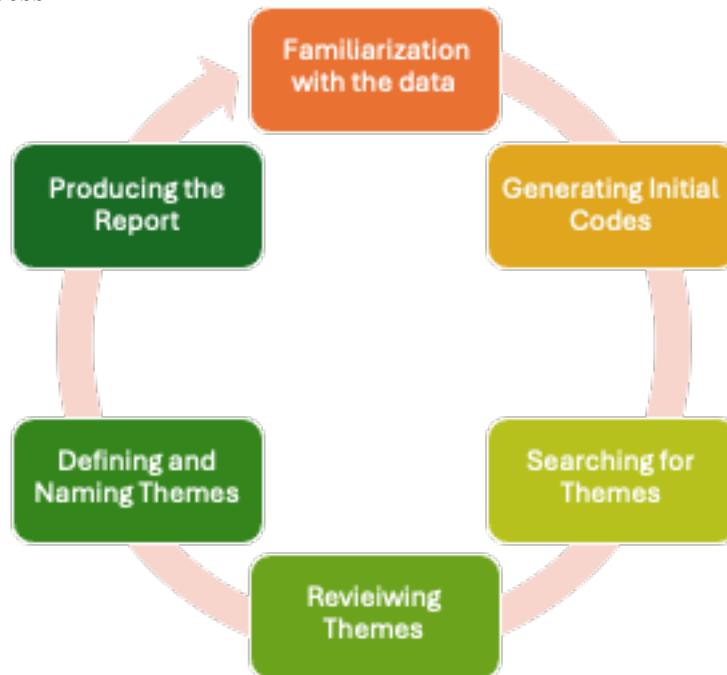
The initial phase of thematic analysis involves thoroughly reading and re-reading the data to become deeply familiar with its content, which might include transcribing data if necessary. Maguire and Delahunt (2017) described this as immersing oneself in the data to get a deep sense of the content, often achieved by repeated reading and taking notes. The next step is systematically coding interesting data features across the entire dataset, labeling parts that appear significant or interesting (Clarke et al., 2015, p. 222). At this point, the process of interpreting and understanding one's own cultural experiences through autoethnography becomes fully realized and productive.

After generating initial codes, the researcher searched for themes by identifying overlaps or patterns, grouping codes into broader themes, and creating thematic maps to visualize

relationships between themes (Clarke et al., 2015, p. 224). This was be done traditionally, manually, or with coding software; for this research, the researcher manually examined the data, identifying codes, overlapping patterns, and themes. The manual coding process involved personally reviewing the data, applying codes, and grouping them into broader thematic categories. Additionally, using Adobe Acrobat software for virtual manual coding and physically working with a hard copy further emphasized the manual nature of the coding process.

The reviewing themes phase involved refining the identified themes, entailing two levels of review: at the level of coded data extracts and the level of the entire dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 91). Subsequently, during the defining and naming themes phase, the researcher refined the specifics of each theme and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 92). This leads to writing detailed analyses for each theme, considering how each fit into the broader story, and refining theme names to be clear and descriptive. The final phase involved writing the analysis and contextualizing it within the existing literature, where the autoethnography provides a compelling and coherent account of the data, showing how themes are supported by data extracts (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 93).

Thematic Breakdown

In this research, the research analyzed 38 data sources, comprising journal entries, photos, poems, and vignettes derived from journal entries. Here's the breakdown of these sources:

- Photos: 7
- Vignettes: 2 with three major theories(identities), 3 with two major theories(identities)

- Journal Entries: 7 with three major theories (identities), 20 with two major theories(identities)

- Poems: 6 with 2 or more theories(identities) correlating to the research question

Through this analysis, several recurring themes emerged:

1. Intersectionality as a Guide to Addressing 2 or More Major Theory (Identities)

2. Recurring Theme: Doctoral Student,

3. Internal and External Conflicts in Education,

4. Community and Support Systems in Education, and

5. Intersectional Identity Struggles in Education.

These themes surfaced repeatedly across the different types of data, highlighting the complex and multifaceted nature of the experiences documented. The consistent appearance of Intersectionality underscored the intertwined identities and their significant impact on the educational journeys of a doctoral student. Moreover, the themes of internal and external conflicts, along with the importance of community and support systems, revealed both the challenges and the support mechanisms inherent in educational settings. The struggles with intersectional identity provided a deeper understanding of the unique challenges faced by individuals managing multiple identities within the educational context.

Identifying these themes was crucial for guiding the subsequent analysis and interpretation of the data. By focusing on these recurring themes, I uncovered more profound insights into how intersectionality shaped the experiences of doctoral students, the nature of educational conflicts and support systems, and the specific identity struggles encountered. This

thematic analysis offered a comprehensive understanding of the data and contribute significantly to the overall findings of this research.

In conclusion, the intersectional analysis undertaken through the coding process revealed a rich tapestry of experiences and themes within the collected data. By categorizing entries based on intersecting identities, from dual to multiple identities, and subsequently narrowing down the selection based on relevance to the research question, a comprehensive understanding of identity development and emotional experiences emerged.

Through thematic breakdown, it became evident that the data contributed to the exploration of identity and its development. Notably, recurring themes such as Intersectionality served as a guide that addressed multiple thematic identities, alongside the prevalent theme of being a doctoral student, underscored the complexity of experiences within the realm of education. Moreover, the thematic breakdown highlighted the prevalence of internal and external conflicts within educational settings, the importance of community and support systems, and the struggles inherent in navigating intersecting identities within educational contexts.

Overall, this intersectional analysis not only shed light on the nuanced experiences of individuals but also provided valuable insights into the complexities of identity development within educational environments. Moving forward, these findings will offer a foundation for further exploration and understanding of the multifaceted nature of identity and its implications for education and beyond.

Ethical Considerations

In the realm of research, autobiographical methods introduced ethical complexities that researchers must grapple with. Issues such as safeguarding the identities of participants through

pseudonyms, managing emotional strains like stress and anxiety, and mitigating potential physical harm, such as in asylum cases, underscore the intricacies of employing autobiographies as a research tool. Furthermore, the act of self-disclosure adds another layer of ethical consideration to the process.

In the context of researcher-and-researched autoethnography, it became imperative to ensure that conventional ethical frameworks safeguard the integrity of the study, particularly the ethnographic element, as Doloriert and Sambrook (2009) advocated.

Ethical deliberations extended to the consent process, where the researcher weighed the implications of including or excluding individuals from the narrative. For example, the work's autonomy was a concern during the data collection process. Questioning how the narrative would impact family members or friends being mentioned (pseudonyms have been provided) in the research. Additionally, the researcher's lived experiences, which may have involved controversial or sensitive topics, necessitated careful handling within the autoethnographic framework.

Lee-Treweek and Linkogle (2002) delineated four types of harm researchers may encounter in their fieldwork: physical, emotional, ethical, and professional. Physical harm, exemplified by Van Maanen's (1988) work on police culture, underscored the dangers researchers may face. Emotional harm raised from the negative emotional states induced by the research process. Ethical harm occurred when researchers deviate from established ethical guidelines, while professional harm can result from overstepping methodological boundaries or engaging in controversial research. This was followed by concerns regarding the ethics of

autoethnography stemming from its inherent nature of studying the self and engaging in reflexivity, thus implicating the researcher in the ethical discourse.

Duncan (2004) contended that the value of autoethnography hinges on addressing key concerns related to the authenticity and representation of the narrative. These concerns delineate the study's scope, practical utility, construct validity, external validity, reliability, and scholarly rigor. In autoethnography, validity can be assessed by several criteria: subjectivity (the prominence of the self in the research), self-reflexivity (demonstrated self-awareness, self-exposure, and introspection), resonance (commonality between researcher and audience), credibility (research permeated by honesty), and contribution (work that teaches, informs, and inspires (Le Roux, 2016). For this research project, where the researcher was the researcher, the writing style can be deemed as evocative autoethnography. The researcher's study was never meant to "simplify, categorize, slice, and dice" (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 737) but to inform, evoke emotion, and offer a unique triangulation among the diverse identities showcased throughout this study.

In autoethnography, triangulation was demonstrated by integrating multiple perspectives and sources to enrich the understanding of personal experiences. Autoethnographers achieved this by reflecting on their own life (self-reflection), contextualizing their experiences within broader social and cultural frameworks (theoretical analysis), and comparing their narratives with existing literature and other individuals' stories (comparative analysis). This combination of personal narrative, theoretical context, and external validation ensured a more comprehensive and robust analysis of the intersecting identities and experiences (Chang, 2008; Ellis, 2005).

Autoethnography is a "reader-friendly," engaging writing style that appeals to readers more than conventional scholarly writing (Chang, 2008). As a new autoethnographer, the researcher struggled to produce this work with the challenge of honing my academic voice. The researcher's academic voice felt unauthentic. The researcher felt the academic voice came off producing inaccessible, esoteric, and jargon-laden texts, and autoethnographers work to connect with multiple and diffuse audiences by writing and performing in clear, concise, and engaging ways (Gasper, 2018). Autoethnographers use "literary, poetic, and aesthetic conventions for creating engaging texts" (Jones et al., 2013, p. 25). This aligned with my performative pieces and poetry. What had been said about one's personal experiences was now open for interpretation and criticism, and published words could not be taken back (Ellis, 1999). Poets tend to embrace vulnerability as an essential aspect of their practice. Being raw, unfiltered, and performative allowed an explorative journey for readers to delve into the subconscious of the researcher.

Through the data collected, there were many instances of oppression faced by marginalized identities. However, there were also moments of joy—Black boy joy—that served as negative case analyses. Negative case analysis was a method used to refine theories by examining cases that do not fit expected patterns, thereby enhancing the validity and depth of qualitative research (Creswell, 2013). In autoethnography, this approach helped challenge assumptions and broaden understanding by integrating diverse and contradictory experiences within the studied identities (Becker, 2008; Creswell, 2013). The researcher understood that life was never linear; thus, negative case analysis offers insight into the counter-narrative of living as a Black, Quare, Afro-Caribbean asylum seeker.

Supporting this research claim for validity and exploring the research question, "What is it like to be Black, Quare, Afro-Caribbean, and an asylum seeker in U.S. higher education?" this research addressed a significant gap in scholarly literature. While studies used intersectionality and autoethnography, this study was unique and encompasses five main identities: Black, Quare, Afro-Caribbean, asylum seeker, and doctoral student in U.S. higher education. Contrary to assertions by Delamont (2007) that autoethnography was simplistic or lazy, Le Roux (2016) emphasized its rigor. She argued that rigor lies not solely in the chosen method but in its careful application and transparent implementation process documentation.

By combining autoethnography with an intersectionality framework, this research offered a nuanced and powerful account of navigating U.S. higher education as a Black, Quare, Afro-Caribbean, and asylum seeking individual. It amplified marginalized voices within academia and contributes to broader discussions about equity, inclusion, and social justice in education. By delving into the researcher's own lived experiences and reflections, this study served as a call to action, urging greater recognition and support for marginalized individuals in U.S. higher education while fostering a stronger sense of belonging that promotes inclusive and equitable educational environments. Ultimately, this dissertation demonstrated the power of autoethnography as a methodological tool for exploring complex and sensitive topics, offering a unique and intimate lens to understand the intricacies of human life and advocate for meaningful change.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Thematic Analysis and Findings

This chapter presents thematic data analysis findings, including photos, journal entries, and artifacts. This analysis followed the six-phase process outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). Additionally, the researcher integrated autoethnography as a method, reflecting on their own experiences and positioning them within the broader cultural context. The chapter was structured around three main themes: Intersectional Identity Struggles in Education, Community and Support Systems in Education, and Internal and External Conflicts in Education. These themes supported the researchers reasoning for answering the research question: "What is it like to be Black, Quare, Afro-Caribbean and asylum seeker in U.S. higher education?"

Section 1: Intersectional Identity Struggles in Education

Overview of Intersectionality in Education

Intersectionality in education referred to how various aspects of an individual's identity—like race, gender, class, and sexuality—interact and intersect, creating unique experiences of privilege and oppression within educational settings. Introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991), this concept highlighted that identity dimensions are interconnected, leading to complex forms of discrimination and advantage.

Applying an intersectional approach in educational contexts means recognizing and addressing students' diverse and overlapping identities to foster more inclusive and equitable learning environments. For instance, in Chapter 2 it was mentioned about Asante et al.'s (2016) research highlighting the story of a Nigerian student, Ajoke, who spoke about being the only

Black person in her class and using Black and African to assert her identity. She emphasized that she wanted her classmates to know Africans are not dumb (Asante et al., 2016). This narrative highlighted how she navigated her identity by reclaiming negative perceptions and emphasizing her African-ness.

Educators used intersectionality to grasp better students' experiences and the structural barriers they face, creating a more inclusive classroom environment. This included integrating curricula that reflect students' diverse identities, promoting discussions about power, privilege, and oppression, and creating safe spaces for all students to express and navigate their multiple identities (Varsik & Gorochovskij, 2023).

<div align="center">

Findings on Intersectional Identity Struggles

</div>

Sub-theme 1: Navigating Multiple Identities

Traditionally, words will not completely describe the nuanced experiences of being Black, Quare, Afro-Caribbean, and asylum seeker in U.S. higher education. This self-study research was the first of its kind. Most days, the researcher found it challenging to present all identity aspects to ensure authenticity stood strong. However, as a Black, male, Quare, Afro-Caribbean, doctoral candidate, those identities were situational given the time, space, and concern for safety. This action can be identified as code-switching. Code-switching for Black people often involved alternating between different linguistic and behavioral styles to navigate predominantly white or different cultural environments. It can be seen as a survival strategy to fit into various social settings and to avoid negative stereotypes or discrimination. As McCluney et al. (2019) stated, "For Black people, code-switching entailed adjusting one's style of speech, appearance, behavior, and expression in ways that will optimize the comfort of others in

exchange for fair treatment, quality service, and employment opportunities" (p. 3). Throughout this U.S. higher educational journey, the researcher found himself in unique situations that reflect identity development. Their experiences shaped their reality. Through the use of an intersectional framework (Crenshaw, 1991), on American soil, the identity of Blackness took precedence as a primary identity. Other identities, such as Afro-Caribbean, Quare, and asylum seeker, were suppressed, given the influence of the environment and community involved.

Illustrative Quotes and Excerpts From Journal Entries and Vignettes

Journal entry, "The Cabin Trip," (Richards, 2023), stated that being African American in this country was a struggle but being Black in America brought about a whole other perspective related to the Black experience in America. The major red tape prevented the experience of working to feel like a whole adult, rather than letting these institutions rape students with these whack ass wages that will not help a homeless man out. I may not have been homeless, but I lacked economic safety consistently, which led to my heart breaking every day and walking out of my home, closing the door to a dwelling that is filled with toxicity. I was battling a system that kept breaking me to the point that I didn't want this. I deserved whatever the world or home has in store for me ("V3: Just don't be so damn mad," Richards, 2023).

Autoethnographic Insight

The researcher's experiences navigating these identities in academia have been met with an overwhelming reality of being in constant fear, fixation on finding solutions, and being out of control. The data presented a reality that the researcher's life was is not his own. The researcher navigated two systems simultaneously, ultimately impacting the researcher's journey, navigating U.S. higher education. Code-switching has become the new normal. Having multiple identities

experiencing trauma, frustration, and oppression creates a call for help. As the researcher, the data presented a scary reality of internally screaming about providing critical insight into battling daily security issues about housing, food, and financial security.

Sub-theme 2: Educational Barriers and Challenges

To be a Black, Afro-Caribbean, Quare, and asylum seeker in higher education was rather complex. Honing into identities as their situational experiences intersect showed how each intersectionality serves a strong divine purpose within this research. Amongst these intersecting identities, the data highlighted discrimination, a lack of representation in the curriculum in U.S. higher education, social isolation, assimilation, and acculturation.

Data Excerpts Highlight These Challenges

"The Pearly Gates-Revamped" (Richards, 2023) journal entry noted that the U.S. higher education and immigration system were not made with people like myself in mind. Living within the reach of the pearly gates (U.S. higher education), I was faced too often with housing, food, and financial security. How was the researcher able focus on school when life was falling apart? These pearly gates provided a stern reminder of the remanence of power and how it embodied the meaning of true gatekeeping. The wonderment of being a minority requirement meant presenting a diversity quota at the table in U.S. higher education. These pearly gates have blocked so many people. As a transnational identity in U.S. higher education, I found myself in economic poverty status, on the brink of high blood pressure, and gaining a substantial amount of weight due to stress while navigating Los Angeles nonprofits that offered aid to immigrants in need. As a doctoral student, it should be noted the researcher did not feel supported, the urge of constant pressure and the echo of silenced surrounded. I could not seem to shake off the hurt that

positioned me see the truth of power displayed in administration, staff, and faculty actions. The constant lies being told, the manipulation, the experience overall has been exhausting ("I want to leave," Richards, 2023).

Autoethnographic Insight

The weaving that intersected the Afro-Caribbean experience in U.S. higher education extended itself beyond the educational experience. The data presented warrants a deeper understanding of how the educational barriers hit the identity marker, simultaneously highlighting the policy and legal implications of both Blackness and Immigration.

Discussion

The United States has a culture that celebrates diversity; it maintains uncomfortable silence regarding race and its psychological impact on international students (Prasath et al., 2022). International students and visiting scholars have expressed powerlessness in a higher education system that determines their educational visa status or financial and living resources (Hwang et al., 2016). Living in America under these harsh conditions makes the researcher wonder if he submitted to the system of being less than. The value of self as a Black, Quare, Afro-Caribbean asylum seeker is a crucial reality many are not preview to. As a Black, Quare, Afro-Caribbean asylum seeker, the researcher tend to gravitate to his own demographic. Though he worked at a private liberal art's higher education institution in the Western United States and attend the institution, the researcher still presented the mask which affirms his Blackness in these spaces (Klein, 2013). The challenge as a Black, Quare man in higher education overlapped with systemic oppression. Black international students who are interested in studying in the United States are concerned about feeling unwelcome due to the current U.S. administration's stance on

immigration and international mobility (Fischer, 2015; Patel, 2017). The concern of being international in America was met with the warrant of racism targeting Black people in America.

Implications for Educational Policy and Practice

Status is something international students are trained to internalize and given numerical numbers to showcase their status in the country, being tracked like wild animals. The Immigration system can be inherently racist and dehumanizing. U.S. policy historically reinforced federal immigration policy and other nonfederal immigrant-related policies that are mechanisms of structural racism (De Trinidad Young & Crookes, 2023). As a Black Afro-Caribbean international student, the researcher was like many others, but his experience might differ from that of White international students (Warren & Constantine, 2007). The U.S. immigration system has been shaped by xenophobic and racist attitudes and has served as a tool of racial control (Bosworth et al., 2018). The ramifications of existing in this systemic system as a Black, Quare, Afro-Caribbean asylum seeker is exhausting. Indefinitely presents a constant flight or fight scenario to which many international students are previewed (Duster et al., 2018).

Autoethnographic Reflection

YOUR SILENCE<THEIR WIN [Unpublished Poem]

Trav shut up, they don't want to fear you
Trav shut up they don't want to see you!
For centuries institutions ruptured the allure for globalization
Tethering whimsical themes to engage its audience.
The allure, I fear has clouded your judgement!
The allure, I fear has led astray.
Its uncanny to believe we are here for the truth, when it silence its messenger and bid them ado.
4% increase your pockets full of joy
Walking your kids and dogs behind the Golden Arches and floors
The 4% gave your president the weapon of choice taken safety, security and support from a community he barely sees, now what?

The 4% is hidden behind the curtains, waiting for you to finally see them for the human that they are.

To shut up now, hurts the people, invisible to America and glorified joy.

No you will never understand the pain, the frustration it is to be black in America.

For which this blackness can't adhere to your manipulation any longer.

So, shut up Travi. You say when the shackles restrain my truth.

So, shut up Trav. Before they finally tighten that noose.

So shut up Trav. For every Immigrant story untold.

My silence is dangerous, another black, Quare, Afro-Caribbean immigrant who's also asylum seeking story begin to unfold.

This story is anchor that intersects academia's gap.

Splashed with mudded water, vague truths, and political gain.

This game of chess was made for the big boys. So shut up Trav, walk that stage, fight no more for which

A system has won, took another soul, damaged in place like these thoughts once mirrored a soul.

Trav shut up, as the silence echoes the room.

Trav shut up, you're an alien in this space. Them little papers, come with a time stamp like death stamps across this earthly plane.

So shut up in the presence of power, political gain, faculty and staff.

This defense is armored enough, riddled with scholarships, truth, and empowerment for all. Invisible people stand tall. . . . I hope my story brings hope that today you can see yourself beyond these concrete walls. (Richards, 2023b)

This poem intertwined my identities, revealing the ongoing negotiation of various cultural, social, and legal landscapes. It acknowledged how silence is dangerous especially for another Black, Quare, Afro-Caribbean immigrant as forementioned in "Your Silence<Their Win," (Richards, 2023b). As a Black individual, the pervasive reality of systemic racism in America permeated daily life, as supported by Bosworth et al. (2018) on racialized immigration policies. Navigating these immigration systems remain to be a challenge ("Your Silence<Their Win," Richards, 2023b). The Quare identity introduced an additional layer of complexity, navigating spaces that may not fully embrace LGBTQ+ identities, as discussed in studies on intersectionality and marginalization. Moreover, being Afro-Caribbean further complicated the negotiation of cultural heritage within a predominantly different cultural framework.

The portrayal of being an asylum seeker added a poignant dimension of vulnerability and instability, constantly grappling with legal status in a xenophobic and dehumanizing system (Duster et al., 2018). By sharing this autoethnographic narrative, the researcher shed light on the lived experiences of individuals navigating these intersecting identities, advocating for more inclusive and equitable policies and practices within higher education and society at large. As mentioned in "Your Silence<Their Win," (Richards, 2023b), "This defense is armored enough, riddled with scholarships, truth, and empowerment for all. Invisible people stand tall. . . . " which embodied a call to action, urging acknowledgment of marginalized voices and the imperative cry for systemic change.

Section 2: Community and Support Systems in Education

When thinking about community, the researcher reflected on the moments when his tribe showed up in ways he had never fathomed people would. There have been many moments in the researcher's life where brothers and sisters in the community found and picked them up, especially during times when they did not feel deserving. Ubuntu, "I am because we are," (Paulson, 2019) was the researcher's favorite African proverb. It provided context that supports their understanding or interpretation of the community.

Importance of Community and Support

U.S. higher education brings together a diverse pool of students worldwide. These students gathered in one remote location, but the community is built on openness, understanding, respect, and love. However, within U.S. higher education, administration and staff could only do so much to construct a community and institutional support due to a lack of cultural exposure and knowledge about the cultures of international students.

Theoretical Background on Support Systems in Education

Support systems played a crucial role in educational success. This section delved into the theoretical background of support systems in education, highlighting the importance of community and institutional support mechanisms.

Findings on Community and Support Systems

Sub-theme 1: Peer Support and Networks

Undergraduates have access to a large pool of success programs and resources. However, this pool gets smaller as you move up to higher credentials. As a former academic coach at a private liberal arts institution in the Western United States, the researcher found familiarity with this dynamic. The researcher built strong relationships with Black staff, faculty, and administrators, including some graduate students. It was disheartening when the researcher couldn't offer a colleague service from their job due to policies focusing primarily on undergraduates.

Graduate students face unique challenges. They are not typically on campus, often juggling full-time jobs with night classes. International graduate students, in particular, can only work part-time (20 hours a week) and must do so on campus. the researcher found it personally a significant challenge when moving from Dayton, Ohio, to Los Angeles. There were no clear pathways for applying for a graduate assistantship. Relying on research skills, the researcher compiled a list of potential positions and contacted department directors directly through email. It was a lot of work, but after 2-4 weeks of hustling, meeting, and interviewing, the researcher secured a job that provided financial stability during their academic journey.

For the past three years, the researcher struggled financially, which impacted his mental, physical, and emotional health. Surviving on $18 an hour for 20 hours a week in Los Angeles was tough. They leaned heavily on community support and a lot of prayer to get through. Without this support, the researcher would not have made it to graduation at his private liberal arts institution.

Quotes and Anecdotes From the Data

The higher one goes within U.S. higher education, the smaller the pool of available funding and support. As a doctoral student, one of the major support systems the researcher needed was the writing lab. Journal entry, "Wha iz diz," (Richards, 2023), mentioned how the researcher had worked with a writing partner for about two years. Though helpful, this assistance did not suffice for writing a dissertation. No one teaches how to write a dissertation; it involved numerous trials and errors. Additionally, the researcher's dissertation chair was not always accessible due to numerous ongoing projects, family responsibilities, and career advancement. There were brief pockets of time where concerns were addressed, but often, the researcher felt alone in the process, trying to figure it out. Committee members helped, but the researcher often felt more support was needed. Despite frustrations, the researcher leaned on their community when committee members could not attend. For example, he felt really good a few days before the dissertation proposal. However, they received an email from the chair with dreaded revisions. Although proud of their work, there was still much to do. The researcher's doctoral friend called after receiving an SOS and walked them through the request virtually. The visiting friend at the time was concerned about the researcher's mental health, constantly hugging and asking if they

were okay ("Phone friend dem," Richards, 2023). Most days, this process feels like it is meant to break one down and build one up. Unfortunately, there has been a lot of breaking down.

Autoethnographic Insight

Reflecting upon the overview of peers and support throughout this educational journey, I have come to several conclusions. Firstly, my community saved me. They fed me when I had only $5.00 to my name and was too ashamed to ask for help. Navigating U.S. higher education as someone with a transnational identity required constant innovation and vigilance, creating a trauma response that makes a person feel like no one should never be at ease on American soil. As a Black, Quare, Afro-Caribbean asylum seeker, reflecting on this nuanced experience feels like gaslighting. Institutions was aware of the issues, but the value of money often replaces the value of life, perpetuating racial policies that marginalize Black and Brown people in America.

In these environments, the intentionality of building community became crucial. The community acted as a tool of protection for marginalized populations. There was never a day when community was not at the forefront of concern. Community pushed me to become Dr. Travis Richards. They helped the researcher paid for half of my education. They offered me housing during my transition from Nashville, Tennessee, to Dayton, Ohio. The love and kindness I have experienced over the past decade have shown me who I am through the eyes of people who calls themselves my family.

Sub-theme 2: Institutional Support Mechanisms

Institutional support structures such as mentoring programs and cultural organizations played a crucial role in students' academic and personal success, especially those from marginalized communities. These support mechanisms was designed to provide guidance, build

networks, and foster a sense of belonging. However, the effectiveness of these structures can vary significantly depending on the institution's commitment to inclusivity and equity.

Data Illustrating the Impact of Supports

As previously mentioned, the higher the credentials in higher education in the United States, the less support a student will receive. Analyzing the data, the researcher realized the main issue was the lack of solutions. Services were limited, and the needs exceeded what U.S. higher education could provide. The researcher needed immigration lawyers.

In my journal entry, "Da Gawd Damn Law" (Richards, 2023), I discussed how essential immigration lawyers are for handling immigration cases. However, these attorneys are expensive, with costs starting at $5,000. After submitting evidence to Homeland Security, there is an expected waiting period of up to 180 days for a response, but cases can go unanswered for years (USCIS, 2022). This leaves asylum seekers in limbo, unable to work legally, disrupting housing and financial security, and causing significant mental stress.

The lack of support from U.S. higher education exacerbated the stressors the researcher faced as an Afro-Caribbean, Quare, asylum seeker. University case managers could only offer so much, primarily emotional support and lists of non-profit organizations assisting international individuals with complex identities.

Autoethnographic Insight

As an Afro-Caribbean, Black, Quare, asylum seeker in U.S. higher education, institutional support would have significantly eased my journey as a doctoral student. The curriculum did not fully reflect my identity, and securing funding for my program was equally challenging. Over the past three years, I spent more time finding ways to stay afloat rather than

immersing myself in the educational experience. Daily, I was overwhelmed by external factors impacting my identity.

Reflecting on these journal entries reminds me of my reality in America continuously questioning: "Is this how I want to live forever?" "What can I do to change my life, feel empowered, and find joy instead of sadness because of my positionality?"

Discussion

To exist in a space where one was three times the minority rendered me invisible when only the external factor was the only thing being acknowledged (skin tone/Blackness). Black, Quare, and Afro-Caribbean are the identities the researcher expressed for two years in his doctoral program ("Doc Life," Richards, 2023). Higher Education continues to fail international students. Undervaluing the existence of culture, representation, and diversity internationally brings to U.S. higher education. As a doctoral student, the researcher was systemically a part of another marginalized population and pre-exposed to doctoral dropouts. Reports of doctoral discontinuation, that is, of individuals who prematurely withdraw from their doctoral studies, was strikingly high, with estimates in various countries rounding at about 50% (Council of Graduate Schools, 2008; Groenvynck et al., 2013; Vassil & Solvak 2012).

Potential international students expressed concerns about campus climates and the quality and amount of support they might receive if they enroll in an American university (Patel, 2017). Financial concerns also contribute to public resistance to international student enrollment and support services at U.S. universities. Policymakers sometimes assume that universities provide numerous scholarships to international students. Contrary to common misconceptions, the U.S. Department of Commerce (2016) reported that most funds used to pay international student

tuition and expenses originated outside the United States (Martirosyan et al., 2019). In fact, 75% of the costs were paid from international students' personal or family funds and non-U.S. government (country of origin) and international university resources (Institute of International Education, 2016). Research literature indicated that financial challenges were often a substantial source of international student dissatisfaction and a primary reason for their attrition (Redden, 2014; Schulmann & Choudaha, 2014).

Autoethnographic Reflection

International students bring a certain amount of value to U.S. higher education. International students bring culture, identity, perspective, and economic investment to the U.S. system and are willing to build in a host country. Hegarty (2014) argued that although U.S. universities may recognize the value of enrolling international students, many of them fail to understand the scale of influence international students bring as a vital component to higher education, particularly because they enrich university environments intellectually and culturally (Luo & Jamieson-Drake, 2013). International students need more! U.S. higher education researchers have stressed that college-sponsored student success programs are important to all students' academic success and engagement (Kuh et al., 2005; Tinto, 1998). Living in America as a transnational identity in U.S. higher education, one's survival depends on community. International students who are thousands of miles away from their home country will continue to be a challenged. It is lonely in the United States, especially when one does not have a strong support system. According to Martirosyan et al. (2019) separation from close family and friends, lack of comfort and familiarity with different cultural practices (e.g., foods and social customs), social isolation, and challenges with host country language proficiency contribute to challenges

with social adjustment (Johnson &Sandhu, 2007; Khawaja & Stallman, 2011). As a researcher, I have often felt isolated from living in the United States in Nashville, Tennessee, I had a stronger support system. I was surrounded by a group of Bahamians as I attended my HBCUs (Fall 2013-Fall 2020). I felt seen the most when I was in Nashville because of my community. They offered me a version of home in another country. In a Bahamian Thanksgiving meal (taken place every year), we have traditional Bahamian food with a twist. Cold Kalik (Bahamian Beer) is our delectable, sweet treat, included coconut tarts, guava duff, etc. The richness of my culture was in front of my face, and I took it for granted. It made a big difference for international students to have a community or a taste of home. During this time of my life, I felt seen, I felt love and having that support pushed me to continue my journey in U.S. higher education. The emptiness transnational students face in their host country is a saddening experience, especially for those who are not capable of going back based on their status, sexual identity, or religious beliefs. As transnational students establish friendships with other transnational students and host country peers, study results indicate that they experience greater social adjustment (Ebinger, 2011; Rienties & Nolan, 2014). Even with the social adjustment to the host country, transnational students who fall under the identity marker as Black, Quare, Afro-Caribbean, and Asylum seeking, safety continues to be a concern. As a result of the lack of safety, they find home and other places.

Section 3: Internal and External Conflicts in Education

Conceptualizing Conflicts in Education

Status is something international students are trained to internalize and given numerical numbers to showcase their status in the country, being tracked like wild animals. The

Immigration system can be inherently racist and dehumanizing. U.S. policy historically reinforced federal immigration policy and other nonfederal immigrant-related policies that are mechanisms of structural racism (De Trinidad Young & Crookes, 2023). The U.S. immigration system has been shaped by xenophobic and racist attitudes and has served as a tool of racial control (Bosworth et al., 2018). The ramifications of existing in this systemic system as a Black, Quare, Afro-Caribbean asylum seeker are exhausting. Indefinitely presents a constant flight-or-fight scenario to which many international students are previewed (Duster et al., 2018). The exploitation of international students should be a crime especially when tokenism is, in fact, at play.

In Journal Entry, "Blackface for the white cause", (Richards, 2023), the researcher talked about the reality of being Afro-Caribbean and Black in higher education:

However, I get it; they need a Black face, but what they do not get is that this position does not fix my financial problems. It becomes a problem for me when I cannot pay my bills. It becomes a problem for me when I can't get to work. It is a problem for me that I am straining my body for an institution that does not care for my well-being. ("Blackface for the white cause," (Richards, 2023)

The United States has a culture that celebrates diversity; it maintains uncomfortable silence regarding race and its psychological impact on international students (Prasath et al., 2022). A strong psychological impact psychologically that leads to depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation. "The Darkest Part of Me" (Richards, 2023) journal entry questioned why it is so important to show up for myself. I just keep playing imagery over and over again, where I allow people to hurt me:

I am tired of fighting! I have been fighting for two years straight, and I am overwhelmed. I need to disconnect, but I can't find a job to sustain myself due to being an international student. I am truly in a space of self-discovery, and it is one of the toughest things I have ever encountered. ("The Darkest Part of Me," Richards, 2023)

Frankly, the researcher felt powerless. Living in America under these harsh conditions made him wonder if he submitted to the system of being less than. The value of self as a Black, Quare, Afro-Caribbean asylum seeker is a crucial reality many are to preview.

The experiences of international students, particularly those from marginalized racial backgrounds, within the United States immigration system reflect the enduring impact of systemic racism. Scholars like Ahmed (2021) emphasized how immigration policies in the United States perpetuate racial inequalities, disproportionately affecting marginalized communities and reinforcing structures of oppression. This sentiment is echoed by Patel (2017) and Nkomo (2020), who highlight the racialized nature of immigration enforcement practices, which subject international students to heightened scrutiny and surveillance. The dehumanizing treatment of international students within the immigration system is further illuminated by Lee (2010), who discussed how racialized perceptions shaped their experiences, resulting in feelings of alienation and marginalization. These experiences contribute to significant psychological distress among international students, as noted by Nguyen et al. (2019), who highlighted the prevalence of mental health challenges such as depression and anxiety within this population. Moreover, the financial exploitation of international students, coupled with tokenistic representations, exacerbates their vulnerability and perpetuates cycles of marginalization and disempowerment (Jackson et al., 2023). Understanding these intersecting dynamics is crucial for

addressing the systemic challenges faced by international students and advocating for more equitable immigration policies.

Findings on Internal and External Conflicts

Sub-theme 1: Internal Conflicts

As a Black, Quare, Afro-Caribbean asylum seeker, the researcher tend to gravitate to his own demographic. Though he worked at a private liberal arts higher education institution in the Western United States and attend the institution, he still present the mask that affirms my Blackness in these spaces (Klein, 2013). The challenge as a Black, Quare man in higher education overlaps with systemic oppression. Black international students who are interested in studying in the United States are concerned about feeling unwelcome due to the current U.S. administration's stance on immigration and international mobility (Fischer, 2015; Patel, 2017). The concern of being international in America is met with the warrant of racism targeting Black people in America.

"The psychological remanence of always watching over your shoulders as you walk out the door or walk into a store to grab a gallon of silk milk. There seems always to be a warrant for one's blackness ("Afro-Caribbean Man Speak up," Richards, 2023)." According to Bleich et al. (2019), Black Americans have historically been disproportionally exposed to both institutional racism (i.e., institutions, policies, and practices that perpetuate barriers to opportunities and racial disparities, such as through residential and educational segregation) and interpersonal racial discrimination (i.e., directly perceived discriminatory interactions between individuals such as racial slurs or microaggressions), which are associated with major physical and mental health consequences, including mortality, hypertension, depression, anxiety, and psychological distress

(Bleich et al., 2019). The racialized tension in America ultimately impacts how other Transnational Black Identities show up in America. Thus, reinforcing the reasoning behind the armor. How one may show up with psychological armor is situational. It provided a way to flip a switch based on the environment the researcher in or, in this case, his intersectionality and how it may show up. The strength of the intersections the researcher tends to lean on most is Blackness. The intersectional analysis gathers that the researchers blackness becomes a defensive armor while Quareness is too intimate. It's too comfortable. He was not safe on a college campus as a Quare, Black, Afro-Caribbean asylum seeker, so he find other spaces to exist. The researcher struggled with challenging the heteronomativity and respectability politics of society, thus resulting in a collision where his black masculinity with his black femininity challenged him the most during this era of my life.

Figure 4

Image Displaying Artist With a Flower and Backdrop

The MASC [Unpublished Poem]

Masculinity you bitch!

I thought I'd never breakthrough.

All the condescending ways,

letting me have autonomy was a joke for you.

Submitting to this construct everyone is conditioned to.

Belittling this kind of special thought, yeah you were the only thing I knew.

Running through phases, no counts, dropping 'em like changes.

Changing the way you walk, talk, demeanor.

Like Missy Elliot you, you can't see 'er

I'm not mad at you, I'm congratulating you. You've made your presence known.

I found peace and combining the thought of loving you. I found peace in knowing that its because of you I'm so strong.

I found peace in knowing that you can collide with my feminine side.

Not straddling the fence,

like most do so best believe i am more than enough for you.

Best believe I will walk beside you, not shrinking myself for your world.

Masculinity I love you. You protected me for a change.

Taught me how to pivot in the midst of the rain.

No longer disdained from the world, when evolution has bid us the fame.

Educating people, engaging experiences. Playing with fire, spit!

Look what came in.

I could laugh with you, no wonder.

Like when you cross your legs, oh the thunder.

Masculinity your smile, skin cocoa butter,

shea moisture, lips plump, its so great to know you.

You are beautiful, you are handsome. It is a pleasure to see you again.

Finally we are at peace evolving with time,

nor longer conflicting with the idea of power, you are finally mine.

But lets not forget our past, it was once graced with shame,

A young boys smile went avid to the rain,

washed him with the color hue that was always meant to be tamed.

Masculinity, you bitch. I hope you see what you did

took a young Black boys joys,

who always caved in.

Note to all Black boys using the shield,

Be careful when you fight, this battle internally can't be fully healed. (Richards, 2023c)

My journal entry, "The MASC," (Richards, 2023c), was a prime example of how this experience of navigating both The Bahamas and America has been a riveting experience not only in identity development but cultural development as well. The number of patriarchal expectations of Black boys transitioning into Black men is outstanding, and how the construct of identity can also be imprisonment. The idea of truly discovering one's Quare identity at such a late stage in life has a daunting reality tethered to it. Attention should be drawn to the fact that the researcher was constantly in a space where construct time was running out. Running out of time to find love, running out of time to start a career, running out of time to stay in America (if it is an option), running out of time to be free. bell hooks (1992) mentioned that until both colonizers and colonized decolonize their minds, audiences in White supremacist cultures will have difficulty "seeing" and understanding images of blackness that do not conform to the stereotype. Yet what do you do when no one wants to see the truth? Then, you finally come to

terms and realize that you are invisible. This discovery process was rather exhausting, and within

this dissertation process, there have been many instances where the researcher has been

emotionally tapped out and do not want to continue doing this program. This was not only

because people within higher education and my community recommended marriage constantly

but also because it presented a time stamp on life; adhering to their expectations and projections

continues to be an overwhelming environment where under the immense pressure anyone would

want out. Education provided a self-discovery platform, but the researcher took on its prejudice,

discrimination, and xenophobia while getting a taste or sliver of what it meant to be whole. This

emptiness was a void that develops further over time. As this data unfolded, it brings up the

insecurities that tether itself to safety.

Figure 5

Image of Author Kneeling Near a Shore in Nashville, Tennessee.

Friendships has limitations. As an International student, the data presented a strong sense of loneliness, vulnerability, and fear however the data also presented a concern for the psychological safety of being a part of a marginalized population. The researcher presented an experience where he had the question the intentions of his friendships where they blatantly disrespected him. *"I am not safe when another Black man says to me to go back to my country* ("Abusive Friendships," Richards, 2023)". The researcher was hurt. He felt the disregard of who he is in America, and how a system can be implicitly racist. It is necessary to understand that the researcher was faced with the ultimate dilemma: the oppressed becomes the oppressor. These words will forever be ingrained in his subconscious, plaguing the reality of what it means to be Black in America and not Black from America. The reality as an Afro-Caribbean student, it is

evident that it is challenging to exist in these educational spaces because of the expectation of upward mobility(success) while simultaneously dealing with restraints by institutional racism and cultural bias (Gilroy, 1993). The roadblocks of anti-Black policies, criminalizing Black transnational identities further perpetuate a dismantling of a true sense of belonging. The journal entry, "It Is Not Your Fourth, But Okay," dated July 2023, brought a strong claim to this research that provided evidence about how the development of Blackness showed up in this research: "To exist in a world where the world does not see your passport, but only your skin is another traumatic experience I had to endure when coming to America" (Richards, 2023). The growth of Blackness the researcher endured during my matriculation through higher education in the United States was a pivotal foundation while exploring contextual and situational experiences like the promising experience of navigating U.S. immigration policy as an asylum seeker while battling the gatekeeping of higher education in the United States As a Black Afro-Caribbean international student, the researcher, like many others, underwent an experience that may have differed from that of White international students (Warren & Constantine, 2007). This is in part because, in the United States, African international students are considered racial/ethnic minorities who are exposed to racism, nativism, and other discrimination (Hanassab, 2006). So, the real question became "Was the campus safe?" but was it safe for Black international students?

These experiences of a Black, Quare, Afro-Caribbean Asylum seeker alluded to mental health problems. The journal entry "The Darkest Part of Me," (Richards, 2023) addressed the sadness that has been around for years. As depression creeped up, the fear of being alone hurted; on the opposite side of the spectrum to reach out to the community as a Black man, it felt

emasculating to tell Tori or De'ce (my closest LA friends) how depression was winning its battle over me. Holding on to this prehistoric notion of what it means to be That Black Man ("To be That Black Man," Richards, 2023).

 Narratives and Reflective Journal Entries

These experiences of a Black, Quare, Afro-Caribbean Asylum seeker caused mental health problems. Journal entry "The Darkest Part of Me" (Richards, 2023) explained how my journey through mental health crisis impacted my day-to-day activities. The extensive reality of being both, Afro-Caribbean and Black made way for existential crisis during the tenure of program.

I fought for stability for over a decade. In this space, I found myself broken more now than ever. My therapist kept recommending that I get medication. My emotions were constantly in an uproar, and I needed stability in this era of my life. I still said no, I could battle this myself. However, the reality of the matter was this cheap ass, but expensive school gave me nothing but poverty for the complete 3 years of the program. I hustled so hard from going to nonprofits, attended Black Lives Matter events to network and find more money (which I successfully did) to even tapping into my fraternity to cover my financial concerns for about a year and a half. Man, the pressure has been on for years, I think on most days now, America wants me to die. Die and then get shipped back to my homeland, because that's where I should've been from the jump. Who would have thought, clinging on to the very thing the world tells you who to be, becomes the very thing that breaks you.

In America, Blackness is beautiful, but it can also be dangerous, especially if you are a Black man. A Black man who continued holding on to this prehistoric notion of what it means to

be That Black Man ("To be That Black Man," Richards, 2023) lends itself to the pride, ego, and

pain of being a part of the heteronomitivity.

Figure 6

An Image of my K5 Graduation Photo at Nassau Christian Academy.

To Be That Black Man [Unpublished Poem]

To be that Black man, requires you to stand tall no flinching.
Your weakness will be a weapon used, truly invasive.
To be a Black man means you have to show no fear
the tears, you shed, means you easily manipulated, don't you dare.
To be that Black man requires you the utmost confidence.
I don't care if it fake, just don't let no one see through it.

To be that Black man requires you to be the rock that can't be moved.

Settled in the wind, like the whistle singing the sad blues.
Your Jazzy fae wanna be, holding up what you claim to be the reasoning for
our existence and yet you wonder why.
I fathom the thought that relinquish the idea, for when the black man becomes the problem of
most.
Please tell the story where the Black man will rise,
like the pastor who speaks, he shall fear no one but God.
To be that black man requires strength unfolded
by the vulnerability between his soul and eyes.
That's what they told him, what he says may be true,
For that Black man that forget the parts of himself unbeknownst to the ones who taint this world
true blue.
I've kept the heart beating for you since you were 3,
fearful of the world and how it is tearing you down to bleed.
I know you're hurting, I know you are tired, but one thing for sure, I can see you true heart in it.
for years they've been waiting for you to exist, molding you into the person they see fit.
For this moment, where their curiosity kills your spirit, just remember it is not just you, we all in
it.
To be that Black man is complicated
leaping into a world of empty promises.
I don't want you to believe me, when I say this,
to be that Black man, man it you, the blankest slate, the world can ever knew. (Richards, 2023d)

This poem depicted the internal conflict pushed upon Black men in this world.

Superficial standards of masculinity cloud the judgment of strength and degrade the value of

vulnerability. This poem also spoke about the internal conflict of defining masculinity, receiving

the world's views of himself, and rejecting the notion of finding oneself. Black Quare men

struggle with accepting their Quare identities because of internalized homophobia—to evade

hostile antigay treatment on their campuses (Means & Jaeger, 2013; Patton, 2011).

Crichlow (2014) mentioned that, for most young men in the Caribbean, the success and

strength of their manhood, to a large degree, depends on how well they can perform "normative,

straitjacket or dominant masculinity" to obfuscate any form of tenderness or effeminacy. Their

hypermasculinity is an apparatus or sum of collective surveillance and regulation of what is

supposed to be male, masculine, and not effeminate. To that end, most men police and deny

expressions of tenderness to perform, instead, a certain cheerful obsequiousness,

hypermasculinity, and, by extension, hyperheterosexualization (Wesley, 2014).

This type of masculinity was brought from the Bahamas, where many young Black Quare

Bahamians are forced to assimilate into these constructs. However, a big recommendation for the

next generation of Black, Afro-Caribbean, Quare scholars is to not fixate on the embedded

construct of masculinity but rather refer to it as the configuration of practice that is accomplished

in social action, which can differ according to the gender relations in a particular social setting

(Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 836). We must adjust the notion of what it means to be

Black, Quare, and men. What it means to be a Black Quare man is complex and rich, and it truly

depends on how you view yourself in the long run. It overlaps with oppression from higher

education, internalized homophobia from community/culture, and the ongoing battle of the social

construct of masculinity. These journal entries highlighted the external factors that directly

impacted the internal factor (mental health), which can be a larger problem when students like

me are not given the right support.

Autoethnographic Insight

To reflect upon the nuanced experiences of being a Black, Quare, Afro-Caribbean,

asylum seeker, and doctoral student seemed majorly complex. These identities together are far

from simple. The negative impact of having these identities comes with a negative connotation.

To be Black in America is met with racism. To be Afro-Caribbean in America, the researcher

was met with xenophobia and neo-racism. Quareness was met with both racism and xenophobia.

If one was identified from the islands, they were met with undeniable homophobia and

heteronomitvity. This subtheme of Internal conflict embodied real sadness from being told to go back to your country by someone who said they loved you, from crying on the bathroom floor due to the feeling of isolation and being alone. The internal conflict continued to run rampant through these journal entries.

Sub-theme 2: External Conflicts

As an Afro-Caribbean, Black, Quare, and asylum seeker individual, facing restrictions in America is a normative experience. Such individuals are reduced to mere numbers, controlled by systemic forces, and dehumanized in the process. While this reality raises concerns for marginalized and invisible populations, it also underscores the resilience and adaptability required to survive in America. The lack of security entails navigating micro-aggressions and the pervasive fear of being Black in America, revealing facets of Blackness often overlooked by those outside these specific identities.

Vignettes and Examples From the Data

As an Afro-Caribbean, Black, and Quare man, I found it a continuous challenge to understand the lay of the land. I had to forgo my identity to meet professors and lecturers in the middle about language, cultural relevancy, and trends (Robertson et al., 2000). More importantly, when I requested a more diverse curriculum for the past two years of my doctoral program, I was met with micro-aggressions: the readings did not match my professional dynamics, especially when a program focus such as that of the EdD degree was specific to a practitioner-scholar (which meant working with U.S. K-12 educators as a researcher ("Dey no see me," Richards, 2023). These responses were political and dismissive. It also positioned students like me to feel invisible. International students continue to experience racism and discrimination at several

levels, including through school admission policies and procedures, tracking practices, and a distinctive lack of clarity given to migrant students about eligibility for progress to higher education (Darmody et al., 2012).

The words from my aunt back in the Bahamas played in my ears for over a decade: "You a foreigner, in a foreign land. Don't you go over there tink'n you have a say in how them people operate dey country. Sit down and shut up! You are there for one reason and one reason only, to get an education" ("Foreign Tings," Richards, 2023). She suggested I silence myself and not focus on the issues plaguing the African American students. The funny coincidence was I was already affected by racism the minute I stepped on American soil. For being Black in America, no matter where you are from, you would still be in the crossfire of racism in America. Scholar Kim (2023) stated that international students in U.S. colleges and universities primarily focus on adjustment issues and challenges, acculturative stress, and mental health problems associated with language barriers and cultural differences. Additionally, due to academic and social isolation, international students face many acculturative stressors during their time in the United States (Rodríguez et al., 2019). The acceleration and assimilation to the customs and policies of America can be rather strange for international students, specifically Black, Afro-Caribbean students. The racial tension brings into context how the development of Blackness further complicates the safety and security of international students.

To further exacerbate international students' experience in American higher education, a concern truly surrounds the experiences of discrimination that can have a detrimental impact on international students and have been linked with poor psychological well-being and depression (Rodríguez et al., 2019). For instance, I have attended HBCU (Historically Black Colleges and

Universities) for both my bachelor's and master's programs in Nashville, Tennessee. Both have been first-hand experience in educating individuals outside of the perimeters of America, focused specifically on the historical battles African Americans faced from slavery till now. This era within my educational journey laid the foundation for the development of Blackness and Nigrescence (Cross, 1980). American Baptist College in Nashville, Tennessee, provided riveting content to understand the Black experience in America better. Not only did it challenge my cultural background, but it expanded my intersectionality of redefining Blackness from a global perspective.

There is no physical or psychological protection for being Black in America. The journal entry, "It's not your Fourth, but okay. . ." (Richards, 2023), painted the picture about the Fourth Of July vivid as day: Before the fireworks came the American national anthem and as all stood up to pay their respect, I remained seated. Why? Because of the way I felt in that cultural climate that if the Constitution did not see beyond the pigmentation of my skin or recognize Black people as more than two-thirds of a person, why should I respect the Pledge of Allegiance or the American national anthem?

As I sat down, my friends looked at me strangely, as if I had committed a heinous crime. I would not budge, but low-key, I felt like I was a part of the Nashville Sit-Ins (a series of non-violent protests from February 13 to May 10, 1960) (Clark & Coy, 2015). I saw this clip vividly in my head: Myself sitting, a blank stare, vacant eyes, immovable body. I kept thinking to myself don't retaliate; stick to your beliefs. I guess I was saying to myself if they can't sing the Negro national anthem ("Lift Every Voice and Sing" [Johnson, 1900, cited in National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, 2023]), why should I respect this white-wash version of

American history. As I sat there frozen, my eyes glued to the specific part of the stage, I zoned out, ignoring the police officer on the horse or the White lady behind me singing to her heart's content the national anthem. Once she saw me sitting down, she indefinitely pulled a "Karen," an outrageous and over-reactive response (Slang Dictionary, 2020). This White lady shouted out "You better stand right now. You are in my country" ("It's not your Fourth, but okay. . . .," Richards, 2023)!

During a time when racism was heightened, I reminded myself that I have rights in this country, regardless of whether I am a citizen or an alien. In my mind during that time, I could only think about African American scholars, activists, leaders, and teachers, pondering what armor they would put on to face the big bad world. Higher Education in America can never truly prepare transnational identities to cope with the reality of African Americans, nor can they protect us on or off campus (Rodríguez et al., 2019). Nothing will ever take the feeling away of walking out of my home and being gunned down, falling prey to a stereotype that positions Black men in America as an animal.

Autoethnographic Insight

The reality of navigating both U.S. higher education and the immigration system has been an overwhelming reality. Reflecting upon the data, one can see that it presents a consistent state of turmoil. Feeling an uncomfortable reality of the impacts placed on marginalized communities (i.e., Black, Afro-Caribbean, Quare, asylum seekers) and dealing with the ramifications of anti-immigrant laws and how their transnational identity has to be creative with finding resources and maintaining a sense of stability while balancing the fear and hope of one day having an opportunity to become either a citizen, work, or support.

Conclusion

As a doctoral student navigating U.S. higher education, the researchers experience was marked by recurring themes of internal and external conflicts, the crucial role of community and support systems, and the complex struggles of intersectional identity. Utilizing triangulation of data sources, including personal narratives, academic literature, and peer-reviewed studies, provided a robust and comprehensive understanding of these themes. Negative case analysis, where instances that do not fit the expected pattern was examined, further enriched this understanding by highlighting the diversity of experiences within these common themes.

The researcher's journey has been fraught with both internal and external conflicts. Internally, he has grappled with feelings of isolation, identity crises, and the constant pressure to conform to a new cultural environment. Externally, systemic barriers like xenophobic and racist immigration policies, lack of institutional support, and financial instability have added to the challenge. This dual conflict created a particularly tough environment for international students with marginalized identities such as mine—Black, Quare, Afro-Caribbean, and asylum seeker. The research underscored this, with Prasath et al. (2022) highlighting the psychological impact of racial silence on international students and Hwang et al. (2016) discussing the powerlessness felt due to dependency on institutions for visa status and resources.

Community and support systems have been my lifeline. Strong support networks, including peer groups and cultural communities, provide emotional, financial, and practical assistance, significantly easing the transition and integration into a new environment. The presence of a supportive community mitigated the loneliness and cultural shock experienced by international students. Martirosyan et al. (2019) and Ebinger (2011) emphasized the importance

of social adjustment facilitated by friendships with other international students and host country peers.

Navigating multiple intersecting identities added layers of complexity to the researchers' experience. Being Black, Quare, Afro-Caribbean, and an asylum seeker in U.S. higher education amplified the challenges due to compounded systemic oppressions like racism, xenophobia, homophobia, and neo-racism. These identities were often met with negative societal attitudes and institutional neglect, leading to a heightened sense of vulnerability and exclusion. Bosworth et al. (2018) and Warren and Constantine (2007) discussed the compounded challenges faced by international students of color due to xenophobic and racist attitudes embedded in U.S. immigration policies.

Reflecting on the researchers' educational journey, he saw the value of international students clearly. We bring diverse cultures, perspectives, and economic contributions to U.S. higher education (Hegarty, 2014; Luo & Jamieson-Drake, 2013). Despite this, our experiences often highlight a gap between the value we bring and the support we receive. Living in the United States with a transnational identity, the researcher has realized how crucial a strong community is. His survival and success have been heavily reliant on the support of his peers and cultural community, which provided a sense of belonging and practical assistance. This reliance on peer support is critical for marginalized students, who often face additional barriers within institutional settings. The researcher's community support was essential for navigating the systemic challenges and personal hardships of being a Black, Quare, Afro-Caribbean asylum seeker in U.S. higher education. Martirosyan et al. (2019) emphasized the social adjustment benefits of strong peer networks.

Institutional support—or the lack thereof—has played a crucial role in my experience. The curriculum often failed to reflect the diverse identities and experiences of students like me, and securing funding remains a significant challenge. Research supported the need for more inclusive and supportive policies (Kuh et al., 2005; Tinto, 1998). The nuanced experiences of holding multiple marginalized identities present complex challenges. These identities intersect in ways that compound oppression and discrimination, making the navigation of higher education and immigration systems particularly difficult. These intersecting identities' emotional and psychological toll is profound, often leading to feelings of isolation and systemic invisibility.

The constant negotiation of identity and survival within U.S. higher education and immigration systems is overwhelming. Systemic barriers and anti-immigrant laws create a state of perpetual turmoil for marginalized communities, forcing us to be resourceful and resilient in our quest for stability and acceptance. Reflecting on these themes and my personal experiences underscores the need for more inclusive, supportive, and equitable policies in higher education and immigration. The resilience and solidarity within communities provide hope and strength for international students navigating these challenging landscapes.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

In this chapter, I delve into the implications of the findings unveiled in Chapter 4, integrating my personal reflections through autoethnography with a broader thematic analysis. My journey through the intricate landscape of U.S. higher education as a doctoral student has been deeply transformative, intertwining a diverse array of experiences that offer profound insights into the complexities of my life. Through the lens of my personal narrative, a rich tapestry of themes emerges, vividly illustrating the myriad obstacles and triumphs inherent in this academic odyssey.

From the perpetual juggling act between internal conflicts and external challenges to the invaluable support cultivated within communities and networks, my journey mirrors the delicate interplay of identity, resilience, and belonging. By delving into an eclectic mix of personal anecdotes, scholarly literature, and research studies, I have unearthed layers of understanding that illuminate the nuanced realities encountered by individuals like myself.

This exploration not only shed light on my own path but it advocates for a higher education and immigration landscape that is more inclusive, supportive, and equitable. Within this chapter, I delve into the significance of key themes—Intersectional Identity Struggles in Education, Community and Support Systems in Education, and Internal and External Conflicts in Education—in the context of existing literature. Additionally, I offer recommendations for policy, practice, and future research, aiming to foster positive change within academic institutions and beyond.

Section 1: Intersectional Identity Struggles in Education

The intersectional identity struggles experienced by individuals in education, particularly those of Black Quare individuals, reveal profound challenges within academic environments. These individuals navigate spaces where their identities are not fully accepted or understood, leading to feelings of invisibility and undervaluation. Systemic racism in education exacerbates these struggles, creating hostile environments and limiting opportunities, as evidenced by battles with financial aid and institutional support. Additionally, Afro-Caribbean immigrants face the complexity of adapting to new cultural norms while contending with biases from peers and faculty. Despite these obstacles, resilience is found within these intersecting identities, reflected in the strength of individuals like Black Quare Afro-Caribbean asylum seekers. However, developing a positive Black identity within the context of intersecting identities presents its own challenges. These findings underscore the need for greater recognition and support for individuals with complex, intersecting identities in educational settings.

Key Barriers and Challenges

Navigating the educational system as a Black Quare person presents many challenges, with the constant struggle of finding acceptance and understanding in academic spaces. Feeling unseen and undervalued, I grappled with embracing my full identity while encountering systemic racism and institutional barriers that hinder my progress. From battles with financial aid to the lack of institutional support, these barriers are pervasive, hindering academic success. Additionally, being an Afro-Caribbean immigrant added another layer of complexity as I adapt to new cultural norms while facing bias from peers and faculty. Balancing intersecting identities

further complicates the journey, as developing a positive Black identity becomes intertwined with Quare and immigrant identities, impacting self-confidence and academic achievements.

Interpretation of Findings

The findings bring to light the complex struggles faced by individuals with intersecting identities in educational settings, particularly those of Black Quare individuals and Afro-Caribbean immigrants. It's a reality of feeling unseen, undervalued, and navigating systemic barriers like financial aid disparities and inadequate institutional support, all rooted in systemic racism. These challenges are compounded by the intersectionality of identities, adding layers to the experience of cultural adaptation and bias. Despite these adversities, there's an undeniable resilience within these intersecting identities. Still, the interpretation of findings also reveals a troubling trend: higher education systems' failure to support international students adequately. Despite enriching academic environments intellectually and culturally, international students often encounter high dropout rates and systemic obstacles driven by institutional racism and cultural bias, further exacerbated by restrictive policies like visa limitations. As someone who's experienced these challenges firsthand, it's clear that there's a pressing need for educational institutions to interpret these findings as a call to action, prioritizing inclusivity, awareness, and support to dismantle systemic barriers and ensure equitable opportunities for all individuals, irrespective of their intersecting identities.

Integration With Existing Literature

According to Nichols and Stahl (2019), an intersectionality lens is crucial for interrogating equity policies and strategies within higher education institutions and challenging the invisibility of particular social identities, such as women of color. My findings align with this

perspective, revealing that intersectionality helps to address overlapping external factors like racism, homophobia, xenophobia, and neo-racism. These challenges are compounded by the intersectionality of identities, adding layers to the experience of cultural adaptation and bias. Intersectionality in higher education advocates for a non-traditional epistemology to generate complex bodies of knowledge (Hill Collins, 2000) and promotes social justice and transforming institutional structures for historically marginalized groups.

My journey as an Afro-Caribbean, Black, Quare asylum seeker adds depth to understanding intersectional identity struggles. For instance, my autoethnographic reflections highlighted these intersecting identities' unique challenges and resilience. The concealment of Quare identities and the expression of vulnerability within educational settings that may not fully affirm queer identities are ongoing struggles. In a journal entry titled "Days Turn into Weeks" (Richards, 2024), I noted, "I chuckle at the mere fact that in the space of growth comes a system unbeknownst of oneself that offers a clear transparency of who I am becoming." This reflection underscores the complexities of Afro-Caribbean identity and Blackness. In the United States, Blackness often takes precedence, pushing Afro-Caribbean identities to the background, while Quareness contends with the heteronormativity ingrained in Afro-Caribbean culture. As an asylum seeker, my identity is often prioritized over my status as a doctoral student due to the higher stakes involved. Though seemingly in conflict, these intersecting identities—Afro-Caribbean, Black, Quare, asylum seeker—coexist and influence each other. This research highlighted how identities are situational and how the challenges or barriers they present were systemically overlapping. Consequently, this nuanced understanding of intersectionality offered a unique lens to explore identity struggles in greater depth.

Implications for Educational Policy and Practice

Educators and policymakers must adopt a multifaceted approach encompassing curriculum reform, faculty development, and community partnerships to better support students with intersecting identities. According to Allexsaht-Snider et al. (2013), praxis in education involves merging theoretical understanding with practical application. This approach was particularly relevant in higher education, where instructional methods should prioritize experiential learning, hands-on activities, and real-world application of concepts.

Institutions should redesign curricula to include interdisciplinary courses and integrate community-based learning experiences. This will allow students to engage with course material meaningfully, reflecting their diverse identities and experiences. For example, creating courses that address intersectionality and social justice can provide students with a more comprehensive understanding of these issues. Investing in faculty development programs is essential for educators adopting praxis-based approaches. These programs should focus on enhancing pedagogical skills, promoting active learning strategies, and fostering an inclusive learning environment. Educators need to be equipped with the tools to create classroom spaces that validate and celebrate the diverse identities of their students. Building partnerships with external stakeholders, such as industry partners and community organizations (e.g., the African Coalition), is vital. These partnerships can provide Afro-Caribbean students and others with authentic learning experiences through internships, service-learning projects, and research collaborations. Such initiatives can bridge the gap between academic learning and real-world application, enriching students' educational experiences.

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Strategies to Create More Inclusive and Supportive Educational Environments.

Educators and staff should undergo regular training in cultural competence to understand better and address the needs of students with intersecting identities. This training should cover topics such as implicit bias, microaggressions, and strategies for creating inclusive classroom environments.

Increasing the representation of diverse identities within the curriculum and among faculty members is crucial. This can be achieved by including more works by authors of color, LGBTQ+ scholars, and other marginalized voices in course readings and discussions. Hiring faculty members from diverse backgrounds can also provide students with role models and mentors who understand their unique challenges. Institutions should provide comprehensive support services tailored to the needs of students with intersecting identities. This could include counseling services, mentorship programs, and affinity groups that offer a safe space for students to connect and share their experiences.

The Importance of Representation and Cultural Competence in Educational Settings.

Representation and cultural competence are critical components of an inclusive educational environment. When students see themselves reflected in the curriculum and among the faculty, they are more likely to feel valued and understood. According to Hill Collins (2000), intersectionality in higher education promotes social justice and the transformation of institutional structures for historically marginalized groups. By fostering cultural competence among educators and ensuring diverse representation, institutions can create a more supportive and affirming environment for all students. Educators and policymakers must adopt praxis-oriented approaches, invest in faculty development, build community partnerships, and prioritize

cultural competence and representation. These strategies will help create more inclusive and supportive educational environments that acknowledge and celebrate the diverse identities of all students.

Section 2: Community and Support Systems in Education

International students contribute significantly to U.S. higher education by bringing diverse cultures, perspectives, and economic investments. Despite their value, many universities fail to fully appreciate their influence on intellectually and culturally enriching academic environments. Peer and institutional support systems are crucial to these students' educational experiences.

Interpretation of Findings

My findings on the importance of community and support for international students align with and expand upon current research as a Black Quare, Afro-Caribbean asylum seeker, navigating educational spaces has revealed significant gaps in support, safety, and security for marginalized groups. Language barriers and cultural differences, as highlighted by Lee (2013), hinder classroom participation and group collaboration. Financial constraints are another major hurdle; Schulmann and Choudaha (2014) reported widespread dissatisfaction among international students regarding financial support from host universities. Universities must provide targeted funding and educate international students about the true costs of living and studying in the United States (Patel, 2017). Tillman (1990) emphasized the importance of institutional commitment to designing effective support services that address academic and personal needs, a need that my experiences underscore.

International students actively seek institutions that support their social and academic integration, which is vital for their retention and success (Cetinkaya-Yildiz et al., 2011; Cho & Yu, 2014)—my time in Nashville, surrounded by a Bahamian community, provided a profound sense of belonging and cultural connection, highlighting the importance of peer support and cultural familiarity. Access to resources and workshops on job search processes and professional development is another crucial support area.

Personal Insights

My realities have continuously clashed over the past three years, leading to academic underperformance as I focused on survival. Creating communities often led to disappointment and numerous setbacks. Finding solidarity among peers and mentors is essential to combat systemic racism in educational institutions. Living in Los Angeles gave me a unique perspective on community formation, where relationships often felt transactional, and classism was prevalent. I felt out of place for years. As I reflected in my journal entry "Cultural Reset," (Richards, 2023), "I keep contemplating about going home. Dropping everything, and just leave. I need a cultural reset." I was at my wit's end, battling depression, suicidal ideation, and systemic racism. I couldn't win. Combatting that depressive state involved building a supportive community that fosters positive Black identity development, especially in predominantly white institutions (PWIs).

Being part of a small group of Black, Quare, and Afro-Caribbean asylum seekers in a doctoral program presented significant challenges in finding support. At certain points in my academic career, I had a case manager who resonated with me due to our shared minority and transnational identities. In my journal entry "This Can't Be Life" (Richards, 2023), I wrote, "My

case manager actually showed up for me in ways I did not see coming. She gave me the remaining funding for my rent, $30.00." This instance exemplifies the importance of community. Despite rejecting their offer three times, my case manager remained committed to helping me. That $30.00 for survival in California made a significant difference for me that day. For a Black, Quare, Afro-Caribbean asylum seeker, the value and intent behind the gesture showed me that I had people looking out for me, which then finally sunk in that I am not alone.

Implications for Educational Policy and Practice

Resources for international students often dwindle and become scarce as they progress to a higher degree of attainment. The recommendation for enhancing peer support networks and institutional support mechanisms is to understand these students' individual needs and backgrounds. Administration and staff should familiarize themselves with the international population they are enrolling in, creating a more profound preparation for these students' cultural transition. This approach aligns with findings by Andrade (2006) and Glass et al. (2015), who highlight the importance of cultural awareness and tailored support in improving international students' experiences.

Graduate programs should enhance peer support by pairing students based on responses to a simple survey. Integrating technology in this process can help match students with cultural similarities and shared identities, fostering a supportive peer network. This method is supported by studies suggesting that peer mentoring and support programs significantly aid international students' social and academic adjustment (Johnson & Sandhu, 2007; Rienties & Nolan, 2014).

Additionally, institutions should provide specialized academic writing support tailored to the needs of doctoral students. Access to scholarly writers and writing centers dedicated to

graduate-level writing can significantly improve international doctoral students' academic success and confidence (Martirosyan et al., 2015). Enhancing these resources ensures that international students receive comprehensive support throughout their academic journey.

<p style="text-align:center">Section 3: Internal and External Conflicts in Education</p>

Navigating the complexities of U.S. higher education and the immigration system presents significant psychological challenges, which have stirred considerable research interest. The mental well-being of international students has emerged as a pressing concern for universities worldwide (Poyrazli, 2015). The growing population of foreign students of color pursuing education in the United States is particularly noteworthy. This trend underscores the necessity of addressing the health and wellness of international students, especially considering the paradox between the United States' celebration of diversity and its reluctance to engage in discussions about race (Jiang, 2020). Both external and internal factors intricately shape the educational experiences of researchers in this realm.

Interpretation of Findings

The intersection of Black identity development stages with educational experiences significantly impacts self-esteem and academic performance. For instance, in the extract from "Life in Full Circle," (Richards, 2023), Dr. Travis Alfred Chavez Richards reflected, "This is not the end . . . but this journey has really worn me out." The ongoing struggle to secure resources to cover living expenses and tuition as an international student has proven to be deeply traumatic. This prolonged exposure to stress can result in heightened levels of negative emotions, including irritability, agitation, depression, and anxiety, along with difficulties in relaxation and maintaining a state of arousal (Mori, 2000). International students face restrictions on off-campus

work, requiring approval and limiting employment to specific fields, posing challenges in securing fair compensation for their services. I often feel isolated as a doctoral student, particularly within my age demographic. Hailing from the Bahamas, where the percentage of doctoral students is notably low, I take pride in my achievements. However, despite this pride, the reality of marginalized individuals having to navigate academia largely independently is stark. Compared to their domestic counterparts, international students consistently report lower levels of well-being (Paralkar, 2020). Despite the accumulating barriers and the increasing challenges of navigating U.S. higher education and the immigration system, there remains a glimmer of hope. However, external conflicts compounded by systemic racism continue to present additional hurdles in my educational journey. In a journal entry titled "My Time," (Richards, 2023), I wrote, "I am upset on most days when things don't go my way, but right now, I am taking the time to appreciate the work I have done." While such sentiments often induce mental anguish, leading to exhaustion, depression, anxiety, and even suicidal thoughts, there are moments when I manage to tune out the noise and embrace the person I am becoming—Dr. Travis Richards.

Implications for Educational Policy and Practice

Navigating the complexities of U.S. higher education and the immigration system poses significant challenges, prompting a call for comprehensive support services tailored to the unique needs of international students and individuals from marginalized communities. Research by Hendrickson et al. (2011) underscored the importance of analyzing friendship networks, social connectedness, and satisfaction levels among international students, emphasizing the necessity of resources for adaptation and belonging. Additionally, Hirai et al. (2015) highlighted the

significance of psychological and sociocultural adjustment for first-year international students, suggesting targeted support services for successful integration. Policy revisions are warranted to ease restrictions on off-campus work, as Mori (2000) addressed the mental health concerns of international students, and Paralkar (2020) advocated for expanded employment opportunities to alleviate financial burdens.

Cultural competency training is imperative to mitigate instances of stereotyping and social isolation experienced by international and marginalized students. Mori (2000) emphasized that addressing mental health concerns through culturally sensitive approaches is crucial. Moreover, Paralkar (2020) stressed the importance of promoting an inclusive campus culture to foster a supportive environment conducive to academic success. Prioritizing mental health support services, including counseling and therapy, is essential to address heightened levels of stress prevalent among international and marginalized student populations, as highlighted by Mori (2000). Creating safe spaces for expression and seeking help, as recommended by Paralkar (2020), can facilitate emotional well-being and academic resilience. Efforts to enhance diversity and representation within academic communities are crucial, as well as acknowledging and celebrating the achievements of individuals from underrepresented backgrounds, as demonstrated by Hendrickson et al. (2011) and Hirai et al. (2015).

Summary

In reflecting on the critical themes of community and support systems within education, it's evident that international students, including myself as a Black Quare, Afro-Caribbean asylum seeker, contribute immensely to the fabric of U.S. higher education. However, there remains a disparity between their invaluable contributions and the inadequate support they often

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receive. My own experiences navigating educational spaces have revealed significant gaps in support, safety, and security for marginalized groups. These findings align with existing research and underscore the urgent need for targeted interventions to address the multifaceted challenges faced by international students and marginalized communities.

As I have traversed through various educational landscapes, I have encountered obstacles ranging from language barriers to financial constraints. The insights gleaned from scholarly works by Lee (2013), Schulmann and Choudaha (2014), and Tillman (1990) corroborated these challenges, emphasizing the necessity of culturally sensitive support mechanisms and institutional commitment to addressing the diverse needs of international students. Additionally, my personal journey underscored the transformative power of community and peer support in combating systemic racism and fostering positive identity development. Moving forward, educational policies and practices must be recalibrated to prioritize cultural competency training, enhance peer support networks, and provide tailored academic resources to ensure the holistic well-being and academic success of all students, particularly those from underrepresented backgrounds. Through these concerted efforts, we can pave the way for a more inclusive and equitable educational landscape that celebrates diversity and empowers all learners to thrive.

Synthesis of Key Findings

Exploring doctoral students' multifaceted experiences, particularly within the realms of internal and external conflicts in education, community and support systems, and intersectional identity struggles, it becomes apparent that resilience plays a pivotal role in navigating the intricate landscape of academia. The complexities that international students face, exemplified by visa issues and limited work opportunities, underscore the need for tailored support

mechanisms within educational institutions (Lee, 2013). Moreover, the intersectionality of identities, such as being a Black Quare Afro-Caribbean asylum seeker, highlights the importance of affirming and understanding diverse identities within academic communities (Schulmann & Choudaha, 2014).

Within the realm of community and support systems, the significance of creating inclusive spaces that acknowledge and validate queer Black identities cannot be overstated. Research by Tillman (1990) emphasizes the pivotal role of supportive communities in combating systemic marginalization and fostering positive identity development among underrepresented groups. However, the inherent challenges of navigating educational spaces that fail to fully embrace and understand diverse identities persist, leading to feelings of invisibility and undervaluation (Paralkar, 2020). Embracing authenticity and utilizing autoethnography as a tool for narrative exploration offers a powerful means of amplifying marginalized voices and contributing to the evolving discourse on intersectionality in education (Mori, 2000). As scholars and advocates, we must continue to engage in critical dialogue and research endeavors that center on the lived experiences of individuals navigating complex educational systems, ensuring that our efforts are informed by an intersectional lens and a commitment to social justice and equity.

Major Contributions/Takeaways

Doctoral researchers face the intellectually demanding task of undertaking original research to contribute to existing knowledge (Cai et al., 2019). Throughout this research, the researcher found autoethnography to be one of the most demanding methods they have encountered academically. It demanded such vulnerability from me to the point of emotional

distress (Doloriert & Sambrook, 2009). This self-reflective project allowed me to address inner child trauma while navigating adulthood (Chang, 2008). It's truly healing work. aspire that future researchers, activists, scholars, and young adults delving into profound content will find inspiration in the work done within this project. I believe the 2.5 years dedicated to this endeavor deserve reverence as divine work, enriching the complexity of being an Afro-Caribbean, Quare, Black asylum seeker in higher education. This dissertation aims to challenge the gatekeeping prevalent against minority communities within higher education.

We need more advocates willing and able to speak out against the disenfranchisement of other Black and Brown individuals in predominantly white institutions (Kim, 2023). Additionally, there must be a diverse representation of international individuals among staff and faculty within international departments in higher education. We require individuals who are unbiased and capable of recognizing the support transnational students need at face value (Lien, 2021). Simply presenting solutions is inadequate when the world is in pain; we must find ways to transcend love and foster a sense of belonging for all global citizens.

Recommendations for Future Researchers

I welcome all researchers to explore not only themselves but different ways of approaching research. I challenge scholars to explore Understudied Populations: This research highlights the understudied population of Black, Quare, asylum-seeking students in higher education. Future researchers should focus on exploring and understanding the multifaceted challenges, experiences, and needs of this minority group while shedding light on their experiences in U.S. higher education. Overcome Information Restriction: Information on race, gender, or status of new asylum applicants is limited or restricted; future researchers must work

toward finding innovative ways to access data ethically while ensuring the protection and morals of the individuals are respected. In addition, collaboration with relevant entities and organizations might be necessary to access this specific population. (i.e., The African Coalition).

Use Multiple Theoretical Perspectives

The current research drew from five theoretical perspectives to analyze the researcher's experiences (Critical Race Theory [Bell, 1995), Quare Theory [Johnson, 2001), Intersectionality [Crenshaw, 1991), Nigrescence [Cross, 1991), and Transnational Identity [Esteban-Guitart & Vila, 2015)). Future researchers should consider adopting an interdisciplinary approach and employing multiple theoretical frameworks to gain a comprehensive understanding of the experiences of marginalized and invisible populations. Education can be rather rigid, but if we challenge a system to change its way of approaching academic writing, studying, and achieving, we truly begin the process of welcoming the next generation of activists, educators, and positive disrupters.

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Researcher Future's Intent

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As a new researcher, I am passionate about innovative research. After completing my dissertation, I have delved into various aspects of U.S. higher education. Although finding a niche has been challenging, I am committed to growing my educational consulting business. My dissertation was a foundation for developing new strategies to support students with diverse identities. In the fall of 2022, I launched "The Safe Space by Travis Chavez" (Richards, 2022). Today, it is being rebranded to reach a broader audience. I am also working on an art installation called "The Variation of Blackness," which features the artistic expressions of Black asylum seekers through poetry and other art forms. My love for research has opened new paths for me,

allowing me to combine creativity, research, and advocacy. This journey has given me a deeper understanding of my strengths and passions.

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Recommendation for International Students

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U.S. higher education can be a very intimidating place; here are some guidelines for Afro-Caribbean youth who are in pursuit of higher education. It is highly recommended to know university Resources. It is crucial to familiarize yourself with the wide array of resources available within the university.

Reach Out to Former Afro-Caribbean Alumni. Be sure to utilize platforms like LinkedIn or connect with the alumni association on campus to establish relationships with former Afro-Caribbean students. Seek External Immigration Assistance: Remember that international departments might have limitations concerning immigration policies. Don't hesitate to seek out external resources if needed.

Consult Afro-Caribbean Non-Profit. Take advantage of the opportunity to schedule free consultations with Afro-Caribbean non-profit organizations. This will help you understand your rights in America and stay informed about policy issues affecting student life.

Prepare Thoughtful Questions for Alumni. Before engaging with alumni, prepare intentional questions about navigating higher education experiences with racism, xenophobia, language barriers, and other oppressive systems.

Document Important Conversations. Make it a habit to document discussions that could impact your personal, professional, or academic journey.

Develop Contingency Plans. Recognize the importance of having contingency plans in place for various aspects of life, including job opportunities, academic pursuits, and personal circumstances. As a transnational individual, being ready to adapt and pivot is key.

Make Informed College Choices. While the marketing may be enticing, prioritize understanding the cultural climate of potential colleges.

Ask Probing Questions. Thes can engage curiosity by asking questions such as:

- How does the institution address diversity and foster a sense of belonging for international students?

- What specific support systems are available for Afro-Caribbean students?

- What are the limitations of the program concerning career development and assistance?

- Can the institution provide examples of firsthand support offered to students facing hardship, and what forms did this support take?

Limitation

The primary challenge the researcher encountered in this project revolved around time constraints. Time became crucial as the researcher navigated the terrain of employing autoethnography for their dissertation. Consistently, I found myself weighing whether I had allotted enough time and whether I had remained committed to the process of radical honesty. Balancing the expression of my authentic self with the responsibilities of scholarly analysis posed another significant hurdle. Transitioning from delving into my raw emotions to critically analyzing the gathered data and process proved demanding.

Furthermore, concerns regarding validity and reliability arose due to the traditional standardized approach to data collection. Recognizing the uniqueness of each process, this dissertation was no exception. Collecting and evaluating journal entries from an impartial observer's perspective required academic code-switching. It is crucial to acknowledge that this dissertation inherently carried subjectivity and bias since it was rooted in my personal experiences. As the researcher, I have leveraged my own encounters while also grounding academic writing to ensure clarity for the audience, presenting an ongoing challenge of addressing reflexivity and maintaining a balance between authenticity and academic rigor. Scholars such as Shim (2018) and Forber-Pratt (2015) have highlighted criticisms of autoethnography, often viewing it as self-indulgent or narcissistic within academic circles. However, it offers a fresh perspective on engaging with frequently overlooked populations and shattering the silence surrounding their experiences.

Conclusion

The implications drawn from this study are profound, touching upon the core of my educational journey. My initial apathy toward this domain has been repeatedly challenged, prompting profound reflections on the invaluable contributions of luminaries such as Bayard Rustin (2014; 2015), Audre Lorde (1997), James Baldwin (2024), and contemporary poets Jasmine Mans (2021) and Danez Smith (2017). These trailblazers have not only paved the way for scholars like myself to fuse storytelling with academic discourse but have also instilled in me the conviction to articulate the nuanced experience of being an Afro-Caribbean, Black, Quare, and asylum seeker within the realm of higher education in the United States.

The endeavor to articulate "What is it like to be an Afro-Caribbean, Black, Quare, Asylum seeker in U.S. higher education?" has demanded unwavering tenacity, courage, and a fervent dedication to social justice in confronting the enduring systems of oppression entrenched within the corridors of academia. Every individual, irrespective of their background, merits recognition and support in their pursuit of success. Hence, higher education institutions must conscientiously and respectfully cater to their transnational populace.

To inhabit the intersectional identities of being Black, Quare, Afro-Caribbean, and asylum seeking is to navigate a terrain besieged by systemic racism and oppression. This dissertation serves as a beacon, illuminating the arduous journey traversing U.S. higher education and immigration policies, laying bare the pervasive fear, anxiety, depression, and mental fatigue inherent in the pursuit of doctoral studies. In doing so, it challenges entrenched perceptions of what being part of the African Diaspora in America entails. Yet, this narrative transcends individual conquest; it serves as a clarion call for systemic transformation and an unwavering commitment to justice. It underscores the imperative for a paradigm shift within higher education that embraces inclusivity, equity, and empathy as guiding principles, fostering an environment where everyone can thrive, unencumbered by discrimination and marginalization.

APPENDIX

Table 4

Data Table

Data Type	# of Total Entries	Entries Used for Analysis	Selection Criteria for Analysis
Journal Entries	91	38	I've chosen journals specifically that fits the framework of Black, Quare, Afro-Caribbean, Asylum seeker in higher education.
Photographs	10	6	I've chosen the selected images that are significant to my educational journey.
Artifacts	2	1	"Not Your fourth but okay" is an excerpt originated from my early journaling era (2013-2018)
Poetry	10	4	-Your Silence<Their win -MASC, -To be that Black Man -To my homeland -When will they see us?

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