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Trans* Funds of Identity: Exploring Trans* Collegians' Classroom Experiences to Envision Anti-oppressive Education

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Trans* Funds of Identity:

Exploring Trans* Collegians' Classroom Experiences to Envision Anti-oppressive Education

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction

of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in Education

by

Justin Andrew Gutzwa

2022

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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Doctor of Philosophy in Education

University of California, Los Angeles, 2022

Professor Jessica C. Harris, Chair

The creation of the cisgender binary through the advent of settler colonialism in the land now known as the United States contributed to centuries of violence against and erasure of trans* communities. Structural oppression against trans*ness at a societal level contributes to similar modes of oppression in microcosms of society, including all sectors of education. Underexplored are the ways such societal dominance permeates classrooms in postsecondary environments, where deficit-based narratives of trans* identities are both reinforced in course curriculum and perpetuated by exclusionary pedagogical practices. Oftentimes expected to shoulder the burden of transgressing their own oppression, trans* college students' identities are not understood as assets to their educational environments.

This qualitative study uses a critical, asset-based approach to center the ways of knowing trans* college students develop throughout their lives as self-authored epistemologies they employ to navigate trans*phobic classroom environments. Through combining queer theory with Esteban-Guitart's funds of identity framework, I explore how trans* students develop their funds

of identity throughout their lives, and interrogate how they utilize their funds of identity in navigating collegiate classrooms. Data were collected through a combination of qualitative methods, including semi-structured interviews, poetic reflections, and identity-mapping. Centering the narratives of 16 trans* undergraduate college students from across the United States and holding a range of social identities, findings underscore trans* students' self-authored epistemologies as powerful assets they bring to their institutions of higher education.

Findings show that trans* students develop a wealth of funds of identity throughout their lived experiences embodying their many social identities, including their trans*, racial, ethnic, class, and dis/ability identities. While individually unique, the similarities in where and how trans* collegians' funds of identity were formed illustrate the many modes of knowledge production that trans* students tap into when traversing structural inequities in collegiate classrooms. These findings challenge deficit-based understandings of trans* students perpetuated in higher education scholarship, praxis, and policy, and similarly offer funds of identity as a valuable framework for asset-based work with trans* communities in higher education. Implications for actualizing research, praxis, and policy that affirms and liberates trans* realities are discussed.

The dissertation of Justin Andrew Gutzwa is approved.

Sylvia Hurtado

Teresa L. McCarty

Cecilia Rios-Aguilar

Jessica C. Harris, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2022

Dedication

To the late Dr. Robert A. Rhoads, who helped support the earliest stages of this work: I hope this dissertation reaches you and reflects the warmth, care, and love you gave me in my journey

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

As I have described to many, this dissertation has been a labor of love. Without many communities of people affirming, uplifting, challenging, and supporting me during this journey, I'm not sure I would have made it to this point. Scratch that–I *know* that I would not have made it to this point.

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The community of UCLA as a whole and the microcosm of the School of Education and Information Studies specifically have never been perfect to me, or to any of my trans* peers. Individuals and collectives within this institution, however, have shaped the course of my life forever, and without them, I would never have reached this point. I have been blessed to build relationships with many mentors throughout this process. Two of those mentors are no longer physically in this realm. First, I was formerly the advisee of the late Dr. Robert Rhoads, to whom this dissertation is dedicated; without his support, I would have never started the pilot study that grew into this dissertation, and quite possibly might not have come into my own identities as a trans, nonbinary scholar. Another friend and mentor I hold dear is Dr. Mike Rose, whose writing course shaped me as a thinker, scholar, and person in ways that I am still learning. Whenever I doubt myself, the direction I'm taking my work, and the power of my voice, I revisit the emails each of you wrote me, the feedback you each gave me, and the laughs we shared together. I hope this work reaches you where you are, and that you're as excited as I am to see it through.

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VITA/BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

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EDUCATION

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RECENT PUBLICATIONS

Peer-Reviewed Journal Articles

Gutzwa, J. A. (2022). "It's survival mode": Exploring how an Indigenous Trans* Student of Color (per)forms identity while transgressing space. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1037/dhe0000410

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FELLOWSHIPS & AWARDS

Eric Rofes Graduate Student Travel Grant Award 2021
Queer Studies Special Interest Group, American Educational Research Association

Dissertation Year Fellowship ($20,000) 2020 – 2021
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University Fellowship ($10,000) 2019 – 2020
UCLA Graduate School of Education & Information Studies

Marion Wells Fellowship ($7,000) 2018 – 2019
UCLA Graduate School of Education & Information Studies

University Fellowship ($20,000) 2018 – 2019
UCLA Graduate School of Education & Information Studies

Dean's Scholar 2018 – 2019
UCLA Graduate School of Education & Information Studies

CHAPTER 1

In 2019, I conducted a qualitative study exploring the classroom experiences of trans*[1]-identifying undergraduate collegians (Gutzwa, 2021a). Through the conversations in the qualitative study, I met Jay (pseudonym; they/them/theirs pronouns), a trans*, agender, nonbinary third-year student. Coming from a South Asian family which they identify to be exceptionally conservative, Jay has a tumultuous relationship with their nuclear family– particularly with regards to their gender identities and expression. As Jay was assigned female at birth, their parents' conservative views on gender roles policed how Jay was able to present their gender. Jay even experienced homelessness briefly after a tense fight with their parents regarding their queerness. Further, as one of the only Students of Color in their Pennsylvania high school, Jay frequently experienced what they defined as "racialized misogyny" in the classroom from their white peers who read them as a Woman of Color. Compounding on one another, these experiences taught Jay that their intersecting marginalized identities were not respected, both by their nuclear kinship communities and their academic spaces.

Jay's lived realities led them to attend college as far away from their "home" as they possibly could. Jay enrolled at their university in part because the campus has a reputation of being particularly queer and trans*-friendly. While Jay has been able to find spaces on campus that are supportive of their identities, including the several student activist organizations they participate in, their experiences as a trans*, agender, nonbinary student in the classroom have been a mixed bag. One effort Jay has taken to demand respect for their gender identity from faculty has been to send emails to their professors at the beginning of each term to confirm the gender markers, including name and pronouns, Jay identifies with. Also identifying as a disabled

[1] I use "trans*" as an umbrella term to describe the communities of people who do not identify on the cisgender male/female binary (Tompkins, 2014); this term will be defined in greater detail later in this chapter.

student who has had to develop self-advocacy strategies throughout their academic career, Jay opts to include their disability accommodations in the same email as their gender markers, hoping that doing so will necessitate a response to the email from their teaching staff.

Though some faculty have been receptive, not all have responded in kind to Jay's emails. For example, one professor for a class centering global issues of gender and sexuality failed to respond to Jay's email, and subsequently proceeded to misgender Jay throughout the course of the quarter. In spite of these microaggressions, Jay persisted in attending and participating in the class, hopeful that their voice and perspective as a trans* individual would be respected. Instead, however, the professor continually silenced Jay by dismissing or actively refuting the contributions they made. One particularly frustrating experience was when the professor included a discussion on hijra (a term used to refer to some third-gender individuals in the Indian subcontinent) communities in India. As a South Asian trans* student, Jay was excited to see representation of global trans* issues–particularly those reflecting tensions in their communities–and hoped that, as a Woman of Color, the professor would be mindful of the language she used in discussing hijras in the classroom. When the professor, instead, used problematic language, Jay attempted to correct their professor, saying of the experience:

> When she was talking about trans women, [the professor] was using incorrect words, and also just being transmisogynistic in ways that I don't think she knew she was. She was talking about hijras in India, calling them aggressive and using very racialized transmisogynistic words. I tried talking about that with her in class. I raised my hand and I was like, "we like we shouldn't use like those words," and she was like, "well, this is like I'm talking about a specific community and that this is a specific study." I was like,

"that doesn't detract from the fact that you are using these words that are used to subjugate these people in a certain way."[2]

The language used by the professor, a cisgender Woman of Color, in describing trans* South Asian communities was not only deeply transmisogynistic, but also directly mirrored the silencing and racialized language Jay heard throughout their life. Combined with the fact that the professor in question continually misgendered Jay throughout the term, Jay felt the environment was neither safe nor productive, and they stopped regularly attending class, ultimately failing the course altogether.

This snapshot of Jay's experiences demonstrates the interconnected nature of identity, lived experience, marginalization, and pedagogy in the lived experiences of trans* collegians. How does Jay navigate these instances of oppression? How is the oppression of trans* identities embedded into the everyday minutiae of collegiate classrooms? What does it mean to create pedagogy that is anti-oppressive, and how could such a pedagogy serve trans* students? This study further explores the experiences that trans* collegians like Jay have in their classroom environments in an effort to dismantle systems of domination latent in higher education, and guide future efforts for pedagogical reform in higher education.

Statement of the Problem

Violence against the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) communities has been a pervasive constant in the history of the lands now known to be the United States since the advent of settler colonialism (Mogul, Ritchie, & Whitlocke, 2011; Smith, 2015). To facilitate the colonization and erasure of Indigenous communities, white European colonists exerted dominance over Indigenous peoples by forcibly introducing systems of gender

[2] This quote also appears in Gutzwa (2021).

and sexuality policing (Mogul, et al., 2011; Smith, 2015). One such mode of structural violence was the creation of a cisgender male/female binary to subjugate "deviant" societies which celebrated the fluid presentation of gender and sexuality: as Smith (2015) argues, "in order to colonize a people whose society was not hierarchical, colonizers must first naturalize hierarchy through instituting patriarchy," (p. 23). Indigenous genocide and the trans-Atlantic slave trade in part meant that such "deviant" sexual and gender status was forcibly prescribed to Indigenous and Black communities as a mode to control non-white bodies (Ritchie, et al., 2011). The institution of sodomy and buggery laws in settler colonies codified the subjugation of communities who were determined to be "deviant" in their sexual and/or gender performativity, setting the legal precedent for structural violence against the LGBTQ+ communities which the United States is built on (Ritchie, et al., 2011).

Today, marriage equality, bathroom bills, restrictions on who is able to serve in the military, and bureaucratic obstacle courses in place to prevent people from expressing their identities are a few of the many daily reminders of how institutions in the United States actively perpetuate structural violence against LGBTQ+ communities, and particularly trans* communities (Spade, 2015). The national prevalence of queer and trans* subjugation points to the creation of trans* identities as being a culturally "deviant" or "different" other–a macro-level deficiency-based understanding that is perpetuated at a variety of local and institutional levels. In particular, scholars have explored how institutions of higher education in the United States perpetuate the oppression of trans* communities through their policies, procedures, structures, and overall governance (e.g., Dirks, 2016; Nicolazzo, 2016a).

When identities of cultural difference are historically constructed, systemic domination facilitates the understanding of otherized communities as "deficient;" these deficit-based narratives of marginalized communities take a particularly strong foothold in classroom

environments (Kiyama & Rios-Aguilar, 2017; Vélez-Ibáñez & Greenberg, 1992). In the case of US-Mexican immigrant communities, for example, histories of structural oppression facilitated by capitalism and colonization created an understanding that Mexican immigrant families do not value education, meaning that US-Mexican immigrant children were culturally predisposed to struggle in the US educational system (Vélez-Ibáñez & Greenberg, 1992). Such mindsets, in turn, impact how educators approach working with Latinx students in their classrooms (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992; Vélez-Ibáñez & Greenberg, 1992). Histories of domination over communities that today might be identified as trans*, coupled with the oppressive treatment of trans* communities in higher education today, have similarly created a deficit-understanding of trans* students in higher education. Nicolazzo (2016a) argues that these deficit-narratives are routinely reproduced in scholarship centering and practice catered towards trans* students. In doing so, she asserts the necessity for scholarship that takes an asset-based approach towards understanding trans* student experiences.

A wealth of scholarship exists which centers the lived experiences of trans*-identifying college students (Nicolazzo, 2016a; Yates, 2019); most of this literature pays close attention to residential life, student groups, and social relationships (e.g., Bilodeau, 2012; Catalano, 2014; 2015; Duran & Nicolazzo, 2017; Garvey, Chang, Nicolazzo, & Jackson, eds., 2018; Nicolazzo, 2016a; 2016b; 2017). Through this work, scholars have demonstrated that both institutions of higher education (e.g., Dirks, 2016) and higher education researchers (e.g., Nicolazzo, 2016a) alike have constructed the narrative that trans* students are at an innate deficit by virtue of their trans*ness in higher education. As has been argued, however, deficit-narratives of otherized communities bleed into the classroom by informing the pedagogical practices of educators working with students from marginalized backgrounds. While there is a large body of literature exploring the experiences of trans* collegians, only a handful of scholars (e.g., Duran &

Nicolazzo, 2017; Gutzwa, 2021a; 2022; Linley et al., 2016; Pryor, 2015) even begin to explore the specific experiences of trans* collegians in the classroom.

If there is any hope of dismantling deficit-narratives of trans* students in higher education, it is vital to critique the collegiate classroom as a place where deficit-based narratives of trans* students are perpetuated and embodied (Gutzwa, 2021a). Doing so requires an asset-based approach in viewing both the lives and academic trajectories of trans* collegians. One such approach that has been taken by scholars hoping to counter deficit-based narratives of marginalized students in educational settings is to explore students' funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992; Vélez-Ibáñez & Greenberg, 1992). Students' funds of knowledge, defined by Moll and colleagues (1992) as the skills and practices cultivated through individuals' households that are necessary for one's well-being, inform how students understand the world around them. By viewing Students of Color–particularly Latinx students–as assets to their educational environments due to the cultural forms of knowledge they develop over the course of their lives, research taking a funds of knowledge approach has enabled discursive and pedagogical shifts for the representation of Students of Color in education. While much of the foundational research on funds of knowledge explores pre-college educational settings (Moll et al., 1992; Rios-Aguilar & Kiyama, 2017), recent work has expanded the exploration of funds of knowledge to the field of higher education. Additionally, recent writing on funds of knowledge has evolved to include how students shape their identities around their funds of knowledge; this concept is defined as *funds of identity* (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014; Esteban-Guitart, 2012; 2016). No scholarship, however, has taken either a funds of knowledge or funds of identity approach in exploring the classroom experiences of trans* collegians; similarly, no research has extended the exploration of funds of identity to the sector of higher education.

Through the exploration of trans* collegians' funds of identity, it is possible to understand not only how trans* collegians make sense of and navigate the classrooms they enroll in, but also to work towards a system of higher education research and practice that views trans* students as assets to their educational communities. Therefore, the goal of this study is to explore the funds of identity trans* collegians bring to their college environments, and how these funds of identity shape the way trans* students navigate collegiate classrooms. By doing so, this study takes an asset-based approach in understanding the ways of knowing trans* students develop uniquely through their trans*ness.

Research Questions and Study Design

The research questions that guide this study are:

1. How do trans* collegians develop the funds of identity they bring to collegiate classrooms?
2. How do trans* students utilize their funds of identity to navigate classroom experiences?

A "queered" understanding of funds of identity is the theoretical framework that guides this research (Esteban-Guitart, 2012; 2016; Moll & Esteban-Guitart, 2014). As defined by Esteban-Guitart and Moll (2014), "*funds of knowledge* become *funds of identity* when people actively internalize family and community resources to make meaning and to describe themselves" (p. 33). Funds of identity are, according to Esteban-Guitart (2012; 2016), typically developed in the interactions an individual has in their home and immediate surrounding communities, meaning that the "household" becomes a unit of analysis many researchers take in exploring what students' funds of identity are. As the original writings on funds of identity fails to consider the nuanced lived realities of trans* identities in building their understanding of the "household," I queer the "household" as a unit of analysis by changing it to "kinship" more broadly. To do so, I incorporate conversations on kinship originating from queer theorists (e.g., Freeman, 2007;

Muñoz, 1999; Weston, 1991), opting to use Freeman's (2007) definition of kinship as "the process by which bodies and the potential for physical and emotional attachment are created, transformed, and sustained over time," (p. 298).

To address the above research questions, this study utilizes a queer qualitative methodological approach (Dahl, 2010; Gorman-Murray, et al., 2010; Jackman, 2010; Muñoz, 2010; Rooke, 2010). Queer qualitative methodology combines queer theory and nuanced understandings of the lived realities of queer and trans* identities in conversation with more "traditional" modes of qualitative data collection in order to "speak to or interact with queer people, usually on the basis of sexual/gender identities and with anti-normative frameworks," (Browne & Nash, 2010, p. 1). In the study at hand, I "queer" Esteban-Guitart's (2012; 2016) extended multi-method autobiographical approach to research. This approach involves collecting three different forms of "identity artifacts" (Gutzwa & Wofford, 2022) from participants in order to ascertain their funds of identity, including verbal, written, and visual artifacts. I conducted 2 semi-structured interviews with and elicited both written (poems) and visual (identity maps) artifacts from 16 undergraduate students who identify as non-cisgender. These students attended a range of institutions that span institutional differences, including institutional type, control, and geographic region, and hold an array of gender and other social identities. By simultaneously unpacking students' individual narratives and placing their experiences in conversation with one another, I gain an understanding of the ways trans* students develop their unique, individual ways of knowing throughout their lives, and the ways these funds of identity are used as navigational tools in the postsecondary classroom.

Significance of Study

This study offers a reimagined approach into the academic experiences of trans* students. For one, this study is an attempt to utilize a funds of identity approach in exploring trans* student

populations as a mode of challenging deficit narratives of trans* students. By design, funds of identity is an asset-based framework, as it views the ways of knowing that students from marginalized communities develop over the course of their lives as strengths which students can bring to their educational environments (Esteban-Guitart, 2012; 2016). By contrast, higher education operates under and perpetuates deficit-based understandings of trans*-identifying students, constructing the narrative that by virtue of their trans*ness, trans* collegians are at an innate disadvantage when entering collegiate academic spaces (Nicolazzo, 2016a). Frequently, deficit mentalities of students bleed into the classroom, impacting how teachers and pedagogues work with students who they feel are innately at a disadvantage compared to peers that hegemonically experience success (Vélez-Ibáñez, 1988). Trans* oppression is societally encoded (Spade, 2015), and is perpetuated frequently in the microcosm of higher education (Yates, 2019). Despite a wealth of scholarship demonstrating the ways trans* collegians experience oppression in higher education broadly (e.g., Nicolazzo, 2016a; Yates, 2019), most scholars do not center the academic experiences of trans* students in their conversations (Duran & Nicolazzo, 2017). As such, there is a need to further explore the specific ways trans* students navigate the classroom, as without knowing the types of oppression trans* collegians experience in curricular spaces, it is difficult to explore the ways to dismantle that oppression pedagogically.

This study specifically contributes to this gap in the literature by centering trans* students' embodied modes of knowledge production, which provides necessary insight into how pedagogy can be transformed to counter trans* oppression. Many of the narratives of trans* identities which are societally pervasive–particularly those centering deficit-minded understandings of trans* people–have been established *about* trans* people, not *by* trans* people (Nicolazzo, 2017). To this extent, the voices of trans* students in particular have been disregarded in classroom settings, such as in the case of Jay's professor silencing them after

attempting to contribute to a conversation on global trans* identities. When trans* students are not silenced, oppression is still somewhat normative in the classroom. For example, scholars looking into the curricular experiences of trans* students have argued that many trans* students are expected to serve as a voice for all trans* individuals globally by their professors and peers, which in and of itself is a form of oppression these students face (Linley & Nguyen, 2015). By taking a funds of identity approach, this study not only centers trans* individuals, but also centers their ways of knowing and epistemologies, situating these as liberatory practices pedagogues can employ in building anti-oppressive pedagogy. These ways of knowing similarly emerge as trans* epistemologies (Nicolazzo, 2017) which can be used in research and praxis to debase deficit-narratives of trans*ness in postsecondary education.

Ultimately, centering trans* ways of knowing through this study pushes the landscape of higher education to disrupt what forms of knowledge production are academically valued by centering self-authored, self-informed, identity-based knowledge. By disrupting the societal and academic reliance on narratives of trans* issues and identities constructed through what Nicolazzo (2017) refers to as the cisgender gaze, this study positions a new way for anti-deficit, self-authored ways of knowing to inform the creation of pedagogy that dismantles systems of oppression which subjugate trans* communities.

Defining Key Terms

Many of the terms used throughout this dissertation carry a wide range of connotations and meanings that differ based on field, lens, and subjectivity. In this section, I operationalize how I understand these terms in the context of this study.

Transgender, Cisgender, and Trans*

The term *transgender*, often shortened to *trans*, has been used since the 1990's as a categorical term to describe an individual whose gender identity is not congruous with the sex

they were assigned at birth (Tompkins, 2014; Yates, 2019). Largely, "transgender" has been used in juxtaposition with the term "cisgender," defined as "Designating a person whose sense of personal identity and gender corresponds to his or her sex at birth," (Oxford English Dictionary, 2019). As social understandings of the multitude of gender identities have increased, usages of "transgender", and its abbreviated form, "trans", oftentimes reinforce the gender binarization the terms attempt to counteract. Frequently, "trans" is used in specific reference to transgender men or transgender women (Tompkins, 2014). Such usages in discourse erase and silence those with gender identities that fall outside of both the cisgender and transgender binaries, including but not limited to genderqueer, nonbinary, genderfluid, agender, and gender nonconforming identities (Duran & Nicolazzo, 2017; Tompkins, 2014).

To circumvent such silencing, scholars both in (Catalano, 2015; 2017; Duran & Nicolazzo, 2017; Nicolazzo, 2016a; 2016b; 2016c) and out (Tompkins, 2014) of educational research have opted to utilize the term *trans** as an umbrella term to be inclusive of all individuals who do not identify as cisgender. While this approach is not without fault, some scholars feel that using "trans" with an asterisk is the best way to "open up transgender or trans to a greater range of meaning," (Tompkins, 2014, p. 26). In Chapter 2, I expand more on critical understandings of trans* identities in explaining the theoretical framework of this study. I describe the history and use of the asterisk here in effort to differentiate the various terminology I use. Trans* as an umbrella term allows researcher to consider "a broad constellation of gender identities that falls outside of the strict gender binary of male-assigned men and female-assigned women," (Catalano, 2017, p. 235).

While it is possible to provide definitions for specific gender identities under the trans* umbrella (such as those listed earlier in this section), I avoid providing definitions here for specific identities in order to circumvent pigeonholing certain identities into a specific set of

criteria. Further, as each individual's understanding of gender is different, two participants might identify with similar language for their identities, but have two very different understandings of what that identity means to them. As such, I will use not only the language my participants provide to discuss their gender identities, but also ask for and use their language to operationalize their unique gender identities.

Modes of Trans* Oppression

In her book "Trans* in college: Transgender students' strategies for navigating campus life and the institutional politics of inclusion," Z Nicolazzo (2016a) uses the term "trans* oppression" "as an organizing principle for understanding the social asymmetry of gender enforcement and regulation" designed specifically to center the needs and experiences of trans* individuals (p. 170). She opts to use Catalano and Griffin's (2016) understanding of trans* oppression as the systems of domination that disadvantage individuals whose gender identity and/or expression do not correlate with the societally presumed cisgender binary. A wide array of language has been used to discuss how trans* oppression occurs, including but not limited to trans*phobia, (trans*)misogyny, and compulsory heterogenderism. While not interchangeable, each of these terms contributes to my understanding of the broader systems of power that govern the subjugation of trans* identities, both in the macrocosm of society and in the microcosm of higher education.

- **Trans*phobia:** Using the word's etymology as a guide, "trans*phobia" quite literally refers to the fear of trans*-identifying people. Similar to "homophobia," or the fear of gay people, trans*phobia itself is not a form of oppression, but rather describes ideologies that contribute to the broad subjugation of trans* individuals societally. For example, some legislators are motivated by their latent fear of trans* people (or, their internalized trans*phobia) to advocate for policies that prevent trans* people from accessing certain

bathrooms. What evokes trans*phobia is a much longer conversation which results from this study attempt to speak to.

- **Misogyny:** Broadly speaking, "misogyny" refers to actions and mindsets that demonstrate hatred towards women. Specifically speaking, I use "trans*misogyny" to refer to ideologies and actions of hatred against individuals who identify as trans*women, femmes, or trans*feminine. As discussed at the beginning of this chapter in retelling Jay's childhood experiences being read as a Woman of Color, "racialized misogyny" refers to misogyny against Women of Color that is based not only on gender, but also race and racism. In defining intersectionality, Crenshaw (1989; 1991) notes that Black women experienced nuanced oppression based on their intersecting racial and gender identities; "racialized misogyny" describes the combining ideologies which contribute to such nuanced oppression. Combining these terms together, "racialized trans*misogyny" refers to the specific subjugation of trans*feminine People of Color.
- **Compulsory Heterosexism:** Durham (2003) defines "compulsory heterosexism" as "the oppressive view that the only or at least the most valid sexuality is heterosexual," (p. 85). Not only does compulsory heterosexism situate heterosexuality as aspirational, but it also renders heterosexuality, and subsequently heteronormativity, as expected elements of human existence.
- **Compulsory Heterogenderism:** Nicolazzo (2016a) uses the term "compulsory heterogenderism" in order "to describe how trans* peoples' genders are (mis)understood as sexualities. This happens as a result of peoples' reliance on sexuality-based stereotypes, which leads them to (mis)read trans* peoples' genders," (p. 166). For Nicolazzo (2016a), compulsory heterogenderism contributes to the total erasure of trans*

identities, making them "culturally unknowable or impossible" as they do not fit into compulsory, normative understandings of gender and sexuality (p. 166).

Funds of Knowledge and Funds of Identity

Vélez-Ibáñez and Greenberg (1992) define "funds of knowledge" as "the strategic and cultural resources […] that households contain," (p. 313). In the context of their original study exploring US-Mexican immigrant families, Vélez-Ibáñez and Greenberg (1992) saw funds of knowledge as both "the basis for understanding the cultural systems" that shape the development of children from US-Mexican immigrant communities and useful tools for teachers to use in the classroom when working with these students (p. 313). As such, by design, funds of knowledge have always been envisioned as a pedagogical tool which researchers and educators alike can use to understand the ways of knowing which students from marginalized experiences develop over the course of their lives. As the definition implies, the site of origin for individuals' funds of knowledge is understood by Vélez-Ibáñez and Greenberg (1992) to be their "household."

Despite historically centering marginalized communities, scholars taking a funds of knowledge approach have been critiqued for not paying attention to how an individual's world view shapes their various identities, and similarly, how their identities shape their world views. To account for the role of identity, scholars (Esteban-Guitart, 2012; 2016; Moll & Esteban-Guitart, 2014) introduced the concept of "funds of identity." As defined by Esteban-Guitart and Moll (2014), "*funds of knowledge* become *funds of identity* when people actively internalize family and community resources to make meaning and to describe themselves" (p. 33). Both funds of knowledge and funds of identity will be explored in greater detail in Chapter 2.

Kinship

Both funds of knowledge and funds of identity are reliant upon notions of an individual's "household," "family," and "community," in that across all major definitions, both funds of

knowledge and funds of identity are derived from an individual's interactions in and with the "home." These systems as such view kinship as mostly biological, or centering the nuclear family. In contrast, I opt to understand kinship as "the process by which bodies and the potential for physical and emotional attachment are created, transformed, and sustained over time," (Freeman, 2007, p. 298). Taken from queer theorist Elizabeth Freeman's (2007) work exploring the nuances in kinship for queer and trans* communities, this definition takes into consideration the fact that biological understandings of kinship are largely inaccessible for queer and trans* communities due to the fact that, by premise, biological understandings of kinship necessitate one's desire to engage in sex as primarily procreative, a reality which is not descriptive of queer and trans* identities and relationships. In Chapter 2, I will provide a more comprehensive understanding of kinship through a queer theory lens, in addition to applying this queered notion of "kinship" to the funds of identity framework.

Overview of Dissertation

This dissertation is broken into five chapters. The preceding chapter outlines the significance and rationale behind this study; it also operationalizes key terms and establishes the study's research questions. While each subsequent chapter has its own roadmap that details the respective chapter's organization, I briefly outline the remainder of the dissertation here.

Chapter 2 is organized in two key sections. In the first section, I establish funds of identity as the theoretical framework for this study. I begin by providing the scholastic lineage of both funds of knowledge and funds of identity, before articulating the specific application of funds of identity to the study of trans* collegians' classroom experiences. In doing so, I introduce conversations on kinship originating from queer theory to build a funds of identity framework that is inclusive of the nuanced lived realities trans* individuals experience. In the

second section, I critically engage the literature on trans* collegians in higher education, paying particular attention to the (lack of) scholarship centering their classroom experiences.

In Chapter 3, I begin by defining and explicating queer qualitative methodology as the methodological approach for this study. I then outline my intended mechanics for this study, discussing recruitment, modes data collection, and other elements of research design. I also give voice to a candid conversation about my positionality, and the ways my identities as a white, trans, nonbinary, queer settler shape the work that is presented here.

In Chapter 4, I introduce the metaphor of textiles and fabric to frame the findings of this study. I liken the locations, times, ways, and other modalities where participants developed their funds of identity into three overarching "textiles," each of which demonstrates a nuanced understanding of how participants developed their funds of identity. After describing different modalities of forming funds of identity, I weave these three textiles together to create an understanding of the myriad ways participants employed their funds of identity as tools to navigate all elements of the courses they enrolled in throughout their doctoral careers.

Finally, in Chapter 5, I place the findings of this dissertation in conversation with the literature and theory which guides it. In the discussion, I employ Nicolazzo's (2017) open tenets of imagining trans* epistemologies to organize my discussion of the various ways findings corroborate, critique, and expand upon both funds of identity literature and the literature on trans* collegians. I close the dissertation by offering implications findings offer for research, praxis, and policy, suggesting avenues for collective action in transforming postsecondary institutions into spaces that dismantle the modes of domination which subjugate trans* lives.

CHAPTER 2

By exploring the funds of identity trans* collegians develop and utilize in navigating classrooms and faculty interactions, it is possible to work toward a more complete understanding of how pedagogy can challenge the systems of oppression that further marginalize trans* identities. While scholars have found that trans* students experience oppression in curricular spaces (e.g., Duran & Nicolazzo, 2017; Gutzwa, 2021a; 2022; Linley, et al., 2016; Pryor, 2015), it is necessary to shift discourse on trans* collegians away from asking how they overcome oppression in the classroom and toward how educators can take responsibility in building anti-oppressive pedagogical practices. By focusing only on the oppression trans* collegians experience, deficit understandings of trans* students are perpetuated in both research and practice (Nicolazzo, 2016a); as such, it is vital to approach scholarship centering trans* students' classroom experiences through asset-based lenses that transgress simply citing the oppression they might experience in curricular spaces.

In this chapter, I critically review the corpus of literature centering trans* students in higher education research, with the primary goal of highlighting and problematizing several gaps in research centering trans* students. First, I establish funds of identity as a theoretical framework for this study at large, specifically problematizing its earlier implementations through the lens of queer kinship in order to create a trans*-inclusive framework. Finally, through the queered, asset-based funds of identity framework, I critique existing literature on trans* students in higher education, paying particular attention to the dearth of literature centering trans* students in collegiate classrooms.

Theoretical Framework

This study is rooted in a funds of identity (Esteban-Guitart, 2012; 2016) and queer kinship (Freeman, 2007; Muñoz, 1999; Weston, 1991) frameworks. I begin this section by

tracing the genealogy of funds of identity through a history of its predecessor, funds of knowledge. After, I demonstrate the applicability of using a funds of identity framework in exploring how trans* collegians navigate classroom environments, while also acknowledging limitations in how existing funds of identity literature deals with issues of gender and sexuality. I conclude by offering queered understandings of kinship in order to reconcile the existing shortcomings in funds of identity to ensure that the framework can be inclusive of trans* experiences in the context of my study.

Funds of Identity

Funds of identity was first introduced by Moises Esteban-Guitart (2012; 2016) as an adaptation of the funds of knowledge framework (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & González, 1992; Vélez-Ibañez, 1988). The origin of funds of knowledge stems from the anthropological work of Vélez-Ibáñez (1988); this study focused on the social and economic systems of Mexican immigrant households (Esteban-Guitart, 2016). Funds of knowledge are defined by Moll and colleagues (1992) as "historically accumulated and culturally-developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being," (p. 133). The original funds of knowledge study reframed conversations on students from Mexican immigrant families in the K-12 educational system by removing deficit-based frameworks of evaluation. Anti-deficit frameworks are essential in reframing conversations of underrepresented students in education away from the misconception that marginalized students are underprepared towards the recognition that they have been prepared in different ways outside of the traditional school context. Rather than focusing discourse on negatively connotated experiences, studying and discussing the value these students bring to academic spaces helps promote understandings that underrepresented students are assets to their scholastic environment (Harper, 2010). This does

not mean all funds of knowledge are positive in origin; many stem from experiences of hardship and oppression (Poole & Huang, 2018; Zipin, 2009).

The funds of knowledge framework was originally contextualized in the K-12 educational sphere and applied to U.S. Mexican households. Subsequent research has expanded the framework to consider students from a wide range of racial and ethnic backgrounds, as well as to consider students in the realm of higher education (Kiyama, 2017; Montiel, 2017; Neri, 2017; Rios-Aguilar & Kiyama, 2012). For example, Mwangi (2017) explained that funds of knowledge was a suitable framework for analyzing the experiences of students whose families do not navigate the United States higher education system in the same way that "middle/upper class, White American" populations (p. 119-120). Mwangi's (2017) study opened funds of knowledge research to understanding students from sub-Saharan African immigrant communities as they navigate the American higher education system (Mwangi, 2017). Similarly, scholars writing conceptual and theoretical pieces (Dowd, et al., 2011; Kiyama & Harper, 2018; Ramos & Kiyama, 2021) advocate for resituating funds of knowledge frameworks to ascertain the learned systems of knowledge of students from a wide array of racial and ethnic backgrounds.

Funds of identity expands on funds of knowledge to critique how funds are not just products of one's lived experiences, but also can directly influence one's own understanding of their self and their position in the world, or, their funds of identity. *Funds of identity* were conceptually introduced by Esteban-Guitart (2012) to address this gap in prior funds of knowledge research. As defined by Esteban-Guitart and Moll (2014), "*funds of knowledge* become *funds of identity* when people actively internalize family and community resources to make meaning and to describe themselves" (p. 33). The concept of "identity" as used in funds of identity stems from the Vygotskian-inspired interpretation of identity as "lived experiences on self," (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014, p. 34). Esteban-Guitart (2016) further elucidates that self-

actualization of identity stems from the "artefacts"–or the skills, lessons, words, images, and texts–one develops through their interaction with the world around them.

Studying an individual's funds of identity is a necessary expansion to funds of knowledge as funds of identity speak not just to the systems of knowledge students develop, but how these systems impact students' self-understanding. Learning and psychological development are both products of participation in practices and rituals with groups who share common experiences and goals (Esteban-Guitart, 2016). Funds of identity not only function as a nuanced reimagination of funds of knowledge, but also operates under similar parameters as its predecessor, as "both concepts are based on practical activities that build strong connections between different spheres of learning," (Esteban-Guitart, 2016, p. 33).

In the case of trans* individuals, gender identity moderates much of how they experience not just higher education (Nicolazzo, 2016a), but also how they navigate the world around them (Gutzwa, 2021a; Nicolazzo, 2017; Spade, 2015). In particular, latent structures of trans*phobia in society impact nearly every facet of how trans* individuals navigate the world around them: issues cisgender individuals might find "mundane" parts of everyday experience, such as what bathrooms people can use or listing identity markers on government-issued identification, are rooted in systems of oppression that demonstrate how gender shapes the daily realities of trans* individuals (Spade, 2015). Identity shapes not just how trans* individuals navigate spaces (Gutzwa, 2022), but also make sense of their place in the world (Gutzwa, 2021a).

Due to this emphasis on and inclusion of identity, funds of identity critiques, and ultimately advances, funds of knowledge approaches. The funds of knowledge framework frames an individual's ways of knowing as developed through their lived interactions with those around them–namely their families and immediate communities. Funds of identity, in contrast, shifts the unit of analysis away from the household (as understood in funds of knowledge

scholarship) to an exploration of students and learners as *individuals* (Esteban-Guitart, 2021). Trans* individuals, as with just about any identity community, can develop funds of knowledge through the interactions they have in their homes: any lesson they learn through their interactions with parents, siblings, and other family members can contribute to the ways in which trans* individuals make sense of the world around them. Without focusing on identity, however, it is difficult to determine which ways of knowing trans* individuals develop that are specific to their gender identities (Gutzwa, 2021a). A trans* individual could repeatedly be told growing up that they need to advocate for themselves to "make it" in society, for example. Without also focusing on how their gender identity plays into being told they must advocate for themselves, however, it is difficult to make sense of how the fund of knowledge of needing to "make it" relates to their identity experiences.

A lack of centrality of identity fails to account for the ways an individual makes sense of the world based on their social identities, as well as how their worldview shapes their own identity construction (Esteban-Guitart, 2016). Continuing the previous example, if trans* individuals heard from their families after coming out as trans* that they needed to continually advocate for their rights as a trans* person in order to "make it," it would become clear that self-advocacy becomes a fund of identity that shapes how the individual makes sense of the world around them, and how they understand their place in society as a trans* person. Providing a specific look into how identity shapes knowledge production is the key contribution funds of identity makes, both to advancing funds frameworks broadly and to this study specifically. As such, not only is funds of identity a necessary expansion on funds of knowledge, but it also is a uniquely necessary expansion for the context of this study, as it carries the potential to account for trans* realities in a way funds of knowledge cannot.

Funds of identity as a framework has only been formally extended to trans* communities in the pilot study for this dissertation (Gutzwa, 2021a; 2022). In this work, I found that exploring trans* collegians' funds of identity was a powerful, asset-based approach to understanding their curricular experiences in postsecondary education. Beyond funds of identity specifically, however, many have discussed the importance of identity in both knowledge production and self-actualization for trans* communities. Epistemologies of queer and trans* experiences stress that identity and environment dually shape one another (Anzaldúa, 1999; Marine & Catalano, 2014). In theorizing how trans* individuals can develop and utilize a trans* epistemological approach in teaching and producing scholarship, Nicolazzo (2017) argues that societally, trans* narratives are controlled and policed by cisgender others.

For example, Nicolazzo (2017) cites the "near constant social panic" enveloping discourse about what restrooms trans* people can use as one place where the cisgender gaze controls the rights and narratives of trans* individuals, as determinations on how trans* individuals are allowed to access space are determined by conglomerates of people who are not trans* themselves (pp. 3-4). This policing at the hand of cisgender institutions is built in opposition to the epistemologies trans* people develop over their lives that shape how trans* individuals come to know themselves, their kin, and ultimately, their place in the world around them (Nicolazzo, 2017). Nicolazzo (2017) argues that the social visibility of trans* celebrities, including Laverne Cox and Caitlyn Jenner, is one process that demonstrates how largely cisgender societal infrastructures (in this case, mass media) create narratives of how individuals can or should be "trans*" in society. While increased representation of trans* identities through media can be one way to influence understanding of trans* identities at the societal level, many trans* individuals do not perfectly match up with the preapproved narratives of trans*ness that are largely determined by cisgender individuals. As such, Nicolazzo (2017) laments that

"Because of the way the cisgender public continues to dominate the shaping of the discourse on trans* people, there has been a lack of conversation about a truly transgender epistemology that is for us and by us," (p. 4). She ultimately demonstrates that trans*ness is defined by those that are not themselves trans*, contrary to the epistemologies and modes of knowledge production trans* communities have authored for generations (Nicolazzo, 2017).

Such an epistemology is an example of exploring trans* funds of identity, as opposed to exploring trans* funds of knowledge. Epistemological explorations such as those discussed by Nicolazzo (2017) center identity as a unique source of knowledge production for trans* individuals; this conclusion could not be reached were trans* epistemologies to be explored under a funds of knowledge lens, as funds of knowledge prioritizes systems of knowledge inherited through one's interaction with their homes and families. Because it fails to consider the impact of identity on worldview, funds of knowledge is insufficient as a framework in exploring the ways of knowing trans* collegians develop and employ throughout their lives. Therefore, this study seeks to situate trans* students' classroom experiences through the lens of exploring their funds of identity.

Funds of identity is an apt framework to apply to work centering trans* students as there are latent narratives in higher education research and practice that view trans* identities as deficits to academic environments. The funds of identity approach counters deficit-based framing of minoritized student populations (Esteban-Guitart, 2016). Extending this framework to LGBTQ+ students can enable researchers and practitioners alike to reframe hegemonic narratives that devalue these communities, both in the sector of higher education and beyond. Ascertaining students' funds of identity is an identity-centric, anti-deficit approach both researchers and practitioners can take in working with trans* students to create systemic change in higher education. For one, there are a litany of considerations, oppressions, and barriers that

color the higher education narratives of queer and trans* students differently from their heterosexual and/or cisgender peers (Nicolazzo, 2016a; 2016b; Rhoads, 1994). Stewart and Howard-Hamilton (2015) explain how compulsory heterosexism impacts classrooms, Greek life, athletic teams, and other co-curricular spaces, as they are settings "where dominant cultural norms of heteronormativity work to marginalize the perspectives, experiences, and needs of LGB students" (p. 124). Similarly, Marine and Catalano (2014) argue that documentation procedures, physical and mental health services, gendered bathrooms and locker rooms, and housing all contribute to compulsory heterogendered environments on campuses create physical, bureaucratic, and sociopolitical barriers that prevent trans* collegians from accessing resources or physical spaces on campuses, ultimately dehumanizing them. By not placing gender-inclusive bathrooms in every campus building or by restricting who can access gender-specified bathrooms on campuses through university or state-wide policies, for example, universities perpetuate systems of domination that presume all students on campus are cisgender, rendering trans* collegians invisible. These administrative and cultural modes of oppressing trans* populations in higher education in turn function as forms of deficit thinking: failure to create policy that is inclusive based on a lack of perceived need for such action demonstrates that colleges and universities devalue the identities of LGBTQ+ student populations, therein not recognizing their presence as an asset to the overall campus environment.

Similarly to funds of knowledge, funds of identity have largely been understood as being developed through an individuals' interactions in their "household," (Poole & Huang, 2018). Though the phrase "household" does not immediately harken the image of a nuclear family, the word is traditionally used as an ambiguous reference to the spaces in which an individual is reared (Kiyama, 2017). The original funds of knowledge study sought to explore how K-12 educators teach to "culturally different" students from US-Mexican immigrant backgrounds

based on their preconceived deficit-based understandings of how immigrant families "valued" education (Kiyama, 2017; Valencia & Black, 2002). To do so, both teachers and researchers alike went into the homes of students from US-Mexican immigrant families to explore how students interact with their nuclear families, what lessons they are taught, and what activities they participate in. The rituals and practices that took place directly informed the funds of knowledge students developed, and in turn informed the ways educators learned to work with students from similar communities and backgrounds in their classrooms. Thus, even though an end result of the study was shifting educators' pedagogical practices, the actual site of data collection was not a classroom, but rather the homes of individual students.

Similarly, though it might counter the original intent of funds of identity as a framework (Esteban-Guitart, 2021), Esteban-Guitart's (2016) exploration of students' funds of identity largely centers the home lives of students in its methods and findings. He argues that, in the case of one student, her experiences working with her father on a farm growing up led to the development of some of her funds of identity. Even though the "home" was not necessarily the focal point of data collection, the interactions this student had with her nuclear family contributed to what funds of identity she developed over the course of her life. As such, existing approaches to both funds of knowledge and funds of identity are reliant upon traditional notions of the "household" as a unit of analysis for exploring where funds of identity are developed.

It is important to note that recent scholarship on both funds of knowledge (e.g., Ramos & Kiyama, 2021) and funds of identity (e.g., Esteban-Guitart, 2021; Gutzwa, 2021a) have expanded funds frameworks beyond the confines of a nuclear household. In fact, Esteban-Guitart (2021) argues that the original purpose of introducing funds of identity as a framework was in part to respond to the critiques of funds of knowledge scholarship which devalued the role of the ways of knowing individuals develop beyond their households through participation in social

networks, schools, communities, and even the Internet. In organizing 6 tenets of funds of knowledge, Ramos and Kiyama (2021) offer an understanding of how funds of knowledge can develop beyond the home, explaining that individuals' funds of knowledge can derive from a number of communal and institutional resources, showing how "[funds of knowledge] transcend the familial environment to empower funds of knowledge holders to navigate society" (p. 440). Further, the third tenet they offer explains that

> When not present within households, fk [funds of knowledge] are accessed and developed through the mobilization of social networks, which challenge notions of historically underserved communities as socially unorganized. However, when fk cannot be consistently accessed within social networks and communities, individuals turn to formal institutions for assistance. (p. 440)

Of note for Ramos and Kiyama are the ways which an individual's funds can develop outside of and beyond one's household through the mobilization and utilization of their social networks. Implicit in the phrasing of this tenet, however, is the temporal prioritization of how funds of knowledge are developed first and foremost in one's home. Ramos and Kiyama almost phrase the development of funds as conditional, implying that if a person's funds of knowledge can be developed and are visibly present in their home, then they do not need to access social networks or community resources in order to continually develop their funds. By hierarchically prioritizing the household and immediate community that people have as sites where funds of knowledge are formed, the myriad spaces (physical, digital, imagined, and otherwise) where individuals develop their ways of knowing can be easily overlooked, despite the fact that such spaces are where many, particularly trans* students, form and understand their funds (Gutzwa, 2021a).

This prioritization of the "household," and in particular the interactions one has with their nuclear family, means that the funds of identity approach cannot fully speak to the nuanced lived

realities of trans* students (Gutzwa, 2021a). Envisioning the "household" as tied to nuclear family places temporal and spatial guidelines on the development of funds of identity. As trans* identities fall outside of the heterogendered and heterosexist binaries upon which the ideal of the "family" is reliant (Freeman, 2007; Nicolazzo, 2016a; 2016c), traditional understandings of family in funds of identity literature may make the framework inaccessible for some trans* student experiences. Take, for example, an individual who is kicked out of their home at the age of 16 for identifying as trans*. Cut off from their nuclear family, this individual is without both a physical "household" *and* a nuclear kinship network. Does the development of their funds of identity cease, therefore, at the age of 16? While it is difficult to imagine that Esteban-Guitart's answer to this rhetorical question would be "yes," this hypothetical scenario (which is, sadly, a reality faced by some members of the trans* communities) highlights a shortcoming in the application of funds of identity as an approach to exploring the experiences of trans* students.

It is also important to differentiate between accounting for identity and interrogating the societal systems and forces that demarcate, categorize, and ultimately minoritize various identities. This nuance exposes another documented limitation of funds of identity as a framework: that funds approaches often circumvent explicit discussion of the relationship between systems of power and an individuals' ways of knowing (Esteban-Guitart, 2021; Wofford & Gutzwa, 2022). While funds scholarship at its core aims to disrupt deficit-based understandings of systemically minoritized communities, a common critique of both funds of knowledge and funds of identity as theoretical approaches is that they fail to address the impacts of "power, gender, social class, and racism" on schooling, teacher practices, and ultimately students' lived experiences (Esteban-Guitart, 2021, p. 5). In response to these criticisms, Esteban-Guitart (2021) theorizes *invisible funds of identity* as separate from those funds of identity that are more readily tangible, visible, and consciously understood by an individual.

Using the sector of early childhood education as a conceptual vehicle, Esteban-Guitart explains how children's visible funds of identity might reflect their conscious understandings of their identities, qualities such as their likes, dislikes, hobbies, preferences, and knowledge about both themselves and those they value. Much can be lost, however, when only exploring the funds of identity one *knows* they have–or their visible funds of identity. He explains that this focus

> can also disguise, underestimate or even totally obscure the various hegemonic concepts, ideologies, and practices that individuals appropriate from the world around them (i.e., racism, classism, sexism). They become so implicit, and unconscious, that they do not appear in the identity artifacts. (Esteban-Guitart, 2021, p. 10)

Ultimately, Esteban-Guitart's distinction between visible and invisible funds of identity establishes invisible funds of identity as those that "mediate the identities and behaviors of learner, and also of teachers, even as they are tacitly subsumed in doing so" (p. 10). This distinction implies that the exploration of how systems of power, oppression, and domination impact individuals' understandings and development of their identities *can* be a part of funds of identity scholarship, so long as this interrogation is intentional and not assumed.

In the pilot study for this dissertation, I placed power front and center in my exploration of trans* collegians funds of identity (Gutzwa, 2021a). Though I did not at the time draw a distinction between participants' visible and invisible funds of identity, the findings which emerged from participants' narratives were emblematic of the ways their embodied knowledge as trans* individuals were fundamentally shaped by their engagement with systems of power, including cisheteronormativity, racism, ableism, and classism, throughout their lives. In line with Esteban-Guitart's (2021) belief that accounting for a learner's invisible funds of identity can disrupt hegemonic logics that stratify education against minoritized communities, I argued that

> Work rooted in the exploration of students' funds of identity can challenge colonially-informed deficit mentalities of all students who hold minoritized identities, and especially trans* students, by privileging their identities and ways of knowing as valuable, both in and out of the classroom. (Gutzwa, 2021a, p. 320).

Part of how my exploration of Alosno's, Ethan's, and Jay's funds of identity was able to intentionally account for each participants' experiences with power was because I grounded my implementation of funds of identity in a theoretical approach that explicitly critiques systems of power: queer theory.

These documented limitations of funds of identity demonstrate that simply exploring funds of identity alone cannot account for the totality of trans* realities. Without a way to reconcile what I understand as the "household problem," it is difficult to envision or explore where trans* students develop their funds of identity, who is influential in the development of these funds, and ultimately, how these funds are harnessed in the classroom by trans* students. Additionally, it is impossible to gain an understanding of the ways of knowing trans* students develop without placing their funds of identity in relation to the systems of domination they navigate at individual, institutional, and societal levels daily. In the next section, I introduce queer understandings of kinship (e.g., Freeman, 2007; Muñoz, 1999; Weston, 1991) to respond to both of these potential limitations of funds of identity. Queered understandings of kinship offer a solution to the "household problem" by shifting the unit of analysis of funds of identity away from the "household" and towards a nuanced understanding of kinship. Similarly, the ways queer theory critiques power and domination in society facilitates the exploration of individuals' visible *and* invisible funds of identity by explicitly accounting for the impact of power on the development of their identities and ways of knowing.

Queer Kinship

Initial writing on queer kinship discusses the intentionality of creating and belonging to a "family" as a queer person. If kinship relies upon procreation, it is then inaccessible for queer bodies as there are limited means for the biological creation of a family (Freeman, 2007). Weston (1991) used this logic to establish that kinship for queer individuals cannot be defined in relation to heterosexual, cisgender kinship, but rather must be completely reframed. The conclusion of many is to define queer kinship through families of choice (Freeman, 2007); this definition has also been coopted to reframe "households" as inclusive of social communities by scholars exploring both funds of knowledge (e.g., Mwangi, 2017) and funds of identity (e.g., Esteban-Guitart, 2016). This logic, however, is exclusionary as "choice" is an option only accessible to privileged, "bourgeois" populations (Freeman, 2007; Habermas, 1991; Weston, 1991). The chosen family model "presumes a range of economic, racial, gender, and national privileges" unavailable to many who fall under the LGBTQ+ identity umbrellas, especially trans* Individuals of Color," (Freeman, 2007, p. 304).

A popular media example of the questionable nature of "chosen" family rhetoric as applied to Communities of Color occurred during the filming of the fifth season of the television show *RuPaul's Drag Race*. In what has been referred to as one of the most "important" moments on the show's filming, one of the show's Contestants of Color, Roxxxy Andrews, emotionally relayed the story of how she was abandoned by her mother at a bus stop at the age of three, citing the community she built as a drag queen as one of the only stable familial networks in her life. In response, RuPaul famously replied, "as gay people, we get to choose our families," constructing a compelling story in which participation in the artform of drag enabled Andrews to build a community of love and support completely through her own agency. This narrative, however, ignores the realities of Andrews' lived experiences: as a Person of Color coming from a low-income background, the influence of race and class on why Andrews was abandoned by her

mother is completely ignored; further, as a three year-old child, Andrews had virtually no "choice" in being abandoned by her family, or needing to build new kinship networks to replace those that were broken. As such, while drag provided Andrews a kinship network that she might not have had previously, this community was build out of necessity, not by "choice." "Chosen" family rhetoric, as such, ignores the systems of privilege and domination which dictate how many queer and trans* individuals live their lives.

Freeman (2007) also exposes that the static nature of biological kinship ignores the temporality of sexual orientation and gender identities, further excluding both queer and trans* bodies. Gender identity and sexual orientation are not fixed facets of one's identity, but rather socially constructed concepts that are individually determined, fluid, and ever-evolving (Jourian, 2015). Individual experiences with "coming out" are examples of this concept. Systems of compulsory heterosexism create environments where all individuals are automatically assumed to be both heterosexual and cisgender. As individuals navigate society, some might learn new language to define their identities outside of a heteronormative understanding of sexuality or a binaristic understanding of gender. Due to the fluidity of both sexuality and gender, "coming out" is never a static event, wherein one definitive moment "makes" an individual queer. Rather, individuals continually "come out" to those around them, continually (re)defining their identities for public consumption. Similarly, once someone has "come out," they can (and likely will) continue to redevelop the language they use to define their identities. Popular trans* social media influencer Gigi Gorgeous is one example of this concept. At the age of sixteen, Gorgeous publicly identified as a gay, cisgender man. Several years later, she "came out" as a bisexual trans* woman, before once again "coming out" as lesbian in 2016. Gorgeous' experiences defining and redefining her gender and sexual identities shows that gender and sexuality are temporal, rather than fixed–a fact which Freeman (2007) argues biological kinship ignores.

Freeman (2007) concludes that Bourdieu's (1977) understanding of kinship as "the utilization of *connections*" (p. 34) is the definition which speaks most to the queer experience. Moll and colleagues' (1992) description of communities carries the connotation of nuclear familial ties, necessitating a new approach if funds of identity is to be applied to trans* students. This understanding stems from Bourdieu's (1997) *habitus*, or the embodied, taken for granted qualities that run common across social identity groups. In reacting to the economically-constructed human capital model, Bourdieu (1977) posits that there are three key influences that shape individual action: cultural capital (or the socially-determined "power" an individual possesses), the field of competition for resources an individual operates within, and the individual's habitus. Of these, Freeman (2007) explains how habitus notably shapes kinship:

> In that habitus produces bodies that are like other bodies, it is a replicative system, but not a heterosexually reproductive one. It is a representational technology of sorts, but a metonymic rather than a metaphorical one: a subject acquires a bodily schema through proximity, through the physical motions of imitating or being directed in an activity, which process may or may not result in a self-understood or culturally symbolized identity. (p. 306).

A notion of kinship that is rooted in habitus is particularly able to circumvent the tradition of kinship as purely reproductive. Habitus enables kinship to be understood as the creation of networks between individuals sharing identity, experience, and characteristics with one another. Pure "lineage" is thus not the only mode of analysis. While queer and/or trans* individuals undoubtedly gain "artefacts" that translate to funds of identity from their immediate families, brick-and-mortar definitions of a "household" ignore the importance that building community amongst those who share one's identities can have on their lived experiences. Additionally, relying on traditional kinship structures romanticizes an understanding that the

family one is born into comes without hardship. This, sadly, is not the reality of the many queer and/or trans* individuals who face direct oppressive retaliation from their relatives upon disclosing their identities (Pusch, 2005). For these individuals, communally created kinship networks are vital to not just an individual's survival, but also learning how to navigate their lived experiences; these communities vary in origin and location, ranging from communities of like-minded or similarly identifying peers to online networks which cross traditional spatial borders (Marine & Catalano, 2014; Nicolazzo, 2016; Pusch, 2005).

Furthermore, habitus is also able to account for the critique Freeman (2007) offers against simply reshaping the "household" to rhetoric that emphasizes "choice" and "chosen families." While it is romantic to believe that queer and trans* individuals have infinite ability to choose their families, agency is a luxury of privilege often inaccessible to members of these communities, particularly those of Color, as explored in the earlier example of a drag queen from *RuPaul's Drag Race* (Freeman, 2007; Habermas, 1991; Weston, 1991). Habitus is able to explain this nuance in queer and trans* kinship. While competition within the various fields one inhabits can change their capital–and therein their agency–habitus establishes certain qualities and characteristics that are universal to experience. As such, a trans* Person of Color's agency might never be as fully guaranteed at a sociopolitical level as that of a white, cisgender man.

The solution which Freeman (2007) posits, and that I in part adopt, is a concept of kinship based on habitus. Establishing community with those of similar lived experience might not be simply just a "choice" for queer or trans* individuals, but rather a tool of survival (Freeman, 2007; Muñoz, 1999). Many current funds of knowledge and funds of identity frameworks implement the "household" as a unit of analysis without formally distinguishing between blood related and non-blood related kinship systems; when they do, their new understanding of the "household" is expanded to a romanticized "chosen" network of people.

Adopting an understanding of kinship based on habitus as the unit of analysis for ascertaining funds of identity allows the theory to be extended to queer and trans* communities in a way that does not minimize the importance of the networks established within their identity groups.

While Bourdieu's (1977) original musings do not center gender or sexual identity groups, adopting a habitus-based approach to kinship is compatible with how trans* communities define kinship in higher education. Nicolazzo (2016a) writes that trans* students' kinship networks are often comprised of people that are similarly-minded to the individual in question who in turn respect that individual's gender identities; these networks also support students as they navigate institutions of higher education by helping them resist the compulsory heterogenderism they encounter in these spaces. Nicolazzo and colleagues (2017) add that the kinship networks trans* collegians build are done actively and by choice, positing their understanding of trans* kinship in line with the work of Weston (1991). They advance that "Such counterhegemonic cultures of care are brought into existence, often out of necessity or circumstance, and care and support flows within, these networks without rigid legal, biological, or social ties" (Nicolazzo, et al., 2017, p. 307), echoing Freeman's (2007) concerns that viewing kinship purely through chosen networks diminishes the element of survival and necessity that trans* individuals must consider. Throughout her work, Nicolazzo (2016a; 2017) demonstrates the importance of kinship to the academic experiences of trans* collegians. I echo this sentiment as a necessary step in adapting funds frameworks to research with trans* students.

Queering my understanding of "the household" by utilizing a nuanced definition of kinship expands how scholars and educators view trans* students' development of their funds of identity. Previously, the unit of analysis of "the household" placed certain spatial constraints on where an individual's funds of knowledge and identity could be developed. Under a habitus-driven definition of kinship, however, one can build meaningful connections and community in a

variety of spaces, be they physical (a university, a community center), digital (online forums, social networking/media platforms), or both. Further, an individual's gender identity does not always correlate with how they present or perform gender in every space (Butler, 1990). As explored by Freeman (2007), issues of physical and emotional safety govern how queer and trans* individuals navigate the relationships they build with others; the same can also be said for how queer and trans* students navigate different spaces, particularly educational institutions like a university or a classroom (Schmidt, 2017).

This queering of kinship in line with the understanding of habitus facilitates the disruption of relying on biologically deterministic understandings of family that have long been central to funds of knowledge and funds of identity scholarship. At the same time, however, understanding kinship as the utilization of one's connections is not without fault. It could be argued, for example, that the word "utilization" implies that kinship is transactional: if an individual uses their relationships to further their understanding of their place in the world around them, how do we avoid understanding the relationships that one builds with their kin as utilitarian? Doing so implies that the relationships one builds–and subsequently the people one builds relationships with–are but pieces on a chessboard that one can move (either somewhat freely, like the queen, or governed by the rules and constraints of a game, like pawns) to reach self-actualization, which itself become an individualistic, winnable end goal.

Though understanding kinship as connections or networks can broaden the definition of kinship, it can also narrow kinship's focus to lose sight of the love, magic, care, and spirituality infused within the relationships one builds with their kin. Indigenous ontologies and epistemologies, for example, remind us of the importance of relationality: as Shawn Wilson (2008) articulates, "relationships do not merely shape reality, they *are* reality" (p. 7). Similarly, José Esteban Muñoz (2009) argues that to understand queerness as liberatory and utopian "is not

to imagine an isolated future for the individual but instead to participate in a hermeneutic that wishes to describe a collective futurity" (p. 26). In this light, a queer understanding of the relationality between an individual and their kin is not transactional, but one that acknowledges, honors, and treasures the community which said relationality represents. Thus, while defining kinship as "connections" provides me a simplified way to represent the broad and fluid nature of trans* individuals' kinship networks, these networks are not utilitarian in the way such language might imply. Rather, central to my theorization of queered kinship is an honoring of the collective futurity and relationality these relationships embody, as it is this very futurity and relationality that creates the boundless power that trans*ness holds. Such an understanding of kinship is therefore needed in order to fully understand trans*ness and queerness as assets that trans* college students bring with them to their collegiate classrooms.

In summation, it is necessary to shift the locales where funds of identity and knowledge are developed away from strictly just one's "household" and towards a queered, nuanced understanding of kinship (Gutzwa, 2021a). As it was originally conceptualized, funds of identity can speak to the ways trans* individuals develop unique systems of knowledge and ways of knowing throughout their lives. Emphasizing the "household" as the primary place where funds of identity are developed, however, fails to speak to complexities in how trans* individuals experience kinship and build kinship networks, as the rhetoric of the "household" relies upon a biological understanding of kinship. As biological kinship is an inherently inaccessible concept for queer and trans* communities (Freeman, 2007), it therefore is currently untenable to explore the funds of identity trans* students develop without first shifting its unit of analysis. As such, this study combines the funds of identity framework with queered notions of kinship in order to explore how the ways of knowing trans* collegians develop and bring to their institutions shape how they navigate classroom environments.

Literature Review

In 2010, Kristen Renn published the article, "LGBT and queer research in higher education: The state and status of the field," which served as a state of union regarding existing research surrounding lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans*, and queer communities in higher education. In her article, Renn highlighted several areas where educational research must expand to better represent queer and trans* communities. One area Renn identified was that few scholars explored the intersection of queer and trans* identities with other salient social identities, including race. This gap results in an academic system which assumes that being "White, able-bodied, and middle-class" is normative of members in the queer and trans* communities (Renn, 2010, p. 135). Additionally, though research exploring trans* students in the context of higher education had been published (e.g., Beemyn, et al., 2005a; 2005b), much of the scholarship "discussing" trans* experiences does so by lumping trans* collegians into a broader LGBT monolith, where any research centering queerness can be labeled as work with "LGBT" students regardless of the actual presence of trans* participants in a study. Doing so draws a false equivalency between the systems of oppression that lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) students experience and the nuanced forms of domination trans* individuals live in daily, ultimately silencing trans* voices in academic scholarship. As such, Renn (2010) advocated for more scholarship centering trans* identities among her recommendations.

Following the publication of Renn's (2010) piece, the breadth of literature explicitly centering trans* students' experiences in higher education has increased (Lange, et al., 2019; Nicolazzo, 2016a; Yates, 2019). Much of this work tends to focus on the broad collegiate experiences of trans* students' collegiate experiences, paying close attention to residential life, student groups, and social relationships (e.g., Bilodeau, 2012; Catalano, 2014; 2015; Duran & Nicolazzo, 2017; Garvey, et al., eds., 2018; Nicolazzo, 2016a; 2016b; 2017). Despite some

acknowledging the lack of effective faculty support trans* students receive (e.g., Case, et al., 2012; Nicolazzo, 2017; Pryor, 2015), little published research has specifically explored the experiences trans* students have in the classroom–one of the places where collegians are most likely to interact with the faculty members at their institution (Duran & Nicolazzo, 2017). As Duran and Nicolazzo (2017) argue, more research needs to explore trans* collegians' classroom experiences in order to better understand the nuanced ways they experience higher education in its totality. Similarly, existing research has overwhelmingly focused on the oppression experienced by trans* students (Nicolazzo, 2016a; 2019). While exposing oppression is revelatory of the ways higher education fails to serve marginalized students, centering it advances the many ways trans* students are discussed through a deficit-based lens in both research and practice (Jackel & Nicolazzo, 2017). Though some have explored the tools trans* collegians' employ in navigating oppressive campus environments, namely the resiliency they build (Nicolazzo, 2016a), scholarship must continue to advance narratives centering the kaleidoscope of strengths trans* students can bring to educational spaces.

In order to make sense of the corpus of scholarship centering trans* collegians, I have identified two overarching categories through which trans* experiences have been explored: the breath of experiences of trans* collegians on campuses and the specific experiences of trans* students in collegiate classrooms. Guided by the previously established framework, I will review and critique these two distinct bodies of literature, paying specific attention to highlighting existing gaps in scholarly understandings of trans* students experiences at institutions of higher education. First, I will explore the ways in which scholars have discussed trans* experiences on college campuses broadly, paying close attention to the overemphasis placed on the oppression trans* students experience in higher education as perpetuating deficit narratives about trans* students. Secondly, I will engage the growing body of literature specifically engaging trans*

students' classroom experiences. In critically reviewing these bodies of scholarship, I discuss the existing gaps in collective understandings of trans* students' collegiate experiences that I aim to explore in this study. While the second body of literature may have more direct application to the topic at hand, I review both the relative macrocosm of campuses and the microcosms of classrooms as scholars frequently discuss trans* students' classroom experiences either in direct relationship to or merely as subsets of their collegiate experiences. Similarly, experiences outside of the classroom have direct impacts on how students experience their time in classrooms (Nicolazzo, 2016a), showing the interwoven nature of the blur between curricular and co-curricular spaces. It is therefore necessary to explore the literature on trans* students' campus experiences broadly, as doing so provides context on the experiences trans* collegians have in the classroom.

Trans* Experiences on Campus

Of the literature centering trans* collegians in higher education, the majority of scholarship has explored the overall lived experiences of trans* students while navigating institutions of higher education. Several key themes arose as I reviewed the body of literature exploring trans* student experiences in higher education broadly; in this section, I review these major themes. First, I discuss the emphasis scholars have historically placed on discussing the oppression trans* collegians experience at all levels of higher education. In doing so, I critique the often deficit-based approach scholarship has taken in positioning trans* students as an oppressed population. Second, I explore broader institutional initiatives to make campuses more "inclusive" of trans* students. Third, I focus more specifically on the policies, practices, and procedures institutions have taken to address trans* issues on campuses, and the experiences trans* students have navigating these policies, practices, and procedures. Finally, I review literature on trans* students navigating housing and residential life offices on campuses.

Centering Oppression

In discussing trans* students' experiences at institutions of higher education, the oppression that trans* students face on college campuses in a variety of spaces is often prioritized. While oppression is undoubtedly a reality of many trans* collegians' lived experiences, scholars (namely Nicolazzo, 2016a) have critiqued the overemphasis researchers place on the oppression that trans* students experience in higher education, as doing so connotes that oppression is the end-all-be-all of what trans* students encounter in higher education. Failure to transgress rhetoric surrounding oppression means that trans* students are frequently defined *by* their oppression, perpetuating the deficit-based narratives of trans*ness in higher education research and practice (Nicolazzo, 2016a).

In two separate reviews of literature centering trans* student experiences in higher education, the trend of centering oppression becomes clear. First, in her book "Trans* in college: Transgender students' strategies for navigating campus life and the institutional politics of inclusion," Nicolazzo (2016a) aptly notes that "Trans* people have always existed and have always gone to college, whether or not the higher education community has recognized them as doing so," (p. 40); she further argues that the relative lack of literature centering trans* identities compared against other social identities in higher education research is "itself a manifestation of trans* oppression" (p. 40). Similarly, though her literature review is neutrally titled "Transgender students' experiences in postsecondary education: A literature review," Yates (2019) solely documents the "Challenges facing transgender students in higher education" (p. 136), positioning the various documented ways trans* collegians experience oppression in higher education at the forefront of her analysis.

Highlighting the oppression trans* students experience throughout their engagement with many sectors of higher education can provide insight into how trans* collegians are not served

by colleges and universities. Solely discussing trans* experiences in higher education through the lens of oppression, however, actively perpetuates the very oppression documented. After rearticulating how uniquely oppressed trans* collegians are based on their underrepresented identities, Yates (2019) argues that: "This hostile environment and the negative experiences transgender students disproportionately face within higher education not only *limits their ability to persist* but also *causes significant emotional, developmental, and psychological damage*," (p. 141; emphasis added). Here, Yates does not advance curtailing the systems of oppression and domination that subjugate trans* collegians as a desirable end goal. Rather, "oppression" merely becomes a placeholder for institutional ideals of persistence and retention.

Such rhetoric carries forward the problematic understanding that, because of their marginalized gender identities, trans* collegians are deficient in their ability to navigate their respective institutions. Focus on retention as the sole marker for a trans* student's ability to thrive in higher education *ignores* the matrices of oppression that are cited as the reasons why trans* students are unable to persist (Nicolazzo, 2016a). In concluding her review of existing literature on trans* collegians, Nicolazzo (2016a) laments that:

> of the available literature regarding trans* collegians, much of it discusses trans* people by using deficient language and perspectives. These deficit-based studies point to the heightened need not only for scholarship regarding trans* students but also for that scholarship to take an affirmative, resilience-based approach. (p. 43).

As articulated in situating my theoretical framework, funds of identity provides my study an asset-based lens (Esteban-Guitart, 2016), through which I am able to highlight the ways trans* students enact resilience in their classrooms. Despite centering strength as opposed to oppression, however, it is impossible to more specifically discuss existing literature without addressing the documented oppression faced by trans* students in higher education.

Though they focus on the impact of oppression on trans* students, some scholars are often unwilling to name trans*phobia, heterogenderism, transmisogyny, and other systems of domination as the root cause *of* oppression. Instead, "chilly" and "cool" are words used in campus climate literature centering trans* students to describe the ways they perceive their respective environments (Linley & Nguyen, 2015); relying on vague and generic descriptors of experiences with oppression does a disservice to marginalized student communities by failing to name the systems of power that enable oppression (Harper, 2012). This being said, some (namely, Nicolazzo, 2016a; 2016b; 2017) have centered students' abilities to build and demonstrate resilience as a mode of navigating oppressive environments; I will explore resilience more in depth later in this chapter.

What *is* frequently named in discussion of trans* oppression, however, are the psychological impacts oppressive campus spaces have on trans* collegians. A large number of studies have either referenced or centered the mental health of trans* students in higher education as a way to problematize the quality of services provided to non-cisgender collegians (Yates, 2019). Jackel and Nicolazzo (2017) aptly explain that an emphasis on trans* victimization furthers deficit models of working with trans* communities in higher education. That being said, Woodford, Weber, Nicolazzo, Hunt, Kulick, Coleman, Coulombe, and Renn (2018) utilized a resilience-based framework in their discussion of depression and attempted suicide amongst LGBTQ college students broadly. Themes present throughout the literature on trans* students' lived experiences–including experiences with microaggressions, discrimination, social stress, gender performance, and, in the case of Students of Color, racism–all were found to contribute to a trans* collegian's likelihood to contemplate suicide, particularly for students with lower levels of resilience demonstrated (Woodford, et al., 2018). By viewing mental health under a resilience framework, trans* students' innate abilities to practice and demonstrate resilience

throughout their collegiate careers are visible assets trans* collegians bring to colleges and universities; rather than situating struggles with mental health as a hurdle trans* students must overcome based on their gender identities, Woodford and colleagues (2018) choose instead to focus on the strengths and abilities of trans* students to process oppression on campus. Therefore, what becomes a clear takeaway is that colleges must prioritize creating spaces where trans* students are able to best practice resilience–a discussion often couched in the language of making campuses "inclusive" for trans* students.

Policies, Procedures, and Practices

In 2016, representatives from the U.S. Department of Justice and U.S. Department of Education (Lhamon & Gupta, 2016) released a "Dear colleague" letter highlighting protections available to trans* collegians under Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972. The provided guidelines include a student's right to a "Safe and nondiscriminatory environment," (Lhamon & Gupta, 2016, p. 2), a university's responsibility to "treat students consistent with their gender identity" regardless of the student's listed sex on institutional documents (p. 3), regulations regarding a trans* student's ability to utilize "sex-segregated activities and facilities" (p. 3), and more. Scholars both prior to and following the release of the "Dear colleague" letter, however, have documented countless ways trans* students face challenges in navigating these very systems at their universities. Despite this, many universities rely upon their policies as symbolic measures to demonstrate their care for and service to trans* students (Catalano & Griffin, 2016; Nicolazzo, 2016a). As Nicolazzo (2016a) argues, advancing administrative, policy-level change as the only cure-all for institutional trans*phobia and oppression actively does a disservice to trans* collegians.

Dirks (2016) conducted a policy discourse analysis of task force reports regarding campus climate for LGBTQ+ students at four Big Ten universities. Their study highlights the

largely deficit-based rhetoric the surveyed institutions employ when discussing trans* students on their respective campuses. Namely, task force reports were found to "construct the victim subject position" of trans* students, which serves to advance trans* victimization as opposed to combat it (Dirks, 2016, p. 381). Further, reports justified exclusionary practices directly in violation of Title IX protections as a mode of protecting trans* students. For example, Dirks (2016) stresses that a theme across many surveyed reports was the implicit promotion of gender segregation on campus. Doing so

> allows the institution to depict itself as concerned for the privacy of trans people without either addressing the larger issue of why gendered spaces such as bathrooms, residence halls, and locker rooms are dangerous places for a transgender person, or confronting cisgender privilege and exploring why gendered spaces were created and how that might change if we challenge unstated cultural norms around gender segregation. (Dirks, 2016, p. 382)

Such rhetoric is deeply problematic. First, rather than striving to create gender inclusive spaces on campuses, policy makers instead strive to force trans* student needs to fit into a cisgender binary. By protecting heterogendered practices in education, universities actively attempt to mask their prioritization of cisgender students under the guise of protecting trans* students from undue physical and/or psychological harm (Dirks, 2016). Second, Dirks' (2016) analysis corroborates the deficit-based critique of literature advanced by Nicolazzo (2016a) by also showing how university policies and reports actively focus on supposed "deficiencies" trans* students possess based on their identities.

Often included in discourse on policies centering trans* students is the need to create "inclusive" policies and campus environments. The word "inclusivity" is frequently employed in reference to theorizing change for trans* collegians (Nicolazzo, 2016a). Beemyn and colleagues

(2005a) initiated a conversation on programmatic changes that can improve the lived experiences of trans* undergraduate students. Beyond policy initiatives, the authors call for colleges to design programming specifically geared towards trans* issues, offer greater support services through clearly defined spaces (such as trans* resource centers or trans* student groups), and offer gender-inclusive housing options for students (Beemyn, et al., 2005a).

Such suggestions have been both corroborated and complicated by subsequent studies. For example, while many have qualitatively found that trans* students benefit from membership in identity-based organizations (Garvey, et al., 2019; Marine & Nicolazzo, 2014), others have highlighted narratives of students experiencing ostracization from trans* student groups based off of negative social dynamics and, for some Black trans* collegians and other trans* Students of Color, experiences with racialization (Nicolazzo, 2016a; 2016b). Participants in Catalano's (2015) study of trans* men advocated that regardless of where, finding allyship amongst students in social and curricular spaces is an imperative aspect of navigating potentially hostile collegiate environments. Beemyn and colleagues (2005b) argue that LGBTQ student organizations should work intentionally to include gender inclusive language and programming in group operations to further promote an environment of trans* inclusivity on colleges; Nicolazzo and Harris (2014) similarly advocate that collegiate women's centers must explicitly incorporate and welcome transwomen, transfeminine, and femme identities to promote inclusivity.

Housing and Residence Life

Many scholars (e.g., Bautista, et al., 2018; Chang & Leets, Jr., 2018; Dirks, 2016; Nicolazzo, et al., 2018) have explored trans* students' engagement with housing and residence life. There are multiple avenues through which trans* collegians can interact with residence life offices, including applying to live in on-campus housing as a resident (Nicolazzo, et al., 2018) and applying to serve as a resident assistant (RA) or another position on a university's residence

hall staff (Nicolazzo & Marine, 2015). Students' lived experiences as residents in campus housing, including the transphobic and heterogendered dynamics trans* collegians experience when interacting with cisgender peers (Nicolazzo, 2016a), also impact their experiences navigating the bureaucracy and proceedings of university housing.

In discussing housing and residence life policies, several scholars have focused on the establishment or reclassification of certain gender-inclusive campus facilities at specific universities. For example, the anthology "Trans* policies & experiences in housing & residence life," compiled by Garvey and colleagues (Eds., 2018), features chapters by administrators at a variety of institutions documenting their respective university's adoption of gender-inclusive policies. In their history of gender-inclusive policies at Oberlin College, for example, Bautista and colleagues (2018) highlight the progression of how the College has shifted policies centering bathrooms, residence halls, and living-learning communities towards an emphasis on gender inclusivity beyond the traditionally enforced cisgender binary. Smith and Tubbs (2018) document the history of gender-inclusive housing at the University of California, Riverside, focusing specifically on Stonewall Hall, an aptly-named intentional living community designed for students who identify as members of the LGBTQ+ communities. They also shed insight into training staff members receive relating to queer and gender inclusivity, as well as how university staff respond to internal and external "concerns" (read as: transphobic stereotypes) about the safety of (cisgender) students on campus in light of the University's adoption of gender-inclusive policies. These institutions, in addition to Dickson College (Patchcoski & Harris, 2018), George Washington University (Weinshel, et al., 2018), and the University of Wisconsin – Madison (Erdman & Tingley, 2018), all adopted various policies and spearheaded gender-inclusivity initiatives *in direct response to* the activism of trans*-identifying students on campus.

While not all institutions have waited until outcry from student activists in order to change policies (Garvey, 2018), the reality is such that a number of institutions have not pursued avenues of change on campus for trans* students without first being prompted to do so by members of their community who identify as trans*. In their concluding remarks regarding Oberlin's strides towards trans*-inclusivity, Bautista and colleagues (2018) celebrate that the College is "fortunate to have a student body that is forward thinking and solution oriented" (p. 59); the unstated assumption is that without a group of trans* students and allies fighting for the College to recognize and affirm its trans* students, Oberlin might never have adopted gender-inclusive housing policies to begin with. By expanding on the specific verbiage of student affairs professionals in their writing, my goal is not to admonish university staff, nor is it to dismiss the necessary and important work administrators are putting in to support students at the policy level. I present the specific words of those such as Bautista and colleagues, rather, to expose what many (e.g., Chang & Leets, Jr., 2018; Nicolazzo, 2016a; 2018) have already advocated: that trans* students are largely invisible in the eyes of many colleges and universities around the country, even as universities attempt to change administrative policies to promote inclusivity.

Seeing that a large amount of the conversation in scholarship surrounding trans* experiences in residence life and housing from a policy-based perspective, there are several key nuances that are missing from existing discourse. As Nicolazzo (2018) eloquently argues, "It is imperative for student affairs educators to not assume that the creation of a more inclusive policy or practice means the work of gender equity and trans* inclusion is done," (p. 201). While policy change is a necessary way for trans* students to seek inclusivity at their institutions, as well as protections underneath their university/college administrations, only focusing on residential life as a collective of bureaucratic proceedings trans* students are required to navigate fails to address the totality of oppression students might face. Housing is not just an application that a

student fills out, but also a community where a student lives. Not exploring the actual experiences of students *in* housing spaces while focusing only on the institution's documents and programs still serves to remove the voices of trans* students from the equation all together. Little to no research has taken a spatial lens of analysis in considering trans* students' experiences in housing; as discussed earlier, exploring how students inhabit and move between spaces is imperative in understanding the totality of their lived experiences (Chang & Leets, Jr., 2018). Though the primary focus of this study is not to explore experiences in housing, it would be remis to ignore the effects of housing (both from lived and policy-oriented perspectives) on a student's experiences in the classroom.

Still, it is important to note that the symbolism that policy measures provide can and do have a positive impact on trans* students' sense of belonging (Chang & Leets, Jr., 2018). Similarly, the *lack* of trans*-inclusive policies on campuses send the message to many trans* students–particularly trans* Students of Color (Garvey, et al., 2019)–that their campus environments are unwelcoming. Outside of housing policies, Garvey and colleagues (2019) note other policy areas, including financial aid, student healthcare, and general campus resources, as lacking in trans*-inclusivity, as well as being particularly damaging towards trans* Students of Color. As such, while it is important to continue to work beyond generating inclusive policies, documenting the ways bureaucracy negatively impacts trans* collegians is an important consideration in existing literature.

Trans* Experiences in College Classrooms

Scholars often discuss trans* students' academic experiences and interactions as one piece of the broader context of a study's findings; many studies do not draw specific conclusions about trans* students' academic experiences, instead using singular narratives about classes students were enrolled in as a broader mode of discussing the ways students generally experience

college. An even smaller body of work has directly explored how trans* collegians navigate classroom environments. In this section, I will explore the ways trans* students' academic and classroom narratives are presented in higher education research, highlighting the areas where understandings can be expanded through this study. First, I will review the group of literature that tangentially *reference* the classroom experiences of trans* students in their findings–namely, studies that explore the social identity development of trans* collegians, and those that explore how trans* collegians build kinship networks and practice resilience. Second, I will engage the smaller corpus of literature *centering* the classroom experiences of trans* collegians as a core element of their study design.

Trans* students' identity development

Scholars have provided differing perspectives on how a students' classroom experiences can impact their identity development. In his study exploring how transgender students develop their gender identities during their undergraduate careers, Bilodeau (2005) included one narrative from a transgender participant who referenced the classroom as one place where she could productively explore her gender identity. For one student, the work she was completing for her classes gave her the language and knowledge to lead sessions on gender at conferences, as well as draw connections between her identity and her coursework (Bilodeau, 2005). On a more somber note, however, another student in Bilodeau's study discussed her plan to attempt suicide during her time in undergrad. Though not directly related to her class experiences, the student referred to the period prior to her planned attempt as one of the most liberating in her life, in part because she was not regularly attending classes at the time (Bilodeau, 2005). In this instance, the student's actual experiences in classes were not discussed; it can be implied, however, that coursework was in some way contributing to the student's mental health.

Jourian (2017) corroborates that negative interactions with faculty and peers in classroom settings can impact how trans* students develop and perform their social identities. In discussing the experiences of Black trans*men, they reference multiple participants experiences navigating both racial and gendered microaggressions while transitioning. One student, in particular, "described the ways he silenced and shrank himself to not 'take up a lot of space in class,'" (Jourian, 2017, p. 258). Similarly to Bilodeau's (2005) work, Jourian does not expand further on the dynamics that contributed to the student feeling as though they were taking up space, or the specific microaggressions the student experienced in the classroom. For Black trans* students, and non-binary Black trans* students in particular (Nicolazzo, 2016b), the development and presentation of their gender identities in academic spaces is moderated by experiences of multiple systems of oppression, including anti-Blackness and trans*phobia.

By not discussing systemic power as a root cause of negative experiences in the classroom, it is difficult to actualize change at the classroom level. Similarly, though both Bilodeau's and Jourian's discussions of performing identity in the classroom center students' social identities as influencing academic engagement, neither discuss the potential for trans* collegians' various social identities to be a source of strength in navigating classroom environments. Such scholarship toes the line of falling into the reproduction of deficit narratives of trans* students through the centering of their oppression that Nicolazzo (2016a) cautions against. What remains to be seen in conversations surrounding identity development in curricular spaces is a specific discussion of how trans* students' identities are an asset to educational environments, not just simple hinderances in their ability to perform in academic spaces.

Kinship and resilience

In conversation with how trans* students develop kinship networks and display resilience on campus, both Nicolazzo (2016a; 2016c) and Nicolazzo and colleagues (2017) discuss the

impact that trans* collegians' kinship networks have in supporting them through oppressive classroom dynamics. Across these publications, the networks trans* students build amongst one another are cited as support systems that enable trans* collegians to display resiliency in spite of direct oppression by faculty in the classroom. In one account, a student described the support ze found amongst peers in a trans* student group on campus while dealing with a professor that created a hostile academic environment (Nicolazzo, et al., 2017). Similarly to Bilodeau's (2005) study, Nicolazzo and colleagues (2017) also document a student who, after learning their insurance would not cover his gender-confirming surgery, was unable to attend class due to emotional distress. The student cited an individual relationship with a peer as being the what was most responsible for helping "him get back into his academic routine" (Nicolazzo, et al., 2017, p. 314), demonstrating the powerful role a trans* collegian's kinship network plays in providing support that extends to the classroom.

Nicolazzo and colleagues (2017) do not, however, dive deeper into their exploration of *how* kinship networks developed by trans* collegians impact the ability for trans* students to display resilience in the classroom–just that they do. By approaching experiences such as those documented by Nicolazzo and colleagues (2017) through the lens of funds of identity, this study hopes to explore the specific modalities of navigation that trans* collegians learn through both their experiences identifying as trans* and the kinship networks they build with their peers. In other words, while it is helpful to know that strong kinship networks have the power to change students' academic trajectories for the better, exploring the funds of identity trans* collegians develop through their kinship networks can provide scholars and practitioners clear ways to harness trans* students' identities and experiences in working towards building anti-oppressive pedagogy. In doing so, pedagogues can alleviate some of the implicit responsibility placed on

trans* students to find their own ways to navigate classroom environments by finding ways to reconstruct classrooms to view trans* collegians as assets to their academic spaces.

Practicing resilience in the classroom is not, however, always easy for trans* collegians, even with strong kinship networks. In Nicolazzo's (2016a) ethnographic study centering trans* resilience, she found that many collegians encountered academic departments that created environments that were so hostile, students felt no other option but to change majors all together. Students cited a litany of reasons why a particular academic department on campus infringed upon their abilities to practice resilience. For one, an economics course reinforced expectations for traditional gendered presentation when requiring students to dress in formal, business attire in order to participate in a graded presentation (Nicolazzo, 2016a); this created financial barriers for the student, who was unable to purchase clothing and accessories to professionally present their gender in a manner that authentically reflected their desires (Nicolazzo, 2016a). For the student, practicing resilience meant being able to perform their gender freely; coupled with her fears of encountering confrontation, these instances led her to "change majors in favor of finding an academic department where she could be more comfortable and safe practicing resilience on a consistent basis," (Nicolazzo, 2016a, p. 99). Another student recounted that the latent gender binarism in the psychology department demonstrated by fellow students as a frustrating roadblock in practicing resilience on campus.

Examples such as these show the multiple layers of classroom dynamics that can prevent a student from practicing resilience: anything from curricular requirements to the failure of faculty to intervene when students are acting in directly transphobic ways towards their trans* classmates can be wholly detrimental (Nicolazzo, 2016a). That being said, while resilience was documented as being difficult for these students to practice in the classroom, Nicolazzo's

(2016a) work does not offer much beyond discussing the importance of kinship in building students' abilities to practice resilience. In doing so, she argues that

> educators would be well advised not to seek a specific list of best practices they can implement to increase trans* inclusion on campus, as such lists will undoubtedly lead to suggesting practices and policies that may have an impact on students in a variety of potentially negative ways. (Nicolazzo, 2016a, p. 136)

The argument that each students' experience is unique based on a variety of factors, including their intersecting social identities, academic major, and specific faculty interactions, is powerful; I, too, do not advocate for "one-size-fits-all" solutions to creating "inclusive" spaces. There is still, however, a middle ground to be reached between offering a monolithic "to-do" list of recommendations for educators to follow and offering insight into the tools educators and researchers can use to promote the development of kinship networks and demonstration of resilience in the classroom. I argue that ascertaining and tapping into trans* collegians' funds of identity is one way to demonstrate how trans* students demonstrate resilience in the classroom. In other words, trans* students using their funds of identity in the classroom is one way trans* students demonstrate resilience in the face of oppression. Funds of identity approaches recognize the nuance and individuality of lived experiences, showing that there is no singular way to approach working with specific populations of students (Esteban-Guitart, 2016). By viewing students as individuals and by centering their marginalized social identities as assets to educational spaces, exploring students' funds of identity itself *becomes* a "best practice" in striving towards dismantling structures of oppression that are latent in classroom environments. By studying trans* students funds of identity, it becomes possible to explore how students demonstrate resilience, and also to provide pedagogues an avenue to create classroom environments that promote the demonstration of resilience.

Other students participating in Nicolazzo's (2016a) study reflected positively on certain academic departments and spaces, and that her subsequent analysis of these positive experiences does offer educators some possible places to begin to transform their pedagogical practices. Particularly, students were largely appreciative of faculty members who included diversity language on their syllabi establishing ground rules of respect and support for all students regardless of "gender variance" (Nicolazzo, 2016a, p. 99). In discussing their education professor's gender inclusive language on a syllabus, one student noted that they, in turn, felt more comfortable centering their identity in course assignments, feeling that they truly belonged in the department (and field) of education (Nicolazzo, 2016a). It has been documented that trans* collegians, on average, find far less support from their faculty when compared to their cisgender peers (Linley & Nguyen, 2015). Nicolazzo's work reaffirms the power that something as small as a syllabus with inclusive language can have for trans* students entering academic spaces.

Though she engages in one of the most thorough discussions of trans* students' academic experiences currently present in higher education research, the bulk of Nicolazzo's work prioritizes other aspects of the lived experiences of trans* collegians in highlighting the development and practice of resilience on campus. For example, many students in Nicolazzo's ethnographic work highlight their involvement in trans* student organizations as a place where they were able to learn tactics for demonstrating resilience when navigating bureaucratic and policy-based oppression on their campus. In focusing on experiences that largely fall outside the classroom, the potential of using the classroom as a space to explore and cultivate trans* collegians' kinship networks is untapped. The exploration of funds of identity bridges the gap between the classroom and kinship networks as funds of identity are derived largely through a students' kinship networks, and directly shape the way students see and understand the world.

Knowing how kinship impacts the learning styles of students in turn becomes one way to explore how strong kinship networks help students display resilience strategies in the classroom.

Similarly, though Nicolazzo (2016a) and Nicolazzo and colleagues (2017) establish a clear connection between the kinship networks a student develops and how they enact resilience academically, their discussions do not engage the specific reasons *why* and *how* kinship networks provide students the ability to display resilience in collegiate classrooms. What is therefore missing is an understanding of the ways a students' interactions with their kinship networks directly shape their ways of learning and actively *navigating* a classroom environment, and how these strategies can subsequently be folded into the very curriculum and pedagogical strategies educators utilize; exploring students funds of identity is one way to gain this understanding, as funds of identity are a link between how kinship networks can directly influence a students' classroom experiences. By ascertaining and exploring the funds of identity trans* students bring with them to the classroom, one goal of this study is to offer further insight into the tools trans* collegians actively bring to their courses. By expanding beyond just discussing the practice of resilience, scholars and practitioners can begin to fully consider the nuanced vibrancy trans* collegians can infuse into their academic environments, hopefully ushering the creation of pedagogical environments that dismantle systems of oppression impacting trans* students.

Centering Academic Experiences

As mentioned above, a small pocket of the broader corpus of literature centering trans* students in higher education focuses specifically on their experiences in the classroom. In one qualitative study, Pryor (2015) "sought to understand how transgender students experience the classroom environment, particularly as it relates to their interactions with faculty and peers" (p. 452). Students experienced marginalization based on their gender identities being (dis)respected in the classroom, such as through the (lack of) recognition given to a student's stated pronouns

and/or name, especially when their identity markers were not congruent with their legal name and/or sex as listed on university records. Additionally, students discussed varying degrees of comfort navigating coming out in classes, being expected to educate cisgender peers and faculty on trans*-related issues, and the levels of support they received from peers in counteracting microaggressions made by people in the class, including misgendering, misnaming, and drawing false equivalencies between trans* experiences and mental illnesses (Pryor, 2015). Ultimately, he argues that "these findings demonstrate the need for instructors and practitioners to continually reflect on the potential consequences classroom experiences have on students' academic and overall college experience," (Pryor, 2015, p. 453).

Pryor found that, largely, faculty demonstrated little grasp on best practices for working with trans* students, both in actual pedagogical interactions, as well as in conversations with students outside of class (2015). Most participants who felt supported by a faculty member indicated their instructor's acknowledgment of their stated pronouns and/or preferred name; in a few select, yet powerful, instances, students lauded faculty who actively intervened in the classroom when a trans* student was misgendered or microaggressed by a peer (Pryor, 2015). Participants also acknowledged that what happens in the classroom does not merely stay inside the classroom, but rather that the consequences of actions and interactions in pedagogical spaces directly impacts the totality of a student's collegiate experience (Pryor, 2015). This finding corroborates not only how other scholars have situated trans* collegians' classroom experiences in their work (e.g., Jourian, 2017; Nicolazzo, 2016a), but also a common understanding in higher education research that curricular, co-curricular, and extracurricular spaces are intertwined for many students (Pryor, 2015).

Picking up on Pryor's discussion of faculty support for trans* collegians, Linley and colleagues (2016) conducted a qualitative study to explore the ways faculty support LGBTQ

undergraduate students. In doing so, the authors do not wholly disaggregate trans* respondents from the collective of cisgender participants who identify with marginalized non-heterosexual sexual orientations in their work; most of the findings lump trans* students with their cisgender LGBQ peers, and thus have the potential to draw false equivalencies between the oppression experienced by cisgender and non-cisgender participants (Renn, 2010). When specifically documenting the experiences of trans* participants, Linley and colleagues corroborate Pryor's (2015) findings that trans* students feel supported by professors who respect and use names and pronouns they provide. In rarer cases, participants reported times when faculty retroactively apologized to their trans* students for assuming the (cis)gender identity of all students in the course before they knew students in question identified as trans*; "the few students whom faculty approached one-on-one reported that this active inclusion contributed to their well-being as transgender students," (Linley, et al., 2016, p. 58).

As has been echoed by many scholars in the years following Renn's (2010) state of the field, Pryor's (2015) study is exemplary of the need for research to uniquely explore the classroom experiences of trans* students as separate from those of cisgender LGBQ students, a suggestion Linley and colleagues (2016) do not follow. Despite drawing conclusions and implications regarding the academic experiences of trans* students in conjunction with their LGBQ peers, most of the narratives Linley and colleagues (2016) offer in their findings come from participants who did not identify as trans*. This oversight perpetuates an understanding that all queer and trans* students have the same needs, particularly in the classroom. While the article demonstrates the nuanced ways faculty can support LGBQ students beyond the classroom, there is still little understanding of the powerful roles faculty can play in supporting students as they move through various spaces during their collegiate careers.

Additionally, neither Pryor (2015) nor Linley and colleagues (2016) take into consideration participants' multiple social identities, namely, their racial/ethnic identities: neither study discusses the presence of Students of Color amongst their participant pool, treating their subsequent analyses as race-neutral conversations. This exclusion of race from conversations on trans* student experiences is endemic of much of the literature surrounding trans* students in higher education. Few scholars explore the experiences of trans* students holding multiple marginalized social identities; those that do (e.g., Jourian, 2017; Nicolazzo, 2016b) do not center trans* Students of Colors' academic experiences in their work. Latent whiteness in higher education fosters cultures of racial domination that, when coupled with systems of heterogendered oppression, uniquely impact the lived realities of Black trans* women, Black non-binary students, and other trans* Students of Color (Nicolazzo, 2016b; Stewart & Nicolazzo, 2018). Educational research that fails to consider both race and racism in relation to student experiences legitimates and perpetuates oppressive racialization, both on college campuses and in the academy broadly (Harper, 2012). Thus, further research must specifically center the curricular experiences of trans* Students of Color (Duran & Nicolazzo, 2017). By centering the salience of individuals' social identities, funds of identity frameworks have the potential to explore the nuanced academic experiences of students who hold multiply marginalized identities.

Trans* students have often discussed the oppressive expectations placed on them to both speak on behalf of all trans* individuals and to educate their cisgender peers on any/all trans* issues in the classroom (Duran & Nicolazzo, 2017; Pryor, 2015). Speaking to the nuanced levels of oppression trans* students experience in the classroom, Duran and Nicolazzo (2017) note that "participants simultaneously defined the classroom as a physical location that is bearable only if they remained invisible and as a place where they feel forced to share their experiences in order to gain access to conversations," (p. 539). Under the lens of queer and trans* subjectivities,

Duran and Nicolazzo (2017) expressed that faculty and peers who looked *at* trans* students as subjects perpetuated oppressive classroom environments, while those "who saw trans* collegians as partners in learning mitigated trans* oppression" (p. 536). Ultimately, trans* collegians express that faculty who seek to build relationships with the trans* students in their classes are those that are most supportive; ways faculty demonstrate their willingness to build relationships with trans* students can include respecting a students' provided pronouns/name or checking back against students who misgender or microaggress trans* peers in the classroom (Duran & Nicolazzo, 2017; Linley & Nguyen, 2015; Linley, et al., 2016; Pryor, 2015).

Additional steps faculty can take to demonstrate allyship and build relationships with their students is through including trans* identities in both their curriculum and the language of their syllabi (Duran & Nicolazzo, 2017). As previously discussed, the presence of gender-inclusive language on a course syllabus sends the signal to trans* students that their identities are welcomed in the classroom (Nicolazzo, 2016a; 2017b). Additionally, several scholars (Adair, 2015; Jackel & Nicolazzo, 2017; Jourian, Simmons, & Devaney, 2015; Nicolazzo, 2014) have theorized the potential power of infusing trans* identities and subjectivities in a variety of curricular spaces in order to engage issues of gender in the classroom. For example, when done productively, including the work of trans*-identifying scholars, writers, or artists in a class that does not necessarily center gender and sexuality in its course design becomes a way to raise students' critical consciousness about understandings of gender that fall beyond the binary. When trans* identities are not just pigeonholed into a specific unit or lecture that is designated to queer and trans* topics, it becomes clear to all students (regardless of gender) that every issue can be, and likely is, a trans* issue. As such, the inclusion of trans* experiences in the classroom can augment the development of undergraduate students' critical thinking skills, both in general and with regards to understanding gender specifically (Nicolazzo, 2014). When utilized in the

curriculum of higher education and student affairs graduate/professional programs, trans*-inclusive pedagogy can productively inform professionals-in-training how to carry out trans*formative work in serving trans* students (Jackel & Nicolazzo, 2017).

Still, Duran and Nicolazzo (2017) are among the first to articulate that the productively and appropriately representing trans* identities in course materials is vital in creating curricular spaces where trans* students feel welcome and safe. What is implied is that it is not merely enough for a professor to list their pronouns on their syllabus or include a unit on trans*-related issues in their course if they do not reflect on how their pedagogical styles might perpetuate systems of domination that subjugate the trans* students in their classes. Simply put, words on a page alone are insufficient in creating anti-oppressive pedagogical spaces. Many (e.g., Duran & Nicolazzo, 2017; Nicolazzo, 2016a; Pryor, 2015) have advocated for faculty, practitioners, and educators to reflect on the ways their pedagogical practices perpetuate or advance systems of oppression that further marginalize trans* students in higher education. By striving for a set of "best practices" as ways to dictate how to work with trans* students, educators might feel as though it is possible to stop reflecting on their pedagogy as long as they make a quick change to a syllabus (Nicolazzo, 2016a). As such, it is necessary to explore how to advance pedagogical practice in the classroom to mirror potential inclusivity on a course syllabus. Much of the solution lies in dismantling deficit-based narratives of trans* identities in higher education. Shifting pedagogy away from treating trans* students as exceptions to the norm and finding ways to respect, affirm, and uplift the individual identities of all students in every classroom is one way to build pedagogy that is anti-oppressive; funds of identity frameworks are uniquely able to not only learn the tools and modalities trans* collegians employ in navigating classroom spaces, but also to provide educators, administrators, researchers, and policy-makers concrete ways to reform pedagogical practices that fail to serve trans* students.

As discussed before, the only prior scholarship which takes a funds of identity approach in exploring trans* collegians' academic experiences is my own (Gutzwa, 2021a; 2022). In a study centering the narratives of 3 trans* undergraduate students at a large public university in the Southwest, I explored some of the funds of identity each participant held, and how each participant utilized these funds of identity to navigate trans*-oppressive classroom environments in higher education. In Chapter 1, I retold the story of Jay, whose funds of identity developed at the intersection of their gender, racial, and disability identities helped inform how to navigate discussions of gender in their classroom. In addition to Jay's narratives, I (Gutzwa, 2021a) present the experiences of Ethan and Alonso to show how divergences between individuals' identities and lived realities render the funds of identity they develop and utilize in the classroom as unique. In doing so, I position each of these students' ways of knowing as assets they bring to their educational environments. Here, funds of identity become tangible manifestations of participants' lived realities, testimonies, and epistemologies which can be harnessed by researchers and pedagogues alike to transform their classroom environments into trans*-inclusive spaces.

Further, exploring trans* collegians' funds of identity opened up space to explore how their intersecting minoritized identities further create nuance in the ways they develop and utilize their epistemologies in educational environments. Unpacking Alonso's story in a separate manuscript (Gutzwa, 2022), for example, I explored the ways in which Alonso's identities as a genderfluid, nonbinary, Indigenous (Zapotec), multiracial Student of Color combine and diverge to shape the way they navigate the many on- and off-campus spaces they encounter daily. Findings corroborate existing literature (e.g., Duran, 2019; Duran & Nicolazzo, 2017) that demonstrate the nuanced ways that race and racism shape the collegiate experiences of trans* Students of Color. Additionally, findings from both manuscripts (Gutzwa, 2021a included)

eschew the long-discussed "need" for best practices in working with trans* students by underscoring the unique and individual realities each trans* student brings to the classroom. It is impossible to find a set of practices that universally serve all trans* students; as such, exploring students' funds of identity emerges from this scholarship as a way to ascertain the nuanced needs of all students in a classroom–including and especially trans* students–in order to disrupt the many modes of oppression and dominance reinforced curricularly.

Across the literature, the importance of dismantling deficit-based understandings of trans* collegians emerges in perpetuity as a blatant need for disrupting trans*-oppression perpetuated throughout all strata of higher education. Given the demonstrated power of funds of identity as a framework in understanding trans* students as assets, this study expands on my prior work by exploring the realms in which they develop the ways their ways of knowing that shape their subsequent navigation of collegiate academic environments.

Conclusion

It is impossible to argue that little is known about trans* students in higher education. Doing so not only ignores the work of scholars–many of whom identify as trans* themselves–centering trans* identities in their work (Nicolazzo, 2016a), but also silences the narratives of trans* students that have been published in educational research. Seeing as each individual's social identities, backgrounds, hopes, fears, dreams, and realities are unique and divergent, it is also impossible to strive for an understanding of the lived experiences of trans* collegians that is final and complete. As scholarship centering trans* lives both in and out of the field of education continues to blossom, however, it is important to reflect on areas where the collective understanding of trans* student experiences falls short.

One such area is how trans* collegians navigate classroom experiences. Many have documented the oppression trans* students experience in the classroom (e.g., Duran &

Nicolazzo, 2017; Linley, et al., 2016; Nicolazzo, 2016a; Pryor, 2015). While scholars (e.g., Nicolazzo, et al., 2017) have tangentially discussed the classroom as a place where trans* students experience can practice resilience, they largely use the classroom as one example among many to advance larger arguments. Similarly, while trans* scholars have critically reflected upon their own pedagogy, epistemologies, and experiences as faculty members (e.g., Harris & Nicolazzo, 2017; Jackel & Nicolazzo, 2017; Nicolazzo, 2014; 2017b), only a small amount of scholarship explores how educators can work to better teach and serve their trans* collegians, both in and out of the classroom. On a broad level, this study seeks to add nuanced perspective to this base of literature. Just as the field needs more work centering trans* students' classroom experiences, higher education needs revitalized frameworks to guide research and practice with trans* collegians. Beyond Nicolazzo's (2016a) work exploring trans* resilience, much of existing literature perpetuates the deficit modes of thinking that (re)victimize and subjugate trans* collegians. Through using an adapted funds of identity framework and by ascertaining the individual funds of identity trans* students develop and bring to collegiate classrooms, this dissertation proposes an asset-based lens that future researchers and practitioners can use in creating pedagogy that dismantles systems of oppression and domination.

CHAPTER 3

This study is structured as a queer qualitative study; in this chapter, I outline the methodological approach for this study. First, I define queer qualitative methodology and explore its specific utility in this study (Gorman-Murray, et al., 2010; Jackman, 2010; Muñoz, 2010; Rooke, 2010). Guided by these queer methodologists, I then present the research design of this study in three sections: research sites and participant recruitment, methods of data collection and analysis, and researcher positionality.

Queer Qualitative Methodology

Both the theory and literature which frame this study advocate against quantitative modes of analysis in conducting research with the trans* individuals, and particularly those who hold multiple marginalized social identities (Catalano, 2017; Spade, 2015). Identity compartmentalization through quantitative methods would contribute to hegemonic measures of population control. Further, Harris (2017) advocates against academic pressures to represent the intersecting identities of participants in easily commodifiable or accessible ways. Finally, existing recommendations from scholars exploring funds of identity (Esteban-Guitart, 2012; 2016; Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014) stress the value of qualitative research methods. This study thus utilizes qualitative research methods as the frame for research design and data collection.

Given the study's centrality of queerness, I employ a queer qualitative methodological approach. Authors (Gorman-Murray, et al., 2010; Jackman, 2010; Muñoz, 2010) have advocated the necessity for reconceptualizing qualitative research involving queer and trans* communities to account for the nuances in experience queer identities hold; collectively, these scholars have advanced a queered qualitative approach to research. Muñoz (2010) describes that "queer methodologies speak to redefining ontological views, which frame every day realities that,

within normative categorisations, have been rendered as marginalized, silenced, and oppressed," (p. 57). Critiques of qualitative research stem from the Eurocentric, colonial origins of anthropology which privilege white, heteronormative, and Western cannons of thought (Gorman-Murray, et al., 2010). By utilizing queer qualitative methods, researchers are able to explore the lived realities of queer and trans* communities without further marginalizing individuals by using methodologies that are rooted in colonial systems of domination (Muñoz, 2010).

Adopting a queer methodological approach in research design particularly impacts three areas of research design: participant recruitment, the specific methodologies used in data collection, and reflections on the author's positionality (Gorman-Murray, et al., 2010; Jackman, 2010; Muñoz, 2010; Rooke, 2010). In describing her ethnographic fieldwork with lesbian and bisexual women in London, for example, Rooke (2010) argues that traditional approaches to ethnographic research do not innately take into consideration queer politics of identity performance, the temporal and spatial nuances of queer experience, and the queer subject position of the researcher. She notes that "Queering ethnography requires a methodology that pays close attention to the performativity of a self which is gendered, sexed, sexualised, classed and generational in the research process," a process which necessitates that the research engage in a process she describes as "queer reflexivity," (p. 35). Operating as an insider of the communities she engaged in her work, Rooke's (2010) practice of queer reflexivity forced her to consider the cultural and social capital she held in accessing sites for data collection (such as the community's LGB center), the ways her identities and relationships contributed to her ability to build relationships with informants, and other nuances she brought to her scholarship by virtue of her identities and subjectivities.

It is important to note that queer methodological approaches traditionally privilege groups minoritized based on sexual orientation (Jackman, 2010) and have been criticized for reaffirming academic structures which only value affluent, white, cisgender, gay men (Muñoz, 2010). While this study does involve communities that fall underneath the overarching umbrella of queer theory, few (Dahl, 2010; Muñoz, 2010) discuss how queer methods impact trans* populations in particular. Nevertheless, as queer theory underpins much of the conceptualization of this study, I feel it is necessary to reflect on the ways methodology can be more inclusive of my participants. As such, in presenting my research design, I will discuss my intended plans for participant recruitment, the specific methods of data collection I plan to use, and my own positionality in conversation with discourse on queer methodology. These discussions are important in extending the accessibility of qualitative methodologies to queer and trans* communities further silenced through academic devaluation.

Participant Recruitment

As the goal of this study is to explore the academic experiences of trans* collegians individually and broadly, this study does not focus on any specific gender identities that fall outside of the cisgender binary (e.g., trans*men, trans*women, nonbinary students). In designing the study, I aimed to intentionally leave my language as open as possible to promote inclusivity. In doing so, however, I did not require that all participants identify as "trans*" in recruitment language. Gorman-Murray and colleagues (2010) problematize research with queer communities for too often framing participant recruitment in terms of "essentialised identities" which can adversely impact knowledge shared by participants in the research setting by forcing them to categorize their identity in certain ways (p. 103). As discussed in earlier chapters, there is disagreement regarding the usage of "trans*" as an umbrella term that encompasses all gender

identities that fall outside of the cisgender binary (Tompkins, 2014); listing identifying as "trans*" as a requirement for participation in this study might have alienated students who feel that language does not describe their identities. As such, participant eligibility was determined based on the following criteria:

1. Participants must be over the age of 18
2. Participants must **NOT** identify as cisgender, wherein cisgender is defined as identifying with a gender identity that matches the biological sex an individual is assigned at birth
3. Participants must be (1) currently enrolled at a four-year undergraduate institution in the United States, and (2) have completed at least one quarter of academic study on campus

In all, I recruited 19 participants for this study, 16 of whom completed their participation in the study. Appendix A provides a table which outlines participants' pseudonyms (either self-selected or assigned), pronouns, and expanded demographic information. Recruitment fliers were disbursed through social media (e.g., my own social media profiles/accounts, closed social media groups such as the Queer PhD Network on Facebook, student groups), departmental listservs for academic departments and student services centers at my home institution and various others, and through my own professional and personal networks at various higher education institutions. Given the community-based nature of the development of funds of identity (as discussed in Chapter 2), I also utilized snowball sampling (Noy, 2008) as a means to simultaneously recruit participants and explore the "organic social networks" trans* collegians build with fellow trans*-identifying peers at their institutions (p. 340); Noy (2008) argues that "A sampling procedure may be defined as snowball sampling when the researcher accesses informants through contact information that is provided by other informants" (p. 330). Data collection took place during the 2020-2021 academic year, beginning in October 2020 and ending in February 2021.

Individuals who met the recruitment criteria and were interested in participating emailed me to express their interest. I then asked participants basic demographic information to confirm they meet the participation criteria. I reached out to those interested parties to confirm they meet participation criteria, to offer any additional information, and to confirm that they would like to participate in the study. In these conversations, I set up a time to meet for the initial interview, where I obtained consent to participate in the study. Due to the digital nature of interviews, I obtained oral consent in lieu of written consent. Beyond the relative ease of obtaining oral consent due to technological limitations, I also opted to use oral consent so as not to contribute to the systems of domination which bureaucratically subjugate trans* individuals in society (Spade, 2015). For example, a student who might identify as trans* might not use their legal name in day-to-day conversation, instead using a name that correlates with their gender identities and/or performance. Asking a participant at the beginning of correspondence to file a document with their legal name for consent purposes, as such, might pose psychological risk to the participant, alienating them from participation or creating an uncomfortable and unsafe dynamic between myself and the participant that could prevent them from openly sharing information in the context of the study. Further, written consent documents pose the risk of being lost or seen by parties not involved in the research process; while this risk is potentially damaging to all communities, it is particularly harmful to trans* individuals, as it could "out" students as trans* or otherwise expose their identities to parties the participant is not open with regarding their genders. Oral consent avoids these issues.

Methods of Data Collection

Studies attempting to ascertain funds of identity must rely on a multitude of qualitative methodological tools in order to fully ascertain what Esteban-Guitart (2012) refers to as an

individual's "testimonies of identity," (p. 179). This study used an adapted version of Esteban-Guitart's (2012) extended multi-method autobiographical approach to research. Esteban-Guitart (2016) explores how individuals create, experience, and utilize artifacts from a variety of mediums as they form their funds of identity; the multi-method autobiographical approach is a tool to collect and understand these artifacts. Esteban-Guitart establishes three primary data collection tools that make up this approach: in-depth interviews, linguistic texts, and visual texts. Each of these methods were necessary in exploring issues of pedagogy and academic experience, as they were distinctly able to illuminate the products of each participant's identity across time and space (Esteban-Guitart, 2012). In this section, I expand upon the utility of these three forms of data collection (interviews, collection of linguistic texts, collection of visual texts), highlighting how I collected each form of data.

I am unaware of any pre-existing usages of Esteban-Guitart's (2016) multi-method autobiographical approach under a queer qualitative methodology lens beyond the pilot study for this dissertation (Gutzwa, 2021a; 2022). This study continues my prior reimagination of Esteban-Guitart's (2016) approach under a queer methodological lens by reshaping how each of the identity artifacts are collected. For example, in collecting visual artifacts, Esteban-Guitart and Moll (2014) asked their participants specifically to demonstrate on a sheet of paper who they "were" at the time of the study. This was accomplished artistically by having participants draw a literal self-portrait of themselves. This line of thought might further exclude queer and trans* individuals, as Esteban-Guitart and Moll's (2014) instructions to focus thought on the immediate values and identity of a person ignores the temporal nature of both sexual and gender identity development (Freeman, 2007). First "coming out," whether as non-heterosexual or as non-cisgender, is not a static moment in one's life. Second, many queer and trans* individuals adopt

multiple gender and/or sexual identities throughout their lives, sometimes simultaneously. Just as "coming out" is not a fixed moment in space or time, neither are one's gender and/or sexual identities fixed and rigid throughout their lives. Asking someone how they identify today might yield a different answer than asking how they identified yesterday, or how they might respond if asked how they identify two weeks down the line.

I emphasize the self-portrait activity used by both Esteban-Guitart (2016) and Moll and Esteban-Guitart (2014) to show how, under a queer methodological lens, the multi-method autobiographical approach can be a valuable tool in ascertaining trans* collegians' funds of identity. As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, authors (Gorman-Murray, et al., 2010; Jackman, 2010; Muñoz, 2010) utilize queer qualitative methodologies to reconceptualize qualitative research as inclusive of queer and trans* communities. Just as the funds of identity framework at first fails to account for nuances in queer and trans* lived experiences, so does the main methodological approach used in ascertaining funds of identity. Combining the multi-method approach with queer methodologies, therefore, builds a methodological approach that is inclusive of trans* identities and perfectly tailored to this study.

In-depth Interviews

In proposing the multi-method autobiographical approach to exploring funds of identity, Esteban-Guitart (2012; 2016) argues that interviews are necessary tools for participants to verbally process their experiences, share their stories, and discuss identity salience. Similarly, interviews are vital tools for researchers to employ in identifying students' funds of identity, particularly when making sense of the linguistic and visual texts participants produce (Esteban-Guitart, 2012; 2016). As such, participants engaged in 2 semi-structured interviews, each lasting ~90 minutes in length. Semi-structured interviews allowed for a level of emotional depth and

resonance with participants that rigidly structured interviewing could not account for. By allowing my participants to be in control of their own narratives and to help shape the course of our conversation, we collectively created a research environment which enabled their experiences to be represented in the most honest light (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Seidman, 2013). A protocol for each interview can be found in Appendix B (Interview 1) and Appendix C (Interview 2); an abbreviated description of what transpired in each interview is as follows:

Interview 1

The first interview was a focused life history (Bagnoli, 2004) exploring the development of the participant's gender identity/ies. This interview began with the production and collection of a linguistic text in the form of Tatum's (2007) "I am from…" poem (described below); discussion centered how the participant has come to understand their gender/s, paying close attention to their lived experiences before attending college. This interview was instrumental in developing an understanding of the individual funds of identity participants develop over their lives and bring with them to their collegiate classroom spaces.

Interview 2

The second interview focused on how the participant's identities shaped their classroom experiences. Participants were also asked to reflect upon their co-curricular experiences in college in order to explore how their involvements and communities outside of the classroom related to their experiences inside the classroom. Doing so both aided in exploring what funds of identity trans* collegians bring to campus, as well as how they use their funds of identity to navigate classroom experiences. This interview began with the production and collection of a visual text in the form of Esteban-Guitart's (2016) significant circles (described below), and was also used to highlight specific communities and classes where observations can be conducted.

Linguistic Texts

Writing "is a fluid instrument where the boundaries between author and reader, art and life, present and past selves, as well as self and other, are characteristically shifting," (Bagnoli, 2004, np); written word allows for nuances in expression that verbal reflection can often omit. For these reasons, Esteban-Guitart (2016) finds linguistic texts produced by participants to be important identity artifacts in elucidating students' funds of identity. To explore these nuances in written form, participants were asked to write a poem in the style of Tatum's (2007) "I am from…" poem during the first interview. These poems are traditionally between three and five stanzas in length, and focus on the formation and the salience of participants' identities over their lives. At the start of the first interview, participants were given ~30 minutes to write this poem, and were asked to read this poem aloud at the start of the interview (Appendix B). As these poems explore the students' life histories in a creative format, questions during the first semi-structured life history interview were guided by how participants reflect and explore their identity in linguistic form. Poems were collected at the end of the interview as a document to be further analyzed.

Visual Texts

Similarly to nuances in writing, nuances in graphic representations of identity progression and lived experience can open new ways to expressing and understanding one's development (Bagnoli, 2004; Esteban-Guitart, 2012). Each participant produced a significant circle (Esteban-Guitart, 2012) during the second interview. Participants were instructed to draw a large circle, place themselves at the middle, and then draw shapes within the circle to represent the people, communities, spaces, institutions, and practices that are important in defining themselves. Those icons drawn closest to the center of the circle held the most weight/importance; those on the

edges weere more peripheral to the participant's understanding of themselves. I specifically asked participants to focus on the communities, places, and spaces that were important to the exploration and support of their gender identities while in college (Appendix C). As with the "I am from…" poems, these diagrams will guide questions in the second interview, and will be collected for further analysis at the conclusion of the data collection period.

Analysis

Based on the sample size of this study, I was able to focus deeply on the individual experiences of participants to paint simultaneously diverging and intertwining tapestries of their experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). While FI are unique to each individual, placing participants' individual experiences in conversation with one another will highlight broader themes regarding how trans* collegians navigate classroom experiences. To account for both individual and collective findings, I used Vagle's (2018) whole-parts-whole approach to analyze data.

First, I read all of the participants' identity artifacts as a "whole" to get a general understanding of students' experiences. During this phase, I read each individuals' identity artifacts together (including the discussions had with participants in which they explained their poems and significant circles). As one goal of this study is to co-create knowledge with study participants, I used in vivo coding, which allowed for the participant's own words to dictate what themes emerge in each narrative profile (Saldaña, 2015). Poems were similarly coded in vivo during this stage of analysis. Visual texts, while not able to be coded in vivo, were also included in this round, as the interview in which they are produced will involve an explication of the document post-creation.

Using these in vivo codes, I created loose narrative profiles for all 16 participants. This process broke down participants' narratives as "parts" of the collective testimonies authored by participants. Each narrative profile was organized thematically by research question, and utilized participants' own words (in the form of in vivo codes) to structure individual themes which emerged from their unique narratives. These profiles were shared with participants as a form of member checking. I subsequently coded thematically *across* these narrative profiles (Saldaña, 2015) to take the "parts" of each participants' stories and weave them into a cohesive "whole" representation of the total corpus of data collected. Because funds of identity are individually unique, this mode of cross-participant analysis illuminated similarities in *how* participants developed their funds of identity and subsequently utilized them in classroom spaces.

Positionality, Trustworthiness, and Reciprocity

During the initial drafting of my dissertation proposal, I identified as a white, gay, cisgender man. At the time of my dissertation proposal defense–February 2020–the United States had yet to acknowledge the status and severity of the COVID-19 pandemic, and as such, had yet to go move towards a system of remote higher education, lockdown, physical isolation, and social distancing. Over the course of the pandemic, my own relationship with my body and my gender identity has shifted, and the introspection. Many of the changes in lifestyle, mental health, and lived experience which have come with the COVID-19 pandemic have felt like highjackers forcing their way into the cockpit of a bullet train, attempting to derail my own strives towards professional and academic progress. Among these changes, however, came a newfound need *for* the derailment and pause which I formerly found stifling. The introspection following the now endless hours of time spent alone with myself, at once daunting, has become one of the few gifts one could ever receive in unforeseen times.

Physical isolation and social distancing have brought a considerable level of anxiety into my life. In search of a creative outlet, I turned towards experimenting with my own gender presentation and performance. It turns out that, as with my scholarship, further queering myself brought me a considerable amount of pleasure. For much of my life, gender has felt like a box that I routinely try to push the limits of. Feeling as though I firmly identified as a cisgender man, any actions that felt like indulgences into my queerness were largely done, if not in the privacy of my home, in environments where there were people I felt safe around. Over the months of quarantining, however, the lines between the realm of "home"–of "privacy"–and my professional and personal lives quickly blurred together. As such, queering my gender performance and presentation in my home meant simultaneously queering my gender performance and presentation in all aspects of my life. Exploring my identity through digital platforms–Zoom meetings, FaceTime calls with friends–forced me to reconsider my understanding of *my* relationship with gender; as I soon learned, while my academic and societal understandings of the concept of gender were radical, my personal relationship with my gender was rigid and binaristic. Rather than being a box I attempted to push and expand the walls of, I have come to view gender as a sandbox I can play in, constructing my own realities.

As I began to reimagine my relationship with gender, I also began to re-immerse myself in the conversations and stories shared between me and the three students who participated in my pilot study for this dissertation. I also turned to the words of trans* and nonbinary public figures. Most recently, I read activist and artist Alok Vaid-Menon's (2020) memoir Beyond the Gender Binary. Their words struck a chord in me, particularly in discussing the reclamation of their personhood: "Reclaiming my body, my identity, and my worth back from other people's shame has showed me that transformation is possible, no matter how impossible it may seem," (Vaid-

Menon, 2020, p. 34). In these moments I realized that, while many societal forces and systems of power and domination shaped my worldview, the only factor truly *forcing* me to live in a closed box of gender identity as a cisgender man was myself. Like Vaid-Menon (2020) writes, in reclaiming my identity by choosing the language of nonbinary and by adopting they/them pronouns, I have moved closer towards a transformative understanding of gender, both as it relates to society broadly and myself individually.

Occurring in tandem with the global COVID-19 pandemic is another: the pandemic of state-sanctioned and funded violence against Black communities, Indigenous communities, and other Communities of Color. Not only do the white supremacist, settler colonial realities shape my understandings of my racial, ethnic, and settler colonizer identities, but they also shape my understanding of how my queer and nonbinary identities are directly shaped by systems of racism and settler colonialism. My whiteness affords me a vast wealth of privileges, particularly in how I navigate the world as a queer, nonbinary individual. Formerly, my identities meant I was firmly an outsider of the communities that this study centers. Now, although I identify as nonbinary, I recognize that my lived experiences and privileges stem from a white supremacist system which still firmly place me outside the communities this study engages. In most spaces, I am immediately read as white, and most often read as a cisgender man; this white, cis, male privilege from which I benefitted for 27 years of my life continues to benefit me in all aspects of my life, even as someone who no longer identifies as cisgender. Black, Indigenous, and other Queer and Trans* People of Color (BIQTPOC), on the other hand, have always been subjugated by structural oppression since the dawn of settler colonialism. Histories of intergenerational domination and trauma shape the lived realities of BIQTPOC today, particularly during multiply occurring global pandemics.

Even now that I identify as nonbinary, my timeline of understanding and coming into my gender identity means my experiences are wildly different from those of my participants. I never have had to navigate a classroom at any educational level as someone who identified as nonbinary. While I have experienced policing of my gender identity and expression in professional and personal situations in my life, and while these instances of silencing are rooted in normative systems of domination at the societal level, I have, until the writing of this statement, never navigated an institution of higher education as a member of the trans* community. As such, I recognize the privilege I come to this research with, and I am aware of the ways in which my identities make me incapable of fully understanding the experiences participants in this study have lived. Trans* communities are routinely silenced discursively, particularly in academic research (Renn, 2010); such silencing is a form of discursive oppression which is wholly detrimental to those who identify as non-cisgender (Lorde, 1984; Spade, 2015).

My relative outsider status might hinder participants' desire to be forthcoming in detailing some of their experiences, especially those that are traumatic, triggering, or otherwise difficult, as they may feel no amount of detailing their experiences will help me understand them in totality (Muñoz, 2010). That being said, qualitative researchers who identify as queer often fail to problematize their insider perspective when researching with queer communities (Gorman-Murray, et al., 2010). This romanticizing of the insider perspective can be detrimental, as it can lead researchers to assume they share their participants' lived experiences, therein silencing participants (Gorman-Murray, et al., 2010). As such, operating as somewhat of an outsider to their communities does not by nature render me uncapable of conducting research with my participants. My relative outsider status, however, makes it vital for me to constantly reflect on the power dynamics my positionality creates throughout the course of this research. To

create as safe of a space as possible for participants, I will allow participants to decide where interviews will be conducted, and constantly remind participants of their right to decline answering any questions they choose.

Queer methodologists emphasize the importance of the co-creation of knowledge which stems from qualitative research with queer and trans* communities (Dahl, 2010; Gorman-Murray, et al., 2010; Muñoz, 2010). Co-creating knowledge through narrative inquiry will respect the authenticity and authorship of participants' stories (Duran & Pérez II, 2018). I will do this in part through participant checks, which I model after Harris' (2017) study on Multiracial microaggressions and Abes' (2012) multi-framework study of a lesbian college student's social identities. Throughout the data collection process, as well as during the initial phases of analysis, I will write reflective memos on emerging themes (Emerson, et al., 2011). Once data collection has concluded, I will compile these memos, themes, and initial findings into a single document to share with study participants. I will then offer the ability for participants to provide written feedback on my findings so as to: (1) triangulate the validity of my reading of the data, (2) accurately represent participants' stories, and (3) contribute to the overall corpus of data for this study where additional findings might arise (Harris, 2017).

One of the ways society is stratified against trans* individuals is socioeconomically. 29% of trans* identifying individuals in the United States experience poverty, and 15% experience unemployment; these rates are substantially higher than composite national poverty and unemployment rates (James, et al., 2016). Similarly, trans* students are routinely expected to perform the emotional labor of educating cisgender members of their educational communities, which is distinctly oppressive (Nicolazzo, 2016a). Active participation in this study was time-intensive and longitudinal in nature. This magnitude of temporal and emotional labor participants

put into this study was and is not lost on me. As such, I fiscally compensated participants at the conclusion of their participation in the study. I compensated participants with $80 in the form of $40 Target gift cards disbursed at the completion of each interview. While I do not claim this amount in anyway rectifies systemic trans*phobia, I hope fiscal compensation acknowledges and affirms the labor participants provided. As described earlier, I also shared each analytic narrative profiles with participants as a mode of member checking to both triangulate data and ensure participants' stories were represented holistically and accurately.

CHAPTER 4

An individual's funds of identity are just that: individual. Each person develops their own funds of identity that are unique to the contextual realities of their lived experience. As the name also suggests, one's funds of identity both inform and are informed by the social identities they hold. Any inquiry that seeks to ascertain, codify, or explore the collective funds of identity of a specific identity group–such as my inquiry into trans* collegians' funds of identity–as such must keep this complexity in mind. While it might be tempting to seek out funds of identity that are universally held by all people within a certain identity group, doing so ignores the nuance amongst individual experiences.

As I have argued elsewhere (Gutzwa, 2021a), each individual who identifies as trans* experiences their trans*ness in different ways. Several participants, for example, mentioned over our conversations how their experiences holding nonbinary trans* identities look, feel, operate, and are perceived differently than those holding binary trans* identities. Moss sums this up best, saying

> There's really a lot of difference in directionality. I've been thinking about this a little bit. For like, assigned female at birth [AFAB] bodies–and I use that to encompass cis women, trans men, and also nonbinary people–to be gender nonconforming is to not engage in particular behaviors, like to not wear makeup, to not shave your body. And in the other sense, to perform femininity is to take on certain behaviors. So I think those two experiences are both non-cis, obviously, but also are very different.

Even between two individuals who hold the same gender identity, their funds of identity will differ based on the other social identities they hold, the environments they have lived and learned in, and a plethora of other diverging factors that differentiate each person globally. As a white,

nonbinary person, for example, my funds of identity are fundamentally different from those of Moss, who identifies as Asian, based on the ways in which we have experienced (or have not experienced) the racialization of our gender identities. Similarly, even though each of us identifies as white, my funds of identity are also innately distinct from Flower's funds of identity, whose funds are innately distinct from Ryan's, whose funds are distinct from my own. This reality is based on the myriad nuances between our lived experiences, such as the geographic regions we were raised in, the other identities we hold that may or may not be shared with one another, and the ways we came into and understand our nonbinary identities.

Yet still, scholars (and namely trans* scholars) are all too often expected to produce universal, generalizable "best practices" as the implications of their work with trans* students, a frustrating reality that has been lamented by many (e.g., Nicolazzo, 2016). Any attempt to do such in my work would be a disservice to my participants and the unique realities they have lived, as James explained in our conversations:

> In our community, everyone has different stories, and everyone has different experiences. I can't speak on behalf of someone else. My experience is a fraction of another person's trans experiences. We're human too. We're people. We have like all these different experiences because of our intersecting identities. So when you talk to trans people, you can't just generalize, "Oh, this is what trans people act like." That would just be creating another binary system.

Therefore, I have wrestled with two main struggles in writing this work. First, how do I retain the authenticity of my participants' individual narratives while also elucidating the interconnected nature of the funds of identity participants developed throughout their lives? And second, how do I highlight the similarities in the ways participants utilize their funds of identity to navigate their

individual experiences in collegiate classrooms without losing their stories' nuances or falling into the pitfalls of overgeneralization?

I lead with these challenges to explain how I organized my findings, which is split into four primary sections. When analyzing data, it quickly became clear that it would be impossible to discuss every single one of the myriad funds of identity each of my participants holds. While they were always unique, some funds of identity that participants developed stood out in how they spoke to similar lived realities and lessons learned, regardless of the contextual differences between participants' identities and lives. What was more notable, however, was the shared locales where funds of identity were developed. More participants, for example, discussed *how* school environments impacted them rather than sharing specific experiences from *within* school. The goals of my inquiry thus shifted to presenting *where* students developed their own individual funds, rather than simply trying to explore *what* funds were shared as a commonality across most trans* students.

This shift in analytic approach highlighted three main themes as to where students develop their funds. I started to view the individual funds of identity each participant developed as distinct threads of fabric that, when woven together, combined to create three cohesive textiles. Each of these textiles, through their combination of varying textures, colors, patterns, and materials, demonstrate a collective "family" of locales where participants developed the funds of identity that they bring into their collegiate environments. Each of the first three sections of this chapter represent one of these textiles; when read together, they address my first research question of where trans* students develop the funds of identity that they bring to their collegiate classrooms.

The first textile, "'I'm Always on the Edge of the Fence' – Building Funds of Identity through Navigating the Home, Local Community, and School", centers the physical locations participants engaged prior to attending college that shaped the developments of their funds of identity. Taking a more traditional approach to funds of identity scholarship, this textile also engages the funds of identity participants developed through their nuclear families, their households, and their immediate physical communal structures (e.g., religion, school).

The second textile, "'Butch Feels Like Home' – Building Funds of Identity Through Queered Kinship Networks," queers the traditional approach taken in the first textile by expanding understandings of what constitutes as "family," the "household," and "community." In this section, I explore how students developed their funds of identity by interacting with spaces that are not physically tangible, such as social media groups and media representations of trans*ness. I also deconstruct nuclear understandings of the family in line with queer theorists (e.g., Freeman, 2007; Weston, 1991) to explore the kinship networks participants self-constructed by building community with people such as queer elders they met in their daily lives and other trans* peers they met online. Finally, this section queers the temporal restrictions found in traditional understandings of funds of identity by exploring how funds can be developed during college as opposed to purely in one's "early childhood."

The third textile, "'Colonizer Vibes' – Building Funds of Identity at the Intersections of Race and Trans*ness," takes a specific look at the experiences of participants who identify as trans* Students of Color to explore how race and racism intersect gender identity development. By attending to the various politics of whiteness and erasures of trans* identities of Color that participants experienced, this section interrogates the ways participants who identify as Students of Color internalized racialized understandings of gender identity, as well as understandings of

white supremacy in relation to gender. At the same time, this section explores the way embodying trans* identities as a trans* Person of Color allowed some to resist politics of white supremacy; funds of identity were built by some participants as a result of using their dual embodiment of minoritized racial and gender identities to resist racialized oppression.

The final section of this chapter, "'How Angry am I in This Moment?': Utilizing Funds of Identity in Navigating the Collegiate Classroom," sews these textiles together to create a tapestry that illustrates how participants utilize their varying funds of identities when navigating classroom experiences, addressing my second research question. By exploring how trans* students use their funds of identity to navigate how they select courses, declare majors, and engage in course materials and classroom conversations, the ways that trans* students use the embodied forms of knowledge they developed through holding their trans* identities to circumvent oppression in the collegiate classroom are illuminated.

Textile 1: "I'm Always on the Edge of the Fence" – Building Funds of Identity Through Navigating the Home, Local Community, and School

As in most explorations of funds of knowledge and funds of identity, some of the main avenues where trans* students develop their funds of identity are in the spaces they are raised. All participants discussed the varying ways their home environments, kinship networks (nuclear and formed), regional communities, cultural norms, and experiences in the K-12 school system contributed to the development of their gender identities. Exploring participants' experiences in these sites thus serves as a valuable exercise in ascertaining some of the funds of identity that trans* students develop throughout their lives. These spaces are not siloed, nor are they mutually exclusive from one another; in fact, trans* students sometimes develop funds of identity based on the varying ways they perform their identities depending on what spaces they are in, as well

as how they move across and through the many spaces they operate throughout their lives (Gutzwa, 2021a; 2022). This section highlights some of the similar or shared funds of identity that trans* students have developed through their engagement with the unique, physical communal spaces they have lived in throughout their lives.

Navigating tensions in the nuclear family

All of the participants in this study spoke about tensions they have experienced (and, in many cases, still experience) in navigating their gender identities with their nuclear families. For many, this came in the form of their nuclear families being actively unsupportive of participants' trans*ness, as illustrated in the first sub-theme, "Messages of queerness and trans*ness in the home". Even for participants who encountered less resistance from their families with regards to accepting their trans* identities, however, their trans* identities were still often silenced, ignored, or otherwise invalidated throughout their lives. The second sub-theme, "Navigating religious environments and teachings," demonstrates how cultural and religious institutions present both in participants' nuclear families and the regions they lived in played complicated roles in shaping the identity development. For a smaller number of participants, actively abusive households forced participants to develop funds of identity out of a need for survival; this reality is explored in the two vignettes presented in the third sub-theme, "Navigating bureaucracies alone".

Messages of queerness and trans*ness in the home

All but two of the participants in this study were the only queer and/or trans* people in their families (both nuclear and extended), which meant that very few participants directly learned about trans*ness through observing or hearing the lived experiences of someone in their biological kinship networks. In fact, most participants did not learn much at all about queerness or trans*ness in the home: over half of the participants in the study made a comment along the

lines of how their family really didn't know or say much about trans* people while they were growing up.

This is not to say that participants did not internalize messages about queerness or trans*ness in the home. The various contexts in which participants grew up played a direct role in shaping the ways they learned about gender. Chris, for example, grew up in a military family they constantly moved from base to base during his childhood. He remembers none of his family ever discussing trans*ness until he discussed his identity as a trans guy with them:

> No one [knew] anything about trans people at all, and [were] so ignorant. It wasn't even the hurtful things that they would say, but even people like my mom not knowing what being trans was, I'd think "this is very lonely."

Chris' feelings of isolation were internalized throughout his identity development, representing a fund of identity regarding his trans man identity: the "taboo" nature of trans*ness, particularly Black trans*ness. While his childhood experience is unique to his reality, similar sentiments of isolation at the hands of their families' ignorance towards trans people were shared by many. Jin, for example, referenced zir immigrant parents' lack of understanding of queerness as culturally derived, saying that "They didn't have the language. Growing up, they weren't exposed to it. I was obviously very upset about it when I was younger. But now, as a young adult, I realize they didn't know any better." The experiences of isolation many participants faced in the home based on their queer identities served as locations where funds of identity related to their trans* identities developed.

Cultural contexts defined not only the lack of knowledge of trans*ness that existed in participants' homes, but also the ways their biological kinship networks would perpetuate rigid expectations of masculinity, femininity, and gender performance. The regions of the country

where participants grew up were influential on their gender and sexual identity development, just as were the contexts in which their parents and other family members grew up. Describing some of the messages they internalized throughout their life about gender performance, as well as one of the only conversations they can remember having about trans*ness in the home growing up, Em explained how their aunt (one of their primary caretakers) was a product of her upbringing:

> My dad and my aunt grew up in small-town Tennessee, small town Georgia. My aunt was a boomer. She told me a story about how her teacher had to call her mom and ask if it was ok if she sat next to a Black girl, so that was the upbringing they had–very strict, no love shown parenting, you have to be successful in the world by conforming to other people. […] I remember one of the last conversations that I had with my aunt was when Caitlyn Jenner was coming out. My aunt said something like, "you know you're not a real woman if you haven't had the surgery yet." So it was a very interesting moment. She was kind of accepting–maybe more accepting than the average person her age, with her upbringing. But she had very traditionalist ideas about what trans people could be.

Em's experiences demonstrate how the environments those who raise us were themselves raised in inevitably shape the ways we are raised. Though Em's aunt was someone who was for all intents and purposes reasonably progressive given the realities of where she grew up–Em reflected on how her aunt had several gay friends that she spoke of openly–the cultural contexts of her upbringing still shaped the damaging rhetoric about gender and trans*ness she used in conversations with Em. These understandings of respectability and conformation formed salient funds of identity for Em growing up. An interesting implication of stories such as Em's is how trans* people form funds of identity that are directly informed by the funds of identity of members of their various kinship networks. Streams of knowledge about gender and trans*ness

appeared to be passed down generationally in many instances, highlighting the ways that upbringing can radically inform identity development for trans people.

If not about trans*ness particularly, several participants did internalize direct negative messages about gender and queerness in their homes. Many of these messages were discussed in the context of religion, while some families were actively abusive towards participants who started navigating their trans*ness while living at home. An interesting way that some participants internalized messages about queerness and gender was through the specific language participants' families would use to describe them. For example, when X started navigating conversations about their nonbinary identity with their mom, their mom rejected their identity by saying "I'm more masculine than you, if I'm a woman, so are you." Similarly, Yujn, who identifies with the language of butch lesbian to describe both their sexuality and their gender performance, first learned the word "butch" because it was what their mother called them growing up:

> As I grew older, my mom would call me "butch." I didn't know butch was a slur when I was growing up. After I went to college, I went clothes shopping with my mom and was looking at the men's section. I tried on this button up shirt, and I was so upset because it wouldn't fit over my chest. I was telling my mom, "I don't know how my butch friends do it." […] My mom was so mad that I said the word butch. She pulled me outside and said, "Stop saying that, people are gonna think we're homophobic." Why do you think people are gonna think we're homophobic? My mom says "because butch is a slur." I'm like, "wait a minute. You've been calling me butch this whole time thinking it's a slur?" I guess that gave me a little splash of childhood trauma.

The self-described trauma Yujin unpacked in our conversation demonstrated the way that the word "butch" itself became a fund of his identity. At once, "butch" encapsulated a word Yujin had both always been told to identify with and a word that they were reprimanded for using by their mother. Conversations like those that X and Yujin had with their respective mothers are representative of the dramatic impact words and language can have on an individual during their identity development. Such language, when internalized, can become funds of one's identity, in turn shaping the way that an individual makes sense of their identities in relation to the world around them.

Some participants, however, grew up in households where there was more visibility of trans* people. Flower, for example, has multiple siblings who identify as queer and trans*, one of whom came out while Flower was growing up. Surprisingly, however, Flower didn't feel that this relationship was one that informed much of their gender identity, describing that they were never particularly close with that sibling, and that they therefore rarely discussed identity until much later in their lives. Similarly, one of Rose's sister's childhood friends eventually came out as trans* during Rose's upbringing. In both of their experiences, their families were relatively accepting of trans* identities. How trans identities were described, however, was oftentimes without nuance: Rose explained to me that though their mother tried to explain their sister's friend's trans* identity to Rose as a child, how they did so was vague and binaristic, implying that while trans*ness was more or less acceptable, trans*ness must always be performed on a binary.

Even though Rose's parents were "pretty accepting" of queerness and trans*ness, Rose still internalized some negative messaging about when and how to discuss queerness. As a writer for a queer student publication at their university, Rose was tasked with writing a piece on

queerness in media. Choosing to write about their "head canons" of queerness in Disney films, they argued for why 5 characters in Disney films were queer-coded "heroes." When Rose showed the article to their mom, her response was somewhat cold: "Why does everyone have to be gay? There aren't that many gay characters." Rose described how their parents found their insistence on queerness as "amusing." Though nothing their parents said was overtly queerphobic or trans*phobic, Rose walked away from that conversation internalizing the supposed appropriateness of discussing queer-related topics, particularly in writing or in academic settings. Internalizing negative responses to their writing as understanding that it's not "correct" to talk about queerness in writing meant that Rose found it difficult to imagine ways to bring their passion for reading queer sub-text into the classroom. This fund of Rose's identity will become important to revisit when I unpack the ways that participants use their funds of identity in the classroom in the concluding section of this chapter, "'How Angry am I in this Moment?'".

Navigating religious environments and teachings

For a number of participants, religion had a palpable influence on how they formed understandings of their trans* identities. Carol, Egg, Em, Flower, Laurel, Ryan, and X all described various ways in which either their direct involvement in organized religion or the overwhelmingly religious culture of the area they grew up in reinforced complicated messages about queer and trans* identities.

Some participants, like Flower and X, described how they, at points, tried to build a substantial portion of their identity as members of their respective churches by participating in youth groups, service activities, and other church-related functions. As people who strove to be involved in their organized religions, discussing their queer identities with religious leaders in

the churches and/or schools painted complex pictures of their potential role in a religious system as queer and trans* people. Before Flower came out as genderqueer, for example, they identified openly as a cisgender gay man in all facets of their life, including in the church. While they didn't experience explicit ostracization from members of the church community for being queer, Flower quickly learned that their church viewed queerness as incompatible with their religion: "I found out I could never run a small group, or volunteer with children if I wanted to do so [because I was queer], which is weird. And then I was like, 'I'm out.'" Flower's decision to remove themselves from that church also sparked their parents to leave the church as well: given that multiple of Flower's siblings are queer and trans*, their parents decided to leave the church alongside Flower in part to support and affirm their queer children. This experience contributed to the development of Flower's funds of identity, particularly in understanding how religion and queerness intersect.

X's encounters with leaders at their Catholic church taught them much more explicit, and arguably more nefarious, lessons about queer identities. X has exclusively attended Catholic parochial schools for their entire life, including a Catholic-affiliated undergraduate institution, and like Flower was extremely involved in church activities. For one, their school's policies and curriculum directly policed X's gender expression and demonized their queer identities; these experiences will be further discussed later in this section. Outside of the classroom, however, X used confessional as a time to anonymously discuss queerness with leaders in the church. The lessons X internalized about the role of queerness in the Catholic church were damaging. Some leaders in the Church utilized stereotypical language–"It's ok at that you have these tendencies, you just have to stay away from them and keep confessing"–while others were more nefarious:

> Some would say, “this is great that you are queer, because you have this inherent understanding of brokenness, and you have this inherent understanding of sin that you can then use to evangelize others.” I thought I was broken, […] there's something inherently wrong with me that's not wrong with others.

The messaging X received about the role of queerness in the church was complex and contradictory: they were simultaneously told that they should feel stereotypical Catholic guilt about their queerness, which was sinful and morally incongruent with Catholicism, but also that their queer identity could be useful for the church in working to indoctrinate other people who identified as queer. While X did not and still does not view Catholicism as being wholly incompatible with queerness and trans*ness, these violent messages compounded with their queerness in complex ways; unlike Flower, who used similar messaging as a reason to leave their church, X strove to build more of their identity around the church. By the end of their high school career, X was presenting their gender in what they described as the most hyperfeminine way they ever had in an effort to conform to the Church’s expectations of femininity.

Other participants who were less involved with their family’s religions still internalized much of the religious teachings of their upbringing. Despite being forced to attend church for much of their life, Carol never sought an identity in the church in the ways Flower and X did. Religion, however, was very important to their mother, who viewed any attempt Carol made to reject Catholicism as “a rejection of her.” This reaction of shaming Carol for wanting to disavow Catholicism is one representation of how Carol internalized principles of Catholic guilt as a fund of their identity:

> Catholicism really enforces the shame and the guilt that anytime you're doing something for you, it's selfish, and it's wrong. I let one person cheat on me three times because I

> thought that walking away from that and not forgiving them would be wrong and selfish. I've been in countless situations where I haven't done things for myself because I still wonder, “is this selfish? Is this wrong?” Only recently have I made friends who are like, “no, stop,” and who are able to pull me out of that. But still, I don't know that I would be where I am without having been that person up to this point.

Throughout our conversations, Carol described many elements of coming into their gender identity as instances where they learned to overcome the guilt they felt towards prioritizing themselves. This internalization of prioritizing themselves as a nonbinary person is “selfish” and “wrong” in turn developed into a fund of Carol’s identity. At the same time, Carol also demonstrates the process of unlearning this fund of identity through the description of their friends as a source of support to remind Carol that protecting and prioritizing themselves is not selfish. Learning to prioritize themselves as a nonbinary person has in turn influenced how Carol interacts with their classroom environment: they actively choose to engage in classroom conversations about gender to make sure nonbinary identities are represented in academic spaces, a navigational strategy I will further unpack in the section “‘How Angry am I in this Moment?’” Both X and Carol’s stories demonstrate different ways in which the religious teachings of guilt in the Catholic church serve as a fund of their identity, despite their diverging relationships with Catholicism and spirituality.

Religion impacted participants who hold minoritized racial and ethnic identities in particularly nuanced ways. Much of my early conversations with Egg, for example, revolved around the concept of borders. As a Chicanx, enby person who experiences life on multiple borders, Egg discussed borders in a similar way to Gloria Anzaldúa (1999), describing the borders that have been built between countries, identity groups, and other liminal spaces as

things that "are constructed and don't actually mean anything, but get to mean so much because of settler colonialism and white supremacy." Part of how Egg was pushed to the borders for their queer and nonbinary identities was through messages they internalized about queerness from the "yelly talk radio" their Catholic parents would listen to in the car: "We would be driving somewhere, and t would be the default station. I would hear all kinds of stuff, like your typical "going to hell" kind of thing about gay people, and that they're sinful and need to be changed." Egg also connected their experiences with Catholicism to settler colonialism:

> Catholicism is the colonizer's religion, […] its dominance is everywhere. It doesn't exist at the same time as queerness and transness. […] I think about being invisible and having gender variance and desires throughout my childhood. I've always been acutely aware of binaries and borders because I've always seen them, and I've always felt like I'm outside of them, or between them, and never on either side. I'm always on the edge of the fence.

The notion of "borders" was an understanding Egg frequently revisited throughout our conversations. Here, however, Egg's connection of settler colonialism, Catholicism, and the messages they internalized about their gender and racial identities demonstrates one instance of how funds of identity are oftentimes formed differently for trans* individuals who hold minoritized racial and ethnic identities. For the participants who identified as trans* People of Color, experiencing their trans*ness through a racialized lens served as experiences, locations, and times where they uniquely developed funds of identity. I explore these tensions and nuances in greater detail in the third textile.

While most participants' funds of identity related to religion stem from experiences of trauma and exclusion, not all did. I close this section with a fund of Ryan's identity that is unique to their experiences growing up with a grandmother who was both "selectively Catholic when it

fits her agenda" and, in Ryan's words, lived with diagnosed narcissistic personality disorder. When Ryan came out as queer in their childhood, their grandmother's initial reaction was to suggest that Ryan's queerness was "fixable" by means of therapy. As time passed, however, Ryan's grandmother came around as supportive of their identities. As Ryan shared this anecdote with me, I asked them what lessons watching a grandparent who was so committed to her world view taught them; their response was simple: "If she can progress, everyone can. But they choose not to. That's what I've taken away. If she can, anybody can." While many internalized negative experiences with organized religion as they tried to navigate their identity development, some of Ryan's experiences have a faint silver lining. After watching their grandmother's ideological transformation, Ryan developed a powerful fund of identity through the influence of religion: the understanding that people are capable of growing to understand, and even accept, trans* identities. Religion, thus, serves as a complex foundation for trans* individuals' funds of identity.

Navigating bureaucracies alone

Though much of how participants discussed the tensions they navigated in their homes and communities was through the phrases, sayings, and lessons they internalized about trans*ness, a smaller group of participants were forced to deal with more tangible and structural forms of oppression during their identity development. While several participants, including James, Moss, and Yujin, mentioned experiencing trauma in their homes that connected with their queer and trans* identities, Jin and Kenan described in greater detail the ways negligent and abusive family dynamics forced them to navigate many of the medical and fiscal bureaucracies of both transitioning and seeking out higher education by themselves. While some might describe the funds of identity developed as they contended with structural and bureaucratic

inequities alone as demonstrations of their resilience, I struggle with the potential of romanticizing the trauma both Jin and Kenan circumnavigated in their lived experiences. Still, it is undeniable how these funds of identity shaped not only their understandings of their trans* identities (and their other identities, including class and race), but also the strategies they employ in navigating postsecondary education. In what follows, I present abridged vignettes from both Jin and Kenan's narratives to demonstrate some of the funds of identity that trans* students who are similarly forced to transverse bureaucracy in isolation develop throughout their lives.

Vignette #1: Jin. Both at home and in school, Jin's nonbinary trans identity was policed. As such, starting in high school, Jin was forced to develop self-advocacy skills in order to demand respect for their gender. At school, this meant learning early on how to fight against an administration that directly tried to silence zir gender:

> I was apparently the first person, student or otherwise, to come out as trans at my high school according to some of the teachers. That was difficult to say the least. It was it was a private school. They were disrespectful of me as a trans person, and told all my teachers that they shouldn't call me my preferred name. Some of them did anyway, some of them didn't, it was not great. I had them change the rule after a year though. Because they were private school, technically, they could do that.

Though it was possible to fight for equity within the structure of their school, Jin's nuclear family presented different challenges. The child of two Chinese immigrant parents, Jin described zir nuclear family as not having the language or education on gender to understand trans* identities available to them growing up–a reality which contributed to coming out being a particularly traumatic process.

After coming out as bi to their mother, Jin explained that she later forced them to come out as trans. This verbal altercation led to a range of reactions from Jin's parents regarding their gender and sexuality, ranging from manipulative, such as asking Jin "is this because your dad and I yelled at you?", to invasive, such as forcing Jin to undergo medical testing to ensure their reproductive organs were properly functioning. With few queer people in zir life to connect with, Jin turned to social media as a way to connect with other trans* people and learn more about their trans and nonbinary identities (relationships which will be further expanded upon later in this chapter); Jin's parents, however, responded by trying to cut zir access to these communities:

> My parents really started like restricting my internet access. I couldn't use the Wi-Fi at home. Instead, I had to use like an Ethernet cable connected to my laptop, and only could in the living room. And it really was very, very isolating, because [the internet] was the only avenue where I felt like I could really talk about [gender].

As a result of encountering structural abuse by way of their high school's administration and living with "literally abusive" parents who were "verbally and financially very controlling," Jin was forced to continually find ways to prioritize their physical and mental well-being and develop their agency as a trans, nonbinary person.

The college application process presented one avenue where Jin could, in theory, enact their agency. Ze realized that, for their own survival, leaving their immediate community and attending college away from home was a necessity, as was finding an institution that offered supports for their queer and trans identities. As such, Jin attempted to exert as much autonomy as possible applying to college: "I was 16 or 17 when I was applying to college, and I was like, 'I don't know how I'm going to do this, but I want to do it on my own.'" This desire, however, was somewhat difficult to actualize. Jin explained in our conversations that attending college was

always an expectation their parents had of them. As an upper-middle class family, it was assumed that Jin's parents would financially support zir college career; due to their financially controlling nature, Jin's parents required zir to apply to colleges and universities that fit into what Jin described as "the immigrant parent's pipe dream of 'winning.'" In spite of these restrictions, Jin was able to find a list of schools that were mutually agreeable on to apply to.

Despite having the commitment of financial support from zir parents, Jin began to seek out scholarships to supplement the expense of attending college. When they chose to apply to some queer-specific scholarships that required an interview during the application process, however, Jin knew that telling their parents was out of the question:

> I applied to a couple of scholarships for LGBTQ students in high school, and I had to do the interviews and the phone calls in secret. I could just tell my parents that I didn't have those while I was at school. I actually did a Skype interview on the day of prom when I was out of my parent's house. My friends and I went to a local university to take pictures, and I sat on the ground, connected to their public Wi-Fi, and did my interview for a scholarship that I did end up getting. It was just a lot of secretive planning.

At the time, Jin didn't realize that the skills they were building by applying for scholarships in secret would lay the groundwork for their ability to seek total financial independence from their parents after they began their undergraduate education. Once on campus, Jin started volunteering at zir school's LGBTQ student center, where they began working with a case worker that suggested ze consider fiscal emancipation as a potential way to further distance zirself from zir parents' abuse. It wasn't until after Jin attended a campus-led retreat for trans* students where ze was able to meet other trans* Students of Color who had similarly sought fiscal independence

(an experience further described later in this chapter) that ze realized fiscal independence was a viable option for zir.

Jin continued to apply for scholarships and tap into institutional resources at their school, eventually achieving independence. Choosing to tell zir parents in a letter, Jin explained how declaring their independence "was a huge step, because my parents had been holding finances over me. 'If you transition, we won't pay for your housing.' I was like, 'well, now I'm paying for my own housing and tuition, and I'm gonna transition.'" Jin attributed their ability to do so in part to the resourcefulness they were forced to develop on their own accord, but also through the support they received once matriculating to college. The resourcefulness, ability to build networks of support, and understanding of bureaucracy that Jin demonstrated by undergoing the process of seeking fiscal independence from zir abusive family developed into funds of zir identity, informing zir of the many barriers and inequities that stratify postsecondary education against trans* individuals.

Vignette #2: Kenan. Though she is now fully supportive of his gender identity, and even serves as a leader in the local community by supporting other parents when their children come out as queer and trans*, Kenan's mother was extremely hostile towards him when he came out as a trans man. In describing some of the abuse he endured from his mother, Kenan recounted times when she hid or destroyed his testosterone and other prescriptions from him to prevent him from medically transitioning, refused to drive him to trans* support groups, or called him derogatory names. In addition to gender-related violence in the home, Kenan's mom was also a single mother who did not have a college degree. As such, when it came time for Kenan to graduate from high school and consider continuing his education, he was forced to navigate both the college search process and his medical transition alone. This reality was all the more complicated

by the fact that Kenan internalized the alarmingly low enrollment rates of trans* students at colleges and universities as a sign that higher education would already be stratified against him: at one point in our conversation, he grimly said that "statistically, neither of us should be where we are."

Though he knew he wanted to eventually get his bachelor's degree, the trauma he endured at home and in his community both before and during his transition made attending undergrad without the fear of being outed Kenan's top priority. As such, Kenan's seemingly mundane decision to attend and graduate from a local community college before transferring to a four-year institution was, in actuality, his "little buffer" to complete his medical and legal transition so that he could truly make the most of his undergraduate experience. Kenan described his intricate, complicated, and meticulously planned timeline plainly and modestly, almost as if he was Elle Woods describing her admission to Harvard Law in Legally Blonde:

> I planned this really far out. Six months before graduating high school, I started taking testosterone. Usually, within that six-month time, most people start passing, so I was like, "Okay, that's great, when I graduate, I'll be six months on testosterone. Over the summer, that'll give me about eight months, so I'll be closer to a year on testosterone." And then I decided to go to community college to give me some extra time to do legal document changing. Over the summer after graduating high school, I got top surgery because I had just turned 18. […] I planned that really tight schedule.

Kenan described these experiences as a form of "self-care" he did to minimize the potential harm he might experience in his undergrad education. Without support from his mother or his school, Kenan's only resource was himself. He quickly learned the inner workings of medical bureaucracies (filing insurance claims, planning surgeries) and community college admissions all

in an effort to minimize the risk of transphobic oppression that he might experience during his undergraduate career.

The process of transferring to his undergraduate institution presented a new slew of structural barriers for Kenan to navigate. Considering that he both was a legal adult and still had a fraught relationship with his mother, Kenan once again found himself applying to four-year colleges with no assistance from his mother and little support from his community college, a process which he described as "the most terrifying thing ever." He viscerally remembered his mother's lack of support, recalling her "sitting in her room watching TV, watching her soaps, while I was sitting there having a nervous breakdown on my laptop thinking about the cost of everything." While in community college, Kenan did seek some institutional resources, but oftentimes felt unsupported by them. Reflecting on his first advising appointment, Kenan expressed his main goal was to "try to stay on trajectory so I don't have to come back to this office. Let me not get lost. Let me just do what I'm supposed to, and take these classes, so I can transfer out."

Kenan's resourcefulness in navigating his college application process illuminates the ways various structural forces can interconnect to stratify postsecondary education against trans* students. This vignette also highlights several funds of identity that Kenan developed throughout his life as a trans* man. For one, Kenan's experiences provided him strategies for navigating medical hardships in tandem with his education: when asked what lessons he internalized through his experiences, his first responded that "I'm used to having surgeries and medical interventions within my college experience, which I don't think a lot of people are used to. That's a lot, but, you know, I learned to manage it pretty well." Additionally, whether by choice or out

of duress, Kenan developed an intimate understanding of multiple societal systems that perpetuate trans* subjectivity, as well as the resourcefulness required to contend with inequity.

These vignettes of Jin and Kenan's experiences capture some of the ways that living in trans*-oppressive environments informs the ways of knowing trans* individuals develop as they make sense of the world around them through the lens of their identities. As I described earlier, some might view how Jin and Kenan navigated medical, educational, and fiscal bureaucracies largely on their own as demonstrative of their resilience. While I do not necessarily disagree with this understanding, it is important to not romanticize–and therefore normalize–the oppression that trans* individuals like Jin and Kenan experience throughout their lives. Taking a funds-based approach to exploring these experiences instead facilitates an understanding of how trans* students internalize these difficult (or "dark," to use the words of Zipin (2009)) experiences as ways of knowing that can be tapped into in academic settings. As funds of their knowledge, the various strategies trans* students such as Jin and Kenan employ to disrupt structural and bureaucratic inequities societally have a direct link to the tools they use when contending with similar forms of domination in collegiate spaces.

Navigating trans*ness in school

It is estimated that students in the United States spend just under 9000 hours on average in the first 9 years they are in the K-12 educational system (Sparks, 2019). Keeping this in mind, it is probable that the many experiences one has in school directly contribute to the development of their funds of identity–an assumption confirmed through my conversations with participants. Whether or not they identified as trans* when in school, many participants internalized messages about trans* communities through the many interactions they had with their peers, teachers, and

school administrators. Such messages, in turn, contributed to the development of their funds of identity.

Trans visibility in school

While not the case for all, several participants noted that school was a place where they could see, meet, and build formative relationships with other queer and trans* people. Some, including Ryan and Poe, mentioned that being involved in queer student organizations at their high school provided them a space to learn about and discuss trans* identities. Ryan explained how "having somebody talk about [gender] was a revelatory moment of like, 'that's a thing! That's a thing I can apply to me!' instead of just a foreign idea of 'there are some people out there who feel this and that way" was instrumental in their discovery of their nonbinary identity, as well as their decision to adopt they/them pronouns.

More so, however, participants discussed the interactions they had with other students as formative in developing an understanding of queer and trans* identities. One phenomenon mentioned by many participants was how they, often unintentionally, built friend groups with a number of people who similarly came into queer identities over time. When available, these networks provided some participants the ability to develop their own identities in a safe and welcoming space. A group project that James did with a peer during high school, for example, was open-ended, allowing students to choose topics they were interested. When this friend suggested centering LGBTQ+ rights, James heard the word "queer" for the first time in a positive context; thinking "huh! Queer's an interesting word," James then took on queer as a label for their gender and sexual identity. Many participants referred to these networks of peers that shared their queer and trans* identities using the language of "found family," a concept

which queers understandings of nuclear kinship by prioritizing the networks they utilize as established through the relationships one makes over biologically-defined relationships.

The visibility of others who either openly identified as trans or presented gender in a nonconforming way also opened the possibility for some participants to explore trans*ness in relation to the many forms of "desire" described in queer theory (Kasch, 2013). Flower, for example, described how their first partner was a trans man. Though they identified as cis at the time, Flower described that it was somewhat "comforting to be with a trans person looking back" because it set the precursor for Flower's desire to be in relationships with other trans* people moving forward. Flower's romantic relationships are demonstrative of how sexual desire can be important to one's gender identity development. Additionally, several participants had more amorphous connections with their trans* peers. Some, for example, described the crushes they had on students at their school that they either knew were trans* (Moss) or perceived as trans* (Egg). In both cases, these infatuations straddled the lines of their desires to be *with* and to be *like* the person in question; these encounters with trans*ness shows how individuals can interpret their own identities through a lens of desire (Kasch, 2013).

Discussions of trans* visibility are both intricate and nuanced. Many participants, for example, did not have formalized queer spaces in their schools where they could meet and build community with other trans* students. Similarly, some were the first people to openly navigate their trans*ness at school, as described earlier in Jin's stories. Conversations on trans* visibility are also incomplete without also considering the ways trans* people holding multiple minoritized identities, such as trans* People of Color and disabled trans* people, are perpetually silenced and excluded. Keeping these realities in mind, I further complicate the concept of trans* visibility in

subsequent sections. Here, however, it is possible to see how corporeal visibility of trans*ness in some participants' schools directly contributed to the formation of their funds of identity.

Encountering trans*phobia in school

While some recounted relatively positively-connotated experiences with trans*ness at school, such narratives were fewer and farther between. More often than not, trans*phobia at a macrocosmic societal level was replicated on a microcosmic level within participants' schools. Collectively, participants named specific encounters with queerphobic and trans*phobic peers at all divisions of the K-12 school system, beginning as early as elementary school. Poe, for example, described how some playground games that they were forced to play with their classmates outside of school hours were steeped in queerphobia:

> Have you ever played smear the queer? It's basically monkey in the middle with contact allowed. It's tackle football monkey in the middle. But it's also deeply queerphobic, which deeply tied in the local homophobia. It's one of the memories that sticks out to me as the first moment of realizing, "I am not safe here."

The queerphobic naming of the game coupled with the game's physical nature created an environment where Poe, who had not even come into their identities at the time, was forced to internalize how they–and by transitive property, whatever it was that they "*were*"–were physically unsafe in the world. Similarly, James described how lunch table conversations in middle school were particularly othering. In middle school, James did not know what language like "queer" or "gay" meant. When this language was used against them, it was particularly damaging:

> I was just sitting at lunch, and I was asking my friends "what's the difference between guys pants and girls pants?" And they were like, "oh, this kid must be gay." […] I think it

> was just toxic for me trying to figure out stuff while people tried to police the things that I do, or what I want to wear, or how I want to act, or my interests.

At the time these memories were formed, neither Poe nor James knew what queerness or trans*ness were, nor did they understand that they themselves held trans* identities. Still, both these events were fundamental for being among the first times that Poe and James were ostracized for their queerness, and therefore some of the first times where they internalized negative messaging about queer and trans* identities. When placed in conversation with one another, Poe and James' stories illuminate the sad reality of how interactions with aggressively anti-trans* classmates have the power to directly trans* students' funds of identity.

Participants additionally named classrooms as places where they encountered trans*phobic oppression; namely, X, Chris, and Em each spoke to three different ways they encountered trans*phobia during classes in high school. As they attended a Catholic parochial school, some of X's teachers were vocal about their anti-trans* beliefs. One, in particular, was particularly violent towards trans* identities in her pedagogy:

> I had a teacher who was aggressively anti-queer. She was actually my first exposure to trans people, because she made us watch anti transition videos and videos of people who detransition. […] She also compared them to people like Rachel Dolezal. […] But I still was the biggest fighter in my class of like, "that doesn't make sense with this Church teaching, this is what your to your answer says." Ideas of femininity and masculinity, and all these things, I always fought back against them. I never felt like I had to be silent.

Despite not identifying as nonbinary at the time, X's first exposure to trans* identities by way of this class directly shaped their understanding of queerness and trans*ness in multiple ways. First, as I described earlier, X was someone whose queerness was constantly at odds with their

religious identity. Given that their first exposure to trans* people was in a religious educational context, internalizing this act of violence further complicated their confusion regarding how religion and queerness could co-exist. Further, by falsely equating trans* communities to white individuals that mislabel their personal and professional Blackfishing as "transracial," X's teacher weaponized racial politics to otherize trans*ness in a way that uniquely impacted X, a multiracial Student of Color. In response to internalizing these complex messages about trans*ness, however, X's immediate reaction was to adamantly reject and challenge their teacher's trans*phobia. This specific encounter with trans*phobia in the classroom thus shaped X's funds of identity in two opposing ways: by internalizing the otherization they encountered, X came to understand their own queerness as morally "deviant"; at the same time, their drive to challenge normative understandings of gender and sexuality, particularly in the classroom, was bolstered.

Like X, Em also encountered trans*phobia by way of course content. During high school, Em was dual enrolled in several classes at a local community college. At the start of one sociology class they took, Em disclosed their preference for they/them pronouns publicly when introducing themselves to the class. In response, one student turned around and disgustedly asked "what are those?", forcing Em to awkwardly explain gender pronouns to class. This altercation heightened their fears of further discussing their identities in the classroom, fears which amplified when a later conversation on queerness quickly turned hostile:

> The topic of queer literature for children came up, and people were saying, "I'm fine with people being gay, but they don't have to shove it down our throats." The "gay agenda" was mentioned so many times. It was very unsafe in that class. I emailed the professor afterwards. I was like, "this felt like a very unsafe environment for me. I know it's not

> entirely your fault. The students were a fucking mess, and it was not necessarily you, but there were steps that you could have taken to prevent this for your trans kids in the class." I remember walking out of the classroom that day shaking, borderline about to cry. Even thinking about it now makes me very emotional, because that was such a stressful day. I remember feeling so unsafe. I was afraid people were gonna hurt me if I came out.

Em immediately internalized that discussing their queerness in the classroom context could put their safety at risk: after this experience, Em never disclosed their pronouns during any in-person class they took, even after matriculating to their undergraduate institution. Further, after experiencing the professor's silence while watching Em be forced to navigate explaining their pronouns to the class and their lack of intervention when students were outwardly queerphobic in a class discussion, Em internalized that it was vital to be distrustful of not just their academic environments, but of their professors as well. These internalizations of how queerness is respected in the classroom thus directly shaped Em's funds of identity as a trans* student.

Chris' experiences of navigating his gender identity in the classroom as a trans guy were similarly violent. As a military kid, Chris constantly moved states throughout his childhood. The state he lived in before starting high school had progressive policies that were supportive of trans youth, meaning he was able to change his name and start his medical transition at a young age. His family moved once more between middle and high school, and he started at a new school where he was able to comfortably be gendered as a man despite no one knowing that he was trans. Despite this, Chris still encountered trans*phobia in an English classroom:

> We were talking about prepositions, and one of the words was "trans." "Transgender" was on the board. This guy was like, "that's so disgusting, trannies scare me." My teacher didn't say anything. That was the first time in school where it was an outright thing.

Several years later, one of his friends outed Chris to her brother, who Chris described as a "big, white, redneck guy." The friend's brother and his friends were in Chris' history class. While watching a movie during class, the group of cis white boys were sending texts to one another detailing threats of physical violence towards Chris due to being trans–threats which Chris only learned about after his friend's brother stood up during the movie to sit next to Chris, silently intimidating him.

The verbal and physical violence Chris endured shaped a somber fund of his identity: the understanding that being open regarding trans*ness in the classroom could open him up to violence. Like Em, Chris' experiences being in multiple classrooms where his peers were actively trans*phobic impacted the ways he navigated his identity in academic settings moving forward. In the first instance, watching his teacher not intervene as a student was being transphobic shaped the ways that he navigated disclosing his identity in both the classroom and the school community at large. After being outed to and subsequently threatened with physical violence by one of his classmates, Chris further internalized that his identity as a trans man would always be subjugated in educational spaces. Whether in or out of the classroom, the five stories presented in this section paint diverging yet interconnected pictures of how trans* identities are actively oppressed in the K-12 school system. Interactions with peers and instructors alike proved vital in shaping the ways participants understand their queer and trans* identities, as well as how they contended with holding these identities in academic contexts.

Pushing the boundaries of funds of identity

Over time, and in conjunction with one another, the messages that participants received and internalized about trans*ness in their homes, communities, cultural institutions, and schools interlock to build the ways of knowing they embody through their trans*ness. These findings

also begin to illuminate the ways participants utilize their funds of identity in collegiate spaces, particularly the classroom. The physical communities and tangible relationships explored in this section fit comfortably within the boundaries of how funds of knowledge and funds of identity have been explored by scholars who have taken this approach before me (e.g., Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014). Indeed, taking a microscope to the people, relationships, and institutions that are the most physically proximal to participants provides rich context to the ways of knowing that participants develop over time and bring to the collegiate classroom.

As I problematize in Chapter 2, however, stopping my exploration of trans* collegians' funds of identity here would fail to account for the totality of funds of identity that trans* people develop in their lives. Focusing only on the interactions that participants have in their nuclear families and immediate communities ignores the queered and limitless ways that trans* people build their various kinship networks. Flower was the only participant, for example, who grew up in a nuclear family with multiple other queer and trans* people; to say that they were the only participant who was able to build their funds of identity through interactions with queer family members would disregard the importance of the boundless kinship networks many participants treasure as instrumental in shaping how they make sense of the world through their trans*ness.

Textile 2: "Butch Feels Like Home" – Building Funds of Identity Through Queered Kinship Networks

In this section, I center those kinship networks that queer our understanding of what "family," "the household," and "community" mean. These include the networks that participants built through their engagement with queer spaces outside of the home, such as the found families participants made with their peers in school, queer elders they met in their local communities,

and other interpersonal relations of love and compassion that defy the heteronormative expectations of the biological family.

In addition, I also explore the ways participants queered time and space by creating kinship networks that transgress the need for physical proximity. In the digital era, accessibility of information is more democratized than ever before; the advent of social media similarly widened the available channels people use to learn from and communicate with one another. Just as do relationships that rely on more corporeal and interpersonal modes of connection, the less tangible relationships one builds in digital spaces help develop their understanding of both their identities and the world around them. Further, traditional approaches to funds of identity prioritize linear time as vital in demonstrating one's development of funds: most often, people are described as developing funds of identity in their childhood that they then use later on in their lives (for example, as seen in Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014). By exploring the kinship networks participants built throughout their lives–including those built during college–this queered approach to exploring funds of identity does not treat identity as a static constant, but rather as malleable and in flux over time. As such, by exploring the myriad queered kinship networks that trans* collegians form throughout their lives, it becomes possible to ascertain their individual and collective funds of identity in a more comprehensive and nuanced way.

Two sub-themes emerged throughout data analysis. First, as discussed in the section "Representation and identity-based education through social media," one way that participants engaged with intangible spaces was through their interaction with and internalization of media representations of trans* identity. While some participants were able to build kinship networks using social media, their education about trans*ness was also heavily influenced by how trans*ness was represented and discussed on digital platforms; these nuances highlight digital

space as vital in the formation of trans* students' funds of identity. The second section, "The role of found family," explores how non-nuclear, non-biological kinship networks formed by participants with members of both their physical and intangible communities helped participants develop deeper understandings of gender in two main ways: providing support in exploring and performing their gender identities, and helping participants navigate their educational journeys.

Representation and identity-based education through social media

When asked to describe how they came to adopt the language they use to describe their gender identity (as well as their other social identities), almost all participants highlighted the role of kinship networks in providing them with their first exposure to trans* identities. For many, this education came by way of social media platforms like Tumblr, Facebook, and Twitter. Participants reported varying degrees of connection to the people and accounts they followed on social media. Some, like Jin, built sustained friendships through the connections they made on social networking platforms. Others were more passive in their engagement, such as treating their profiles as places to post and "experiment in some ways" (Rose) or not directly conversing with other users because they "have too much social anxiety for that" (Em).

Still, digital environments were places where participants found connection with others via shared identities or interests. Such as the queer fandom spaces that Carol, Em, James, and Rose participated in independently. In turn, these participants learned more about the trans* identities they hold. Providing exposure to trans* identities was one of the most discussed impacts that social media had on participants. Em discussed how their passive engagement with trans* content creators on Tumblr eventually informed their nonbinary identity, naming it as the first place they "started realizing that other genders existed." As they started to follow more and more trans* content creators, they started "seeing it [trans*ness] every day. I guess exposure to it

made me realize." Similar narratives were echoed by many, demonstrating social media as a prominent place where participants developed their understandings of their identities.

Many of these participants, however, had mixed feelings about the lessons they internalized about trans*ness through social media. Particularly, participants who hold multiple minoritized identities, such as trans* People of Color and trans* people who are disabled, felt that while social media provided representation of queer and trans* identities, such representation prioritized certain identities. As a fat, immunocompromised nonbinary person, Carol explained how the messages they internalized about trans*ness from social media shaped the somewhat toxic ways they engaged their nonbinary identity:

> I was identifying as nonbinary, but still sort of wanted to distance myself from this idea of being trans. I think it's because I had internalized a lot of trans*phobia around not having positive images in media or online about trans people being beautiful and lovable. You had to either be that really strong, independent trans person, or like… that that was it. That was the only positive type of trans person that you could be. And that was someone who was seen as an asexual being. I knew that that would not be seen as sexual, and I sort of work through that with some of my friends, but when I think about like my hair loss and my body, I was like, "do I need to be like the masculine person? Do I need to be the person because that's the like expression that fits my body type?"

Carol's story is but one account of how the prioritization of certain trans* narratives on social media negatively impacts one's own journey towards coming into their identity performance. For many participants who identify as trans* Students of Color, the overwhelming whiteness of trans* representation on social media further impacted their journeys in diverging ways: Chris and Jin, for example, both described the trans* representation they saw on social media as

overwhelmingly white, which in turn presented trans*ness as something that didn't fully map onto their realities as trans* People of Color. In the third textile, I take a deeper and more critical look at how the overrepresentation of narratives of whiteness within representations of trans* identities on social media reinforces normative white supremacy in trans* communities, particularly silencing trans* People of Color.

The role of "found family"

In discussing the relationships some participants built with fellow queer and trans* peers at their school, I introduced "found family" as the language that some participants use to describe the kinship networks they built through their own agency. Be they interpersonal or digital in nature, all participants described the role that these queered kinship networks helped them develop a better understanding of their trans* (and other social) identities. Participants largely placed extreme value in these relationships, as well as the lessons and strategies learned from them; to use Ryan's words, "My found family mean everything to me. They're the family that I chose, the family that I know will be there because we chose to be there." Participants developed funds through two different types of support provided by these kinship networks: networks that provided support with regard to participants' gender identities, and networks that provided support through their educational journeys.

Identity-based support

One way that participants' queered kinship networks were vital in helping participants understand, perform, and navigate their trans* identities was through providing participants with resources to embody their identities in an authentic way. Particularly when participants encountered tensions at home, such as having parents that were not understanding or supportive

of their trans* identities, the queered kinship networks that participants formed were able to provide both emotional and tangible support.

Identity-affirming resources. When asked who some of the most important people were in helping shape his understanding of his gender identity, the first person Kenan mentioned was his drag mother. As discussed above in the vignette of Kenan's trajectory to higher education, his mother was wholly unsupportive of his identity. In turn, Kenan's drag mother provided the support he didn't receive at home by providing both emotional support and resources he needed to perform gender authentically, such as "smuggling boxers and things like that [to] work." This labor was especially vital for Kenan's development, as he described a lack of local community resources like clothing closets as a prominent roadblock in accessing the gender-affirming tools needed to perform masculinity. In turn, Kenan described moments with his drag mother as some of his "fondest memories of actually being myself," but also as experiences that directly informed a fund of his identity, as encapsulated through his expressing that "you have to do what you gotta do."

Similarly experiencing abuse from zir nuclear family, Jin described how ze "really doubled down in online communities, specifically Facebook groups" as their main network of support. When Jin moved out of their home to attend undergrad, they were still in contact with the friends they made in these social media groups, some of whom lived in the same area as their undergraduate institution. Jin opened up about the ways members of that community rallied behind them:

> When I came to college, some of those friends who I had known for several years at that point actually pulled money together to buy me a phone plan, and clippers so I could cut

my hair in a gender affirming way that my mom never really liked. That was really beautiful.

By providing Kenan and Jin some of the resources to more authentically perform their gender identities and, in Jin's case, escape some of the controlling and abusive tendencies of their parents, these queered kinship networks did more than just provide support. The ideals of resourcefulness and community organizing these networks embodied became funds of both Kenan and Jin's identities, shaping how both navigate their trans*ness in higher education, as well as the work they do with other trans* individuals who are members of their communities.

The power of language. Oftentimes during the "I am from…" poem exercise, participants would include some of the language they internalized throughout their lives that both subjugated their identities and provided them liberation. In explaining their poems, these participants discussed their queered kinship networks in relation to the identity-based language they included in their poems.

One such way networks provided support was by empowering participants to, as Audre Lorde (1984) describes in her essay *The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action*, reclaim the very language that had been used to silence and oppress them. Earlier, I described how Yujin internalized confusion and hurt after learning that their mother viewed the word she most often used to describe Yujin throughout their life–"butch"–as a slur. For a time, Yujin tried to distance themselves from being "butch" while still holding onto their lesbian identity by forcibly assimilating to societal expectations of femininity. Now, however, Yujin takes pride in their butch identity. In their "I am from…" poem, Yujin wrote the line "butch feels like home." When asked to explain the significance of that phrase, they discussed how the connections they made with other butch lesbians at their college helped them reclaim pride in identifying as butch:

> Right now, I'm comfortable being butch, and I take pride in being butch, especially because I found such a community that's welcoming to me here. I guess how I talked about in the poem, "butch feels like home"–no other word except for butch lesbian has ever felt as much like home.

The reclamation of the word "butch" in their "I am from…" poem is thus, in and of itself, a fund of Yujin's identity. By stating that "butch feels like home," the role that Yujin's queered kinship networks played in helping them own their identities shines through. "Butch" represents more than a word Yujin uses to describe their gender: it serves almost as the lifeforce that ties their kinship network together.

In addition to reclaiming language, kinship networks also helped participants reject language and practices that bound them to certain ways of acting and performing their identities. Ever since their parents divorced and their father remarried, for example, Carol has had a particularly tumultuous relationship with their father's wife. In their poem, Carol included the question "are you a sociopath?", words that their father's wife yelled at them after discovering Carol was in a queer relationship. In our conversation, they described these words as ones that "echo in my mind a lot," and the zenith of the argument they were yelled in as a "moment that really shaped" how they navigate their social and romantic interactions. Carol opened up that the question "are you a sociopath?" represents how elements of their upbringing, including much of the internalized Catholic guilt and shame I discussed earlier, shape their world view. Also included in the poem was the question "are you really going to eat that?", a direct reference to how their fat identity directly informs how they make sense of their nonbinary gender performance.

Through the kinship networks they built with other queer and trans* individuals, in particular their roommates, Carol learned to disentangle themselves from the verbal abuse of their father's wife: as described earlier, Carol views these friendships as playing a pivotal role in unlearning the guilt and shame ingrained in them by their Catholic upbringing for taking pride in their queer, nonbinary, and fat identities and prioritizing their happiness. Nevertheless, the questions Carol reproduced in their poem represent funds of their identity–not because of the chokehold they still have on Carol's life, but rather for the legacy they represent in Carol's journey towards embodying radical self-love as facilitated by their kinship networks.

Educational support

A smaller number of participants outlined the ways their kinship networks provided them with direct support in navigating their educational environments, particularly their trajectories to and experiences at their undergraduate institutions. This diverges from traditional interpretations of funds of identity, which situate funds as only being developed by interactions in the home, and therefore developed purely before one gets to college.

For some, such networks were formed by building relationships with administrators, staff, and even faculty at their respective institutions. Carol and James both were able to build lasting relationships with directors and staff of their university's LGBTQ resource centers during their admissions visits to their institutions as prospective students that have lasted throughout their undergraduate careers as networks of support in navigating the institution. Ryan's relationship fostered with their school's director of diversity and multicultural affairs helped them navigate the institutional bureaucracies of changing their name on school documents, as well as changing their email address. By making a relationship with the dean through their involvement in their school's LGBTQ+ student organization, Ryan gained access to a kinship

network that would support them personally and academically throughout college, even outside of the academic year:

> I sent her an iMessage in the middle of the summer like, "Hello, can we Zoom please? You're an adult, I need an adult to tell me everything's ok. I'm in an off my medication panic." At this point, she knows me, she knows a lot of us. So, she can tell when there's something off. She'll be like, "hey, you ok?" I love her. She's great. Everyone needs [someone like her].

Though they couldn't remember specific forms of advice or support that the director gave in this manner, Ryan noted that throughout their relationship, this administrator has offered "so much advice" regarding "navigating classroom settings," saying that "she's always there for any kind of advice you could imagine." The relationship that Ryan built with their dean, therefore, demonstrates how kinship networks with queer allies can serve as sites where funds of identity are developed.

Workplaces, both on and off campus, were additional spaces where some participants built kinship networks that supported them in academically and socially navigating their collegiate environments. Working with their LGBTQ student resource centers introduced both Carol and Jin, for example, to staff members that helped them build community with other queer and trans* students and provided resources and support to help them navigate institutional and structural bureaucracies while holding trans* identities. Egg's queered kinship networks in part included queer elders that they met through various jobs they held in high school and college. Finding queer role models in their various communities shaped their desires to pursue both an undergraduate and graduate degree–aspirations they did not always have. Describing the role that queer elders played in their trajectory to their undergraduate institution, Egg said that

> I was really set on not going to college. I was working at a store at the time, and I made friends with this older person. A couple of weeks later, I registered she was gay. She invited me to live with her after high school. […] she was the one who was like, "you should think about going." […] another older queer and trans person at a different job also pushed me to go to college […] she came out as queer and trans to me, and that's basically why I applied to college.

After starting college, Egg took a student worker position at their university's library. Through the relationships they made with university librarians, the library became "a space where [Egg] could grow and ask other people to give me what I needed" that was more influential for their development "than any club or any class." The kinship built between their boss was particularly salient: "My boss is definitely a dad role. He calls me his kid sometimes. He's stepped in when my parents weren't there, guiding me towards graduate school, and figuring out that I can do that, and that I want that." This relationship was valuable in providing Egg support because "there was this personal aspect–having my boss step into this dad role was in part having someone that checked in on me, and who could give me advice." At once not interested in pursuing higher education, Egg's queered kinship networks propelled their desire to find value in the collegiate classroom, ultimately shaping their postgraduate academic and career goals.

Some participants, particularly those who attended smaller institutions, described how they were able to make close relationships with faculty members that helped them develop strategies to navigate the classroom holding trans* and other minoritized social identities. Through his connection with the director of his school's LGBTQ center, James was able to meet a queer faculty member in his education minor that provided them academic support and development in and out of the classroom, including offering them an undergraduate research

assistantship. Yujin built a lasting relationship with an art professor after learning that their family home burned down in an arson in the middle of her class, after which she invited Yujin to her home for dinner and welcomed them into her family as a way to provide them emotional support; this relationship inspired Yujin to take further classes with this faculty member where they were given the space to explore how their identities interconnect with visual art, a fund of their identity that they included in their significant circle by drawing a Baroque-style picture frame with the words "new ways to see yourself" written in it.

Moss also spoke to the power of relationships they built with faculty in shaping their educational trajectory by describing their relationship with their faculty advisor. While their advisor is cisgender, they identify as both queer and ethnically Chinese, identities Moss shares. These shared identities not only provide Moss the space to be open about their gender identity, but also have helped them develop strategies to navigate their predominantly white institution:

> He's been real with me about experiencing [this place] in a critical way. Before I declared anything and I was like "I don't know what I should major in," I'd [tell my advisor], "this sociology class is so freaking white, and everyone says all these shitty things about colonialism. I can't stand it, I hate this." And he'd agree with me. He'd be like, "yeah, that's academia, that's college, that's [this school] as a PWI." He'd be super honest with me about that, but also still strategize with me about how to find what I want and to get the best that I can from it. He [helped me be] able to hold the tension between [this school] as an oppressive institution but also an institution that I can benefit a lot from.

Across these stories, it becomes clear how queered kinship networks help trans* students develop some of the funds of identity that they employ in the collegiate classroom. The educational support that these kinship networks were uniquely able to provide participants

proved vital in not only helping them build community with people who shared some of, or at least supported, their social identities, but also developing strategies that they used to navigate the structural tensions they encountered throughout their undergraduate careers, particularly in collegiate classrooms. I revisit these funds of identity as navigational strategies in the final section of this chapter.

Beyond kinship networks

Whether they were loosely formed or tightly knit, all participants built kinship networks beyond their nuclear families and immediate communities that shaped their identity development and subsequent embodiment of their identities in the world. By forming and utilizing these networks, participants queered common understandings of kinship, therein showing the ways that understandings of "family" are especially nuanced for trans* people. For many, the relationships built with queer elders they met in their communities, schools, and online filled explicit familial roles that were otherwise absent in participants' lives.

At the same time, networks directly informed how participants came to understand, identify, and embody their trans*ness. As such, the funds of identity that participants developed through queered kinship networks were innately distinct from those that they developed in their nuclear households and immediate physical communities. This exploration should not be taken as a sign to wholly reject or ignore the funds of identity that trans* students develop through their nuclear and proximal forms of kinship. Rather, by exploring the range of environments that participants formed their funds of identity in, it becomes possible to create a more complete understanding of the ways of knowing trans* students bring to their educational environments.

Due to the fact that the sole commonality shared amongst all participants in this study is the fact that they hold trans* identities, much of my analysis thus far has predominantly centered

participants' experiences developing funds of identity through their genders. As I have noted throughout this chapter, however, the development of funds of identity looks particularly nuanced when explored at the intersection of participants' multiple minoritized social identities. In particular, participants who identify as trans* Students of Color developed complex and intricate ways of knowing by contending with the simultaneous forces of trans*phobia and white supremacy. In the next section, I interrogate the funds of identity that trans* Students of Color developed through such engagement with interlocking modes of domination.

Textile 3: "Colonizer Vibes" – Building Funds of Identity at the Intersections of Race and Trans*ness

Just as settler colonialism is uniquely responsible for the creation of a cisgender binary that subjugates trans* communities both in and out of the colonized United States (Smith, 2015), it is similarly to blame for the creation of racialized categories of difference (Menchaca, 1993). As nine of the participants in this study identify as trans* Students of Color, many of the funds of identity that were illuminated throughout conversations centered learning how to navigate the intersections of trans*ness and race in a settler colonial state. For both binary and nonbinary trans* Students of Color, the intersections of race, racism, trans*ness, trans*phobia, and the other minoritized identities they may hold directly shaped the funds of identity these participants developed throughout their lives.

In what follows, I outline some of the nuanced tensions participants described in navigating their minoritized racial, ethnic, and gender identities, and how such tensions contributed to the development of the funds of identity they employ in the collegiate classroom.

The in/visibility of trans* People of Color

Overwhelmingly, participants who identified as Students of Color recounted the relative invisibility of queer and trans* People of Color in their lives as impacting their navigation and understanding of their own gender identities. While almost all participants discussed the ways they were forced to navigate learning about their trans* identities in a society that routinely silences trans* communities in media, politics, schooling, and the home, the lack of representation of trans* People of Color in these same arenas uniquely impacted many participants who identify as Students of Color during their identity exploration.

Lack of representation of trans* People of Color

For some, the relative overrepresentation of white narratives of trans*ness on social media made it difficult to envision themselves as trans*, or to connect their trans* experiences with what they saw on screen. The omnipresence of white trans* people on social media served as a gatekeeping force as some participants came into their gender identities. For example, white trans* visibility created a disconnect for Chris in navigating how to perform and present masculinity as a Black trans guy:

> I remember back in the day when I used to go online and was first looking at transitions and understanding what that could mean to me, it was always white trans guys. I remember I went in for my first haircut. The first haircut out as trans is going to be short, right? My hair had been long. I only saw photos of this white trans guy, because that's all there were on Tumblr, and then I almost *had* to want to do that with my hair. It was this up, straight, wavy type of thing, which I just couldn't do with my hair. And maybe it's my fault because I'm hanging out in those circles, but white politics usually are bad to me. I think there's still a lot of colonizer vibes.

The white racial politics Chris described as “colonizer vibes” similarly impacted several other participants in the navigation of their identities. Egg, for example, viewed their navigation of conservative Catholicism as a Chicanx, queer, enby person through the lens of colonialism, both in describing Catholicism as “the colonizer’s religion” and in describing the physical and intangible borders created through colonialism that uniquely silenced their diasporic Chicanx identity and their gender and sexuality.

Though not directly using the language of colonialism, Yujin similarly recounted how they felt that being nonbinary was a “white people thing” that they could not gain access to as a Mexican-Korean queer mestizo: “I couldn't get over the surface-level whiteness of nonbinary identities. But in reality, it’s not necessarily because it is white, it’s just because white people can be the loudest about it.” In addition to “family and societal pressures,” the lack of representation of trans* People of Color in the messages about trans*ness they saw growing up meant that Yujin felt distanced from the possibility of embodying a nonbinary identity based on their lack of whiteness. Just as Egg referred to the borders of identity rendering them as feeling “on the edge of a fence,” Yujin’s experiences holding a self-defined mestizo identity made them feel as though they were unable to access the language of trans*ness for themselves. This internalization ultimately developed into a fund of Yujin’s identity.

Several participants similarly discussed the safety that whiteness affords white trans* people in discussing their gender under the realities of a white supremacist society. Jin in particular related the relative safety whiteness provides white trans* and nonbinary people to the dissonance they experienced when navigating what being nonbinary means for them, explaining how zir experiences coming out to zir Chinese immigrant parents made them “aware of these intersections” between race, ethnicity, and trans*ness:

> My experiences completely diverged from the narratives that I was seeing on YouTube of these white, American trans boys and guys who were coming out and their parents. They were like, "maybe it was a little weird with my family for a little while, but then they were like, we love you and we're going to support you." […] Trans people who experience trans*phobia from their parents are not safe, like in the way that I wasn't. There are other people of color who also experienced the same thing, […] But I was 15, so I didn't really think through that.

Here, Jin attributes the discrepancies they found between the messaging about trans*ness they absorbed from white content creators on YouTube and the response they received regarding their trans*ness from their parents to the differences between the realities of white trans* people and trans* People of Color. They felt that white trans* individuals were "safer" discussing their trans* experiences than many trans* People of Color, especially when juxtaposed against the cultural differences in how Communities of Color discuss and understand gender–an understanding that was also highlighted by several other Participants of Color. By not seeing representations of modes of trans*ness that were accessible to People of Color in both popular and social media, participants formed funds of identity to compartmentalize the ways white trans* people are prioritized out of a necessity to cope with the nuanced otherization proliferated by white supremacy.

While some rationalized the safety afforded to white trans* people, Kenan took a more direct approach when expressing his frustrations with society's supposed confusion regarding the absence of People of Color, and Black people in particular, in representations of trans*ness on social media:

> I see online when people ask “where are all the Black trans* people at? Why aren't they on social media? Where are they on YouTube?” And you know, the answer to that question has always been for me that we're out on the ground, and we're doing things for our community. It’s frustrating when people ask “where are the black trans people?” We’re there. It's just that we were not able to be as open as white trans people in our day to day lives. I think that's the barrier. We have to live a double life. Not even just with, you know, code switching in Black spaces, but in our LGBTQ spaces as well.

Kenan’s narrative exposes a troubling byproduct of the safety that is provided to white trans* people in a world governed by white supremacy. Not only are white narratives of trans*ness treated as normative, but such normativity also enables white trans* ignorance of the racialized ways Black trans* people and other trans* people of color experience trans*ness.

In a settler colonial society, white supremacy ensures that whiteness is always privileged and protected, even within the very communities that settler colonialism created and subsequently defined as “deviant” or in opposition with settler realities. As such, the omnipresence and subsequent prioritization of white narratives within trans* communities can be explained–or even rationalized–but never justified; many trans* Students of Color form some of their funds of identity through their lived experiences with the implications of this reality.

When trans* People of Color become visible

While the relative invisibility of trans* People of Color was both palpable and overwhelming for most, some participants described how their ability to see, learn from, and build community with queer and trans* People of Color at various stages of their life was instrumental in developing an understanding of their intersecting, minoritized racial, ethnic, and gender identities. Moss, for example, was one of the only participants who recounted their ability

to formatively build relationships with other queer and trans* Asian people prior to attending college. Through their participation in a local Asian American-led housing rights organization during high school, Moss met a mentor who was both genderqueer and Chinese American. Their relationship was particularly revelatory for Moss:

> They were really loving in a way that I had never encountered from another person before. They were genderqueer, I think they were one of the first people in my life who was, you know, a "they/them" (laughs). I wasn't like "oh my gosh, a trans person! Woah, trans!" But I think it was a combination of how they were both Chinese and queer in a certain way. They felt safe. They felt like someone I wanted to be.

While Moss at the time identified as a cis woman who was just beginning to explore their queer sexual identity, this relationship with a fellow queer, Chinese mentor provided space for Moss to unpack and work through some of the complex traumas of their lived experience, and also paved the way for Moss to continue seeking out spaces where they could build community with other queer and trans* Asian Americans.

Throughout their high school and early college years, Moss participated in several other Asian American-led youth groups; each space was either designed explicitly for queer and trans* Asian American youth, or happened to have a relatively large community of queer and trans* Asian American youth. It was at the culmination of these experiences when Moss began exploring their nonbinary gender identity:

> Summer before sophomore year of college, I went to a camp in the Bay Area with one of the orgs there that's a specifically queer and trans-led Asian community organization. I remember I was going to one of their events, and I thought, "I kinda want to put they on

> my nametag […] maybe I can use they for myself." [That's] when I started being a little more cultivating of "maybe I'm not a girl."

In reflecting on this experience, Moss explained how the importance placed on the intersections of race and gender were vital in supporting their exploration of their gender, saying that "I'm not really sure that I would have found my way to a queer space if it wasn't Asian, you know? I don't really know how things would have gone." Moss' experience navigating spaces that affirmed their identities holistically both leading into and during college thus demonstrates the power that representation of people holding intersecting minoritized identities has in shaping someone's funds of identity.

While Moss was one of the only participants who found visibility in and built community with other people who were both trans* and racially minoritized before college, several other participants discussed how they were able to find the representation they lacked prior to college in the relationships they built with other queer and trans* Students of Color during college. Some, like Yujin, who candidly said they "don't associate with cishet people at their school," explained that the disproportionately large queer and trans* student body of their institutions made it easier to find community with other queer and trans* Students of Color. James articulated that meeting other Asian trans* students was pivotal in not just processing their lived experiences, but also in feeling less alone in their college environment:

> I've definitely found a lot of people who connected with me and my experiences. I found the other trans, nonconforming Asian folks who I can also relate to. They're like, "you experienced trauma." I'm like, "What? What's trauma?" And then they're like, "this is what is trauma." I'm like, "oh, I guess it kind of makes sense to me." Hearing people's

> stories that kind of click with yours, it's just like this magical burst of excitement where you're like, "I'm not alone." People are okay with you just being you.

Others were able to turn to specific resources at their institution to build community at the intersection of trans*ness and race: Jin, for example, was able to attend a university-sponsored retreat for trans* students where there was a "specific discussion space for the trans People of Color there" that "changed the trajectory of [their] life" by giving them resources to handle some of the traumas they had experienced in their household growing up, such as information on how to seek fiscal independence from zir family.

The university was not the only context where participants were able to build community with those who hold minoritized gender and racial identities: several participants sought out spaces for queer and trans* People of Color in their regional communities. X, for example, described how leaving their university and working with local service groups helped them build community both with queer and trans* Organizers of Color and other multiracial queer folx, a step that has been vital to their identity development. When such spaces were not available, some participants worked to build them themselves. Inspired by his lack of connections with other Black trans* people, Kenan devoted time during his undergraduate career to establishing a support group for Black trans* people in his local community:

> I feel like I've helped create something that I would have liked to have growing up, and it's helped a lot. And I'm hoping it helps other guys too as well, because I honestly felt like I didn't have this space that I really needed. There was something there. But it wasn't necessarily catered towards you People of Color or Men of Color.

Just as funds of identity were formed for some participants through their inability to find representation or community with other trans* People of Color, some participants' funds were

similarly developed through the connections they formed with other trans* People of Color throughout their lives. In all instances, finding avenues to both bond and learn in community with people who shared similar minoritized identities helped trans* Students of Color develop ways of knowing that facilitated their abilities to transverse all elements of higher education, particularly the classroom.

Grappling with politics of whiteness

In establishing the concept of intersectionality, Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989; 1991) argues that representational, structural, and political factors contribute to the nuanced oppression that people who hold multiple minoritized identities, in her case, Black women, experience. Though intersectionality is not the theoretical lens I employ in this dissertation, Crenshaw's distinction between the different forms of intersectionality is helpful in explaining the multifaceted impact of white supremacy on trans* communities, particularly trans* Communities of Color. As Kenan alluded to in expressing his disdain towards the oft-asked question "where are all the Black trans* people?", a lack of representation alone is not the only societal force that minoritizes trans* People of Color. In addition to the silencing and isolation caused by the prioritization of white narratives in representations of the trans* community, such prioritization perpetuates and reifies structural and political inequities (such as the medical, fiscal, and political bureaucracies Jin and Kenan navigated alone, as described in the first textile) that extend beyond the mere in/visibility of trans* People of Color. In this section, I highlight the multiple ways participants described the politics of whiteness and white supremacy as uniquely impacting their lived realities as trans* People of Color to explore how such politics shape the development of their funds of identity.

White politics manifesting in queer and trans* communities

As discussed earlier, the exclusion of trans* People of Color from narratives of trans*ness contributed to a range of responses from participants. Chris, Kenan, and X, all of whom identified as mixed race or biracial, further expanded on these conversations by explaining how the intersection of their multiracial and trans* identities augment their understanding of how politics of respectability, desirability, and acceptability in queer and trans* spaces are rooted in white supremacy. In turn, these participants formed some of their funds of identity as a response to their feelings of isolation from, distrust of, or anger towards white queer and trans* people.

The "colonizer vibes" that Chris observed when internalizing visual representations of trans*ness as he navigated his gender performance are one example of this shared fund of identity. As Chris worked to make sense of his identity in reference to overwhelming media representations, he also came to understand how being mixed race made him more physically desirable in certain queer spaces. This duality contributed to his development of distrust of white cis gay men, trans men, and transmasculine people *as* a fund of his identity, particularly as a light-skinned, biracial trans guy:

> Both in the cis gay community and the trans community, I feel like I'm desired for my complexion because I'm light skin, and that's sexy and cool because I'm not dark. […] It makes me feel weird, because I stand in solidarity with dark skinned people, but I can't take my face off or change my complexion. I see that being trans. I feel like there's a lot of white trans people, especially white trans men. That's all I've seen on dating apps. I can't trust them. […] I can't mesh with these white people because they're all messy.

Chris' narrative hits on the nuanced ways white supremacy shapes desirability within queer and trans* communities, especially how such desirability politics impact People of Color. At once othered from white trans* people by being Black and fetishized for the ways his whiteness and

Blackness intersect, Chris has been forced to develop a complex understanding of how his embodiment of his racial and gender identities are perceived by a variety of communities. In turn, this understanding helped Chris develop funds of identity about how his identities are understood in Black communal spaces and white-dominated queer spaces, funds that directly impact the ways he contends with the perception of his identities throughout his life.

Unlike some participants, Kenan was able to participate in local queer and trans* spaces throughout his childhood. When attending youth support groups, however, he was oftentimes the only trans* Person of Color, and was always the only Black trans man in attendance. Kenan's experience attending trans* youth groups as the only Black trans* person oftentimes made him feel like he had "to fend for [himself]," a feeling that contributed to his resentment of not just his white trans* peers that he attended youth groups with, but also the trans* community at large:

> When I would go into like spaces specifically for LGBTQ youth, […] I felt like I was tiptoeing around things. […] I was really angry towards white trans people, because I felt like it wasn't fair. There's a lot of things that we couldn't discuss, that people couldn't relate with, just because they're white and have different opinions.

When asked what Kenan felt the need to "tiptoe" around in these spaces, he shared the discrepancies he picked up on between issues that mattered to his white trans* peers versus the issues that were impacting both his life as a Black trans man and Black trans* communities collectively. White trans* youth in the support groups Kenan attended almost exclusively discussed issues of gender performance and expression, placing a value on trans* aesthetics that distracted from conversations on structural inequities facing Black trans* people:

> We get so caught up in the empowerment of expressing ourselves that we get lost in the fact that there are people dying. There are Black trans women being murdered, and we

don't take the time to talk about that in these spaces, even though it should be a really pressing issue. Instead, we're having discussions on topics I don't think are as important.

Kenan's frustration with surface-level, white-washed conversations on the oppression trans* people experience contributed to his desires to start a support group in his local community for Black trans men, as described earlier. While his empowerment to organize is one salient fund of identity that Kenan formed through his lived experience, another fund illuminated in this narrative is the distrust of and anger towards the (white) trans* community created by the ways politics of whiteness exclude racial equity from the focus of many in the trans* community.

In both Chris and Kenan's stories, their realization of how politics of whiteness manifest in queer and trans* communities developed some of their funds of identity prior to attending college. The way that many scholars have discussed both funds of identity and funds of knowledge implies that a person's funds are developed in their childhood (e.g., Esteban-Guitart, 2016; Poole & Huang, 2018). X's story in part demonstrates how one's funds of identity are not always developed before enrolling in college. As a mixed, Latinx and white nonbinary person, the first experience X had of navigating white supremacy within queer and trans* spaces was during leadership elections for their school's queer student organization. An active member who "basically devoted [their] life" to the organization in their first two years of college, X worked tirelessly to build relationships between the queer student organization and the school's racial cultural affinity groups–even after experiencing otherization from their school's Latinx affinity group as a result of their implicit anti-queerness. X described how one "super racist and super transphobic" white cis gay member of their campus' queer student organization "tricked" them during leadership elections, pushing X out of the organization entirely:

> He told me “I’m not running, you can run for president, you should do it.” Day of, I get a text. “I’m running for president.” And then at the voting, none of the people there were people I had ever seen before at a meeting. He magically won and pushed me out. They brought cops to come talk to them the next semester. All of my efforts to work with the Black student organization fell apart. […] that was one of my first realizations of “I have to be careful about which communities I'm in, and these aren't all for me,” because that was explicit discrimination, instead of like implicit things I'd been absorbing.

X’s experiences being pushed out of their university’s LGBTQ+ student group speak to the ways racialized and gendered oppression oftentimes coalesce. Vocal about their nonbinary identity while holding a minoritized racial identity, X’s labor and dedication to the organization were unacknowledged by the organization’s white, cis leadership, who instead acted in ways to bar X’s further participation in the organization. Further, these actions also directly damaged the relationships X built between their university’s notoriously white LGBTQ+ organization and other racial affinity groups on campus: in a sociopolitical climate following George Floyd, Brionna Taylor, Tony McDade, Elijah McClain, and many other Black Americans’ murder at the hands of the police, the LGBTQ+ organization’s subsequent partnership with campus and local law enforcement following X’s departure from the group were read as a direct affront on X’s efforts to build solidarity across racial and queer lines. In turn, this exclusion helped X develop a fund of their identity–the frustrating realization that their multiple minoritized identities are not often accepted in tandem with one another.

Despite navigating otherization from both white and Latinx communities throughout most of their life as a mixed-race person, this experience was the first time in X’s lived experience where white supremacy and trans*phobia manifested simultaneously, and the first

time where they manifested in both queer spaces and Latinx spaces. The development of this fund of X's identity–assessing which communities are and are not "for [them]"–was the final push towards complete disillusionment with their institution as a whole:

> that was this pivot of me giving up on my institution. I completely divested from any organizations I was in that were part of college, and completely invested in my community locally, because this hurt so bad. I'm not doing it again. I'm not doing the labor for these people that do not care about me and actively want to hurt me.

Though they ultimately described the situation as "one of the best things that happened" to them due to the lessons they learned about prioritizing themselves and building connections with communities that care for them, X's experience underscores the nuanced ways white supremacy further minoritizes the experiences of multiracial trans* collegians, particularly those who also hold white identities.

The ways that white supremacy manifest within queer communal spaces compounds the exclusion and isolation many trans* People of Color already experience when embodying their trans* identities. In response, trans* People of Color form complex relationalities with whiteness; this is especially true for multiracial trans* People of Color who also hold white identities themselves. Thus, by contending with politics of whiteness that are latent in queer spaces, trans* People of Color develop funds of identity that are unique to their experiences transgressing the intersections of trans*ness and race.

Embodying identity as an act of resistance

Just as politics of whiteness shape many elements of how trans* People of Color understand their identities, they also often shape the way they perform their identities. Earlier, I shared the stories of some participants, including Chris and Yujin, to highlight how the

overrepresentation of white trans* people in media representations of trans*ness made participants' own trans*ness feel inaccessible or difficult to embody as a Person of Color. Some participants–namely Jin and X–furthered this conversation by describing the various ways they subverted societal expectations of how to "look" and "be" trans* that are entrenched in whiteness as acts of liberation from systemic whiteness. By embodying their identities in a way that affirmed both their gender and racial identities, these participants directly developed funds of identity through the rejection of normative whiteness.

Like many, X internalized societal pressures to assimilate to white standards of trans*ness in exploring their identity. Across the messages X learned through church, their mother and grandfather, and social media about masculinity and femininity, X strived to emulate the white models of how to be trans* and nonbinary they understood as aspirational by forcibly adopting modes of gender performance that they described as "hypermasculine":

> Because the internet told me that nonbinary people were super skinny and masc and white, that's what I tried to be. I tried to be skinnier. I was super dangerously binding, and constantly wore super masculine clothing.

X explained that despite being nonbinary and using they/them pronouns, their obsession with embodying masculinity was so strong that any time they were gendered as a man in public, they would take mental notes of how they were dressed, talking, and otherwise performing gender in that moment so as to replicate that gender performance in the future. Eventually, however, this forced hypermasculinity felt exactly that: forced. X described feeling as though they were "playing a part in a play of a man," and over time worked to unlearn the toxic forms of masculinity that aspiring to assimilate to white understandings of nonbinary identities ingrained in them. X reported that they internalized too many messages of white nonbinary identities,

which carried their own racialized understandings of masculinity that fit into white normative understandings of beauty and gender performance. By transcending these, their rejection of white societal expectations became liberatory:

> It feels like I have so much more freedom over myself, and I'm not bound by these strict rules. After I was able to let go of toxic masculinity, I just feel so free in what I wear and how I express myself and how I do my hair. I can wear makeup. I can wear earrings. I can wear literally anything. It just feels so nice to have that autonomy over myself.

This newfound autonomy of gender expression became a powerful fund of X's identity: acts of resisting whiteness not only helped X develop an understanding of their gender rooted in self-love and self-authorship, but also contributed to their ability to understand how complex trauma impacts those who do not share their identities through a lens of empathy and compassion.

Embodying gender in a way that rejects whiteness extends beyond just how someone physically performs their gender. For example, one of the most salient ways Jin embodies their racial, ethnic, and gender identities in tandem with one another is through their name. Jin struggled to pick a name that accurately reflected who ze was. In our conversations, they recounted the pushes and pulls they felt between pressures they felt to assimilate to whiteness in a professional sense and their desire to pick a name that reflected their multiple minoritized identities. One way this manifested was in choosing their name. Jin described how, during the process of coming into their identities, ze used an "intermediary," "more Western" name that they felt would fit better into professional norms of whiteness. This, however, created a disconnect between Jin's racial and ethnic identities and their gender. Turning to friends, some of whom were also trans* People of Color, they asked "Do I change my first name to this Western name, and then my middle name to this chosen trans name that I feel like more accurately

reflects me so that I can avoid racism in professional settings?" Reflecting on the tension, Jin explained that

> I was literally 16 or 17 when I was asking these questions and compromising on my own name. I was so strongly questioning if I should legally change my name to a name that I didn't want to go by anymore because it would be safer or more palatable to white people.

Ultimately, Jin decided to select a Chinese name that authentically reflected both their racial and gender identities, thinking "if people are going to be racist to me that sucks, but my happiness is more important than that." Through this process, Jin actively rejected the "shitty, white supremacist ideals of what 'professional' names are." Beyond just prioritizing their self-worth and happiness, ze explained that embodying their gender in a way that rejected white supremacy "influenced me in becoming independent. I had to do it, but it taught me to take my own agency, claim that for myself, and be independent and assertive. Shitty circumstances, but I learned a lot of skills there." Through this narrative, it therefore becomes clear how the lessons Jin learned through the process of selecting zir name formed funds of Jin's identity in a way that was similar to how the lessons X learned by rejecting white, toxic standards of masculinity helped form their funds of identity.

Complicating the narratives

Because both white supremacy and the cisgender binary are projects of settler colonialism, white supremacy inevitably dictates the lived experiences of all trans* individuals, including white trans* people. The narratives in this section, however, demonstrate how the nuanced ways trans* People of Color engage with politics of whiteness uniquely and directly shape their funds of identity as trans* people who hold minoritized racial and ethnic identities. On a surface level, some of these funds of identity appear similar in nature to those embodied by

white trans* participants. For example, many participants learned and internalized the importance of personal happiness over other people's discomfort as a fund of their identity, regardless of their race. The ways that Participants of Color developed this fund of identity, however, are distinct from how white participants developed similar funds because of the ways their trans* identities have been racialized throughout their lives. Similarly, while many participants discussed the importance of prioritizing their safety when determining how, where, and when they disclose their gender identities, participants holding minoritized racial identities understood safety through the lens of whiteness, underscoring the ways racism and trans*phobia intersect to create complex systems of trauma that white trans* people do not encounter (and, in some cases, perpetuate).

In discussing the various ways trans* Students of Color formed similar funds of identity through the distinct ways they each encounter white supremacy, my goal is not to generalize that all trans* Students of Color share a collective set of funds of identity that they develop as a result of experiencing oppression at the intersection of racism and trans*phobia. Additionally, by highlighting the specific and nuanced funds of identity trans* Students of Color develop, my goal is not to compare trans* Students of Color against their white trans* peers. Rather, underscoring the unique ways trans* Students of Color are forced to navigate white supremacy throughout their lives gives richer context to the strategies they use to subvert the latent white supremacy in collegiate spaces.

Sewing the Textiles Together: "How Angry am I in This Moment?" – Utilizing Funds of Identity in Navigating the Collegiate Classroom

The three preceding sections serve as textiles that show the composite range of funds of identity trans* students develop across their lives. By closely examining these textiles, one can

ascertain how trans* collegians form the individual ways of knowing they utilize to make sense of their identities and the world around them. In this final section, I sew these textiles together to demonstrate the complex and nuanced ways that trans* students employ their funds of identity when navigating classroom spaces.

Throughout data analysis, three main sectors of the classroom experience emerge as places where trans* students implement their funds of identity. First, trans* collegians tap into their funds of identity when deciding what classes to sign up for, including what majors to declare and, when possible, what instructors to enroll in classes with. I discuss these in the first sub-theme, "Selecting departments and instructors." Second, trans* students rely on their funds of identity when determining whether to disclose their gender identity in the classroom and how to perform gender in academic spaces, which I unpack in "Disclosing and performing identities in the classroom." Finally, when conversations about gender do (or do not) arise, trans* students again tap into their funds of knowledge in assessing how to engage and/or challenge conversations on identity, as well as whether and how to include their identities in their course assignments. I explore these realities in the final sub-theme, "Engaging trans* identities in the classroom."

Selecting departments and instructors

Before trans* students even enter the classroom, many utilize their funds of identity in selecting what courses to enroll in. While many factors play into this decision-making process, two prominent ones which emerged from the data were what field a participant was majoring in, and whether or not the participant had the ability to intentionally select their course instructors. Many participants' narratives underscored the ways that they tapped into some of the funds of identity discussed earlier, including those developed around prioritizing safety in community

spaces and proactively seeking information about trans* identities, when deciding what classroom spaces they would engage throughout their collegiate careers; these ways of knowing developed throughout their lives in turn directly shaped the strategies participants' employed to (re)claim their agency in navigating higher education.

First, several participants discussed how their trajectories to their declared majors were informed by their trans* identities. For some, this trajectory was nonlinear. While almost all participants at one point in our conversations shared frustrations with and/or celebrations of how materials for their courses featured content centering trans* experiences, some participants explained how they started college planning to declare a specific major before changing the course of their studies after taking classes that more directly spoke to their lived experiences. For Carol, who began college as a math major, taking a sociology class on gender and the body was a prominent step in their journey of embodying their nonbinary identity as it provided the space to think "about dimensions of gender in society, and by proxy my own gender." Through enrolling in courses that expanded their understanding of gender beyond the cisgender binary, Carol was able to learn more about their own gender identity, and also further develop their funds of identity in the process. Beyond this, however, being in a space that spoke to, affirmed, and challenged their identities provided Carol the tools interrogate more about what they wanted out of their academic experience in college:

> I was really good at math, […] so I thought, "I'll go in as a pure math major and study math theory." I quickly found out that I didn't like it. I was miserable in my math classes here. At the same time, I was in the class on sex and biology and gender, and I was like, "Oh, if this is kind of like what sociology is then I'm like really into this." It was what I

> thought that college would be, what I thought that I wanted to get out of college: these really critical conversations about society.

As described earlier, one fund of Carol's identity developed as they went through the process of unlearning the internalized shame they felt when "selfishly" prioritizing themselves, their identities, and ultimately their passions. Though they originally found some interest in math, it quickly dawned on Carol that this was largely out of an obligation to major in whatever field they were naturally talented in, rather than prioritizing their interests and passions. In part because it provided Carol the opportunity to explore their gender identity in depth, taking the sociology class on gender was a part of their process of unlearning the long-held fund of their identity that prioritizing their identities was "selfish" and "wrong." Thus, by making the decision to pursue their intellectual passions as opposed to strictly following their preconceived understandings of what they were "good" at, Carol utilized this fund of their identity to reclaim agency in the collegiate classroom.

Beyond Carol, several other participants similarly described how their initial intentions to major in a STEM discipline dissipated in part due to a lack of inclusive curriculum. Yujin, for example, entered their undergraduate career with a plan to double major in biology and art at the start of their undergraduate career. While their biology classes themselves were somewhat adequate at acknowledging the existence nonbinary gender identities, their other required STEM coursework never centered identity:

> I actually used to be a biology major before I changed to sociology. In biology and the associated departments that you have to take like chemistry, I would say [gender] was [mostly] never brought up, which isn't great. In biology, when we'd talk about biological sex, there was always a caveat of "don't use this to be transphobic," which I appreciated. I

> remember my biology professors were like, “All right, we're going to talk about chromosomes, don't say anything stupid,” which was nice. But then in math, or stats, there was never anything where we dove into gender even remotely close to scratching the surface like we did in sociology.

The lack of attention that these classes paid to identity were contributing factors in Yujin’s decision to switch one of their majors to sociology, a field where they experienced far more integration of identity into the classroom. Yujin’s experiences demonstrate that the act of switching majors all together was one of several ways participants responded to course curricula that were unsatisfactory in their discussion of gender. Both Yujin and Carol’s narratives demonstrate the ways several participants used their funds of identity in making the decision to change their majors in order to gain access to spaces that more critically engaged identity.

While the majority of participants who switched majors did so to seek out identity-affirming spaces, one participant was contemplating switching their major for almost the opposite reason. During our conversations, Moss described how their current academic interests outgrew their initial reasons for choosing to major in gender studies:

> I think part of my interest in majoring in gender studies, for example, was curiosity and wanting to be closer to queer authors, queer and feminist fields of thought. And I still am interested in that, but I think from a little bit less of a place of I feel like I am searching for a stronger sense of my own identity, and therefore I’m looking to these places to help with that. Just because I feel more secure in my own gender and queerness now. I think there’s still a lot to explore, so I’m certainly not set for life. I think I just feel a little less like I need that to be in my academic studies.

Moss was one of a minority of participants who was able to build community with trans* individuals (and particularly those who shared their racial identity) at multiple stages of their pre-college life. Additionally, they were also as one of a minority of participants who attended a private, liberal arts institution that was described as having a disproportionately large queer student body. Keeping these realities in mind, it is telling how Moss was able to develop a stronger sense of their identities in other spaces beyond the classroom. Further, Moss had almost nothing negative to say about any of the courses they had taken during their college career, especially with regards to how their courses engaged issues of gender and sexuality. As such, their diverging narrative illuminates how the collegiate classroom can play varying roles in trans* students' academic and personal navigation of their identities: Moss' contemplation of leaving their major underscores the importance of not assuming that all trans* collegians look to have the same academic experiences.

In addition to selecting their majors, a second way that some participants employed their funds of identity when selecting courses was by intentionally selecting instructors. For participants who developed funds through the ways that their schools or homes policed their trans* identities, such as Egg, intentionally selecting instructors they knew on good faith would support their identities either through curricular or interpersonal means was one way that their funds of identity shaped their navigation of academic environments. As participants attended a range of institutional types and sizes, not every participant was able to be selective with regards to instructional staff when choosing what classes to enroll in. Some, such as those who attended larger schools where multiple professors or teaching assistants taught the same course concurrently, took advantage of their ability to select their instructors as a way to maximize the likelihood that they would end up in space that supported them. When enrolling in a large

lecture, for example, Egg described why choosing discussion sections based on which teaching assistant they would be assigned to is their top priority in course selection:

> A lot of times, I have options for what TA I get to spend discussion sections with. So, I will always immediately seek out the best TA of the bunch and drop whoever else, because I do not have time for that. I learned early on if you have a sucky TA, you will just die. Being around someone who is your point of contact that sucks is just horrible. And if there's a wonderful person, there's a chance to grow, and make a connection, and make a friend. I'll always choose someone who is queer, someone who I know, or someone who I share an identity with. I'm really picky about dropping TAs. I will make it hard on myself for the rest of the quarter, but if I have someone who is a good educator because they consider everyone else, I will always choose them. I'll drop a class; I'll drop a section. That's how I cultivate my space. I just don't have time for the rest.

The practice of cultivating academic spaces that affirm and support their identities through instructor selection was discussed similarly by several other participants. Among these, James, Ryan, and Yujin each named times that they signed up for multiple classes taught by the same faculty member because they had previously had a positive experience in that professor's class and knew they would be personally and academically supportive. Yujin, for example, found out that their family home had burned down in an arson during one professor's art history class. The experiences they had being supported by that professor in their personal life inspired Yujin to continue to enroll in that professor's classes moving forward. In turn, that professor provided Yujin the opportunity to continue to explore their identity in relation to art and art history by allowing Yujin to write final papers on topics about gender and representation in art history. These stories combine to demonstrate how the funds of identity participants developed

throughout their lives, particularly those which arose from finding and building their own queered kinship networks, proved instrumental in helping participants determine how to best navigate the collegiate classroom.

Disclosing and performing identity in the classroom

The considerations participants take when determining whether to disclose their trans* identities and their gender markers in the classroom vary widely, and are oftentimes based on the individual funds of identity each participant developed through their embodiment of their transness throughout their lives.

Introductions and naming pronouns

Participants mostly discussed their decisions to disclose identity in relation to how they introduce themselves on the first day of class. Some participants who attended smaller liberal arts colleges or institutions that were otherwise known to have socio-politically liberal climates felt that pronouns were somewhat of a non-issue at their campuses. Moss and Yujin, for example, both attended institutions where there are disproportionately large queer populations. In turn, they felt their professors likely had experience with gender neutral and other neopronouns, and thus had little hesitation when introducing themselves with less normative gender pronouns. After they went through the process of changing their name and other gender markers in institutional records during the middle of the semester, Ryan had almost exclusively positive responses from professors after they reintroduced themselves: several professors treated their reintroduction as a non-issue, while one made an attempt to connect with Ryan through his own daughter's queer identity, saying "that's really cool, my daughter is queer, so I kinda get it, but I'm always learning." Because of the small nature of their campus and the relative visibility they had as a leader in campus organizations, Ryan rarely had to think about introducing themselves

with their pronouns after these initial interactions, as they think that virtually everyone on campus knows their pronouns.

Experiencing being misgendered in educational settings prior to attending college informed participants' funds of identity in a variety of ways, which in turn lead participants to navigate the introduction of their pronouns in different ways. Shaped by how zir's high school administration initially banned teachers from referring to zir with gender neutral pronouns, Jin will oftentimes email professors prior to the start of the term to inform them of zir pronouns; should professors continue to misgender them after receipt of this email, Jin will immediately correct them. When asked how they made the decision to be vocal in correcting their professors, Jin candidly explained:

> I don't give a fuck. I will correct anyone and everyone about my pronouns, and other people's pronouns, and their names, all because of [high school]. Because I had to. I learned that the only way that I could expect people to more consistently use my name and pronouns was to correct them every single time that they said them incorrectly in my presence. I got used to that really quickly, and I carried that through to college. I don't let people misgender me. I just don't take bullshit like that.

Guided by experiences being misgendered in their life, Carol similarly always introduces themselves with their pronouns in every class they take. Part of their decision to do so is to provide visibility of nonbinary identities in classroom spaces:

> I will always introduce myself with my pronouns, mostly because like I want to be representation. Even if no one up to that point has introduced themselves with their pronouns, maybe the people after me will introduce themselves with theirs. [I like]

> creating an environment that people feel comfortable to do so by saying that I'm nonbinary, and that I use they/them pronouns.

In Carol's case, experiences such as being misgendered throughout their life and not being able to find representation of their identities in social media coalesced to develop their desire to *become* representation in the classroom as a fund of their identity. In turn, this fund of identity shapes how Carol chooses to verbalize their pronouns in the classroom as a mode of representation. Across both Jin and Carol's stories, therefore, it becomes clear how funds of identity embodied through their experiences with varying manifestations of trans*phobia in educational spaces prior to college shape their navigation of the collegiate classroom environment. Funds of identity developed through being disrespected and misgendered both in and out of educational spaces inform the steps that some trans* students take to demand accountability for themselves and others in their classroom environments.

In some cases, participants' professors required all students in the class to introduce themselves with their pronouns at the start of the term. In these situations, participants had mixed reactions: while they more often than not viewed such actions as a sign of inclusivity, some participants like Rose and James felt as though the requirement could be potentially othering. James, for example, discussed the impact of one instance where a professor required all students state their pronouns during their introductions. James described feeling viscerally uncomfortable in the immediate, saying: "I bet I'm the only trans person, I bet it's going to be so weird." Their discomfort was nuanced, however, by their simultaneous appreciation towards the gesture: "it felt really nice that that existed, but it also felt very outing, being the one person in the room who used they/them pronouns." James' story illustrates that funds of identity developed earlier in life through internalizing isolation by visibly holding a trans* identity can in turn shape how

participants view the obligation to state pronouns in a classroom introduction. Some participants' funds of identity inform their decision to wait before disclosing their pronouns to determine if the space is a safe one for them to disclose their identities in. Being required to do so puts some trans* individuals in a precarious situation, where they might feel the need to risk their safety to not lie about their pronouns when asked.

The switch many institutions made to remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic opened new opportunities for participants to approach their gender pronouns. Many, including Flower, James, Rose, and others, valued the ability to change their name freely on Zoom and list their preferred name and pronouns, actions which several felt would prevent them from being misgendered without having to approach the topic of gender with their professors and peers. As discussed in the first textile, Em experienced several classroom environments that were hostile towards their gender identity when taking dual-enrollment courses during high school. The negative experiences had when introducing their pronouns or being forced to listen to outwardly queerphobic rhetoric in class discussions developed the understanding that Em should prioritize their physical safety by not coming out in academic settings as a fund of Em's identity that in turn shaped how Em chose to engage their identities in the collegiate classroom. Em explained that the switch to Zoom learning was "the first time that I've come out in all of my classes." They expanded,

> I never had to have any conversation because of Zoom. You can just put your pronouns in your name, and then you don't have to talk about it. It's there, and pretty much everyone is educated enough now to know that if there is like pronouns in parentheses, those are their pronouns. I think pretty much everyone is educated on pronouns, so it's not a conversation anymore. Zoom has opened open some doors in terms of disclosure

without it having to be a conversation, which I think is huge. I don't know if I would choose to be out outside of Zoom classrooms.

Em would normally not disclose their gender identity publicly in the classroom, demonstrating how they use their fund of prioritizing their physical safety to navigate in-person learning. Zoom, however, has provided new context for how Em can feel safe in the classroom. Likening the safety they feel in the Zoom classroom to the ways they feel safe in Zoom medical appointments or in digital spaces they engage while in the comfort of their own bedroom, the fund of identity that forces Em to not use gender neutral pronouns in the classroom–the fund of prioritizing their safety–becomes less necessary. Em's experience navigating Zoom is one example that demonstrates how individuals use their funds of identity can change over time and based on context. It also highlights the ways that technology can be a powerful force in assisting trans* inclusivity in the classroom.

Not all experiences with listing pronouns on Zoom were positive, however. As a student at a conservative, Catholic institution, X relied on how professors reacted to their gender performance when taking in-person classes to determine whether they felt fully safe disclosing their nonbinary identity. The switch to remote learning, however, removed the ability for X to physically take space as a nonbinary person, therein also removing their ability to perceive social cues that indicated how professors responded to their gender. X works with queer youth in the vicinity of their university, and as such is expected to list their pronouns in their Zoom name professionally. Because they used Zoom to both learn and work remotely during the pandemic, X's Zoom name oftentimes listed their pronouns as they entered the Zoom room for their class, a reality they described as uncomfortably "outing." They further explained that "on Zoom, it's like, 'hi, I'm queer, and not just queer, I'm extra queer, and you don't even know what this means, and

now it's next to my name! Yay!' So I found myself deleting it before I entered." Zoom's technological limitations, therefore, limited X's autonomy in determining whether they feel safe enough to disclose their pronouns. Prior to the pandemic, work and school were two separate spaces where X felt control over how and when they chose to open up regarding their pronouns. As these two spaces converged into the shared digital Zoom room, however, X became unable to predetermine how they entered the collegiate classroom: by automatically having their pronouns in their Zoom name, X lost the ability to control if and when they shared their pronouns with their instructors and peers.

X's experience demonstrates how funds of identity are malleable over time. When in in-person classes, X felt more in control of their ability to disclose their pronouns, and as a result, often did so. Even when peers did not know what gender neutral pronouns were, or even when they might have felt unsafe in front of a professor, one of their salient funds of identity–disrupting educational spaces, which was developed through years of experiencing structural violence in the classroom during high school–informed their decision to continue disrupting discourse in their collegiate classroom. When faced by the new realities of learning online, however, X lost control over their own autonomy to disclose their identity on their terms, and in turn, their funds of identity and navigational strategies both shifted.

Performing gender in the classroom

In addition to whether participants chose to explicitly disclose their gender to their professors and peers, how participants chose to perform their gender identities in the classroom similarly had a large impact on their academic experiences. For some, visually signaling their queerness was a strategy that they used to build community with peers: Em, for example, hoped that other students would see the buttons on their backpack that displayed icons to represent both

their trans* and disability identities and use them as a conversation starter. For others, how they performed gender in the classroom opened them up to microaggressions from professors who had a difficult time making sense of their gender presentation. James described how their calculus professor routinely microaggressed them throughout the term, describing the ways they would stare at James for long period of times in the class looking at minute elements of their gender performance, such as how they wore hats. These uncomfortable experiences culminating during a particularly tense encounter James had with the instructor during the class' final exam:

> The day I took my final exam, we had to have IDs checked. My professor sat at my desk and looked at my ID for a very long time–a longer time than for other students. […] as a cover-up excuse, she said "oh, your handwriting looks really neat on this study guide." I'm like, "bruh, you're just trying to figure out what I am. This is gross. Please, no."

How James performed gender throughout the term caused a professor to viscerally react when presented with James' formal identity markers, such as their student ID, which they perceived as at odds with James' gender presentation. While both Em and James actively chose to perform gender in a visibly queer-coded way in the hopes of building community with other queer students in their classes (as guided by funds of identity they developed throughout their lives–Em, for example, used their fund of identity regarding prioritizing their safety by not verbalizing their identity in the classroom to prefer subtly nodding to their various minoritized identities through the visual cues of pins on their backpack), the responses they received from faculty differed wildly. These contrasting experiences demonstrate some of the ways in which the performance of trans* identities is both understood in the classroom and utilized by trans* students in physical classroom settings.

Gender performance was most commonly discussed by participants in relation to remote learning. Every person's experience navigating gender performance is unique to their personal desires and styles, but also their lived realities at the intersection of their social identities. Further, the same societal stereotypes of how to "look" and "be" trans* that formed many participants' funds of identity similarly shape how some students' peers and professors expect trans*ness to look and feel. Ryan, for example, explained how certain features and restrictions of Zoom made it easier for them to navigate classes while they were medically transitioning:

> I kind of hate [Zoom], but it's been so nice from a performing gender perspective. I started testosterone literally the Wednesday before everything shut down. So I went through all of my really horrible voice cracking at home, where I could just be on mute. At that time, I was not really on the phone with anyone besides my close friends. So I didn't have to talk, which was nice. Nobody got to experience the really horrible point of my voice cracking. That was nice. Wearing a binder didn't really matter, because you can only see from here up. I didn't have to crush my ribs to feel comfortable, for a change.

Because they could control when and how people saw them, Ryan was not required to make the sacrifice of physical comfort to be perceived by their peers in a gender-affirming way. As such, Zoom classrooms allowed Ryan to feel more comfortable starting testosterone during the academic term than they might have felt were classes in-person, as it gave them greater control over how their gender presentation was perceived. Funds of identity developed throughout Ryan's life that once informed Ryan on how to perform or present their gender in order to be respected in academic settings shifted with the advent of the Zoom university: being able to dress in a way that prioritized physical comfort without needing to perform in a way where others

would publicly affirm their gender performance made the virtual classroom somewhat more comfortable to live and learn in.

The connection between remote learning and gender performance was particularly pronounced for participants who identified as disabled and/or neurodivergent. Em's chronic pain and fatigue directly shape their gender performance, as they often are restricted in what clothing they can wear based on how painful certain gendered articles of clothing are. In-person, this frequently meant that Em was read as a cisgender woman based on the clothing they wore and the way their body looked. This frustration, however, was rendered somewhat obsolete by Zoom:

> If I'm having a bad day, I don't need to show up to class with my cane, because I can just sit on my bed and do class. Especially lately, when I've been more femme presenting, I haven't had to interact with other people's perceptions of me being nonbinary very much. […] Zoom kind of takes away the need for those conversations that would otherwise be very emotionally charged or make me feel very vulnerable.

Em has been forced to perform gender in specific ways based on their chronic pain: wearing skirts and other loosely-fitting garments that are more traditionally femininely-coded means that oftentimes, Em is read as a cisgender woman in the various spaces they occupy physically on campus. The shift to Zoom learning, like Ryan, allowed Em to prioritize their comfort in presenting their gender, and as such gave them the space to avoid having uncomfortable conversations about gender that they might be forced to have in-person based on their gender performance. Almost similarly to Ryan, Em's experience in remote learning allows them to prioritize both their physical and emotional comfort in the classroom by removing certain anxieties about how their gender is read by their peers.

This opinion of Zoom, however, was not universal. For X and Yujin, who both identify as neurodivergent, the remote classroom heightened their gender dysphoria. Yujin described how the expectation to have their camera on while in class is draining: "Knowing that people can see me and perceive my body just amplifies my dysphoria. And then, me doing weird neurodivergent things in my room and people also seeing that bothers me as well." X similarly feels a heightened sense of dysphoria in remote learning, which compounds with their diagnosed anxiety to make remote learning environments particularly hostile. In an attempt to make their remote learning environment more safe and productive, X attempted to work with the disability support center on their campus to modify their accommodations to account for Zoom learning:

> I had to talk to Disability Support Services and ask, "please write in my accommodations letter that I'm allowed to turn my camera off sometimes." Because I would have such huge anxiety that would distract me from class, I'd turn my camera off so I could focus on class, but the teachers would say "turn your camera on right now." So, I can either panic and look at my little bubble, or learn the lesson. I don't know what you want from me. That's also horrible if I'm having a bad dysphoria day and I have to look at myself all day. Instead of putting on a sweatshirt and going to class and forgetting I exist, I have to see myself, and overperceive myself and others' reactions, and that's bad for my health.

Encountering heightened dysphoria in academic settings similarly heightened X's anxiety, which adversely impacted their ability to pay attention and learn in the classroom. Having a formalized anxiety diagnosis that is both recognized and receives accommodations through their university's disability services center, X attempted to find a way to get their university's accommodations structure to support their gender identity. However, the only support DSS was able to provide X was stipulating that they were allowed to turn off their camera for limited intervals; X reported

that some of their faculty would read their accommodations closely, and subsequently require them to turn on their camera throughout the lecture because X's accommodations did not approve X's camera being off 100% of the course.

Elsewhere, I have explored the ways that some disabled trans* students use their funds of identity to try and advocate for respect of their gender by navigating disclosing their identity at the same time as discussing their accommodations with faculty (Gutzwa, 2021a). X's story illustrates another example of this utilization of funds: by trying to navigate gendered oppression in the classroom in tandem with disability accommodations, X attempted to utilize formal protections for their rights to also demand accountability for their gender identity, which does not receive formal protections at their Catholic university. Nevertheless, these structures were still limiting and damaging to X, demonstrating that even when funds of identity are used as navigational strategies, they are not always wholly effective when faced with structural inequities academically. These diverging experiences further complicate how disabled and/or neurodivergent trans* students tap into their funds of identity when working to make classrooms more safe and comfortable spaces to learn in, particularly in the era of remote instruction.

Engaging trans* identities in the classroom

Course content and assignments were a main area of frustration for many participants. Scholars have discussed the ways that identity-affirming course readings and materials can make classrooms feel more inclusive for trans* students, as well as the converse (e.g., Duran & Nicolazzo, 2017; Gutzwa, 2021a; 2022). As such, I do not focus on the specific praises given by participants to professors who included productive conversations of gender, or the frustrations participants expressed when courses were not inclusive in their content. Rather, this section focuses on the various ways trans* students brought their funds of identity into the classroom as

strategies to engage with course material. In some cases, students brought their identities (and, in turn, their embodied ways of knowing) into their course assignments. Others found ways to engage in course discussion by directly or indirectly referencing their trans*ness in conversations about gender. Reorienting the conversation away from "what do professors do/not do well" to "how to trans* students navigate the ways gender is/is not discussed in the classroom" pushes the conversation on trans* inclusivity in the classroom beyond "best practices" for faculty to adopt in designing courses towards centering the actual ways trans* students bring their individual and collective ways of knowing to the classroom.

Discussing and exploring identity through course assignments

One key way participants discussed engaging their identities in the classroom was their decision to include or to not include mentions of their trans*ness in course assignments. Some took classes where they were either asked to discuss identity directly or given open-ended course assignments. These participants in turn used their coursework as a place to disclose their identities to faculty and connect their identities to course content.

For some who, for whatever reason, felt uncomfortable discussing identity with their professors face-to-face, assignments offered a space to not only further explore how their identities connected to course material, but also to share their trans* identities with professors. Though Yujin was unable to pinpoint exactly why they felt uncomfortable talking with their professors about their gender in some cases, they explained that:

> I don't go out of my way necessarily to talk about my experiences with professors, even though I am working on projects about the queer community, especially like trans or lesbian issues. That's not to say I don't think they would respect that, but just I feel like my academic content is more important. (Yujin)

One possible reason why Yujin might feel uncomfortable discussing their identities with faculty is the fact that the nature of their relationship with faculty has predominantly been "academic" in nature; as such, they believe that it is more "academic" for them to disclose their identities by connecting their identities to course materials, rather than just discussing their identities point-blank with faculty. Regardless of the reason, Yujin's narrative shows one way that professors can allow students to bring their funds of identity into the classroom: open-ended assignments provide students an ability to disclose their identity and share their embodied ways of knowing in a format that sometimes feels safer, more accessible, or, as Yujin described, more "academic."

The understanding that is more "academic" to discuss identity through assignments than it is to share experiences about identity with faculty was the rationale which several participants used to make their professors aware of their identities. When Kenan had a professor that he perceived to be trans* for one of his classes, for example, he felt uncomfortable coming out to the professor, as he worried it might force the professor to acknowledge their own identity or otherwise might make the professor feel uncomfortable. As such, Kenan used reflection papers to discuss his experiences as a trans man to bridge that gap. While the professor never formally acknowledged Kenan's identity, Kenan felt more comfortable being in the space having disclosed his identity discretely.

This tactic of using open-ended assignments to discuss identity was one Kenan took in several other classes with cisgender professors. He expressed that he discussed identity in some assignments simply because it made the assignment easier to complete, saying that "sometimes I don't have anything creative to really write about, and my experience is like my trump card, so I'll throw that in there." As Kenan learned in another class, however, doing so leaves open the opportunity for faculty to respond in oppressive ways:

> I got the grade back, I did good on the assignment. It was just like a like two, three, paragraph thing, and I threw it in there. And then this asshole, probably like two or three weeks later, went on a rant, or a "lecture." He talked about Freud, and penis envy, and he looked right at me the whole time. I was so uncomfortable. [I learned] you gotta be careful. You gotta read people before you go on writing things like that.

James also experienced an aggressive response from a professor after writing a paper for a business leadership class about identity. Frustrated by the way that the professor did not include issues of identity in her curriculum, James took the opportunity to write their final paper about diversity in leadership. The professor, in turn, did not take kindly to James' arguments, responding by saying "if you did not say you were nonbinary, I would never notice, and even I know I would not care." In turn, James internalized that business education spaces were ones where identity was not allowed, even if bringing identity into the course would provide deeper nuance and provide them more opportunity to learn. When James tried to utilize their funds of identity in the classroom and challenge identity-neutral discourse, they were admonished for doing so by their faculty; similarly, Kenan's attempt to utilize his funds of identity by discussing his lived experiences as a trans man in a classroom assignment led to an uncomfortable, hostile faculty member who implied they were unsupportive of Kenan's approach to a class assignment. Even though both James and Kenan took the opportunity to take an academic approach in discussing their identity in their assignments, their professors responded in ways that they did not anticipate, demonstrating the ways in which navigating identity in the classroom is hardly foolproof. Experiences like these demonstrate how even when participants tried to bring their funds of identity into academic spaces by discussing their lived realities in course assignments,

particularly when trying to navigate frustrations with the lack of identity-based discussion in the classroom, doing so was not always validated by collegiate faculty.

Engaging in conversations about identity in class discussion

When topics of gender came up as a topic of conversation in participants' classes, it was often to varying degrees of inclusivity, appropriateness, and tact. As such, the strategies participants employed in deciding if, when, and how they would engage in conversations about gender were similarly divergent. In the best-case scenarios, some participants were affirmed and encouraged to bring up conversations of identity in the classroom. For example, when discussing what instructors they enjoyed the most, Egg stated, "There's some professors who appreciate my additions and questions about their class, and who see that as valid–almost as a necessary part of improving their own scholarship." For Ryan, courses where professors shared about their own lived experiences and identities created an environment where they felt safe sharing their own:

> One professor was an openly queer woman who talked about her wife and her twins. She was really great. In there, it was really welcoming. Very discussion-based–your grade depended on interacting with the class and participating in discussion, so whenever gender stuff came up, I'd be like "here's my two cents from personal experience," and she'd say she agreed.

Leading by example, the professor in Ryan's class found opportunities to bring her own identities and lived experiences into the classroom, modelling for students that it was similarly acceptable for them to do so. Further. The fact that this professor affirmed Ryan's contributions in class that were rooted in their lived realities demonstrated to Ryan that interrogating their lived realities in the classroom was a welcome part of educational praxis. Others similarly shared stories of times when their professors and teaching assistants brought their own lived

experiences, academic scholarship, and ways of knowing into the classroom space as a way to promote inclusivity in the classroom. Egg, for example, valued the fact that one of their TAs found ways to discuss their research in relation with their gender and national identities in a class on human trafficking. For Yujin, a sociology class that focused, among other things, on ethnographic approaches to exploring tattooing communities not only gave the professor the opportunity to bring their own identities and networks (including his wife, who Yujin described as a "cool lawyer lady with a bunch of tattoos") into the class, but also allowed Yujin the ability to further explore their own interests and passions in the context of the sociology classroom. Across these stories, participants read classrooms where their professors brought their own identities into the space as classes that in turn affirmed them and their identities. By allowing space for students to actively bring their funds of identity into the curriculum, professors who celebrated identity-based approaches to course material created classrooms in which participants felt safe contributing to conversation, facilitating their course engagement.

More often than not, however, the ways that professors engaged gender in their lectures and assigned materials were either implicitly or explicitly trans*-exclusive. For many, STEM classes were spaces that largely used outdated, binary language, if gender and identity were even ever discussed. This is not to say that the same did not also occur in the social sciences, humanities, and arts. When faced with professors that did not satisfactorily discuss gender in a nuanced, trans*-inclusive way, participants oftentimes decided how to respond or engage on a case-by-case basis. Jin, for example, summarized their decision-making process by saying: "some of the main factors that I consider are one, do I think this person might listen to me and listen to this feedback? Two, how upset am I? And three, how much energy do I have in this

moment?" There is thus no universal way to explain how participants engaged problematic dialogue that was raised in the classroom.

In some STEM classes where identity was either rarely mentioned or grossly misrepresented, some participants felt like their complaints would not be taken seriously, and so they either remained silent or left the department altogether. In other spaces, however, some participants actively challenged their peers and professors to more critically engage issues of gender. In some sociology classes that Carol was in, for example, their peers and professors would sometimes tack on a brief mention trans* people to the end of their comments as a nod to acknowledging the existence of trans* identities retroactively: "[After] all this stuff about how women experience things, and then 'oh, also, I guess, like, trans women, too!'" In these instances, Carol will lead with their nonbinary identity and offer further, nuanced perspectives on trans*ness, again utilizing their fund of identity to be representation in the classroom as a way to navigate transphobic silencing. When describing their decision to vocalize their identity and speak to trans* realities, they said:

> I never want to be like the person who's like, "I speak for the whole trans community," because I don't, and no one should. But someone has to speak about trans issues. Someone has to say something. Because otherwise people are just going to continue going through their education without ever thinking about trans experiences in depth.

Carol's words highlight how they feel a certain responsibility to their communities to challenge their peers to think more critically about how they engage gender. The responsibility Carol feels to speak to trans* realities as they are silenced in classroom dialogue is shaped by their desire to be visible representation of trans*ness in the classrooms, which was developed as a fund of their

identity throughout their life. Thus, funds of identity shape how some students respond to the silencing of trans* identities by their peers and professors in the collegiate classroom.

This responsibility to speak on trans* issues is notably different from the expectation to carry the labor of educating the room on queer and trans* issues that is often placed on trans* students by professors, which was felt by some participants, namely James. Rather, the obligation that Carol and other participants like Egg feel to do this work stems from a desire to make spaces more welcoming of trans* people by challenging discourse:

> I almost don't want that shit to fall on someone else, so I think, "It might as well be me." I don't want to put other people through that as well. It's me thinking about generations to come, because the longer we let that shit stay there, it's going to grow, and gain more authority as truth, and more people are going to have to suffer through that. (Egg)

Like Carol, Egg frequently takes a "disruptor" role in classes where the rhetoric used and materials assigned by faculty are damaging to trans* students. As aforementioned, Egg has sometimes received positive reinforcement for engaging identity in the class and for challenging professors to view their work differently. In some instances, however, professors have responded defensively, or even aggressively. For example, Egg explained how one of their geography professors, who they described as a "classic second-wave feminist," routinely assigned readings that upheld white savior understandings human slavery and trafficking and conceptualizations of gender that prioritized biological essentialism over all else. They also noticed how some of their peers, including many white students, responded positively to the professor's course. Their approach to challenging the professor's course content was not well received, to say the least:

> I personally took it upon myself to be so loud and outrageous, and call out how shitty her readings were for the class. She chose the most white savior readings and films. I'd call

> her out, and it got to the point when she wouldn't call on me when I had my hand raised, even I was the only person with my hand raised. Oh my god, this one time, she and [her TA] were walking to [a café on campus], and she was shit talking me! Loudly! She was screaming about how I scream, and how other students that have valid things to say. She was screaming about me to my former TA in public.

Just as frequently as trans* students are expected to provide the intellectual and emotional labor of educating their peers on trans* realities, they are also demonized and shamed when they challenge oppressive ideologies and advocate for respect for their identities in the classroom. Even in spaces where students expect professors to be more or less understanding of trans*ness, such as Egg's experiences taking social sciences classes, faculty member's own inflated understanding of their superiority and knowledge on a subject can be bruised, leading them to actively harm their trans* students.

While some participants felt the need to speak up in response to questionable course content, others chose to keep opinions to themselves. Rose, for example, learned across many interactions in their life (like when their mom asked "why does everyone have to be gay?" in response to them sharing a piece of their writing with her) that it is not academic to discuss queerness outside of classes specifically centering queer and trans* identities. Of this, Rose said: "I feel like part of me almost feels an internalized sense of like, 'well, that's not academic, why would you talk about that?'" Nevertheless, in some of their English classes, Rose is unable to help but read queerness into some of the texts that they are assigned, but they never bring up these interpretations in class:

> When I have a queer reading of something, I usually don't share it, because oftentimes it's just how I get through classic literature. I'm reading the *Divine Comedy* right now and I'm

like, “Dante is really gay for Virgil!” But I'm not gonna say that in class, I'm just going to think it for myself.

Through this excerpt, it becomes clear that Rose internalized that queerness and academics do not always coalesce as a fund of their identity. As a fund of Rose’s identity, the internalization that queerness is not “academic” in turn shapes the ways that they choose to engage in the classes they take. Rose uses their fund of identity that queerness is not “academic” to avoid conversations and reactions from their peers they predict might be uncomfortable as a mode of self-preservation in classroom spaces.

As alluded to in Egg’s stories, one additional frustration that many trans* Students of Color hold in particular with their classes is the fact that readings and discussions often never address the intersection of race, gender, queerness, and other identities that participants hold. Yujin, Moss, Kenan, and Chris all corroborated Egg’s frustrations that class readings and discussions rarely take a critical approach to examining multiple minoritized identities. Chris lamented that his classes on gender oftentimes ignore a specific focus on Blackness: “I'll look at the material and think, ‘I don't think that applies to People of Color.’ […] When they talk about hegemonic masculinity or femininity, or whatever words they use, it's a white femininity, white gender, and white masculinity.” On the other hand, in classes that he has taken on race, such as African American studies classes, gender is almost always discussed in cisgender, binary terms, if it is even discussed at all.

Chris explained two main reasons why he chooses to not participate in many class discussions. First, Chris chooses to stay silent in many classes simply because he does not feel engaged by or represented in the course material. In one conversation, he mentioned that “if the reading was about Black trans people, I definitely would probably join in on the discussion in

class." Second, however, was the fact that he felt white voices "colonize" many of the discussions on gender, specifically trans*ness, that he has seen in the classroom:

> White trans people love to talk in discussions compared to Black trans people. White trans people get in these classes that are spaces that are meant for talking about trans stuff, and I feel like they're more overzealous to talk about it because that's their one avenue of oppression. […] But Black trans people who are people with multiple oppressed identities, we could talk about it all. You know what I mean? […] but white trans people monopolize the conversation. Colonize, if you want to use that word.

As discussed previously, one salient fund of Chris' identity was understanding their Blackness and their trans*ness through the "colonizer vibes" of whitewashed queer and trans* spaces. Internalizing a need to stay away from conversations that prioritize whiteness, Chris' decision to not participate in such dialogues in the classroom is unsurprising. This story demonstrates the ways that Chris' funds of identity developed through his experiences simultaneously holding minoritized gender and racial identities shape his navigation of the collegiate classroom: his distrust of white trans* people, who he frequently described as "messy" for how they "colonize" every space they are part of, informed his decision to avoid participating in class as a means of avoiding further interaction with them.

Conclusion

As demonstrated throughout this chapter, each participant in this study comes from a different set of lived experiences, meaning that each of their funds of identity are unique. Because funds of identity are unique, exploring the various locales where trans* individuals build networks that inform their world views is essential in understanding how trans* students tap into these embodied realities in the classroom. How trans* students develop their funds of

identity varies: trans* students develop powerful ways of knowing through the many experiences they have, the various kinship networks they build, and the ways they are taught to understand their identities on a societal level. Similarities in how funds are developed ties individuals' experiences together as a collective. Understanding this collective–or, put in other words, sewing together these textiles–therefore enables an understanding of the complex strategies trans* collegians use to navigate oppressive realities in the collegiate classroom. By routinely bring their ways of knowing into the classroom as funds of their identity, trans* students utilize their funds to make meaning of their experiences in the classroom.

Students often encounter resistance for working to bring their ways of knowing into the educational space, be it internal resistance or active silencing at the hands of faculty and peers. Still, these streams of knowledge are powerful in that they provide trans* students the tools to survive in and rise against systems of oppression and domination, both societally and in the collegiate classroom. In the final chapter of this dissertation, I further unpack the interconnections between trans* students' funds of identity, as well as their navigational strategies. In doing so, I theorize how faculty, administrators, and scholars alike can ascertain and harness the funds of identity trans* students into their environments in order to transform higher education in ways that are liberatory and trans*-inclusive.

CHAPTER 5

In the preceding chapter, I discuss and synthesize the many experiences shared with me by participants as they relate to the research questions which framed this study:

1. How do trans* collegians develop the funds of identity they bring to collegiate classrooms?
2. How do trans* students utilize their funds of identity to navigate classroom experiences?

I liken the narratives shared by participants in qualitative research to clusters of stars in a night sky. In Chapter 4, I observed the patterns of the stars in the sky, forming constellations of themes by drawing lines connecting these stars together. In this chapter, I widen my focus to see how this new collective of constellations fits into the broader Milky Way of higher education scholarship, praxis, and policy. Turning my telescope to once again explore the theories and literature amongst which this dissertation is situated, I use this space to theorize the ways the present work augments, pushes, and expands the limits of the galaxy of knowledge produced by and for trans* communities in higher education.

This chapter is split into two main sections. First, in the discussion section, I use Nicolazzo's (2017) tenets of trans* epistemology to guide my connection of this study's findings to extant literature on trans* collegians specifically and funds of identity broadly. Second, I follow this by outlining implications for future research, praxis, and policy that works to advance radical, innovative understandings of trans* liberation in postsecondary education.

Discussion

Given the theoretical nature of this study's research questions and design, it is important to not only discuss the relation of this work to extant research centering trans* collegians, but also to the theories this work is grounded in. Throughout the chapters of this dissertation, I have

referred to trans* students' funds of identity as embodied epistemologies they develop over the course of their lives and employ throughout their educational trajectories. At the same time, existing models of funds of identity as a theoretical framework are limited in the ways they can recognize the nuances unique to trans* realities. These limits exist because historically, individuals' funds of knowledge and funds of identity have been considered to derive from the ways individuals engage with their nuclear families, immediate households, local communities, and physical structures. As such, I infused the tradition of funds of identity with understandings of kinship from queer theory (e.g., Freeman, 2007; Weston, 1991) to release funds of identity from the orbit of these limitations and into more explicitly queer frontiers. Doing so allows me to theorize and envision trans* collegians' funds of identity as modes of trans* epistemology.

I am far from the first scholar to imagine what trans* epistemologies can look like. In her imagining of trans* epistemologies, Z Nicolazzo (2017) offers 6 provisional, open tenets of what a trans* epistemology can look like, which she came through her experiences "living, working, and learning alongside trans* kin" (p. 7). In a similar way, my time spent living, working, and learning alongside participants over the course of this study, coupled with my experiences coming into my trans and nonbinary identities over the course of my doctoral career, shape the ways I view trans* individuals' funds of identity as embodiments of their own self-authored epistemologies. To position trans* funds of identity as trans* epistemology, I thus organize my discussion of findings in line with 5 of Nicolazzo's tenets of trans* epistemology:

1. Trans* people may be *from* oppression, but we ourselves are not *of* oppression.
2. We all experience our trans*ness differently as a result of our varied, intersecting identities.

3. In and through community with each other, we have the power to heal and remake ourselves as trans* people.
4. Our continued de/re/construction of our trans* subjectivities spans material and virtual environments.
5. In/visibility and its varied meanings are central to our senses of self, community, and kinship.

Nicolazzo's remaining tenet, "'Trickle up activism' and grassroots coalition-building are, and will remain to be, orientations for our community," is no less important than the other 5 in imagining trans* epistemologies. The considerations she writes about in establishing this tenet, however, did not emerge from the findings of this study. As such, I focus on the tenets which clearly map onto the findings of this study.

Framing my discussion under the guidance of Nicolazzo's tenets offers several advantages. First, this exploration contextualizes my theoretical expansions of funds of identity as a framework in the empirical findings of this study. As one of the major contributions of this study is the extension of funds of identity to trans* communities and the overall evolution of funds of identity into an explicitly trans*-affirming framework, exploring these expansions of funds of identity scholarship through the lens of trans* epistemologies ultimately demonstrates how trans* students' funds of identity are manifestations of their self-authored epistemologies. Second, because Nicolazzo's empirical, theoretical, and epistemological scholarship makes up many of the planets in the solar system of research centering trans* communities in postsecondary education, this organization of my discussion offers many opportunities to connect the present work with scholarship that has come before it.

Trans* People may be *From* Oppression, but we Ourselves are not *of* Oppression

As one project of settler colonialism (Smith, 2015), the creation of the cisgender binary through the policing of gender and sexual performance in the colonized United States was one of many modes of otherizing what colonizers understood as gender "deviance" (Mogul et al., 2011). This otherization, in turn, lays a sociopolitical foundation on which deficit-based understandings of trans*ness are built (Gutzwa, 2021a; Nicolazzo, 2017). Deficit-narratives of trans*ness plague higher education research, praxis, and policy–a reality which I argue can only be reckoned with by introducing asset-based approaches to work (in all its meanings) with trans* communities in higher education. Such a shift has begun within the last decade, at least within the realm of scholarship. Lange and colleagues (2019) argue that "an increasing amount of scholarship has centered the lives of trans individuals in higher education in ways that focus on what factors lead to their ability to overcome challenges rather than on deficit perspectives" (p. 517).

It is for this reason why I turned to funds of identity as the framework for this study. Funds-based approaches, at their core, situate the cultural, embodied systems of knowing students develop throughout their lives as assets (Véléz-Ibáñez & Greenberg, 1991). Because there remains a critical need for scholarship that centers the factors that enable trans* collegians to transgress oppression (Lange et al., 2019), inquiry into the many funds of identity that trans* collegians hold advances nuanced understandings of what trans* epistemologies can look like in education research. Further, the need for asset-based trans*-centric scholarship exposes a theoretical gap in the overall galaxy of higher education literature. While scholars have engaged trans* identities through asset-based lenses, very few have offered frameworks that specifically guide scholars in understanding *how* to create asset-based knowledge in community with the trans* individuals who engage in their research (outside of Nicolazzo's provisional tenets of

trans* epistemology). When read through the lens of funds of identity, findings from this study speak to both needs.

First, findings corroborate long-held understandings of funds of identity as an asset-based framework. Because trans* students' funds of identity emerge from and affirm participants' many "historically accumulated, culturally developed, and socially distributed resources that are essential for people's self-definition, self-expression, and self-understanding" (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014, p. 37), this study transcends deficit-based mentalities of understanding trans* students that are perpetuated by postsecondary scholarship and reinforced within collegiate classrooms by understanding their funds of identity as educational assets. While discussing the various locations where and modalities through which trans* students developed their funds of identity, it was impossible to divorce the ways of knowing participants built from their lived experiences navigating multiple strata of oppression throughout their lives.

By presenting participants' experiences with oppression as events that developed their funds of identity, however, findings from this study explore the many epistemologies trans* collegians develop in response to and use to navigate the multitudes of oppression they experience, therein disrupting the deficit-based understandings of trans* students that are reinforced through higher education research and praxis. Reading the vignettes that explore Jin and Kenan's navigation of various structural bureaucracies as a collection of moments where each developed funds of their identity, for example, prioritizes the ways each "supersede [their] oppression" (Nicolazzo, 2017, p. 9) while still naming and recognizing the realities of the oppression they both endured. While Jin and Kenan might both be *from* multiple modes of oppression, they each also harnessed the funds of identity they developed in response to these barriers as assets when navigating oppression in classroom environments, such as how Jin used

their fund of identity of "don't take bullshit like that" which ze developed in response to being misgendered by administrators in high school as the rationale behind demanding respect for their pronouns from faculty in college. Therefore, taking a funds of identity approach in work with trans* students enables exploration of the many epistemologies developed through oppressive realities as assets they bring to collegiate environments without romanticizing such assets as what Nicolazzo refers to as "inspiration porn" that prevents the dismantling of trans*phobia and the myriad oppressive systems it intersects.

Second, funds of identity as a framework (when queered) emerges from this study as one potential theoretical model scholars can use to better understand and center trans* epistemologies in their work. While many have advocated for the need for more asset-based scholarship centering trans* communities, potential pathways on how to engage such inquiry remain underdiscussed. This absence might offer one explanation as to why the majority of asset-based scholarship centering trans* communities is conducted by scholars who themselves also identify as trans*. As problematized by Lange and colleagues (2019), trans* scholars and practitioners are often expected to take the focus on working with trans* communities both in their scholarship and at their institutions. One does not need to be trans* to engage in meaningful, transformative work with trans* communities; similarly, one does not need to be trans* in order to explore trans* students' funds of identity, or to center trans* students' funds of identity as assets in their research and praxis.

We all Experience our Trans*ness Differently as a Result of our Varied, Intersecting Identities

One of the core principles of funds of identity as a school of thought is the understanding that funds of identity are largely individual in nature. That understanding subsequently guided

much of the presentation of my findings. As this tenet of Nicolazzo's (2017) reminds, and as the findings of this study corroborate, no two people experience trans*ness the same way. As the experiences of participants who identify as trans* Students of Color and/or disabled demonstrate, people who hold additional minoritized identities in tandem with their trans*ness navigate complex, nuanced, and wholly diverging matrices of oppression than do white trans* people whose trans*ness is their sole minoritized identity.

This being said, an unsettling majority of scholarship centering trans* individuals in higher education does so without discussing the nuanced experiences of trans* individuals who hold multiple minoritized identities, particularly the experiences of trans* People of Color (Duran, 2019; Gutzwa, 2022; Jackson et al., 2021). For one, scholars frequently take race-neutral approaches to trans*ness in their work regardless of whether participants or respondents within their sample identify as trans* People of Color; this occurs even when employing theoretical frameworks and/or methods that themselves are rooted in the work of Scholars of Color (Jackson et al., 2021). When race *is* discussed in scholarship centering trans* collegians, rarely is this discussion removed from conversations of whiteness. In his systematic literature review of scholarship on queer and trans* Collegians of Color in higher education, Duran (2019) located only two articles that exclusively explored the lives of trans* Collegians of Color "as opposed to having a few collegians of color in a larger sample of White people" (p. 397). This reality, frustratingly, has not significantly changed in the years following Duran's review. For example, at the time of its publication, an article of mine (Gutzwa, 2022) was one of only a few pieces published after Duran's review that solely centered trans* Students of Color, and potentially remains the only to exclusively center the narratives Indigenous trans* Students of Color.

Trans* Students of Color are routinely silenced and erased from scholarship in the same ways participants described the erasure of trans* People of Color from media representations of trans*ness, their course syllabi, and most elements of the universities they attend. When the realities of trans* Students of Color are not highlighted as a focal point in scholarship, it is impossible to expect actors within the field of higher education to act with the understanding that trans* identities are not monolithic. Taking a funds of identity approach means viewing trans* collegians as individuals holding unique identities, lived realities, and experiences navigating matrices of domination. As argued by Duran and Nicolazzo (2017), a Black trans* student does not stop being both Black and trans* when they enter the classroom; participants who identify as trans* Students of Color in this study similarly expressed that faculty rarely held space for them to engage more than one of their minoritized identities at a time, if they were even provided the space to engage one identity to begin with. Findings expand on conversations on race and trans*ness in the classroom by discussing how the societal erasure of narratives of trans* People of Color is reflected in the classroom, and also how experiencing this erasure societally shapes how trans* Students of Color navigate such silencing in the classroom.

In this study, I work to counter some of this silencing by naming the ways white supremacy and racism shape *all* trans* individuals' lives (not just those of trans* People of Color) and integrating conversations about race/racism throughout my presentation of findings; still, my approach to these conversations was imperfect. It is therefore important to also unpack the ways in which findings do not fully push the boundaries of conversations at the intersection of trans*ness and race. For one, while the majority of participants identified as trans* Students of Color, this study does not explicitly center trans* Collegians of Color. Additionally, while I intentionally wove conversations on race and racism into each of the textiles presented in

Chapter 4, I still mostly unpack intersections of racism and trans*phobia in one specific section of the findings. I name these realities to corroborate Duran's (2019) critiques regarding the dearth of higher education scholarship exclusively centering trans* Collegians of Color, as well as to take accountability my own complicity in these systems by generating scholarship that, in some ways, remains comparative across white/non-white racial dichotomies.

In and Through Community With Each Other, we Have the Power to Heal and Remake Ourselves as Trans* People

Findings from this study reinforce the importance of "found family" for trans* individuals in learning more about their identities, building communities of support, and navigating life both on and off campus as a trans* student. As a collective, however, no participant's "found family" was solely comprised of other trans* individuals. The kinship a trans* person builds with other trans* people provides an even more sacred connection, as "it is by each other's sides that we can commune and create a world in which possibilities for our gendered pasts/presents/futures are proliferated rather than stifled" (Nicolazzo, 2017, p. 12). For this reason, I will revisit the importance of "found family" and other non-biological modes of kinship for participants in the following tenet, and instead choose to focus the present discussion on the ways both the findings and methods of this study speak to the importance of building trans* community.

The vitality of building community with other trans* people was expressed by all participants who were able to do so. Scholarship centering the kinship trans* students build with one another largely centers extracurricular contexts, including gender-affirming housing (e.g., Bautista et al., 2018; Chang & Leets, Jr., 2018) and campus LGBTQ+ affinity centers (e.g., Marine & Nicolazzo, 2014). Rarely, however, do scholars explore how trans* community can be

built between trans* individuals in collegiate classes. For example, though Duran and Nicolazzo (2017) discuss the relationships trans* students build with professors and peers in the classroom broadly, their findings do not explore the potential for trans* individuals to build community with one another in classroom environments. I interpret the overall absence of scholarship that discusses the formation of trans* community in classrooms as an implication in literature that collegiate classrooms are not spaces where kinship between trans* students can be built.

This is an assumption that findings from this study disrupt in several ways. First, several participants utilized the classroom as a way to potentially meet other queer and trans* people, such as how both Em and James mentioned how they chose to present gender in the classroom in a way that might signal their trans* identities to others in the aim of building community. For others such as Carol and Egg, who both spoke about challenging trans*phobic discourse in the classroom to serve as form of representation for trans* identities in their classes partially in the hope of making the classroom safer for other trans* students, their agential, community-centered actions demonstrate how trans* communities can thrive beyond the temporal and physical limitations some might place on community. Queer theorists have provided language to explain some of these tensions. Sara Ahmed uses the language of "imagined community" as she "encourages an interrogation of the relationship between the re-imagining of communities and the materiality of everyday life" (2011, p. 257). In doing so, she queers understandings of how community between individuals who share identities can be built. To build community, interpersonal connection is not necessary, but rather can be imagined ideologically. Both Carol and Egg's active decision to disrupt trans*phobia in the classroom demonstrates how their imagined communities with trans* people collectively (those who they know, who they might know, who they don't; those who came before them in classes, those who might share classes

with them currently, those who will come after them) are influential in determining how they act and perform in the classroom. Here, classrooms themselves can be considered places where trans* students build multiple modalities of community with one another.

Beyond the findings of this study, the methods I used in data collection further demonstrate the healing power of building trans* communities. Though it is not necessary to be trans* to center trans*ness in one's scholarship, there is a certain magic that can occur in a research setting where all who are involved hold trans* identities. As I discuss both in Chapter 3 and elsewhere (Gutzwa, 2022), I came into my own trans and nonbinary identities through the act of participating in research with trans* collegians. I attribute much of my own gender identity development to the ways I elicited identity artifacts from participants in my research. Both in this study and the preceding pilot study (Gutzwa, 2021a; 2022), I gave participants the option to also participate in the writing of "I am from…" poems and drawing of significant circles in community with them. When I identified as a cisgender man during data collection for the pilot study, I made this offer partly in the hopes of building rapport with participants by subverting the power dynamics of a traditional interview setting: rather than me holding all of the power to asking questions of participants, we each had the ability to share our own identity artifacts with one another and learn more about the other's world view.

My relation to this technique shifted as I came into my trans and nonbinary identities, a process which occurred in part as I created and shared my identity artifacts with participants in the pilot study. In the present study, the act of sharing identity artifacts still helped to debase some of the power dynamics that can make interviews uncomfortable for the participant. As I identified as trans and nonbinary through the duration of data collection, however, offering to create and share identity artifacts alongside my participants took a new form. Through writing

and reciting our poems and through drawing and sharing our circles, I built some of the first relationships with other trans* people that I had ever made in my life. This act of building community *with* the students who participated in this study was and remains sacred to me.

In both studies, the ritual of sharing myself with participants through the artifacts I created and allowing them to ask as many questions as they wanted about myself before I began the formal interview was healing for me–not just for Justin the researcher, but for Justin the person. These activities opened windows into my own soul. They were where I formed my understandings of my own identity. They were locations where I was able to build community with trans* people, after years spent in education environments where almost all of the trans* people I "knew" were those whose scholarship I had read, or whose faces I had seen on television. At the same time, a number of participants shared how their experiences participating in the mutual creation of identity artifacts was healing for them as well.

Discussion sections normally prioritize connecting findings to literature and theory. While the findings of this study also connect to this tenet of trans* epistemology, the communal act of discovering and sharing our individual funds of identity as self-authored epistemologies which participants and I engaged in together underscores how the arts of research design and data collection can be transformative when carrying out research as a trans* scholar in community with trans* people. The methods of data collection used in qualitative studies that adopt funds of identity as a theoretical lens, such as the extended multi-method autobiographical approach (Esteban-Guitart, 2012) and the creation and elicitation of identity artifacts (Gutzwa & Wofford, 2022; Wofford & Gutzwa, 2022), are demonstrative of how the research environment itself can serve as a site where trans* people can build communities that heal and foster reimagination and recreation of the self.

Our Continued De/re/construction of our Trans* Subjectivities Spans Material and Virtual Environments

In sharing her own experiences coming into her trans* identity, Nicolazzo (2017) explains how the first ways she built community with trans* people was through reading the published epistemologies of trans* authors. Additionally, trans* participants in her scholarship (e.g., Nicolazzo, 2016), the scholarship of others (e.g., Miller, 2017), and my own scholarship (both in this study and in Gutzwa, 2021a) have all explained the ways that digital spaces helped them build kinship networks with other trans* people and develop their own self-understandings. Across these conversations, the ways trans* identities develop and reconstruct both in and beyond the physical spaces trans * people occupy and the immediate interpersonal relationships trans* people hold become clear.

Findings from this study offer insight into many of the ways trans* students develop their epistemologies through virtual and material spaces. For one, stories such as Yujin's experience building community through Discord servers for butch lesbians affirm the work of many (e.g., Miller, 2016; Nicolazzo, 2015; 2016; 2017) who argue that digital spaces (particularly social media platforms) are locations where trans* collegians are able to build community and self-educate about trans* identities. At the same time, however, the scholars who sing the praises of social media often tend to romanticize social media as a universally positive force for trans* collegians without nuancing their discussions (Gutzwa, 2021b). Findings from this study push existing conversations on social media and trans*ness by dulling some of the rose-colored tint scholars have previously viewed social media through. For example, almost all participants who identify as Students of Color named social media as a somewhat damaging force in their identity development because of their overwhelming whiteness and subsequent erasure of trans* People

of Color. This nuance demonstrates one way that findings complicate the implicature of social media as a wholly positive force advanced by higher education scholarship.

Findings also speak to the ways scholars have explored trans* realities in the collegiate classroom. Just as Nicolazzo (2017) described her engagement with the writing of trans* authors as formative in the development of her identity, some participants, including Carol and Yujin, explained how engaging trans*-related materials in their classes facilitated their exploration of their trans* identities. To revisit Ahmed's (2011) discussion of "imagined community" which I introduced earlier in this chapter, the visibility of trans*ness on a course syllabus helped connect participants to other trans* people by helping them form intangible kinship networks that, in turn, facilitated the development of their own epistemologies. As such, these stories further confirm the importance of including trans* realities in course syllabi for trans* students' personal and academic development (Duran & Nicolazzo, 2017; Pryor, 2015). Similarly, participants who discussed their frustrations at the lack of trans* representation on course syllabi as one barrier to their participation in classroom dialogues. This finding was particularly salient for trans* Students of Color, as illustrated through the ways Chris disengaged from conversations in both his race-centric and gender-centric classes because he was frustrated by the lack of course materials that acknowledged the intersections of race and trans*ness. Chris' story is a direct converse to one finding from my earlier work, which described one Indigenous (Zapotec) trans* Student of Color's near euphoric experience watching a documentary centering Zapotec trans* communities in one of their classes (Gutzwa, 2022); in conversation with one another, these findings confirm how the intentional inclusion of the voices of trans* Communities of Color on a course syllabus can be a radical, trans*-inclusive, anti-racist pedagogical strategy.

Beyond augmenting the body of scholarship centering trans* students in higher education, mapping the experiences of participants onto this tenet demonstrates several ways how the findings of this study also advance funds of identity scholarship more broadly. One of the greatest limitations of existing implementations of funds of identity as a framework lies in how scholars discuss where and when individuals develop their funds of identity (Gutzwa, 2021a). As I problematize extensively in Chapter 2, traditional approaches to funds of knowledge and funds of identity prioritize the exploration of funds that individuals develop through earlier-in-life interactions with their nuclear families, the physical confines of their "households," and the people, places, and institutions that are located in their immediate communities. As the first textile I present in the findings demonstrates, trans* students do also develop funds of their identity through such interactions.

Limiting the discussion of trans* students' funds to these spatial, material, and temporal confines, however, ignores the rich and nuanced ways trans* epistemologies take shape across and between both time and space. For one, the aforementioned findings at the nexus of trans*ness and digital space would never have emerged had I not asked participants to speak to all of the places they developed understandings of their identity, and instead asked them just to prioritize the messages about trans*ness they internalized in their homes. Further, had I limited my understanding of funds of identity to be ways of knowing developed early in one's life, I would not have authentically understood the ways trans* identities and epistemologies develop and reinvent themselves continually throughout trans* collegians' lives, particularly during their time in college. The most glaring omission, however, would have been ignoring the roles participants' "found family" played in developing understandings of their identities and supporting them through their educational trajectories. Findings therefore demonstrate how it is

necessary to continue to challenge the ways funds of identity has traditionally overlooked many nuances in trans* realities in order to extend funds frameworks to trans* communities. Failure to do so would prevent the totality of trans* students' funds from being ascertained, therein ignoring many of the assets trans* students employ as navigational strategies in the classroom.

In/visibility and its Varied Meanings are Central to our Senses of Self, Community, and Kinship.

Politics of trans* in/visibility are loaded, to say the least. What is liberatory for some might be social death for others, a reality that is especially true when considering the nuanced ways each person experiences their own trans*ness (Nicolazzo, 2017). Participants in this study and scholars alike (e.g., Brockenbrough, 2015; Nicolazzo, 2017), for example, discuss the myriad reasons why universally advocating for wide-spread trans* visibility ignores the intersections of multiple modes of systemic oppression that make trans* visibility safer for some than it is for others. Participants, namely those who identify as trans* Students of Color, also discussed the range of ways trans* in/visibility in the media impacted their development of their identities, their epistemologies, and ultimately the ways they navigate classroom environments.

Findings from this study substantiate existing discussions of the in/visibility of trans*ness in collegiate classrooms. As scholars have discussed, trans* students hold a range of complicated opinions of their classrooms, ranging from feeling the need to self-police identity to be accepted to feeling obligated to share their identities to gain access to class discussion (Duran & Nicolazzo, 2017; Pryor, 2015). Similar frustrations regarding their own in/visibility as trans* people were expressed by many participants in this study, who explained varying ways in which classrooms were environments where participants experienced discursive violence and feared the potential of physical violence. On another note, participants in this study further supported Duran

& Nicolazzo's (2017) finding that "faculty members and students who saw trans* collegians as partners in learning mitigated trans* oppression" (p. 536). Egg, Ryan, Yujin, and Carol, for example, shared experiences where instructors affirmed their contributions related to trans*ness that were rooted in their own lived experiences, accepted and applied their feedback on using more trans*-inclusive language, or supported them in learning more about trans*ness through open-ended course assignments. In these cases, instructors viewed students as "partners in learning" by allowing them to bring their funds of identity directly into the classroom. By recognizing participants' trans* epistemologies as assets to their classrooms, these faculty members and teaching assistants created and sustained learning environments that were radical in their inclusion and acceptance of trans* realities. Through these dualities, it becomes clear that the impact of trans* in/visibility in the classroom on trans* collegians remains complex, nuanced, and context-dependent.

One final expansion findings offer extant literature is by nuancing conversations on in/visibility in the classroom through discussing both in-person and virtual classroom environments. For example, Duran & Nicolazzo (2017) discuss the power of classrooms where professors initiate micro interactions asking students for their pronouns. The funds of identity participants in this study developed throughout their lives, however, complicate this understanding: while some, like Em, found it less intimidating to disclose their pronouns on Zoom than it was to do so in-person, others, like X, experienced anxiety and at times dysphoria when they were unable to remove pronouns left over in their Zoom name from extracurricular meetings prior to entering the Zoom classroom. Further, because scholars have discussed how engagement with digital environments like social media supports trans* collegians' resilience (Nicolazzo, 2015), particularly for trans* students with disabilities (Miller, 2017), it might be

natural to assume that virtual classrooms similarly supported trans* students' identities in ways in-person learning might not. While this was true for some participants (such as Ryan and Em, who both discussed how their need to compromise physical comfort to perform gender in an affirming way when attending in-person classes became a non-issue on Zoom), Yujin and X's experiences navigating virtual classes as neurodivergent trans* Students of Color heightened their gender dysphoria and anxiety, particularly when expected to have their cameras on during class, making their Zoom classrooms unsafe and counterproductive learning environments. As colleges and universities continue to reckon with the COVID-19 pandemic, such differences between in-person, virtual, and hybrid classrooms become all the more important to unpack.

Implications

This study marks one of the first theoretical implementations of funds of identity in empirical postsecondary education research; it also contributes to the nascent utilization of funds of identity as an asset-based tool in understanding trans* individuals' ways of knowing. In these respects, the present work both contributes to and advances the robust body of funds of identity scholarship in meaningful ways. Further, placing the findings of this study in conversation with extant scholarship on trans* collegians, funds of identity, and trans* epistemological work illuminates many of the complex realities that face trans* collegians in their classrooms. As discussed at length, the funds of identity trans* students develop throughout their lives emerge from the findings of this study as assets which aid trans* collegians in navigating the interlocking modes of oppression they encounter in curricular spaces. In the same way that trans* students employ their own funds of identity as tools throughout their personal educational journeys, a funds of identity approach can be used by scholars, pedagogues, practitioners, and policy makers to disrupt the settler colonial, white supremacist, trans*phobic systems of

domination that are perpetuated by the field of higher education daily. In this section, I explore how findings from this study advance funds of identity as a framework, as well as inform future higher education research, praxis, and policy, in working towards the advancement and actualization of trans* liberation.

Implications for theory

Before addressing the implications that this study has for the field of higher education, I feel it is important to show how this study advances funds of identity as both a theoretical framework and pedagogical approach. First, the combination of educational contexts and social identities that this study includes highlights several ways this work evolves funds of identity as a framework. By exploring funds of knowledge in the context of postsecondary education, for example, this study nuances the body of extant funds of identity literature – the majority of which is rooted in early childhood educational settings (e.g., Esteban-Guitart, 2016; 2021; Poole & Huang, 2018). Placing this study in concert with this literature now means that funds of identity theoretically sits almost at the bookends of students' educational journeys: whereas scholars have previously theorized and demonstrated how children's funds of identity develop, are understood, and can be utilized in their classrooms, this study demonstrates how students' funds of identity remain assets to their educational development (no matter how much they shift or evolve with the flow of linear time) in undergraduate contexts.

This burgeoning inquiry into funds of identity at the collegiate level also complicates existing understandings of what individuals' funds are, how these funds develop and are understood, and ultimately how funds can be used in pedagogy and praxis. While queer time is not itself linear, it is impossible to deny that college students are largely at different stages in their educational, identity, and personal development than are children in their early childhoods.

In kind, children in early childhood education settings understand and utilize their funds of identity differently than undergraduate collegians might. One example of this potential can be seen in Esteban-Guitart's (2021) distinction between visible and invisible funds of identity. In differentiating these funds, Esteban-Guitart argues that children are largely unaware of their own invisible funds of identity, referencing the fact that these funds are difficult to locate within the identity artifacts that they produce. As such, he argues that teacher mediation might be required to unearth students' invisible funds, particularly those shaped by societal forces of power and domination.

In this study, however, many participants actively understood the ways these same forces shaped their understanding of their identities, their world views, and their educational trajectories. In fact, many discussed their experiences with cisheteronormativity, racism, colonialism, ableism, and more in the "I am from…" poems and significant circles they produced. As I introduced in Chapter 4, for example, Carol and Yujin both wrote poems that made direct reference to the language they internalized that had been used to subjugate their identities throughout much of their lives, showing how the identity artifacts they produced in the research setting did, in fact, illuminate the funds of their identities that Esteban-Guitart might describe as "invisible." Though they might not have used the language of "funds of identity" themselves when describing their world views, participants in this study by and large showed a certain awareness of the impact of power on their lived realities, openly discussing the ways systemic domination informed their understanding of their trans*ness and other social identities.

One possible takeaway from these findings is that time, lived experience, and identity development all blur the lines between what funds of identity are "visible" and "invisible" in nature. The stories shared by participants in this study illustrate that, unlike younger children,

many college students are able to recognize and verbalize the ways their understandings of their identities have been shaped by cisheteronormativity, racism, ableism, and other modes of domination–and while producing and discussing identity artifacts might have facilitated these connections being drawn, I imagine many would be able to discuss these funds of their identity without my aid as a researcher. By exploring funds of identity at different stages of educational development and degree attainment, it becomes possible to challenge existing understandings of what funds of identity are, how they develop, and how they can be used by learners, teachers, and researchers alike–ultimately advancing funds of identity as a framework.

Additionally, extending the exploration of funds of identity to trans* communities advances funds of identity as a framework beyond novelty in several ways. Reimagining kinship to displace the historical reliance on individuals' households as the primary origin of their funds of identity, for one, offers clear guidance for how future funds-based work can be explicitly trans*-inclusive by design. Intentionally centering not just trans*ness but the relationality between power, oppression, and trans* realities in this study also demonstrates how funds of identity can be used as a framework to critically examine systems of domination as they manifest in education. As Esteban-Guitart (2021) documents, many scholars have historically critiqued funds of knowledge and funds of identity scholarship for not addressing hegemonic discourses that serve to stratify education against students holding systemically minoritized identities–a critique which I wholeheartedly agree with.

Just because an approach is asset-based does not mean that it acknowledges or tackles the systems of domination that lie at the root of deficit-framed ideologies. As such, while earlier implementations of funds of identity as a framework might have responded to deficit-minded mentalities of minoritized student populations, they did not fully offer ways to reimagine

research, pedagogy, and praxis in ways that displace the systems of domination that appear in classrooms. The findings of the present study go beyond prior empirical work guided by funds of identity because they show not just how trans* students' funds of identity are valuable to their educational development, but also how trans* collegians harness their funds in response to the oppressive systems that perpetuate trans*phobia and cisheteronormativity in the collegiate classroom. In doing so, this study provides potential guidance for future funds-based scholarship on how to intentionally integrate critical perspectives (like queer theory) with funds of identity to acknowledge and disrupt power front and center.

Implications for research

Funds-based scholarship has evolved considerably in the nearly 30 years following the original studies that coined and explored funds of knowledge conceptually (Ramos & Kiyama, 2021). As I document in greater detail in Chapter 2, the extension of funds of knowledge scholarship to higher education opened countless doors of possibility for reimagining the many deficit-based mentalities the field holds of minoritized communities. The utilization of funds of identity as a theoretical approach in postsecondary education research, however, is far more burgeoning. Though scholars have suggested the use of funds of identity as an asset-based lens for postsecondary scholarship (Rodriguez et al., 2020), or have even provided adaptations of funds of identity as frameworks for critical qualitative work in higher education research and praxis (e.g., funds of science identity, as theorized for use in postsecondary STEM contexts by Wofford & Gutzwa (2022)), few have employed funds of identity in empirical scholarship at the postsecondary level; my review of literature suggests that this study and the pilot study which proceeded it (Gutzwa, 2021a) are among the first–if not the first–published empirical studies that employ funds of identity as a framework in the context of higher education.

Thus, one of the largest implications of this study is that funds of identity is a powerful, asset-based theoretical framework that holds rich potential to transform scholarship in the field of higher education. In a narrative inquiry of how three trans* collegians at one public university in the United States use their funds of identity to navigate collegiate classrooms (Gutzwa, 2021a), I previously discussed this anti-deficit potential of funds of identity in work with trans* college students. As this study first and foremost centers trans* identities, findings corroborate the fact that scholarship exploring trans* student experiences "must not only continue to center the narratives and experiences of trans* people but also work to view the wealth of lived experiences trans* collegians hold as assets" (Gutzwa, 2021a, p. 319). The varied ways participants in this study described being silenced, aggressed, tokenized, otherized, and omitted from collegiate academic spaces demonstrates that at many institutions of higher education, deficit-based understandings of trans* identities are still the overwhelming norm.

Future scholarship exploring trans* collegians' curricular experiences must continue to be asset-based in orientation–not just to disrupt these oppressive logics in and out of the collegiate classroom, but to transform the ways the field of higher education understands trans* identities. Additionally, as many scholars have argued (e.g., Duran, 2019; Duran & Nicolazzo, 2017; Gutzwa, 2021a; Jackson et al., 2021), and as the findings from this study corroborate, discussing queer and trans* identities in a race-neutral way serves to only advance the needs of white trans* communities. As such, scholarship must not only continue to explore the intersections of trans* identities and minoritized racial and ethnic identities, but must also continue to explore all of the varying modes of oppression trans* people experience *in conjunction with and in relation to* their trans* identities. Just as participants who identify as trans* Students of Color lamented the detrimental impact that the omnipresence of white trans*

narratives in media had on their identity development, a dearth of scholarship exploring the realities of trans* Students of Color in higher education research perpetuates the racist silencing of Communities of Color that has long plagued the field. This study positions funds of identity as one of many available frameworks that can engage these intersections of identity and oppression.

Funds of identity as a framework, however, is not only useful in exploring the experiences of trans* students. Scholars including Rodriguez and colleagues (2020) and Wofford and Gutzwa (2022), for example, have suggested funds of identity as a powerful framework to explore the experiences of students holding minoritized identities in postsecondary STEM education. Further, my earlier work with funds of identity (Gutzwa, 2021a) suggested funds of identity as a powerful framework for use in scholarship exploring the realities of queer and trans* individuals who hold multiple minoritized identities. Many of the participants in this study are people who navigate multiple axes of minoritization daily. Their stories speak to the ways that trans*phobia, racism, ableism, classism, and other modes of domination are pervasive, interlocking, white supremacist projects of settler colonialism.

Shifting the locus of analysis from trans* identities to, for example, minoritized racial and ethnic identities would not diminish the anti-deficit nature of funds as a framework; this is because, by design, the approach to funds of identity employed in this study works to decenter "the most privileged of queer and trans people" by exploring how trans*ness intersects other identities (Lange et al., 2019, p. 520). When intentionally theorized and applied in conjunction with critical theories (e.g., queer theory and Black, Indigenous, and other Women of Color feminisms, as discussed in Gutzwa (2022)), funds of identity evolves from a mere asset-based framework into a lens that disrupts the collective of intersecting deficit-based mentalities that are reified in higher education to subjugate minoritized communities. Scholars working to disrupt

deficit-based ideology should thus employ funds of identity in their work. Specifically, such scholars should continue to play in and push the boundaries of the theoretical sandbox funds of identity provides by theorizing funds of identity in intellectual community with new critical frameworks such inquiry has yet to explore.

In order to dismantle structures of power that subjugate trans* collegians, future scholarship must continue to interrogate higher education's complicity in trans*phobia in all of its forms. Without radically reforming the collegiate classroom, it is impossible to envision an institution that wholly uplifts its trans* students. Thus, if the goal of scholarship centering trans* students is truly to transform institutions into spaces that celebrate and affirm trans* realities, it is particularly vital for scholars to continue questioning how trans*phobia manifests in the collegiate classroom. As Lange and colleagues (2019) argue, "the use of queer and trans epistemologies in educational practice continues to receive scant attention" at the postsecondary level (p. 522). While they primarily urge practitioners, administrators, and other stakeholders to adopt queer and trans epistemologies in their praxis with students, I extend their reasoning to the realm scholarship. Despite the fact that students primarily attend college for educational attainment, research on trans* student experiences still largely prioritizes the experiences that trans* students have *outside* of the classroom (Gutzwa, 2021a). Scholarship must continue to not only interrogate the classroom as a site of trans*phobia, but to do so using theories and methods that amplify trans* epistemologies and ways of knowing.

This aim underscores another layer of the powerful potential of funds of identity's utility in postsecondary scholarship. Because this work explicitly ascertains trans* students' embodied ways of knowing as data, the life force of this study *is* the collective of epistemologies my participants created throughout their lives and shared with me over the course of our engagement

with one another. In presenting the findings of this study, I draw not only on the "traditional" modes of qualitative inquiry I engaged by conducting semi-structured interviews with participants, but also present excerpts from the "I am from…" poems and descriptions of the significant circle drawings participants created. I do so for grander aims than to just triangulate data or supplement the supposed "rigor" of my scholarship. By presenting identity artifacts as participants produced them, I ground this work firmly in the epistemologies that trans* students shared with me during data collection. Doing so disrupts the normative whiteness in qualitative research by decentering white modes of knowledge production (e.g., traditional interviews, observation data) as the only "correct," "academic," "publishable" forms of knowledge (Bhattacharya, 2019). The arts-based methods used in this study were vital in highlighting participants' funds. As such, this study's findings corroborate my understanding that funds of identity scholarship "can challenge colonially-informed deficit mentalities of all students who hold minoritized identities, and especially trans* students, by privileging their identities and ways of knowing as valuable, both in and out of the classroom" (Gutzwa, 2021a, p. 320). Beyond promoting the use of self-authored trans* epistemologies in research, this line of reasoning also implores that more qualitative scholarship should utilize creative, arts-based methods–particularly when exploring individuals' funds of identity (Gutzwa & Wofford, 2022).

Outside of scholarship utilizing a funds of identity lens, findings from this study additionally suggest future directions for work centering trans* collegians more broadly. First, future scholarship must continue to interrogate classrooms as places on university campuses where trans*-based oppression and other modes of domination are reproduced. As findings demonstrate, one impact of exploring trans* collegians' classroom experiences is that such inquiry presents avenues to disrupt deficit-based understandings of trans* students (Gutzwa,

2021a). Beyond this, however, continued exploration of the collegiate classroom offers the ability to further envision the ways higher education prioritizes normative modes of knowledge production in its functioning. Findings show that complete inquiry into trans* students' experiences in the classroom illuminates more than just the ways trans* voices are silenced in college curriculum. By speaking to the totality of minoritized identities trans* students hold in tandem with their trans*ness, scholars can continue to unearth nuances in how higher education silences those minoritized identities as well. As Duran & Nicolazzo (2017) argue, for example, specifically centering the narratives of trans* Students of Color enables simultaneous engagement with trans*phobia and racism as modes of domination students experience in their courses; through attending to the intersections of race and gender, scholars can ideate liberatory educational practices that similarly operate at the intersections of race and gender.

Finally, trans*phobia does not only exist at 4-year institutions, and does not only manifest in traditional brick-and-mortar classroom settings. Due to the national sample of this study and the subsequent lack of restrictions on institutional type for participation, findings from this study underline the variable nature of classroom experiences in higher education. Institutional type, for example, was particularly salient for how trans* collegians understood, experienced, and ultimately navigated their classrooms, as demonstrated in part by the difference in experiences between those who were able to have more autonomy in their course selection process (e.g., options of multiple possible instructors, being able to take classes outside of their major) and those who were not. Additionally, as shown by the varied narratives of participants navigating the switch from in-person to remote learning as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, findings expose differences in how trans* students experience different classroom modalities. Finally, findings underscore nuances in how trans* students navigate classrooms at 2-year and 4-

year institutions, as Em and Kenan's experiences in trans*phobic community college classes suggest. These considerations suggest that future scholarship exploring trans* collegians' classroom experiences should continue to account for nuances in institution type and classroom setting, and particularly should center postsecondary environments oftentimes excluded from scholarship (e.g., community colleges, online classrooms) because they are not the "normative" institution type (read: residential, 4-year degree-granting institutions) prioritized in research. This imperative is even more important when we remember that a sizable amount of scholarship exploring trans* issues in higher education do so within the context of one institution (e.g., Billodeau, 2005; Nicolazzo, 2016) or institutions of similar type (e.g., Dirks, 2016).

Implications for praxis

Funds of identity offers an innovative way to amplify the self-authored epistemologies of trans* individuals in scholarship. Revisiting Lange and colleagues' (2019) arguments in favor of the increased utilization of queer and trans* epistemologies in postsecondary praxis, I also position funds of identity as a powerful approach practitioners and pedagogues can employ in their work with trans* students. K-12 education scholars and teachers have argued for funds of identity as an asset-based pedagogical approach "that fosters self-reflection and self-expression, as well as moves toward an educational practice that is responsive to learners in the classroom" (Flint & Jaggers, 2021, p. 256). K-12 scholars have also explored the power of radical trans inclusive pedagogy (e.g., Keenan, 2017; Keenan & Hot Mess, 2021) in transforming classroom spaces not just for queer and trans* students, but for all learners. As the findings of this dissertation implore, trans*phobia in the classroom does not magically evaporate when one matriculates from K-12 schooling to postsecondary spaces; simply put, there is thus no reason why these conversations should not also be extended to higher education. In this section, I argue

that ascertaining trans* collegians' funds of identity can be used by instructors and practitioners alike to transform their course curricula, pedagogical praxis, and relationality to students in ways that celebrate, affirm, and liberate trans* epistemologies.

In Chapter 4, I discussed the various ways trans* students used their funds of identity to navigate classroom environments. In some of the narratives presented, participants described the ways that they brought their trans* identities into assignments, class discussions, and interactions with faculty in order to challenge identity-based oppression in the classroom. One broad implication which emerges from these findings is that there is always more that can be done in any class, regardless of discipline, to allow trans* students to tap into their identities in the classroom. As others have argued (e.g., Gutzwa, 2021a; Nicolazzo, 2017), findings corroborate the value of including trans* identities in course readings, lectures, materials, and discussions as a form of representation in the classroom. Such inclusion must, however, be intentional. First, pedagogues cannot expect or rely on their trans* students to fill in the gaps in their instruction. Faculty must actively work to learn the ways trans* identities connect with their course content by seeking out and including trans* scholarship in their syllabi. In doing so, faculty can take one step towards unlearning their internalized trans*phobia, particularly as it relates to their field of study. While it is not possible for every class in every department to center gender and identity as a focus, it is always possible to learn from and include the voices of trans* scholars within one's discipline in course material. Additionally, while including trans* people should never be an afterthought (especially in a class explicitly discussing identity), almost worse is the silencing of the voices of trans* people who hold multiple minoritized identities, particularly trans* People of Color. Such strategies are small, intrinsically motivated steps instructors can take to create classrooms that affirm trans* identities.

Visibility of trans*ness on a syllabus is not where inclusivity stops, however. The issue is not just *what* one teaches, but also *how* one teaches what they teach. Many participants reflected positively on the environments where they were given space to explore the intersection between their identities and course material through projects and assignments. Many also explained how they understood thing such as the inclusion of a professor's pronouns on syllabi or email signatures or conversations about anti-discrimination policies at the start of a term as indicators that professors would be supportive of their identities. While not always foolproof, these recommendations demonstrate that it really is not difficult to model trans*-inclusivity through one's pedagogical practice. That being said, signaling inclusivity and actually being inclusive are two entirely different things. When Kenan and James mentioned their trans* identities in their course assignments, for example, both had professors that responded either through a series of microaggressions or direct hostility. When Egg challenged their professor for relying on second-wave, trans*-exclusionary feminist ideals in her course discussions, that professor silenced Egg in the classroom and publicly mocked Egg in a campus restaurant within earshot of Egg. These damaging narratives demonstrate that providing space to discuss identity is only one part of the battle: when opening oneself to learning about their students' identities, it is important to do so in a way that *affirms* these identities and contributions, rather than further oppressing them.

One way that instructors can intentionally tap into their students' identities in the classroom is through taking a funds of identity approach to their pedagogy. The methods used during data collection to ascertain students' funds of identity can similarly be adapted for use in pedagogical praxis. In theorizing the framework of funds of science identity, Annie Wofford and I (2022) argue that classrooms become identity-affirming when students are provided space to produce identity artifacts as a part of the classroom environment. As we argue, identity artifacts

can take the form of "I am from…" poems or significant circles, such as was the case in this study, education journey maps as proposed by Annamma (2017), or any other visual, linguistic, auditory, or otherwise creative mode of identity exploration. Infusing courses with exercises where students can generate identity artifacts is powerful for several reasons. First, engaging with identity artifacts as an instructor allows for the instructor to ascertain and tap into their students' funds of identity, similarly to how engaging with participants' identity artifacts in the research setting of this study highlighted their funds of identity. By knowing students' ways of knowing, it becomes easier to tailor course content to them, invite their contributions in a productive manner, and build relationships with students beyond the classroom that can support their intellectual and personal development.

Second, students in the classroom can share identity artifacts with one another as a way to build community in the classroom. In one class I taught, for example, I asked students to draft "I am from…" poems at the start of the second course session. For the next 4 weeks, students started each class by pairing up with someone they had not yet connected with and sharing their poems with one another. Giving students the opportunity to share their poems and learn more about one another through creative reflection allowed students to build community that lasted beyond the end of the academic term: I am still in touch with many of the students from that class, who often tell me about the lasting friendships they made with peers in the space based on the community built through creating and sharing identity artifacts. While it might seem frivolous to devote an ample amount of time to identity exploration and community building, doing so created an environment where students felt affirmed and confident when bringing their ways of knowing into the space throughout the term, creating a vibrant educational environment

with rich, engaging conversations where students demonstrated mastery of subject material in part through *how* they engaged their own identities in relation to course content.

This anecdote is one small demonstration of the power of taking a funds of identity approach in teaching as well as in research. Through this work, I have learned that much of my pedagogy is informed by how I cultivate healing and generative spaces in my research, and vice-versa. One final implication this reflection has given me is the importance of also sharing one's own identity as an instructor of a course. As discussed earlier, I gave participants the option of having me participate in the creation of identity artifacts alongside them–when asked to, we wrote poems and drew significant circles in tandem, sharing them with one another as a way to build our shared understanding of one another and lay the ground for an honest, healing conversation. Similarly, when I ask students in my class to create "I am from…" poems, I lead the activity by sharing one of my own with the class. Participants including Ryan, Egg, and Moss all discussed the ways learning more about their instructors' identities created classroom spaces and advising relationships where they felt comfortable sharing more of themselves with their faculty. By participating in identity artifact creation, I share my own funds of identity with my students, just as they share theirs with me. Through this reciprocal transparency, we can build our own understandings of the world around us, in turn further developing the funds of identity we bring into our academic work. Activities such as these can be used in all academic disciplines and regardless of course content to make the classroom an identity-affirming space (Wofford & Gutzwa, 2022), a step I feel is vital to embodying trans*-inclusive approaches to pedagogy.

Another area for praxis-based reform that this study explores is in remote instruction. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, institutions across the world were required to shift towards online, remote learning options. In light of these shifts, conversations have broadened regarding

the ways in which continuing to offer hybrid or fully remote learning options in postsecondary education can be a support for students–particularly queer and trans* students (Abrams & Abes, 2021). As the data collection for this study occurred in the height of the pandemic, all participants in this study were students who had experienced both in-person and remote classrooms; as discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4, many had diverging experiences navigating remote classrooms. As such, as we continue to wrestle with reforming remote postsecondary learning to be more inclusive and equitable for all, it is especially important to understand how remote classrooms can be made more equitable for trans* collegians.

One frustration I have personally encountered in reading suggestions on how to make remote classrooms more equitable is that the needs of trans* students are oftentimes ignored. Many documentations of "best-practices" for remote learning stress that instructors need to be flexible in their pedagogical styles, especially in how instructors monitor student participation by requiring cameras to be turned on or mandating verbal engagement in classes (Neuwirth et al., 2021). When making these suggestions, scholars oftentimes remind instructors that not all students have consistently quiet learning environments, or might not have stable access to internet in their learning environments; while these concerns are not mutually exclusive of the needs of trans* students, only framing access to and equity in remote learning on socioeconomic lines further silences the nuanced needs of trans* students, implying that requiring a camera to be turned on in a classroom is *only* a problem for students who cannot access stable internet.

In reality, many participants in this study had diverging positive and negative experiences navigating new expectations in remote classrooms. For some, like Ryan and Em, only having part of their bodies in the frame of view on a web camera or being able to control when and how their bodies were visible in class made the experience of navigating affirming gender

performance in class a more physically comfortable experience. By contrast, X and Yujin–two neurodivergent trans* Students of Color–reported that expectations to have their camera turned on at all times (regardless of whether these expectations were enforced through punitive directives or implied classroom norms) created hostile environments where the physical presentation of both their gender and neurodivergent identities felt policed by their professors, their peers, and even themselves. Additionally, while some expressed that the ability to add their pronouns to their names on remote platforms circumvented potentially uncomfortable conversations about gender identity in the classroom and helped normalize the use of gender-neutral pronouns, neo-pronouns, or other pronouns that subvert the cisgender binary, others felt uncomfortably outed when they lost control over their ability to assess the safety of disclosing their pronouns in a classroom space before doing so.

As with in-person, physical classes, the norms of identity performance and engagement in remote classes can be damaging to trans* students. Even with the best of intentions, faculty can employ pedagogical strategies that can other, ostracize, and harm their trans* students, inadvertently and oftentimes unknowingly. Ascertaining students' funds of identity in remote learning environments is one way to ensure that students' identities are respected in the classroom space, but is not the only way to understand the identities and potential needs of the students in one's classroom on a personal level. Sending a pre-course survey to ask students both what pronouns to use in referring to them in group settings *and* one-on-one, for example, not only can signal inclusivity of trans* identities to an incoming student who is trans, but also affirms the understanding of identity as fluid and changing based on contexts and environments. Not all trans* students use the same pronouns in the home, at work, in extracurricular activities, and in classroom settings (Gutzwa, 2022); keeping this in mind demonstrates that an instructor is

paying attention to the details of creating an actively trans*-inclusive classroom environment beyond merely signaling to students that they understand pronouns that disrupt the cisgender binary conceptually. Pre-course surveys are also a great way to understand students' intentions for taking a class, their passions and interests, and anything else they might want to share about their learning styles. Ascertaining the latter can be particularly helpful in working with disabled and/or neurodivergent students who might not have access to formal diagnoses, institutional accommodations, or other structural supports provided by their institution to support their learning and development. All of these also themselves *are* ways of ascertaining all students' funds of identity at the beginning of the course, and can aid an instructor in further developing not just their curriculum to be as accessible and engaging for students as possible, but also their inclusive pedagogical practices and strategies.

Implications for policy

For centuries, queer and trans* communities have been labeled as social pariahs by policy and society alike. In line with an increased visibility of queer and trans* people over the past several decades, sociopolitical and legal debates over the basic rights of queer and trans* people have spread throughout mainstream discourse internationally. Conservative outcry to the rise in popularity of Drag Queen Story Hours–one powerful mode of liberatory, trans*-inclusive pedagogy in early childhood education (Keenan & Hot Mess, 2021)–and state-level policy initiatives to ban trans* students participating in athletics are two examples of how fights for trans* equity have fueled a long-standing moral panic that paints queer and trans* people as threats to society, particularly children (Pepin-Neff & Cohen, 2021). These examples also highlight how, across all sectors of education in the United States, trans* people–and particularly trans* youth–are under attack by legislators and policy makers (Meyer & Keenan, 2018; Meyer

at al., 2022). In light of these disturbing realities, is arguably now more important than ever to utilize scholarship that centers trans* communities as assets to inform the creation of policy that advances the protection of trans* rights, both in and out of education. In this section, I outline ways this study can inform the development of such liberatory policy.

Many participants in this study openly discussed how debates on trans* rights in education and the existence of destructive legal and bureaucratic structures directly impacted them as they came into their trans* identities. Ryan, for example, was classmates with one prominent trans* student who sought legal action against their high school for anti-trans* policies. Others were trailblazers for trans* rights at their own schools: Jin's experiences fighting against school administrators at zir high school to challenge restrictions on what pronouns teachers were forced to refer to Jin by serve as one example of how trans* students are oftentimes forced to resort to self-advocacy in navigating trans*phobic barriers in education policy. It is therefore tempting to both begin and end discussions of policy-based implications by simply saying "protect trans* people," as that adage is the true fiber of this dissertation's being.

Doing so, however, would undercut the power that both the present work and funds-based approaches broadly can hold in transforming educational policy. As a theoretical framing for education research and praxis, funds-based approaches have long been positioned to "disrupt discourses of deficit, right from [their] earliest inception" (Oughton, 2010, p. 67). Foundationally, the first work using funds of knowledge in K-12 education contexts (Moll et al., 1992) illuminated the skills, ways of knowing, and proficiencies that students of Mexican origin developed through familial, working, and communal histories to "challenge the deficit thinking prevalent in education and the racist policies that misunderstand the inherent complexities of migrant people" (Llopart & Moll, 2018, p. 146). Over time, the language of "funds of

knowledge" has entered education policy discourse in attempts to disrupt deficit-framed teaching (Oughton, 2010). Internationally, some scholars have even argued for the incorporation of funds of knowledge approaches in national curricula (e.g., Thomson and Hall (2008), who discuss the potential value of formalizing funds of knowledge in the national curriculum of England).

Despite this history, the majority of scholars employing funds of identity approaches both in (e.g., Gutzwa, 2021a) and out (e.g., Poole & Huang, 2018) of higher education contexts have not fully explored the potential for funds of identity-based work to transform educational policy. This omission, in part, does a disservice to the ways trans* individuals develop funds of identity in response to (and subsequently utilize these funds of identity when continuing to navigate) the policy-based oppression they experience. One of the many ways taking a funds of identity approach in my work has impacted my understanding of the pervasive nature of trans*phobia is how centering students' embodied ways of knowing allowed me to uncover the ways policy shapes deficit-based mentalities of trans* individuals. Several narratives presented in Chapter 4, such as the vignettes profiling Jin and Kenan's experiences navigating oppressive educational and medical structures, demonstrate the ways that trans*phobic institutional, local, and national policies can inform the ways of knowing trans* individuals develop throughout their lives.

Hearing such stories, many might attribute the tribulations Jin, Kenan, and others endured to their trans* identities, rhetoric which implies that "if only this student were not trans*, they would not have had to figure out how to overcome these structural barriers on their own accord." Such damaging, dismissive logic is the root of deficit-based thinking, as it places the "blame" of structural violence on trans* identities, and therein the collective of individuals who hold trans* identities. Part of what emerges from funds-based approaches to research and praxis is the reframing of such deficit thinking. Just as ascertaining Mexican origin students' funds of

knowledge facilitated the broader disruption of racist K-12 education policies (Llopart & Moll, 2018), exploring trans* collegians' funds of identity exposes the embodied ways of they develop through their identities as not just tools collegians use to navigate structural violence in higher education, but as assets that they uniquely bring to their institutions. Because trans*phobic legislation is one root cause of the deficit-based mentalities trans* individuals are viewed through societally, it is my argument that transforming discourse on trans*ness to center asset-based language is a vital step in disrupting trans*phobic policies at a structural level. Said differently, adopting funds-based approaches in research and praxis is one way that we can actualize my earlier directive to "protect trans* people" through policy.

K-12 educational structures in the United States currently serve as one key battleground for trans* rights at a societal level. In a policy report discussing trans* equity in public K-12 schooling, Meyer and colleagues (2022) outline a range of recommendations for federal, state, and local policymakers working to engage trans* students in their policy work. Many of their recommendations, such as ensuring Title IX coordinators work and educate in accordance with updated guidance from the Office of Civil rights or advancing interdisciplinary, trans*-inclusive curricular reform efforts, have corollaries in higher education. Taking a funds of identity approach in work with trans* collegians thus corroborates the guiding questions that Meyer and colleagues (2022) pose to K-12 policymakers, which I adapt to postsecondary contexts:

- How can the federal government reduce structural barriers that subjugate trans* students as they matriculate from secondary to postsecondary institutions?
- How do we reform state-level laws that "reinforce inflexible structures surrounding gender" and therein limit trans* collegians' educational opportunities and realities (Meyer et al., 2022, p, 4)?

- How can postsecondary institutions partner with their local communities and legislators to sustain spaces that affirm and support trans* individuals?

These questions are pertinent to grapple with, especially as postsecondary policies designed in part to support trans* students oftentimes undermine these goals when they are implemented (Dirks, 2016). Further, much of this work begins by reframing conversations on trans*ness through asset-based lenses. Funds of identity not only lays one possible foundation on which policy-level conversations of radical trans*-inclusive reformation can begin, but also provides a needed asset-based framework for legislators to adopt in reckoning with existing and burgeoning legislation that actively works to subjugate trans* people.

In envisioning how to best "protect trans* people" as I advocated earlier, it is important to consider the seemingly boundless variability of institutional types in the United States higher education system (Birnbaum, 1993), a system which creates a notoriously convoluted landscape for education policy. The national sample of participants in this study demonstrates these realities in real time. Beyond living in many geographic regions across the country, participants also spanned a variety of institutional types and Carnegie classifications, ranging from private liberal arts colleges to public research institutions. This reality makes it somewhat difficult to make wide-spread policy recommendations from this research. Control over the various functions of public institutions is relegated to state-level governance (McGuinnes, 2016); at the same time, the presence of national institutions, such as federal financial aid programs, demonstrate how multiple sectors of policy and legislation impact the daily operation of public institutions. While still having to abide by state- and federal-level regulations in order to receive certain types of funding or accreditation, private postsecondary institutions oftentimes have more autonomy than their public peers to determine institution-level policies (e.g., private women's

colleges' abilities to create admissions and retention policies that are trans*-inclusive, as discussed by Boskey & Ganor (2020)).

As such, while making sweeping recommendations for universities to unilaterally reform college admissions practices, transform financial aid structures, or alter their healthcare policies might be in line with the findings of this study, such recommendations would ignore nuances that exist both within and across the thousands of colleges and universities in the United States, and thus would prove to be too "general" to adapt to specific institutional contexts. Though this reality might appear to create a circular conundrum where needed legislative reform is never actualized, it instead further highlights the power that taking a funds of identity-based approach can have in reimagining trans*-inclusive educational policies. Due to the unique nature of individuals' funds of identity, ascertaining how trans* students harness their funds of identity within the localized context of individual universities can illuminate the institution-specific structural barriers that trans* students navigate daily. Such inquiry can, in turn, underscore the areas of campus where trans* students encounter trans*phobic oppression, opening conversation for reforming such structures.

Naturally, as this study suggests, a funds of identity approach lends itself particularly well to suggesting areas for curricular and pedagogical reform. By taking a funds approach in this study, however, the conversations I had with participants extended far beyond just their curricular experiences. X's experiences navigating their institution's disability support services office during the pandemic to modify their accommodations to reflect new realities in remote learning, for example, suggests some avenues for professors to modify pedagogical practices in trans*-inclusive ways (such as not requiring students to have their cameras on in remote lectures), but it also shows how begs the question of how support structures at X's institution can

be reformed to better support trans* students who hold multiple minoritized identities. Similarly, taking a funds of identity approach to make sense of Jin's experiences navigating the process of declaring financial independence from their parents during their first year of college highlights how administrative structures at Jin's institution could evolve to better support trans* students who are traversing similar junctions in their own lives. Taking a funds of identity approach thus informs policy to not lose the nuance of individuals' lived realities. No two trans* students at the same institution are the same. In order to truly protect trans* people, designing and reforming institutional policies to be trans*-inclusive must continue to take into consideration the nuances within and across trans* lived realities.

Rooting policy conversations in the asset-based framework funds of identity offers can do more than just dismantle trans*phobia. By paying attention to the ways individuals traverse a nuanced matrix of domination based on the totality of their identities, funds approaches encourage the exploration of how students navigate intersections of oppression, ultimately shedding light onto the ways white supremacy, racism, ableism, classism, and countless other modes of oppression can be debased at institutional, local, and national levels. As such, it is important to conclude by reminding that addressing policy in education is not enough to actualize trans* liberation societally. While contending with structures that exacerbate the sociopolitical inequity trans* students experience within education can begin address oppressive structures of power that mimic those existing within all facets of society at large, stopping at educational reform only places a band-aid over the much larger wounds of systemic trans* exclusion. This reminder is not meant to be nihilistic in nature, but rather to galvanize action across social sectors. Trans* people are not just viewed through deficit lenses within education, but in all areas of society. Though it might be naïve or overly optimistic to do so, I therefore

believe that shifting narratives of trans*ness away from deficit-based understandings towards asset-based affirmations, scholarship, praxis, and policy within education can in turn disrupt deficit-narratives of trans*ness societally.

APPENDIX A: Table of Participants

Pseudonym	Pronouns	Gender Identities	Racial/ethnic Identities	Year	Major/Minor	Institution Type	Institution Region	Other Identities
Carol	They/them	Nonbinary	White	4th	Sociology major; LGBTQ studies minor	Public	Southwest	Queer & bisexual; autoimmune; fat; low-income
Chris	He/him	Trans guy	Mixed, Black, white	3rd	Psychology & sociology major	Public	Southeast	Gay; from a military family
Em	They/them	Genderqueer, nonbinary	White	4th	Geography major	Public	Mid-Atlantic	Disabled; "straddling between bisexual and lesbian"; first-generation
Egg	They/them	Nonbinary/enby	Chicanx	3rd	Geography & environmental studies majors; history and Chicanx studies minors	Public	Southwest	Queer; library worker
Flower	They/them	Genderqueer	White	2nd	Social work major; gender studies minor	Public	Northwest	Queer; first-generation; sex worker
James	They/them; he/him; vin	Trans, nonbinary, demiboy	Asian American, Vietnamese	2nd	Business major; education minor	Public	Southwest	Middle class
Jin	They/them; ze/zir	Nonbinary, trans, trans masculine	Asian, Chinese	4th	Psychobiology major (pre-med)	Public	Southwest	Queer; second-generation immigrant;

								financially independent
Kenan	He/him	Trans man	Biracial, Black, white	4th	Social work major; psychology minor	Public	Southeast	First-generation; low-income; transfer student
Laurel	They/them	Nonbinary	Asian, Filipinx	3rd	Nursing major	Public	Southeast	Queer
Max	They/them; he/him	Agender	White	3rd	Linguistics major	Public	Southwest	Transfer student
Moss	They/them	Nonbinary, genderqueer	Asian American, Chinese	2nd	Gender studies major	Private	Northeast	Queer; neurodivergent; diasporic; transfer student
Poe	They/them	Genderqueer, nonbinary	White	2nd	Theater major; LGBTQ studies minor	Public	Southwest	Neurodivergent; anarchist; performer;
Rose	They/them	Nonbinary	White	4th	English major; LGBTQ studies minor	Public	Southwest	Asexual; writer
Ryan	They/them	Genderqueer, nonbinary, transmasculine	White	4th	Biology major	Private	Southeast	Activist
X	They/them	Trans, nonbinary, transmasculine	Mixed, Latinx, white	4th	Social work major; art minor	Private (Catholic affiliated)	Mid-Atlantic	Queer; polyamorous; fat; spiritual
Yujin	He/him; they/them	Butch lesbian, trans masculine nonbinary	Half Korean, half Mexican, mestizo	3rd	Sociology & art majors; art history minor	Private	Midwest	Butch lesbian, autistic

APPENDIX B: Protocol for Interview 1

Interview 1

****Prior to the start of this interview, oral consent to participate will be obtained.**

Phase 1: Biographical Questions

- What is your name?
- For the purposes of this study, I will refer to you by a pseudonym. Would you like to provide me a pseudonym to use for you, or would you like me to decide one?
- How do you currently identify your gender? If you have multiple answers to this question, please let me know, as I'd love to talk more about that later.
- Currently, what are your gender pronouns?
- How do you racially and ethnically identify yourself?
- What institution do you attend?
- What year in college do you consider yourself to be?
- What other social identities are salient to you? For example, are you a first-generation college student? Are you religious? Are you an international student?

Phase 2: Creative Reflection – "I am from…" poem (script)

"Before I begin the interview, I would love to ask you to participate in a self-reflection exercise. This is a short creative writing activity that we can use to build our conversation off of. I love to use this in interviews, because I feel it's a way to get to know you and the things that are important to you.

In this exercise you will follow a specific poem structure to reflect on your identity. The finished poem will use sensory details to describe the many people, places, and things that show where you are from. It should also get you thinking about your personal histories and what you bring to college based on past experience.

Your poem should be between three and five stanzas in length, with each stanza being ~4 lines in length. Each stanza should start with the phrase "I am from…". You may write about whatever seems appropriate in answering where you are from. Examples of what to include might be the sights, sounds, smells, food, activities, and rituals you have participated in throughout your life, the sayings or phrases you've heard that have shaped you, and the people, places, and communities that have been influential in your life.

You can take as much time as you need to write your poem, so please do not feel rushed. After you write your poem, I will ask you to read it to me before I ask you any further questions. At the end of this conversation, I will collect your poem from you. If you'd like to see an example of an "I am from…" poem, please let me know. Also, if you'd like me to also write a similar poem and read it to you so that you can learn more about me, I'd love to do so."

Sample Poem (written by me):
I am from dust devils and neon lights,
From a city of sin – but not the kinds that people
Tell me they "pray for me" for.
I am from a space of in-betweens.

I am from not being Jewish enough to light the menorah;
From "sissy" and "fairy" and "fag" for not being "manly" enough;
From being not thin enough, not strong enough,
From not being "safe enough to be by yourself tonight."

I am from looking back fondly on black and white cookies the size of my face
And lips stained purple by grape ices on the boardwalk,
While I eat tacos alone in my parked car
In the wheat fields of a rural town with a red sky.

I am from "you can be whatever you want to be"
As much as I am from "They make medicine for boys like you" and
"You will never be successful in college."
I am from a space of in-betweens – which is where I want to be.

Phase 3: Follow-up Questions

- Thank you so much for sharing your poem with me! Before I ask you any questions about what you wrote, I'd love to hear more about how you felt writing that poem.
    - Probe: Were there any parts of writing this that were challenging for you? If so, what were they?
    - Probe: What are some things you thought about including, but didn't?
- I will use this space to ask individual questions regarding what participants write in their poem, namely asking the significance of the lines they include.
- Before moving on, would you like to hear my poem? I'd love to answer any questions you have about it, too.

Phase 4: Semi-structured Interview

**some of these questions might be answered in the previous section

This section will involve asking leading questions, followed by follow-up questions to deepen the conversation. Examples of guiding questions that will be asked of all participants are:

- Temporal life history
    - If you feel comfortable, I'd love to hear a bit more about where you grew up. Where are you from?
    - Can you tell me more about the town/s you lived in growing up?
    - If you feel comfortable, can you tell me about your family?
    - Who were some of the most important people in your life growing up?

    - Can you tell me more about the communities you belonged to growing up?
- Queer life history
    - At the start of our conversation, you identified your gender/s as [gender]. When did you start identifying with this gender/these genders?
    - Where did you first hear the language you currently use to identify your gender/s?
    - If you're comfortable, I'd love to hear a little bit more about how you've come to identify with this gender/these genders.
    - Can you tell me about some of the people who were most influential in helping you as you began to identify as [gender/s]?
    - Growing up, what were some of the messages you received about people who fall outside of the cisgender binary? Where did they come from (e.g., family, media, community, school)?
    - What are some of the lessons you've learned throughout your life based on your gender identity?
    - Outside of college, who would you consider to be a part of your community?
    - What are the spaces outside of college that you find the most community?

APPENDIX C: Protocol for Interview 2

Phase 1: Introduction

- Reflecting on our conversation from last time, is there anything you want to begin with today?
- Do you have any questions about what we discussed during our last conversation?
- If you were able to review the transcript of our last conversation, is there anything you would like to change? Remove?
- Has anything changed between our last conversation and today in terms of how you identify your gender, the pronouns you use, or any of your other social identities?

Phase 2: Creative Reflection – Significant Circle (script)

"Similarly to last time, I want to start with another creative reflection exercise. This one will be visual, and I would like you to focus specifically on where you are at in your life right now. This activity is called the 'significant circle,' in which you will think about the people, places, activities, and things that are most important to you.

Draw a circle and put a dot in the center of it. Imagine that you are the dot in this circle. Within the circle, you can draw smaller circles to represent the people who are more significant or important to you. You can draw squares to represent the activities, hobbies, institutions, and places that are most important to you. Remember that the closer to the center you draw the circles and squares, the more significant/important they are to you.

Please take as much time as you need to draw your circle. After you're done, I'd love for you to walk me through the circle, what you drew, and why you picked the things you included. I will ask you some follow-up questions, as well. At the end of our conversation, I'll be collecting this drawing as well. Please let me know if you have any questions. I'm also more than happy to complete a circle alongside you and share my circle, if you'd like me to."

Phase 3: Follow-up Questions

- Thank you so much for sharing your circle with me! Before I ask you any questions about what you drew, I'd love to hear more about how you felt drawing the diagram.
    - Probe: Were there any parts of drawing this that were challenging for you? If so, what were they?
    - Probe: What are some things you thought about including, but didn't?
- I will use this space to ask individual questions regarding what participants write in their circles.
- Before moving on, would you like to see my circle and hear my explanations? I'd love to answer any questions you have about it, too.

Phase 4: Semi-structured Interview

- Transition to college

    - Can you tell me a little bit about your college application process?
    - Who was influential in your college application process? How did these people advise and help you?
    - How did your gender identity factor into your application process?
    - What expectations did you have of the school's academic environment before you started at your institution?
- Classroom experiences
    - Have you decided on a major? Can you tell me a bit about the classes you take?
    - Professor Interactions:
        - Are you open with any of your professors about your gender identity? Why/why not?
        - What are some things professors have done well to support you in the classroom?
        - If you feel comfortable, could you tell me more about some of the things professors might have done that are disrespectful?
        - How do you respond to negative interactions with professors based on your identities?
        - Has anyone given you any advice on how to handle these interactions? If so, what?
    - Course structure + development:
        - Do conversations about gender identity ever come up in your classes? If so, how do those play out?
        - How comfortable do you feel participating in class?
        - Have you learned anything about yourself/your identities in class in any way, be it through course materials or interactions with faculty/peers?
    - Zoom classes etc
- Advising/mentorship experiences
    - To what extent are you open/feel a connection with faculty?
    - Can you tell me about one faculty interaction that stands out as particularly positive? Negative?
    - What are some of the things your academic mentors on campus have done to support you?
    - If you feel comfortable, could you tell me about any of your mentorship experiences that might have been less than ideal?
    - In an ideal world, what kind of support would a faculty mentor provide you?
    - Have you participated in any formal research projects with any faculty members on campus?
        - IF APPLICABLE: How does your gender identity factor into these professional interactions?

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