(Student) Activism as a Queer Worldmaking Disruption to White Supremacy and Heteropatriarchy within and Beyond Higher Education

by

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore how queer (student) activists challenge, disrupt, and transform higher education. With queer schools of thought as the theoretical framework, I positioned (student) activism as a queer intervention into white supremacist and heteropatriarchal logics at Auburn University. Using collaborative autoethnography as the methodology, I collected data through reflective, retroactive, and collaborative writing; two focus groups; individual interviews; and document analysis. The collaborators and myself engaged in intuitive and analytic approaches to writing (Alexander, 2016), as well as writing as analysis (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005) to understand their experiences as (student) activists. Building (student) activist communities, catalyzing queer awakenings, and the art of organizing illuminate the collaborators' and my experiences as queer worldmaking practices to resist white supremacist and heteropatriarchal logics. I offer implications for students, faculty, staff, administrators, and community members engaged in activism with the intention of queering/transforming higher education.

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As I wrote this dissertation, I was consistently reminded of the value of community. Community is at the heart of this study and as such, at the heart of my gratitude for my communities that supported me along this journey. I am honored to be loved by so many people, from California to Alabama, Canada to Australia, and everywhere in between. I would like to acknowledge the people who are more like family, who supported me in this work, and held me close when I needed it the most.

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Chapter One: Introduction

In October 2019, news erupted that a professor at Auburn University shared transphobic and homophobic rhetoric on their Facebook page. A group of undergraduate students wrote a letter to student affairs administrators in the school newspaper calling out their lack of attention to the issue. The undergraduate students scheduled a meeting with student affairs upper-level administrators to discuss LGBTQ+ equity on campus. Informed of the meeting through a faculty mentor, I went to listen and support the (student) activists[1]. The session went as one might imagine: a white man administrator took up all the time and talked over the students. The administrators paid us in cookies, lemonade, and sweet tea. With 60 minutes of allotted time, the students asked about LGBTQ+ equity on campus and why the institution did not have a resource center or service for LGBTQ+ people. Apparently, building a LGBTQ+ resource center was already in the works but finding the space on campus was challenging.

Thinking about space (i.e., physical, intellectual, emotional; Strange & Banning, 2015) in terms of college campuses is a musing project: Indigenous people, knowledges, and cultures were colonized by white European settlers in the name of establishing postsecondary education systems (Tuck, 2018; Wilder, 2013). Queer students and queer people of Color have repeatedly encountered violent and unwelcoming environments, finding themselves pushed to the campus periphery (Blockett, 2017; Nicolazzo, 2016). In response to these issues, people have mobilized within and beyond college campuses to advocate for more equitable campus environments

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[1] Throughout this dissertation, I purposefully write (student) activism to queer what it means to be a student and highlight the complexity of participants' role as students and community members. I further define (student) activism in the Definition of Terms section.

(Rhoads, 2016; Quaye et al., 2021). These realities moved me to the current project to explore how marginalized students, particularly queer (student) activists, interrupt college campuses saturated in white supremacy and heteropatriarchy.

The previous story led me to the present study about queering (student) activism in Alabama. As I worked alongside (student) activists for queer equity and racial justice at Auburn University following the murder of George Floyd, I came to the understanding of (student) activism as more than an identity. Witnessing manifestations of white supremacy and heteropatriarchy also informed how I thought about the political potential of extending (student) activism beyond one dimensionality. By this, I pose that in addition to an identity and action, (student) activism is a dynamic way of being. In this study, I viewed (student) activists as resisting logics of white supremacy and heteropatriarchy in higher education informed by Smith's (2016) "Three Pillars of White Supremacy" framework:

> This framework does not assume that racism and white supremacy is enacted in a singular fashion; rather, white supremacy is constituted by separate and distinct, but still interrelated, logics. Envision three pillars, one labeled Slavery/Capitalism, another labeled Genocide/Capitalism, and the last one labeled Orientalism/War, as well as arrows connecting each of the pillars together. (p. 67)

Smith (2016) proposed the interrelation of slavery/capitalism, genocide/colonialism, and orientalism/war as three pillars that uphold white supremacist and heteropatriarchal logics. In higher education, scholars have documented and traced white supremacist and heteropatriarchal lineages (e.g., Grande, 2018; Tuck, 2018; Wilder, 2013). These are the legacies that (student) activists actively navigate and resist for transformative change. Below, I discuss the logics of

white supremacy and heteropatriarchy within higher education to set the foundation for the study and remaining sections of this chapter.

Articulating the Problem: Exposing the Logics in Higher Education

Colonizers brought and used capitalist logics to implement the founding colonial colleges in Colonial America (Wilder, 2013; Wright, 1988). By colonizing Indigenous people, land, and cultures, white settler colonists accumulated 'ownership' over the land and chartered the exploitation of African and Indigenous peoples. Western education systems were among the logics the colonial world carried to the Northeast. As Wilder (2013) stated:

> The first five colleges in the British American colonies – Harvard (established 1636), William and Mary (1693), Yale (1701), Codrington (1745) in Barbados, and New Jersey (1746) – were instruments of Christian expansionism, weapons for the conquest of indigenous peoples, and major beneficiaries of the African slave trade. (p. 17)

Clergymen and British colonizers used colleges to rationalize slavery during colonial college expansion (Wilder, 2013). From these histories, it is clear to see that anti-blackness, racism, and capitalism are closely intertwined systems that have and continue to perpetuate the exploitation of people of Color.

In addition to capitalism, higher education is connected to logics of imperialism that are similar to orientalism. Smith (2016) defined orientalism as the logic that distinguishes people, nations, and cultures that pressure the stability of empire. In 1944, the federal government passed the G.I. Bill as an attempt to return servicemen back to civilian life by providing them financial assistance for college (Thelin, 2019). Though the G.I. Bill did not explicitly discriminate based on race, the Veteran's Administration prevented Black servicemen from receiving

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unemployment benefits (Herbold, 1994). Most notably in the Southern United States, discrimination and segregation permeated throughout the nation; namely, socioeconomic barriers and racist structures prevented Black servicemen from seeking postsecondary education. The G.I. Bill created an even deeper socioeconomic divide between white and Black middle-class families (Herbold, 1994). Through the logic of imperialism, Black servicemen served as a tool to expand the U.S. empire during WWII and were repositioned as a threat to U.S. empire upon return from war through segregationist strategies. The historical relationship of postsecondary education and imperialism further entrenched socioeconomic, legal, institutional, and intellectual barriers within the higher education system.

In response to the logics of colonialism, imperialism, and capitalism, students began to challenge institutions involved in perpetrating these mechanisms. Within this conversation on imperialism and higher education, (student) activism most often took the form of antimilitary and antiwar protests (Broadhurst, 2016; Rhoads, 2016). The Peace Movement and antiwar demonstrations in the 1940s and 1950s occurred on campus spaces due to the rise of socialist and communist student groups (i.e., Intercollegiate Socialist Society and American Student Union; Broadhurst, 2016). In the 1960s, protests erupted during the Vietnam War, military draft, and presence of ROTC recruiters on campus (Rhoads, 2016). In 1970, National Guardsmen shot and killed (student) activists at Kent State University during a protest against the U.S. invasion of Cambodia. To date, (student) activists continue to challenge imperialist, state-sanctioned forms of violence, such as the prison industrial complex system, police brutality (Vandelinder, 2015), and the presence of cops on campus (Cops Off Campus Coalition, n.d.).

Heteronormativity and Patriarchy

Smith (2016) also demonstrated the importance in including heteronormative and patriarchal considerations when interrogating white supremacist logics. Any movement to dismantle white supremacy must similarly seek to dismantle heteropatriarchal logics. The U.S. empire is reliant on marriage, particularly heterosexual marriage (Smith, 2016), as it serves as a building block of capitalism and marketization of sexuality (Foucault, 1970). Within a patriarchal system, marriage is based on a binary, hierarchical relationship between a heterosexual couple. Queerness then is an attack on (cis)heterosexuality through its disruption in/to gender identity, sexual identity, and nonnormative ways of being (or gendered and sexual person). Queer scholars of Color have extended this line of thought to include the interrelation of race and capital in discourse on heteropatriarchal relations (Ferguson, 2004). What these insights showcase is that critiques and analyses of coloniality, imperialism, and capitalism are not mutually exclusive from heteronormative and patriarchal logics.

Similar to previous discussions on the logics of white supremacy, heteropatriarchal logics are (re)produced in higher education. For instance, postsecondary institutions have a history of excluding women from gaining access to higher education (Malkiel, 2016). When (white) women received access to higher education, the education offered to them stemmed from patriarchal logics that reinforced gendered differences among intellects (Conway, 1974; Turpin, 2010). It was not until later that Black women could finally access postsecondary education institutions, being seen as figures for "race uplift" in the process (Perkins, 1983). Like women, queer people also faced exclusionary practices on college campuses, illustrated through Wright's text (2005) that presented higher education's history, particularly at Harvard, purging

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homosexual students, faculty, and staff. These realities are examples of the ways that postsecondary education in the United States is rooted in white supremacist and heteropatriarchal logics.

Today, scholarship on the experiences of queer students is focused on (in)visibility, campus climate, and identity (Lange et al., 2019; Rankin et al., 2019), concepts shaped by heteropatriarchal logics. For example, Lange et al. (2019) presented ideas around perceptibility, climate, and (co)curricular involvement as prevalent topics within higher education research on LGBTQ people. Within these broad areas of study, queer scholars of Color have shown the manifestations of racism, sexism, homophobia, and transphobia on college campuses, and the ways that queer people of Color navigate violence within their institution (Blockett, 2017; Duran, 2021; Means & Jaeger, 2013; Means et al., 2017; Mobley et al., 2020). Stewart and Nicolazzo (2019) also explicated how whiteness inter/unlocks violent operations in higher education that create oppressive contexts for trans* students. This context highlights the necessity of understanding the historical and contemporary manifestations of white supremacy and heteropatriarchy in higher education. This study thus contributes to this gap in higher education scholarship through an inquiry into queering (student) activism.

The problem this study sought to address are the manifestations of white supremacy and heteropatriarchy within and beyond higher education that create violent and oppressive conditions for marginalized people. In this study, I looked at how (student) activists intervened into these logics broadly through (student) activism. More specifically, I interrupted these logics by reimagining (student) activism as an inherently queer project, bringing to light how (student)

activists' onto-epistemologies and organizing strategies illuminated queer worldmaking practices.

Looking to (Student) Activists

White supremacy and heteropatriarchy are (re)produced through curriculum, instruction, policies, and programming within higher education. Colonial and capitalist logics, such as the accumulation of wealth through the exploitation of students' labor, continue to permeate postsecondary institutions (Dancy et al., 2018; Mustaffa, 2017; Patel, 2015; Patton, 2016; Stein, 2017). As I have discussed above, postsecondary institutions have a tumultuous relationship with white supremacy and heteropatriarchy. (Student) activism is a response, challenge, and disruption to white supremacist and heteropatriarchal logics within the academy. Indeed, scholars have documented historical (student) activist movements (Rhoads, 1998, 2016; Rogers, 2012) and contemporary movements (Connor, 2020; Douglas et al., 2020; Linder et al., 2020; Morgan & Davis, 2019) on college campuses. Within college campuses, (student) activists' efforts have led to the implementation of ethnic studies departments, as well as women and gender studies programs (Altbach & Cohen, 1990; Rogers, 2012; Williamson-Lott, 2018). (Student) activism also has extended beyond college campuses to stir up transformative change across political, economic, and sociocultural systems, as seen during the Civil Rights Movement, Feminist Movement, and Gay Liberation Movement.

Most recently, (student) activists continue to demand equity for those who are marginalized in higher education and people affected by state-sanctioned violence on and off college campuses. This study offered a necessary perspective into higher education literature, attempting to arrive at (student) activism as a queer intervention into white supremacist and

heteropatriarchal logics within and beyond higher education. To provide an overview of the study, this chapter discusses the following areas: (1) the purpose of the study and research questions, (2) the research design, (3) its significance to the field of higher education, (4) definition of relevant terms, and (5) the delimitations of the research.

Purpose of Study and Research Questions

As mentioned previously, a need exists to challenge white supremacist and heteropatriarchal logics within and beyond higher education. The mechanisms that uphold racist, transphobic, and homophobic ideologies in Southern education systems (Rogers, 2012; Williamson-Lott, 2018) were particularly important to consider in the context of this study. Additionally, this study was situated in the Deep South[2] of the United States (i.e., Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Georgia) where education systems are saturated by pervasive anti-LGBT laws, pro-religious discrimination, and cultural norms rooted in fundamentalist Christian ideologies (Andrzejewski et al., 2018; Bailey & Strunk, 2018; Shelton, 2018). Racial segregation in the Deep South's education system is still present through resistance to Brown v. Board of Education (1954) in K-12 education, desegregation in Alabama higher education systems (*Ayers* v. *Fordice*, 1992), and educational reform efforts that further drive racial disparities (Strunk et al., 2015). I acknowledged that the Deep Southern context is a unique dynamic in this study;

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[2] Scholarship and sources vary in contextualizing the states that make up the Deep South, The South, and Southeastern region. For example, the United States Census Bureau (2021) distinguishes the Southern region into three divisions: the South Atlantic, East South Central, and West South Central divisions. Deep Southern state distinctions are also defined by the Confederate States of America and the Cotton Belt region. Based on varying definitions, for the purposes of this dissertation, I refer to the Deep South as Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Georgia.

however, I also recognized that segregation and anti-LGBT legislation is not an isolated phenomenon within the Deep South and is pervasive across the United States. What is unique about the Deep Southern context is that the geographic location is often the scapegoat of conservative, far-right sociopolitical discourses and events. Though researchers show how white supremacist and heteropatriarchal logics manifest in Southern education systems, few scholars have explored how students challenge those logics, particularly from a queer theoretical lens.

As such, the purpose of this study was to explore (student) activism as a queer intervention into white supremacy and heteropatriarchy within and beyond higher education at Auburn University. Using queer theoretical perspectives as the theoretical framework challenged me to consider how (student) activists employed alter/native ways of navigating and resisting violent campus spaces. Additionally, I sought to explore the relationship between (student) activists' queerness and activism. The research questions that guided this study were:

1. How do (student) activists at a large public university in the Deep South describe participating in performance through strategies and tactics that resist white supremacy and heteropatriarchy within/beyond their postsecondary institution?

2. How do (student) activists at a large public university in the Deep South (re)conceptualize notions of (student) activism when viewed from a lens of queer theoretical perspectives?

Research Design

Further articulated in Chapter Two, I mobilized queer theoretical frameworks to identify hegemonic ideologies of normalcy (i.e., white supremacy and heteropatriarchy) within higher education and to analyze/understand (student) activism as an inherently queer project. This study

was guided by paradigmatic traditions of queer theoretical frameworks that position queerness as a politic and as actively (un)doing normative conceptualizations of identity and knowledge (Butler, 1993; Ebert, 2005; Ferguson, 2004; Shlasko, 2005; Wolf, 2009; Yep, 2013). Disruptive acts that move within, through, and beyond heteropatriarchal structures (Coloma, 2006) operationalize 'queering' (student) activism. I was also responsive to concerns articulated by queer of color[3] critique–an extension of queer inquiry–to understand the formulations and material realities of queerness through white, capitalist interventions (Ferguson, 2004). The queer theoretical frameworks for this study allowed for an exploratory analysis of the transformative potentials of (student) activism within and beyond higher education.

This study centered the experiences of (student) activists through collaborative autoethnography (Chang, 2013) and as such, (student) activists' knowledge and experiences were the onto-epistemological foundation of the study. Described in greater detail in Chapter Three, the purpose of engaging in collaborative autoethnographic methods is to "unfasten the hinge that separates experience and analysis and the personal and the political" (Jones & Adams, 2016, p. 12). Additionally, engaging in collaborative autoethnographic methods onto-epistemologically aligns with (student) activists' commitment to community and coalition building. Data collection included (retroactive) reflective writing, two focus group sessions, individual interviews, and document analysis of publicly available (student) activist documents.

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[3] I do not capitalize 'color' when referring to queer of color critique to honor Ferguson's capitonym choice. In other places throughout the dissertation, when I refer to queer *people* of Color, I capitalize 'Color,' signifying a proper noun.

These methods allowed for collaboration among the researchers, in addition to centering the knowledges and stories of (student) activists.

Significance of Study

This queer, collaborative autoethnographic study contributes to existing critical scholarship in the field of higher education, queer studies, and qualitative methodologies that interrogate systems of violence and oppression within postsecondary institutions. The theoretical, methodological, and onto-epistemological decisions made in this research challenged hegemonic ways of thinking and conducting research. As such, this study offers a queer perspective into ways of being, existing, and researching. The following section further discusses opportunities offered by this study: 1) expanding the use of queer theoretical frameworks (Butler, 1993; Muñoz, 2009); 2) contributing to collaborative, community-centric scholarship (Jourian & Nicolazzo, 2017); and 3) highlighting the stories of (student) activists fighting for transformative justice within/beyond Auburn University.

Expanding Queer Theoretical Frameworks

Hegemonic ideologies of normalcy are not always easily identifiable, hence the complicit nature that institutional actors may play in (re)producing these logics. This study offered an intervention into queer studies by positioning white supremacist and heteropatriarchal logics as normal. Queer theoretical frameworks identify hegemony through heteronormativity:

> The possibility of disrupting its [heterosexual hegemony] apparent strangehold on social relations and identity construction relies on the recognition of hegemony in Gramsci's terms as the organization of consent, and the recognition that sacred orders both require

constant maintenance (not occasional repairs) and are susceptible to subversion through

performative reinscriptions. (Atkinson & DePalma, 2009, p. 27)

Similarly, queer theoretical frameworks are political tools to dismantle white supremacy and heteropatriarchal logics within academia. In this study, I understood queerness as both an identity and political position (Shlasko, 2005), like my framing of (student) activism as an inherently queer project. Queer and (student) activist onto-epistemologies offer insights into transformative change and are dynamic ways of being that surpass static categorization. As Renn (2010) highlighted in her review of LGBT and queer research, the use of queer theory in higher education scholarship is rare. Lange et al. (2019) revisited this claim and found that researchers underutilize queer theory and queer epistemologies are still largely underemployed in higher education scholarship. Mobilizing queer theory's political potential pushes scholars to continuously question and trouble normative logics within the operations of higher education.

Individuals have leveraged queer theoretical perspectives to understand LGBTQ+ social movements (Gamson, 1995; Renn, 2010; Revilla, 2010). However, there is limited scholarship that uses queer theoretical frameworks within a study focused on (student) activism, particularly in the Deep South. As a region where anti-LGBTQ+ laws are still in place within education systems (Bailey & Strunk, 2018; Shelton, 2018), the use of queer theoretical frameworks becomes even more important. Scholars have applied critical theories such as critical race theory (Logan et al., 2017; Revilla, 2004, 2010; Robertson, 2021), Muxerista (Chicana/Latina feminist) theory (Revilla, 2004), and feminist theory (Naples, 2002) to study (student) activism. This study contributes to (student) activism literature by mobilizing queer theoretical perspectives as a political tool.

Collaborative Community-Centric Scholarship

This dissertation contributes to higher education scholarship committed to working *with* rather than *on* communities involved in research projects. Jourian and Nicolazzo (2017), as well as Bhattacharya (2007, 2009) informed the way I approached qualitative inquiry through collaborative and community-centered practices. These scholars troubled onto-epistemological and methodological practices rooted in individualist, objective, and binary logics. For example, Jourian and Nicolazzo (2017) challenged researchers to build meaningful relationships among LGBTQ+ communities and to conduct research addressing the needs of local groups. As such, this study offers a significant contribution to scholarship challenging normative, static research processes by positioning research participants as co-collaborators. Namely, collaborative autoethnography presented an opportunity to engage research participants as co-constructors of scholarly knowledge through collaborative focus group sessions, together with reflective, retroactive, and evocative writing (McMahon et al., 2012). This study informs (student) activist efforts within and beyond the context of Auburn University as documentation of tactics, stories, and organizing possibilities for generations of (student) activists to come.

Sharing (Student) Activist Stories

Lastly, this study is significant because it collected and shared the stories of (student) activists committed to revolutionary love in their local community. Contributing to (student) activist scholarship, this study introduced queered ways of conceptualizing (student) activism as an intervention to white supremacy and heteropatriarchy. Indeed, this project identified a novel understanding of queer (student) activists' efforts to transform hostile environments as a queer worldmaking practice. Identifying activist tactics/performances was an important component of

this research because doing so helps position queer (student) activism as actively challenging hegemony and actively building spaces of existence. Uncovering (student) activist performances not only shows how they survive hostile conditions, but also how (student) activists create anti-oppressive worlds and communities centered on values such as love and care. For students, faculty, and staff members in higher education, it is important to know how queer students navigate white supremacy and heteropatriarchy within and beyond the institution. In this research, I worked with students who are actively engaged in challenging a white supremacist and heteropatriarchal system to survive their postsecondary experience. As a result, the material contributions and significance of this study supports students, faculty, and staff resisting oppressive systems in higher education.

I begin the conclusion of this chapter with Quaye's (2005) words:

Resistance efforts should never be taken lightly, for in them, students are often trying to exert their influence on a hegemonic system that refuses to see them as human beings but instead as spawns who can be bought, commodified, and exploited. (p. 304)

Previously, I discussed the problem at hand: the founders of postsecondary institutions in the United States built these structures on white supremacist and heteropatriarchal logics. (Student) activism as a queer intervention into hegemonic ideologies of normalcy offers an arrival into knowledges, ways of being, and stories that refuse these very systems (Tuck & Yang, 2014).

Definition of Terms

To understand the intricacies that informed the exploration of (student) activism in Alabama, I offer definitions for the language that guided this study. These terms and their explanations are as follows:

Capitalism: I present capitalism as the system that commodifies and exploits workers, specifically their labor. This system relies on hierarchies of difference such as race, gender, and sexuality to keep a stratified system among those marked as "other" (Smith, 2016). In this study, I defined capitalist systems as mechanisms that shape the material realities of queer people and queer people of Color.

Colonialism: Smith (2016) presented colonialism through logics of genocide: the destruction of Indigenous people and culture. Tuck (2018) added that colonialism is the extraction of Indigenous labor, land, people, and resources. The purpose of colonialism is to remove Indigeneity and replace it with Western logics. In this study, colonialism was related to the foundation of Western logics in higher education.

Counterpublic: Warner (2002) operationalized a counterpublic as a space defined through performances that run counter to mainstream knowledges and ways of being. Muñoz (1999) distinguished a counterpublic as a mechanism to resist dominant cultural scripts, particularly for queer people of Color.

Hegemonic Ideologies of Normalcy: I referred to ideologies rooted in the subordination of queer people and queer people of Color as hegemonic ideologies of hegemonic normalcy. The ideologies include (and are not limited to) racism, homophobia, and transphobia. I used this phrase to offer a queered perspective into viewing these logics as heteronormative.

Heteropatriarchy: Smith (2016) described heteropatriarchy as a building block of the nation-state, specifically heterosexuality and a gender binary system. Heteropatriarchal logics reinforce nuclear family relations and a hierarchy of gender, sexuality, and sexual behaviors. Additionally, in this study, heteropatriarchy was an integral component to maintaining capitalist systems.

LGBTQ+: This LGBTQ+ moniker stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and other minoritized sexual and gender identities not listed. I used the LGBTQ+ moniker to refer to sexual and gender identity.

Orientalism: The logic of orientalism refers to the inferiority of non-Western people and nations as a threat to the United States and other Western nations (Smith, 2016). Orientalism rests on the need to conflict with other nations, communities, and people to maintain dominance. Smith (2016) does not explicitly conceptualize orientalism to Sinophobia/anti-Asian racism and I saw them engaging in imperialist ideas. In this study, I used imperialism to reflect Smith's (2016) thinking and to describe the mechanisms of Western expansion/violence within higher education.

Queer: I used queer to refer to identities, ways of being, and knowledges that challenge normativity (Weise, 2021). Similarly, I mobilized queer as a literary tool through its usage as a noun, verb, and adjective (Shlasko, 2005). In this dissertation, queer represented a site of resistance to oppressive systems by rejecting stability and challenging taken-for-granted meanings (Butler, 1993).

Queer Worldmaking: Queer worldmaking practices are performances that marginalized people engage in to (re)fashion a way of being and transform their lived conditions (Berlant & Warner, 1999). In this study, (student) activists engaged in queer worldmaking practices to envision an anti-oppressive world while navigating and resisting hostile environments.

(Student) Activists: In this study, I purposefully used parenthesis around (student) activist to queer conceptualizations of (student) activism. For example, writing (student) activist in this way allows me to acknowledge the multiple identities that students hold such as being a student and

member of the local community. Additionally, (student) activism refers to the queered performance of disruptive tactics to oppressive systems.

White Supremacy: Throughout this study, I used white supremacy to describe mechanisms of capitalism, colonialism, and orientalism (Smith, 2016). By saying white supremacy, I referred to capitalism, colonialism, and imperialism (see previous definition of orientalism) as interrelated logics that create oppressive conditions for marginalized students.

Delimitations

Creswell and Creswell (2018) described delimitations in qualitative inquiry as the intentional reasonings behind key decisions made in the study. To communicate my decisions in the research design, I highlight the delimitations of this research including the site of the study, the decision behind the co-collaborators, the temporality of data collection, and the overall problem under investigation.

First, I intentionally located this study at Auburn University as the study's context to explore a particular (student) activist movement, referring to the overall action and change that occurred from fall 2019–summer 2021. Within collaborative autoethnography, it is important and necessary to investigate the researchers' experience within a specific culture or context (Chang, 2013). Exploring (student) activism beyond the culture that the collaborators and myself are situated in would not honor collaborative autoethnographic traditions, because such a decision would mean that we would not have shared experiences and knowledges. Also, I believe (student) activism in the geographic location (i.e., Alabama, U.S.) sheds light on indispensable knowledge for transformative change within and beyond higher education. Scholars and practitioners often overlook and leave the South out of conversations regarding social justice.

Similarly, people often discuss social justice movements in the Deep South as a thing of the past which excludes current grassroots organizing efforts for social justice. As such, this study brings forward current and ongoing efforts to dismantle violent and oppressive structures like white supremacy and heteropatriarchy.

Second, I organized alongside other (student) activists and chose to learn from them in this study. The present (student) activist movement involved over a dozen other people but for this project, I collaborated with four people. This decision poses a delimitation to the applicability of (student) activist stories outside of the study's context. However, Jones et al. (2013) stated that "autoethnography does not claim to produce better or more reliable, generalizable and/or valid research than other methods, but instead provides another approach for studying cultural experience" (p. 33). It is a risk to harbor the stories of a small number of (student) activists and claim that (student) activism is a queer project. Still, I assert that the stories shared and analyzed in this study showed the transformative potential of (student) activism as a queer intervention into white supremacy and heteropatriarchy within and beyond higher education.

The third delimitation was related to the data collection methods, particularly the retroactive collection process. Recall or retroactive writing is a necessary element within collaborative autoethnographic methods (McMahon et al., 2012). This tradition is messy and necessary to collect the stories of the collaborators in the study because activism is an ongoing project. The research is temporal–it began before the formal design of the project and continues after the study is 'complete.' Embracing the uncertainty of social science research aligns with my approach to queering research topics, methods, and processes.

Lastly, the final delimitation of this study related to my positioning of (student) activism as an intervention into white supremacy and heteropatriarchy in higher education. Existing literature on (student) activism has framed student activists' efforts as mechanisms of resistance to oppressive systems within an institution. Much of student activist scholarship has focused on (student) activism as student engagement, specifically centering the purpose of (student) activism to develop civically engaged citizens for a democratic society. In this study, I did tend to the function of the (student) activists' identity but not from a developmental perspective. Focusing on the political interventions of (student) activism *and* complexities of identity as a politic is an intentional boundary I am putting on the research. Because I was interested in how white supremacist and heteropatriarchal logics operate in higher education, addressing the performance of (student) activism was more appropriate. In the end, these delimitations were choices I carefully made when conceptualizing the study, influencing the pieces of the project in the remaining chapters.

Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to set the foundation of the study, specifically describing the purpose and research questions, research design, and significance to queer, qualitative inquiry in higher education. As presented in this chapter, white supremacist and heteropatriarchal logics permeate higher education institutions and create violent conditions for queer students. These logics are especially pertinent at institutions in the Deep South due to a long history of racism, homophobia, and transphobia. This study benefits students, faculty, staff, administrators, and community members engaged in grassroots organizing and advocacy efforts, providing transformative stories and tactics through queer theoretical perspectives. With the goal of

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deploying the political potential of queer theory, I will now discuss the theoretical and (student)

activist literature that informed this study.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

The purpose of this chapter is to present queer schools of thought as the guiding theoretical framework for the dissertation and to examine existing literature from these perspectives. In the following sections, I present poststructural, postmodern, and queer of color critique (QOCC). I organize the queer theoretical perspectives into distinct paradigmatic traditions to discuss their varying/overlapping perspectives on materiality and embodiment. Additionally, I describe queer theory as a politic (Eng et al., 2005; Shlasko, 2005) to better understand (student) activism as an inherently queer project. Then, I present a review of (student) activist literature, an overview of tactics employed by (student) activists, and the role of (student) activism within and beyond higher education. Finally, I further situate the dissertation within the context of the Deep South, in addition to explaining the strengths and limitations of this study.

Queer Theoretical Framework

Several camps of queer theory enlightened this study including poststructural, postmodern, and queer of color critique. Together, the paradigmatic traditions of queer theory enlightened my approach to this study, but I centered queer theory as a politic (Eng et al., 2005) throughout data analysis. In Chapter Three, I discuss in depth how I mobilized poststructural, postmodern, and queer of color critique as a framework for analysis. For the purposes of this chapter, I provide an overview of the queer theoretical approaches that informed my sensemaking of the collaborators' and my queer worldmaking practices to disrupt white supremacy and heteropatriarchy at Auburn University. As such, in the following sections, I present classic queer perspectives like poststructuralism and postmodernism. Then, I articulate a queer theoretical perspective rooted in standpoint epistemologies, queer of color critique, to

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understand the (re)evolutions of queer theory's political utility. I used these queer theoretical perspectives to inform and support how I made sense of (student) activism as an inherently queer project.

Classic Queer Perspectives: Poststructuralism and Postmodernism

The following section discusses poststructural and postmodern queer perspectives together because queer scholars such as Butler (1988, 1990, 1993) tend to fall into both theoretical camps. Poststructuralism is concerned with analyzing the role of language and discourse by deconstructing taken-for-granted meanings that shape everyday lives (Lincoln et al., 2018; Seidman, 1994). Discourse constructs systems of power, knowledge, as well as "working attitudes, modes of address, terms of reference, and courses of action" (Holstein & Gubrium, 2008, p. 182) that (in)form meanings for subjects. Foucault (1970) theorized that cultural forms shape what is possible and normal, impose confession as a cultural operation, and create queerness as a category that is capable of acquiring and punishing people. Poststructuralists believe that meanings are contextual and historically situated (Seidman, 1994). As a result, discourse operates to perpetuate and reinforce sociopolitical and cultural hierarchies. As an analytical tool, poststructuralism aims to destabilize and disrupt hegemonic meanings, binary oppositions, and universal truth claims, particularly related to identity (Halperin, 1995, 2003).

Poststructural queer theory deconstructs all systems of categorization, meaning, knowledge, and truth of gender and sexuality that emerge as a result of heteropatriarchal systems of oppression (Carlson, 1998; Ebert, 2005; Puar, 2006, 2007; Sedgwick, 1990; Seidman, 1994). As such, poststructural queer theorists indicate identity is not real, reject materiality in general, and assert identity meanings are informed by extraneous power. Additionally, queer theory

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rejects notions of stable identity categories and suggests that gender and sexual identity are not fixed identities, and more broadly, are ideological and political constructions to maintain power over non-normative bodies. Under poststructural thought, Ebert (2005) described identities as having their own "immanent logic" (p. 39) which means that to arrive at a knowledge of sexuality, one cannot approach it through another identity like race or gender. This perspective asks *how* gender and sexuality work independently in relation to hegemonic discourses. Poststructuralist queer theory denies that identities have material substance among racial, gendered, sexual, and classed identities. Although the aims of postmodern queer theory are to deconstruct identity categories, poststructural queer theory seeks to go beyond deconstruction to understand the social situation and historical construction of identity categories (Butler, 1988).

Because poststructural queer theory recognizes identities are not fixed and themselves are performative, queer theory also conveys a person can never fully exist within or outside of an identity (Namaste, 1994). Performativity refers to a series of repetitive acts dependent on and reproduced through social and cultural scripts that are interpreted and (re)negotiated by others (Butler, 1993; Sedgwick, 1990). As Butler (1993) pointed out, for queer to maintain its political possibilities, it must not (and cannot) become fixed to a singular meaning. Poststructuralist queer theorists such as Sedgwick (1990) proposed then that queer operates as *both* a sexual identity *and* political position in opposition to heteronormativity. Sedgwick (1990) extended this position in reference to 'the closet' and 'coming out,' specifically that one is never fully out because the parameters of the closet are constantly renegotiated. Queerness is situated within and reinforced by heteronormative parameters. To a similar point, Butler (1995) stated, "power pervades the

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very conceptual apparatus that seeks to negotiate its terms, including the subject-position of the critic" (p. 39).

The onto-epistemological assumptions of poststructuralism are that knowledge is subjective, rooted in the individual experience, and individuals have little control over their material realities. The social construction of dominant narratives regarding gender and sexuality makes it so that people have less agency to control their material realities. The criminalization and medicalization of sexuality created sexual knowledges (Foucault, 1970); specifically social structures like the church and medicine (re)produced discourses of sexual irregularity and deviancy, positioning queer bodies and knowledges as non-normative and needing regulation (Foucault, 1970; Wolf, 2009). By this, queerness is not a static positioning; rather, it is dynamic and fleeting through its ability to operate as a noun, adjective, and verb (Weise, 2021).

Postmodernism emerged as an intellectual paradigm after the Enlightenment period to critique modernist perspectives (Lyotard, 1994; Rorty, 1994). Postmodernism's onto-epistemological assumptions reject universal truth positions, disavow universalism, and support subjective knowledges. Postmodern perspectives pose that identities are socially constructed but aim to blur to the boundaries of identities. Postmodernists tend to (re)produce essentialist notions of identity politics by attending to the deconstruction of identities as liberation, rather than viewing the identity categories themselves as oppressive (Agostinone-Wilson, 2010; D'Emilio, 2002).

Postmodern queer theories are concerned with deconstructing all categorizations of sexual and gender identities (Seidman, 1991). Within the postmodern deconstruction project, queer scholars reject the existence of truth associated with gender and sexuality. This perspective

indicates gender and sexuality are a series of repetitive acts dependent on and reproduced through social and cultural scripts. Gender and sexuality then are fluid identities with no stable meanings and (re)shaped by cultures and communities (D'Emilio, 2002; Seidman, 1991). Through this viewpoint, queerness is (re)negotiated through performative acts interpreted by others; queerness is read onto the body through cultural scripts and is never embodied by the individual.

Critiques of postmodern queer perspectives relate to their proximity to (re)producing identity politics (Agostinone-Wilson, 2010; Ebert, 2005; Green, 2002; Wolf, 2009). Even though postmodern queer theory is concerned with deconstructing and destabilizing binary gender and identity categories, deconstructing an *entire* identity category (re)produces essentialist assumptions. To say that "gay" or "lesbian," "man" or "woman" are monolithic categories creates an assumption that all gays, lesbians, women, and men experience their gender and/or sexuality in the same way. It also conveys those who hold these identities define their gender and sexuality under similar parameters. Alongside gender and sexual texts, power becomes a free-floating phenomenon in postmodern queer analyses (Plummer, 2003; Sears, 2005; Wolf, 2009).

Another critique of postmodern queer theory is its lack of attention to the role of class-based relations in identity politics (Sears, 2005; Seidman, 2011; Wolf, 2009). Agostinone-Wilson (2010) detailed power and material realities cannot embrace the same fluidity postmodern queer scholars apply to gender and sexuality. Similarly, Ebert (2005) stated difference is not autonomous and is always determined by "class difference – that is, by relations of property" (p. 34). Critics of the erasure of class in postmodern queer analyses typically come from queer of color critique who center class as a pivotal component of materiality and

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embodiment. Given the absence of class and other intersecting analyses, materiality is based in/on socially constructed identity categories informed by cultural/social scripts and (re)produced through the performance of gender and sexuality (Butler, 1993; Green, 2002). Elements of universality exist within embodied queerness through postmodernism's attention to deconstructing identity categories. Through this perspective, the universality of queer embodiment could imply that all queerness looks/exists in a singular way.

Queer of Color Critique Theoretical Perspective

Queer of color critique is theoretically and epistemologically grounded in queer theory's rejection of ideologies of hegemonic normalcy and in women of Color feminisms (Anzaldúa, 1987; Crenshaw, 1995; Lorde, 1984). As a framework for analysis, queer of color critique exposes the cultural, social, and historical events, discourses, and structures producing queer people of Colors' realities (Alexander, 2018; Brockenbrough, 2015; Ferguson, 2004; Reddy, 2011). Additionally, queer of color critique "names and contextualizes the marginalization of queer of color difference; and it differentiates strategies of resistance to account for the shifting exigencies of the lives of queers of color" (Brockenbrough, 2013, p. 428). Ferguson (2004) identified class and capital as the key contributors to the marginalization of queer of Color difference. As such, a queer of color critique denies approaches taken in postmodern queer theories that describe identities as fragmented and disconnected. Queer of color critique articulates people cannot solely think of identities as fragmented, because oppressive systems tied to these identities are interconnected and create the material realities of queer people of Color. Materiality is a key claim to queer of color critique because treating identities as illusions and constructions denies the antiblack experiences queer people of Color face. Rather, through

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an analytic lens, queer of color critique positions race as a material outcome of nation and capital (Ferguson, 2004).

As an epistemological intervention to queer theory, queer of color critique is grounded in the experiences of queer people of Color; racialized, sexualized, and classed knowledges are rooted in the queer of Color body (Ferguson, 2004). As a standpoint epistemology, centering the lived experiences of queer people of Color sheds light on the ways that they encounter and resist white supremacist and heteropatriarchal logics. Without living as a queer person of Color, it is impossible to fully understand and see the realities of queer people of Color. This epistemological and analytic shift identifies cultural, social, and political practices queer people of Color employ to "create space for their ways of being" and "pathways toward their desired futures" (Brockenbrough, 2015, p. 31). Muñoz's (1999) disidentifications was a social, cultural, and political tactic that challenged hegemonic cultural and social scripts from within an identity. Disidentification stems from an analysis of performance which is the series of acts that queer people of Color engage in both in relation and resistance to hegemony. Performance is a political act in which queer people of Color work within racialized, gendered, and sexualized identities to disrupt normalized meanings of identity (Alexander, 2018; Ferguson, 2004; Muñoz, 1999).

In terms of materiality and embodiment, QOCC scholars theorize the different material realities queer people of Color experience are a result of class. Specifically, queer of color critique challenges Marx's work on historical materialism due to his overlooking of race, gender, and sexuality (Ferguson, 2004). Ferguson (2004) suggested that "to disidentify in no way means to discard" (p. 5), but rather queer of color critique extends historical materialism to consider how racism is fundamental to maintain a capitalist society. Freddy (2011) further explained

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queer of color critique as a disidentification from historical materiality as it rejects a universal reality for working class subjects under capitalism. The violence that working class people face under capitalism is distinct based on their race.

Mobilizing poststructural and postmodern queer perspectives alongside queer of color critique does create a tension considering their conflicting perspectives on materiality. I was attentive to this tension and believed classic queer perspectives were appropriate in this study because I sought to understand how the collaborators and myself made sense of our queerness and activism through a queer lens that disrupts all categorization and hegemonic meaning, knowledge, and truth. Additionally, poststructural and postmodern queer perspectives informed my interpretation of queerness and activism as cultural signifiers saturated with meaning by extraneous power. Then, QOCC enlightened the challenge to classic queer perspectives to show materiality exists given that the collaborators and myself in the study engaged in forms of resistance and transformation in our activism because of their material realities at Auburn University. Lastly, queer of color critique informed my understandings of the collaborators' and my tactics as queer worldmaking practices, particularly through the emergence of counterpublics. Together, the queer theoretical frameworks offered a unique intervention into (student) activism inquiry.

Queering (Student) Activism

In the context of this dissertation, I came to this study with the belief that the (student) activism the collaborators and myself were involved in was part of an inherently queer project through the queer theoretical perspectives discussed previously. (Student) activism is inherently a queer project because a subject position(s) (*n.*) is/are engaged in disruptive behaviors (*v.*) and

hold/holds ideologies and ways of being (*adj.*) that disrupt hegemonic ideologies of normalcy. I recognized that my claim of (student) activism as an inherently queer project may create a universal truth claim which is antithetical to queer perspectives; however, I do not believe that *all* (student) activism is inherently queer. For example, antiqueer groups such as Turning Point USA and alt-right, white nationalist leaders such as Richard Spencer have mobilized on Auburn University's campus around white supremacy and heteropatriarchy (Brownlee, 2017). I do not define their work as activism because it intentionally (re)produces violence, oppression and hegemonic ideologies of normalcy, whereas in this study, (student) activism is an intentional challenge and disruption to white supremacy and heteropatriarchy. Postmodern queer theoretical perspectives view the performance of (student) activism as engagements in tactics such as protests, sit-ins, and letter-writing campaigns (Barnhardt, 2014). Poststructural perspectives problematize the stability of (student) activism as an identity to suggest that (student) activism is a contextually dependent position. Additionally, the methods and behaviors that (student) activists employ came to be in response to violent and oppressive social structures. Embodied queerness–or in the present case, (student) activist identities, behaviors, and ideologies–is (re)shaped by historical and contextual discourse within the setting where the disruption occurred.

I made sense of (student) activism as a queer project through epistemological standpoint queer theories such as queer of color critique (Ferguson, 2004). Queer of color critique illuminated my recognition of the relationship among the racialized, historical (material) realities of people of Color within and outside of the academy and white supremacy and heteropatriarchy (Smith, 2016). (Student) activism then is a disidentifactory process of creating counterpublics

within and beyond higher education (Blockett, 2017; Duran et al., 2020). Queer of color critique helped me come to (student) activism as an onto-epistemological intervention into white supremacist and heteropatriarchal logics. The purpose and intention of the (student) activism in this study was to challenge homophobic, transphobic, racist, classist, and ableist logics and procedures at Auburn University and to form counterpublics to help (student) activists survive previously stated hostilities.

In this dissertation, I was responsive to the concerns that queer standpoint theories raised within the field of queer studies are complicit in reproducing white, homonormative epistemologies. As a queer white scholar, I recognize my proximity to replicating those logics and the tension in using queer standpoint theories that are rooted in the experiences of identities I do not hold. Queer of color critique allowed me to see the tactics and performances described in this study as part of a broader queer worldmaking project as I learned from/with the collaborators and engaged with the data. I echo the critiques of queer theory that extend queerness beyond the body to a point that materiality is erased from analyses from queer ways of being (Ferguson, 2004; Johnson, 2001). Cohen (1997) offered a critique of queer politics that homogenize the expansiveness of queerness and stated the following:

> any truly radical potential to be found in the idea of queerness and the practice of queer politics, it would seem to be located in its ability create space in opposition to dominant norms, a space where transformational political work can begin (p. 438).

Rather than only focusing on destabilizing identity categories, Cohen (1997) advocated queer theorists and coalition builders pay attention to proximity to power, specifically "the ideological, social, political, and economic marginalization" (p. 482) of queer people of Color. Particularly,

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in this dissertation, I used queer theoretical perspectives to explore alter/native ways of being, logics, and strategies (student) activists employ.

In the following sections, I present the intricacies of queering (student) activism beginning with extensions to definitions of activist/m. Within this discussion, I further position (student) activism as an inherently queer project attending to queer as a subject position through a review of LGBTQ+-centered (student) activism. Then, I present what activism means in the context of postsecondary education and the ways that (student) activism overlaps with broader social movements. To better understand the scope of (student) activism, I describe the strategies used to achieve activists' goals within their postsecondary institution. Then, I discuss queer worldmaking and lean on concepts like counterpublics and queer temporality to inform and support the queer potentiality of (student) activism. Finally, I consider how this study situated in Alabama influences and extends understandings of (student) activism.

Activism's Contested Meanings

(Student) activism is a series of contextually appropriate tactics relative to a culture (Barnhardt, 2014) to disrupt and change oppressive practices and systems (Rhoads, 2016). Some scholars believe activism is a collective identity shared amongst individuals who hold insider knowledges and share experiences within an oppressive system (Bobel, 2007; Pasque & Vargas, 2014; Robnett, 2002; Snow & McAdam, 2000). There are various social psychological theories such as social constructionism, structuralism, and dispositional perspectives that help explain the relationship between personal identity, collective identity and social movements (Snow, 2004; Snow & McAdam, 2000; Snow et al., 1986; Snow et al., 2014). Robnett (2002) claimed collective activist identities are made up of shared cultural capital informed by their knowledge

of the situated context under disruption. Scholars position activist as a collective identity, as opposed to an individual identity, which emerges through involvement in collective action often associated with risk (Klandermans, 2004; Rupp & Taylor, 1999).

Some researchers have stated individuals must take structural analyses into consideration in addition to social psychological perspectives to understand and more fully capture 'activist' as an identity (Connor, 2020; Geca, 2000; Naples, 2002; Stryker et al., 2000). Turning to structural analyses sheds light on the systems of power, oppression, and exploitation that shape people's lived experiences and desires to change those systems (Chambers, 1994). Naples (2002) demonstrated that a materialist feminist approach to studying social movements offered an onto-epistemological tool to "examining how race, class, gender, and other dimensions of social inequalities are inevitably woven into even the most radical political projects" (p. 245). Current scholarship on (student) activism has also highlighted the dynamics of neoliberalism within postsecondary education as a key influence of student activists' motivations (Cole & Heinecke, 2020; Connor, 2020; Rhoads, 2016).

Together, structural analyses and social psychological analyses can assist scholars in defining and understanding (student) activism. For example, Geca (2000) argued researchers should turn to value-based analyses of social movements because identity is more than a social location. Geca (2000) defined values as "conceptions or beliefs about desirable modes of conduct or states of being that transcend specific situations, guide decision making and the evaluation of events" (p. 95). Presenting the values shared by activists demonstrates that in addition to being an identity, activism is an action concerned with transforming systems of oppression and

exploitation to bring about collective change. Barnhardt (2014) defined the tactics employed by (student) activists as:

> deconstructing collective action according to who specifically is seeking a change (*mobilizing group or groups*), the entity whom the mobilizing group aspires to influence (*targets*), the *claims* (or substantive ideas being advanced), and the *tactics* used in advancing the group's claims. (p. 44, emphasis in original)

Highlighted in the quote above, (student) activism involves a series of tactics that form an overall strategy to provoke social, political, and cultural change. Activist tactics also occur within political organizations to target policies (Spade & Willse, 2000). Some of the actions (student) activists engage in are similar to tactics taken in broader social movements and include sit-ins, letter writing campaigns, and teach-ins (Barnhardt, 2014; Rhoads, 2016). Pasque and Vargas (2014) positioned the actions of activism as a series of performances, similar to Butler's (1988) analysis of gender and sexuality as a performance. 'Doing' activism is a "physical manifestation of resistance to marginalization and oppression" (Pasque & Vargas, 2014, p. 60). Through this perspective, activism is a performance that challenges hegemonic ideologies.

Defining Activism in the Dissertation

Current and existing literature on (student) activism demonstrated the intricacies and nuanced understandings of activist identities (e.g., Collins, 2000). Whether the term 'student activist' describes a personal identity, collective identity, and/or action, I engaged the central component of activism as a commitment to disrupting oppressive structures. In the theoretical framework section, I reviewed queer theoretical perspectives to show how queer operates as a politic within (student) activism inquiry. Next, I turn my attention to overviewing LGBTQ+

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centered (student) activist movements, because scholars demonstrated that activist movements typically start through collective organizing around an identity (e.g., race, gender, immigration status, and sexuality; Bernstein, 2005; Britt & Heise, 2000; Gamson, 1995). Reviewing LGBTQ+-centered social movements also reinforces queer as subject within queer theoretical perspectives. Then, I discuss key themes within (student) activism scholarship.

LGBTQ+ Activism

Prior to the Stonewall Inn riot that led the Gay Liberation Movement, queer college students started organizing to form LGB student groups in the wake of the Civil Rights Movements (Beemyn, 2003). At Columbia University, gay students came together to form The Student Homophile League (SHL) after administrators forced them to move out of campus residence halls. After gaining national attention at Columbia University, gay students at Cornell University became interested in establishing their own SHL. To gain visibility at Cornell, the SHL changed their name to the Gay Liberation Front, hosted a series of educational sessions for homosexual students, invited radical leaders to meetings, built coalition with the Student Democratic Society, and held a sit-in at Morrie's bar (Beemyn, 2003). In 1971, the Oberlin Gay Liberation became the first queer student organization who sought sexual freedom and ending harassment and hostility toward gay people, and support for college sponsored social events. During the same year, similar gay movements occurred at Penn State University after the university denied student's efforts to establish a queer student organization (D'Augelli, 1989). Ten years later, students held a demonstration to bring attention to the university's failure to protect gay and lesbian students. After threats to take over the president's office, the Penn State board of trustees added sexual orientation to the university's nondiscrimination policy

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(D'Augelli, 1989). Queer perspectives informed my understanding of these students' organizing and direct initiatives as performances and acts of resistance that challenged heteronormativity at Penn State and Oberlin College.

In present time, LGBTQ+ activism has typically shown up through political engagement with groups that seek to disrupt and change transphobic and homophobic policies (Linder, 2019). In addition to political and civic engagement, LGBTQ+ activism on college campuses has disrupted gendered spaces (Goldberg et al., 2020), implemented LGBT resource centers (Linder, 2019), and advocated for queer and gender inclusive curriculum (Lugg, 2003; Kumashiro, 2001). Within the context of LGBTQ+-focused (student) activism, student activists highlight that one of the barriers to engaging in LGBTQ+ advocacy efforts included the individual's ability and desire to be 'out' on campus (Gabriele-Black & Goldberg, 2021; Goldberg et al., 2020; Renn, 2007; Renn & Bilodeau, 2005). LGBTQ+ activism in higher education is closely linked to gaining visibility on campus and educating the student body on topics related to sexuality and gender (Revilla, 2004). Additionally, student activist groups that centered advocacy for queer students of Color operated as counterspaces (Revilla, 2004; Revilla & Santilla, 2014) in the midst of oppressive and exclusionary college campuses.

I associated the concepts of gaining visibility and educating heteronormative audiences with normalizing the presence of queer people and queerness, which is perhaps an unqueer focus of (student) activism. Queer visibility and education are important; however, they also create a tension within queer (student) activism related to homogenizing queerness and only making socially acceptable forms of queerness visible. Cohen (1997) raised a similar concern in queer activism that is "focus[ed] on integration into dominant structures" (p. 437) rather than

organizing around "a politics where the *nonnormative* and *marginal* position of punks, bulldaggers, and welfare queens, for example, [are] the basis for progressive transformative coalition work" (p. 438). Integrating queerness into dominant structures recenters whiteness in conceptualizations of queerness (Kumashiro, 2001) and is a tension/reality of gaining visibility and antiheterosexist education.

(Student) Activism as Civic Engagement

One of the unique characteristics of (student) activism that distinguish it from broader social movements (e.g., Civil Rights Movement) is its focus on student learning and civic engagement. Scholars demonstrated that in addition to achieving goals of social justice, one of the purposes of (student) activism is to build students' democratic participation (Biddix, 2014; Farago et al., 2018; Hemer & Reason, 2021; Kezar, 2010; Kezar & Maxey, 2014). Scholarship pointed to (student) activism as fulfilling postsecondary education's purpose of developing civically aware and engaged citizens (Kezar & Maxey, 2014; Renn, 2007; Rhoads, 1997). Within literature that highlighted the developmental component of (student) activism, scholars recognized leadership identity development as one of the focal outcomes of (student) activism (Renn, 2007). One of the differences between (student) activism and activism outside of the academy is the attention toward intellectualizing student development and learning as students encounter less-than-ideal campus spaces. Social movement scholars are more concerned with understanding how social movements start, tactics employed by activists, and the outcomes of the movement (Almeida, 2019; Staggenborg, 2016; Stryker et al., 2000). Though existing literature attends to the specific dynamics of student activist movements, a unique feature of current student activist literature is the focus on student developmental experiences.

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Queer theoretical perspectives illuminate the tension within student activist literature that (student) activism is common and expected on college campuses because undesirable campus climates and systems of oppression and exploitation are also typical. The existence of these two realities is mutually replicative and reinforcing. Using queer theory as a framework for analysis, hegemonic ideologies of normalcy are ingrained logics within higher education. Framing the outcomes of (student) activism as leadership development, civic engagement, and preparation for being an engaged citizen in a democratic society is not without critique. Situating these outcomes as constructive diverts from the oppressive systems that create the conditions that (student) activists challenge. Additionally, institutions profit off (student) activists' queer labor such as policy and resource implementation within and beyond higher education. Queer of color critique informs (student) activists' labor as a source of capital for postsecondary institutions, particularly Black (student) activists' work like desegregation efforts during the Civil Rights Movement (Rhoads, 2016) and Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals and Black Lives Matter demonstrations (Hope et al., 2016; Pearson, 2015). Capitalizing off the labor of Black (student) activists (re)produces systems of oppression and exploitation within and beyond postsecondary education.

Identity-Based (Student) Activism

Another salient component of (student) activism in the context of postsecondary education is its attention to identity-based activism. Identity-based activism is not unique to activism in higher education and is often how social movements start (Gamson, 1995). Identity-based activism centers on the experiences of people who share a collective social identity (e.g., race, gender, sexuality, disability, immigration status). Historical social movements focused on

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identity included the Civil Rights Movement and Gay Liberation Movement. These movements occurred in broader society and took place on several college campuses (Broadhurst, 2014; Linder et al., 2019; Rhoads, 1998). Contemporary student activist movements have centralized on the experiences of historically excluded students within higher education. Identity-based student activist movements include disability rights (Danforth, 2018; Kimball et al., 2016), LGBTQ+ rights (Clawson, 2014; Reichard, 2010; Schmitz et al., 2020), racial equity (Dixson, 2018; Hope et al., 2016; Nguyen & Gasman, 2015; Schmitz et al., 2020), and immigration status (DeAngelo et al., 2016; Gonzales, 2008; Hope et al., 2016). Highlighting identity-based activism is a necessary component of (student) activism because as Linder et al. (2019) stated: "an increase in the number of Students of Color, queer and trans students, and students with disabilities on college and university campuses exemplifies the significance of existence as resistance as a significant form of activism" (p. 50). Below, I discuss the significance of existence as activism through queer theoretical frameworks.

Queer theoretical frameworks emerged from the lived experiences of gay and lesbian HIV activists during the 1980s as well as queer activism in the 1960s. Gay and lesbian social movements critiqued the lack of support from governmental health officials to address the HIV crisis in the 1980s, and queer and trans activists rioted against police brutality in the 1960s (Amin, 2016; Graves, 2012). Understanding higher education's exclusionary history is integral in the current context because white supremacist and heteropatriarchal logics are woven throughout the fabric of postsecondary institutions. The presence of queer people of Color and people with historically excluded identities on college campuses is a disruption to heteronormative knowledges which helps explain Linder et al.'s (2019) commentary on existence as activism.

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The experiences that historically excluded students bring to college campuses queer normative knowledges by presenting alter/native epistemologies (Coloma, 2006).

Working Within and Against the Institution

Current scholarship on (student) activist has cited neoliberalism as a prominent structure (student) activists are working within and against (Cole & Heinecke, 2020; Connor, 2020; Morgan, 2018; Revilla, 2004; Rhoads, 2016; Stern & Carey, 2020; Thomas, 2018). State appropriations declined due to the rise of neoliberalism within higher education such as the rise of market-based ideology in education, and the corporatization of higher education (Cole & Heinecke, 2020; Connor, 2020; Giroux, 2014). Neoliberalism as an ideology and cultural construct normalized capitalist thinking, positioned students as consumers and commodities to the institution, and importantly, posited education as a private good, not a public good (Slaughter & Rhoads, 2004). Neoliberalism is closely related to the effects of capitalist logics in broader society. In essence, as the broader society divests from postsecondary education, colleges and universities must adapt resulting in divisive practices, further drove inequalities, and increased exploitation of working-class people of Color.

Closely related to neoliberalism, other structures that (student) activists are working within and against are related to campus climate, specifically the presence of racism, homophobia, xenophobia, and other ideologies of oppression. Rhoads (2016) traced the genealogy of (student) activism within higher education, noting a shift in the 1980s from anti-war demonstrations to "improving higher education access and campus climate for underrepresented and marginalized populations" (p. 194) due to the rise in neoliberalism. A shift from antiwar demonstrations to marginalized populations is neoliberal because of the attention

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from rights to opportunity, multiculturalism and cultural diversity. Contemporary campus

activists are engaged in demonstrations in response to racist incidents within and beyond the

campus (Bonilla & Rosa, 2015; Jones et al., 2017; Linder & Rodriguez, 2012; Logan et al., 2017;

Mustaffa, 2017), federal immigration policies affecting undocumented students (Chen & Rhoads,

2016; DeAngelo et al., 2016; Gonzales, 2008; Perez & Cortes, 2011), and graduate student union

efforts (Julius & Gumport, 2005; Whitford, 2014). Racist, homophobic, and xenophobic campus

climates affect the material realities of historically excluded students. (Student) activism then is

as a direct response and form of resistance to those realities.

Queer theoretical perspectives help to understand and analyze the material realities of

students engaged in activist efforts as outcomes of capital exploitation (Drucker, 2015; Ferguson,

2004; Sears, 2005) and heteronormative discourses (Foucault, 1970; Gamson, 1995). Institutions

exploit the labor of (student) activists by holding activists responsible for changing the

conditions they find themselves living in because of capitalist exploitation, and capitalize on

(student) activists to exhaust their labor toward institutional transformation. Additionally,

institutions profit off the outcomes of (student) activism such as policies and resources making

the institution look like a more equitable place for marginalized students.

Free Speech

An important feature of (student) activism within colleges and universities is related to

free speech. The Free Speech Movement (FSM) started in the 1964 at the University of

California, Berkeley in light of anti-war demonstrations and the *loco parentis* policy across

campuses (Broadhurst, 2014; Rhoads, 2016; Thomas, 2018; Wheatle & Commodore, 2019). The

FSM started when police arrested UC Berkeley students for protesting the Vietnam War on

campus. Students demonstrated their disapproval with UC Berkeley's restrictive policies and distributed flyers, marched on the administrative building, held protests, and graduate students went on a strike. Eventually the UC Board of Regents changed their policy to allow political activity on campus; this policy spread throughout the nation to other postsecondary institutions. After the Free Speech Movement, students at University of California, Berkeley demanded inclusive programming which led to a variety of multicultural studies such as women's studies, Black studies, and Chicano studies (Stern & Carey, 2020; Thomas, 2018).

Today, free speech is highly debated terrain due to the growth in white nationalist and alt-right speakers on campus (Morgan & Davis, 2019). As an attempt to regulate free speech and mitigate harmful situations for marginalized students, colleges and universities limit free speech demonstrations to specific areas on campus (Thomas, 2018). Wheatle and Commodore (2019) explored the evolution of free speech from the 1960s to the current context and highlighted that upper-level university administrators largely determine what is considered "free speech" or "hate speech." Implications for how administrators navigate the debate over free speech have consequences for marginalized students' safety and wellbeing. Additionally, Thomas (2018) shared campus climate and culture shapes the treatment of unpopular perspectives and demonstrations that belittle historically disadvantaged groups.

Together, neoliberalism, campus climate, and free speech are critical components to understanding (student) activism in the current context to comprehend how institutions and (student) activists are engaged in a dialectical relationship (Connor, 2020). A dialectical relationship is one where each party–in this case, students and postsecondary institutions–challenge and change each other. This relationship can be extended further to include the broader

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society as a key change agent within and beyond institutions (Morgan, 2018). Connor (2020) suggested the neoliberal university caters more to prospective students than currently enrolled students because prospective students are consumers and current students are commodities. In the present context, particularly after the 45th presidential term, (student) activists have shaped the way university administrators responded to sociopolitical events. In the current climate, Connor (2020) stated:

> student activists must balance the competing imperatives to challenge but also to defend their universities…this dialectic will culminate not only with the university and student supporting and strengthening one another, either as institutions or individuals, but also with their empowering and emboldening one another as powerful political actors in the broader societal sphere. (p. 24)

Within a neoliberal logic, when students are positioned as consumers, they become integral agents that uphold the purpose and function of postsecondary institutions (Cole & Heinecke, 2020; Connor, 2020; Morgan, 2018).

Queer theoretical perspectives further extend the relationship between (student) activists and the institution by attending to (student) activism as a disidentifactory process (Muñoz, 1999). As (student) activists engage in activism, they still exist within the dominant culture of higher education and identify as a student. As disidentifactory actors, they work within the hegemonic norms of their institution (e.g., passive recipients of "scholarly" knowledge) to subvert those norms. In this process, (student) activists create counterspaces both within and outside of the institution as a mechanism of resistance to white supremacy and heteropatriarchy. (Student) activists draw local and national attention to institutions through their tactics; queer theoretical

perspectives indicate this is a counteridentification due to (student) activists' challenges to the institution. (Student) activists use their position within and outside the institution to challenge or *queer* what it means to identify as a student and community member.

(Student) Activist Strategies

Barnhardt (2014) defined the variety of strategies and tactics student activists engage in as "relative to the specific structural and cultural features of the environment or context that the movement group seeks to influence and can be generally categorized as being either violent, disruptive, conventional, or a combination of these things" (p. 45). The purpose of tactics is to cause a disruption to a normalized structure, behavior, and/or policy. Violent tactics are less common among student activists and typically occur as a last result. Disruptive tactics include sit-ins, boycotts, and political theatre. Conventional tactics, as articulated by Barnhardt, operate within a predetermined set of norms and practices to communicate different perspectives; on campus, these tactics include speaking during a faculty senate meeting or altering university slogans to convey a message. (Student) activist mobilize strategies to "transform the mundane into the profane" (Barnhardt, 2014, p. 47) in order to ignite action on college campuses. (Student) activists face barriers when administering demonstrations due to codified free speech regulations that limit students' expression to sequestered areas of campus (Thomas, 2018).

Current (student) activists are engaged in strategies that mirror activist tactics from the 1960s, such as sit-ins, boycotts, marches, and teach-ins (Barnhardt, 2014; Broadhurst, 2014; Rhoads, 2016). Virtual spaces such as social media have emerged as an integral action to mobilize student activist efforts (Bettencourt, 2019; Bonilla & Rosa, 2015; Byrne et al., 2021; Davis, 2019). Social media tools quickly bring awareness to issues and connect student activists

to communities beyond their immediate scope. Indeed, social media is an important tool for coalition building and sustaining student activist efforts. For historically exploited student activists, digital platforms challenge tokenization, misrepresentation, and forms of violence that can occur in person (Bonilla & Rosa, 2015; Linder & Rodriguez, 2012; Mwangi et al., 2016). Recent student activist efforts targeted the neoliberal core of higher education through disruptions to their exploitative systems (Connor, 2020). For instance, in 2015, students at the University of Mizzou started a hunger strike to bring attention to racist incidents that happened on campus and to criticize administrators' lack of response to the ongoing incidents (Pearson, 2015). The hunger strike drew minimal attention to the students' efforts until the football team got active. Black athletes from the Mizzou's football team protested an upcoming football game and refused to play until the demands were met. This tactic would have led to a major financial loss for the institution because the institution capitalizes off football players' labor and so, the administrators addressed the students' demands. Other student activist efforts have utilized social media to share the stories of students experiencing violence on campus (Mwangi et al., 2016; Mwangi et al., 2019). Going public with current student experiences creates a negative image of the institution and could affect prospective students' (or consumers') recruitment.

Queering Student Activist Strategies

(Student) activism is inherently a queer project because it is a disruption to hegemonic ideologies of normalcy and the tactics that students engage in resist institutional discourses. Queer theoretical perspectives imply that (student) activism is disidentifactory (Ferguson, 2004). (Student) activists perform disruptive tactics to challenge hegemonic operations and logics within higher education. Disturbing norms represents a disidentification from hegemonic norms

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of being a student, as (student) activists both exist within the institution but learn to use their power to push back on the systems perpetuated by key actors at their colleges and universities. Additionally, there are elements of performativity and performance as (student) activists engage in behaviors to disrupt normalcy, and that are perceived by others as challenges to normalcy.

Through a queer theoretical perspective, there are elements of performativity in *doing* activism which in turn reinforces the (student) activist identity. (Student) activists unsettle those norms to bring attention to the history of white supremacy and heteropatriarchy within the institution's norms and traditions. This perspective also positions (student) activist strategies and identities as a "new" student identification to highlight the material realities of those who need to resist the oppressive institutions in order to survive. Pasque and Vargas (2014) discussed (student) activism as performances and as such, are integral to understanding (student) activists worldmaking practices. Within the context of (student) activism, as a performance, it works within an identity to disrupt and flip taken-for-granted meanings. Articulating (student) activist strategies through queer theoretical perspectives is best understood through Muñoz's (1999) work. In the following section, I describe queer worldmaking and counterpublics as strategies that (student) activists engage in to navigate hostile environments.

Queer Worldmaking and Counterpublics

Goodman (1978) contextualized worldmaking as a process that involves five dimensions: 1) composition and decomposition, 2) weighting, 3) ordering, and 4) deletion and supplementation, and 5) deformation. Together, these components of worldmaking involve (re)fashioning sociocultural scripts, organization, and knowledge. Similarly, queer worldmaking is the process of intimate connectivity to people "who bear no necessary relation" (Berlant &

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Warner, 1999, p. 598) and rather, identify with a counterpublic. In his study on Black queer men's worldmaking practices, Blockett (2017) described such deployments as an "epistemological, discursive, and performative politic" to "destabilize compulsory heterosexual and White racial homogenous spaces and locations into anti-oppressive, sexually heterogenous counterpublics" (p. 90). Performance is a key aspect of queer worldmaking, specifically the acts and activities that celebrate LGBTQ life, practices, and politics (Alexander et al., 2013). In the context of (student) activism, Reichard (2016) characterized queer worldmaking in the 1970s at the University of California Los, Angeles as the formation of lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) student organizations; public gatherings like poetry readings, speakers, movie showings, and LGB awareness days; protests; and changes to curricula. Scholars also position public drag as a radical act of queer performance that influenced generations of queer activism and social movements (Cole, 2017). Queer (student) activists engage in queer worldmaking tendencies that draw attention to performances and politics that defy heteronormativity, a process of counterpublic formation.

As previously discussed in this chapter, Muñoz (1999) viewed worldmaking as a process of disidentification, "an agentic political act of resistance that creates new truths rather than either adopting the dominant reality or opposing it entirely" (p. 247). Counterpublics result in the disidentification process and operate as a mechanism of resistance to the dominant culture. For queer people and particularly queer people of Color, counterpublics function as a site of opposition to racism and heteronormativity. Blockett and Renn (2021) further described counterpublics as a place of Black queer cultural phenomena that defy "compulsory heterosexism and white supremacy" (p. 90). In sum, counterpublics operate as spaces of

resistance that defy hegemonic logics and withstand oppressive cultural identity markers to envision "new" worlds and ways of being.

Queer Kinship and Community

Understanding concepts related to fortifying support networks through kinship bonds and community are important dynamics of queer worldmaking, particularly for queer student (activists) in the Deep South, which I discuss in a later section. Nicolazzo et al. (2017) stated that "queer kinship – and specifically trans* kinship – is formed by actively choosing and continuing to provide support and care to others" (p. 307). Kinship differs from traditional notions of family in that kinship does not depend on biological ties (Weston, 1991). Rather, kinship is the agency that an individual has in *choosing* people to support and care for, and also be supported by those individuals. Kinship networks and queer communities provide communities for queer and trans students navigating hostile campus communities and external environments (Blockett, 2017; Means et al., 2017; Means & Jaegar, 2013; Nicolazzo et al., 2017; Renn & Bilodeau, 2005). Supportive communities of people help trans and queer students of Color navigate overtly racist, homophobic, and transphobic environments, affirm them in their multiple identities, and provide necessary "social, spiritual, financial, and psychological support" (Strayhorn, 2012, p. 48). Through queer theoretical perspectives, queer kinship networks and communities operate as counterpublics. As discussed previously, counterpublics operate as a space that exists counter to hegemonic culture (Muñoz, 1999).

Queer Temporality

The concept of queer temporality refers to the relationship of the past, present, and future and the refusal of linear, heterogenous time (Dinshaw et al., 2007). Early queer theorists

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reference the temporality of labor, social life, and politics (Foucault, 1990); gender (Butler, 1999, 2006); and queer potentialities (Sedgwick, 1993). Indeed, Monaghan (2019) identified notions of emergent temporality throughout these scholars' work and points to queer temporality as an important line in queer theory given the political terrain of queerness in the United States. The relationship between queer temporality and the political terrain of queerness are the politics of queer existence informed by heterosexual ideologies. Monaghan (2019) offered life narratives such as debates over marriage equality to support this logic. I add that the emergence of anti-LGBTQ and anti-trans legislation inform the political terrain of queerness by criminalizing queerness in public education and health sectors. In Dinshaw's (2007) roundtable discussion on queer temporality, Halberstam stated that queer time "is a theory of queerness as a way of being in the world and a critique of the careful social scripts that usher even the most queer among us through major markers of individual development and into normativity" (p. 182). Halberstam's definition of queer time advances a performativity of existence outside of heteronormative cultural identity markers, such as marriage and family planning, and highlights queer potentials. Dinshaw et al.'s (2007) attention toward the future highlights that queerness, queer history, and queer experiences are not "regulated by 'clock' time or by a conceptualization of the present as singular and fleeting" (p. 185). As such, queer temporalities open a perspective that allows scholars to look to the future of queerness and imagine queer possibilities (Ahmed, 2019; Muñoz, 2009). As a concept, queer temporality imagines what queerness could be and what it currently is.

Geographic Region

Few institutionally sanctioned studies have explored (student) activist movements on college campuses in the Deep South (Rogers, 2012; Williams-Lott, 2018). As a region often forgotten for their social, political, and cultural contributions to broader society, situating this study in the Deep South offers a crucial contribution to (student) activism in higher education literature. Indeed, this study shows that people are building grassroots networks toward social justice in Southern regions of this nation-state. As a caveat to this section, I recognize that (student) activism scholarship in the Deep South that is situated within postsecondary spaces is not fully representative of organizing knowledges. Indeed, activists, community members, and artists have created zines to communicate radical knowledges about social justice, popular culture, gender and sexuality, and politics (see The Radical South Zine Archive, 2016 for a collection of Southern-based zines). I acknowledge there are "gaps" in academic literature related to queer (student) activism in the Deep South and the tension of writing a dissertation that is an intentional disruption to sanctioned academic knowledges. Locating zines and alternative sources of media that depicted queer (student) activism in the Deep South was challenging because those forms of knowledges are not widely accessible to broader audiences, particularly to audiences outside of those communities (including myself). In fact, within alternative, radical queer communities like ballroom culture, there are intentional gatekeeping tactics to protect member of those communities, and to prevent dominant cultures from co-opting the knowledges and cultures of queer communities. Often, knowledge is shared and generated in relation to others (Patel, 2014) and is not documented for consumption and co-option from dominant spheres. To navigate this tension, I present non-mainstream resources at the end of this section to

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interrupt dominant educational and empirical research. Below, I further situate the study within the context of the Deep South.

Studying (student) activism in the Deep South provides a pertinent dynamic to this study. First, the Deep South is deeply tied to sociopolitical and cultural social movements as evidenced during the Civil Rights Movement. This region is an epicenter and birthplace of social justice movements (Rogers, 2012). Throughout the South during the Civil Rights Movement, organizers formed coalitions and stood up to racist systems of exploitation and oppression. Through their organizing, Southern Civil Rights activists fought for desegregation, voting rights, and equitable employment and housing opportunities (Rogers, 2012).

Students were an integral role during the Civil Rights Movement and led several demonstrations. For example, North Carolina A&T college students David Richmond, Ezell Blair Jr., Joseph McNeil, and Franklin McCain started the lunch counter sit-ins that spread throughout the Deep South (Rhoads, 2016). The Nashville Student Movement led several stand-in desegregation efforts throughout the South. Eventually, Black students took part in "freedom rides" to disrupt discriminatory and segregated public transportation systems which drew national attention (Broadhurst, 2014; Rhoads, 2016). During the Civil Rights Movement, Black students on college campuses were actively engaged in registering other students to vote and advocated to desegrated campuses spaces (Rogers, 2012). The Deep South shaped the Civil Rights era and (student) activism.

This region provided a meaningful context to study (student) activism because of its connection to fundamentalist Christian ideologies. Sears (1991) reflected on this dynamic:

In their unapologetic devotion to church, community, and family, Southerners most

visibly reflect those conservative values that for many define the heartland of

America…The power of Southern religion is evident in activities ranging from marches

on state capitols protesting racial segregation to marches around health care clinics

decrying abortion on demand. (p. 9, 24)

Conservative fundamentalist Christian ideologies infringe on the rights of LGBTQ+ individuals

as evidenced through anti-transgender legislation and resisting occupational and housing

protections for LGBTQ+ individuals (Sears, 1991; Shelton, 2018). Conservative ideologies

rooted in homophobia and transphobia trickle into educational policies. Education researchers

showed that within K-12 and postsecondary education systems, students meet educators with

resistance when discussing topics related to LGBTQ+ people (Andrzejewski et al., 2018; Bailey

& Strunk, 2018; Shelton, 2018). Additionally, racial segregation in the Deep South's education

systems is still present through resistance to *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) and

educational reform efforts that further drive racial disparities (Strunk et al., 2015). In

postsecondary institutions in the Deep South, writers have highlighted how (cis)heteropatriarchal

ideologies affect campus climates leading to experiences of harassment and assault among

LGTBQ+-identifying students (Ueno et al., 2021; Weise et al., 2021).

Previously discussed at the beginning of this section, locating documented "street"

knowledges from queer organizers in the Deep South was difficult because typically, those

knowledges are "underground" and not publicly accessible. As I mentioned in the opening

paragraph of this section, the University of Alabama library housed the Radical South Zine

Archive. This archive consists of a collection of zines about race and ethnicity, spirituality,

gender and sexuality, popular culture, postsecondary education, and politics. Zines and other

forms of alternative media were necessary tools for organizing and communicating ideas and resources to LGBTQ+ communities in Alabama. For example, Holloway (n.d.) was the editor of The *Alabama Forum* which was a news source for the LGBTQ community from 1977 to 2002 that publicized events, local and national LGBTQ+ news, and LGBTQ+ friendly business and organizations. Also, social media accounts such as BhamStands (n.d.), Bible Belt Queers (n.d.), Black at Auburn (n.d.), Cell A65 (n.d.), and SONG Montgomery (n.d.) are nonmainstream discourse that communicate the experiences, stories, and news related to LGBTQ+ people, organizers, and activists in Alabama. I identified these social media accounts because they are publicly accessible and share the knowledges and stories of queer people, queer people of Color, and queer (student) activists in the Deep South. For more information on literature and sources of knowledge that characterized (student) activism in the Deep South, I recommend readers and scholars learn from local communities doing the work.

Conclusion

This chapter provided a review of key queer theoretical literature that were integral to forming this study in (student) activism as a queer disruption into higher education. Specifically, this chapter described queer theory through poststructural, postmodern, and queer of color critique. This literature review presented the various interpretations and perspectives on materiality and embodiment within queer theoretical perspectives. In analyzing these different perspectives, I amplified the need for mobilizing queer theory as a political tool.

In addition to queer theory, this chapter presented a review of (student) activism literature. First, the present chapter explained how I arrived at (student) activism through the interrelation of queer theoretical perspectives. This operationalization situates (student) activism

as a dynamic, multidimensional way of being. Next, this chapter covered (student) activist topics such as higher education activism, working within and against institutions, purposeful strategies/tactics, and geographic influences. Additionally, I reviewed queer worldmaking and counterpublics within the subsection on (student) activist strategies and tactics, As demonstrated, there are few studies that captured the stories of (student) activists specifically in the Deep South (Rogers, 2012; Williamson-Lott, 2018) and queer activism in the South (Broadhurst et al., 2018; Martin et al., 2017). Situating the present study alongside (student) activists in Alabama introduces an opportunity to better understand white supremacist and heteropatriarchal logics in higher education institutions. Additionally, as a historical epicenter for civil rights and activism, placing this study within the context of Alabama offers transformative possibilities for postsecondary education. One of the intentions throughout the design of this study was to honor the (student) activists who made this project possible. To accomplish this goal, I engaged in a collaborative autoethnographic study to share the stories of (student) activists in the Deep South, the key topic of the next chapter.

Chapter Three: Methodology

The purpose of this study was to explore (student) activism as disruptions to white supremacy and heteropatriarchal logics within and beyond higher education, specifically at Auburn University. Using queer theoretical perspectives, collaborative autoethnography served as the methodological foundation for the study. Collaborative autoethnography was an appropriate methodology for this project because it is a queer tradition (Jones & Adams, 2016); it challenges the fluidity of the researcher/participant relationship, intervenes onto-epistemological constructions, and questions "normative discourses, and acts, and undermining and refiguring how lives (and lives worth living) come into being" (p. 197). Additionally, Jones and Adams (2016) proposed collaborative autoethnography is in congruence with queer theoretical perspectives through its attention to the performative self. Collaborative autoethnography and queer theory recognize identities, or the self, are not fixed and are relational across interactions. In this study, collaborative autoethnography offered an opportunity to exploring the performative and transformative possibilities of queering (student) activism.

The following chapter briefly traces the methodological origins of collaborative autoethnography, starting with autoethnography. This chapter also addresses the ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions within the genealogical trajectory of collaborative autoethnography. The remaining sections of the chapter identify the research design including sampling methods, data generation, and reporting. Throughout this chapter, I write about the ethical implications of engaging in collaborative autoethnography. As noted in Chapter One, the two research questions that informed this study were:

1. How do (student) activists at a large public university in the Deep South describe participating in performance through strategies and tactics that resist white supremacy and heteropatriarchy within/beyond their postsecondary institution?

2. How do (student) activists at a large public university in the Deep South (re)conceptualize notions of (student) activism when viewed from a lens of queer theoretical perspectives?

Collaborative Autoethnographic Lineages

To provide a foundation for collaborative autoethnography, I first describe the origins of autoethnography broadly. Autoethnography emerged from ethnography in response to calls from social science researchers to more critically consider the role of the researcher in the field. Ethnography is the study of local cultures and researchers engage in this inquiry to understand the "meanings of cultural phenomena" (Markham, 2018, p. 653). Arnberg (2020) stated queer ethnography "makes visible lives and experiences that refuse to be 'handmaidens of hegemonic knowledge production,' since the queer lives studies refuse categorization" (p. 2). Autoethnography offers a similar approach through queer perspectives to pose that personal stories are in relation with/to others, dynamic, and a performance.

In autoethnographic research, the researcher's personal experience within a situated context is the onto-epistemological foundation of the study (Chang, 2013; Ellis et al., 2011). Onto-epistemology refers to the knowledge generated through lived experience. The researcher uses their personal experience to examine and critique systems of power and oppression within a specific context. The characteristics of autoethnography that distinguish it from autobiographical narratives include: "1) purposefully commenting on/critiquing of culture and cultural practices,

2) making contributions to existing research, 3) embracing vulnerability with purpose, and 4) creating a reciprocal relationship with audiences in order to compel a response" (Jones et al., 2013, p. 22). Hughes and Pennington (2017) synthesized the various types of autoethnographic research within critical social science research: analytic autoethnography (Anderson, 2006); collaborative ethnography (Ellis et al., 2011); community autoethnographies (Toyosaki et al., 2009); critical co-constructed autoethnography (Cann & DeMeulenaere, 2012); duoethnography (Breault, 2016); interpretive autoethnography (Denzin, 2014); meta-autoethnography (Ellis, 2009); performance autoethnography (Denzin, 2014); and racial autoethnography (Taylor et al., 2008). The types of autoethnographic research previously listed differ in their attention to collaborative writing, methods used, and paradigmatic traditions. In this study, I used collaborative autoethnographic methodology to explore (student) activism as a queer project.

Philosophical Assumptions of (Collaborative) Autoethnography

The call for autoethnographic research emerged in response to shifts toward objective social science research methods that mirrored natural science methods (Douglas & Carless, 2013). Adler and Adler (1987) believed field researchers needed to document their own personal stories, including their roles, membership, and experiences within a community, while conducting ethnographic studies. Using poststructural perspectives, the call to embrace subjectivity and reflexivity within social science research embraces writing the self as an ongoing, emergent, and contradictory project (Gannon, 2013). This position closely aligns with queer theoretical perspectives that describe the self as emergent and in a constant state of becoming. In autoethnography, the self is in a constant state of becoming, a key idea of queer theory, as the researcher (re)negotiates their relationship to the culture/phenomenon (Davies &

Gannon, 2012; Gannon, 2006, 2013). Collaborative autoethnography then is the intentional integration of multiple autoethnographies to understand researchers' relationship to and experiences of a culture/phenomenon. One of the epistemological assumptions of collaborative autoethnography is that the researchers' way(s) of knowing is/are contextually driven and exist/s in relation to the culture in which the researchers are situated. Collaborative autoethnography is based on the premise that knowledge is derived from critical reflexivity among researchers (Rappaport, 2008). Researchers must be attuned to manifestations of power and oppression to define the phenomenon of interest. Knowledge is created *during* critical reflection; when researchers share their personal experiences, they come to understand the differences and similarities in their lived experiences (Breault, 2016; Rinehart & Earl, 2016).

Researchers that engage in collaborative autoethnographic methods take on an evocative epistemology to bring stories to life; the purpose of collaborative autoethnography and as such, evocative epistemology is to *tell* a story rather than *explain* it (Ellis, 2004; Hughes & Pennington, 2017; Jones et al., 2013). Evocative epistemology rests on the notion that researchers must be willing to engage in a level of vulnerability with readers. Vulnerability is an important component of evocative epistemology, because the researcher must *show* personally evocative texts, such as sharing raw feelings and tensions, as well as embracing one's subjectivity (Douglas & Carless, 2013).

An onto-epistemological assumption of collaborative ethnography rests on the notion that knowledge(s) and realities are unstable, given that collaborative autoethnography consists of researchers' personal accounts in relation to a culture or phenomenon. The instability of reality and knowledge lies in the negotiations between the self/culture, self/politics, self/futures, and

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self/self (Allen-Collinson, 2013). Through poststructural thought, the self shifts and engages in relation to others: "autoethnographers thus boldly traverse, blur, and threaten the putative distinctions of the personal and the social, and of self and other" (Allen-Collinson, 2013, p. 297). Ontologically speaking, collaborative autoethnography rejects a "fixed" self, meaning that the self (lived reality) is based on social positioning within a culture which inevitably is fluid and ever changing (Hughes & Pennington, 2017). Put another way, collaborative autoethnography recognizes an individual's experience is largely dependent on sociocultural and political structures. Therefore, the self adapts based on its relation to the external environment or culture. Researchers bring multiple realities and knowledges to the research project offering an opportunity to *queer* the research process by embracing fluidity and rejecting objectivity.

The onto-epistemological assumptions of collaborative autoethnography closely align with queer theoretical perspectives of the self. Queer theoretical perspectives describe identity, often specifically gender and sexuality, as being in a constant state of becoming (Butler, 1993; Sedgwick, 1990). Under poststructural perspectives, queer identities are temporal and never fully reach a place of arrival. Butler (1993) described gender and sexuality as political, performative acts based on social and cultural scripts–their meanings are dependent on interpretations from others. According to queer theory, the individual and queerness itself are in a constant state of becoming (Butler, 1993; Sedgwick, 1990). Similarly, autoethnographic texts recognize the self is never fully imagined and continually (re)shaped in cultural interactions (Adams, 2005; Spry, 2006). Together, queer theory and collaborative autoethnography challenge dominant methodological and onto-epistemological narratives (Jones & Adams, 2016). Namely, Jones and Adams (2016) stated:

Autoethnography is a queer method. Saying so means taking a stand on a poetics of

change. Saying so treats identities and communities as performative and relational

achievements…This recognition of a need to unfasten the hinge that separates experience

and analysis and the personal and the political, even as we need it to create an intelligible

humanity, a life both livable and worth living. (p. 212)

Collaborative autoethnography as a queer method then offers an opportunity into social science

research that *becomes*, is never fully complete, embraces fluid identities and subjectivities, and is

alive.

Collaborative Autoethnography as Methodology

One of the methodological assumptions of collaborative autoethnographic research is that

research is a political tool; in autoethnographic traditions, the researcher critically analyzes and

writes their lived experiences within a culture as a socially just act (Ellis et al., 2011; Hughes et

al., 2012). Autoethnographic methods combine aspects of autobiography and ethnographic

methods, such as personal reflections on past experiences (Denzin, 1988; Freeman, 2010)

together with photographs, textual analysis, journals, and interviews with research participants.

Autoethnographic writing often takes the form of performative, arts-based, and creative methods

to connect the researcher's story to readers. Aligning with poststructuralism, autoethnography

challenges binary, static representations of data by merging scientific knowledge and art. Doing

so draws "attention to the self as subject who is constituted in language, within and through

discourses that are socially and culturally framed" (Gannon, 2013, p. 23).

Paralleling poststructuralism, collaborative autoethnography rejects the positivist stance

that researchers are objective actors in qualitative inquiry (Adams & Jones, 2011; Ellis, 2004;

Hughes et al., 2012; Jones et al., 2013; Rinehart & Earl, 2016). As a result, one of the methodological assumptions of collaborative autoethnography is that researchers are the site of exploration; their subjective experience within a culture forms the basis of the study. Through this perspective, the researcher is also the participant in collaborative autoethnography. Though this methodological assumption is centered on the self, collaborative autoethnography suggests the self as subject is informed and (re)shaped in relation to others (Gannon, 2013; Toyosaki & Pensoneau-Conway, 2013). As such, autoethnographers "interrogate our own identity performance-in-production and its reproductive social mechanisms of injustice" (Toyosaki & Pensoneau-Conway, 2013, p. 565). As a methodology, autoethnography is concerned with critiquing personal experiences to understand oppressive logics within a culture to work toward social justice (Jones et al., 2013).

(Collaborative) Autoethnography in Higher Education Scholarship

Autoethnographic studies have focused on institutional actors' experiences navigating oppressive systems within higher education. Scholars have engaged in autoethnographic research to analyze their lived experiences as individuals with marginalized identities and to reflect on the ways they encounter intersecting forms of oppression (Chang et al., 2014; Hernandez et al., 2015; Hughes & Noblit, 2017; Mobley et al., 2020). For example, Pearce (2020) presented their critiques of being a trans person within the neoliberal university, highlighting their mental health issues and advocated for increased mental health support for marginalized people. Kim (2020) criticized imperialism within academia through their experience as a Korean, foreign-born scholar to advocate for the need of more support for racially marginalized faculty. Other researchers engaged in autoethnography to critique sexism (Edwards, 2017), xenophobia

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(Elbelazi & Alharbi, 2020) and mental normativity (Hoben & Hesson, 2021). Individuals have also used collaborative autoethnography to better understand and challenge oppressive systems within higher education (Ashlee et al., 2017; Crawley & Husakouskaya, 2013; Elbelazi & Alharbi, 2020; Mobley et al., 2020). Across these autoethnographic studies, the scholars critiqued hegemonic ideologies of normalcy within their institution and used their personal experience to advocate for social justice within the academy. In relation to this dissertation, these studies informed the ethical considerations/navigations of belonging to the institution under critique, the use of collaborative and independent methods, and guiding reflective questions.

Critiques and Concerns: Reliability, Validity, and Generalizability

Anderson and Glass-Coffin (2013) cautioned people to consider methodological clarity in autoethnographic research because it does not align with traditional social science methods in terms of structure and 'rigor.' The methodological process in autoethnography is often experimental, fluid, and dynamic as collaborators engage in the research process. As such, social science researchers often criticize autoethnographic methods on the grounds of reliability, validity, and generalizability.

In collaborative autoethnography, challenges of reliability relate to the narrators' credibility, specifically related to matters of truth with/in their story (Ellis et al., 2011). As with other forms of ethnographic inquiry, researchers interpret cultural norms and behaviors. In autoethnography, the reliability of the narrator's story rests on their ability to present "factual evidence" that describe and support the believability of their experience (Bochner, 2002, p. 86). The presence of multiple stories, perspectives, and critiques related to a social phenomenon contribute to concerns of reliability. Validity in collaborative autoethnography relates to the

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authors' ability to show that the story is true or believable. Additionally, Ellis (2004) and Bochner (2002) added that validity rests on the authors' ability to communicate the utility and importance of a story. Ellis et al. (2011) claimed generalizability in autoethnographic research moves from applicability to respondents instead to resonance with the reader. Generalizability determines "whether the (specific) autoethnographer is able to illuminate (general) unfamiliar cultural process" (Ellis et al., 2011, para. 35). The text's ability to evoke feelings and emotionality are characteristics of importance in determining the credibility of autoethnographic texts (Ellis, 2004).

Yet, I find it important to note core concerns related to reliability, validity, and generalizability in collaborative autoethnography are rooted in positivistic standards. Ellis et al. (2011) corrected criticisms toward autoethnography as a methodology that is not rigorous, too emotional, and too personal by troubling postpositivist social science standards. The criticisms toward autoethnography position science and art against each other. Though Ellis et al. (2011) did not frame their argument on queer theoretical perspectives, they suggested an autoethnographic queer intervention into social science research: "Autoethnography, as a method, attempts to disrupt the binary of science and art. Autoethnographers believe research can be rigorous, theoretical, and analytical *and* emotional, therapeutic, and inclusive of personal and social phenomena" (para. 39). Queer perspectives further this disruption in collaborative autoethnography where collaborators interrogate the self and others in relation to a social phenomenon; the performative self and its material realities exist through relationships with others (Butler, 1990). In this dissertation, queer theoretical perspectives addressed the criticisms

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of autoethnography, specifically collaborative autoethnography, by embracing science and art as inextricably linked forces.

In the following section, I present the setting of the study, present collaborative autoethnographic sampling methods, including participant selection and the role of the co-researchers. Then, I discuss data collection, analysis, and reporting of findings. Throughout this section, I weave ethical considerations and issues that emerged when conducting collaborative autoethnography including the relationship of the self to the group.

Initial Co-Researcher Criteria

This study emerged through my experience organizing alongside other (student) activists at Auburn University during her doctoral program. Various (student) activist organizations whom I had co-conspired alongside were the collaborative autoethnographers in this study.

As noted in Chapter One, during the fall 2019 semester, students at Auburn University organized in response to a homophobic and transphobic incident within one of the university's colleges. The group of (student) activists worked with supportive faculty and staff members to implement LGBTQ+ inclusive resources and presented LGBTQ+ focused educational seminars to university constituents. In May 2020, the same group of (student) activists organized around the murder of George Floyd and expanded efforts to include local community members. The Student Collective formed to advocate for racial equity within the local campus community. Members of The (Student) Collective were also involved in grassroots abolitionist organizing across the state of Alabama with the organization, (Student) Carceral Abolitionists. (Student) Carceral Abolitionists is a joint effort of Alabama students, residents, and abolitionists to abolish

carceral systems across the state of Alabama. I used pseudonyms for the two (student) activist organizations and describe the reasoning for that decision below.

For the purposes of this dissertation, collaborative autoethnographers must have met the following criteria:

1. Collaborative autoethnographers must be involved or previously involved in LGBTQ+ equity, racial equity, and ending state sanctioned violence organizing.

2. Collaborative autoethnographers must be enrolled or previously enrolled at a university in the Deep South beginning in the Fall 2019 semester OR

3. Collaborative autoethnographers must be or were involved as community members beginning in the Fall 2019 semester and.

4. Collaborative autoethnographers must self-identify as queer, LGBQ, and/or transgender (this can include any identity that is not explicitly captured under the LGBTQ+ moniker, gender expressions, identities, romantic queerness, and queer sex acts (Weise, 2021).

Below, I provide explanations behind the selection criteria.

As I previously discussed, intimacy, reciprocity, and relationships are the core methodological assumptions of collaborative autoethnography (Hernandez & Ngunjiri, 2013; Rutter et al., 2021). I formed personal relationships through organizing efforts starting in the fall of 2019 and as such, established the rapport necessary for engaging in collaborative autoethnography. It was also important that collaborative autoethnographers understood the activist efforts under investigation in this dissertation in order to critically reflect on and analyze their own experiences. Given that the focus of this dissertation was on (student) activism, collaborative autoethnographers must have been an enrolled student at the situated university in

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the Deep South or a local community member. Finally, given the queer theoretical foundation and trajectory of this dissertation, collaborative autoethnographers must have identified as queer. Though I attempted to push queer theory's political usage, I also recognized that queer theory emerged from gay and lesbian activism and studies (Amin, 2016; Cohen, 1997; Graves, 2012). Gay and lesbian studies, queer studies, and gender studies curriculum came to higher education due to the efforts of student activists, most notably from the 1960s to 1980s. So, queer theory is historically rooted in the experiences of queer folx; to not acknowledge this reality does not fully capture the history of queer theory. As such, in this study, I aimed to extend queer theory within and beyond queer identities to explore queer theory's usage as a political tool.

Collaborator Recruitment

To build the group of collaborators, I individually reached out to two to four (student) activists. I decided to invite (student) activists whom I started organizing with in 2019 and continued to advocate with for sociocultural and political change until the time I proposed this study. The minimum number of collaborators I sought out was two because duoethnography (another collaborative methodology) requires collaboration among the researcher and one other person (Breault, 2016). The maximum number of collaborators was four (not including myself) to maintain a small team so that we could thoroughly explore the depth of our experiences as (student) activists in the Deep South.

I reached out to the collaborators via email or Slack (see Appendix A) expressing my interest in collaborating with them on their experiences as a (student) activist. I included the study information letter (see Appendix B) in the recruitment email and/or Slack message. An ethical concern related to anonymity may have emerged during collaborator recruitment, writing,

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and dissemination of research. The collaborators chose a pseudonym to protect their image and maintain confidentiality throughout the study. At the end of the first focus group, we discussed maintaining confidentiality for the (student) activist communities named throughout the study. We decided to anonymize the (student) activist communities because other members of The (Student) Coalition and (Student) Carceral Abolitionists were not present to provide input on that decision.

Another ethical concern that emerged is related to the personal connections that I built with the collaborators. I recognize that our relationships are what brought me to this study given my connection to the activism and (student) activists with whom I wish to collaborate. However, I viewed this is an opportunity to queer methodological procedures. Jourian and Nicolazzo (2017) encouraged researchers engaged in queer scholarship to shift their perspective toward doing studies *with* people rather than *on* people. Furthermore, they offered possibilities for queer research by disrupting normative, post-positivist norms by challenging what it means to be in community with research participants. In fact, Jourian and Nicolazzo (2017) named that "collaborative praxis is a [as] decidedly queer project" (p. 595); being in close community with 'research participants' is inherently queer (see Browne & Nash, 2016 for a collection of literature on queer research methods). In their article describing the role of queering community in research, Jourian and Nicolazzo (2016) discussed their own experiences being in community with 'research participants.' Spending time with research collaborators outside of formal data collection processes and being friends on social media are reasonable dynamics in queer collaborative research. Throughout the duration of this study, I maintained my relationship with the (student) activists as both research collaborators and my friends.

Collaborator Profiles

In this section, I provide a brief overview of each collaborator, including key characteristics they identified in the focus groups and/or interview, their first activist experience, and a description of their reflective journal. Following the collaborator profiles, I introduce the (student) activist organizations the collaborators created and organized with from 2019 to 2021. As a note, the collaborators self-selected their pseudonyms as a singular letter rather than a name. For the (student) activist organizations, I created the pseudonyms after a collective decision to anonymize the groups.

C (they/them). At the time of the focus groups, C identified as a non-binary white lesbian, a graduate student at Auburn University, and an environmental activist. I first met C in a (Student) Carceral Abolitionists' Zoom meeting in 2021 focused on an upcoming protest calling attention to the connection between the brother of a member of Auburn University's Board of Trustees and his construction company's investment in a $3 billion private prison plan. I later met C at the protest and continued to see them at local Drag trivia nights and coffee shops. C stated their first formal experience participating in organizing was with the (Student) Carceral Abolitionists. However, as they reflected, they realized that their role as the Service Project Coordinator for a high school club was an early form of (student) activism and said, "I would like to coordinate service projects. And I think at that time, I wouldn't have known that that was community organizing, but now think that that probably was." Through their organizing with the (Student) Carceral Abolitionists, C realized their heart was not in prison abolition work and was instead passionate about environmental activism. Their enthusiasm for environmental activism stemmed in their childhood experiences, because they "really, really want to save, like, this

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beautiful environment that [they] felt nurtured [them]." For their reflective journal, C wrote a free-form poem or as they called it, "a notes-app rant," about their experiences as a (student) activist. In their reflective journal, they highlighted the temporality of their identities, frustrations from gendered labor within the (Student) Carceral Abolitionists, and early queer experiences informing their present queerness.

R (they/she). During the focus groups, R identified as a queer white person and a graduate student at a school in the Midwestern region of the United States. R and I first met through campus organizing around queer advocacy in November 2019 when they were an undergraduate student at Auburn University. We attended several planning meetings with other queer (student) activists, designed queer education materials, and co-wrote a "Dear white allies" letter for a protest after George Floyd's murder. R is passionate about educational policy and is hyper critical of the manifestations of whiteness in academia and society. In The (Student) Coalition and (Student) Carceral Abolitionists, R helped organize protests, design learn-in sessions, and plan meetings with Auburn University administrators. Organizing with queer (student) activists gave R an "experience of like freedom and power" that allowed them to step outside of their comfort zone because they were "with people who would have [their] back and [they] would all have each other's back." In their reflective journal, R drew a sketch that represented the (student) activists in The (Student) Coalition and (Student) Carceral Abolitionists. At the heart of the sketch was a non-conforming "blob" surrounded by rigid blocks and structures. R imagined the blob in radiating warm tones like yellow and orange contrasted against dark blue and purple rigid towers. Their sketch signified the radiating collective power that (student) activists have over "people who traditionally have power in society."

S (he/him): S identified as a bisexual Black man and was a graduate student at Auburn University. S and I first met in the early formation of The (Student) Coalition when we organized a protest after George Floyd's murder in May 2020. During that time, S went from "being the press guy" to "the guy that gave speeches" at protests and a Black trans vigil. S attributed his involvement in (student) activism as an opportunity that "gave him a sense of purpose" and helped him find his way out of a deep depression. During his time as a (student) activist with The (Student) Coalition and (Student) Carceral Abolitionists, S led a number of marches and protests, some of which I had the privilege of attending with him. S attributed his love for activism with "loving and caring about certain people from my youth and how that love has transcended decades and generations." As a queer Black activist, S took pride in being a role model for younger Black activists and queer activists, was honored to share the stories of a Black trans person at a vigil and hoped that "the next generation of college students can do better than what we did. [They] can make more change and can continue to snowball this effect." In his reflective journal, S created a playlist of songs that encompass his love for activism, love for people, the power of people, and his individual power to create change.

J (any pronouns). Before any of their social identities, J identified as a community organizer. They are passionate about organizing people to build communities and help them realize their collective power. In addition to being a community organizer, J identifies as a non-binary queer person who "is not picky" about their pronouns. Prior to their involvement with The (Student) Coalition and (Student) Carceral Abolitionists, J was an undergraduate student at Auburn University and organized with their socialist friends when Richard Spencer came to campus. J did not graduate from Auburn University due to its classist, ableist, transphobic and

homophobic culture. J's motivation for organizing rests on their personal experiences as a lonely, queer, neurodivergent person living in Alabama and their desire to eradicate systems of power that informed their experience so that other people do not have the same experience. In hir[4] current role as a community organizer, J builds relationships and communities with rural Alabamians and hopes to stay involved with (student) activists. For zir reflective journal, J presented three journals that they took notes in about their emotional memories from organizing and to represent what it is like having ADHD. "Commiserating with other people on how to fuck up the system" opened the potential of their activism and desire to make the world a better place.

Jessica (she/they). I am the author of this dissertation, identify as a queer white person, and am a current doctoral candidate at Auburn University. I first participated in activism as a child when I attended an Alvord Unified School District teacher's union protest in Southern California with my mom. At Auburn University, I organized with other queer (student) activists, including R, around queer advocacy topics in November 2019. I was involved in The (Student) Coalition because of the initial queer advocacy organizing and continued to organize with them until the members of the organization graduated. I continue to engage in activism through scholarship, including the present study. In my reflective journal, I created a collage of newspaper clippings that show the story of my experience as (student) activist at Auburn University. I provide a more in-depth description of my position in this study in the Researcher Statement section.

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[4] I purposefully used different pronouns in J's collaborator profile because they use any pronouns. Ze/zir/zirs and he/hir/hirs are gender non-binary and gender non-conforming pronouns.

(Student) Activist Organization Profiles

In the following sections, I present the (student) activist organizations referenced throughout the dissertation: The (Student) Coalition and (Student) Carceral Abolitionists. The collaborators met each other through organizing in these (student) activist communities. The (Student) Coalition and (Carceral) Student Abolitionists were grassroots organizations founded by college students in Alabama and came together partially in response to a homophobic and transphobic incident in the College of Education. Each organization formed organically, meaning students came together because of their shared concern for queer and racial equity as well as prison abolition in Alabama. As mentioned previously, I selected the pseudonyms after the collaborators and myself collectively decided to anonymize each organization because other (student) activists were not present to weigh in on the decision.

The (Student) Coalition. Described by S, The (Student) Coalition was a "radical racial equality" college student-run organization that formed in light of George Floyd's murder in May 2020. After organizing a protest in Auburn, AL, the group focused on racial equity through education and direct action to Auburn University administrators. Within this (student) activist community, the members focused on educating themselves on topics related to racial equity and intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991). The (Student) Coalition held meetings with students, alumni, faculty, staff, and mid-level administrators to understand the needs of the stakeholders and to build coalition across the university. Actions led to exchanges back and forth with upper-level administrators such as the president, members of the provost's office, and representatives from the Office of Inclusion and Diversity. Additionally, The (Student) Coalition partnered with local grassroots organizations, community members, and faculty, staff, and administrative allies

for transformative change within and beyond the university. The culmination of The (Student) Coalition's efforts led to a list of demands such as monetary commitments to racial equity initiatives like a Black advocacy center, scholarships and tuition assistance to underrepresented students, and accessible diversity, equity, and inclusion liaisons across all colleges. The (Student) Coalition's efforts were direct actions that addressed white supremacy and heteropatriarchy at Auburn University and strategies to create an anti-racist community.

(Student) Carceral Abolitionists. As an organization focused on carceral prison abolition in Alabama, the (Student) Carceral Abolitionists organized (student) activists and community members across Alabama. Some of the (student) activists in The (Student) Coalition were also part of this organization and the (Student) Carceral Abolitionists extended beyond Auburn University's campus and included (student) activists from across the state of Alabama. Additionally, the (Student) Carceral Abolitionists partnered with organizations that advocated for incarcerated people, environmental justice groups, policy advocates, and abolition networks. The direct actions of the (Student) Carceral Abolitionists included numerous protests, letter writing campaigns and "phone zaps" to Alabama legislators, social media campaigns, and virtual education sessions. This community was a student-led grassroots organization that came together to stop a $3 billion private prison plan and advocate for incarcerated people. The (Student) Carceral Abolitionists is an abolitionist organization seeking to eradicate carceral abolition in all forms.

Data Collection

The collaborators in this study were (student) activists with The (Student) Coalition and (Student) Carceral Abolitionists and participated in data collection. Autoethnographic writing

follows ethnographic methods such as fieldnotes, personal documents, and interviews (Anderson & Glass-Coffin, 2013). The purpose of data collection in autoethnographic research is to generate data that contributes to the researcher's understandings of their relation to "the field." Queer methodologists question the applicability of standard social science research methods within research that is queer (Browne & Nash, 2016). In this study, I echo their query and also recognize the conundrum that is finding coherence within a onto-epistemological tradition that is supposed to be messy. Gathering data for this study included reflective writing (McMahon et al., 2012), focus groups (Bennett, 2002; Gorman-Murray et al., 2016), an individual interview (Browne & Nash, 2016), and document analysis of publicly available (student) activist documents (Wolcott, 2008). I received IRB approval for this study in November 2021. After conducting the first focus group, I submitted a revision to the approved IRB protocol to add individual interviews to data collection. I received approval for the revision in February 2022.

Data collection included retroactive reflections on collaborators' experiences as (student) activists. Collaborators used their reflective journals to analyze their experiences organizing around LGBTQ+ equity, racial equity, and carceral abolition as (student) activists in the Deep South. I encouraged collaborators to pay particular attention to emotional and evocative sensibilities within their reflections (McMahon et al., 2012). I also invited them to write in a personal journal to capture their affective responses. Aligning with collaborative autoethnographic methods, I engaged in these same practices alongside the collaborators. As discussed earlier, ethnographic writing often centers evocative epistemologies (Mykhalovskiy, 1996). Researchers weave critical reflection in autoethnography methods from an evocative approach as seen through *testimonios*, counternarratives (Chavez, 2012), and emotional recall

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(McMahon et al., 2012). The collaborators participated in evocative critical reflection and emotional recall through an arts-based reflective journal after the first focus group session.

Reflective Writing

Reflective writing is a central component to collaborative autoethnographic writing. The collaborators and myself engaged in reflective writing after the two focus group sessions to capture their initial thoughts and feelings (see Appendix C). In between the first and second collaborative discussion, the collaborators received a set of reflective questions to help guide their performative modality (e.g., written narrative, poem, graphic art, music; Barone & Eisner, 1997; Bhattacharya & Payne, 2016; Butler-Kisber, 2002). Aligning with collaborative autoethnographic methods, I also referred to the reflective questions when I created my reflective journal through collaging. During the second focus group, collaborators discussed their written reflections. These discussions helped the collaborators and myself better understand each other's experiences as (student) activists and informed further reflective writing. To help collaborators engage in autoethnographic writing, I followed Alexander's (2013) pedagogical trajectories of teaching autoethnography, decisions that I further articulate below as I describe the process of analysis:

> Applied to autoethnography, reflexivity is key to assisting students in seeing and knowing themselves in relation to culture and community; it is key to helping students to recognize their moral and ethical accountabilities, and the origins of their logics. So, while teaching autoethnography and engaging an autoethnographic pedagogy, I remind students *that they are not telling stories about what other people did to them. They are telling on themselves in the context of culture.* (p. 550-551)

Autoethnographic reflective writing values each voice as collaborators engage in "radical acts of both giving testimony and witnessing" (Alexander, 2013, p. 552); researchers mobilize their own story as critique, resistance, and activism. Furthermore, Spry (2018) extended the purpose of reflexivity and reflective writing in autoethnography as an epistemology that "seeks to articulate and embody the sociocultural effects of our material and discursive bodies" (p. 632). Put another way, reflexivity in autoethnography brings stories to the forefront through textual discourse. In this dissertation, collaborative ethnographic writing looked to the collaborators' and my own stories and shared experiences; the writing challenged the socio-cultural-political conditions that shape materiality.

Given that much of autoethnographic writing is reflective, researchers often write from memory "to memorialize the past and present, creating new spaces for community and collective memory" (Giorgio, 2013, p. 407). Chang (2013) provided an extensive list of data collection methods such as "recalling, collecting artifacts and documents, interviewing others, analyzing self, observing self, and reflecting on issues pertaining to the research topic" (p. 113). Recalling is a practice of reflecting on past experiences and memories related to the research topic (Anderson & Glass-Coffin, 2013; Bochner, 2013; Ellis, 2004). Recalling or writing from memory is a common data collection method considering the researcher's experience is the site of research.

Collaborative autoethnographic writing in this dissertation has elements of recall and writing from memory considering the retroactive nature of (student) activism that started in the fall 2019 semester. Recall or writing from memory (Lapadat, 2009) is a way of queering data collection methods through queer theory's attention to time and temporality. Freeman (2010)

referred to chrononormativity as the process of organizing bodies toward productivity; institutionalized structures regulate time along static, linear constructs where there is a clear beginning, middle, and end. Queer time troubles the normativity of linearity and in ethnography, "the 'field' becomes a spatial, temporal and sensory capsule, which is constantly revisited through notes, transcripts and memory in order to make sense of it and to find its broader sociological significance and meaning" (Rooke, 2010, p. 30). Queer temporalities informs data collection in this study because the data, (e.g., stories, memories, and textual discourse) are performativities of existence that refuse linearity (Dinshaw et al., 2007). In this study, I troubled the84ormativee dissertation research process that traditionally has a clear start and end point because my observations and experiences at Auburn University in 2016 and again in 2018 after the homophobic and transphobic incident informed my interest in queer (student) activism. Additionally, though this study will formally end on the day that my doctoral degree is conferred, the (student) activism and queer worldmaking at the heart of the research will go on. Considering that recall and reflection are major components of autoethnography, stories collected in this study came from the past, present, and future–because queerness never fully reaches a place of arrival (Barad, 2007; Butler, 1990). Collaborative autoethnographic texts in this study troubled normative data collection processes through temporal reflective writing and focus group sessions.

Chang (2013) offered different approaches to collecting reflective writing in collaborative autoethnography. Self-analysis is an exercise where collaborators engage in present analysis of the self. Self-observation is a similar process to self-analysis; researchers record their current/past behaviors, actions, and activities (Galman, 2011; Rodriguez & Ryave, 2002). The

difference between the two is that self-observation does not intentionally investigate the behaviors, actions, and activities of the individual. I recognize that creating a clear distinction between self-analysis and self-observation is a redundant task because these forms of reflection can occur concurrently. These approaches to self-reflection differ from recall because researchers focus on the present moment, rather than past reflections of activism. As part of reflective writing, (student) activists engaged in self-analysis and/or self-observation of activities related to their activism. These activities encouraged the collaborators and myself to consider our taken-for-granted or habitual practices that could be considered daily acts of activism. Lastly, self-observation and self-analysis helped encourage us to document their emotions and evocative sensibilities related to their engagement in organizing.

Focus Groups

We engaged in two 60- to 90-minute focus group interviews to discuss our experiences and understandings of organizing on LGBTQ+ equity, racial equity, and carceral abolition; these focus groups were guided by discussion questions (see Appendix D). The purposes of collaborative focus groups are to engage all autoethnographers in conversation on their experiences as (student) activists. The first focus group session took place during in January 2022 and the collaborators and myself reflected on our general thoughts and ideas about their (student) activist experiences. Specifically, these questions were focused on our motivations, experiences, decision-making processes, and challenges related to grassroots organizing. Additionally, the motivation of the first focus group was to understand the relationship between our queerness and activism.

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The purpose of the second focus group session was to discuss everyone's reflections that took place after the first collaborative sessions (see Appendix E). Occurring in February 2022, the second focus group session covered the similarities and differences in their experiences related to organizing based on their written reflections. Particularly, we talked about the role of identity in our organizing. Additionally, the second focus group session focused on looking forward to the possibilities that (student) activism offers within and beyond the institution of higher education. Engaging in two focus group sessions allowed us time to thoughtfully collaborate, write, and reflect on conversations from the sessions.

Interviews

In addition to the two focus groups, I invited the collaborators to participate in a 60- to 90-minute individual interview to learn more about each collaborator's individual experience as a (student) activist. The purpose of the interview was to focus on individual experiences related to being a queer person, a student/community member in Auburn, and being involved in activism. Additionally, the interview served as an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding into the collaborators' personal motivations, decisions, and desires to engage in (student) activism. S, J, and myself opted into an individual interview and R and C did not participate in an interview because they did not have time due to their graduate program demands. Following autoethnographic practices (Chang, 2013), I engaged in my self-interview through reflective practices, responding to the questions in the interview protocol (see Appendix F). The interview differed from reflective writing because I followed the 60- to 90-minute time allotment and followed the interview protocol. I elected to do an interview to allow myself the opportunity to elaborate on my experiences that I did not have a chance to speak to in the focus groups.

Document Analysis

To better understand the tactics (student) activists employed, I looked to (student) activist primary sources such as letters to university administrators; lists of demands to university administrators; publicly available institutional statements; and relevant news articles as topics to discuss. Starting in 2018, I saved these documents during my involvement as a (student) activist. I also used the search engine platform on The Auburn Plainsman website to locate articles using keywords like "student activism," "queer students," and "racial equity" from 2019–2021. Through a poststructural queer lens, the documents functioned as active, living participants in the study given the historicism of discourse (Lincoln et al., 2018; Seidman, 1994). Additionally, communication via textual discourse among (student) activists, faculty activists, and administrators played an important role in the present study. The purpose behind the document analysis was to include supplementary information to understand the motivations behind organizing. That is, I wanted to contextualize what was the climate of the institution the (student) activists were working in. Additionally, collecting these materials shed light on the role of social media in organizing efforts. The collaborators used social media to quickly share their demands and distribute information about queer advocacy, racial equity, and carceral abolition.

Data Analysis

Data analysis involved inductive and deductive approaches to comprehend the collaborators' and my descriptions of participating in performance through strategies and tactics that challenged white supremacist and heteropatriarchal logics at Auburn University. As I transcribed the focus groups and interviews, I engaged in analytic memoing to capture my initial thoughts and reactions to the data. Analytic memoing allowed me to reflect on the data from a

conceptual perspective (Birks et al., 2008), ultimately helping me understand how I approached the data through a queer lens. When I finished the focus groups, interview transcriptions, and analytic memoing, I wrote in my reflective journal about my initial reactions and observations to the patterns in the data. The emergent patterns in the data related to fluidity within queerness and activism, the role of (student) activist communities, and queer strategies and tactics in (student) activism. Following Richardson and St. Pierre (2005), I engaged in writing as a form of analysis to think through the patterns in the data. Reflective writing as a method of analysis further situated myself within the study.

Upon the initial analytic memoing, I conducted a deductive analysis of the data informed by queer theoretical perspectives (Lincoln et al., 2018; Seidman, 1994) through annotations. With postmodern and poststructural queer theories in mind, I highlighted the collaborators' descriptions of their own queerness and activism, noting the fluidity of these terms. There is an inherent tension between deductive approaches and queer perspectives because deduction prescribes predetermined meanings to data. I reconciled this tension because deductively analyzing the data through queer perspectives allowed me to mobilize the political potentials of queer inquiry. Deductively analyzing the data through a postmodern and poststructural queer lens showed me the instability of categorizations along queer and gender lines, as well as behaviors deemed as activism. As I deductively analyzed the data, I returned to my analytic memos, reflective writing, and emergent patterns to understand the collaborators' and my queerness and activism as a politic.

After the first round of deductive analysis, I identified five major occurrences within the data: 1) Queerness in (Student) Activism, 2) (Student) Activist Community, 3) The Art of Queer

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Organizing, 4) Organizing Within and Beyond Higher Education, and 5) (Re)Conceptualizing (Student) Activism. Once I identified these themes, I engaged in another round of deductive analysis with the research questions in mind. I was mindful of the tension between poststructural and postmodern queer perspectives, as well as queer of color critique, allowing this tension to push me toward the potentiality of queer (student) activism. From a poststructural and postmodern queer perspective, mobilizing queer theory as a politic pointed me toward disruptions to hegemonic meanings, categorization, and knowledges in the data. Focusing my analysis on the group of collaborators allowed me to recognize their tactics and strategies as queer worldmaking practices. As such, my interpretation of the data was also informed by a queer of color analysis as I sought to grasp how the collaborators and myself critiqued and defied heteronormativity and white supremacy through community building tactics. This cyclical analytic approach and theoretical tension guided my analysis of the collaborators' and my defiance to hegemonic categorization, logics, and power structures within and beyond Auburn University, and my interpretation of our material conditions as worldmaking practices.

Through the second round of deductive analysis, I reconfigured the original five themes into three themes from the data: 1) (Student) Activist Community, 2) Queerness in (Student) Activism, and 3) The Art of Queer Organizing. I collapsed the initial "Organizing Within and Beyond Higher Education" and "(Re)conceptualizing (Student) Activism" into subthemes and descriptions throughout the three themes. Within each theme, I also identified subthemes that further contextualized the collaborators' and my queer worldmaking practices and counterpublic creations. During this process, I focused on showing the collaborators' stories of queer worldmaking within an oppressive and hostile campus and local community.

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In addition to deductive analysis, I used writing as method of analysis (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). Poststructural assumptions guide writing as a method, specifically the "continual cocreation of the self and social science; they are known through each other. Knowing the self and knowing about the subject are intertwined, partial, historical local knowledges" (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, p. 962). Through this perspective, writing/analyzing data through creative and evocative productions such as poetry, storying, and visual texts lead to "new" ways of knowing. As I analyzed the data, I listened to S's reflective journal in the form of a playlist about love, power, and activism. Immersing myself into meaningful music about individual power, collective potential, and activism while analyzing data helped me connect to the data and recall my memories of organizing alongside the collaborators. Queering writing as data analysis rejects static positionings of the data and "hinges on the push and pull between and among analysis and evocation, personal experience and larger social, cultural and political concerns" (Jones & Adams, 2016, p. 198). Cyclical reflection occurred throughout the data collection, analysis, and reporting stages of the dissertation. In particular, I moved through reflection, analysis, and writing and back to reflection.

I invited the collaborators to provide feedback after I completed my analysis of the data. Two common approaches to data analysis in autoethnography are intuitive approaches to meaning making (Ellis, 2004; Goodall, 2008; Muncey, 2010) and analytic approaches (Anderson, 2006; Lietz et al., 2006). Intuitive approaches include reading, watching, and listening to data holistically to capture intuitive or emotional reactions. The collaborators received an overview of the preliminary data analysis for Chapter Four following the completion of the second focus groups. In the document, I provided an overview of the three emergent

themes: building (student) activist communities, catalyzing queer awakenings, and the art of organizing. Within each theme, I provided rich descriptions and summaries of the three concepts through my own interpretations. In addition to an overview of the preliminary data analysis, I also emailed the collaborators a fully written draft of Chapter Four. In the email, I invited the collaborators to send their feedback and additional information they wanted in Chapter Four. I also asked them to provide any suggestions for the implications of the research for Chapter Five.

I invited the collaborators to participate in data analysis after the focus groups, but I analyzed the data independently. None of the collaborators opted into data analysis because they shared that they were busy with graduate school and work demands. The collaborators did not formally send any recommendations or additional areas of exploration via email for Chapter Four and Five. Rather, they shared their thoughts with me when we informally gathered at a crawfish boil and Korean restaurant. I recognize that data analysis is cyclical and rather than prescribe an order to data analysis, I embraced its messiness and the borders that define data, stories, and lived experiences (Heckert, 2016).

Reporting

Ethical issues may emerge in the reporting of collaborative autoethnographic research through (mis)representations of other actors in their story (Chang, 2013). Considering that collaborative autoethnography functions within relational ethics, researchers have an obligation to portray members of their narrative without commodifying them. Lapadat (2017) alluded autoethnographers consider concerns related to confidentiality of other actors given the heightened attention to the primary researcher's identity/experience. Because collaborators straddle the insider/outsider and researcher/participant binary, collaborators may not be able to

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maintain anonymity and confidentiality during the research process. For example, researchers may have to reveal identifiable details when writing about their own experiences such as their occupation, program of study, and affiliation with organizations. In this study, I found it challenging and slightly redundant to remove all identifiable information because queer autoethnographic methods are rooted in the self; they are rooted in "refiguring how lives (and lives worth living) come into being" (Jones & Adams, 2016, p. 197). Additionally, Detamore (2016) signaled that queer research methods are intimate, political and cannot disengage from the personal. To reconcile this tension, I leaned into the personal relationships I built with the collaborators and trusted their judgment and decisions to de-identify themselves and/or make their identity known. In the case of this dissertation, collaborators had autonomy over how they are named in publications and other reporting measures. The collaborators self-selected a pseudonym to protect their identity.

Within this discussion on reporting, I consider the role of the self in collaborative autoethnography. Lewis and Russell (2011) wrote about how ethnographic researchers become embedded to the research and community they are investigating. For example, the director of an institution's LGBTQ+ resource center conducting an ethnographic study of the LGBTQ+ resource center is considered embedded research. In this example, the director is affiliated with the community they are researching *and* the institution. In the context of this collaborative autoethnography, *I*, the researcher am employed by Auburn University under critique, am embedded to the research and the community of (student) activists. To navigate these tensions, I engaged in critical self-reflection to identify my purpose and hope for the forthcoming implications of this study. The research and organizing I did alongside the collaborators were

intentionally antiestablishment. The motives behind our activism were to expose white supremacy and heteropatriarchy, create communities of refusal and love (Tuck, 2018), and build an anti-oppressive world. As such, I aligned this dissertation with the values of The (Student) Coalition and (Student) Carceral Abolitionists to prioritize the (student) activists and work that we did together. Following writing formats used in collaborative autoethnography, I present my researcher positionality statement in the form of a story. In the story, I discuss how I came to the topic of queering (student) activism through my own experiences leading up to organizing alongside other (student) activists.

Researcher Statement

People often ask why I came to Alabama from California for graduate school. In 2015, I was finishing up my undergraduate degree at Northern Arizona University. I remember sitting in my room working on a paper while watching live coverage of the riots in Ferguson, Missouri. A police officer just murdered Michael Brown. A few days passed, and my teammate and I were talking about everything going on in Ferguson during practice (this was after the football team joined the Concerned Students 1950 protest). We chatted about the power student (athletes) had on college campuses. We imagined the possibilities of change student athletes could bring to athletics, higher education, and society. We understood the labor and exploitation of student athletes within intercollegiate athletics, especially coming from a non-revenue generating sport. We imagined what we could do to incite transformative change at our own institution as student athletes. We imagined all the student athletes coming together to demand some sort of change within our community. We dreamed. The Deep South has a reputation for high-performing intercollegiate athletic programs. I came from a dream to work within college athletics to

elevate/support student athlete concerns. The students at Mizzou inspired me and I wanted to put myself in a position to support student (athlete) activists.

Ever since November 2019, I have been in community with (student) activists, with my friends. We organized and led LGBTQ+ education sessions with campus organizations. In May 2020, we organized a protest in response to George Floyd's death. We filled our small college downtown street with thousands of people. We held a vigil for Nina Pop, Tony McDade, Dominique "Rem'mie" Fells, and the trans lives lost at the hands of state-sanctioned violence and senseless murder.

I was inextricably woven in/to this study, as a researcher, a (student) activist, and as a queer person. As a researcher, I could not remove the methodological and onto-epistemological lenses that informed my theoretical sensemaking of what it means to be a (student) activist, and what it might mean to *queer* (student) activism. I was and am intellectualizing off the lived experiences of people who face institutional-sanctioned violence because of the identities they hold. As a (student) activist, I could not ignore the intimacy and love I built with the people with whom I engaged in this research. I am incredibly thankful for our relationships. As a queer white person, I was privy to (re)producing hegemonic ideologies of normalcy through the collection, analysis, and reporting of this dissertation. I was and am embedded to the predominantly white capitalist institution as a white graduate student. In my position as a doctoral candidate, I am required to *do* research if I want to receive my terminal degree. My proximity to whiteness as a cis/read (straight) person places me in a position to reap the benefits of white supremacy. Witnessing the manifestations of white supremacy and experiencing the ramifications of heteropatriarchy in real-time brought me to how I *did* research: through compassion for the earth

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and its inhabitants. Recently, I learned about queer love and queer joy through my own experience(s) of being in community with queer studies scholars in the Deep South. We all talked about what it means to be in community with students and people participating in research, together with what what it means to queer research and education. This is how I did and will continue to do queer research.

As a human, I wrote this dissertation from a place of love for the people and (student) activist communities that shaped my understandings of queer love, hope, and community.

Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to detail the collaborative autoethnographic research design that provided the tools and techniques to explore (student) activism in the Deep South. This chapter started with tracing the lineages of collaborative autoethnography, briefly starting with ethnography and then autoethnography. Further, I elaborated on the philosophical assumptions of collaborative autoethnography, discussing its potential to honor community and collaborators' knowledge in research. By thoroughly presenting the onto-epistemological and methodological traditions of collaborative autoethnography, I created a research design that aligned with those philosophical pieces. Then, I explained the methods, invitation to co-researchers, and data analysis. I finished this chapter with a researcher statement to position my role within this project and how I engaged further in the study.

Chapter Four: Reporting of Findings

In the following chapter, I present findings from the study. I analyzed and interpreted data through queer theoretical perspectives, including concepts of writing as a method of inquiry (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005), queer worldmaking (Berlant & Warner, 1998; Blockett, 2018; Muñoz, 1999, 2009), and queer temporality (Dinshaw et al., 2005; Freeman, 2019). I relied on deductive analyses (Graham, 2010) to honor the poststructural, postmodern, and queer of color critique onto-epistemologies that guided this research and to engage in a creative analytical practice within the collaborative autoethnographic methodology. The queer theoretical perspectives of this study helped me critically analyze the experiences of the collaborators and myself and the ideologies that informed our organizing decisions and behaviors. Additionally, queer theories informed my interpretation of our (student) activist experiences as queer worldmaking and counterpublic tactics (Berlant & Warner, 1998). In this study, queer worldmaking was a tactic to resist white supremacist and heteropatriarchal logics at Auburn University and build coalitional power with marginalized communities. The following sections present three concepts at the heart of my analysis of the data: building (student) activist communities, catalyzing queer awakenings, and the art of organizing.

(Student) Activist Community

In October 2019, I read the headline of a local newspaper article, "'Undercurrent of fear': Students say professor's online posts are indicative of anti-LGBTQ culture in Auburn" (Medina, 2019). I let out a long sigh. At the time, I lived in Auburn for three years and noticed that queerness and queer communities were mostly invisible to the public. As I read this headline, I prepared myself for disappointment. Students in a tenured professor's class found his

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Facebook where he shared homophobic and transphobic rhetoric. The tenured professor said he is within his right of Freedom of Speech to share his opinion. The university and College of Education failed to comment or support the LGBTQ-identifying people targeted by the tenured professor. I continued to read the article:

> *…boys ridicule "those homosexuals," those people who would burn in hell, they said, who would feel the wrath of the world if they ever dared to love beyond the confines of a man and woman…all of President Trump's "bad tweets" wouldn't be morally equivalent to the "single firing or non-hire of a person for being critical of the 'LGBT' agenda or a single obscene 'Drag Queen Story Hour' corrupting the minds of young children…He also said it's "normal" to oppose the gay community because "we could dislike the things that destroy us, the things that injure us. Homosexuality, for example, injures by spreading a whole lot of sexual diseases." (Medina, 2019, p. 2-4)*

I put my phone down, stopped reading, and closed my eyes. I cried. I cried for the queer students in his classroom. I cried for the queer students who have heard these messages their whole life– that they are a disease, wrong, and immoral. I cried because I knew no one would care. I felt disconnected from the undergraduate student community because of the siloed nature of the graduate school. I had a community of friends and faculty who supported me and cared about the issue at hand. I longed for a community with other students who wanted to do something. I longed for a (student) activist community.

A grassroots faculty organization, the Critical Scholar Coalition (a pseudonym), in the College of Education planned to write an article in response to the 'Undercurrent of fear' article and to show their support for the LGBTQ+ community. One of my mentors invited me to join the

faculty and help write/contribute to their statement. I went to the meeting and advocated for queer students. Within a week of the publication of the 'Undercurrent of fear' article, the grassroots faculty organization published a response supporting LGBTQ+ students, faculty, and staff and provided a list of demands to the College of Education and university administrators. The article "Education faculty sends open letter to the Auburn community" (Letter to the Editor, 2019) spurred a (student) activist ripple at Auburn University.

A week passed. I woke up one morning to a text from my advisor. She called me moments later and told me about a newspaper article written by students at Auburn University. The newspaper article "Administration's lack of response speaks loud enough" was a callout to the student affairs administrators' lack of attention to the incident that happened in the College of Education. This letter communicated that student affairs administrators' silence following a homophobic and transphobic incident, communicates animosity toward LGBTQ+ people. After my advisor explained the context of the letter, she mentioned the students organized a meeting with student affairs leaders. I went to the meeting and found myself among the community I needed. I found a community with (student) activists who desired radical change through coalitional power, mobilized their queerness as a politic, and imagined the potentials of a queer future.

The support I received from my advisor and the Critical Scholar Coalition showed the potential of collective power to spark transformative change within hostile environments which is a theme threaded throughout the collaborators' stories. The initial meeting I attended with a group of (student) activists led to three years of community building with the collaborators. I shared my journey with the collaborators through my reflective journal which was made up of

newspaper clippings from the articles I described previously, photos from a protest after George Floyd's murder, and other materials related to my queerness and activism. As the collaborators reflected on their experiences as (student) activists, they continuously referenced community throughout the conversations. I asked the collaborators "Why is community important within like, this world, you know? In activism?" C quickly jumped in and stated:

> [It] feels like activism is a natural byproduct of caring about community and of having one. It feels like community comes first, right? Like why do you do activism if you don't like give a fuck about the people around you?

S unmuted himself to offer his perspective on community: "I think that, kind of along the lines of what C just said, if you're not doing it for the people and the community, like, it's…you have to do it for the right reasons." S went on to talk about how some people got involved in activism "for clout," showing sometimes people participate in activism without consideration for the people around them. After sharing his perspective, J smirked and said, "I have some very hot takes on community 'cause that is essentially what I got hired to do, is to help build community." I smiled, anticipating J's words of wisdom. They went on sharing the importance of building community to avoid burnout and interpersonal issues:

> When we realize that we, you know, five people can't do this. Or realize that 20 people can't do this. When we cultivate a spirit of invitation and trust with the people who are working with us, you know, our little bundle of twigs gets that much harder to snap over your knee…so like, community is not only – what we do is not only for the sake of building community, it's also for the sake of building our own strengths.

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In the previous quote, J explained the value of intentionally bringing people together because it creates a supportive space for people to grow and strengthens and sustains the potentials of coalitional power.

The collaborators showed several dimensions of community are integral to doing activism. For the collaborators and myself, community meant caring about the people around you, including other queer students, friends, members of the local community, and people we do not know. In the following sections, I share how myself and the collaborators demonstrated that community strengthens bonds between people, prevents feelings of isolation and loneliness, and supports individuals as they navigate hostile conditions.

Coming into Community: "Having That Experience of Being a Lonely Queer, Neurodivergent Person in the Rural South...That Lack of Community, Like it Nearly Destroyed Me"

The following subtheme characterizes how the collaborators and myself came together through our frustrations toward the rampant homophobia, transphobia, and racism operating within Auburn University, channeled our desires to find people who cared about organizing for change, and learned how to be community organizers. In the first focus group, the collaborators and myself shared our first experiences as activists or tangentially related forms of activism such as community organizing. Through a queer theoretical lens, the collaborators' primary early forms of activism as college students demonstrated the initial process of creating a counterpublic (Warner, 2002)**.** A counterpublic "comes into being through an address to indefinite strangers" where the strangers are not "ordinary people [who] are presumed to not want to be mistaken for the kind of person who would participate in this kind of talk or be present in this kind of scene"

(Warner, 2002, p. 86). The collaborators' and my onto-epistemologies based on our lived experiences as queer people living in a heteronormative and cisnormative environment informed our "addresses" to "indefinite strangers" or other queer people, to create an alternative space that defied hegemonic logics. R shared their first experience surrounding activism was in response to the homophobic incident I described in the previous section. For R, this moment was one where they realized they could "do action:"

> I remember being really frustrated at the situation and being like, "Why doesn't somebody do something about this?" And one of my mentors saying, "Well, why don't you do something about it?" And I think that's, that's where that changed for me. And I've tried to remember that moment going forward.

After this instance, R was one of the several students who wrote a letter in response to the homophobic remarks espoused by the professor in the College of Education. Within the dominant heteronormative culture at Auburn University and the College of Education, R and other (student) activists generated momentum toward the formation of a counterpublic through the letter. The letter demonstrated a form of counterpublic discourse that "incorporate[s] the personal/impersonal address and expansive estrangement of public speech as the condition of their own common world" (Warner, 2002, p. 87). By making their personal subjectivity public through the published letter, R and other (student) activists conveyed their queerness as "projects for transformation" (Warner, 2002, p. 88) within the dominant, heteronormative public, inviting other queer people to join their counterpublic. As the collaborators continued to talk about the role of community in activism, C responded to R:

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So, I think for me, like [activism] started with community and then with the realization that R mentioned earlier, like their whole story about the teacher on campus that was really homophobic, and them being so angry and wondering why no one was doing [anything] about it. Like, they only cared because they gave a fuck 'bout the other queer students that went to school with them. And then they realized, "Oh, I can do something about it."

The initial (student) activist group that formed around queer advocacy kickstarted The (Student) Coalition. As R recalled their mentor's words "Why don't you do something about it?", they reflected on the importance of community:

I think that highlights like, the real importance of community and organizing, because it was from that initial very small community where we didn't know what we were doing, I'd never done anything like that before, we were allowed to make mistakes with each other and learn from each other.

As R finished talking about the expedited "coming together" of The (Student) Coalition, S added to the conversation:

I do want to add 'cause, you know, I thought about it when you said that…I think despite some of you know, you know, the way that we were all trying to navigate, you know, being activists in a way that it was really tough whether none of us on that scale, had dealt with that…A lot of us were very new and just kind of flying by night and trying to figure out the system.

I nodded in agreement with R and S because I recalled feeling similarly when The (Student) Coalition came together. I was new to planning and organizing collective demonstrations for racial and queer equity. I shared my feelings about the initial organizing with the collaborators:

> I felt that like, in the beginning of The (Student) Coalition days, like during the planning of the protests and everything because I like had just driven back home to California to be with family during the whole shutdown COVID thing. And so, I was just like, geographically removed from the area, but like, still virtually connected to everyone and like, was trying to, like, help and organize in those ways, but like, I constantly was like, "Damn, like, am I? Am I doing enough? Like, because I can't actually be there?"

I was geographically removed from the collaborators and other (student) activists who started to build a counterpublic through The (Student) Coalition and felt inadequate as an activist. The collaborators and myself formed a counterpublic by coming into community with each other during the COVID-19 pandemic in a virtual space.

For the collaborators and myself, coming into community with each other was a unique experience because it provided an opportunity to organically come into community with other queer people. I discuss the dynamic of queer organizing in the two subthemes later in the chapter, but it is important to name this aspect of coming into community in this section. Coming into community through the formation of a counterpublic allowed the collaborators, as well as myself, to engage in queer worldmaking practices. The collaborators found comfort in the relationships they built with other (student) activists to show up imperfectly, as did I. The following subtheme discusses the dynamics of building coalitional power as a mechanism of strengthening (student) activism as a counterpublic.

Building Coalition: "When We Stand Arm in Arm, it Gets Harder to Break that Chain"

Throughout the focus groups, the collaborators and I talked about the challenges and opportunities we faced when building a coalition among (student) activists, community members, and trusted faculty, staff, and administrators. Though we faced challenges, building coalition provided us with opportunities to mobilize and imagine our queerness as a politic (Eng et al., 2005; Muñoz, 2009; Shlasko, 2005). Our queerness informed our abilities to design and build an anti-oppressive world for marginalized people and for future minoritized students that would live in Auburn. Having no prior experience in building a grassroots organization from the onset, the collaborators and I often felt like we had no idea what we were doing. R laughed as they talked about the growth of The (Student) Coalition because hundreds of people joined the GroupMe protest chat, and it quickly became unmanageable for the dozen (student) activist organizers. As R recalled this memory and laughed, I looked at S, C, and R on the computer screen and saw them smile, perhaps remembering the GroupMe moderating chaos too. Navigating a virtual space for hundreds of people looking to support The (Student) Coalition and the first protest for Black lives was challenging. S reflected on those trials from an organizational perspective:

> We kind of had a lot of conversations on Zoom of like, "How do we do this?" And this and this, and you know, what, systems we put in place to kind of have leadership? And how do people have roles? And how do we decide those roles?" We had a lot of those questions that was really hard to answer, because *it's not really easy to come up with something that you've never really done before*.

It was difficult developing a coalition from the ground up, especially in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic when it was not safe for The (Student) Coalition organizers to be together in person. Despite being "novice activists," as S described, growing a grassroots (student) activist collective provided the opportunity for collaborators and myself to create an anti-heteropatriarchal, anti-white supremacist, and abolitionist world. The planning, designing, and building that went into grassroots organizing fostered the opportunity for queer worldmaking in the rural South.

In this study, queer worldmaking practices emulated communal values such as collaboration, peer support, and relationship building. The collaborators discussed the importance of centering an ethos of collaboration within the (student) activist organizations; particularly, R believed that "what's really important to me when I think about activism is imagining a future with, *together, with a group of people*." R further visualized a future with other people through their reflective journal in which they shared in the second focus group. They sketched out abstract art with a yellow and orange "blob" that is "non-conforming to like, geometric shapes, or like structures and rules and stuff" at the center. The blob represented "us, like activists and our community." Blue and purple rigid blocks surrounded the blob. R further described the rigid blocks as structures and people who are perceived as having power. But in reality, "we have the power…we have radiating power." Through a queer lens, R demonstrated that queer worldmaking involved creating fluid and dynamic (student) activist communities that are contextually driven. Also, queer worldmaking involved building a world where people enacted their collective power. In the Zoom chat function, I asked, "Is there any significance of the colors you envisioned?" R responded:

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I feel like blue is a cold color. And like, the warm, the warmth of the orange and yellow

is just how I feel about all of you and about the experiences – most of the experiences –

that we've had together. And that was just kind of the images, the image that came into

my mind, last focus group when we were talking about this.

I smiled as R shared their feelings about the collaborators and the imagery that came to their

mind during the first focus group.

Their descriptions reminded me of a comment J mentioned in the first focus group about

the strength of the relationships we built during our time organizing:

What's more important I have found, is building sustaining, long lasting relationships. I

mean I'm sure you all can agree, but the best time we had, the reason that we are all here

together and still relatively fond of each other [laughs], is not because of the campaign

itself but those nights where we adjourned from our work, and we did our social stuff and

we cracked jokes. That kind of you know, non-productive community building is really

what kept our relationships alive long enough to be able to do as much as we did. And

that's only really made possible when we value community.

I remembered those non-productive community-building moments when we ate dinner together

after long meetings. The value of our relationships led me to this study and a want to talk about

queer (student) activism. The relationships between the collaborators and myself are unique

because the time we spent together while organizing was intimate, emotional, and vulnerable.

We built dynamic connections and valued each other beyond the labor we gave to (student)

activism. J's comment supports the importance of loving people in their entirety to help sustain

momentum in social justice movements.

In the first focus group, the collaborators offered their visions of a world they would like to live in as their motivation for being a (student) activist. I communicated with the collaborators that part of my activism came from a recognition of my privilege as a white person in the world, and I desire to "leverage every point of privilege that I have to make the world a better place." As I finished talking, J spoke about a personal reflection:

> I grew up as a really lonely kid. Like really lonely. I didn't have any friends and I knew that I was different. And for a long time, I repressed that and so, I do this because I want for other people to feel safe in being themselves and you know, not feeling like they have to be lonely…I do this to ultimately fight broken individualism and to fight loneliness. And to fight alienation.

The motivation behind J's queer worldmaking practices stems from fighting capitalist values such as individualism and alienation. As a queer, neurodivergent person, J highlighted the worldmaking practices that queer people engage in to create communities of support within a heteronormative society in the previous quote. After J revealed their reasoning, C chimed in with a similar sentiment: "I know what it feels like to feel powerless, and like your environment was trying to kill you and I don't think anyone should have to deal with that." After a long pause, R unmuted themselves and laughed because of the drawn-out silence:

> Okay…[laughs]. I feel like my thoughts aren't coming together for this question because I'm just thinking about so many things. I guess I'll just say that part of my why is definitely experiencing growing up queer in the South in Catholic school and like echoing a lot of what you all have said feelings of loneliness, and just really lacking

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community and wanting to build that for better for others, a lot of that resonated with

what you said, J.

R envisioned a similar world as the previous collaborators and desired to create a world where

queer people in the South did not have to feel lonely. I shared a similar sentiment with the

collaborators stating that prior to organizing, "I just felt like this little fish, this little queer fish in

this big straight pond" and that "it took me three years to find a group of people who cared about

these things [queer advocacy and racial equity]." Our personal experiences of powerlessness,

loneliness, and isolation motivated our (student) activism and subsequent queer worldmaking

practices. Building community for queer people in the South was at the heart of the

collaborators' and my worldmaking practices; the importance of mending loneliness through the

building of (student) activist communities resonated deeply.

Relational Building

Within the theme of Building Coalition, the collaborators and I discussed the role of

building relationships within and outside of (student) activist communities to interrupt systems of

power and oppression. The following subtheme presents the context of COVID-19 pandemic,

communal feelings among the collaborators, and the context of Deep South as integral dynamics

of relationship building in this study. In the focus group, the collaborators and I reflected on the

formation of The (Student) Coalition and the culmination of the COVID-19 pandemic. When

The (Student) Coalition formed and planned the protest in light of George Floyd's murder, we

were living in isolation. R commented on this situation:

I had been isolated for so long, and there was so much anxiety and like frustration, and

anger already like, that I was sitting with. And the group kind of like, allowed for that to

become like something that was generative, and like creating something.

In that moment, I remembered feeling anxious when the COVID-19 pandemic started;

businesses closed, the university shut down, and I did not see my friends for months. As I

recalled these memories, S chimed in:

I thought about it when you said that. Like, that was the first time that I had been out of

my house since the pandemic was that protest…that was the first time I saw like, actual

human beings in person. I think yeah, it was like like two and a half months too.

The context of the COVID-19 pandemic offered a unique element to (student) activism in this

study because the protest was The (Student) Coalition's first demonstration.

The collaborators and I implemented extra precautions to keep members of the

community safe from potential counter protesters, police, the Alabama summer heat, and the

COVID-19 virus. The culmination of these dynamics made it challenging to be in physical

community with one another. C elaborated on this point:

I think that so much of the burnout was really difficult to prevent when it was not safe for

us to physically be together. Um. I think a lot of it could've been prevented like J said, by

fomenting really strong community ties and being around each other and we couldn't do

that, it wasn't safe to do that.

Despite the challenges to building relationships with one another because of the COVID-19

pandemic, being in community with each other and having the support of The (Student)

Coalition granted us an opportunity to channel our frustrations through a protest that called

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attention to white supremacy at Auburn University, Auburn, and the nation. In the Zoom chat, S added that the protest was "Biggest since the 50s" for Auburn. In terms of protests, Clark (2021) stated that "queering space creates moments to question how space's daily embodiments exclude or discipline certain bodies and reimagine the space through a more expansive, always changing, and never complete set of performances and relationalities" (p. 172). Queering space through the protest for Black lives asserted visibility and presented an alternative queer world that challenged everyday normativity.

We were motivated by our feelings of anxiety, frustration, and anger, and allowed our feelings and desires to "do something" to guide our organizing. For the collaborators and myself, we often questioned our organizing because we did not want to create an organization that replicated the hostilities and systems of oppression we sought to eradicate S postulated on the ways to implement anti-oppressive operations: "A lot of us were very new and just kind of flying by night and trying to figure out the system, and how do we continue to do it? How do we dismantle this oppression?" R spoke to these challenges as well:

> I think I feel like it's interesting…a lot of, that hierarchical leadership is the norm in our society and so we don't have a lot for examples, or I don't at least, of shared leadership and how that could work. So, we made a lot of mistakes, and we did it well sometimes and we did it poorly other times. But it's…I think it was definitely the right way to go about it.

J also shared with us their experiences of being in organizing spaces saturated in whiteness that taught them to recognize "when something is cishet patriarchal bullshit:"

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[Organization name removed] is kind of infested by cishet white dudes, well-meaning

cishet white dudes, but cishet white dudes all the same. And there were times when I was

organizing with that bunch that I didn't want any part of it because it was a bunch of

dudes sitting around talking armchair socialism and I was like "What are y'all doin'??"

J's exposure to "cishet patriarchal bullshit" in organizing spaces helped the collaborators

navigate the tensions that S and R shared, because J learned how to call out oppressive logics

when they encountered them.

To hold each other accountable, we embraced vulnerability because organizing is

emotionally taxing. Embracing vulnerability in organizing spaces helped us build meaningful

relationships and establish trust with one another. For example, J commented on the value of

vulnerability and relationships:

Not only are we building things together, but that community was accommodating me in

letting me grow. And in turn that made me a better member of the community. It made

me more confident. It made me better at talking to people. And it made me more willing

to be vulnerable with people. And those are things that are crucial in community building

is story sharing and being vulnerable with people. And I would not have been able to do

that if I did not have people willing to be in community with me in the first place.

After J shared their story, R jumped into the conversation:

J, thank you so much for sharing that…I think like being in community with other

organizers is some of…is some of the most genuine connections that I've had with people

because you're, *you're putting your whole self into it*. And it's kind of raw in a way. Like

you're all there together in the same place and so *sometimes you're crying together*,

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sometimes you're like, *there are disagreements*. Like *sometimes you're celebrating*. Like

you really go through the whole range of human emotions together and that's like really

powerful.

As J and R shared, I felt an immense amount of gratitude to experience these loving relationships

with the collaborators and hear their reflections about the impact of organizing on their lives. C

felt similarly and commented on the conversation: "You know I'm really glad that you guys both

shared that because I think, personally have like a really bad capacity for self-reflection unless

I'm prompted [laughs]." The emotional labor of organizing brought (student) activists together

and deepened the relationships among us. I remembered the level of emotional vulnerability we

engaged in when we were actively organizing. In The (Student) Coalition meetings, we always

ended by checking in with each other to talk about our lives. Sharing our life updates was a

valuable moment that humanized each of the (student) activists and built our love and support for

each other.

The history of segregation, racism and chattel slavery in the Deep South continues to

affect the social, political, and economic realities of rural Black Southerners. In their interview, J

talked about the importance of building relationships with people in rural Southern communities

because they "know something is fundamentally wrong but at their core, they can't change it." J

highlighted this reality as they shared their canvassing experiences in rural areas of the Deep

South. Narratives illuminated the sociopolitical and economic disparities that rural Southerners

face because of ongoing manifestations of white supremacist logics. For example, J recalled

stories from rural Southerners:

Their brother has been in prison for 37 years. They started to talk about how you know,

they lost their mother last year to COVID because you know she, she couldn't make it to

a hospital, because the next hospital was a county away. And you start talking to people

who suffer from chronic illness, who are having to parse out their medication, because

they don't have the money to go and pay for their insulin this month.

Learning about the ways that white supremacist and heteropatriarchal logics affect rural

Southerners' lives came out when (student) activists focused on building relationships with

community members. Sharing those experiences with organizers requires vulnerability and trust.

Building coalitional power among queer people in the Deep South continued to present

important sociocultural and political implications for the collaborators and myself. In his

interview, S explained the uniqueness of community within queer activist spaces in Alabama:

It's like "whoa whoa they got their backs against the wall, we should might as well, like

support each other and love each other through it." So, you know being a queer activist is

a thing, it's a, it's a pretty minority thing. It's a pretty small minority. But I think those

minority communities have like the strongest bonds because it's less of them. Especially

Black activists. Like, Black queer activists. I mean I can name like, a handful off my

hand but like not a ton. And I think that, like you know. People like *that* help you

experience, you know, community and love in places that you don't get, you don't get it

anywhere else good. It's so unique to feel that. You can, someone who sees you entirely

and don't judge you for it and they don't judge you cause they're there too. They're there

with you.

S's explanation positioned queer activist communities as a necessity for queer people living in Alabama, particularly for Black queer activists, because those communities are not as represented in rural towns (Jones & Reddick, 2017). Queer of color critique informed my interpretation of S's narrative about Black queer activist communities in Alabama, specifically that "the racialization of queer subjects [are] bounded to colonization, capitalism, and heteropatriarchy" (Blockett, 2017, p. 813). S showed counterpublic spaces within queer activist communities provide loving and supportive bonds for Black queer activists. Further, S demonstrated the practices that Black queer activists employed "create[d] space for their ways of being" (Brockenbrough, 2015, p. 31) in Alabama. S reinforced the vitality and necessity of building relationships among marginalized queer activists.

In organizing, J identified relationship building as "the only viable strategy because Southerners can smell bullshit snake oil like pitches from a million miles away." Focusing on building relationships with rural Southerners is a way to honor the humanity of people most marginalized by white supremacy and heteropatriarchy in the Deep South. Moving away from toxic individualism and appreciating people challenged capitalist logics that prioritizes profit over people. Valuing people and constructing meaningful relationships within The (Student) Coalition, (Student) Carceral Abolitionists and local communities demonstrated queer worldmaking "that bear[s] no necessary relation to domestic space, to kinship, to the couple form, to property, or to the nation" (Berlant & Warner, 1998, p. 558). As I discussed earlier, we came together organically, meaning we came together because we wanted to do something about local, state, and national sociocultural incidents related to queer and racial equity. The relation to one another rested on our desire to create an anti-racist and anti-heteropatriarchal world for

marginalized people living in the Deep South. The values we embodied demonstrated that queer worldmaking practices require the desire to create a better world for queer, neurodivergent people of Color.

(Re)producing Harms from Within: "We Don't Have Enough People Power for That!"

Although there were such strengths associated with the (student) activist groups we associated with, the collaborators and I also found these (student) activist communities to be complex spaces; specially, though they operated as counterpublic, they were also places that were mentally, emotionally, and physically taxing. The spaces and connections queer people make amid oppressive regimes are counterpublic realms that defy anti-LGBT, racist, and transphobic normative cultures. Buckland (2002) posited, "many queers are worldless, cut off in many instances from family, church, and other institutions of community-building" (p. 38). J described this outlook as they navigated Auburn University which is "a classist, ableist, racist, usually transphobic, usually LGBT-phobic institution." During the first focus group, the collaborators were in the middle of talking about how (student) activism influenced their queerness when S sent me a private message:

> S: Bestie I have a great question for this discussion that I can give to you
>
> Jessica: ask it!
>
> S: Okay!
>
> Jessica: <3

When the conversation slowed down, S addressed the group:

> I know I've been thinking about this, so I wanted to ask y'all and myself included. What were the things you wish you knew that you know now about activism? Like if you could

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go back in the past and kind of tell you when you were first starting out…like what

would you tell them?

That question intrigued me because it required us to reflect on our past experiences as (student)

activists. As the collaborators reflected, S shared that he wished he knew that a lot of people

"were doing this [activism] for clout." S's comment demonstrated some people join (student)

activist organizations to push their agenda, use them as platforms to gain popularity, and build

their social media following. S was disappointed that some people co-opted (student) activism

for their gain while he came close to burning out because of the labor he put into organizing

while being a full-time student.

Other collaborators shared their frustrations about navigating (student) activist labor

dynamics, particularly from within the organization. C added to S's narrative by calling out the

gendered divide in the distribution of labor; specifically, they exclaimed:

I just need to say this. Why? [highlights a section of their notes-app-rant] Why were all

the goddamn women-coded-people doing every administrative task in (Student) Carceral

Abolitionists? That sucked. I disliked it. And I made me feel really bad. And I thought it

was really frustrating that we were supposed to be this like progressive, leftist adjacent

organization and then like all the men just got to like commiserate and like, smoke their

cigars and talk to the head honchos, and like Taylor and R and I had to like make Zoom

meetings and teach people how to use Dropbox. That sucked.

I was unaware of the gendered distribution of labor and was shocked to hear C and S's

frustrations from organizing.

Even though the collaborators and myself found refuge in The (Student) Coalition and (Student) Carceral Abolitionists from external oppressive logics, those logics were present within the organizations themselves. At times, the (student) activist communities fell into patterns that replicated the oppressive logics we sought to dismantle, as shown previously through C's experience. (Student) activist communities both replicated and alleviated white supremacist and heteropatriarchal logics focused on binary gendered production. I shared with the collaborators that I internalized a lot of doubt in my activism based on my limited capacity to work and produce within the (student) activist groups because of my graduate school demands. I recognized my view of production was based on capitalist logics. Within a capitalist logic, material goods are the measure of production. Similarly, C reconciled their perspective on what is considered activism by naming activism as "mundane" and that "sometimes you are making phone calls and sending emails and making graphics and setting up like, donation platforms and all of this stuff that feels really unspectacular." Viewed through a queer lens, C demonstrated that there are multiple avenues of arriving at activism; it is fluid and contextually driven to meet the needs of the cause. J responded to C's reckoning:

> What I've been taught is that there is kind of three different tiers to activism depending on how deep you want to go. You know there's *advocacy*, there's *mobilizing*: mobilizing being things like protests and direct actions, those little blips of events that you're doing. And then there's *organizing* and that's usually all of the boring administrative stuff that's underneath the iceberg. That's the talking to people and networking and building relationships. But like all three of these things are types of activism.

The "active" part of doing activism is at the heart of C and J's understandings of activism. Informed by queer perspectives, the collaborators and myself recognized that we must interrogate our internalized outlooks on production within (student) activist communities because to J's point, activism is "making an active decision to advocate for something" even if it means spending time on spreadsheets. Collectively, we grappled with the ways that white supremacist logics trickled into our queer (student) activist worldmaking through internal and external manifestations.

In his individual interview, S elaborated how (student) activist communities (re)produced dominant logics within our organizing spaces. S ended up leaving the (Student) Carceral Abolitionists because it was "mentally drainin':"

> I'll never forget, I think it was 3 AM, someone was yelling at me on the phone about (Student) Carceral Abolitionists at 3AM. And I was like I can't do this. I couldn't sleep that night. If someone is yelling at me and I wasn't even involved in it. Someone else had fucked up. And so, she knew me so she could yell at me about it. It's like, I can't, I deserve my peace too.

In this situation, another member of the (Student) Carceral Abolitionists lashed out on S because of a mistake that someone else made. The other person's actions reflected capitalist logics via perfectionism, individualism, and a hostile sense of urgency by placing the burden on S, rather than bringing forward the problem to the rest of the (student) activist community. J also highlighted instances of urgency as a symptom of whiteness in their individual interview. As a white person, J shared:

Whether I, like it or not, whiteness does appear in my organizing and it's something that I, you know, try and be very mindful of you know. Instances of urgency, I think very hard about. Like, is it necessary that we do this in an urgent way?

J encountered moments in organizing where other people wanted to participate in acts that (re)produced hegemonic logics that appeased larger audiences. Also, in the previous subtheme, J discussed knowing when "something is cishet patriarchal bullshit" in organizing spaces such as building coalition spaces for political clout. Our stories showed that actions and logics within (student) activist communities could still cause harm by (re)producing dominant ideologies. Queer of color critique aligns with this finding, particularly that critical work can further harm marginalized communities when race and class are not considered in analyses (Ferguson, 2004). Spade and Willse (2000) raised a similar consideration within social movements:

We must not let our sense of urgency about the violence committed against gay and trans people bring us to a place in which we uncritically reproduce the marginalization of the most disenfranchised among us and create anti-homophobic positions that cultivate ignorance of systemic subordination. (p. 51-52)

Spade and Willse (2000) highlighted urgency as a mechanism that can further harm marginalized people within (student) activist organizations and social movements. This logic reflects the realities that the collaborators and myself experienced within (student) activist communities.

Queerness in (Student) Activism

I frequently ran into C at one of the local coffee shops where they worked during the summer of 2021. Because they were working and I was writing my comprehensive exams, our conversations were short and did not stray beyond "How are you? How is life?" One summer

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evening, I ran into C at a local bar where the local LGBTQ+ community organization hosted a

queer trivia night. I looked through my hand binoculars, and they mimicked my playful greeting.

During the trivia intermission, C approached me, and we embraced one another. They asked me

about my comprehensive exams, specifically what I wrote about. I explained the purpose of the

written comprehensive exams and how they prepared me for my dissertation proposal and study.

After describing my interest in exploring queer (student) activism in the Deep South for the

study, their eyes widened, their mouth dropped, and sheepishly tucked their hair behind their

ear. We laughed as C batted their eyes at the thought of merging activism and queerness.

Intrigued at the topic of queerness and activism, C and I briefly geeked out on queer theory. We

wrapped up our conversation as the drag queen MC brought everyone back for the last couple of

rounds of trivia.

(Student) activists (re)conceptualized notions of activism by negotiating the symbiotic relationship between queerness, (student) activism, and queer (student) activism. When viewed from a lens of queer theoretical perspectives, queer (student) activists negotiated the temporality of queer and activist identities. Additionally, the temporality of collaborators' queer (student) activist identities influenced their participation in movements that resist white supremacy and heteropatriarchy. The following finding encompasses collaborators' queer awakenings while organizing, the influences of activism on their queerness, the influence of collaborators' queerness on their activism, and queer temporalities.

During data collection, the collaborators and I noticed that there was a clear connection between (student) activism and queerness. We spoke of a clear connection between involvement in (student) activism and coming into queer identities. Though there is a distinct relationship, I

do not suggest there is a linear development concerning the collaborators' queer identities. Queer scholars reject linear developmental approaches to identity development (Dinshaw et al., 2007) and propose that queerness is a way of being that is in a constant state of becoming. As evidenced in the focus groups, the collaborators' queer identities were present before, during, and after their (student) activists' experiences. Rather, (student) activism introduced "new" onto-epistemologies and ideologies that catalyzed the arrival of collaborators' queerness.

Catalyst to Queerness: "I Think the (Student) Carceral Abolitionists was a Really Big Part of my *Queer Awakening*"

During the first focus group, collaborators reflected on the importance of building community within activist spaces, because forming relationships with other queer activists helped them come into their queerness. Without asking about the importance of community specifically for queer (student) activists, J shared with the group:

> This is something that I've been very excited to share because of this intersection of queerness and organizing. I didn't really come to terms with my own queerness until I started organizing. I didn't trust that for the longest time, and I was just like "I'll get around to it one of these days. Maybe I'll think about it and maybe I won't, I'll just be okay.

J continued to say that organizing was the first time they found a group of people who respected them and were supportive of their queer identity. Through organizing, J met other (student) activists at Auburn University who held anti-capitalist and anti-racist ideologies. Supportive peers who held similar viewpoints were integral to J's acceptance of their queer identities. To

further describe the importance of like-minded peers, J shared a story they like to tell "because it's so mundane:"

> So, I was going through a shift in my relationships with people. I had started to organize and kind of come into my own little affinity group. And we talked about you know queerness and you know, anti-capitalism, anti-racism, all the good justice stuff. And I was finally comfortable being with people and talking about things that made my former peers uncomfortable. And prior to this, I had always kind of had this notion of you know, the more I read and understand gender, the more disconnected I feel from it. It's almost like I feel like I am outside of gender if that makes any sense. But then I was you know in I think I was in like a Winn Dixie pharmacy waiting to get my antidepressants refilled and I was just sitting there waiting, like I think I sent a Snapchat in the Winn Dixie parking lot, just just to continue this like narrative of flippant student organizer in the South just like "hey. I think I'm nonbinary now." Them being like "neat! What are your pronouns?" And just like "I don't know, say whatever" and everybody's just like "okay! cool."

After J shared this story, we joked about the beauty of J "[walking] out of that Winn Dixie as a non-binary person," because Winn Dixie is a Southern supermarket. Beyond the humor of J coming to terms with their queerness in a Winn Dixie, their story characterized the value of affirming peers. Specifically, having activist friends who "were in the trenches with [them]" communicated to J that they were in a safe place and surrounded by supportive people who would accept J as a queer person.

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After J shared their experience of coming into their queerness through organizing, R quickly unmuted themselves to share that they had an almost identical story to J's. R and I were involved in queer advocacy before the formation of The (Student) Coalition and (Student) Carceral Abolitionists. As an undergraduate student, R organized around queer advocacy on Auburn University's campus in response to the incident with a tenured professor in the College of Education. Queer advocacy on campus included adding Auburn University to the Campus Pride Index, hosting a series of gender and sexuality educational sessions, and adding pronouns to the university's Banner system. During this time, R identified as an ally:

> When I first got involved in like activism around the homophobic professor, like I was not comfortable in my identity at all. Like I think I had told some people that I was an ally and then like one time Logan asked me like, straight up like what I identified as. And I was like "…. [shocked face] I don't know! [laughs]" Like I was not comfortable even saying it you know? Which is kind of interesting to think about cause I've come a long way since then…I have – we all have – together.

As R shared their queer identity journey, I reflected on the queer advocacy work and organizing they did alongside R. Over the past two and half years of my relationship with R, I noticed that R's pronouns changed but did not know that (student) activism played a role in their queerness. R attributed part of their queer awakening to living in a capitalistic world "focused on production and not on people" and ignoring their queerness as a result. However, R observed that "in organizing, in like, taking radical action in exploring radical ideas, you also have to come to parts of yourself and…allow yourself to be real and genuine." As a result, R grew into their queer identities as they challenged white supremacist and heteropatriarchal systems and

structures on campus and in society. As I reflected, I recognized I shared a similar experience to R. When the opportunity to talk about my queerness and activism re-surfaced in the second focus group, I told the collaborators part of my queer identity is asking myself, "How can I be as anti-patriarchal and anti-heteronormative as possible? And also, just like very gay at the end of the day." R and I described our queerness as a politic (Shlasko, 2005) to challenge heteronormative ideologies. The collaborators and myself demonstrated that queerness and activism are multidimensional ways of being.

As J and R talked about their queer stirrings as (student) activists, C reflected. When C unmuted themselves, a little smirk emerged: "Yeah, like I think (Student) Carceral Abolitionists was a really big part of my *queer awakening*. But like, when I started (Student) Carceral Abolitionists, I was a straight woman, with a boyfriend. And I'm a nonbinary lesbian now [laughs]." The collaborators smiled and laughed. R wrote in the Zoom chat "raises a glass to the 'straight' women." C started to talk about their previous boyfriend who attended a capitol protest with the (Student) Carceral Abolitionists. As C reflected on feelings of incongruence related to their sexuality at the capitol protest, they shared one of the first times they acknowledged their queerness:

> I remember there was this time where all of us were just on a social zoom call to cut up. And we all just took a pause and were like "Wait…everyone in this zoom meeting is queer right?" And I think that this was the first time for a while where I had said "Yes, I'm queer." Because I had known that since I was little and then unfortunately, reformed Christianity did a number on me for a few years.

In the Zoom chat, S wrote "Those social zooms were different." The collaborators smiled as they recalled memories from socializing on Zoom because it was not safe to do so in person. C disclosed their queer awakening as a (student) activist and the impact that queer peers had on their understandings of their queerness. C elaborated on the impact of being in community with queer activist peers in their reflective journal when they "unlocked a memory" from their first queer relationship:

> I remember that, like, she asked me to be her girlfriend, and I was so happy, and we were girlfriends. And then she, like, lost interest in me and broke up with me. Because we were like, 15. So and I like, did not… I wasn't queer after that, until I got into (Student) Carceral Abolitionists, And I don't know why. Um, but it really felt like healing some inner child to like, be around queer people and like a really significant and sustained way. And to be like, "Oh, hey, like, maybe like, not every gay person will reject you in a really intimate and harmful way."

Being in a community with queer activist peers helped C rediscover and heal their relationship with their queerness and queer people. C's reflection highlighted a queer worldmaking practice because being in community with queer (student) activists presented an opportunity for C to recover from painful experiences that dimmed their queerness. In this context, queer worldmaking offered space to heal from hurtful heteronormative experiences and reconnect with queer communities.

In the focus group, S did not share his queer awakening with the group but in an individual interview, he opened up about his queer organizing experiences. One night after the protest for Black Lives, members of The (Student) Coalition socialized and debriefed the protest.

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S recalled sitting around everyone and suddenly, the organizers realized, "Oh, so like we all are queer in here?" S did not notice that all of the (student) activists who were responsible for organizing the protest for Black Lives identified as queer: "You know how weird it is to get eight people from different diversity backgrounds in the South, but like I, like all queer people? That's so insane. You don't see that that often." At the time, S was enrolled at a different institution than the other (student) activists and was heavily involved in student organizations with queer students. Shocked at the queer (student) activist community he found, S "began to just like, become more [himself] in Auburn because there was a community that [he] knew, that [he] now knew that [he] could do that, like do that better than [he] ever could when [he] was anywhere else." For S, finding a queer community with other (student) activists meant he could show up as his authentic self, which was "really refreshing" because of living in the Deep South. S explained:

> There's, you know, like always a stigma in the South like it's always gonna be there, right? But like you, *it slowly goes away when you find more people that are just like you*
> Jessica: Mmm [affirming].
> S: And you find more people who have had those same experiences and and the same pressure who have done through the same insecurities and they're still doing it. They're still making, making progress.

Being in community with queer (student) activists was refreshing for S and helped him find comfort in his own queerness. Removing the stigma of being queer in Alabama is a strategy of queer (student) activists, because it resists hegemonic heteronormativity by allowing "positive and intelligible meanings and associations" (Atkinson & DePalma, 2009, p. 25) with queerness.

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The collaborators engaged in the ongoing deconstruction of heteronormativity by organizing with other queer (student) activists.

As the collaborators shared the impact of organizing on their queer identities, I reflected on my own queer identity to see if I had a similar queer awakening experience. When I started to organize around queer advocacy topics with R and other queer (student) activists, I was "out" and comfortable in my queerness. I learned about other queer identities while organizing:

> I definitely, like similarly, like learned so much from everyone in The (Student) Coalition and even (Student) Carceral Abolitionists. Like I was like "Oh I didn't even know this thing existed" or like "I didn't know, that like people also thought of their gender identity in a similar way that I do" or whatever it was.

Witnessing other (student) activists grow in their queer identities taught me the expansiveness and fluidity of queerness. As a scholar, I interpret queerness through queer theoretical perspectives that I learned in my undergraduate and graduate coursework and struggle to view queerness outside of my academic training. The (student) activists taught me how to have agency over my own queerness and define who I am on my own terms. Learning from their (student) activist peers helped me explore my queer identities without the labor of "coming out."

Each of the collaborators identified moments where they came into their queerness or learned to embrace and love their queer identities. As the collaborators expressed their queer awakenings, they also discussed how their involvement in activism further influenced their queer identities. The dynamics of (student) activist communities like being "no judgment zones," critiquing oppressive systems and internalized oppressive messaging, and exploring radical ideas helped each collaborator approach solitude regarding their queerness. The collaborators engaged

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in "epistemological, discursive, and performative politics" (Blockett, 2021, p. 90) to create (student) activist spaces founded on anti-oppressive logics. Introducing anti-heteronormative logics within these spaces presented the collaborators and myself with opportunities to engage with/in "new" onto-epistemologies and (re)conceptualize a queer politic that is anticapitalist, antiracist, and anti-ableist.

Activism and Queerness Symbiosis: "I've Been Very Excited to Share Because of This Intersection of Queerness and Organizing"

This subtheme is an extension of the catalyzing effects of organizing and describes the specific ways (student) activism influenced the collaborators' and my queerness as a politic. The symbiotic and intertwined connection between activism and queerness was evident as collaborators reflected on their experiences organizing with The (Student) Coalition, (Student) Carceral Abolitionists, and other local grassroots organizations. Particularly, J's identity as a community organizer continues to be more prominent than their queer identities:

> I think I am more mature and developed in my role as–or not even my role–in my identity as a, as an organizer than I am in my identity as a queer and gender non-conforming person. Like I always think of things as like, my, my coming to terms with my queerness helped me become a better organizer and I wouldn't have been able to come to terms with my queerness if I weren't first an organizer.

J started organizing as a (student) activist when an unaffiliated university student group, the White Nationalists, invited Richard Spencer to speak at Auburn University. J voiced their anger on Twitter when Richard Spencer, a known white supremacist and alt-right leader, came to campus in April 2017. After their Twitter rant, a student reached out to them and invited J to

have lunch with a group of socialist students. J quickly found a community of anti-capitalist and anti-racist students at their "classist, ableist, racist, usually transphobic, usually LGBT-phobic institution" who became an integral influence on their queer (student) activist identity.

J's realization of the interwoven ableist, classist, racist, homophobic, and transphobic logics at Auburn University radicalized them when they "realized the university wasn't made for [them]." J continued, "I wasn't really, the kind of person that Auburn University wanted to succeed because I was neurodivergent. I was working class." This realization also helped J see that higher education is deeply rooted in capitalism and inherently an ableist system. As J organized with other (student) activists who were attentive to dismantling capitalism and individualism, they also settled into their fluid, queer, non-binary identities. After J embraced their non-binary identity, they recognized the symbiotic relationship between organizing and queerness; learning about anticapitalist practices informed their perspectives on anti-heteronormativity and vice versa.

Part of S's experience in (student) activist organizations meant showing up as his real and authentic self. For S, (student) activist organizations presented themselves as "no judgment" spaces where he was able to share his mental health challenges. Specifically, S reflected by saying:

> We all had bad days. We've all had crazy days. And I think…when you all have gone through that. When you're pushed to the brink, there is no place of judgment, there is no place of that. You just, you just become yourself.

S also described the people in The (Student) Coalition and (Student) Carceral Abolitionists as "underdogs…not one for society that traditionally believed in." Taking the time to learn and

reflect on the self played an important role in the collaborators' and my understandings of queerness. S found (student) activism as a place that gave him time to understand his queerness because outside of (student) activism, S said: "Because I've been so busy, I haven't had a lot of time to reflect on these things." Fostering emotional vulnerability and judgment-free (student) activist spaces helped S explore his queerness and embrace his bisexual identity. Similarly, C and R discussed occupying radical, anti-establishment organizations and their self-awareness of their queer identities. After S shared his story, R added to the conversation:

> Yeah, I really resonated with that what you said S about not having time to like, evaluate yourself. Umm, cause I feel like for me it was like before I got into organizing space, like, I didn't have the time or the space to explore that part of me.

R came to similar feelings of incongruence with the way they presented themselves to the world and their ideological positionings while organizing around queer advocacy on campus and with The (Student) Coalition and (Student) Carceral Abolitionists. Before getting involved in organizing, R felt they lived "in the world according to other people." But once they started organizing with other (student) activists, they questioned their preconceived ideas about who they were. R explained:

> Organizing itself goes against society and the way everything works naturally. And so, I think it's just a natural by-product of that. Where like, *you're questioning everything about the way society works and it, the way power works and you're also questioning that in yourself* and *you're able to*… [long pause]. I don't know, like, *discover yourself…*

In the previous "Queer Awakenings" section, R discussed how far they have come in their queer identities as a (student) activist because they actively challenged heteropatriarchal logic within

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themselves. As an organizer, practicing anti-racist, anti-heteropatriarchal logics within (student) activist spaces contributed to R's growth in their queerness. This finding offers a distinction from the previous subtheme by expanding on queerness as a political tool. From a queer perspective, R's activism extended their understanding of their queer identities as a political tool to question "everything about the way society works." When R finished explaining their exploration of queerness as a politic, C chimed in:

> I really get that, R…So, there's this establishment I was trying to disrupt and *it kind of made me kind of turn the mirror back to myself* and like, why is it the further left you go like, the more weird, and wrong these heteronormative relationships that you're in, feel? And I think like, I felt a little like, lame. Like I disliked myself. I disliked the way I was presenting like my body to the world. I was just, I disliked that I wasn't different enough. *I just didn't like that I wasn't, I don't know, like living in I think this like, queer non-mainstream way that makes me feel more like myself.* Umm and like entering this space that's already about that kind of disruption kind of made it more known to me.

The (Student) Carceral Abolitionists organization was focused on dismantling the incarceration system in the Deep South, particularly by stopping a plan to build three private prisons. The organization sought to end prison systems and state-sanctioned surveillance establishments. As C organized with the (Student) Carceral Abolitionists, they became more aware of misalignment with the way they presented their queerness and antiestablishment ideologies. C's narrative also positioned queerness as a political tool and way of being that seeks to disrupt heteronormativity and state-sanctioned violence. The collaborators' reflections reinforced queerness as an identity and ideology that disrupts hegemonic ideologies of normalcy.

Related to the relationships between queerness and activism, I shared my experience as someone who was already "out" and comfortable in their queer identity when I started organizing. I shared with the collaborators:

> When I started organizing, I think what it was for me about that space that allowed me to just like, get really comfortable in my queerness was that like, I didn't have to come out to anyone. Like I don't – there was like never a moment where someone was like "What are you? Like are you gay? Are you straight? What's your deal?" It's like, I could just be in that space and just be in community with people who were concerned about like a similar issue.

Part of my confidence came from not having to "come out" in (student) activist spaces. Going into (student) activist spaces with this mentality provided me the ability to identify and critique the ways that white supremacist and heteropatriarchal logics, like capitalism, operate within and beyond higher education. I further explained this point:

> Because I got to a place where I was so comfortable in my queerness that like I didn't fear speaking up to say something like "Uhh, that sounds pretty heteropatriarchal" like something along those lines because I can, I'm more comfortable speaking to the way those systems operate in the world because like umm, racism and transphobia and things of that nature.

After I explained my perspective, R highlighted similarities in how their queerness influenced their activism: "I don't really have anything to the original question but what you just said made me think about something, which is that like…this is not a fully formed thought…this claim [laughs]." R went on to explain that it is likely that they would not have been involved in queer

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advocacy a few years before the organizing because they were not comfortable in their queer identity. They still would have cared about queer advocacy and standing up for queer rights but would not have been as vocal an activist. For R, they "had to be at a certain level of acceptance and willingness to be like, publicly associated with a queer issue and not like afraid of that part of me." Being confident in their queerness helped R be a vocal advocate and heavily involved (student) activism for queer topics. J shared a similar sentiment when they shared their pronouns with a group of (student) activists and said, "It's just so *normal,* this kind of just like, levity in just how cool it was." Normalizing and celebrating queerness within the (student) activist communities provided the collaborators and myself a space to be confident and comfortable across all dimensions of our identities.

As we discussed the interconnected nature of queerness and (student) activism, the collaborators pointed out that the (student) activist communities allowed us to just "be" in those spaces. We talked about the heteronormative expectation to "come out" and present ourselves in physical ways that stood out among normatively gendered presentations of the self and recognized that that heteronormative expectation did not exist in (student) activist spaces. The collaborators and other (student) activists (re)fashioned a queer politic that refused heteropatriarchal logics focused on queerness as a "spectacle of the state" (Muñoz, 2009, p. 22). The collaborators and the (student) activist communities defied heteronormative expectations because the collaborators did not feel pressured to display their queerness in a way that appeases cishetero folks. S illuminated this perspective in his interview:

> If you have a collective group behind you of queer activism, it gives you, I think the
> power and it gives you the gives you the ability to be able to tell your story… Because

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like I definitely understand those still don't cause there's still a lot of stigma and, but I think in a way it frees you. Because you're getting, because at the end of the day when you're speaking at a protest it's between you and the mic.

The support of a collective group of queer activists at protests created a space where queerness was present without a grandiose display of "coming out" to attendees. S also spoke to this point at the end of the second focus group as the collaborators and I talked about the interconnected relationship between queerness and activism:

R: I think it's interesting that I had to be at a certain level of acceptance and willingness to be like publicly associated with a queer issue and not like afraid of that part of me, you know?

Jessica: Yeah, that makes sense to me…I was trying to give it a little airtime for S before going on to the next, but we can always put a pin – oh wait!

S: Hi.

Jessica: Perfect timing.

S: …I think one thing I miss about activism really is like for some reason like though it was hectic, it was weird because it was hectic, it was crazy, it was weird. It also was things slow down. Like if it's just me and a microphone you know on a stage and everyone's quiet like they're only listening, things flow, because you control what the mood is, and you control what you're saying… But for grad school you're working toward the goal that you don't even know what it is yet, like graduation definitely but you know what's after that? What job am I going to get? What city am I gonna move, what people am I going to meet? *Can I be openly queer in this location? Can I be myself?*

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Activism gave me that space to be me and be myself and be authentic and be raw and be hungry.

I understood S's "rant" about graduate school chaos and the uncertainty of what follows graduation. S's final reflective questions characterize the uniqueness of queer (student) activist spaces where the collaborators did not feel they had to display their queerness in a heteronormative way. As mentioned previously in this theme, queer (student) activist spaces allowed the collaborators and myself to show up as our authentic selves without feeling the pressure to subscribe to heteronormative expectations, like "coming out".

One way that our queerness influenced our activism was that it gave us the awareness of intersecting forms of oppression and the confidence to call it out within and beyond activist spaces. As I stated previously, my comfort in my queerness contributed to my ability to confront heteropatriarchal and oppressive logics within and beyond activist spaces. Similarly, C felt that they were a better activist after coming into their queerness because it made them "better at interacting with people and like, thinking about complex situations." C illustrated this point, saying:

> As I like, came out as gay and then came out as nonbinary I guess like, I noticed that my life is like…. there are some places where because of my queer identity, I don't have full equality. Umm and so I think I just got better or had a better grasp of how I navigate social spaces while like simultaneously having privilege via whiteness and educatedness and like womanness but then also that sucking because I don't want to be perceived as a woman but I am.

C's personal experience made "the idea of intersectionality" a tangible reality as they recognized the material conditions and external perceptions of their own identities. The material realities that C faced as a non-binary person informed their "capacity to analyze like, how identities in the plural, you know, stack and intersect and inform you know, moments and situations." C offered the following example of how systems of oppression intersect and operate in the world:

> People don't deserve to feel at the mercy of these really hostile environmental conditions. And you know that looks like natural disasters and also just looks like fucking live in Lowndes County and being Black and not having sewage infrastructure. And it also looks like always having to wear a mask everywhere you go, not because of COVID but because the air that you breathe isn't clean.

C's comment highlights intersectional theorizing because they recognize health disparities among Black people are at intersections of racism and classism. Poor air quality and sewage infrastructure are the result of social class and capital exploitation of Black folks in Lowndes County. Not only did C learn more about the complexities of intersecting forms of oppression but they also realized that their heart is in environmental and public health.

Similar to C's experience, S described their queerness as an element that affects "the cause." Because all the (student) activists in The (Student) Coalition were queer and the majority of organizers in (Student) Carceral Abolitionists were also queer, collaborators were more attuned to the ways that white supremacy and heteropatriarchy affect *all* people. Highlighting this uniqueness, in an interview S stated: "Because we were a group that had transgender, and bisexuals, and lesbians, and gays and everything in between that like, we got to talk about *all* people, *all* Black lives. Not just the ones the media likes to pick up." Further contextualizing the

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queer dynamic of The (Student) Coalition and (Student) Carceral Abolitionists, S alluded to a distinctive moment at a Black trans vigil. S was asked to speak and share the story of a trans person at the vigil. Commenting on the impact that moment, S stated:

> You have to do some reflection, right? It's like, you know…it's like if these people can tell their story and a queer story…and it'll be just like a queer group telling stories, it gives you more courage to tell your story when you protest"

Witnessing Black trans people share their stories at a vigil, and reading someone else's story gave S the courage to share his own story about being a bisexual Black man in Alabama. The collaborators' and my stories demonstrate the interconnectedness of our queerness and activism and inform how we navigate the world and organizing spaces.

Queer (Student) Activist Temporalities: "The Motivation for What I Do, When I'm Six, Feels Informed by Like, Now"

Throughout the focus groups, the collaborators and myself discussed the nuanced and complex meanings of activism. In Chapter Three, I introduced the collaborator profiles and provided the formative (student) activist experiences of each individual. Recalling each collaborator's initial experiences, including my own, our current involvement in organizing demonstrates the temporality of (student) activism and queerness. As we shared our first activist experience, we reflected on how our queer and activist identity changed, particularly around ideological alignment with the movements. Over time, we noted a shift in our activism toward movements and causes that are anti-racist, anti-capitalist, queer, and focused on community organizing.

In the first focus group, R shared, "My earliest experiences with organizing were actually for things that I don't believe in anymore? And I'm kind of ashamed that I was part of that." R did not name the cause they organized for until C shared their initial experiences as a (student) activist and what they organized for. During C's introduction, they stated:

> I think, like…my earliest memory of activism, is actually really funny. It's when this guy I was really good friends with in fourth grade showed me a bunch of pictures from the March for Life that he had gone to. And then I was like, okay, well, that seems lame. Or I was in the fourth grade.

As C continued to talk about their early experiences, R wrote in the chat, "March For Life is what I was referring to earlier...very embarrassing, very Catholic school." C laughed when they saw R's message and replied, "I mean, R, you can't help that you went to Catholic school. Every Catholic kid went to the March for Life for real." As previously stated in this chapter, R organized around queer advocacy on campus, challenged systems rooted in white supremacy and heteropatriarchy within Auburn University *and* outside the campus, and carceral abolition. Those movements have starkly different ideological positionings than the March for Life highlighting the temporality of queer (student) activism. Stated earlier, R's involvement in queer advocacy was dependent on their comfort in their queerness and for R, queer (student) activism fluctuated across time.

C wrote about queer temporalities in their reflective journal activity in between the two focus groups. They referred to their journal as a "notes-app-rant" that turned into freeform poetry. They read their queer temporality, notes-app, freeform poetry rant:

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I feel like, I am simultaneously a bunch of different, like, personally significant version of myself, like, there are moments in my life that feel very intense and very real, and then feel like all those little [collaborator name removed] for those, like points in time, like, walking or in my head, or like, sometimes, like the motivation for what I do, when I'm six, feels informed by like, now and what I'm like now, you know, sort of the idea that there's this like, inevitable trajectory.

C went on to describe various memories as a 10-year-old living through a tornado that destroyed their house, a 15-year-old dating their first "burgeoning Hey Mama's Lesbian" girlfriend, and their present self as a queer (student) activist fighting against prison abolition when their heart is in environmental advocacy. C's narratives portrayed their queerness and activism as temporal identities: identities that emerged and faded through exposure to queer (student) activists and activist labor. C reconceptualized queer (student) activism as an emergent identity that becomes visible depending on time and space, and as a way of being that is always present within the self. Coming into their queerness through carceral prison abolition activism helped C grow as an activist and recognize that like their queerness, their activism is not motionless. C demonstrated this occurrence in their reflective journal:

And I am really, really happy that like, through activism, I got to understand my queer identity. But I also got to understand like my activist identity, and I don't think I'll end up where I started out. In a lot of ways, I like started doing activism as a straight woman. And now I'm a non-binary lesbian. And I also like started off activism, like thinking that I wanted to do like education and prison work. And now like, I know that I want to do environmental and public health stuff. And I'm like, comfortable in a lot of prisms of my

identity in a way I didn't think I would end up being, so it was really cool to kind of do

this journaling exercise as like, a personal reflection of how I've grown.

C's reflection showed that like their queerness, their activism is not bound to one way of being.

The phrase "I don't think I'll end up where I started out" demonstrated a temporal sense of being

as a queer (student) activist that is always evolving. C alluded to a shift in their activist identity

when they explained their involvement in the (Student) Carceral Abolitionists:

> I'm so glad that there are people who care about prison abolition for as intimate and
>
> personal reasons as I care about climate change. But you know like I don't want to spend
>
> the rest of my like doing things that are tangentially related to activism that my hearts not
>
> really in. Cause you know quote-unquote, selfishly, my heart is in environmental policy
>
> and environmental advocacy.

As C spoke, J wrote in the chat function: "Do not be daunted by the enormity of the world's

grief. Do justly, now. Love mercy, now. Walk humbly, now. You are not obligated to complete

the work, but neither are you free to abandon it." When C read J's message, they responded, "I

love that quote, J." As I listened to C speak, I reflected on my own queer (student) activist

temporality. After the focus group, I analyzed my interview with a new perspective on queer

temporalities. Indeed, I diverged from linear time when I wrote about seeing a woman modeling

underwear in the JCPenney catalog when I was eight years old:

> I remember feeling shame for feeling that way when I saw a woman in a bra and
>
> underwear because I was taught that it's not okay to look at women like that, like it
>
> wasn't okay to "check out" women because that was something that men would do.

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After that moment, my queer memories jumped from my sophomore year of high school to my freshman year of college, then returned my senior year of college, and finally stayed in 2016. Similarly, I went to a teacher's union strike with my mother when I was eight years old, attended a district-wide budget-cut protest outside of the Riverside Unified School District building when I was a sophomore in high school, and sat at a learn-in for Indigenous People's Day in college. I felt like my eight-year-old self, holding a picket sign when I attended a protest in May 2020 after George Floyd's murder. As I wrote, I pondered my future activism when I am no longer a doctoral student. I returned to Muñoz (2009) who said:

> We need to step out of the rigid conceptualization that is a straight present…What we need to know is that queerness is not yet here but it approaches like a crashing wave of potentiality. And we must give in to its propulsion, its status as a destination. (p. 185)

The previous quote reminded me of the queer potentials of queering time and gave me hope for the future. If the political potentials of queerness are "not yet here," then I have hope that the collaborators' anti-oppressive queer worldmaking practices, as well as my own, will spread to communities beyond geographic boundaries.

S also reflected on the temporality of his queer (student) activist identity, particularly how he envisioned his (student) activist identity in the future. After C shared their experience, S unmuted himself:

> I think that to kind of go off [what] C said, leaving (Student) Carceral Abolitionists was difficult for me. Leaving The (Student) Coalition was difficult for me. You know I thought I was letting people down because I didn't have the capacity. I was trying to graduate.

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When S was involved in The (Student) Coalition and (Student) Carceral Abolitionists, he grounded his activism in love for people and hope for a better world. His love for people and hope that transformative change was possible in the Deep South carried him through the emotional taxation of organizing. Because of past emotional taxation and present graduate school demands, S was not as involved in organizing anymore:

> I remember me and Laura we were at Well Red, and we were talking about like the future of (Student) Carceral Abolitionists, and we both realized at the end of the day that our heart wasn't in it anymore because we were so mentally drained. (Student) Carceral Abolitionists will always have a place in my heart, but it was drainin'. It was mentally drainin'.

It was hard for S to leave (Student) Carceral Abolitionists and The (Student) Coalition because he could not continue organizing and graduate at the same time. S's capacity for (student) activism continued as he started graduate school and reflected on the controlled chaos of his graduate program. Through his graduate program, S found love for public service, voting rights, and election rights and moved away from (student) activism: "Activism, though I love it, *I don't really see it in my future* in a way. Because you know, I love those who do it, I have all the respect for them. It's just not me anymore." S loved the work that he did with (student) activist organizations but does not want to be an activist in the future. S's future vision of his (student) activist identity relies on his present status as a graduate student navigating the demands of graduate school life beyond graduation. The temporality of S's queer (student) activist identity, particularly his future queer activism, predicated his current need to heal from past (student) activism and present responsibilities. Additionally, through a queer of color analysis, S's reality

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highlighted racism and whiteness as stressors that led him to part ways from (student) activism (Gorski & Erakat, 2019). Navigating organizing spaces that pushed logics of whiteness, such as urgency and productivity onto S's (student) activist labor, added unnecessary stress and exhaustion.

As S described a tension with his student *and* activist identities, he also characterized the fluidity of activism. Even though S said that he does not see activism in his future, he described elements of his future that I interpreted as forms of activism, such as working in public service and advocating for voting and election rights. Through my own interpretation, uplifting marginalized voices and advocating for the democratic rights of people is a form of activism. For S, however, public service and voting rights were not part of his future (non)activism. S's narrative brought up a tension related to naming activism and what constitutes activism.

The future orientations of our stories highlight queer temporalities within (student) activism, particularly the importance of creating more equitable conditions for the present moment while also planning for the future world. In the focus group, we talked about the nuances of activism: what it is and what it is not. R spoke up and stated:

Like, is educating yourself alone, activism? Or does it…does it necessitate a community of other people? Doing it with you? I'm not sure. I don't really have an answer to that. But umm. But I do wonder about that. What I, what's really important to me when I think about activism is imagining a future, together with a group of people. An equitable future. A future without prisons. Like, very future oriented. And then working to kind of create that.

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As R talked, I remembered having conversations in The (Student) Coalition about documenting and saving our work for future (student) activists. C also shared their perspective on organizing for the future, particularly related to environmental activism by telling us about a personal incident from their childhood:

> At the end of the day the reason that I want to do activism is because when I was 10 years old, I had to huddle in my closet while an F-5 tore through my home. And I know that because of climate change that's going to happen to more kids in the future. And I don't want kids to be so afraid of the weather and wake up at 2 in the morning having a panic attack because they heard thunder. Which is something that I still do.

As child, a tornado swept through C's home and because of climate change, C recognized that more children were going to experience that same reality. C's future orientation toward climate catastrophes influenced their environmental activism in the current moment. Similarly, in my reflective journal, I wrote about the homophobic and transphobic incident influencing my desire to act on my emotions:

> My mind spiraled thinking about the implications of a professor espousing homophobic and transphobic beliefs in a classroom with students who were going into education professions. I sat and sobbed. My heart hurt for the queer kids who had to sit in a classroom, a space that is often an escape for some students and listen to someone tell them there was something wrong with them.

I feared the safety of queer students who would eventually be in a classroom with the homophobic professor. My attention toward the queer students already in that classroom, and the queer students who would take a class with that homophobic professor in the future,

demonstrated future thinking. The collaborators and myself showed that our past and current experiences informed our desires to organize for the future. This thinking demonstrates the temporality of (student) activism, particularly the futurity of queer (student) activism (Muñoz, 2009). Additionally, the collaborators and myself showed a connection among queerness and (student) activism as a refusal to a state of arrival, meaning that (student) activism looks to future potentials and is a temporal destination (Muñoz, 2009). Butler (1993) offered a similar perspective on queerness:

> If the term "queer" is to be a site of collective contestation, the point of departure for a set of historical reflections and futural imagining, it will have to remain that which is, in the present, never fully owned, but always and only redeployed, twisted, queered from a prior usage and in the direction of urgent and expanding political purposes and perhaps also yielded in favor of terms that do that political work more effectively. (p. 19)

Mobilizations and definitions of "queer" and "queerness" must continuously challenge its meanings and usages or refuse a state of arrival. Together, Muñoz's and Butler's framing of queerness and the collaborators' and my conceptualizations of queer (student) activism indicated the temporality of (student) activism. This framing provides a perspective into (student) activism that is not prescriptive and rigid, but rather responsive to the contexts in which it is situated in.

The Art of Queer Organizing

Engaging in queer worldmaking practices demonstrated a tactic of our organizing efforts through the formation and implementation of anti-oppressive activism. We allowed our anti-oppressive values and collectivist ideologies to guide decision-making and organizing strategies, which ultimately informed our queer worldmaking. Zaino (2022) defined queer worldmaking as

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a "fundamentally creative process" that generates sociocultural and political practices "from the performative disruption or refusal of state-sanctioned heteronormative reproduction" (p. 578). The collaborators and myself demonstrated performative disruptions and refused to engage in reproductions of white supremacist and heteropatriarchal logics through internal and external coalition building, queer storytelling, as well as love and care.

Queer Infrastructure: "How Do We Dismantle This Oppression?"

One of the intentional decisions that collaborators and myself made when designing The (Student) Coalition and (Student) Carceral Abolitionists was facilitating a non-hierarchical collective "structure." This intentional decision came from the shared values, ideologies, and experiences of (student) activists who were at the "wrong end of power" during their time as a student at Auburn University. We recognized the white supremacist and heteropatriarchal structures at Auburn University and compliant administrators who upheld oppressive logics would not support queer (student) activists' efforts. To illuminate this realization, R recalled an interaction with an upper-level student affairs administrator during the queer advocacy movement. R shared with the collaborators:

> In that meeting that Jess that was describing earlier with the cookies and lemonade, after the meeting like, Ms. Blue (a pseudonym) came up to me and the like, she only knew me from [a leadership program] retreat. And which is like about activism basically and like visioning and community. And so, she like came up to me and said "you know, I think like the [leadership program] and a real leader wouldn't do this" or something like that.

Initially, R felt ashamed and questioned their approach and the (student) activists' approach to queer advocacy. In the chat function, J immediately wrote: "Off the record: Fuck Ms. Blue." Within moments, R bounced back:

> My gut reaction was like "oh this person is telling me this is wrong. Maybe I shouldn't have done this. Maybe like this is the wrong way to do it." And then [laughs] and then like two seconds later I was like "Noo!" Like J said, "Fuck Ms. Blue, like no!" You don't get to have that power over me and how I feel and with like what we are doing together.

R's experience highlights the patronization we often received from Auburn University administrators and reinforced our belief that as long as white supremacy and heteropatriarchy existed within higher education, queer (student) activists will not be cared for by those who intentionally uphold those systems of power.

S and J recalled similar racialized and ableist experiences that informed their motivation to create alternative (student) activist spaces centered on community, collaboration, and care for *all* people. In their interview, J stated:

> As, and again, a queer neurodivergent person, I have been failed by the state, by institutions so many times. So, it's hard to have belief in you know systems like the nuclear family, and you know public school and housing programs when they are, there are so many instances where those things are actively hostile to you know people like me.

S also elaborated on a similar perspective regarding his experience as a queer, Black man: "I'm getting a degree from this institution that's always been against Black people. Like I mean you look at, it's so white! Oh my god you walk around campus and there's barely any people of Color." S further spoke to whiteness and power, noting that "you can make change somewhat,

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but also like you can also make change if the powers above decide there's a chance." I added to S's statement highlighting my tension of organizing within an institution: "Higher Ed is an interesting one. It's like a system that fosters a lot of opportunity but uh you know; you dive deeper and look at what those opportunities are and who they are for…" Higher education offers educational, social, and political opportunities to engage in transformative work *and also* gatekeeps that work. S elaborated on his perspective about higher education, particularly Auburn University, in his interview:

> I think in the Deep South where you have more conservative schools, you still get like and the activism community itself. So, they'll make a protest and all that and you'll get shit from leaders who don't believe in what you're saying, shit from the dean who's like, who's like "this is an issue now." Umm. Like you know a bullshit task force and diversity and inclusion, you know just a bunch of hollow stuff. They're actually bells and whistles so they can write an article about it and be like "Auburn is doing something" and they're actually not [laugh].

S made a notable connection between the performative actions of university administrators when they are pressured to address issues related to equity on campus. Particularly in the South, S commented on the "ongoing drama" of "fighting all these forces" from actors who gatekeep (student) activists' work. In the context of this study, the forces that S alluded to included bureaucratic and ideological barriers from "leaders," or deans, upper-level student affairs administrators, the provost, and the president who do not believe in queer advocacy, racial equity, and carceral abolition. Indeed, in the South racial desegregation and LGBTQ+ topics are met with resistance from students and upper-level administrators in education spaces

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(Andrzejewski et al., 2018; Bailey & Strunk, 2015; Martin et al., 2017; Shelton, 2018; Strunk et al., 2015). (Student) activists in the Deep South have fought against white supremacy and heteropatriarchy for generations (Rogers, 2012; Williams-Lott, 2018), and the forces and people that the collaborators and I encountered during our organizing continued to uphold and reinforce these hostilities.

As S and I continued on the topic of higher education and (student) activism, he highlighted another important consideration:

> So, you have to work around and push through those as well and again find ways to fight, not only the system, the system in like whether its police brutality. And also, you have to fight the system in your institution that you pay money to go to. They will one day have to give you a degree, you get all your years of college paid off. It's hard to make those people upset and if you make them upset then you have to navigate that institution, you have a target on your back.

As S spoke, I remembered conversations within The (Student) Coalition about the limits of our organizing because some members feared repercussions from Auburn University. Specifically, some members feared losing their scholarships and backlash from administrators that would result in them not being able to graduate. Linder et al. (2019) also found that postsecondary administrators protected "dominant ways of knowing and being" (p. 48) and the institution over the lives of the (student) activists. Recognizing the reality of administrative authority, the collaborators and I organized in opposition to what the institution expected. The collaborators and I created shared, non-hierarchical leadership structures to protect individual (student) activists.

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The (Student) Coalition and (Student) Carceral Abolitionists focused on shared leadership models to mitigate hierarchical and white power dynamics. To create this model, we held collaborative discussions and asked each other questions that S posited, "What systems do we put in place to kind of have leadership? How do people have roles? How do we decide those roles?" We relied on the trust and relationships we built within and outside of the (student) activist organizations to navigate these questions because we did not have experience building grassroots, non-hierarchical organizations. C and R further elaborated on the challenges of implementing a non-hierarchical model and that even though we did not have experience, "*It's really just so important to not be doing anything alone.* And be doing everything together and setting up structures within the organization to have shared leadership and to be collaborative." The emphasis on the importance of "not doing anything alone" highlighted our spirit of connection and creating a world with other people.

Muñoz (2009) suggested queer futurity or queer worldmaking requires "a collective political becoming" and that "from [a] shared critical dissatisfaction we arrive at collective potentiality" (p. 189). The emphasis on "collective becoming" and "collective potential" demonstrates the importance of collaboration within queer worldmaking practices. Values like building coalitional power across multiple audiences, showing institutionally displaced members of the community their power, and the transformative possibilities of caring for others characterized the collaborators' efforts to build an anti-oppressive world. In the following subthemes, I elaborate on the queer worldmaking practices that transpired through grassroots organizing, queer storytelling, and collective love and care.

Grassroots Organizing Within and Beyond Higher Education

Grassroots organizing across Auburn University and beyond the campus community is a queer worldmaking practice because it involved actors with no relation to kinship (Berlant & Warner, 1999). Nicolazzo et al. (2017) described queer kinship as an intentional decision to care for people who bear no biological relation to one another. In this study, the collaborators, other grassroots organizations, and I willingly chose to support each other and advocate for transformative change. R's sentiment about the importance of "not doing anything alone" as a (student) activist carried over into grassroots organizing efforts outside of The (Student) Coalition and (Student) Carceral Abolitionists. Previously discussed in (Student) Activist Community section, in my interview, I reflected on the importance of a supportive group of critical scholars in the College of Education when the professor in the College of Education expressed homophobic and transphobic beliefs: "I felt very safe and protected by the Critical Scholar Coalition (CSC). Mostly because I knew the professors who were part of CSC and built trusting relationships with them." Through my retroactive journal and document analysis, I positioned the CSC as a grassroots organization that came together and organized around their shared critical onto-epistemologies and pedagogies. The CSC responded to the incident in the College of Education and was one of the first groups of employees of Auburn University to express their support for LGBTQ+ students at the institution.

In the newspaper article "Education faculty send open letter to the Auburn community," the CSC, staff, and other faculty members at Auburn University demanded a response from upper-level administrators. The CSC addressed the homophobic and transphobic culture at Auburn University and the lack of a response from university administrators stating, "It is time

for [Auburn University], and specifically, the College of Education, to take a stand to support

LGBTQ+ students, staff, faculty, and community members" (Letter to the Editor, 2019, p. 3).

The letter included a list of demands to the university, the College of Education, and a statement

of continued support "to advocate for LGBTQ+ individuals, as well as other minoritized groups"

(Letter to the Editor, 2019, p. 6). A unique aspect of the CSC is that they were a group of

employees who can mobilize within the institution some of whom are protected by academic

freedom and their affiliation with the institution. Pre-tenured faculty are not protected by

academic freedom and risk their job by vocally advocating for certain issues, like LGBTQ+

equity and racial equity. Even though the CSC provided some protection to faculty members as a

grassroots organization, individual pre-tenured professors were still at risk for challenging

Auburn University and the College of Education. The CSC provided support to the queer

advocacy (student) activists and The (Student) Coalition, extending the collaborators' sentiment

of organizing with communities.

The CSC was among many external constituency groups assisting (student) activists at

Auburn University in their coalitional and transformative projects. As I reflected on the network

of (student) activist advocates that the collaborators and myself formed, I was reminded of the

importance of building relationships with people. In The (Student) Coalition planning meetings, I

recalled (student) activists building a network of supporters with past (student) activists who

attended Auburn University, (student) activists from other universities, Black alumni, local

pastors, graduate students, faculty, staff, and administrators. Building a network of people who

supported the racial equity and anti-oppressive efforts of The (Student) Coalition was possible

due to our connections and knowledges. Relationships from within the institution and

connections beyond the university's campus demonstrated the value of connectivity. Amina Mama (2018) elaborated on this point: "Why do we make organizations? We make them to do more than what we ourselves can do as individuals. It is only collective action that can make real change" (p. 90). I do not suggest that organizing must lead to the creation of organizations, but that collective action makes "real change" because collaboration interrupts capitalist, individualist logics and infiltrates toxic systems of oppression from within and outside the institution. Demonstrated by collaborators' narratives, collective action is part of queer worldmaking in the Deep South which is an important dynamic given that in college towns, (student) activists come and go depending on when/if they graduate. J spoke to this challenge in the first focus group:

> This is something that I have learned in student organizing. By the time you build up that strong community, people are ready to move on. It takes years to be able to build community and it kind of hurts because it makes it hard to do sustained student organizing.

Collective organizing that involves multiple constituent groups buffers the impact when (student) activists leave the institution and carry-out (student) activist knowledges and queer worldmaking blueprints. Additionally, this phenomenon is unique in the Deep South because of ongoing segregation, like redistricting and education reform initiatives, which drive communities apart from each other.

Building coalition within and beyond (student) activist and (faculty) activist communities extends Berlant and Warner's (1998) description of queer worlds: "a world-making project, where 'world,' like 'public,' differs from community or group because it necessarily includes

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more people than can be identified, more spaces that can be mapped beyond a few reference points" (p. 558). In this sense, (student) activists' queer worldmaking project traversed beyond the traditional student and faculty dynamic where faculty are only seen as distributors of knowledge. The CSC showed that caring for students goes beyond their academic performance and includes advocating for marginalized students' rights, wellbeing, and unpaid labor. Collaborators' queer worldmaking project included collaboration with supportive faculty, staff, community members, and Black alumni.

Queer Storytelling

During the focus group sessions, collaborators spoke about the importance of storytelling, particularly among queer individuals in the Deep South. Within The (Student) Coalition and Carceral (Student) Activists, queer storytelling helped the collaborators and myself embrace our queerness by sharing our anti-capitalist and anti-racist ideologies. Previously discussed in the Queerness in (Student) Activist section, collaborators recalled other (student) activists talking about their queer identities which invited them into a space where they were able to embrace their own queer identities. I commented on the impact of queer storytelling as I heard from other (student) activists in The (Student) Coalition: "I didn't know that like, people also thought of their gender Identity in a similar way that I do." Discovering my own gender identity alongside the collaborators informed my criticality toward heteropatriarchal logics in my activism. Learning from (student) activists also had an impact on C:

> I think I just admired the fuck out of everyone in this organization and they were all
> queer…Like I think just having people to admire in your life that are gay is so important.
> Because I was just like, "Oh my god these are my peers, and they are so fucking cool".

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Queer storytelling in the form of (student) activists sharing their queerness with other organizers impacted C's comfortability with their own queer identities. Collaborators' queer stories in the focus groups reminded us that we were not alone as we navigated (student) activist spaces and our queerness.

Queer storytelling is a powerful tool that shows queer people in the Deep South that they are not alone in their experiences. In his interview, S shared a personal affect after he shared his story of identifying as a queer Black man at a protest:

I knew people who were like some of the most like, hard conservatives that I knew when I was younger. And they talked to me after that protest and being like "I didn't know that about you, you know what? I'm proud of you. I'm this and I'm this…It's really cool to see you like, be yourself." You don't get that in South that often.

For S, having people come up to him after a protest and tell him that they are proud of him for being his authentic self, made him excited and happy. Sharing his story in front of thousands of people at a protest, encouraged him to "not be afraid of this thing [queerness] anymore." Queer storytelling helped S embrace his queerness and abetted other queer people who were listening to him. In a Zoom call with a group of high schoolers, S shared his story about being a queer Black man and a (student) activist. During the Zoom call, the high schoolers told S: "[It's] just cool to see someone like you protesting and doing this…I'm [we're] so happy that you're here like talking to us about this stuff and like, to be like an example." Hearing the high school students tell S that he was their "hero" affirmed S's motivation for doing activism for other people who "didn't have the space or didn't have the confidence or the ability to speak." S's story shows that in the Deep South, queer storytelling creates a space for queer (student) activists to feel validated

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and supported in their queerness. A queer of color analysis sheds light on S's experience with queer storytelling as a disidentifactory process because S spoke from his experience as a queer Black man to expose whiteness and heteronormativity and (re)present transformative political possibilities for (dis)empowered people.

In addition to building individual confidence, queer storytelling helped mobilize the racial equity and prison abolition movement in the Deep South. At the Black Trans Vigil that The (Student) Coalition organized, S read somebody else's story who identified as a Black trans man. Reading someone else's story was extremely powerful for S because the vigil was smaller and more intimate and S did not want to "mess up their story." In an interview, I asked S more about the Black Trans Vigil and the impact it had on him and he said it helped him embrace his queer Black identity because it was a queer space centered on queer Black lives. Particularly, witnessing Black trans people openly share their stories at the vigil made S do some reflection because "if these people can tell the story…it'll be just like a queer group telling stories. It gives you more courage to tell your story when you protest."

When S talked about finding the courage to be open about his sexuality during protests, I was taken back to the march across the Edmund Pettus Bridge. After marching across one side of the bridge, the protestors took a moment of silence to uplift incarcerated people and those who died in prison because of hostile living conditions and police brutality. A few moments passed as cars slowed down to see what was going on. The reverend passed the microphone to a woman whose nephew was killed inside a prison. She shared his story because his death was buried in the news. Beside the woman was the mother of the man who was killed. I could not see her, but S said that she was "so grief stricken, she couldn't stand upright." The cars grew louder as they

honked at the crowd. I could not hear this woman's story, but I could feel the energy of the crowd turn toward her grief and collectively lift her voice.

I returned to my discussion with S, and we continued to talk about the power of sharing stories. As a queer person living in the Deep South, S said that with a "collective group behind you of queer activism…it gives you a space in a way, like safe space to be able to talk about your story." S's point mirrored the power of storytelling that J highlighted in their interview. Previously touched on in the (Student) Activist Community section, J talked about the importance of storytelling in rural Alabama. J stated sharing stories are an important part of organizing in the Deep South because,

> In order to build power like I was saying that I want to do, that takes a lot of like time and trust building and working through people's trauma. Because we are resilient people, like we're tough as nails and we're smarter than anybody thinks we are.

J continued to talk about building trust with rural Southerners and the vulnerability of sharing your story as a queer (student) activist:

> I can't tell you how many situations where I've been and where I've been like canvassing and you know they come up to the door. And you know started to talk to them about the issue and they're standing there like this: arms crossed very standoffish answering and short. Quiet in short answers, but then you start to ask them about their story, and I can get into this later, but I think that, fundamentally, if you want to be a good organizer you have to be a good storyteller. And you start to get stories from these people you start to share stories and you start to see their body language slip into something more comfortable. This is actually one of those times, where whiteness comes into play too

because wouldn't you know it there's a hell of a lot more Black people in rural Alabama, than the narrative seems to want to talk about. And so, there is a barrier to trust building when you know some white college looking out of towner comes in and wants to talk to you about your story it's like "What the fuck are you talking about kid? I gotta go the grocery store." So, there's definitely some some fear and really being yourself out in the field, but like If you're not being honest with people, then how can you expect to build trust with them? Liberalism teaches us to be marketable to make ourselves marketable. And the fact of the matter is, is that I am not marketable to the people that I want to organize.

J's narrative showed the importance of taking the time to build trust with people because it helps people understand where organizers are coming and honors the humanity or community members. For rural Southerners, storytelling is a way to connect with people and share the ways they have been disenfranchised by white supremacy and heteropatriarchy. Through queer storytelling, the collaborators showed each other and members of the local community that they can learn from one another in the similarities in their life experiences. Learning from one another through storytelling is a queer worldmaking practice because storytelling encourages collective possibilities of living.

In the focus group, C, R, and J talked about making Canva prints as a form of activism to communicate ideas, institutional demands, and action plans. I frame communication via social media as a form of queer storytelling because virtual spaces provide a large platform to transmit stories and ideas to broader audiences. Organizing with the (Student) Carceral Abolitionists, C said, "I was on Canva so much. I was on Canva so goddamn much. I never want to open that

application again." C described some of the work they did on Canva such as making fliers as "unspectacular." R echoed a similar experience, "I definitely get lost in the spreadsheets and it feels boring but that's what I tell myself when I feel like I might die if I have to do any more data entry." As mentioned in the (Student) Activist Community theme, J commented on the different forms of activism and the most important part of doing "the boring administrative stuff that's underneath the iceberg" is being "willing to spend time on spreadsheets because that's what's needed for this thing to work." Creating documents to share across various virtual platforms is a form of queer storytelling that allowed the collaborators a space to share information quickly. Though the collaborators did not explicitly talk about the role of social media as a strategy in their organizing, positioning it as a form of queer storytelling opens the possibilities of various forms of discourse in (student) activism.

As a collective, we touched on the importance of sharing stories from racially diverse, neurodivergent, queer people because it allowed us to engage in more critical discussions. Sharing stories made us more attentive to the needs of *all* people so that we could create a space for all people disenfranchised by white supremacy and heteropatriarchy. Queer storytelling shows that "the development of new cultural forms to resist prevailing ideologies and expectations typically rooted in normativity" (Blockett, 2021, p. 90) is possible.

Power of Love and Care

This subtheme captures the power of love and care in (student) activism as values that inspired the collaborators and myself to organize, build relationships and collective power across communities, and fight white supremacist and heteropatriarchal logics. The collaborators demonstrated the power of (student) activist communities to imagine a world that represents "a

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disempowered politics or positionality that has been rendered unthinkable by the dominant culture" (Muñoz, 2009, p. 31) in the Deep South. Demonstrated in the previous sections, the collaborators and I navigated an anti-LGBTQ, racist, and ableist institution within a highly conservative, evangelical, heteronormative, white city in the Deep South. Within the highly oppressive and hostile environment, the collaborators and I engaged in relationships, coalitions, and strategies to build (student) activist communities that used connectivity as a political tool.

During a discussion on queer politics in (student) activist communities, we identified love and care as two central ideologies that aided in (re)conceptualizing queer (student) activism. C reflected on why people organize in the first place and start *doing* activism:

> Usually, those people have been harmed by systems, are marginalized in some way, or are like caring people. They're people that give a damn. And like the people that give a damn about mass incarceration and want prison abolition to be a thing usually like, usually aren't homophobic. Usually, they've gotten over that if they ever were. *You know there's this certain element of like when you decide you're going to like, organize around edifying humans and their care. It's like, that's incompatible with being the kind of hateful person I would be like afraid to be gay around.*

J responded to C in the chat: "That's hugI. a hunger for AGENCY as a queer person in activism." J also added in the chat that "when you are organizing with other people, you are essentially having a long, unspoken discussion around 'Who did this to you?'" C and J identified that typically people who organize have been harmed by white supremacy and heteropatriarchy in some way and as a result, care about people who are also harmed by systems of violence and oppression and want to do something about it. To C's point, that ideological shift is incompatible

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with being a hateful person, and also incompatible within anti-capitalist, anti-racist, anti-homophobic (student) activist communities because of white supremacy and heteropatriarchy logics are (re)produced through the absence of love. Queer worldmaking among us rested on care, love, and direct action to eradicate the material realities of white supremacy and heteropatriarchy.

We characterized an ideological shift within The (Student) Coalition and (Student) Carceral Abolitionists that centered on love and care for people. As mentioned previously in the (Student) Activist Community theme, the collaborators and myself embodied values of love and care for people in their organizing by being in community with other (student) activists. Additionally, S asked us, "What were the things you wish you knew that you know now about activism?" As others discussed, C spoke:

> This might be deviating from the topic a little bit but it's about me being gay and doing activism so like not for real…People of our generation are passionate about a lot of things. We are passionate about everything it seems like. And that's good. But I think for a while I thought that I had to do prison abolition work because I was a person who cared about the fact that prisons are bad and there was a group in my area doing that was doing that kind of work. And I'm so happy that I joined (Student) Carceral Abolitionists because it's the reason I know I want to be an environmental advocate now.

Even though C did not continue to do prison abolition work, they joined the (Student) Carceral Abolitionists because they cared about incarcerated people. Toward the end of the conversation, J encouraged others to reassess and ask themselves:

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Why am I doing this? Why do I care so much? Why does this matter? If there is nothing

else that you know about this whole organizing experience, let it be that you joined this

for a very specific reason. *You care about this for a very specific reason. And it hits very*

close to home.

Recognizing an opportunity to engage in self-reflection, I asked the collaborators: "Why is it that

you did organizing work? Why do you continue to do it?"

I started the conversation and said:

I care. I care a lot about people and the earth, and I want to do something about that. And

I recognize that I've been afforded a lot of privilege in my life as a white person, and I

want to leverage every point of privilege that I have to make the world a better place. So

that's kind of my why that keeps me going.

After I spoke, J unmuted themselves and said, "I do this because I want for other people to feel

safe in being themselves." Similarly, C offered their perspective and said, "I think that everyone

deserves to feel safe and cared for and provided by their environment." R laughed as they

unmuted themselves because of an awkward pause, "echoing a lot of what you all have said

feelings of loneliness, and just really lacking community and wanting to build that for better for

others." S spoke last and offered a thought-provoking reply:

You know I think you have to care about the spaces you're in to really do work in them.

And even if you don't understand that space, if you care about you can make some

leeway, you can raise some hell, you can make some amazing things. Like caring is such

a powerful tool in life. Because like…there's a lot of emotion we go through, but if you

care about someone, that's a very deep emotion we go through. You know it takes a lot to

care about others. And love too, I think my why is love as well. I think love is a universal thing that all of us want to feel and if you can put love into your activism and love people around you, you've done a great thing.

The collaborators reflected on humanizing moments during their time as (student) activists to further contextualize the queer political-ideological shift.

S demonstrated a queer politic of love and care through a playlist he uses to hype himself up for protests. Songs like "My Power" by Nija and Beyonce, "Mazza" by Guvna B, "16 Shots" by Stefflon Don, "Burn" by Big Sean, and "Around My Way" by Lupe Fiasco characterized S's power, collective power, and love of history and activism. For example, S described "Burn" by Big Sean as:

The song that's like "burn the system" down. That is that song. That is what it stands for. That's the beat, the lyrics. And when I'm really feeling angry, I need to listen to that song. I have visions of myself putting my fist up on Capitol steps, in the middle of Toomer's and that song that song that comes to my mind. I know that we didn't really burn anything down but mentally when I'm really feeling like I'm pushing something that's song that I listened to.

The playlist was deeply personal to S 163dditioied him through challenging times in his life. S showed this as he talked about "My Power:"

That's a song just about power, about Black Power, power within yourself. You think wanting to activism has given me a sense of power. You know, it's given me a sense of power and activism in school in my personal and social life, I wouldn't be the person I

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am today without that power that I got from going through the ringer with mental stuff and doing a protest. *It's all about your power, my power.*

As S described each song on his playlist, I was taken back to the march across the Edmund Pettus Bridge. S and I listened to some of these songs during the drive. S jammed out in the passenger seat, waving his hands and singing every word of each song. I listened to S as I drove through rural southern towns; buildings boarded up, and wild grass and bushes grew in the cracks on the pavement. Nature took back the land, much like the people at the march who gathered to take back their power from state-sanctioned carceral systems.

To further demonstrate the importance and effect of creating (student) activist communities and relationships that defy heteronormativity and refuse to support white supremacy and heteropatriarchal logics, J offered the following narrative:

Your relationship, your presence here is something that matter in and of itself. You as a person, not just what you produce, is something that's valuable of you. And I think that kind of just, this very inherent appreciation of existence regardless of what that looks like, that's something that was so new to me when I was organizing that other people care about me even when I say that I'll do something and then I don't do it? These people are…I told these people I would do this thing and then I drop the ball and they still care about me? It's such a fascinating paradigm shift and it's very healing, I think.

The paradigm shift from valuing production to valuing people mirrors Muñoz's (2009) conceptualization of disidentification, particularly that queerness is an ongoing production of queer worldmaking that emerges out of "reproductive majoritarian heterosexuality" (p. 22). The

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collaborators and myself created a world where they could imagine living in a community that valued people, eradicated individualism, and advocated for *all* people in the Deep South.

Concluding Reflections

The themes presented in this chapter characterize the memories and experiences of the collaborators and from our time spent as (student) activists from 2019–2021. As I presented previously, the collaborators and I illuminated the purposes of the (student) activist community, queerness as an identity and politic, and anti-oppressive organizing characteristics as key features of queer worldmaking. Given that the collaborators and myself organized in Alabama, queer (student) activist communities played a crucial role as we navigated Auburn University and surrounding communities. The collaborators and I described the importance of building coalitional power for our own growth as queer (student) activists and to strengthen advocacy efforts. Queerness and activism showed up as two interconnected ways of being, one informing the other as we grew and became more involved in organizing. Finally, centering collectivism, love, and care allowed the collaborators and myself an opportunity to create an anti-oppressive world. To imagine the possibilities of this research for higher education and society, Chapter Five presents a discussion of the findings and several implications for postsecondary research and practice. To conclude Chapter Four, I offer a personal reflection from the first focus group.

Stop Recording.

I did it. I completed the first step of data analysis.

My head spun as I looked at my computer screen and saw R, J, S, and C looking back at me: Don't forget to thank them for their participation in the study. Don't forget to thank them for taking the time to talk with each other. Don't forget to thank them for helping

me with my dissertation. Don't forget to tell them the next steps of the study. Don't forget

to tell them they have the right to discontinue their participation in the study. Don't

forget to plan the second focus group. Don't forget to explain the reflective journal.

Don't forget to journal when you hang up.

My mind raced trying to remember my qualitative interview trainings. Before I could

explain the administrative tasks, I looked at the screen and let out a sigh. R, J, C, and S

smiled back at me. I felt my emotions creep up my throat because of all of the memories

and time we spent together, fighting for change in our community. And because of the

immense gratitude for my friends and the privilege of being able to listen to their stories.

I thanked them for taking the time to do the focus group and help me with my

dissertation. I thanked them again for sharing their stories. As I started to wrap up

everyone unmuted themselves. R shared that they had a bad day and really did not want

to be on Zoom that night but were incredibly glad they did. Soon everyone jumped in and

said how nice it was to see everyone again. We talked about how nice it was to have the

space to think back on all of the work we did, together. The focus group was healing for

us. We stayed on Zoom for a while and talked about our lives. We talked about getting

together for coffee in the following weeks.

Before we left, the collaborators thanked me for bringing us together in community. I

ended the Zoom call and watched their faces leave my screen. Up until that moment, my

anxiety told me that I was burdening the collaborators by asking them to participate in

my study. I did not expect them to actually enjoy the focus group. Queer communities are

vital to our existence and I am honored to be in community with the collaborators, my

friends.

Chapter Five: Discussion and Implications

Using collaborative autoethnography, the collaborators and I uncovered the queer worldmaking practices employed by queer (student) activists who transformed their lived conditions and created anti-oppressive communities in resistance to white supremacist and heteropatriarchal logics at Auburn University. As a reminder, the purpose of this dissertation was to look into the potential of queer (student) activism as an intervention within and beyond postsecondary education at Auburn University. In this chapter, I discuss the study findings; implications for practice, theory, and research within and beyond postsecondary education; and the limitations of the research. First, I present the findings in response to the research questions, illuminating the potential of queer theoretical perspectives and concepts to intervene and inform (student) activist inquiry. Next, I offer ways this study informs student affairs and faculty practice, implications for (student) activists, and postsecondary policy and research.

Presentation of Findings

In the following sections, I detail the findings in response to the research questions that guided this study. The purpose of the first research question was to identify and understand the processes and methods (student) activists engaged in as performance. Within this first research question, I was also attuned to how (student) activists navigated white supremacist and heteropatriarchal manifestations, such as capitalism, heteronormativity, and racism. The motive of the second research question was to rethink (student) activism. Together, the collaborators in this study, including myself (re)conceptualized queer (student) activism as a worldmaking project centered on love and care through coalition building, mobilizing queerness as a politic, and anti-oppressive organizing.

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Research Question One

To restate, the first research question that guided this study was: How do (student) activists at a large public university in the Deep South describe participating in performance through strategies and tactics that resist white supremacy and heteropatriarchy within/beyond their postsecondary institution? The collaborators and myself in this study described participating in performance through strategies and tactics that conceived counterpublics to materialize transformative change within Auburn University, the city of Auburn, and Alabama. Queer (student) activists in this study formed counterpublics based on our shared ideologies and desires to disrupt oppressive systems within and beyond their postsecondary institution. Warner (2002) described counterpublics as spaces that "provide a sense of active belonging that masks or compensates for the real powerlessness of human agents in capitalist society" (p. 81). Data from this research indicated counterpublics did "provide a sense of active belonging" for us (Warner, 2002, p. 81), particularly within The (Student) Coalition and (Student) Carceral Abolitionists. For example, C shared that after finding out that other (student) activists in (Student) Carceral Abolitionists were queer they "admired the fuck out of everyone" and exclaimed, "Having people to admire in your life that are gay is so important. Because I was just like, 'Oh my god these are my peers, and they are so fucking cool.'" For S, activism gave him "a sense of purpose" and helped him "out of like, a deep depression.' Indeed, C and S, as well as the rest of the group showed the value of the (student) activist communities as a counterpublic in providing us a space of belonging.

Yet, I do not pose the collaborators and myself sought a sense of belonging within the capitalist, racist, and homophobic Auburn University campus itself. J illuminated this perspective

in the focus group when they first organized as a (student) activist because they were at the "wrong end of power" at Auburn University, "a classist, ableist, racist, usually transphobic, usually LGBT-phobic institution." Rather, I turn to Muñoz's (1999) work to mobilize counterpublics as "communities and relational chains of resistance that contest the dominant public sphere" (p. 146). Muñoz's (1999) perspective differs from Warner's (2002) in that counterpublics emerge as a means for survival and to actively dismantle hegemonic systems related to gender, sexual, and racial expressions, rather than identify a recognizable difference from a dominant public. The counterpublics in this study utilized collectivist ideologies and shared leadership networks, relationships, and vulnerability with (student) activists, and facilitated "no judgment zones" in the Deep South. The collaborators and I defied normative logics such as heteronormativity and white supremacy to "contest the public sphere for the purposes of political efficacy" (Muñoz, 1999, p. 148). In the following sections, I further answer the first research question by showing how the findings of this study intervene and inform prior (student) activism inquiry.

(Student) Activism Inquiry

As I previously discussed in Chapter Two, common themes across (student) activism inquiry related to participation in (student) activism as a form of civic engagement; engagement identity-based activism; how (student) activists work within and against the institution of postsecondary education; and topics related to free speech. Literature on the experiences of (student) activism often framed the purpose of activism as an opportunity to build students' understanding of and participation in democratic processes (Biddix, 2014; Farago et al., 2018; Hemer & Reason, 2021; Kezar, 2010; Kezar & Maxey, 2014). An outcome of (student) activism

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then is to develop and prepare civically aware and engaged citizens (Kezar & Maxey, 2014; Renn, 2007; Rhoads, 1997). The findings of this study troubled this framing of (student) activism, because the collaborators and myself were not concerned about developing skills to become better equipped to citizens. In fact, the collaborators expressed they were interested in growing and organizing in a way to disrupt democratic processes that are capitalistic and bounded to individualism. The collaborators expressed that they had no desire to conform to the hegemonic society that postsecondary education is so focused on preparing students for. R highlighted this perspective saying, "organizing itself goes against society and the way everything works naturally." Similarly, C shared a dynamic of their (student) activism as "I was doing this thing that was very counter to the institution, you know? It was anti-establishment. It was disrupting an establishment." These narratives demonstrated an intervention into (student) activism as civic engagement, and through queer perspectives (Berlant & Warner, 1999; Muñoz, 1999) showed that queer (student) activism is a form of civic dis-engagement.

The context of the study situated in the Deep South offered an additional intervention into the attention on civic engagement within (student) activism literature. The geographic region introduced a unique dynamic to (student) organizing considering the history of chattel slavery and the Civil Rights movement (Rogers, 2012), and ongoing educational reform efforts that further drive racial segregation in the Deep South (Strunk et al., 2015). In their interview, J said that as a rural Southern organizer, they meet folks who "see how broken [the state] is. Of course they do, they've lived in it their entire lives. They know something is fundamentally wrong." Additionally, when the collaborators and I talked about the role of universities in organizing, J wrote in the chat function: "Ooh don't get me fucking started on the redistricting process in

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Auburn. Straight up Jim Crow shit." J demonstrated that rural Southerners know that democracy

does not work for in favor for rural, working class, Black Southerners. J's knowledge of the rural

realities for working class, Black folks demonstrated that their organizing efforts are civic dis-

engagements, because they help and support rural Southerner's onto-epistemologies of harmful

democratic, political systems. J's exemplification of rural civic dis-engagements was not just hir

experience but was a key characteristic of the broader organizing that the collaborators and I did.

Civic dis-engagement is a strategy of (student) activism that creates counterpublics that are

"conceptualized as social movements that are contested by and contest the public sphere for the

purposes of political efficacy" (Muñoz, 1999, p. 148). The collaborators and I disengaged from

political systems and normative ideologies that continuously perpetuated segregation,

socioeconomic, environmental, and public health disparities; we then enacted ideologies centered

on community, carceral abolition, and anti-oppression through our organizing. This finding

informs (student) activist inquiry to show that queer (student) activism is a dis-engagement from

civic processes.

A common occurrence within (student) activism inquiry is the attention on identity-based

movements, or activism based in a collective social identity (Broadhurst, 2014; Linder et al.,

2019; Rhoads, 1998). Gamson (1995) highlighted this consistency across social movements

because people with a shared social identity typically experience similar realities. I recognize

that the focus on *queer* (student) activism in this dissertation positioned the study within a

particular identity. However, the findings showed that prior to their involvement in The (Student)

Coalition and (Student) Carceral Abolitionists, the collaborators did not know that the other

(student) activists within the organizations identified as queer. C expressed this realization in the

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focus groups as they reflected on a moment during a social Zoom call when they said, "Wait…everyone in this zoom meeting is queer, right?" In his interview, S also highlighted this uniqueness, stating, "You know how weird it is to get eight people from different diversity backgrounds in the South, but like, like all queer people? That's so insane!" Recognizing the (student) activists were queer *after* the collaborators started organizing exhibits the political utility of queerness. Muñoz (1999) theorized that "to perform queerness is to constantly disidentify, to constantly find oneself thriving on sites where meaning does not properly "line up" (p. 78). Demonstrated through our narratives, the collaborators and I were drawn to each other and other members of the (student) activist communities because of their queerness. Given that we did not know about each other's queerness as an *identity*, we were instead drawn to our queerness as a *politic.* Disidentifying from heteronormativity through organizing efforts, communicated to the collaborators and me that (student) activism is part of a queer project. As an extension of the previous intervention and given Muñoz's definition of a counterpublic, the collaborators and I engaged in performance through collective organizing, embodying queerness as a politic, and espousing collectivist ideologies as tactics against white supremacy and heteropatriarchy within and beyond Auburn University. Organizing in resistance to racism, homophobia, transphobia, and carceral abolition in Alabama where anti-transgender legislation and housing discrimination exist (Sears, 1991; Shelton, 2018) explains the performance of queerness as a politic and a strategy. Positioning the performativity of identity (e.g., queerness) as a tactic of (student) activism offers a unique intervention into identity-based (student) activism scholarship to extend beyond social identity.

Findings from this study also inform existing scholarship on the relationship between the broader society and college campuses, specifically that sociopolitical and cultural events interconnect and affect campus climates (Connor, 2020; Rhoads, 2016; Stern & Carey, 2020). Encountering racist, homophobic, and transphobic structures on a college campus is not a novel finding. Indeed, scholars have demonstrated (student) activists respond to incidents of racism (Bonilla & Rosa, 2015; Jones et al., 2017; Linder & Rodriguez, 2012; Logan et al., 2017; Mustaffa, 2017), as well as homophobia and transphobia (Beemyn, 2003; Revilla, 2004) within and beyond their campus. This study's findings expressed the collaborators responded to sociopolitical and cultural events like George Floyd's murder in Minnesota, the private prison plan in Alabama, and ongoing homophobia and transphobia on Auburn University's campus. The stories of the collaborators and myself align with existing (student) activism scholarship, specifically that white supremacist and heteropatriarchal logics affect the material realities of queer students.

Additionally, through queer of color critique, as well as postmodern and poststructural perspectives, (student) activists engaging in tactics to resist and disrupt hegemonic structures like white supremacy and heteropatriarchy was a disidentifactory process (Muñoz, 1999) that led to the creation of counterpublics within and beyond Auburn University. Engaging in tactics to resist and challenge hegemony was a disidentifactory process, because the collaborators and I performed within and against dominant ideologies such as heteronormativity, rather than completely abolishing cultural identifications which is counteridentifactory. Furthermore, resistance to hegemony created new possibilities of being while still holding true the material realities of cultural identification. The collaborators and I demonstrated this reality as we

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mobilized our queerness as a politic. For example, C discussed finding congruence with their anti-establishment ideologies and queer identities while also facing tensions identifying as non-binary and being perceived as a woman: "I navigate social spaces while like, simultaneously having privilege via whiteness and educatedness and like womanness but then also that sucking because I don't want to be perceived as a woman, but I am." For the collaborators and I, utilizing our queerness as a politic and tactic to disrupt dominant ideologies was a disidentification from whiteness and heteronormativity. As the collaborators and myself faced hegemonic ideologies of normalcy, the counterpublics that emerged form disidentification provided us space to resist and transform their lived conditions and envision an anti-oppressive world.

As a prominent theme in existing (student) activism literature, scholars critique freedom of speech rhetoric in postsecondary education due to the presence of white supremacist and alt-right speakers on campuses (Morgan & Davis, 2019; Thomas, 2018; Wheatle & Commodore, 2019). Though the findings of this study did not explicitly address concerns related to freedom of speech, it was still present within the collaborators' experiences. As I presented in Chapter Four, J's first experience as a (student) activist was in response to Richard Spencer's invitation to speak at Auburn University. Also, R and I advocated for queer resources on campus in response to a homophobic and transphobic professor in the College of Education. Richard Spencer and the professor were allowed to vocalize their white supremacist and heteropatriarchal beliefs because they were protected under freedom of speech. Indeed, freedom of speech was a present dynamic in the study; however, it did not emerge as a notable dynamic related to the collaborators' experiences. This study opens an opportunity for future studies to intervene on the role of freedom of speech claims in queer (student) activism. In particular, queer theoretical perspectives

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may illuminate the role of free speech discourse in (re)producing white supremacist and heteropatriarchal logics in postsecondary education.

Our stories showed we engaged in community building, queerness as a politic, and anti-oppressive organizing strategies as performances to disrupt white supremacist and heteropatriarchal logics at Auburn University. In fact, as indicated in Chapter Four, the collaborators and myself built coalitions centered on community, care, and love that operated as counterpublics within and beyond Auburn University. Existing literature within (student) activism inquiry highlight sit-ins, boycotts, and protests (Barnhardt, 2014; Broadhurst, 2014), social media (Bettencourt, 2019; Bonilla & Rosa, 2015; Byrne et al., 2021; Davis, 2019), and hunger strikes (Pearson, 2015) as disruptive tactics to ignite transformative change on college campuses. Certainly, the findings of this study align with existing literature on (student) activist tactics because the collaborators organized demonstrations such as a protest and a Black trans vigil to bring attention to police brutality, racism, and transphobia. Additionally, C and R talked about their extensive use of Canva to create social media posts for The (Student) Coalition and (Student) Carceral Abolitionists. In addition to the previous tactics, the findings of this study offer a novel intervention into existing scholarship on (student) activism to (re)conceptualize (student) activism as a queer worldmaking project when informed by queer theoretical perspectives. In the following section, I discuss how community building, rendering queerness as a politic, and anti-oppressive organizing as strategies of the collaborators (re)fashioned (student) activism.

Research Question Two

As a reminder, the second, theoretically driven research question that guided this inquiry was: How do (student) activists at a large public university in the Deep South (re)conceptualize notions of (student) activism when viewed from a lens of queer theoretical perspectives? Queer of color critique, as well as postmodern and poststructural queer theories allowed me to (re)conceptualize notions of (student) activism as a queer worldmaking practice, as evidenced in our formation and implementation of anti-oppressive values, infrastructures, and coalitions in Alabama. As discussed in Research Question One, the collaborators created counterpublics which informed the collaborators' and my queer worldmaking practices that rejected capitalist logics and heteronormative embodiments. Muñoz (1999) stated that "counterpublics are enabled by visions, 'worldviews,' that reshape as they deconstruct reality" (p. 196). The collaborators and myself created communities of resistance to push back on white supremacy and heteropatriarchy at Auburn University and our surrounding environment. We also generated communities of futurity built on anticapitalism, antiracism, antiheteropatriarchy, and anticarcerality. Coming together to organize around queer advocacy, racial equity, and carceral prison abolition created communities that provided collaborators and myself a place to grow in our queerness, build meaningful relationships, and manage the hostilities of our local environments.

The relationship of queerness and queer identities to (student) activism was a core characteristic of this research. Through queer theoretical perspectives, the collaborators and I (re)conceptualized (student) activism as a queer worldmaking project by mobilizing queerness as a politic (Shlasko, 2005). Enacting queerness as a politic informed our organizing, particularly

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by encouraging us to challenge homogenous logics of queerness within ourselves. Mobilizing queerness as a politic offers an intervention into (student) activism inquiry. Renn (2007) conducted an exploratory study on LGBT (student) activist leaders and found participation in LGBT activism and advocacy work contributed to their leader and queer identity development. Renn (2007) adopted a developmental approach to identity that focused on the effects of student involvement and LGBT and queer identity development. This dissertation study complements Renn's (2007) finding that LGBT student leaders identified a mutually beneficial relationship between their activism and queerness; however, I refrain from adopting a developmental approach to queer (student) activist identities. A developmental approach to queer (student) activist identities would create an additive and subtractive dynamic to queerness and activism. That is, (student) activists become *more* queer or *more* of an activist. Using poststructural and postmodern queer theoretical analyses moves away from identity development discourse and indicates that queer identities are not linear (Freeman, 2010). Indeed, the collaborators illuminated this perspective when C comically stated: "When I started (Student) Carceral Abolitionists, I was a straight woman, with a boyfriend. And I'm a nonbinary lesbian now." J shared that:

> I always think of things as like, my, my coming to terms with my queerness helped me become a better organizer and I wouldn't have been able to come to terms with my queerness if I weren't first an organizer.

Overall, the collaborators recognized that challenging oppressive structures in society throughout their organizing pushed them to challenge oppressive logics within themselves. For the

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collaborators, this meant moving away from homogenous assumptions of queerness and embracing their queerness on their own terms.

I align our stories with current queer (student) activism literature that recognizes the (student) activists grow in their queer identities through participation in activism. Present queer (student) activism literature positions queerness as a fluid identity (Gabriele-Black & Goldberg, 2021; Goldberg et al., 2020; Renn, 2007). For example, Gabriele-Black and Goldberg (2021) showed queer students engaged in activism at Evangelical Christian colleges "often led to increased outness and visibility on campus" (p. 323), a finding similar to Renn's (2007) study. The language of "increased outness" connotes that queerness is not static but does indicate that queerness follows a linear progression which is a similar point I raised in the previous paragraph related to developmental discourse. Positioning queerness as linear leaves out its political potential as a dynamic way of being. As such, I offer an intervention into queer (student) activism literature to (re)position queerness as more than an identity to understand how queerness as a politic informs queer worldmaking possibilities. Though they were not referring to queerness, Pasque and Vargas (2014) add to this perspective stating, "performances of activism are a physical manifestation of resistance to marginalization and oppression in which students join together and speak out with their voices and bodies" (p. 60). Also, Clark (2021) offered a similar perspective specifically related to queer activism: "Queering space destabilizes attempts to make normative performances or relationalities a foregone conclusion by taking space's already available possibilities as rhetorical resources to envision and enact an alternative world" (p. 172). Together, Pasque and Vargas's (2014) and Clark's (2021) theories of queer activism as performances of resistance to heteronormativity show that positioning queerness as a

politic, rather than a fluid yet linear identity (Gabriele-Black & Goldberg, 2021; Renn, 2007), uncovers the futurity of queer (student) activism.

The collaborators and I (re)conceptualized (student) activism as a queer worldmaking through our focus on queer futurities (Muñoz, 2009). As I discussed in Chapter Four, we were future oriented in our organizing to build communities for other queer, neurodivergent people in the Deep South. R spoke to this point saying, "What's really important to me when I think about activism is imagining a future, together with a group of people. An equitable future. A future without prisons. Like, very future oriented. And then working to kind of create that." S also spoke to the challenges of imagining equitable communities because "i''s not really easy to come up with something t180ddyo'u've never really done before." In leveraging queer perspectives, I interpret these future orientations as a queer worldmaking project that defies a linear world. These findings offer an intervention into (student) activism literature that is focused on activism as responsive to past events and/or current realities. The collaborators and I (re)conceptualized (student) activism as a queer worldmaking project that was concerned with the past, present, and future realities of queer peoIle in Alabama.

Our stories showed organizing with other queer (student) activists presented "new" onto-epistemologies to the collaborators as evidenced through C's narrative when they stated: "I think (Student) Carceral Abolitionists was a really big part of my *queer awakening.*" The other collaborators, including myself, noticed shifts in our onto-epistemologies related to our queer identities when we came into community with other queer (student) activists that allowed us to be our authentic queer selves within a hostile campus and local environment. For example, I shared that prior to organizing I was 'out' and that "when I started organizing, I think what it was

for me about that space that allowed me to just like, get really comfortable in my queerness was that like, I didn't *have to* come out to anyone." Queer perspectives interpret the emergence of new onto-epistemologies in (student) activist communities as a process of disidentification that "scrambles and reconstructs the encoded message of a cultural text" (Muñoz, 1999, p. 31). Disidentification shows the potential to (re)work queer (student) activism as a queer worldmaking project to foster resistant and liberating knowledges.

The finding on the role of (student) activist communities informs existing literature on queer kinship and communities, specifically that supportive connections with other queer people help queer students navigate and resist overtly racist, homophobic, and transphobic environments (Blockett, 2017; Duran, 2021; Means et al., 2017; Means & Jaegar, 2013; Nicolazzo et al., 2017; Renn & Bilodeau, 2005; Strayhorn, 2012). Informed by queer perspectives, queer kinship networks and communities operate as counterpublics that reject dominant discourses related to queerness (Blockett & Renn, 2021; Muñoz, 1999). Additionally, these communities create a space within the dominant culture to "engage in a collective temporal distortion" (Muñoz, 2009, p. 185) to imagine queer futurities.

In the context of (student) activism, the insights emerging from this research related to queerness and activism provide a novel intervention into existing literature. Not only do (student) activist counterpublics spur "new" onto-epistemologies related to the collaborators' sense of being, they also introduce knowledges and tactics to transform hegemonic structures. Through queer perspectives, the knowledges and tactics generated within (student) activist counterpublics exemplify queer worldmaking practices to create an antiracist, anti-ableist, antihomophobic, and antitransphobic world. To further exhibit this point, Muñoz stated:

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Queerness is also a performative because it is not simply a being but a doing for and toward the future. Queerness is essentially about the rejection of a here and now and an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world (p. 1)

The collaborators rejected the "here and now" hostilities of white supremacy and heteropatriarchy at Auburn University and mobilized their collective desires and imaginings of a world rooted in active communities of care and love.

Through a queer of color critique, whiteness via urgency and heteropatriarchy often pervaded organizing spaces. This is not a novel finding within (student) activism literature (Gorski & Erakat, 2019; Vaccaro & Mena, 2011). Perfectionism and a sense of urgency were symptoms of whiteness that showed up in organizing spaces. For example, J shared that their whiteness showed up when they canvassed in rural areas of Alabama and worked toward organizing rural Alabamians who were predominately Black people. J's sense of urgency to organize and encourage rural Alabamians to join political campaigns did not align with their direct needs related to food and financial security. Participation in democratic processes and political campaigns that have served the needs of white folks and simultaneously disenfranchised people of Color demonstrates sanctioned activism as a neoliberal formation. The collaborators and I were attentive to manifestations of whiteness in our organizing, but were limited in our perceptibility given that four of the five of us identified as white. C also showed sanctioned activism as a neoliberal formation in their experience as a (student) activist when they were tasked with gendered administrative roles by white, man colleagues. As a woman-coded person, C's narrative showed the presence of white heteropatriarchy in organizing spaces, which is a reality that Gorski and Erakat (2019) identified in activist burnout.

Implications of Research

Positioning the motives and tactics of queer (student) activism as a queer worldmaking project proposes several implications for postsecondary research and practice. The following section provides suggestions and reflections for postsecondary education institutions, queer theorists, and collaborative methodologists. I briefly discuss implications for postsecondary policy and practice broadly before then articulating specific recommendations for faculty, staff, and administrators within colleges and universities. Then, I propose considerations for current and future (student) activists who take on the labor of standing up to justice gatekeepers within and beyond their institution. I then highlight the implications of this research for future projects informed by queer theoretical perspectives and collaborative methodologies. I also articulate the boundaries of this study, before concluding the chapter with a final reflection on my own growth across the course of this study.

Postsecondary Practice and Policy

Within the confines of this study, I draw several implications for postsecondary practice and policy, particularly in the geographic context. As a disclaimer to the following section, I find it difficult to write about the relationship between legislative policies and the material realities of marginalized students and queer (student) activists because of the recent mass shootings in Buffalo, New York and Uvalde, Texas at the time of writing this dissertation (Diaz, 2022). These tragic events as well as countless other mass shootings, like the Pulse nightclub shooting in Orlando, Florida (Morford, 2016), show federal policies and constitutional laws do not protect marginalized people, particularly queer people of Color. In their interview, J showed this reality through their experiences canvassing in rural Alabama and said: "Not only are these terrible

things happening in the world, it's you know, the rural communities that are the most affected –

and rural does not mean white, by the way." Continuing to explain the relationship between

political systems and rural folks, J shared:

> 'here's this very unique kind of fatalism and defeatism that I see here in this out. People
>
> see how broken it is. Of course they do,'they've lived in it their entire lives. They know
>
> something is fundamentally wrong but at their core they believe that the' can't change it.
>
> They are resolved to just suffer through the things that other people have done to them.

As I explained in Chapter Four, the ongoing manifestations of white supremacy and

heteropatriarchy are evident in political systems and contribute to sociopolitical and economic

disparities. J's narrative and ongoing acts of violence demonstrate that the democratic political

system in the United States serves the wealthy, white people. So, even though I offer

implications for postsecondary policy and practice in the following sections, I do not indicate

that policy is a solution to the white supremacist and heteropatriarchal logics that collaborators

and myself faced. Policy is an important consideration and actor that shapes the material realities

of queer (student) activists, and I am simultaneously highly critical of its potential to (re)produce

the violence that (student) activists sought to eradicate.

The documents I review in Chapter Four illuminated that university protections like

academic freedom and constitutional rights like freedom of speech allowed a professor to spew

homophobic and transphobic rhetoric without repercussion. Briefly put, academic freedom is the

institution's right to decide on academic reasons "who may teach, what may be taught, and who

may be admitted to study" (*Sweezy v. New* Hampshire, 1957, p. 263). Scholars and policy

advocates are critical of structures that justify violent discourses in the name of academic

freedom (Morgan & Davis, 2019). I join these scholars with the findings and context of this study to advocate for more critical decision-making processes when determining the bounds of academic freedom. Postsecondary policy stakeholders must recognize that academic protections can also (re)produce white supremacy and heteropatriarchy and affect the material realities of marginalized students. Agua and Pendakur (2019) argued a similar point and proposed that postsecondary institutional actors and policy advocates must publicly "reify the value and equal protections of free speech" and "acknowledge the distinctly structural asymmetries of power" (p. 174). Also, Thomas (2019) conveyed policy and institutional stakeholders should consider campus climate and culture as persuaders in igniting instances of harmful discourses toward marginalized people, rather than focusing on policies to prevent hateful speech. As such, institutional and policy actors must publicly name the power differentials among *who* has freedom of speech *and* offer political learning opportunities for students, staff, and faculty, such as debates, forums, and teach-ins on controversial topics (Thomas, 2019). Also, building a network of communication through continued partnerships among education policy organizations, institutional representatives, and local grassroots education and policy groups helps channel information. Education policy advocates and institutional actors need to be critical of the political discourses that shape the cultures and climates of education institutions.

Related to political discourse in upholding white supremacy and heteropatriarchy, the implications of the collaborators' stories, as well as my own, indicate that education policy advocates such as the American Institutes for Research (AIR), American Council on Education (ACE), American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), and the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AACU) must continue to be proactive to emergent legal

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decisions. For example, in the context of this study, as I collected data, the Florida governor signed an anti-LGBT law called "Don't Say Gay" that bans public school teachers from holding instruction on sexual orientation and gender identity (Diaz, 2022). Also, the Texas governor issued an anti-trans letter to Texas health employees stating that providing gender-affirming medical treatments "constitutes child abuse" (Paxton, 2022). In J's interview, they expressed fear for their own safety and the safety of other trans, non-binary, and gender non-conforming people because of the emergence of these bills. Within a month that these homophobic and transphobic bills came out, Alabama legislatures passed a "Don't Say Gay" law and an anti-trans law that prevents medical professionals from providing gender-affirming care to youth. I first indicate that national education policy advocates build partnerships with local education and justice agencies in Alabama like Magic City Acceptance Center, The Alabama Education Lab, Alabama Possible, Alabama Appleseed Center for Law and Justice, and The Knights and Orchids Society (TKO). Building partnerships with organizations in Alabama mirrors the collaborators' and my efforts to build coalitions within and beyond higher education. Then, policy advocates and local agencies can engage in strategic planning such as ACE's Transformation Lab (American Council on Education, 2022). The ACE Transformation Lab is designed to assess institutional activists, create an action plan, and partner with a cohort of institutions and ACE experts. Education policy advocates and stakeholders as well as campus health and wellness professionals need to be proactive to anti-LGBT legislation and recognize that the effects of K-12 law will affect college students, particularly in a state like Alabama where comprehensive sex education is not provided in public schools (Moss, 2021). It is difficult to gauge the consequences of emerging anti-

LGBTQ bills, but education policy advocates must continue to be aware that legislative decisions do not operate in a vacuum (Kaplan & Lee, 2013).

Local, state, and federal anti-LGBTQ policies influence the material realities of (student) activists. (Student) activist's efforts have historically catalyzed changes in desegregation policies as evidenced by the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee projects in the Southeastern United States, as well as students at Historically Black Colleges and Universities during (and after) the Civil Rights Movement (Rhoads, 2000; Wheatle & Commodore, 2019). In contemporary times, (student) activists challenge the confines of free speech zones (Morgan, 2019), deeply hostile racial climates (Jones & Reddick, 2017; Logan et al., 2017; Pearson, 2015), anti-trans laws (Anderson, 2016), citizenship policies (DeAngelo, 2016), and sexual assault and harassment (Hurtado, 2018). Indeed, historical and current contexts demonstrate (student) activists will react to harmful policies that affect the material realities of marginalized students and scholars show (student) activists are major policy change agents. Like the collaborators in this study, education policy advocates should adopt shared leadership and governance models to include (student) activists' input to improve campus conditions for marginalized people. Shifting away from hierarchical and bureaucratic governance structures will contribute to more equitable campus environments in the presence of harmful policies. Queering organizational structures opens the possibilities to (re)distribute labor and create collaborative and community centric operations.

In light of policy affecting the material realities of (student) activists, during the data collection period of this study, the Alabama House of Representatives passed an anti-riot bill in response to the Birmingham protests after George Floyd's murder. Under this bill, a riot is

considered a crime when "The assemblages of five or more persons engaging in conduct which creates an immediate danger of and/or results in damage to property or injury to persons" (H.B. 2, 2022). A policy at the state level affected (student) activists' efforts to express their right to peacefully protest at institutions in Alabama. The context of this study in Alabama indicates that decisions within and beyond postsecondary institutions affect campus operations. Postsecondary institutions must be proactive to legislative discourses by assessing their non-discrimination policies to ensure that marginalized identities such as sexual orientation and gender expression are protected. Garcia et al. (2020) offered a thought-provoking stance regarding institutional silence:

> Yet, when students' lives and wellbeing are at stake, can we afford to be abstract and vague? Abstract diversity is about as useful as silence. Not naming the issue points to the argument that when you discuss an issue you give more power to it. However, the same could be said of the reverse. How can we strive toward creating systemic change when we do not even name forms of discrimination as they emerge? (p. 352)

The collaborators echoed Garcia et al.'s (2020) call by bringing attention to the silence of student affairs professionals, College of Education administrators, and Auburn University leadership in the presence of homophobic, transphobic, and racist speech. In response to homophobic, transphobic, and racist incidents, The (Student) Coalition advocated for financial commitments for Black student programming including a Black Student Advocacy Center and an increase in financial support for tuition scholarships; providing political education, reports, and trainings for all university personnel; developing strategic plans for all campus units; and creating a staff governance unit. Through a queer of color analysis (Muñoz, 1999, 2009), these demands are

tangible queer worldmaking practices that focus on long-term, future-oriented commitments. Regardless of the content of administrative responses to violent incidents, these decisions must be made with input from faculty, staff, student, and community representatives. Related to the previous point, postmodern, poststructural, and queer of color perspectives highlight the need to interrogate hegemonic ideologies such as individualism thereby informing input from the entire local postsecondary community. Like the collaborators showed in this study, individualist logics and operations further divide people and prevent transformative change. The findings offer important implications and considerations for postsecondary policy and practice, as well as for the institutional actors who uphold these systems.

Faculty, Staff, and Administrators

In addition to illuminating the interconnections of sociopolitical discourse and postsecondary operations, our narratives provide implications for faculty, postsecondary staff, and administrators. The collaborators and myself worked alongside educators across Auburn University and the local community. Indeed, the documents I reviewed positioned the Critical Scholar Coalition, a grassroots faculty collective, as key advocates for racial and queer equity. Also, I reflected on the importance of connecting with supportive faculty within the larger context of navigating a "classicist, ableist, racist, usually transphobic, usually LGBT-phobic institution." S additionally highlighted that the accessibility to professors with particular expertise, like policy, was an opportunity for faculty to support (student) activists' efforts and inform them of institutional practices the (student) activists may not be privy to. I propose that faculty consider adopting elements of direct action and social justice to their curriculum such as community-engaged projects, letter-writing campaigns/projects to college deans and department

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heads, and zine creations. Community-engaged projects and letter-writing campaigns/projects encourage classroom collaboration and introduce students to key stakeholders within their university. Zines are alternative forms of magazines that bear no conformity and typically are used to communicate radical, social justice-oriented ideas. The purpose of these projects is to break down institutional siloing, to build justice-oriented communities across campuses, spread information to local communities, and offer students hands-on queer worldmaking practices. Connecting with faculty who speak out on injustices helps break down individualist logics within postsecondary institutions.

In addition to forming relationships with faculty activists, the study offers implications for postsecondary staff and administrators. The collaborators and I did not talk about early- and mid-career student affairs professionals or administrative staff, but we did discuss senior-level administrators in student and academic affairs. The stories we shared did not address building coalitional power with postsecondary staff. This is not to say that staff members did not play an invaluable role in the collaborators' efforts to enact institutional change. Indeed, scholars identify grassroots activism by student affairs administrators in transformative campus efforts (Broadhurst et al., 2018; Martin et al., 2018). The lack of data and narratives about postsecondary staff in the context of this study demonstrates a boundary of the present research. I am mindful of the context of Alabama as a right-to-work state which creates challenges to unionizing postsecondary employees, including staff. I understand organizing with (student) activists may put staff members at risk of termination from their job. Moving forward, I advocate for staff to engage in unit-driven educational programming on various equity topics and invite faculty and staff from other units to the program. The purpose of offering educational

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programming is to inform staff of the conditions that (student) activists face and to build coalition with other stakeholders. Indeed, Broadhurst et al. (2018) showed building coalitions across student affairs units, community groups, and alumni organizations was a viable strategy for enacting institutional change in the South. Additionally, Broadhurst et al. (2018) highlighted that working within governance structures helped protect and support social justice efforts of staff members. The implications for staff mirror the tactics the collaborators and myself used to build coalition and relationships among communities within and beyond their postsecondary institution.

Administrators, on the other hand, were resistant to the collaborators' organizing efforts. Indeed, the collaborators and myself drew attention to student affairs administrators' patronizing the collaborators organizing. The effects of unsupportive student affairs administrators toward the collaborators' advocacy efforts are concerning and do not align with the Social Justice and Inclusion professional competency for student affairs educators (ACPA & NASPA, 2015). The Social Justice and Inclusion competency stated: "Student affairs educators may incorporate social justice and inclusion competencies into their practice through seeking to meet the needs of all groups, equitably distributing resources, raising social consciousness, and repairing past and current harms on campus communities" (ACPA & NASPA, 2015, p. 14). In this study, the student affairs administrators' silence and patronization of the collaborators created more harm toward queer, Black, and neurodivergent students. Student affairs administrators must "address and acknowledge issues of oppression, privilege, and power" (ACPA & NASPA, 2015, p.14) and the data show that student affairs administrators at Auburn University need to critically interrogate the ways they gatekeep social justice efforts on campus. Training and education

sessions are important; however, they are ineffective if student affairs administrators ignore and belittle the needs of queer students, students of Color, and neurodiverse students.

To reshape the work of student affairs professionals, I believe that each unit needs to be involved in direct action for transformative change on their campus. I recognize most college campuses have some form of a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) office who are labored with equity and justice demands. To S's point in his interview, DEI initiatives typically are a "bullshit task force…just a bunch of hollow stuff." Siloed DEI efforts reinforce individualist logics and divert accountability away from resistant institutional actors. To encourage direct action among student affairs practitioners, individual units could engage in the Bay Area Transformative Justice's pod-mapping activity (Mingus, 2016). The purpose of the pod-mapping activity is to identify people and communities "in our lives that we would call on to support us with things such as our immediate and on-going safety, accountability and transformation of behaviors, or individual and collective healing and resiliency" (Mingus, 2016, para. 1). The pod-mapping tool can be adapted to postsecondary education so that institutional actors, or in this case student affairs professionals, can identify people and units who support transformative justice work. Additionally, informed by organizational theories, Cho (2018) created an institutional response framework and identified "schisming, appeasement, co-option, and partnership" (p. 88) as dimensions of institutional responses to student resistance. The institutional response framework challenges dominant discourses on institutional accountability and repositions responsibility onto institutions and institutional actors, rather than (student) activists. Student affairs professionals can utiI the institutional response framework to "be reflexive in the ways they (do not) assist and support students" (p. 91). Reshaping the work of

student affairs professionals starts with identifying supportive and resistant institutional actors to help build coalitional power for transformative change within postsecondary institutions. I refrain from implying that institutional actors, like student affairs administrators, need to create institutionalized spaces and institutionally recognized groups for (student) activists. I am critical of the institutionalization of (student) activism, particularly at Auburn University, because I worry that the institution would capitalize off (student) activist efforts. In fact, this could bring more harm and risk to (student) activists. To this point, I turn to the implications of this research for current and incoming (student) activists.

(Student) Activists

The collaborators and I demonstrated the importance of building coalitional power across all dimensions of postsecondary institutions because some institutional actors will gatekeep (student) activist efforts. As mentioned earlier, Cho (2018) designed the institutional response framework to provide (student) activists "language and *power*" to "understand and contest the institutional responses with which they may not agree" (p. 91). Indeed, I advise that current and future (student) activists look to Cho's (2018) institutional response framework to understand how postsecondary actors respond to and reify oppression, specifically racism, on their campuses. To navigate upper-level administrative and faculty gatekeeping, our stories show collective power, building communities, and embodying love, care, and sustainability are tools to create and sustain counterpublics within a hostile campus environment. I encourage current and incoming (student) activists to build relationships with supportive people within and outside of your institution. I recognize finding supportive people within hostile climates is a difficult task. First, I recommend looking for student involvement groups and culturally based organizations

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that are focused on social justice, education, and activism. Attending campus programming focused on DEI and seeing speakers that come to campus may be another space to find an activist community. Also, I highly encourage incoming students to locate community groups outside of the institution and in your local town or city. As the collaborators stated in the focus group, it is important to never do advocacy work alone. Collective power and building communities that embody love, care, and sustainability disrupt white supremacy and heteropatriarchy because they rely on the absence of those values.

In the remainder of this section, I refer to a section of the focus group when S asked the collaborators, "What do you wish you could tell yourself, like younger you, before you were an activist?" The following vignettes describe the collaborators' advice to their younger (student) activist self, as implications for current and incoming (student) activists.

S: What I wish I could've told my past me is like, probably like a lot of people are faking activism. It does really suck though that we put in a lot of work and all we got was a lot of anxiety. And it really makes me realize…I wish I could tell my younger self that you'll meet a lot of great people and activism draws a lot of fake people and you have to be careful and just stay clear and keep your guard up. Some people are here for the right reasons, but other people are here for their personal brands. Or just strap themselves to another opportunity that doesn't align with the current values that you guys hold.

C: I wish I could tell myself like, "just because this is your first experience with activism doesn't mean you can't trust your voice. It doesn't mean you can't trust your voice when you need to." And I didn't say it because I thought that like, I didn't have the expertise that I didn't to know, that I need to like sit back and let the experts do their job. Like what

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fucking experts? We're all in our early 20's and I wish I would have spoken up because I saw the scope creep coming from a mile away and I just didn't say anything about it cause I didn't think it was my place.

R: Yeah, I have a very similar answer to that. I think if I had to tell myself something I would say "you don't have to know what you're doing, and you won't." And I think from doing that, it was important to know that: 1) I didn't have to know anything. Like C just said, nobody knows what they're doing. But 2) It's really just so important to not be doing anything alone. And be doing everything together and setting up structures within the organization to have shared leadership and to be collaborative. So, we made a lot of mistakes, and we did it well sometimes and we did it poorly other times. But it's…I think it was definitely the right way to go about it.

J: The TLDR for my advice to my younger self is go read Viktor Frankl's "Man Search for Meaning." There is a reason why you want to change the world for the better and more than likely, it's more personal than you think. And it should personal because dammit…especially for queer folks, we've had too many god damn martyrs. Because this work is hard. This work sucks. Organizing isn't always this give and take thing. The second we make organizing transactional. The second we start treating life, our own life, as an afterthought, that's when we let people who want us to die, win. That would be my advice to you all, that's my advice to my younger self is be clear on why it is that you are doing this. Be very clear on that. If there is nothing else that you know about this whole organizing experience, let it be that you joined this for a very specific reason. You care

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about this for a very specific reason. And it hits very close to home. Because I think that being clear on that is, it helps set up your boundaries and say no to stuff.

C: Oh, believe me, after (Student) Carceral Abolitionists I've become exceptional about saying no when I don't have time to do shit.

J: Fuck yeah. Know your boundaries. You're not a bad person for saying no.

S: Now I think I kind of learned how to say no so I'm proud of myself for that.

C: I'm proud of you for that too S. And J thank you very much for your kind words.

Jessica: I really appreciate you all being so vulnerable and sharing your stories because that's one thing I wish I could've told my younger self and like, continuing to tell present self is to like, get comfortable with vulnerability when doing any sort of advocacy work or standing up for something you think is wrong. 'Cause I definitely had a lot of moments during The (Student) Coalition stuff, and I was kind of in (Student) Carceral Abolitionists, but I was like "I don't know enough about abolition work" and had a lot of other things going on and like couldn't give it 100% of my attention. Yeah, that was something I wish I had knew, to really understand those are spaces to embrace being vulnerable with others.

In the previous vignettes, the collaborators showed that their motivations to organize for transformative change are deeply personal. Organizing for transformative change is also mentally, physically, and emotionally taxing. Leaning on supportive people and embracing vulnerability may help mitigate the labor of (student) activism. In sum, the implications of this study for current and incoming (student) activists are to be aware of people who want to capitalize off your labor, trust your voice and do not be afraid to express your opinion, never

organize alone and focus on collective decision making, be clear on your "why" and honor your boundaries, and embrace vulnerability. The following section discusses the implications and complications for future research.

Implications for Research

In addition to fashioning implications for postsecondary policy and practice, faculty, staff, administrators, and (student) activists, this research has many implications for theory and collaborative methodologies. Mobilizing queer theoretical perspectives as an analytical framework positions data from a lens that frames discourse and identity as temporal, in addition to identifying hegemonic ideologies of normalcy. In this study, I positioned white supremacist and heteropatriarchal logics as hegemonic ideologies of normalcy. Analyzing the data through queer theory as a politic (Atkinson & DePalma, 2009; Eng et al., 2011; Shlasko, 2005) pushed my analysis toward understanding the collaborators' narratives as queer worldmaking practices. Queer worldmaking practices included forming counterpublics within a heteronormative campus that allowed the collaborators and myself to form anti-oppressive organizing communities. Queerness as a politic opens the possibilities for imagining an anti-capitalist, anti-racist, and anti-heteropatriarchal world (Eng et al., 2011). Aligning (student) activism as an inherently queer project introduces a novel perspective on (student) activists as revolutionary agents of change. Together, employing a queer theoretical analysis such as queer worldmaking has the potential to uncover alternative realities toward liberation in the Deep South.

Jourian and Nicolazzo (2017) encouraged researchers to "interrogate the possibilities of collaborative praxis as a decidedly queer project" (p. 595). My approach to this study of mobilizing queer theory as a politic and working collaboratively with (student) activists

demonstrates an intervention to "re-present possibilities, limitations, and queries related to using collaborative methodologies with LGBTQ communities" (Jourian & Nicolazzo, 2017, p. 595). As a researcher, my queer onto-epistemologies guided the research design including data collection and analysis. As a (student) activist, my theoretical and methodological decisions aligned with the purposes of this study to intentionally disrupt normative approaches to dissertation work. This dissertation study is my final act of (student) activism as a doctoral student and the implications of this study are to push the boundaries of dissertation research through queer theory and collaborative autoethnography. Several implications for current and future qualitative research come from this study.

For qualitative studies with lengthy collaboration with research participants, it is important to understand how the researcher shows up in the relationships. I offer a few strategies related to doing collaborative research *with* research participants and integrating the self as data. As I mentioned in this dissertation, I met the collaborators in 2019 through queer advocacy work at Auburn University. Over the course of two years, I spent time getting to know the collaborators through "family dinners," Zoom meetings, and organizing. These experiences allowed me to build trusting relationships with the collaborators and eventually invite them to participate in this study. Like the core findings of this study, building community with the collaborators and fostering coalitional ties with The (Student) Coalition and (Student) Carceral Abolitionists helped in generating rich data. I invited the collaborators to offer their insight on Chapters Four and Five; some opted out of providing feedback whereas others offered their insight at a local crawfish boil and Korean restaurant. Collaboration in this study exemplifies "collaborative praxis as a decidedly queer project" (Jourian & Nicolazzo, 2017, p. 595) because

my approach moved away from the researcher/researched binary. By participating alongside the collaborators, I was able to witness how our experiences as (student) activists reflected queer worldmaking processes. For researchers interested in collaborative praxis, I encourage you to find supportive colleagues who will support you in pursuing queer praxis; find, foster, and build communities in your doctoral journey. At times, it may feel uncomfortable engaging in collaborative inquiry because of positivist logics that tell researchers to separate themselves from the research. Like Jourian and Nicolazzo (2017) and Bhattacharya (2007), I believe that building relationships with research participants and engaging in collaborative projects is a humanizing and beneficial approach to doing research.

Study Future Considerations and Boundaries

This dissertation study introduced an important intervention into research on (student) activism, particularly on queer (student) activists in the Deep South. In my review of literature in Chapter Two, I identified a few studies that explore (student) activism in a Southern context (Rogers, 2012; Williamson-Lott, 2018) and queer activism in the Deep South (Broadhurst et al., 2018; Martin et al., 2017). Indeed, this study presents a novel understanding of (student) activism as a multidimensional queer project in an overlooked or forgotten region of the United States and opens a range of implications for future research. First, future (student) activism inquiry should continue to focus on *queer* (student) activism because local, state, and federal legislation continues to criminalize queer-identifying people. Scholars must understand the ongoing effects of white supremacy and heteropatriarchy that isolate queer students, faculty, and staff. Involving queer (student) activists in research through collaborative methods offers an opportunity to equip queer (student) activists with resources to mitigate white supremacist and heteropatriarchal

structures. Additionally, collaborative praxis provides the research participants with a community of scholars who can help and support queer (student) activists navigate hostile structures. As exemplified in this research, queer (student) activists provide meaningful insights into the queer worldmaking practices of resilient Southerners.

Like all research, this study is not exempt from imperfection. The accuracy of the data comes into question because this study relied on retroactive reflections (McMahon et al., 2012) and collaborator memories. To assure the quality and accuracy of the data, I kept a research journal and took notes throughout the duration of the focus groups and interviews. Additionally, I referred to my personal journal to help recall memories from the queer advocacy organizing in 2019. These techniques help aid in the concern for the quality and reliability of retroactive200dditionn additional boundary of the study lies in the make-up of the collaborators. The group of five collaborators represented two (student) activist organizations that included dozens of organizers. Though it is not my intention, nor is it epistemologically possible, to generalize the findings of this study to the experiences of all the (student) activists in The (Student) Coalition and (Student) Carceral Abolitionists, we were limited in our ability to speak for the rest of the (student) activists. I also must acknowledge the predominance of our white identities and recognize that Black (student) activists were heavily involved in the (student) activist movements. Indeed, as a white researcher, I recognize this boundary and tension of the study and navigated it through a collaborative methodology. Engaging in a collaborative methodology allowed us to call out whiteness and have a voice in the ways that I handled the data. The boundaries of this study open the findings to critique that I encourage readers to keep in mind.

Researcher Reflections

I unknowingly started this project in 2016 when I saw a newspaper article that labeled Auburn as one of the most LGBTQ unfriendly cities in the United States. My focus on queer communities in the Deep South and desire to understand my own queerness started the day I read that article. I entered this dissertation knowing that it would be personal and would force me to settle into the tensions of doing a queer, collaborative autoethnographic study. This research pushed me in ways that I did not expect and helped me grow in my queerness, activism, and researcher identity. To communicate my reflections, I present the remaining researcher reflection as a "Thank You" letter to the collaborators:

To C, J, R, and S:

It goes without saying, thank you. Thank you from the depths of my heart and mind for your friendships, for your camaraderie and all the time we spent together sharing your knowledge of (student) activism. None of this project would have been possible without each of you. And for that, I am incredibly thankful and overwhelmed with gratitude that you all were willing to spend time with me and share personal information with me. I owe a debt of gratitude to each of you:

S, MY BUD. I am always impressed and admire the love and devotion that you have for people. You seriously have one of the biggest hearts of anyone I have every met and I know I am not the only one who sees that in you. You remind me to stay gracious and loyal to people who are more like family. I am privileged being your friend. Thank you for reminding me to always love others and love them hard.

C, I admire your steadfastness for environmental justice, your ability to describe the world around you, and create art that communicates emotions I forgot how to feel. Your talents shifted my perspectives on queerness and community and motivate me to seek ways to be more "antiestablishment." Thank you for challenging my ways of thinking and hugging me when we run into each other.

R, we have known each other for a while now. I enjoyed watching you grow over the past few years; the way that you see and analyze the world is astounding to me. The ways that you talk about the world inspires me to engage in queer thinking, to imagine a world that I would want to live in and push my imagination about what is possible. Thank you for always keeping me grounded.

J, hey J. We have also known each other for quite a while. I really admire that with every ounce of criticality that you bring to organizing spaces, you have just as much (if not more) hope for a more equitable world. You are, without a doubt, an incredible community organizer. I learned so much from you about the importance of community and supporting local communities. Thank you for making me a better member of our community.

Thank you all for teaching me how to be a better activist. You all have helped me grow by showing me how to love people, have hope for the world, and build sustainable futures.

Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to discuss how the findings responded to the research questions and the study's relationship to current scholarship on queer (student) activism in the

Deep South. Additionally, this chapter offered recommendations for postsecondary research, policy, and practice, as well as suggestions for administrators, faculty, staff, and emerging (student) activists. I offered implications for queer theoretical perspectives as an analytical framework and collaborative methodological approaches. Lastly, this chapter provided future considerations for research, the boundaries of the study, and my researcher reflections.

In Chapter One, I claimed that postsecondary institutions are bastions of white supremacy and heteropatriarchy (Smith, 2016) and continue to perpetuate these logics creating violent conditions for marginalized people. I also argued (student) activism is an inherently queer project that exemplifies the transformative possibilities of queer (student) activism. I joined together with collaborators/friends/co-conspirators to uncover how queer (student) activists envisioned and implemented queer worldmaking practices in Alabama. Researchers must listen to queer (student) activists and recognize the potential of their knowledge, imagination, and action toward building an equitable world.

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Collaborator Recruitment Email/Slack Message

Invitation to participate in study: "Stick' it to The Man: (Student) Activism as a Queer Disruption to White Supremacy and Heteropatriarchy within and Beyond Higher Education

Hello! I hope you are doing well as the semester is well underway. Currently, I am in the dissertation phase of my program and am about to start the dissertation study. The study is going to explore (student) activism as a queer intervention into white supremacist and hetero patriarchal logics in higher education. I came to this idea through our organizing, going back to Fall 2019 when we met through the LGBTQ+ advocacy and equity work after the incident in the College of Education. I plan to use the publicly available information that we've created over the past two years for analysis. I am writing to you to see if you could assist me the research study. I am looking to collaborate with two to four (student) activists for this project.

Participation in this project will include two focus groups (60-90 minutes) with a few (2-3) other organizers who agreed to be part of this project. In between and after the focus group sessions, I also ask that everyone engage in reflective writing in response to a few writing prompts as well as your own thoughts and reflections on the topics we've discussed (and maybe didn't discuss). It is my hope that by engaging with you and a few more people, we can document our experiences organizing and navigating the white supremacist and heteropatriarchal (and any

other systemic violence) barriers we faced along the way. This project will be used to not only document these integral stories, but also share knowledge and resources that we've developed. The activities outlined previously are for research purposes only.

I would like to leverage my position/privilege as a doctoral student who has to do research, to continue this transformative work through the channels I have access to. If you are interested in participating, please let me know! If you have any questions or just want to talk more, please reach out! Thank you in advance – I truly appreciate your help.

Best,

Jessica Weise

Jaw0110@auburn.edu

(951) 217-5645
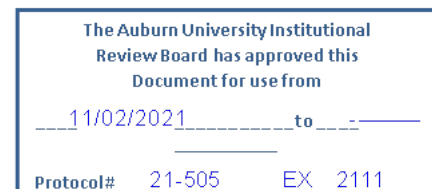
Participant Study Information Letter

IRB#: 21- 505

Study Title: Stickin' it to The Man: (Student) Activism as a Queer Disruption to White Supremacy and Heteropatriarchy within and Beyond Higher Education

Purpose of the Research:

The purpose of this study is to explore (student) activism as a queer intervention into white supremacy and heteropatriarchy within and beyond higher education at a university in the Deep South. The purpose is to also use queer theoretical perspectives to uncover alter/native ways of navigating violent campus spaces understand how (student) activists engage in forms of activism. Below are the eligibility criteria:

- Participants will not be less than 18 years, currently enrolled as a college student or were previously enrolled as a college student at a post-secondary institution in the Deep South from Fall 2019 to Summer 2021 OR;

- Participants must be or were involved as community members beginning in the Fall 2019 semester.

- You must be involved or previously involved in LGBTQ+ equity, racial equity, and/or carceral abolition organizing beginning in the Fall 2019 semester to the Summer 2021 semester.

- You must self-identify as queer, LGBQ, and/or transgender; this can include any queer identity that is not explicitly captured under the LGBTQ+ moniker, queer gender expressions and

identities, queer sexual expressions and identities, romantic queerness, and queer sex acts.

Your participation in this study will assist me in better understanding how (student) activists engage in the campus and community environments for transformative change, which is important knowledge for current and future (student) activists in the Deep South. The student principal investigator for this study is Jessica Weise and the faculty principal investigator, Dr. Hannah Baggett, will supervise the student PI.

Procedures:

Participation in this study will entail: engaging in two focus group sessions with other collaborators/(student) activists—each 60-90 minutes in length; and reflective writing throughout data collection. You will also be asked to show/describe your experience through a creative modality of your choosing (i.e., poetry, graphic design, performance, narrative). The focus groups will be recorded and conducted via Auburn Zoom in accordance with COVD-19 precautions. You will also have the option to participate in a 60-90 minute interview. You will be asked a series of questions, and all interviews will be digitally recorded.

Data analysis will follow standard qualitative procedures. You will choose a pseudonym during the first interview and all identifying information will be removed from interview transcripts prior to analysis. Your pseudonym will be used throughout all documents and in reports.

Following data analysis, you will be contacted by the researcher and given the option to provide feedback regarding the preliminary results of the study. You will be recorded during the interview as a requirement for participation in this study.

Benefits:

There are no direct benefits to you as a research participant.

Compensation:

There is no compensation for participation in this study.

Risks and/or Discomforts:

There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this research, beyond minimal risk of loss of confidentiality.

Freedom to Withdraw:

Participation in this study is voluntary and you can withdraw at any time during the study. If you choose to withdraw, your data can be withdrawn as long as it is identifiable. Your decision to participate will not harm your relationship with Auburn University, the Department of Educational Foundations, Leadership, and Technology, or the researchers.

Confidentiality:

Any information obtained during this study which could identify you will be kept strictly confidential. All interview recordings will be stored in secure, password-protected Auburn University Box folder. The data will only be seen by researchers involved in the project during the study and for three years after the study is complete. The information obtained in this study may be published in academic journals or presented at academic meetings but the data will be reported as aggregated data. Your identity will be confidential and you will be referred to only by a chosen pseudonym throughout the focus groups, analysis, and any reporting processes.

Opportunity to Ask Questions:

You may ask any questions concerning this research and have those questions answered before agreeing to participate in or during the study. Or you may contact the investigator at the phone number or email address below. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Auburn University Office of Research Compliance or the Institutional Review Board by phone (334)-844-5966 or e-mail at IRBadmin@auburn.edu or IRBChair@auburn.edu.

Consent, Right to Receive a Copy:

You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to participate in this research study. You will be given a copy of this information letter to save or print.

Name and Phone number of researchers:

Jessica Weise, Graduate Student & Principal Researcher

jaw0110@auburn.edu

951-217-5645

Hannah C. Baggett, PhD, Faculty PI

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334-844-3024

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Appendix C

Reflection Journal Prompts

As part of the research study titled, "Stickin' it to The Man," you were asked to participate in a project that uses retroactive, reflective, and collaborative writing. After the first focus group session, I provide you with the following reflective questions.

1. How do you believe your body was read by university administrators, community members, and other actors when organizing?

2. How did your identities influence your organizing choices?

3. Describe distinct emotional moments while organizing.

   a. What were your emotions?

   b. How did they influence your motivations and decisions while organizing?

4. How do you envision your (student) activist identity moving forward?

As you write, feel free to answer them in any expressive form you desire (i.e., poetry, narrative, graphic design, photography). I just ask that you keep these questions in mind as you think back on our conversations and memories you have related to your activist identity. We will reconvene for our second focus group session in January 2022.
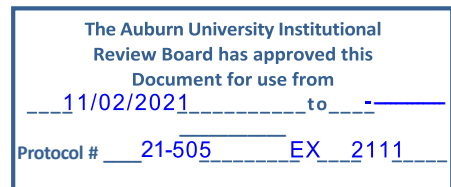

If you have any questions please feel free to reach out! Thank you again.

Focus Group Protocol 1

Focus Group #1 Protocol

1. Describe the (student) activist movement(s) you were involved in at your institution.

    a. What were the central topics organized around?

    b. What were the goals of the movement(s)?

    c. Who was the intended audience of (student) activist organization?

    d. Describe the tactics you employed.

2. Discuss the role of space and place in your activism.

    a. What opportunities did your identity as a student offer? Challenges?

    b. How do you envision the function of (student) activism in broader society?

3. Describe your motivation for getting involved in (student) activism.

    a. Was there a particular incident that brought you to activism?

    b. Why did you get involved in (student) activism?

    c. How did you learn about (student) activist organizations?

    d. Describe your intrinsic goals for getting involved in (student) activism. Extrinsic goals?

4. How was your overall experience organizing with other (student) activists?

    a. Describe the decision-making process within the (student) activist organizations.

    b. How did the organization handle conflict?

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> Protocol # ___21-505_____EX__2111____

    c.   What challenges did you encounter from within the (student) activist

          organization? External challenges?

    d.   What was the role of being situated in the Deep South in your organizing?

5.   Were there any ways that your location in the Deep South affected your queerness?

    a.   How does your involvement in activism/organizing play into your narrative?

Closing Script: Thank you for sharing your stories and talking with me today. Is there anything else you would like to add or feel is important for me to know before wrapping up?

Appendix E

Focus Group Protocol 2

1. Discuss written reflections questions.

   a. How do you believe your body was read by university administrators, community members, and other actors when organizing?

   b. How did your identities influence your organizing choices?

   c. Describe distinct emotional moments while organizing.

      i. What were your emotions?

      ii. How did they influence your motivations and decisions while organizing?

2. How do you envision your (student) activist identity moving forward?

Appendix F

Interview Protocol

Introductory Script: Hello and thank you for taking the time to talk with me. I anticipate spending about 60-90 minutes together toady. As a reminder, this interview will be recorded and transcribed verbatim as part of the research study. Please know that you are free to withdraw from this interview or the study at any time without penalty. Are there any questions or concerns about recording or any other parts of the informed consent before we begin?

So, the purpose of this interview is to get to know you and your individual experiences related to being a queer person, a student/community member in the Deep South, and being part of activist groups. So first, tell me a little bit about who you are related to your identities. How would you describe yourself and what are the salient parts that make you up?

1. Can you tell me story of when you first became aware of your queer identity?

    a. Describe what it was like for you internally as you became aware of your queer identity.

    b. What was it like externally? (e.g., what was the environment like when you came into this awareness?)

2. Now looking back on this experience, how did you shift from that initial awareness of your queer identity to acceptance of your queer identity?

    a. Describe what it was like for you internally as you came into an acceptance of your queer identity?

    b. What was it like externally? (e.g., what was the environment like when you came into acceptance of your queer identity?)

> > i. Were there factors that contributed to your own acceptance of your queerness?
> >
> > ii. Did you face any barriers? Internal and/or external?

3. In the first focus group you talked about the role of activism and organizing spaces as places that fostered a queer awakening. Can you tell me a story related to this queer awakening?

   a. How did your participation in activism spark this queer awakening?

      i. What dynamics of organizing spaces contributed to your queer awakening? People? The cause?

   b. How did organizing contribute to your own understanding of your queer identity?

      i. How did your queer identity influence your activism?

   c. How did your other identities play a role in your understanding of who you are as a queer person?

      i. How did your other identities play a role in your activism/organizing?

Now I want to hear a bit more about your experiences organizing as a queer person in the Deep South, particularly as a student/community member.

4. Describe what it was like organizing as a queer student/person in the Deep South.

   a. What challenges did you face?

   b. What opportunities did your identities provide?

   c. What was the role of the university in your organizing?