

**Queering Evaluation:**  
**An Autoethnographic and Phenomenological Analysis of a Peer-led Healthy  
Relationships Program Designed for Queer and Transgender Youth of Color**

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## **DEDICATION**

*For my grandma and Quay,*

*thank you for loving me.*

*And to the George Floyd Uprising,*

*QTYOC lives matter.*

## ABSTRACT

I use a queer theoretical, and multicultural feminist paradigm to queer evaluation methodology in the evaluation research conducted in this dissertation. Queering is an act of transforming, decentering, and disrupting social norms, reorienting focus towards subjectivities that mainstream society and research silences, erase, elides, and delegitimizes. My aim for this queering evaluation research is to offer Family Science and Evaluation Studies disciplines a conceptual and methodological framework for transformative assessment and scholarship. I accomplish my aim by highlighting two relationally- and experientially-based approaches to science, autoethnography, and phenomenology.

Both studies elevate marginalized perspectives, decenter positivist paradigms, and disrupt evaluative and research norms. Through autoethnographic confessional tales in **Study 1**, I communicate my lived experiences and invite readers to sit with me in the backstage, where I focus the analysis on relational and structural underpinnings of program evaluation implementation. Throughout the work, I connect my standpoint to my research observations of Project CLEAR, the program I evaluated, as well as the organization that offered it. I position connections among self, self-as-researcher, and program participants within the context of healing from trauma and relational violence. Findings reveal tensions, failure, and growth within program stakeholder relationships.

In **Study 2**, I interpreted and illuminated the life experiences of peer educators and the changes that occurred from their participation in Project CLEAR through a phenomenological lens. Peer educators are queer and transgender youth, and queer and transgender youth of color (QTYOC), aged 14-24. Findings highlight their experiences before, during, and their projected future orientation after Project CLEAR, revealing Project CLEAR's efficacy to affect attitudinal, skill, knowledge, and behavioral changes. Finally, I discuss an emergent theory of change for Project CLEAR, suggest future directions for queering summative evaluation, and conclude with implications for healthy relationships programming and research with QTYOC.

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## List of Abbreviations

<b>Abbreviations</b>		<b>Pseudonyms</b>	
AFAB	Assigned Female at Birth	AS	1 <sup>st</sup> New Program Manager
ED	Executive Director	J	Program Intern
EI	Explicitation Interview	RC	Project CLEAR's Housing Organization
EIS	Embodied confidence, Inter-Subjective competence		
EMP	Empowerment		
GSA	Gay Straight Alliance		
IOP	Intensive Outpatient Program		
LCX	Life course Experience		
LGBTQ+	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer; plus, questioning and all non-monogamous, non-cisgender, and non-heterosexual self-defined individuals		
LW	Lifeworld		
MAN	Master and Alternative Narratives		
MSS	Minnesota Student Survey		
OVW	Office on Violence against Women		
PE(s)	Peer Educator(s)		
PM(s)	Program Manager(s)		
POC	People of Color		
Project CLEAR	Consent Leads to Empowering and Affirming Relationships		
PTSS	Post-Traumatic Stress Symptomology (formerly PTSD)		
PYD	Positive Youth Development		
QTYOC	Queer and transgender youth, and queer and transgender youth of color		
QT	Queer and transgender		
RV	Relational Violence		
SV	Sexual Violence		
TWOC	Transwomen of Color		
WOC	Women of Color		
YOC	Youth of Color		

## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction to Queer Methods

*“I am not a stranger to the dark.  
‘Hide away,’ they say  
‘Cause we don’t want your broken parts.’”  
- This is Me, Kesha*

#### Background

In this methodological work, I describe the process and outcomes of conducting person-specific, community-engaged evaluation research (Howard & Hoffman, 2018; Sufian et al., 2011). Between January 2018 and May 2020, I worked with a local organization (pseudonym RC) and their youth clients to evaluate a sexual violence intervention program designed for queer and transgender youth and queer and transgender youth of color (QTYOC), aged 14-24. I invite readers to sit with me in a place of vulnerability and authenticity to conjure a relational form of knowledge-sharing and knowledge-production.

**Language.** I intentionally used the acronym QTYOC throughout to center youth of color (YOC) within a sample of queer and transgender (QT) youth. The majority of my participants were YOC. My language represents combining how my white and YOC participants and their peers self-define (Beckholt, 2020). I also used the terms “LGBTQ+” and “sexual and gender minorities” to refer to the general lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, & questioning population, plus all non-heterosexual and non-cisgender individuals that consider themselves a part of the overarching community (Bockting, 2014; Diamond & Butterworth, 2008).

**Centering multicultural experience.** To center YOC in a sample with white participants addresses the silence and erasure of YOC within the queer community. QTYOC are some of the most vulnerable members of their communities. Few studies highlight how the LGBTQ+ community is heterogeneous, and they fail to look at the nuanced needs and vulnerabilities of less populous groups (cf Bradford & Catalpa, 2019; Doan 2016). A significant obstacle to promoting intervention and prevention programs designed for QTYOC is that the population and intracommunity experiences vary substantially. Scholarship lacks a nuanced and multidimensional understanding of QTYOC.

Research on LGBTQ+ populations most often includes people of color (POC), although the analysis norms on the experiences of white adults and youth who identify as gay and lesbian (Doan, 2016; Weiss, 2008). Bisexual, transgender, non-monogamous, gender expansive, and racial minorities become lumped in with the overall group, despite their divergent experiences (Fassinger & Arseneau, 2007; Johnson, 2016; Stryker, 2008; Weiss, 2008). Positivist research produces scholarship normed by quantitative measurement, and researchers operationalize that instrumentation from their perspectives as heterosexual, gay, lesbian, and/or white (Brim & Ghaziani, 2016; Warner, 2004). The most marginalized groups are silenced in scholarship because dominant research methods reflect a positivist drive for objectivity, which we cannot attain (Doan, 2016). Moreover, LGBTQ+ scholarship produced with POC-only samples is typically deficit-based, focusing on sexual risk behaviors and adverse mental health outcomes (Dickey,

Hendricks, & Bockting, 2016; Steinke, Root-Bowman, Estabrook, Levine, & Kantor, 2017; Wilson, Garofalo, Harris, & Belzer, 2010).

The limited theoretical frameworks and methodologies inadequately approximate the perspectives of their participants or capture their experiences, yet findings inform policy and interventions that affect their lives (Campbell, 1984; Halberstam, 2011). Through relational narrative storytelling, observation, and co-presence, I addressed this scholarship gap. I employed evaluation research methodologies that effectively reveal, capture, and utilize QTYOC experiential knowledge disrupting longstanding evaluation research norms in the process (Ellis, 2004; van Manen, 2011; Guba, 1978).

**Writing subjectively, knowing intersubjectively.** Readers will notice that I ‘wrote autoethnographically,’-which refers to Bochner’s (2012) commentary on writing evocatively. Bochner’s (2012) poetic approach to academic writing reflects the diverging format my scholarly writing takes. I wrote from within my subjective experience to showcase relational *and* rigorous scientific evaluation. I positioned myself and my participants through active voice, grammatically destabilizing societal linguistic tendencies to use passive-voice when discussing sexual violence (Bohner, 2001). I avoided the disembodied, objective voice that is an established feature of scientific writing (Alvin, 2014; Sheldrake, 2004; Van Maanen, 2011), and aimed to engage the reader in a dialogue through my writing.

Further, I employed phenomenology to understand and describe the subjective experiences of participants involved in the program I evaluated. Phenomenology is a

useful paradigm for exploring human consciousness and pre-reflexive subjectivity (Høffding & Martiny, 2016). In my evaluation interviews and observations, I used a hermeneutic lifeworld approach that proved a sophisticated tool to engage in perspective-taking (Creswell, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). By claiming my own lived experiences in my writing in Study 1, I was better equipped to bracket my subjective reality to engage perspective-taking in Study 2.

**Multicultural feminism and standpoints.** Perspective-taking assumes a phenomenological ontology. The assumption holds that there are multiple realities and truths, and they are politically situated at intersectional points of identity-related experiences (Collins, 1989; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Few-Demo, 2014). In multicultural feminist theory, the theory of the flesh posits that our bodily experiences in the world confer personal identity and subjective reality (hooks, 1994; Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1983). In every interaction, our stock references influence our concept of a shared reality, which is the intersubjective meaning we co-construct with others (Rodemeyer, 2017; Schutz, 1953). In Moraga and Anzaldúa's (1983) anthology of radical feminist thought, the authors used the bridge as a metaphor to describe how women of color (WOC) served as a bridge between lived experience and academic knowledge.

The anthology criticized academia for using multicultural suffering for edification, while siloing the scholarship into a realm of non-objective, thus, non-scientific research (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1983). In this work, instead of asking my QTYOC participants to serve as a bridge for knowledge, I articulated my standpoint in

Study 1 and held scholarly space for my participants' narratives in Study 2. The relational, authentic, transparent, vulnerable evaluation I conducted offers a blueprint for relational research, where relationality serves as a bridge for greater understanding and perspective-taking between two divergent standpoints (Fields, 2016).

A queer paradigm informed the autoethnography and phenomenological methodologies. Instead of hypothesizing what I expected to find during my program evaluation, I roamed in uncertainty, remained open to alternative narratives, investigated the program from different perspectives, and held space for new definitions to emerge (Fields, 2016; Halberstam, 2011). In my queer conceptual framework, I redefined mainstream concepts that already held meaning and definition in Evaluation Studies and Family Science disciplines based on the alternative orientations I assumed (Halberstam, 2011; Muñoz, 2010). As I began foregrounding my studies within sexual violence literature, I quickly realized it was too narrow a focus and reduced avenues for alternative perspective-taking.

**From sexual violence to relational violence.** Sexual violence encompasses any unwanted sexual acts (Basile et al., 2015), including all violence against sexual and gender minorities. Any time LGBTQ+ individuals experience discrimination or harassment as a result of their perceived or real sexual and gender minority identities that is a form of sexual violence (National Sexual Violence Resource Center (NSVRC), 2012). The concept of sexual violence is core to racial minorities as well, in that it is a tool of colonization against enslaved people, and indigenous cultures (Smith, 2003),

constituting historical trauma that affects communities in later generations (Brave Heart, 1998).

Yet, focusing on only sexual violence foreclosed an analysis of diverging experiences with multiple iterations of violence, and perpetuated an objectifying focus on sexuality among QTYOC. Further, while I evaluated the program, the stakeholders barely used the phrase “sexual violence.” In light of the program’s explicitly articulated objective to reduce the severity and incidences of sexual violence, the silence surrounding the phrase was astounding, perplexing, and held phenomenological significance.

I can only note the silence, not make meaning of it. However, I conjecture we evaded verbalizing the phrase to prevent countertransference of trauma-related symptomology (Iliffe & Steed, 2000; Pearlman & Saakvitne, 1995). To some degree, everyone involved with the program either survived sexual violence, had witnessed it, or provided support and care to survivors. On the one hand, I understood that avoiding the term sexual violence prevented harm. On the other hand, the silence surrounding our lived experiences with sexual violence had the potential to sow seeds of self-denial (Lorde, 1984). As a result of this realization, I arrived at a broader term, relational violence, to empower self-recognition and accurately reflect the relationship experiences of QTYOC.

Broadening the term sexual violence to relational violence accounts for intersectional minority stressor experiences that promote several forms of violence

against QTYOC (Meyer, 2003). Previous literature on the concept of relational violence positions the framework as social exclusion from interpersonal group relationships (Duru, Balkis, & Turkdoğan, 2019). The destructiveness of isolation and exclusion lies at the heart of my conceptualization. However, my central tenet of relational violence is that it occurs in several forms, through various methods of abuse, in all manner of relationships. Each study presented here traces how I became aware of the concept of relational violence and how peer educators' narratives contributed to developing and dimensionalizing indicators of the program's efficacy to intervene in experiences of relational violence.

**Relational research.** In the following sections, I introduce my queering paradigm, setting the front and backstages for the two studies I conducted. By front and backstages, I am referring to Goffman's (1959) dramaturgy theory, which states that in every self-schema, there is a frontstage, a performance for a public audience, and a backstage, a performance for a private audience. Goffman (1959) posited that backstage performances offered more authentic and intimate intersubjective insights. I reveal my backstage performance through Lorde's (1984) "Uses of the Erotic" to showcase a relational form of research. Lorde (1984) suggests that the erotic is a form of self-recognition and that when we use the erotic, we share from a space of self-recognition that disallows self-denial. Hence, in Study 1, I take readers into the backstage of my research as a form of relational research predicated on sharing from a place of self-recognition.

In Study 1, I used confessional tales to take a public audience behind the curtain into the backstage of my evaluation process (Van Maanen, 2011). I related my subjective past and present experiences to the program evaluation research, and the participants who shared their subjective experiences with me. Study 2 constitutes a frontstage performance, where I present peer educators' narratives to the audience to evaluate the efficacy of the Project CLEAR program. Study 2 constitutes what Van Maanen (2011) called a realist tale, which is a standard approach to scientific inquiry and reporting. I used a lifeworld existential method to guide my evaluative analyses (van Manen, 1990).

### **The Program I Evaluated**

Project CLEAR (Consent Leads to Empowering and Affirming Relationships) is a prevention and intervention program designed to improve relationship experiences for QTYOC across individual, community, school, and family ecologies (Ungar, 2004). The program aimed to reduce the severity and incidences of sexual violence against QTYOC and increase access to quality mental health and community resources. It broadly hypothesized that an increase in school, community, and personal safety and protective resources would correlate with reduced incidences of sexual violence. As a result, the program would reduce adverse mental health outcomes (Barr, Budge, & Adelson, 2016; DeGue et al., 2014; Greytak, Kosciw, & Diaz, 2009).

Project CLEAR has three prongs: 1) school-based staff training, 2) community-based positive youth development, and 3) increased access to mental health resources. Stakeholders designed the peer educator-led Project CLEAR curriculum by borrowing

lessons and activities from evidence-based programs and established anti-violence curriculums such as “Safe Dates” (see DeGue et al., 2014; Foshee et al., 2005; Kivel & Creighton, 1997). The redesign drew from several sources to accurately focus on healthy relationships content for a QTYOC audience.

Leadership collaborators drew on professional knowledge and scholarship to design the Project CLEAR curriculum to improve the relational experiences of QTYOC by creating relevant, representational, and experiential learning opportunities (Cook-Daniels & Munson, 2016; Kosciw, Palmer, Kull, & Greytak, 2013). RC recruited QTYOC to become Peer Educators (PEs) and, in community space, trained them in weekly meetings about healthy relationships. They also guided PEs in developing workshops that PEs then facilitated with their peers in local schools and around the community. While being trained and throughout their involvement in the project, PEs had much-needed access to mental health counseling with RC therapists and other resources from RC.

I contracted with RC to evaluate Project CLEAR to meet their grant requirements and complete my dissertation. When I started, Project CLEAR was in its infancy. The grant outlined the project, school, and community partnerships were in place. PMs and outreach coordinators had agreed to collaborate on the project and had begun recruiting participants for staff, PE, and student training. During the ramp-up stages, I was unfamiliar with the program and the underlying theory-of-action on which Project CLEAR based the program. Further, the adapted curriculum had no previous examination

(Patton, 2008), and there was no guide for what components of the project to prioritize, nor how RC planned to utilize the evaluation.

### **I Am Not an Evaluator**

My first confession is that I am not an evaluator. I am a queer theorist and family scientist who studies transgender youth and their families. Further, little evaluation of programs designed for QTYOC exists. Existing scholarship rarely applies a multidimensional and nuanced methodology to conduct research with LGBTQ+ populations (cf Catalpa et al., 2019; Fish & Pasley, 2015). Therefore, I synthesized a relational and inclusive approach to the program evaluation with QTYOC. The methodological approach I designed for this evaluation avoids the danger of conducting a limiting investigation that produces bad-faith science (Sartre, 1967) and reinforces stigmatizing deficit-based ideology (Russell, 2005). Given the program's newness, the lack of previous literature to draw from, and my unfamiliarity with the evaluation discipline, I spent the first several months utterly lost.

### **Getting Lost and Disidentification**

Typically, researchers know how to start conducting their research because we draw from a vast scholarly literature that gives us models of previous studies and allows us to situate our research questions within previous literature. Through building on previous scholarship, we align ourselves with the contours of archetypal disciplinary methods (Campbell, 1984). I was not familiar with an existing body of literature that documented any evaluation of peer-led healthy relationships programs designed for

QTYOC. For that reason, I had to look outside of particular disciplines to synthesize a cohesive methodology aimed at evaluating a pilot program designed for an under-researched population. I relied on queer empiricism (Brim & Ghaziani, 2016; Rodemeyer, 2017) and postmodernism (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011) to orient a paradigm capable of embracing complexity, exploring in the dark, and disidentifying with many status quo approaches from my training as a researcher (King, 1998).

**Exploring in the dark.** A method for reorienting focus to uncover alternative perspectives is “exploring in the dark” (Campbell, 1984, p. 30) or to get lost (Halberstam, 2011). In many ways, I was already lost. Given the low participant numbers and scant background literature, I assumed that a positivist paradigm was incapable of mining nuance about how the program functioned for QTYOC (Guba, 1978; Johnson & Guzmán, 2013). Yet, I always felt pressure from a voice in the back of my head saying that more traditional research methods would benefit the program, even if I found them uninspiring. It is this voice that motivated me to pursue scientific rigor relentlessly, even as I aimed to dismantle the scientific norms that regulate validity and reliability.

On positivism, Campbell (1984) wrote, “science is a social process, scientists are thoroughly human beings; greedily ambitious, competitive, unscrupulous, self-interested, clique-partisan, biased by tradition and cultural memberships, given to mutual backscratching and the like” (p. 31). This quote from a founder of the evaluation discipline gave me a license to abandon or queer the approach through disidentification. Disidentification describes the process by which queer and transgender people of color

(QTPOC) navigate and manage systemic violence through self-articulated, aesthetic, and artistic performances (Muñoz, 2010).

The concept of disidentification developed from QTPOC who performed alternative narratives and redefined their identities from the context of subjective experiences, reimagining deviance to confer new social meanings. Disidentification is a performative queering act. Queering is performative when it is repetitive and intentional, consistently narrating reality from deviant standpoints, which engenders new spaces for the recognition and validation of alternative experiences that run counter to dominant societal messages and norms (Butler, 1993; Halberstam, 2011). As I conceptualized this evaluation plan, I performed disidentification with positivism. That is, I repeatedly looked for a counter-argument to the firmly held assumption that positivism was the best method to create knowledge that advances society. Campbell (1984) proposed exploring in the dark as a strategy for committing to epistemological relativism by approaching research from the perspective of a blind person, rather than an omnipotent, clairvoyant, objective researcher.

Darkness is disorienting because it obscures our sense of where we are in time and space; thus, our embodied lifeworld experience is that of an uncertain relationship to what is around us (Ahmed, 2006). Consequently, the darkness thoroughly confuses where we are going, which allows the possibility to arrive somewhere new (Campbell, 1984; Halberstam, 2011). In my evaluation, I endeavored to draw on my familiarity with QT identity development while exploring and grasping for an understanding of my

participants' realities for which I had no lived experiences (Primeau, 2003). I began by stumbling through a limited knowledge about program evaluation, sexual violence, and the participants' narration of their lived experiences, the realities they described, and the needs they prioritized (Høffding & Martiny, 2016).

I used my lived experiences to orient new insights when I could and, when I could not, I relied on all manner of information to help illuminate different angles. Campbell (1984) suggested that an experimenting society would draw on various forms of knowledge production and collaborate with other disciplines to generate multiple perspectives on a phenomenon, enabling scholars to interrogate and improve their disciplinary research tools. Drawing on several different disciplines, including philosophy, feminist studies, queer theory, family social science, and evaluation, I developed and implemented an alternative method to positivist evaluation. I used this queering approach to critically investigate the gaps in positivism that would render my evaluation of Project CLEAR, ineffective at best, and harmful at worst.

**Queering evaluation.** Queering is an act of transforming, decentering, and disrupting social norms and traditions in favor of reorienting focus towards that which is silenced, erased, hidden, lost, marginalized, or delegitimized (Hall, 2002; Wilchins, 2002). Halberstam (2011) used references to pop culture and animated films to celebrate loss, darkness, and failure, theorizing the “perspective of losers in a world only interested in winners” (p. 5). I draw from the *Queer of Failure* to conceptually and methodologically frame my research from within the perspective of marginalized

narratives, “losers.” By losers, I mean people who have experienced interpersonal loss due to relational violence, as is the case for many QTYOC.

Halberstam’s (2011) analysis of failure offers the queering assumption that embedded in power structures sustaining norms are alternatives. In theorizing disidentification, Muñoz, (2010) authored accounts of how QTPOC draw from preexisting social constructs such as family, to redefine them within the context of an alternative lived experiences, such as transforming family of origin into queer kinship (Phillips, Peterson, Binson, Hidalgo, & Magnus, 2011).

In Studies 1 and 2, I articulate several of my own and my participants’ alternative narratives. I also engage in an analysis of my failures during evaluation through confessional tales, in Study 1 (Van Maanen, 2011). As a researcher, my goal is to fail often and well at positivist research (Halberstam, 2011). Acknowledging my scientific shortcomings is an essential part of unlearning the patterns of knowledge production that perpetuate oppressive systems (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983). In Study 2, I highlight my participants’ disidentification with heteronormative sexual education curriculums by centering their alternative narratives, storytelling, and meaning-making.

**Master and alternative narratives.** Halberstam (2011) critically analyzed master and alternative narratives that lie within the fabric of animated films and pop-cultural references to showcase new ways of knowing and meaning-making. Master narratives refer to taken for granted dominant messages that permeate throughout society (McLean & Syed, 2016). There are countless master narratives. However, in this work, I addressed

positivism, adultism, white supremacy, and cisgender and heterosexual normativity. Personal narratives are the stories we tell about ourselves. Society praises people who align their personal and master narratives, while those who do not society punishes (Foucault, 1977). Alternative narratives are stories that run counter to master narratives (McLean & Syed, 2016). They originate from the lived experiences of marginalized individuals, realities that counter the stories society constructs about their lives. Alternative narratives within marginalized communities confer identity pride where master narratives seek to instill internalized oppression.

Oswald and colleagues' (2005) research supports the master narrative theory. They theorize family, as the result of cisnormative and compulsory heterosexual procreation, equated success in society while deviations from that norm society labeled as failing to achieve *the* definition of success. Normativity frameworks contend that the master narrative is the only legible story, rendering all deviations from the norm unspoken and illegible (Butler, 2002). Therefore, empowerment and resistance to oppression can be found in methods of speaking our personal and alternative narratives, making our lived experiences legible through storytelling. Collective empowerment lies within knowing and sharing self-truth, acts that disallow self-denial, and engenders connection in the realization that sometimes our inner world matches others', irrespective of identity formations (Lorde, 1984). We all may know what it feels like to grieve loss; not everyone knows what it feels like to experience certain forms of violence.

Alterity offers methods to disidentify with mainstream disciplinary tools of inquiry. Forgetting, exploring in the dark, and examining failure are ways to reveal the other stories master narratives leave out. Forgetting is a rather elegant method of disidentification with positivism. I conveniently forgot all deficit-based frameworks previously used for investigating sexual and gender minorities. In its place, I used my intuition and drew from different disciplines to determine a framework for understanding lived experiences.

My objective was to investigate the stories of QTYOC to uncover the relationship barriers that impeded their sense of safety and pride, and to assess the extent Project CLEAR impacted the identified barriers. My overarching goal is to intentionally unlearn master narratives about non-heterosexual relationships, youth, POC, and the best science (Campbell, 1984; Halberstam, 2011; McLean & Syed, 2016). By doing this, my participants and I created new spaces in science that more appropriately and accurately center the lives of QTYOC, thus increasing the possibility for programming and research to impact their lives meaningfully.

### **Evaluating the Unevaluable**

Determining the evaluability of a program is a pre-evaluation process that “involves clarifying goals, finding out various stakeholders’ views of important issues, and specifying the model or intervention to be assessed” (Patton, 2008, p. 183). There were three primary challenges in determining the evaluability of Project CLEAR. First, there were virtually no prevention and intervention evaluation studies focused on peer-led

healthy relationships programs for QTYOC in the extant literature. Second, Project CLEAR had very complex goals; it sought to address issues of sexual violence by promoting healthy relationships and access to resources across several ecological levels for a transient youth audience. Third, I understood that, like many nonprofit organizations, stakeholders, specifically staff, felt tremendous pressure and urgency to report quantitative outcomes to their grant funders (IllumiLab, 2019). Project CLEAR lacked evaluability in a positivist sense. Hence, disidentification lent to evaluative imagination and innovation to address the outlined barriers.

**Evaluation frameworks for Project CLEAR.** My solution was to conduct a mixed-methods evaluation, which reflected different stakeholder paradigms and needs (Patton, 2008). For my dissertation, I only report on the qualitative components of a much broader evaluation. I started the evaluation with a transformative participatory empowerment evaluation framework (Cousins & Whitmore, 1998; Mertens, 2009; Wandersman et al., 2005). In the end, my evaluation framework had become much more complex, and the implementation methods were quite varied. I describe my framework as ethnographic participant observations (Guba, 1978; Parlett & Hamilton, 1972) and qualitative interviews (van Manen, 2007) imbued with underlying principles of a transformative, participatory, empowerment approach (Cousins & Whitmore, 1998; Fetterman, 1996; Mertens, 2009). In the next section, I discuss the evolution of my approach.

**Transformative participatory empowerment evaluation.** I originally conceived the evaluation as a transformative participatory empowerment approach. Transformative evaluations have an orientation towards social justice, supporting action-based assessment, fairness, and equity (Harner, 2014). Participatory refers to including program stakeholders in assessment design and decision-making (Cousins & Whitmore, 1998; King, 1998). Empowerment in the context of program evaluation seeks to provide key stakeholders with skills and tools to infuse evaluative thinking into the organization, enabling their self-directed assessment in the future (Volkov & King, 2007; Wandersman et al., 2005). Empowerment in the context of a transformative, queering approach holds the assumption that the primary beneficiaries of an intervention should have the loudest voice in evaluating it (Mertens, 2009).

RC respected my research expertise and empowered me with considerable autonomy in designing evaluation activities, which was at odds with a participatory approach (Cousins & Whitmore, 1998). Despite being handed the reigns, I still wanted the process to be collaborative and participatory, so I worked with the PMs over several months to create survey instruments. The executive director (ED) and I worked on the overall evaluation logic model (Svensson, Szijarto, Milley, & Cousins, 2018; Taylor-Powell & Henert, 2008). The relationships between myself as an evaluator and the program leaders was one of transparency and collaboration (Schnoes, Berman, & Chambers, 2000).

By the end, I considered myself a part of the program leadership team. I became a program stakeholder, a role transition that evaluation (Sandelowski, 1986) and anthropology (Behar, 1996) scholars often criticize, insisting that evaluators maintain relational distance to remain as objective as possible (Garbarino & Holland, 2009). These close connections, though very important in a transformative, participatory, empowerment evaluation approach, bring challenges as well. As I built trusting relationships using confidentiality and transparency in my interactions, stakeholders shared increasingly personal and vulnerable information with me.

As I will discuss in-depth in Study 1, I was unprepared to navigate situational and relational challenges that arose with Project CLEAR (King, Stevahn, Ghere, & Minnema, 2001). There are no methodological instructions that prepare graduate students for how to do this; we learn through failure. I followed my gut, my advisor's advice, and IRB guidelines. After a significant organizational upheaval, all of the PMs resigned in May 2019. Further, only five of the peer educators in the active cohorts remained in the program.

Attrition is a common feature in community-engaged research, and it is a significant drawback for evaluations (McCloskey, Aguilar-Gaxiola, & Michener, 2011; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Personnel changes generate a certain degree of fluctuation in the theory-in-use because people bring their subjective experiences to the methods by which they implement an intervention (Argyris & Schön, 1978; Patton, 1997a). Indeed, a key finding of Project CLEAR is that relationships within the program drove participant

and knowledge retention. For me, it had become evident that the staff and peer educator relationships were driving Project CLEAR as well as the evaluation, and attrition caused major pivots for the program and my assessment of it. Within the transition, I was anxious because there was no guarantee that new staff and PEs would “buy” into the assessment, and even if they did, we would have to build new relationships (King, 1998).

**New relationships, naturalistic methods.** Fortunately for me and my dissertation research, the new PM was enthusiastic about evaluation, particularly the qualitative aspect, though she considered it entirely my domain. She and the PE cohorts focused on stabilizing the program while I focused on evaluating it, a separation that again negated my desire to implement a participatory empowerment approach. Therefore, I shifted gears, and we worked collaboratively to outline the program’s theory of action and a new evaluation framework, settling on positive youth development as the guiding conceptual model for assessing PE outcomes.

Qualitative interviews and group participant observations served as the data collection method (Ellis, 2004; Guba, 1978; van Manen, 2007). The new PM continued to collect survey data, but with no training, data were inconsistent. However, as time went on, that improved. I collected supporting observational data. After the drastic change in organizational relationships, I asked to spend more time with the program to get a feel for how different PMs implemented the curriculum. The PM welcomed me to participate in all of Project CLEAR meetings and be as involved as I wanted to be. I accepted the invitation and embraced those participation opportunities as reciprocal input

to the project evaluation (Fields, 2016). Thus began an evaluation methodology grounded in relational scholarship.

### **Finding Jory**

I conclude this chapter with a pop culture reference as a way to employ Halberstam's (2011) low-theory method. In the movie *Finding Dory*, a blue, forgetful, lost fish, voiced by the first out-gay TV actor, searches for her family based only on the memory of experiencing separation from them. Dory traces threads of reflexive memories to conjure the place where she first became lost. When she arrives there, she finds healing and her parents. Further, Dory realizes the family she had along the way (cf Halberstam, 2011).

The story is not unlike the experiences of Project CLEAR youth who participated in this research. The fable of Dory offered a guidepost for engaging with my dissertation from the perspective of youth separated from family, relationships, and a sense of self because of relational violence. On a programmatic level, I found that underlying relational processes can be complicated to navigate and have a profound impact on intervention and evaluative activities. I also discovered that Project CLEAR helped me and its stakeholders cultivate relational and self-knowledge that resulted in authentic, safer, healthier, and more intimate relationships in and out of the program.

In the following chapters, I provide evidence for this claim—Study 1 employed autoethnographic confessional tales to document my lifeworld experiences conducting program evaluation and relational research. Study 2 used van Manen's (1990; 2011)

lifeworld approach as a method for analyzing the essence of PEs' lived experiences in the program. The overall dissertation provides a platform for QTYOC to voice their lived experiences, affords a community-based organization evidence-based evaluative insights, and contributes a queering praxis to the Family Social Science and Evaluation disciplines.

## CHAPTER TWO

### “Acting Like an Insider and Feeling Like the Outsider”: Confessional Tales of Queering Evaluation

*“I’ve learned to be ashamed of all my scars  
‘Run away,’ they say  
‘No one’ll love you as you are’”  
- This is Me, Kesha*

#### The Backstage of Queering Evaluation

In this autoethnographic confessional tale, I trace my lived experiences with relational violence and confess the details of conducting a queer research evaluation (Ellis, 2004; Van Maanen, 2011). I draw on my lived experiences to inform the queering evaluation methodology that I designed to evaluate an intervention of a healthy relationships program designed for queer and transgender youth and queer and transgender youth of color (QTYOC)<sup>1</sup>. I collaborated with a small community-based mental health organization (pseudonym RC), and the QTYOC clients they served. I framed my analysis using Black feminist and queer theory lenses, explicitly Lorde’s (1984) “Uses of the Erotic” and implicitly Halberstam’s (2011) low theory and failure frameworks. I invite readers to sit with me in the backstage (Erving, 1959) of my research performance as I intimately reveal situational and relational processes across

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<sup>1</sup> I use the terms LGBTQ+ and sexual and gender minorities to refer to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, & questioning individuals, plus all non-heterosexual and non-cisgender individuals that consider themselves a part of the overarching community (Bockting, 2014; Diamond & Butterworth, 2008). I more routinely use QTYOC, mirroring how the organization’s clients defined themselves (Beckholt, 2020).

several organizational levels of collaboration and stages of program development, implementation, and assessment that influenced the evaluation.

It is best to view this chapter as a long methods section (Van Maanen, 2011). Much of what appears here sets the foundation for understanding how findings emerged in Study 2, which uses a more traditional method, i.e., phenomenology, to analyze Project CLEAR (Consent Leads to Empowering and Affirming Relationships) outcomes. The current study, however, provides a critical foregrounding to that subsequent research. I give a reflexive narration of my process to queering evaluation through concerted efforts to enact a relational, transparent, and vulnerable approach as a form of rigorous evaluation research (Fields, 2016; Guba, 1978). I use an autoethnographic methodology to document the process by which I queered the evaluation of Project CLEAR.

In both studies, I was intentionally cognizant of the phenomenological lifeworlds paradigm (van Manen, 1990); wherein, I assumed intersubjective reality comprises multiple subjective realities. Phenomenology represents a sophisticated evaluative approach to explore the multiple lived experiences of different stakeholders (Bell, 1999; Husserl, 1931). I use my subjective lifeworld experiences to orient my analysis of queering evaluation. My objectives are to contribute new insights to evaluation studies literature, provide detail and transparency about a queering process that future scholars can consult as they embark on queering research, and elevate QTYOC voices to counterbalance homogenizing narratives.

**The organization and the curriculum.** RC is a community-based organization that provides mental health services to QTYOC, aged 11-24. Project CLEAR is a multifaceted program aimed at reducing the severity and incidence of sexual violence against QTYOC and improving QTYOC sexual violence survivors' access to mental health resources. The Office on Violence Against Women, U.S. Department of Justice (OVW), funded the development, implementation, and evaluation of Project CLEAR. RC's executive director (ED) and two program managers (PMs) designed Project CLEAR in collaboration with outreach coordinators from the county, school district, and sexual violence services. RC hosted and trained Project CLEAR peer educators (PEs) and provided access to therapy. The PMs, certified therapists, worked to support the positive youth development of QTYOC in becoming PEs, as well as collaborated with community stakeholders to implement staff training and student support groups in the local schools.

Although a comprehensive evaluation of the Project CLEAR program was designed and is still being implemented by RC and me, I narrow my focus to one dimension of the evaluation process, namely my interactions with the ED, PMs, and PEs. I evaluated the program from January 2018 until May 2020, with an abrupt stop to fieldwork March 2020 due to SARS-CoV-2. PEs are QTYOC, aged 14-24, who have experienced or witnessed sexual violence, and had a desire to learn and teach about healthy relationships. PMs used the QTYOC-specific Project CLEAR curriculum to train youth for peer leadership, providing them with knowledge and skills to teach and train their peers.

Project CLEAR curriculum pulls ideas and activities from evidence-based programming designed for cisgender, heterosexual young adults (see DeGue et al., 2014; Foshee et al., 2005; Kivel & Creighton, 1997) reimagining it for a QTYOC audience. PEs received sixteen hours of intensive training. PMs taught PEs about the project mission and PEs' roles, such as leading discussions with peers, handling grievances, documenting incident disclosures, creating supportive learning environments, and managing and seeking help when navigating crises with peers. The curriculum also covered topics of healthy and unhealthy relationships in the context of QTYOC relationships. Specific topics included harassment, power and control in heterosexual and same-sex relationships (Munson & Cook-Daniels, 2013; Pence & McMahon, 2008), queer relationships and media representation, rape culture, various types of abuse, trauma, commercialized sexual exploitation, social media, online safety, assertive communication, accountability, establishing boundaries, and practicing self-care (Defur, 2016; Montfort & Brick, 2007).

**Queering healthy relationships and evaluation.** My formal evaluation work started with establishing Project CLEAR's theory-of-action and logic model with the ED (Patton, 2008; Svensson, Szijarto, Milley, & Cousins, 2018). Concomitantly, I was enrolled in a graduate course on evaluation theories and methods and was able to use Project CLEAR for my course project. Working with RC enabled me to apply what I was learning in the class to a real-world situation. I began the evaluation with a quantitative formative assessment of PE training on Project CLEAR's curriculum. With feedback from program leaders, I designed two questionnaires, one for facilitators (PMs) and one

for trainee (PEs), both administered after the PE training session (Patton, 2008; Scriven, 1991; Wandersman et al., 2005). Throughout the first year of the project, I applied my ever-evolving knowledge of evaluation methodology and sexual violence research to the program's data information needs.

Over the year, I felt like the program and evaluation were on two parallel trains, where one train comprised RC's ED, PMs, PEs, and county collaborators implementing Project CLEAR. I, an outsider, chugged along next to them learning evaluation methodology and waiting for assignments. I do not recommend this wait and build approach; however, I lacked the skill and foresight to work ahead and have evaluation instrumentation ready for them to use. As I developed the formative surveys in real-time (Scriven, 1991), I also carefully designed a research-based qualitative evaluation protocol for my personal dissertation research (Cousins & Whitmore, 1998; Fetterman & Haertel, 1989; Guba, 1978; King, 1998; Volkov & King, 2007). I centered my research on PEs' experiences in Project CLEAR.

**Derailment.** My evaluation research seemed to be moving ahead as planned; I even received a fellowship to conduct the work in fulfillment of my Ph.D. dissertation requirements (see Appendix A). However, in early April 2019, the lead PM secretly informed me that the Federal Bureau of Criminal Apprehension was investigating the now-fired program intern (J) for sexually soliciting and exploiting minors. Through careful triangulating conversations with the ED, lead PM, and PEs, I am reassured that the intern did not physically harm any PEs in the program and am grateful for that.

Project CLEAR and RC, however, did not escape unscathed. The incident affected RC's staff, and profoundly shifted the structure of Project CLEAR, and by proxy, the evaluation. By May 2019, both PMs had resigned, and the first three cohorts of PEs, except for five, left the program. I preferred to quit as well but stayed because I had received a fellowship for the project. During the transition, I struggled to remain focused and motivated.

As mentioned in my introductory chapter, I had consciously chosen to reject a positivist paradigm and break down the objectivity barrier, which is essential to queering an evaluation (Behar, 1996; Campbell, 1984; Halberstam, 2011). Enacting a participatory, empowerment evaluation approach brought me into close relationship with RC colleagues and stakeholders. As a result, the substantial losses created by the intern's violation of trust and the ensuing fallout made many aspects of the project quite grim for me. It felt unbearable to think about times that I had sat at the same table with the intern and offered mentorship to a wolf in sheep's clothing, a person acting counter to their real character in the very space we chose to heal from that type of perversion.

I confess that J had a profound effect on me, personally and professionally. I felt betrayed and angry, and it harmed my sense of trust. I made a conscious decision to lean into Project CLEAR and to build new relationships. In the process of rebuilding evaluative relationships, I intentionally failed to hold the objectivity of observing from a distance and avoiding attachment (Behar, 1996; Campbell, 1984; Halberstam, 2011), because I was already emotionally involved. Through the conscious decision of allowing

myself to *heal with* Project CLEAR stakeholders, I queered evaluative research and designed a relational methodology to approach community-engaged evaluation.

In queering the evaluation toward a more relational approach, I rejected two positivist assumptions. I assumed that research originating from positivism and post-positivism does not guarantee objectivity; thus, it is a false standard for my research (Campbell, 1984; Sandelowski, 1986). I also hold that researchers can only ever approximate other's descriptions of experience through our own lived knowledge and positionality (Bell, 1999; Høffding & Martiny, 2016; Schutz, 1972). My task was to, within the limitations of subjectivity and positionality, approximate a better method to understanding my participants' experiences.

I accomplished this task by theorizing through different disciplinary lenses, practicing reflexivity, and engaging phenomenological methods for perspective-taking (Finlay, 2002; Sloan & Bowe, 2014). As an active participant in Project CLEAR, I worked through professional and personal derailment. What emerged in the ensuing research is an autoethnographic confessional tale that addresses queering program evaluation through participating in organizational, transformative, personal, and collective healing, picking up the broken pieces of a good program and evaluation perverted by a "wolf at the table<sup>2</sup>."

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<sup>2</sup> *A Wolf at the Table* is a memoir by a queer author, Augusten Burroughs. Burroughs (2008) discusses his early childhood and his abusive and neglectful relationship with his father, the wolf.

## **Key Theories and Frameworks**

**Lifeworlds.** The evaluand's stakeholders are a part of my story, and I am a part of theirs, but we will never know each other's internal realities. Here, I introduce van Manen's (1990) lifeworlds paradigm to illustrate how I used the approach to reflect on my subjective experiences and engaged in perspective-taking to recognize the lived experiences of my research contributors. Overlapping lifeworld experiences refers to places where my subjective knowledge met that of my participants across lived space, lived body, lived relationships, and lived time (van Manen, 1997). I reflexively acknowledged my subjective experiences as a method of generating intentional awareness toward the PE experiences that resonated with me (Ferguson, 2013). Our similar ground made it easier for me to understand their narrations. Moreover, the method of acknowledging human experience in four separate dimensions of existential reality offered tremendous insight into areas where new ways of knowing and understanding QTYOC experience proliferated.

**“The Audre Lorde Room of One's Own.”** At RC, I conducted interviews with PEs in the fortuitously-named, overlapping spatial lifeworld, the Audre Lorde Room. RC named their therapeutic rooms after prolific historical queer and transgender figures of varying cultural backgrounds to inspire their clients and promote a sense of self-worth. The plaque outside the space said, “Audre Lorde described herself as a ‘Black lesbian mother warrior poet.’”

In the interviews, I typically perched in a pleather rocking chair that nicked the back wall if I rocked too far backward. I faced PEs who sat on a double seat old tweed couch immediately to the right of the door. Between my chair and the right wall, RC strategically placed a wastebasket to catch snow water that dripped into the room through the brown stained and exposed drop-ceiling. During one interview, a PE, Ari, stood up to throw away his Cheeto wrapper, stopping mid toss, he said, “that isn’t a garbage.” He casually put the trash in his pocket and continued the conversation. The room was small, exposing the buildings’ disrepair. It also possessed Black-mother-warrior-poet energy that offered profound healing inspiration. All of Project CLEAR could be categorized similarly, simultaneously falling apart and strategically infused with healing relationships and an implicit acceptance of imperfection.

I drew from Lorde’s (1984) “Uses of the Erotic” to frame my relational approach to research, founded on scholarship produced from vulnerability and sharing authentically. Outside of the Audre Lorde Room, RC had space issues as well. Due to a shortage of space, while I was conducting my evaluation, Project CLEAR staff shuffled around the organization. I remember having a meeting in the first Project CLEAR office, a tiny room in the back of the building where the two PMs and J crammed themselves. Eventually, Project CLEAR settled into “the orange room,” or the Gloria Anzaldúa Room. According to her plaque at RC, Anzaldúa was an American scholar of Chicana cultural theory, feminist theory, and queer theory. She theorized the borders, marginal

positionality, and in-betweenness, a consciousness of inhabiting multiple worlds called borderland theory (Anzaldúa, 1987).

Borderland theory surfaces knowledge from a dual perspective of consciousness, having awareness at the margins of two converging worlds, and reveals implicit power structures, false dichotomies, and all manner of hegemonic structures that result in the oppression of people of color (POC) (Anzaldúa, 1987). Anzaldúa also helped edit the seminal text on radical multicultural feminisms, titled *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1983). The text surfaced contemporary feminist cornerstones, such as the theory of the flesh (i.e., “the personal is political”) and Lorde’s (1983) “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House.”

I draw on the bridge metaphor to discuss the process of building relationships toward mutual understanding and knowledge sharing from the standpoint of our lived experiences. I contend that the master’s *ideology* will never dismantle the master’s house; thus, I reengage and reframe Lorde’s proverb to discuss a new paradigm for using old tools. In the following sections, I describe how I used multicultural feminism to frame my analysis of the evaluative relationships that evolved in the spaces imbued with feminist authors’ namesakes and legacies.

In what I will henceforth refer to as *This Bridge*, the text draws on the bridge as a metaphor to help academics understand women of color (WOC) experiences with violence because of their positionality at several intersections of oppression. Society

expects WOC to teach from a position of pain and suffering, using rather than sharing hardship. Radical feminist authors resisted the ascribed positionality and reclaimed their voices in poems, essays, and short stories (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1983). Anzaldúa (1983) wrote, “I am a wind-swayed bridge, a crossroads inhabited by whirlwinds... This task—to be a bridge, to be a fucking crossroads for goddess' sake” (p. 205-206). In this work, I articulate relationally conducting research wherein sharing experiences constitute the bridge of knowledge production (Fields, 2016). In service of evaluating Project CLEAR, I used my relational methodology to generate insights about the program’s efficacy and the mechanisms by which it improves the lives of QTYOC

*This Bridge* (1983), as well as Lorde’s (1984) “Uses of the Erotic,” used personal narrative, scholarly-associated intellect, and creative writing to engender a different form of knowledge production. Sadly, their scholarship remains mainly siloed in humanities and summarily labeled non- objective, thus not scientific, a ploy by which academia maintains positivist normativity. Researchers avoid lived experience and storytelling-based research; they discard it as a self-indulgent anecdotal scholarship (Sparkes, 2002). Even as academia pushed further into postmodern methods over the past thirty-five years, it rarely credited our radical sisters of color for a conceptual framework of lived experience that bridged several queer theoretical and ethnographic methodology advancements (Behar, 1996; Johnson & Henderson, 2005). “Uses of the Erotic” and *This Bridge* showed me to write, research, and evaluate from a place of self-recognition and relationality.

## **Praxis: Theory, Method, and Embodiment**

I drew on *This Bridge's* (1983) theory of the flesh to produce evaluative research that focalized the researcher's and participants' consciousness of lived experiences and internal self-recognition, which Lorde (1984) defined as "the erotic." I embraced the scientific qualities of using "the erotic" to produce my queered relational and experiential approach to science, "a method of the flesh" (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1983) and consciousness (Husserl, 1931; Rodemeyer, 2017). I did so by linking the multicultural feminism to autoethnography and hermeneutic phenomenology. Through the lenses of queer and multicultural feminist thought, I autoethnographically explored the darkness of researcher self-reflection, then, phenomenologically analyzed the stakeholder's lifeworld experiences to evaluate Project CLEAR (Ellis, 2004; Halberstam, 2011; Lorde, 1984; van Manen, 1997)

Surprisingly, several foundational queer theorists, notably Butler and Foucault, rejected phenomenology (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983; Rodemeyer, 2017). Thus, even in the context of queer theory and methods, queering evaluation is queer. Their rejection of phenomenology was a mistake, as the method is one tool that could have precisely prevented the critique that queer theory foreclosed on multicultural experiences within a sexual and gender deviation framework (Alexander, 2017; Johnson & Henderson, 2005). Despite that critique, I have never considered the queer theory paradigm as limited to a particular identity; instead, I hold a queer epistemology that reflects a deviance praxis.

Praxis is the process of transforming theory into a method into action, and over time, into embodiment (Spry, 2011). Embodiment is the essence of van Manen's (1990) lifeworld corporeality, referring "to the phenomenological fact that we are always bodily in the world" (p. 103). Queer theorists posit that bodies are punished (Foucault, 1977), produced (Butler, 1993), and pre-constituted based on the structure of society. My colleague often remarked that his race "walked through the door." That is, the external reality of our material bodies shapes others' preconceived notions about our experiences (Butler, 1993).

Societal structures superimpose assumptions stereotypically, mass negative perceptions become internalized, and citizens assume incorrect knowledge and take harmful action accordingly. QTYOC are rarely empowered to construct an intersubjective reality reflective of their lived experiences, especially if their stories run counter to societal master narratives (McLean et al., 2017). For example, there is a general adultist assumption that youth are ill-equipped to make important life decisions, resulting in societal and parental efforts to steer youth decision-making about sexual and gender identification (Rahilly, 2013; Singh, Meng, & Hansen, 2014). A critical component of understanding PEs' experiences in the program was to establish transparency and model my willingness to disrupt adultist modes of engaging with youth. Therefore, through relationship building, I created an evaluative platform that offered my participants autonomy to self-define their subjective reality.

Genuinely understanding someone else's lived experiences requires listening intently to the alternative stories that they share (McLean & Syed, 2016), and going beyond how people are labeled and identified to extrapolate a more in-depth knowledge that glimpses internal worlds (Lorde, 1984). "Uses of the Erotic" is a call to action, imploring people to plant a seed of self-recognition, cultivate a kernel of self-knowledge, and approach connection from a space of internal embodiment. The praxis by which I conducted my research evaluation involved holding space for PEs and PMs to share their truth and self-knowledge with me and allowing their sharing, as well as my truth and self-recognition, to guide where I explored for evaluative insights.

Lorde (1984) sees "the erotic" as the personification of love, and a profound source of power that, once felt, disallows self-denial and suffering. When we follow our desires, trust our feelings as knowledge, and orient our lived experiences internally, we enable self-recognition and care. Allowing for self-recognition and intimately sharing that self-connection with others, embracing the power of each other's feelings, enacts the "uses of the erotic." Lorde (1984) contended that using "the erotic" resulted in profound, meaningful, powerful, and emancipatory relationships. Lorde's stance corresponds to van Manen's (1990) relationality and corporeal lifeworlds and the temporal and spatial dimension of sharing life course experiences at the bridge of connection.

One way the authors in *This Bridge* resisted teaching from a place of pain was to reclaim the story, re-sharing it from the subjective experience of having lived it.

Intimacy, trust, and vulnerability are the resultant relational foundations when people

share their experiences with others through erotic exchanges of bearing one's inward embodiment with audiences who hold it tenderly. "Erotic exchanges serve as a bridge...reaching between and across particular locations and forging relationships between researchers' own situated selves and those of the people they seek to understand (Fields, 2016, p. 38). Using autoethnographic storytelling, I aimed to feature a relational approach to scientific writing by reaching out from the pages toward scholarly readers with transparent confessional stories to forge a relationship on relational intimacy and scientific trust.

Like the multicultural feminist giants whose shoulders I stand upon, I seek to produce knowledge from within the passion of experience. "The term passion of experience encompasses many feelings but particularly suffering, for there is a particular knowledge that comes from suffering. It is a way of knowing that is often expressed through the body, what it knows, what has been deeply inscribed on it through experience" (hooks, 1994, p. 91). Erotic space, representing internal knowledge and care and, erotic exchanges, referring to intimate connections based on sharing from that inward knowledge, are thwarted by the conflation of the erotic with the pornographic (Lorde, 1984). Perversion of the erotic is pornographic, obscenity that distorts feeling, uses rather than shares feeling (Lorde, 1984). Sexual violence is one perversion of the erotic that extinguishes inward embodiment and external connections. Assuredly, a perversion of the erotic is what happened in Project CLEAR when stakeholders engaged

in trust, intimacy, and vulnerability unknowingly sharing their pain with a perpetrator of sexual violence.

In the remaining sections, I reveal my queered program evaluation project and my relational model of scientific inquiry and knowledge production. I also share my process of healing from perversions of the erotic because it is central to my analyses of Project CLEAR outcomes and experiences queering evaluation. Through storytelling, I weave subjective knowledge, theory, method, evaluative practice, and pop-culture references into my writing (Ellis, 2004; Halberstam, 2011; Lorde, 1984; Van Maanen, 2011; van Manen, 1997). I will explicitly state that I did not adhere to traditional scientific writing norms. Thus, I opted to tell the narratives as a complete story, irrespective of standard journal article sections. I do, however, adhere to a writing courtesy of orienting readers to the stories and offering some introductory, summary information. Moreover, within the best of my ability, I attempt to constrain my writing to limit the length of the chapters, which forecloses on and disserves qualitative, storytelling, and relational research (Richardson & Liddle, 2017).

### **Autoethnographic Trustworthiness**

In autoethnography, there is a back-and-forth that exposes culturally significant connections between the self and others (Ellis & Bochner, 2006). The vision of autoethnography is to give space to voices, experiences, and knowledge of people in the periphery (ICQM BGU, 2010). “Auto” refers to the self, “ethno” refers to culture, and “graphy” refers to the process (Ellis, 2004). My style of writing reflects autoethnographic

methods, where storytelling about the process of queering evaluation accomplishes the goals of tuning into the self as a researcher and turning towards participants as subjective social agents. I analyzed our subjective experiences through writing, comparing, and contrasting our lived knowledge with politically and culturally significant issues concerning QTYOC and their rights to healthy relationships and scientific research aimed at improving their lives.

Since the development of autoethnography, researchers have cast the method as less credible (Ellis, 2004), and embarrassingly unprofessional science (Tedlock, 1991). Gödel and Morgan hold “that applying the criteria of one research tradition to another is nothing more than self-justification since these criteria inevitably favor the research tradition that generated them” (Sandelowski, 1986, p. 28). To avoid the dubious position of critiquing a square peg from the perspective of a circle, I will outline the qualities of trustworthiness from within a qualitative evaluation paradigm.

According to postmodern thought, the measure of rigor lies in the text’s ability to perform. Evocative storytelling should resonate and create a palpable connection between the audience and the storytellers (Bochner, 2012). The accounts should give off verisimilitude displaying the truthfulness of our experiences (Denzin, 2003; Ellis & Bochner, 2006; Richardson, 2003). Toward social justice aims, I displayed the use of care, relationality, and research ethics through transparency and presentation, contributing to social change. Lastly, Miles and Huberman (1994) outlined evaluative standards for the quality of qualitative conclusions in five dimensions thought to

correspond to quantitative fields. The five dimensions include; confirmability for objectivity, auditability for reliability, authenticity for internal validity, fittingness in place of generalizability, and action orientation to substitute application (Miles & Huberman, 1994). These are the criteria by which to critique my confessional tale of queering evaluation.

### **Confessional Tales and Queered Methods**

Confessional tales serve as a tool to examine, through writing, how my social position influenced my evaluation, and the people I evaluated, as well as how those things changed me (Ellis, 2004). "Stories of infiltration, fables of fieldwork rapport, mini melodramas of hardships endured (and overcome), and accounts of what fieldwork did to the fieldworker are prominent features of confessions" (Van Maanen, 2011, p. 94). The tenets of how to produce confessional tales fall into the three categories of a personalized author(ity), point of view, and naturalness (Van Maanen, 2011). Confessions represent an autobiographical character-building tale about growth from the beginning of the researchers' journey until the end (Van Maanen, 2011).

The arrest of J in some ways is the starting point for this journey. However, the story does not unfold chronologically. Accounting for multiple perspectives necessitated some jumping through time, and not every experience referenced happened in Project CLEAR, though it may have informed the evaluation of it. Therefore, I provide a "Project CLEAR Timeline" appendix, which includes my own timeline integrated with my knowledge of leaders' timeline data they shared with me (see Appendix A). I provide

dates in the manuscript and timeline to provide the readers with a practical spatial orientation as to when components of the evaluation occurred along a temporal dimension of lived time (van Manen, 1990).

**Data collection: Personalized author.** Data collection for my autoethnographic reflection resulted from restructuring the evaluation with a new PM, henceforth referred to by the initials AS. I met with AS in June 2019 to discuss our collaborative efforts to reframe the evaluation based on our understanding of each other's needs and desires. The primary outcome of this meeting was that we reoriented the evaluation. While AS trained as a PM, I situated myself inside in the program, boarding the train to help guide it through the organizational changes and rebuilding process (Guba, 1978). Due to my evaluation involvement, I had considerable knowledge about Project CLEAR implementation, which, on occasion, proved valuable for AS.

In July 2019, I started participant observations to learn AS's instructional and relational approach to training and supporting PEs. These observations would also inform my interviews with the PEs at the end of the summer. AS and I decided that attending Project CLEAR weekly huddles would familiarize the PEs with me and my intentions, which would hopefully improve the quality of interviews later. My work to collect data through these ethnographic participant observations was also helpful to AS because it relieved her of additional responsibilities while taking on the job of two PMs.

I conducted ethnographic participant observations using the illumination model (Parlett & Hamilton, 1972), a member of the naturalistic ethnographic evaluation family (Guba, 1978). The illumination model involves three stages:

(1) initial observation for...familiarization with the day-to-day reality of the settings... (2) more sustained and intensive inquiry into... common incidents, recurring trends, and issues frequently raised in discussion; and (3) efforts to seek general principles underlying the organization of the program, determine the pattern of cause and effect, ...and place individual findings within a broader explanatory context (Guba, 1978, p. 40).

I engaged with PEs and AS in various ethnographic experiences such as leadership meetings and training; I noted informal conversations between program activities and in the halls of RC (Hemwall, 1991). At weekly huddles, I observed as PEs learned the curriculum and designed their workshops, participating to some degree (Fields, 2016). I was an audience member at workshops they facilitated during biannual queer and transgender student conferences. We also volunteered together for organizational fundraisers and events.

**Data: Point of view.** To produce my autoethnographic confessions, I reflexively drew from the following forms of data: journal observations, notes, reflections, as well as records of informal conversations with PMs, program leadership timelines, text messages, and unidentified copies of artwork from the PE training, all recognized as types of data used in ethnographic methodology (Ellis, 2004; Høffding & Martiny, 2016; Van Maanen, 2011). Journal notes and reflections included program information, my feelings about the evaluation experiences, and theoretical and methodological research memos connecting my experiences to research processes and the philosophy of science

literature. Journal observations consisted of interpretive descriptions of my journal notes, derived through a process of reading and reflecting on their meaning, i.e., engaging in reflexivity (Geertz, 1973), and detailing stakeholders' lifeworld experiences as they described and I observed them (Primeau, 2003; van Manen, 1990). My journal notes, reflections, and observations were handwritten in five composition notebooks. Further, I used email communications and meeting notes to corroborate timeline dates and personal recollections.

**Human subjects approval.** In terms of transparency for ethical research, the full scope of the evaluation consisted of two IRB protocols (Orb, Eisenhauer, & Wynaden, 2000). One IRB was for secondary data analysis of QTYOC student profiles from the Minnesota Student Survey (MSS). The other was for data collection with the Project CLEAR youth. In general, according to the Exemption and Limited IRB Review (2019), evaluation does not constitute human subjects research and is exempt. However, Project CLEAR's target audience included underage PEs; thus, it was not exempt. Hence, one IRB protocol contained QTYOC specific protections and safety considerations. I outlined protections against psychological distress and parental consent, age of majority consent, and assent procedures in the next study. The original PE IRB included a focus group study. The protocol I outlined for the focus groups resembled the procedures of my participant observations, wherein I recorded interactions in a group setting, at the organization.

The only differences between the focus groups I proposed and the participant observations I conducted were that I did not audio record my observations. Also, I did not pose structured interview questions. I conducted ethnographic fieldwork in their space, rather than inviting them into a place I hosted. For this reason, I decided that journaling was a less invasive form of recoding. I did audio record the PE interviews because I hosted conversations in the Audre Lorde Room. I also audio recorded informal talks with the PMs, for which they were aware and consented. I used the PM recordings to recount stories AS and I shared during our conversations accurately. Before any public review of this paper, I member-checked drafts with the original lead PM, AS, and ED of RC (see Appendix A; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

**Analyses: The nature of confessional tales.** Van Maanen (2011) devised confessional tales as necessarily transparent testimonials; yet, they are also supposed to reassure readers of the naturalness of the research, that the admitted flaws and problems did not contaminate the study. I have discussed and will continue to address failing, feeling like a failure, despair, and the urge to quit. Still, the overall work is not a failure. I contend that analyses of failure led to insights (Fields, 2016; Halberstam, 2011) and contributed to the development of relational research methods, and greater clarity in understanding the PEs' lived experiences. Additionally, the focus on failure in the research process disrupts a longstanding dichotomy that praises science and problematizes participants, articulating alternative narratives about research and experience (McLean & Syed, 2016).

Confessional tales reveal a type of knowledge production "that revels in the detours, twists, and turns through knowing and confusion, and that seeks not to explain but to involve" (Halberstam, 2011, p. 15). The ensuing stories reflexively highlight some of my most vulnerable moments to generate culturally significant knowledge through several layers of consciousness (Ellis, 2004; Halberstam, 2011) and involve readers in a relational form of research. To that end, I address the following research questions:

- 1) How does a queering evaluation framework adhere to evaluation standards *and* disrupt traditionally held research norms?
- 2) What does a queered evaluation contribute to the disciplines of Evaluation and Family Science, Project CLEAR, and the QTYOC who lent their voices to this queering endeavor?

### **My Queer Phenomenology Ontology**

Husserl's (1931) work is a founding text on the method of phenomenology. He reflected on his varying perspectives of a table to articulate a process of consciousness and perspective-taking. Ahmed (2006) used Husserl's (1931) orientation toward the table to generate *Queer Phenomenology*. She wrote:

On the tables, different objects gather. Making a place feel like home, or becoming at home in a space, is for me about being at my table. I think fondly of Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*. How important it is, especially for women, to claim that space, to take up that space through what one does with one's body. And so when I am at my table, I am also claiming that space, I am becoming a writer by taking up that space (p. 11).

As a homeless youth, in my freshman year of college, I read *A Room of One's Own*. I resonated with Woolf's conclusion that for a woman to create, to craft something substantial over time, she needed money and a room (Woolf, 1989). I know what it is like not to have a space to store my things, killing time during the day, and crashing on

friends' floors. On these grounds, I bonded with a PE, Andrew, who goes by all pronouns. She told me a few minutes before our interview about having become homeless recently (August 2019, see Appendix A). Andrew is still navigating homelessness, as of June 2020.

For background information, Andrew spent the entire time in Project CLEAR cultivating POC-only spaces to empower more QTYOC to share their experiences safely. In my interview with Andrew, I asked him specifically his experience with boundaries and space:

J: Can I ask you a personal question? (A: Yeah) Because we talked about housing insecurity, do you think it's hard for you to set boundaries when you don't have your own space?

A: It is hard because it's like you don't know where you're going to be. You could be in a shelter, but the shelter it's like three people in one room, and then you have these certain items. You're just worried about things stolen, or if you actually got to a real shelter where you sleep there for a night and leave in the morning. Or you're at your family's house. They all start with probing your things. It's hard to keep boundaries around the personal stuff like your ID, your keys, maybe your phone, stuff like that. Because it depends on where you are, you could be on the street. It's like, you never know what could happen to you.

J: Yeah, that's true. Personally, I also experienced homelessness and had to be in other people's space a lot, so I found it was very hard to be like this is my space (A: yeah) when I'm in somebody else's space.

A: That was the most difficult part of my whole childhood (Andrew, PE Interview, August 21<sup>st</sup>, 2019).

It was fortunate that I stumbled into the lifeworlds method, which demanded that I probe about space because it resulted in a greater understanding of the importance of space to Andrew. Not only did he create space for QTYOC, but he also discussed buying a house for his mother during our conversation. The main point of the gesture was that Andrew

didn't want his mom to worry about paying the bills. Perhaps, Andrew's lifeworld experience of space was what drove her to cultivate it for others in Project CLEAR.

The back-and-forth between Andrew and me and my analysis of overlapping experiences in a lifeworld dimension shows the blueprint for the chapter. I attempted to do what Lorde (1984) suggested, "use the erotic." I posit that "the erotic" is a form of scholarship produced from self-recognition of experiential knowledge drawing on embodiment, intuition, and desire. Using the erotic is a method of collaborative knowledge production based on interpersonal relationships (Lorde, 1984). The excerpt above showed care for Andrew by asking for consent before questioning about an experience he shared with me. It also showed my act of self-recognition and vulnerably sharing from that space, driving the conversation into a deeper understanding of Andrew's life course experiences. I contend that relational scholarship in this form is extremely queer because, in positivism, "the worst sin [is] to be 'too personal'" (Behar, 1996, p. 3).

**On being 'too much' and #MeToo.** I use failure and personal strife to dismantle the narrative that people who experience violence and abuse "are to blame for the failures of the social structures we inhabit rather than critiquing the structures themselves" (Halberstam, 2011, p. 35). I invoke failure to reclaim my personhood. I am fallible and affected by trauma. For example, the term sexual violence narrows to focus on survivors and perpetrators of sexual assault without a sustained critique of the societal structures

that promote cycles of abuse and violence (cf Trask, 2016). Sexual violence does not encapsulate mine or the PEs' varied experiences with violence.

I use the term relational violence, which I define as a multi-dimensional construct concerning experiences of several forms of violence across lifeworld domains. Relational violence involves various experiences with types of violence (i.e., psychological, physical, sexual, emotional, financial, and stalking (Defur, 2016), in different relationships (i.e., familial, intimate partner, self, or institutional; Ross-Reed, Reno, Peñaloza, Green, & FitzGerald, 2019), diverse spaces (i.e., work or school, media, communities, or environmental; Kosciw, Palmer, & Kull, 2015), throughout time (i.e., historical, intergenerational, childhood, elderly, or a cycle of violence; Munson & Cook-Daniels, 2013). PEs and I had experienced too much violence.

*Too many J's.* In Project CLEAR, PEs learned about and built healthy relationships. I watched and supported them on their journey as I picked up the broken pieces of trust and a sense of self on my tandem healing odyssey. Together we experienced the violence of J. What they never knew was that I had recently graduated from a group-based intensive outpatient program (IOP) only a few months before we all got the news of J (January 2019, see Appendix A).

I was in the IOP because, in the year prior, I escaped an abusive relationship with a J in graduate school (January 2018, see Appendix A), which triggered post-traumatic stress (PTSS) flashbacks of grooming and exploitation from yet a different J when I was sixteen. As if that were not enough, the summer I began evaluating Project CLEAR, I

learned that I had a different biological father and that he and his mom, my grandmother, Jacqueline, had passed away (August 2018, see Appendix A). I cried for the dad I never met and felt relieved that I was not biologically related to the neglectful, abusive father I had known. In between graduating from IOP and learning about the intern, J's, arrest, my only safe parental figure died, my grandma (February 2019, see Appendix A). We held my grandmother Judith's funeral on her 79<sup>th</sup> birthday, March 16<sup>th</sup>, 2019, I played "Bridge over Troubled Water" by Simon and Garfunkel to commemorate her.

On a chilly New Year's Eve 2019, I was in a hospital room in an intensive outpatient program (IOP) designed for survivors to heal from trauma, manage PTSS, and reintegrate a sense of self. I was sitting in a group therapy circle, staring at my feet. I wondered to myself if I was damaged enough to merit membership in the group, while someone across from me processed a complaint that loved ones called them "too much." The words "too much" rippled throughout the group as we silently reflected on experiences where we felt the shame of having too few resources, too many problems that required too much care and attention. Being called "too much" was a tactic of abusers to make sure we knew that there was no space for our sense of self or vocalizing our experiences.

Social sciences use a similar tactic against the form of knowledge production I sought to expose through this work.

Autoethnography and queer theory are both also often criticized for being too much and too little – too much personal mess, too much theoretical jargon, too elitist, too sentimental, too removed, too difficult, too easy, too white, too Western, too colonialist, too indigenous. Yet, at the same time, too little artistry,

too little theorizing, too little connection between the personal and political, too impractical, too little fieldwork, too few real-world applications (Jones & Adams, 2010, p. 197).

I resist the abusive tactic of being called “too much.” In every instance, the word “too” invokes the sentiment that our mode of being is undesirable. Likewise, when Tarana Burke started the #MeToo movement in 2006, she was citing the very same definition, that our climate of erasure and silence about sexual violence is undesirable, an issue that legislation is too inept at addressing (cf Ransom et al., 2020). The campaign, like my research, represents a tool to reclaim through voice and visibility, the power we lost due to erasure, silence, and legislative injustice. The goal is to take back our stories and to speak our realities into existence.

*Violent media too.* It would be laughable, if not so dreadful; in 2020, the #MeToo is all but synonymous with Hollywood, an industry notorious for its erasure of and violence toward LGBTQ+ individuals and POC (Stockton, 2007). Just as their queer elders did before, PEs described negotiating violent media representations. Anais explained to me that bisexual erasure made her “feel wrong.” Andrew described representation as fleeting; “they get one minute of shine, and it’s over.” I resonated with their complaints about media, their struggle with it because they saw that media had the potential to help them, but stories more often caused harm (Morrison, Parker, Sadika, Sameen, & Morrison, 2020). In the first LGBTQ+ mainstream movie I ever saw, a gang of white boys raped and murdered the character that resembled me. I was twelve years old.

I knew the movie depicted a true story, so I wept as the scene flooded me with fear and sadness; it's called *Boys Don't Cry* (Pierce, 1999). Boys do cry. I had a conflicted relationship with the film; it was at once an end to the loneliness of thinking that I was the only person assigned female at birth (AFAB) that felt male and a sense of terror over the portrayal of societal reactions to that experience. That scene sent me the specific message that love and affection were dependent on self-denial and deception and, if anyone ever found out my truth, they had the right to kill me.

In response to the lesson and society's scathing bitterness toward not giving up my "tomboy phase," I attempted to live a life of less punishment by wearing more feminine clothing and trying to date men. I was turning sixteen when I met Justin, a twenty-four-year-old pedophile who worked with me at a local store. He let me stay in his apartment during the days when I had no place to go; I skipped most of my junior year in high school. For many months, I engaged in a sexually exploitative relationship to survive homelessness, #MeToo.

At the same age as the Project CLEAR PEs, I was teetering between housing insecurity and homelessness; nearly every adult and media portrayal ridiculed my sexual orientation and gender presentation, all while being sexually exploited in a heterosexual relationship. I ended that relationship and entered a very similar relationship with a twenty-three-year-old woman I met on the internet. While I was still in high school, her dad let me live with him; the terms of my housing were that I graduate.

With Justin, love and acceptance took a backseat to survival; in this queer relationship, survival remained the driving force while love and acceptance sat in the passenger seat. We did not date until I turned eighteen. Though the relationship was very different, the high level of dependence meant that my age was a number, not an equalizing factor. However, through these lived experiences, I learned to recognize nuance in the ways that media portrayed LGBTQ+ characters and became critical of a national narrative that positioned queer people as pedophiles (Butler, 2002; Lancaster, 2011). One experience was an unhappy tale about sexual exploitation and perversion, the other, a snippet of how I learned about queer kinship, a nuanced romantic and economic kinship practice between different LGBTQ generational cohorts to counteract abject poverty and rejection from the family of origin (Catalpa & Routon, 2018).

I personified several risk themes associated with QTYOC; homelessness (Yadegarfar, Meinhold-Bergmann, & Ho, 2014), family rejection and abuse (Grossman, D'Augelli, Frank, D'Augelli, & Frank, 2011; Nguyen et al., 2015), suicidal ideation (Mustanski, Garofalo, & Emerson, 2010), intimate adult relations (Burroughs, 2002; Raible, 2011), and trading sex for resources (Keuroghlian, Shtasel, & Bassuk, 2014). The perilousness of my situation, the personal and societal violence I experienced, led to several forms of self-subordinating behaviors like exchanging boundaries and self-care for access to a place to sleep. The idea that to receive acceptance and resources, some QTYOC must engage in toxic, unhealthy relationships is essentially the legacy that Project CLEAR aimed to undo.

The general sentiment among Project CLEAR stakeholders was “be the person you needed at that time.” I represented an anecdotal control group for the program, a youth who did not receive a Project CLEAR-like intervention when I needed it in high school. I only recently learned what PEs described in their interviews about what they knew or learned concerning healthy relationships through Project CLEAR. Take, for example, this conversation with Erin:

E: Vulnerability is so scary! It’s so scary. But, at the same time, it’s like the most intimate thing that you have. But, at the same time, being vulnerable, it’s being vulnerable. You’re allowing someone to know so much about you, and if you don’t trust that. Trust is such a hard thing to come around.

J: So, if you are being vulnerable with someone that you don’t necessarily trust, there is a sense of risk?

E: Yeah. And that’s scary! You pick and choose who you want to be vulnerable with, and that is how relationships come about.

J: True that. Do you think you had this emotional intelligence before PCLEAR?

E: Semi. Sort of, a little bit. But, PCLEAR tapped into it. It was there. It was just a matter of me figuring out the words to say it. And that is what PCLEAR helped me do. Is to figure out the words to say it, so I can help others in a way that makes sense.

J: You’re talking about some high therapy stuff that grown adults don’t understand right now. I was learning this stuff like this year (Erin, PE interview, October 21<sup>st</sup>, 2019).

I understood the significance of what Erin described in terms of vulnerability and trust.

One of the main things I took away from the IOP was a recalibrated sense of trust. A day of therapy was devoted to teaching us a trust scale that we could use as a tool to determine the level of vulnerable information we felt comfortable sharing, a boundary

lesson about moderating vulnerability that I have thrown out the window to write this chapter.

*Trust is a familiar boundary.* Experiences of relational violence damage the definition between self and others; the inner world collapses in a total loss of a sense of personhood and ability to boundary privacy (Mellody, Miller, & Miller, 1989). On a temporal dimension, the same experiences over several familial generations comprise intergenerational violence (Kidron, 2003). Historical violence accounts for familial and collective encounters of colonization, systemic racism, spiritual persecution, genocide, and ethnocide (Brave Heart, 1998). PEs discussed the tension of adultism throughout the transitionary and developmental stage of their current life course, as well as, the consequences resultant of their families surviving historical and intergenerational trauma.

Similar to Andrew and space, Anais and I bonded over our overlapping lived time experiences. In our interview, we shared a moment over intergenerational violence. Anais talked about why self-care is essential for QTYOC:

A: Sometimes, you see something that upsets you, you know, just like you need a little pick me up, especially if it's like a part of your identity that's getting downgraded.

J Right. Yeah. Cuz, there's so much hatefulness out there about LGBTQ people?

A: Yeah. [Asking perplexed] What did we do to you?

J: Nothing.

A: Exactly. Nothing! [Thinking] Hey. Okay. I kind of get it if like something happened, and that was part of the identity. Like my grandma, rest in peace. But grandma didn't like my stepdad at first when they started dating, because she got raped by a Black dude. So she is like, 'I stay away from them.'

[After some conversation]

J: You know, to kind of be vulnerable with you. My grandma passed away too, she also experienced sexual assault, and that has had really long-lasting effects on my entire family. Some people here know that I found my dad on Ancestry, but I also found my mom's dad, my grandmothers' rapist.

A: People ask me if I am Italian. Maybe I am, you never know (Anais, PE Interview, January 13<sup>th</sup>, 2020).

Again, researching and interviewing from a space vulnerability deepened the conversation. While analyzing experiences of violence across the entire data set, I realized that I spent very little time talking about sexual violence with PEs. My conversation with Anais about our grandmothers was the first of two brief interview conversations about the topic, total. It was because of my conversations with PEs that I noticed toxic relational violence was more expansive than the term sexual violence.

*“I only had to listen in order to learn.”* Interviewing phenomenologically as a form of evaluation proved a mighty feat (Kvale, 1996). I deflated in a meeting with my advisor. I thought I failed to balance evaluation and phenomenological insights within my interview questions and probes. My self-critique was that I favored judgment over experience. I designed questions in light of an explicitation interview (EI), working reflexively through stories about Project CLEAR (Høffding & Martiny, 2016). The downfall of over-pursuing evaluative insights was in asking several questions. As my interview skills flourished, I strategized to reduce the number of questions, targeting the emergent key findings (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). An hour before interviewing Ari, I read research generated from a lifeworld interview and analysis (Sloan & Bowe, 2014),

scholarship that provided me with an example of what I might look for when I analyzed the data. I devised a few quick techniques to probe for lifeworld detail.

Mainly, I repeated a lot of the last thing Ari said. More than once, he said, annoyed, “I feel like I already said this.” My probe was not a new question; it was an auger digging deeper into his subjective meaning-making about something. At one point, I said, “I am intentionally asking you hard questions,” to which he replied emphatically, “I’ve noticed!” I felt very confident about my growth after the interview. Later, when I was at home reflecting, I took perspective-taking a step further.

In the interview, Ari told me he experienced a “raging existential crisis.” Instead of blowing off what he said as youth drama, I got curious. I was pretty sure he was referencing nihilism, so I asked, “a real Kafka nihilist?” alluding to the absurdity of existence. He agreed that he was an “optimistic nihilist,” and as we were wrapping up, he demanded, “Write it down, *Ishmael*, by Daniel Quinn.” We left the Audre Lorde Room, and I honestly thought, “I am not going to read that.”

I found the audiobook and listened to it in two days; Ari and I bonded over the lifeworld existential. A few weeks later, still pondering Ari’s interview and the book, I reflected:

Thoughts on COVID-19: He said his current philosophy was, “does anything really matter in the end? We’re all just going to die. Are we going to see a significant change? Everything is going to shit in the world. But, like you might as well try to do the right thing, optimistic nihilism. Is there an innate human flaw? Are humans naturally greedy, or tribalistic? (Ari, PE Interview, February 24<sup>th</sup>, 2020).”

I really wanted to know more about what he meant. Now, four days into light restriction, people are buying all the guns and toilet paper. It’s a very fitting

shopping list for ‘Merica. Not at all the necessary items. Though, those are gone as well. At first, I was mad that people bought all the stuff *I* needed. Then, I thought about *Ishmael*. That is what Ari meant by greedy. We still have to look for the helpers, though. That is the force driving the optimism behind the nihilism. It doesn’t matter, but relationships during *our* time matter. They make a big difference in our consciousness during the time we have here (Journal Reflection n.d.).

“I only had to listen to in order to learn” (Quinn, 1995, p. 15). The rest of my journaling went on to outline a more relational approach to research. I thought about Lorde’s (1984) “Uses of the Erotic,” pondering a way to influence research by pulling from within and bearing it in the open for others to see, acknowledge, maybe legitimize.

### **Uses of the Erotic for Healing from Trauma**

On June 12<sup>th</sup>, 2019, I had my first meeting with AS. We began what she later called “prefigurative politics” (Leach, 2013). She explained that, together, we were “creating a new program in the shell of the old one” (Journal Notes, December 12<sup>th</sup>, 2019). Our relationship was a bridge over troubled water built by our collective commitment to foster alliances and trust, make joint decisions, investigate and improve the program, practice reflexivity, and encourage transparency (Johnson & Guzmán, 2013; McIntyre, 2008). The fresh start was too fresh, however. Something substantial happened, AS knew about it, but she didn’t *know* it.

**“A Wolf at the Table.”** I have had several considerations and reservations concerning writing this section. Firstly, any perversion attracts attention, and it is not my place to tell a story simply because it’s salacious. “Use without consent of the used is abuse” (Lorde, 1984, p. 59). Secondly, the situation was emotionally and logistically challenging to write about as it profoundly impacted anyone close to the program at that

time, and is a legal matter, bound by confidentiality. However, deciding to address how J affected the program served a larger purpose, to help expose and critique implicit narratives about QTYOC. Also, I offer the evaluative field the pathway I carved for talking about difficult topics, to collect accurate data. I observed guilt, shame, and silence flowing through the organization; it was a part of the evaluation.

Consciously or not, RC first tried to heal from the incident and, later, built a wall of silence around it. One interviewee said, “we did not get to [do a training] because stuff happened,” and I outright asked. “by ‘stuff’ you mean J?” I made the option available to talk about it with me because I did not want PEs to feel ashamed or to carry shame. I was afraid of that possibility because in relation to RC, we, the PEs and I, felt like we could not talk about J and what we found out about him. No one ever told me to erase it from the evaluation. Still, I got the sense that, for the good of the organization and the continuation of a necessary resource for QTYOC, we really should not talk about it. There was also the benevolent reason for not vicariously traumatizing (Pearlman & Saakvitne, 1995) and poisoning incoming cohorts who could use the resources of Project CLEAR. The PE interviews were the only place where talking about J seemed optional. I created the container with precautions in my IRB protocol and forethought, and the PEs took the option.

They all said the arrest of J was the most significant challenging experience they had while in the program. A side note, I conducted six interviews, five with PEs from cohorts one through three, and Ari. Ari was the first interview in the second set of

interviews. I planned to conduct an analysis of PEs from cohorts under the new administration before COVID-19 sidetracked fieldwork, as well as the program. Ari, who did not know J, thought for a while before declaring he had no significant challenging experiences in the program. Information I found indicative of Project CLEAR's standalone merit. At any rate, I had an inkling PEs might bring it up.

I ensured an interview protocol with protections for psychological risk. The primary protection was openly communicating with AS, a licensed therapist. I made sure that sensitive information did not sit with me. I asked outright if PEs knew of or needed resources. I did enact those protections on a few occasions. In the interview transcription, I redacted their mentions of J, so no other person would read about it—which amounted to about three pages of transcripts per interview. The PEs and I felt that the organization was “clearly needing to hold back for some reason” (PE interview). The first PE, from the first cohort, described disappointment about how the administration handled information-sharing because there was none.

Four of the five PEs were YOC, and the intern was a POC, as well as a member of the LGBTQ community, joining several layers of complexity. He initially represented someone to which the PEs could aspire. One PE explained, “I’m not gonna lie, I cried. And I talked to my mom about it because it was like, ‘I found someone that [shared my ethnicity], was in the LGBT community, probably wants things that I want, probably can help me with so many things about myself.’ And it’s like; he did that?”

The PEs described being “in a state of denial.” Another said, “When I first heard about the news, I tried to reason with myself. ‘This might not be true because he’s such a good person,’ I thought. But then, I felt really guilty about thinking that.” When I asked why they stayed when the majority of their peers left, they all said some version of; “it reinforced the idea that peer education is so important! Because so many people have been hurt like that. And they don’t have anyone to go to, and I think it’s easier to go to a peer after you’ve been hurt by adults so many times” (PE interview).

My conversation with peers seemed cathartic for them, giving them an ability to wrestle with ambiguity around sexual agency and sexual deviance, thinking through the complexities and layers of identity and relationships. I surmised that from listening to their struggle to take the valuable information that J shared away from the actions of the person who shared it. In the end, showing great maturity, they did that. It taught me a valuable lesson about doing the same thing, keeping the knowledge, and healing from the abuse I experienced.

My job as an evaluator was to hold space for PEs to share and to not burden them with managing my emotions. Since I could not tell anyone, consult with leadership, or quit the evaluation, which I thought about doing every single day, I wrote in my journal:

I feel disconnected from everything. I want to ask about being more integrated, but I am not sure how to while everyone is grieving. I find it difficult to write and think, make my brain go back online. I miss my researcher-self. Is it because I am not well-versed in evaluation, sexual violence literature, autoethnography, or is it trauma? It is undeniable J’s actions will leave a mark on the program. He is a wolf at the table, teaching about consent, boundaries, and healthy relationships here while exploiting them elsewhere. I expect to see a lot of staff and PE attrition in pursuit of self-care and healing. I wonder, how will this situation play out in the

PE interviews? I feel that this is a terrible betrayal, a monumentally obscene situation; I am sick with disgust. I cannot see how to move forward” (Journal Reflection, April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2019).

That month, everything got quiet as the resigning lead program manager, and executive director (ED) shouldered the reorganization of the program, hiring AS, and holding healing circles. At the final leadership meeting with the resigned program managers, I wrote down how the ED responded with immense strength and compassion. When we were villainizing a perpetrator, she spoke about J’s suffering, seeing him both as a victim of violence, and responsible for his actions.

The interviews, the silence, the sense of guilt and shame were contributing factors to why I ultimately decided to write about this. Autoethnography is about creating linkages between the personal, interpersonal, and culturally significant (Ellis, 2004). Two cultural narratives converged on what happened.

There is a pervasive cultural narrative that portrays gay males and transgender adults as predatory, signally that society must protect children at all costs, a tale we—the LGBTQ+ community-- often distance ourselves from by replicating heteronormativity (Butler, 2002; Oswald et al., 2005). The legacy of this narrative silences the erotic makes our identities a taboo topic to discuss and disassociates QTYOC from their sexual and relational agency. Additionally, the sex panic narrative invokes racialized rhetoric that Black men are predators, and society must also save white women at all costs (Lancaster, 2011).

The silence of loving LGBTQ+ relationships and the proliferation of master narratives that positions the culture as pedophilic creates a hostile atmosphere for

QTYOC. While navigating critical developmental stages, the media portrays QTYOC as sexually deviant, accessible, villainous, or expendable. Mass media depictions frequently fetishize QTYOC and LGBTQ+ intergenerational relationships (Davies, 2007; Schuster, Reisner, & Ono, 2016; Stockton, 2007). This legacy continuously messages to QTYOC that they are objects of attention, affection, and adult desires (Raible, 2011). One, it assumes that QTYOC are not worthy of protection or boundaries. Two, it disallows them to self-define their relationships within the construct of legitimized family (cf Catalpa & Routon, 2018). Three, the cultural master narratives erase the possibility of accurate representations.

Project CLEAR ran into J, a person caught in this system of relational violence against QTYOC. Though he never physically harmed the PEs, he enacted several forms of violence, contaminating the precious pocket of safety Project CLEAR represented. He invaded the stakeholders' privacy and distorted and used the pain they intended to share. He also reinforced the worst narratives about QTPOC in a political climate that already does not favor minority communities or the organizations that serve them. He caused harm by poisoning a needed resource. The PEs and program managers that worked with him said they saw "red flags" that made sense only after the situation came to light. The harrowing feelings either directly or indirectly resulted in the managers and most of the PEs leaving.

**Three Burritos & Steven!** Although I observed silence and some emptiness after several people deboarded, I mostly witnessed the capacity for Project CLEAR's

curriculum to address the type of harm J had caused, relational violence. My first participant observation as a form of evaluation was AS training her first cohort of recruits. The objective was to detail how the learning process unfolded. I went into the observations focusing on the energy in the room, the PEs' willingness to participate, their thoughtful contributions and interpersonal interactions, AS's training techniques, and in the moment adaptations.

Ever in the 'get lost' method, I did not fully realize the task at hand in terms of ethnographic observation (Rooke, 2010) and naïve about the curriculum as well. Without having conducted field observations, I was unaware of the need for fieldworkers to moderate vulnerability (Behar, 1996). Later, when I was researching and analyzing my observations, I read that the field of ethnography struggles with the dichotomy of whether to act or observe (Behar, 1996; Fields, 2016). My queer paradigm, "Spidey sense," as Charlie would put it (PE Interview, August 14<sup>th</sup>, 2019), questioned the false dichotomy. Marinating on my first observation, I noticed when the opportunity appeared for me that my reflex was to act *and* observe.

I was sitting at a large table, AS was to my right leading the discussion, two PEs were to my left, and a few other PEs were across from me; they seemed undeterred by my presence. I was listening, writing notes about how AS was training on the topic, and quickly jotting down a few poignant phrases from the PEs. Everything was going as planned. The PEs quickly turned the conversation to abuse, their plethora of experiences with violence. I noted descriptions of family violence, PEs talking about their parents'

ridicule, and invasion of privacy. I thought, “they are so stoic about these abuses.” One PE said plainly, “there are no good people in the world.” The statement was flat, said with total indifference as if it were merely an everyday fact.

The conversation moved to survival sex. PEs were talking about life circumstances, how it is just something that can happen. Another PE said dryly, “I have no sense of self, and I do not care about what people do to me. I deserve this.” Yet another PE explained to the group, “Yeah, I have night terrors every night. I’ve become numb to the violence every day. I feel very vulnerable.” I noticed I felt uncomfortable about how matter of fact the young people were expressing violence and a lack of self-regard, showing no emotional attachment to the horrific things that happened to them.

AS moved the conversation to how to talk to survivors of violence and how PEs can support peers who make disclosures to them. She asked, “What are ways that we can affirm people who’ve had these experiences?” and picked up a marker to write their responses. One PE said quickly and emphatically, “I believe you!” Another PE offered a response, “it took courage for you to tell me.” The PE next to me began to weep. I heard him quietly sniffle, then continued to observe and write the responses. But my mind froze, as I became preoccupied with my own bubbling emotions. I looked to my left; I saw the PE’s face was red and puffy; tears silently rolled down his cheeks. His peers kept offering suggestions, “I care about you,” “It shouldn’t have happened,” “it’s not your fault.”

At that phrase, “it’s not your fault,” the PE’s weeping turned to loud sobs; he snorted and convulsively tried to catch his breath. I was still partially frozen, part observing, part writing, and anxiously thinking, “What should I do? What should AS do? What should we do!?” I looked up at AS; she noticed the PE was upset.

I got the sense from our glance at each other that she decided to give the PE space, determining that it was okay to cry and feel big feelings. I tried to quell my discomfort with strong emotions and followed her lead. The PE next to me stood up, grabbed a hand-knitted blanket, and wrapped himself up in it. Two more PEs began to cry; they also got up and grabbed blankets. They threw the blankets around their shoulders and walked back while others kept suggesting affirmations to survivors, “you are not worthless,” “it’s okay to fuck up,” “you are safe,” “everybody you love is safe.” AS noticed the room was distracted and antsy and called for a ten-minute break.

I got up but decided not to leave the room. Instead, I transitioned to the couch area where the three burritos had found the blankets. The blanketed burritos sat on the couch near me, wrapped head to toe in trans-affirming blankets. I looked around the room nervously, trying not to impose my presence. I saw that a large paper on the wall listed Steven Universe as a positive media representation. I started talking with the PEs about the show, and how healing it was for me.

Steven Universe is a story about unconditional love and queer kinship. Within the queer community, the show is well-known. The story portrays:

LGBTQ+ relationships through ‘fusion’ when two ‘gems’ become one. For example, Steven and another character, Connie, ‘fuse’ into a non-binary character,

Stevonnie, who uses they/them pronouns. [Earlier] in the series, we also learned that a character named Garnet is a fusion of two gems known as Ruby and Sapphire. Garnet, therefore, is essentially a lesbian couple” (Rude, 2018).

The show’s focal point is a family comprised of “Garnet, Amethyst, Pearl, and Steven!” (Sugar, Aivi, & Surasshu, 2017). I watched the series while I was in the IOP, listening to the songs as a form of coping.

I told the PEs I had the Steven Universe soundtrack on my phone and asked if I could play them the song. I played “Here Comes a Thought.” The song is about reassuring ourselves that the moment of discomfort will pass and through self-compassion reminding ourselves we are not alone (Sugar, 2017). The PEs and I started singing the song together. In a later retelling of the story, AS laughed and shared, “I always hear, ‘it’s okay; it’s okay; it’s okay’ in your voice” (Sugar, 2017; AS, Informal Interview, February 12<sup>th</sup>, 2019). Through the song, the mood changed in the training as the PEs returned to their jubilant selves, now wanting to share their favorite memes, YouTube videos, and cartoons.

My first observation illuminated the extent of PE experiences with violence and the knowledge they possessed, as well as their desire to connect and be affirmed. I also became tangibly aware of Lorde’s (1984) argument about the power of bearing witness to each other’s pain as a form of healing and self-recognition. I learned that talking about pain reinforced PEs’ current reality while being affirmed appeared scary and foreign. Participant interviews revealed how PEs understood themselves in the world, while participant observations exposed how PEs interacted with the curriculum. The two

activities were reinforcing, cultivating knowledge about the instructional process, which proved helpful to AS.

**Failing authentically.** Before intentionally observing the PEs, I unintentionally observed Andrew present at a biannual queer and transgender youth conference hosted by the school district. They called the facilitation “Color 4 You” using the title to denote that it was a space for YOC. In Andrew’s PE workshop evaluation, a peer participant said that a strength of the facilitation was, “Black leadership hosting a POC specific workshop.” Participants indicated they enjoyed a safe space for YOC to process healthy relationships and consent without white people in the room. As more cohorts joined Project CLEAR, PEs wanted to infuse their unique cultural and racial experiences into Andrew’s workshop.

I observed a second workshop where three PEs presented “Color 4 You” at a different conference. This time, Andrew looked flustered. The workshop no longer resembled what she designed. Starting the presentation, Andrew snapped, “this workshop is only for POC and white appearing POC. If you are white or white-identified, you got to go.” Nearly the entire room left, including many YOC, who left with their white friends (Journal Observations, November 6<sup>th</sup>, 2019). A few months later, the PMs worked on revamping workshops, structuring the process of infusing new PEs’ voices.

I observed a conversation between G, a new intern, and Andrew. I asked G for permission, then talked with Andrew about my observations in November 2019. I asked, “how are you going to excuse white people from the room without losing most of your

audience like last time?” She listed off several strategies; “I will open the room to speak. I’m going to maintain the queer space, and I’m going to excuse white people by explaining the purposes of the space. I’m gonna tell them that if they’re white identifying, there are other workshops for them” (Journal Observations, February 17<sup>th</sup>, 2019). Andrew exhibited tremendous growth in their reflexive response and several ideas to maintain a YOC only space. Although new PEs may have encroached on “Color 4 You,” Andrew’s main objective was to create space for himself and others, expressing that it was more important to maintain the space “for the youth.”

Based on the PEs’ collective workshop output, AS prepared scripts to help guide them through the presentations. During rehearsal, Andrew became frustrated again, throwing her papers down; she said, “I’m not feeling it! It’s too formal and not peer to peer. It makes it seem like ‘I have more power than you’ (Journal Observations, February 23<sup>th</sup>, 2019). On reflex, AS opened dialogue asking PEs, “what are the barriers?” The general sentiment was, “the scripts did not sound authentic.” A sentiment that perplexed AS because she had carefully prepared the scripts to reflect PEs’ work. After the meeting, she asked for my thoughts, and I told her she handled it well, though I could see she was defensive. I also checked on Andrew, who explained, a fire in his room at the youth shelter, and a lack of sleep primarily caused the frustration.

Later that night, I thought about my interviews and observations; then, a few days later, I sent AS an email. I wrote:

Even though the script was based wholly on what youth designed, I think to them, it felt sanitized and turned into a product that no longer resembled the components

that made up the product. Adults want things to be neat and orderly, and even when the youth want a script, so they aren't bombing in front of their peers, scripting also adds a layer of pressure to match yourself up with a tidy product. My main takeaway is that failing authentically can be as developmental and positive as nailing a great facilitation and feeling very confident and competent. (Email to AS, February 26<sup>th</sup>, 2019).

AS wrote me back, "THANK YOU FOR THIS WISDOM. You are exactly right. I'm learning so much <3 thank you <3" (Email from AS, February 26<sup>th</sup>, 2019). My ability to connect several observations to PEs' explanations about how they experience the world and the program helped the entire instructional process and supported staff implementation in real-time.

I provided AS with nuanced insight into what the PEs valued about Project CLEAR - trust, autonomy, and authenticity, and writing AS the email was when I began to realize that the post-hoc evaluation adjustments resulted in my original aim, which was queering evaluation. I was generating a different type of information mined from the careful and professional navigation of relationships, care, and boundaries. I could not have given AS that insight if I did not have relationships with Andrew and AS, I had not conducted ongoing observations in different contexts, or had not previously interviewed PEs.

### **Buildings and Bridges**

The stories I shared depict several disruptions of traditional research, contradicting that "the norms of scholarship do not require that researchers bare their souls, only their procedures" (Lofland & Lofland, 1995, p.13). It is a queer endeavor to bare my procedures, delicately packaged in stories of pain, vulnerability, anxiety,

helplessness, conscience, and consciousness. I showed the importance of creating relationships that can guide improvement-based decision-making. I also exposed my unique approach to situating myself as a non-threatening entity (Primeau, 2003), by talking about cartoons and singing with the PEs and not imposing research hierarchies.

At the same time, I highlighted approaching research with care and honesty, by questioning with consent, sharing my vulnerability while regulating my emotions, and holding space for stakeholders' vulnerability. I sought to intentionally take the PEs' perspectives, working to understand what they tried to communicate to me. I researched from within the passion of experience (hooks, 1994) and made sense of my experiences through self-recognition (Lorde, 1984). I conclude this chapter by using the final evaluative conversation I had with AS as a springboard for discussion.

**“Forget your perfect offering.”** AS told me two stories that summed our experiences since May 2019. She likened the process to a Jewish story called Tikkun Olam, which is a social justice concept of “repairing the world.” She told me that “our broken pieces are what has brought us to Project CLEAR to be in community with each other” (AS audio recording, February 28<sup>th</sup>, 2020). She also offered a song for inspiration to push through the failure to be perfect.

The song is called “Anthem” by Leonard Cohen. Sitting at the local queer café, AS and I sang the song as a call and response:

Ring the bells that still can ring. (ring the bells that still can ring)  
Forget your perfect offering. (forget your perfect offering)  
There is a crack, a crack in everything. (a crack in everything)  
That's how the light gets in!! (That's how the light gets in!!) (see Appendix B)

I built a queered evaluation on a bridge of friendship and camaraderie over time with program stakeholders, twice. I explored my personal and political experiences as a form of research (Ellis, 2004; Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1983), engaged in the uses of the erotic (Lorde, 1984), trusted the existential reality of the oppressed (van Manen, 1990; Freire, 2000), lost my way and embraced failure (Halberstam, 2011). I exercised a politics of outness, which first represented coming out as homosexual (Namaste, 1994). However, in this text, I enacted outness by desilencing my experiences with violence, personally claiming the #MeToo hashtag and disrupting mental health stigma by sharing accounts of receiving IOP treatment. In each section, I reflected on personal experiences with trauma, connecting my lived experiences to prominent cultural literature, as well as my participant observations and interviews (Ellis, 2004).

**Confessing the principles of queered evaluation methods.** The awkward silence about J crept into and loomed over the evaluation, which mandated that I address the situation without putting shame on the PEs who still felt hurt. They recognized that he was not a reflection of the organization, nor the people who held a similar identity to him. J was an individual, worthy of both compassion and responsibility. A sad reality is that relational violence, particularly sexual violence, is abhorrently prevalent in QTYOC communities (Langenderfer-Magruder, Brown, Walls, Barrett, & Whitfield, 2015; Singh & McKleroy, 2011). An outcome of victimization is perpetration (Reuter, Newcomb, Whitton, & Mustanski, 2017).

Lorde (1984) contends there is no creative use for guilt. RC can release themselves from any sense of guilt, shame, and silence; they can give the shame back. Carried shame is an abusive tactic to instill powerlessness and worthlessness (Mellody, 1992), and silence preserves normativity and limits inquiry (Rooke, 2010). “The fear that we cannot grow beyond whatever distortions we may find within ourselves keeps us docile and loyal and obedient, externally defined, and leads us to accept many facets of our own oppression” (Lorde, 1984, p. 58). Abuse-related shame is a contributor to long term post-traumatic stress symptomology (PTSS) and impedes emotional processing (Feiring & Taska, 2005). Thus, it is imperative that individuals experiencing any form of relational violence feel able to share their stories, allow others to bear witness, and release themselves from the confines of guilt, shame, and silence.

I propose that careful research, that is, a research approach full of care, can empower people through the intimate acts of bearing witness to and affirming each other’s experiences. The eight principles of a relational approach to evaluation and research include; 1) designing and writing research that shares knowledge, 2) self-recognition and care, 3) interpersonal bridge-making, 4) consideration of lifeworld domains and pathic experiences of human consciousness, 5) researcher courage to reveal failure and authenticity, 6) intentional, relentless perspective-taking, 7) storytelling-based empowerment, and 8) a future orientation of reciprocity. A limitation or opportunity of research and writing vulnerably is a leap of faith that readers hold the narratives tenderly. Little evidence suggests that happens often, and I did it anyway. I have a future

orientation that helping my communities helps me and that helping humans helps the world.

My autoethnography explored the duality of maintaining objectivity, as well as approaching research as embodied humans concerned with connection and compassion (Fields, 2016; Primeau, 2003).

A researcher, by nature, has to have some level of outsidership to conduct research... There is othering in the very act of studying, a necessary stepping back or distancing in varying degrees. Researchers, then, can be neither an insider nor outsider; they are instead temporarily and precariously positioned within a continuum” (Eppley, 2006, p. 4).

This confessional tale about queering evaluation used autoethnography to expose the successes and failures I experienced while navigating the tightrope of “acting like an insider and feeling like the outsider” (Lorde, 1984, p.170).

### **Conclusion: Toward a Queer Utopia**

I designed and discussed a form of research written on the body, that cuts deeper than identity, a powerful tool to forge relationships across human experience moving forward. In my writing, Lorde’s (1984) “Uses of the Erotic” permeates the research and evaluation showing how connection, care, sharing, and a relational approach helps build bridges of authenticity, allowing for an examination of that which often goes unnoticed. Our world would benefit significantly from enacting power with people who know differently (Freire, 2000). *This Bridge* promotes the idea that our embodied experiences create a specific way of knowing that can only be shared, not reproduced. “One of the lies we need to unlearn is that we have to do things on our own. That is how oppression

works; it isolates us...We need each other to move towards the queer utopia” (AS, audio-recording, February 28<sup>th</sup>, 2020).

## CHAPTER THREE

### Building a Queer Utopia: Queer and Transgender Youth of Color on Healthy Relationships and Healing from Trauma

*“I’m marching on to the beat I drum  
I’m not scared to be seen  
I make no apologies.”  
- This is Me, Kesha*

#### Introduction

Utopia is “an insistence on something else, something better, something dawning” (Muñoz, 2009, p. 189). In queer theory, queer utopia represents worldmaking (Alexander, 2017); it is a blueprint for our aspirations and disidentification, the horizon of a possible world not yet here (Dahl, 2014; Muñoz, 2010). Due to silence, invisibility, and erasure, queer and transgender youth and queer and transgender youth of color (QTYOC<sup>3</sup>) rarely receive adequate or accurate information to help them navigate unique relational and identity milestones (Diamond & Butterworth, 2008; Diamond, 2003).

I evaluated a community-based intervention program, Project CLEAR (Consent Leads to Empowering and Affirming Relationships) that aimed to improve the skills and knowledge and promote healthy relationship behaviors among QTYOC. Interviews with QTYOC program participants, peer educators (PEs), served as one method of evaluating

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<sup>3</sup> I used the acronym QTYOC to represent and encompass how the program’s youth clients self-defined (Beckholt, 2020). LGBTQ+ and the term sexual and gender minorities encompasses lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning populations, plus all non-monogamous, non-cisgender, and non-heterosexual individuals who identify within the LGBTQ+ community (see Bolger & Killerman, 2019).

the efficacy of Project CLEAR. In this analysis, I center my interview participants' voices, their articulation of the program's ability to empower QTYOC to envision and construct a more relational and caring future, a queer utopia.

This chapter, every section, holds writing space for my participants' narratives to co-create knowledge that will contribute to the scholarly literature. By highlighting participants' stories about everyday struggles to resist oppression, I show that our mainstream systems, bent on normativity, are violent toward QTYOC. Together, my participants and I communicate resistance to normativity frameworks and a new world on the horizon, one wherein QTYOC are validated and represented (Alexander, 2017; Muñoz, 2010; Stone, 2013). In doing so, we provide a counter-narrative to the dominant heterosexual, cisgender, adult, and white normative representation within research, society, media, and school-based sexual education curriculums, which render QTYOC invisible.

For QTYOC, learning about healthy relationships from mainstream society signals a development journey into a world of intimacies and pleasures that are shared by all humans involved in intimate relationships, a kind of "utopia" waiting for them as they mature. However, the QTYOC utopia is counterbalanced by "dystopia," societal messages of "warnings and cautions" they must carefully heed (O'Quinn & Fields 2019, p. 182). Along with silence and erasure, QTYOC navigate a violent dystopian reality, experiencing high rates of hate-based, family, and intimate partner violence (Katz-Wise

& Hyde, 2012; Langenderfer-Magruder et al., 2015; Snapp, Hoenig, Fields, & Russell, 2014; Tillery, Ray, Cruz, & Waters, 2017).

Violence, stigmatizing representation, and erasure thwart self-confidence and interpersonal relationships (Baams, Grossman, & Russell, 2015). Irrelevant learning prospects prevent QTYOC from exploring their sexual and gender identities and growing their skills to negotiate healthy intimate peer relationships (Budge, Chin, & Minero, 2017; Farmer & Byrd, 2015). Systemic barriers to resources increase vulnerability, leaving QTYOC susceptible to toxic relationships. According to the 2019 Minnesota Student Survey (MSS), Indigenous (3.1%), transgender (5.9%) and gender-questioning (3.3%) youth were overrepresented for commercialized sexual exploitation compared to their cisgender, white, male (1.2%) and female (1.3%) counterparts (Martin, McMorris, Johnston-Goodstar, & Rider, 2020). Given systemic violence and inadequate school-based sexual education curriculums to address the needs of their LGBTQ+ students, community collaborators designed a healthy relationship curriculum for QTYOC specifically.

**The program and evaluation.** Project CLEAR is a comprehensive pilot program designed to reduce the severity and incidence of sexual violence against QTYOC. Leadership stakeholders, collaborators from a local mental health organization, the local public school district, and county sexual violence outreach centers created new healthy relationships Project CLEAR curriculums, one for adult school staff, and one for training QTYOC to become peer educators. The program consists of three prongs: 1) school-

based staff training and student group therapy sessions to protect students from commercialized sexual exploitation, 2) peer education training for QTYOC who then facilitate peer-led workshops, 3) therapeutic intervention for QTYOC from therapists at the community-based mental health organization housing Project CLEAR. The Department of Justice, Office on Violence Against Women (OVW), funded the program. I evaluated Project CLEAR as a part of the program's grant requirements.

Since November 2017, I have designed, implemented, managed, and analyzed evaluation data for the program and organization. In collaboration with stakeholders, I created the logic model (see Appendix C), designed an evaluation plan, and, together, we implemented my proposed community-based mixed-methods assessment (see Appendix D). For more information on the methods by which I studied the entirety of Project CLEAR, see "Appendix D." This study addressed one qualitative component, phenomenological interviews with six QTYOC who served as PEs for Project CLEAR; Charlie, Zinnia, Andrew, Erin, Anais, and Ari (see Table 1). PEs' storytelling aided assessment of Project CLEAR's impact on its target audience. As a result of my hermeneutic phenomenological analysis of PEs' narratives, I expanded and created new theoretical tools to understand with greater nuance the lived experiences of QTYOC.

**A note on queering scholarly writing.** Unfortunately, a global pandemic and social distancing significantly limited my ability to co-author and member-check with the PEs. I conducted informal member-checking with the youth participants via telecommunication by explaining to them my writing and ideas as they evolved, asking

for and taking notes on their input and suggestions. Although I could not co-author or do a formal member-check with my PE participants, I am indebted to them for sharing their wisdom and experiences, without which this co-production of knowledge was not possible. In an effort to infuse their voices throughout the writing, I decided on a method of queering scholarly writing.

When I learned how to write about qualitative data, academia trained me to set the context and theory for a study, then to introduce the participants and researchers' findings emerging from their narratives (Holliday, 2007). I have always disliked that conventional writing practice because it structurally situates researchers as experts on participants' lives. Most instruction books on how to write literature reviews perhaps would not even consider the inclusion of participants' narratives in the literature review. The premise for exclusion is that these narratives are invalid knowledge bases upon which to draw when setting the study's context because they are also the research subjects.

In this case, that premise didn't fit. Participants spoke in great length about the context of their experiences and what brought them to the programming. Therefore, I infused participatory writing into the context-setting literature review for this evaluation research study paper (Marciano & Warren, 2019). In concert with relevant scholarship, I organized PEs' stories about their *past* life course experiences with minority stressors (Meyer, 2003; Testa, Habarth, Peta, Balsam, & Bockting, 2015). I framed the literature based on our conversations. We spoke about PEs' past life course experiences with violence and abuse, developmental growth, mental health, self-care, interpersonal

relationships, and societal master and alternative narratives (McLean & Syed, 2016) about their identities. I also used PEs' words of instruction about healthy relationships to convey their assessment of Project CLEAR's curriculum and programming. According to "queer social research methods," I questioned the "origins and effects" of, and, ultimately, disidentified with longstanding scholarly writing traditions (Brim & Ghaziani, 2016, p. 16). I used an alternative approach with an explicit goal to uplift PEs' voices early and often in writing. Doing this represents an act of queer worldmaking and a gesture towards greater social justice in academic writing (Alexander, 2017).

**Research questions.** Using hermeneutic phenomenological methods, I explored the following research questions to evaluate Project CLEAR;

1. What are peer educators' life course experiences before, during, and after they participate in the Project CLEAR healthy relationships intervention?
2. What are Project CLEAR's contributions to positive youth development among PEs?
3. What are PEs' contributions to their communities through their participation in Project CLEAR?

In light of PEs' descriptions about their life course experiences *during* the program, findings reveal Project CLEAR's efficacy and contributions to the PEs, as well as PEs' narrations about queer worldmaking to build a more hopeful and loving *future*. I conclude Study 2 with a discussion of Project CLEAR's theory-of-change, future research and potential summative instrumentation, and evaluative implications for research with QTYOC in the Evaluation and Family Science disciplines.

## **Literature Review**

Based on PE narratives, I researched minority stressors, peer education interventions, and heterosexual and LGBTQ+ sexual education curriculums, as well as literature on the tenets underpinning Project CLEAR programming. Minority stressors are additive layers of distress conferred onto subjugated individuals, communities, and societies due to oppression inherent in the structures of civilization (Galeano, 2000; Freire, 2000; Meyer, 2003). Minority stressors endorse systemic violence against QTYOC, including the erasure of their experience in school-based curriculums, the punishment of public displays of affection, and alienation from social networks and resources (Snapp et al., 2014). Previous scholarship suggests that the Project CLEAR curriculum and a peer education modality may be uniquely situated to intervene in incidences of sexual violence and other forms of abuse (Foshee et al., 2009), enabling QTYOC to grow their self-knowledge and relational competencies (Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Poteat et al., 2015; Vygotskiï & Cole, 1978).

**Minority Stressors.** Several minority stressors are relevant to understand the lived experiences of QTYOC; most often, participants referenced racism, sexism, heterosexism, and adultism. Sexism includes privileging men over women, transgender, and gender-variant individuals (Serano, 2007). Beyond sexual violence, which is a complex and persistent public health issue (Dank, Lachman, Zweig, & Yahner, 2014), QTYOC navigated overlapping oppressed identities giving rise to nuanced experiences with violence, both proximal and distal (Meyer, 2010; Rood et al., 2016). I expanded my

evaluative aim to assess Project CLEAR's ability to intervene in incidences of sexual violence, as well as other forms of relational violence resultant from minority stressors.

QTYOC navigate alternative personal narratives, such as experiences of racial violence and war-based trauma. For example, I asked Zinnia what she wanted to share from her experience. She said:

From my experience? Well, my mom is a refugee and my dad; he wasn't a refugee because my grandpa was an important political figure in Cambodia, so he got flown in before the war. But he still knows war and that stuff. So when I first came out to my parents, it wasn't so much like 'ew, you're gay.' It was more like, 'I've given you this life full of opportunity, and you want to somehow put yourself at more of a disadvantage than you already are.'"

Zinnia said her experiences might resonate with queer and transgender youth from refugee, immigrant, migrant, and asylum-seeking populations (cf Berg & Millbank, 2009; Cantú, 2008; Lewis & Naples, 2014; Manalansan IV, 2006; Munro et al., 2013; Padilla, Rodriguez-Madera, Varas-Diaz, & Ramos-Pibernus, 2016). She surfaced QTYOC experiences with navigating young adult development from the context of someone whose family experienced wartime displacement and racial violence, bringing to light how the context influenced familial neglect to support her sexual orientation. Racial, sexual, gender, and adultist associated minority stressors reinforce several forms of relational violence that ravage the inner worlds of QTYOC in nuanced ways and disrupt their willingness to seek external connections (Brown & Mar, 2018; Follins, Walker, & Lewis, 2014; Galeano, 2000; Singh, Meng, & Hansen, 2014).

**Relational violence.** Experiences of relational violence are commonplace for QTYOC (Anyon, Kennedy, Durbahn, & Jenson, 2018; Singh, Hays, & Watson, 2011;

Singh & McKleroy, 2011). For example, systemic adultism disregards youth's autonomy, competence, and confidence, and fosters violence against youth (Bell, 2003). Anais said, "there was this adult who came up to me, a random adult. I still don't know who they are, and was like, 'why are you doing that? [wearing a bisexual pride flag]. You're too young. You're so confused.'" Anais's story shows how parental and societal perceive youth's racial, sexual, and gender identities and expressions as deviant, and in response, QTYOC experience greater control and social policing (Catalpa & McGuire, 2018; Singh et al., 2014).

In self-determination, Anais said, 'What do you mean I'm confused!?' I'm comfortable with my sexuality!" Although she fended the comment off, QTYOC experience sustained adultism, racism, heterosexism, and sexism, which has cascading effects. When adults thwart youth's autonomy and sense of competence, they are less likely to seek connection with adults (La Guardia & Patrick, 2008). Indeed, all youth participants said adults could not be trusted and that they would not go to adults for support because they've been hurt by adults too many times. Societal and adult stymieing of youth's self-determination prevents their access to positive adult-youth relationships and necessary resources associated with those scaffolding networks (Singh, 2013; Vygotskiï & Cole, 1978).

*Systemic oppression in curriculums.* Inherent in systematic oppression are societal structures and processes that strategically reinforce subjugation. Abstinence and sexually transmitted infection (STI) sexual education programming centers

heteronormativity and fails to prepare students on how to navigate intimate peer relationships specific to QTYOC (Foshee et al., 2011; Greytak, Kosciw, & Boesen, 2013; Mustanski, Garofalo, Monahan, Gratzner, & Andrews, 2013). The “Safe Dates” sexual violence prevention program, designed for heterosexual and mostly white adolescents, effectively reduced dating abuse, other forms of violence, and perpetration of dating violence (Foshee et al., 2005, 2011, 2014). Though the community-based “Safe Dates” curriculum is adaptable to LGBTQ+ needs, the programming does not accurately center QTYOC. Thus, the curriculum currently available ineffectively addresses unique systemic, intersectional minority stressors QTYOC face.

Likewise, school-based sex education curriculums erase QTYOC from the conversation and promote abstinence-only strategies (Fisher, 2009). Erin said, “if I speak in class, someone is going to ask why I did not say a guy and girl.” However, community-based curriculums designed for LGBTQ+ communities concerns primarily sexually transmitted infections (Bauermeister et al., 2015; Garofalo et al., 2012; Mustanski, Garofalo, Monahan, Gratzner, & Andrews, 2013), with little focus on relational competencies (cf Mustanski, Greene, Ryan, & Whitton, 2015). These gaps in curriculum representation illustrate one reason why QTYOC have limited resources, blueprints, and skills training for negotiating identity exploration and pride, and structuring healthy relationships.

*(Inter)subjective violence.* Meyer (2003) theorized that external minority stressors become subjectively internalized messages of low self-esteem, worth, and

confidence. Interpersonally, QTYOC may learn to distrust white, cisgender, and heterosexual people, adults, and external institutions (Balsam, Molina, Beadnell, Simoni, & Walters, 2011; Mitchum & Moodie-Mills, 2014). Over time, the cascading stress takes a toll on financial opportunities, quality of life, and a sense of self (Arditti, Burton, & Neeves-Botelho, 2010). Hence, there is a higher probability of QTYOC suffering from negative internalizing and externalizing mental health consequences resulting from identity-based trauma and abuse (Budge, Adelson, & Howard, 2013; Rosario, Schrimshaw, & Hunter, 2012).

*Racial, sexuality, and gender violence.* Discussing a pandemic of suicide and homicide of people of color (POC) and transgender women of color (TWOC), Andrew said, “the statements, the depression, it trickles down, and it breaks you down.” Andrew surfaced that transmisogyny –the intersection of transphobia and contempt for women-- and racism were killing her communities (Krell, 2017; Serano, 2007). QTYOC experience violence related to subjugated identities that exist at several margins. Andrew’s intersectional experiences with sexism, racism, and transphobia illuminate another facet of minority stress, the concept of double consciousness (Du Bois, 2015), or a borderland experience (Anzaldúa, 1987).

The borderlands theory contends that women of mixed European, Hispanic, and Indigenous descent occupied a borderland identity where they were considered both and neither white nor Latinx (Anzaldúa, 1987). Charlie described a borderland experience, asserting:

I have never really entirely considered myself a POC. It's very interesting. I was adopted into a Caucasian family, and I grew up in like the upper-middle-class part of [a white suburb]. So, I was raised by white people in a very white neighborhood. I have the experiences of being within that white neighborhood and being perceived as a white person.

In Project CLEAR, some staff perceived Charlie as a POC and told them to join the POC workshop, which Charlie described as “a very awkward two minutes of freezing.” The borderland experiences of QTYOC primarily converge on navigating queer and POC cultures.

Meyer, Schwartz, and Frost (2008) found that LGBTQ+ POC reported societal pressures to disavow LGBTQ+ community membership in their communities of ethnic and racial origin, while LGBTQ+ communities erased individuals' ethnic and racial heritages. Anais discussed coming out as bisexual in both Black and Latinx communities. She described how bi-erasure within her family disconnected her from exploring a bisexual identity sooner. When Anais came out to family, she described “learning how to balance” reactions from her Black extended family members who were “very religious” and her “party Latinx” Puerto Rican side. Communities have varied socialized accepting and rejecting responses toward diverse LGBTQ+ identities (Ryan, Huebner, Diaz, & Sanchez, 2009; Ryan, Russell, Huebner, Diaz, & Sanchez, 2010). PEs benefited from Project CLEAR in teaching their families about LGBTQ+ culture, while also cultivating LGBTQ+ community spaces designed to center and celebrate QTYOC.

***White, homo, and transnormative violence.*** Anais surfaced LGBTQ+ erasure; however, other axes of oppression and forms of violence promote acts of disconnectedness and discrimination within the expansive LGBTQ+ community (Galupo

& Gonzalez, 2013; Galupo, Henise, & Davis, 2014; Stryker, 2008). When preparing for his interview, Ari mentioned twice that, because he is still exploring his identity, he was unsure if he qualified. Ari explained: “That’s why I wanted to do the allyship workshop. Because a lot of my perspective comes as that of an ally, even if I’m like, ‘yeah, I am bi,’ it still won’t be a huge part of me.” I noticed Ari painted his fingernails, so I asked: Do you not see that as gender-nonconforming?” He responded, “I like that. I do. I do want to do my part to break down the gender binary It’s a statement, you know, like ‘fuck your gender binary.’”

In the past and now, bisexual, transgender, gender-variant, and countless non-homonormative, non-monogamous, and non-transnormative people experience invisibility, discrimination, and harassment under a tattered LGBTQ+ umbrella (Duggan, 2002; Fassinger & Arseneau, 2007; Johnson, 2016; Weiss, 2008). Similarly, LGBTQ+ POC experience fetishization, racism, transphobia, religious and political persecution, and disproportionately high violence (Jackson, 2000; Lehavot, Balsam, & Ibrahim-Wells, 2009; Stryker, 2008). Experiences of social isolation from within LGBTQ+ communities further limit the pockets of safety QTYOC may access. Thus, for QTYOC, in addition to providing youth with safe space, Project CLEAR’s peer-led education component was a particularly useful instrument for disseminating Project CLEAR curriculum and intervention.

**Peer education to intervene in relational violence.** The idea of peer education is said to date back to Aristotle, conveying the idea of young people growing their

knowledge through a process of peer-to-peer teaching and learning with adult support (Turner & Shepherd, 1999). Erin described, “a peer [as] anyone that is in [their] general vicinity,” highlighting that PEs celebrated moments to share the Project CLEAR curriculum formally and informally, with anyone. In previous research, youth have reported that peers are an approachable and credible source of information; these studies have found that their facilitation style and methods for information dissemination were varied and engaging (Connolly et al., 2015; Mellanby, Rees, & Tripp, 2000; Turner & Shepherd, 1999).

Ari corroborated the literature when we discussed the importance of peer education for QTYOC. He said:

Peer education makes our voices as good as adults as a resource, but we are much more relatable, more approachable. We’re peers. We’re the same. [Q: The same?] In our role as a youth, especially queer youth. I would say if our knowledge of public speaking and queer issues were equal to that of an adult, the person our age would have an easier time talking to us and listening to us than they would an adult.

I asked Ari, “Why?” We continued talking about power. Ari settled that, although PEs possessed knowledge they want to impart on peers, it is power *with* their peers, it’s different in the sense of how an “adult definitely has power *over* a child.” Given the flattening of hierarchies, a peer education modality has the potential to neutralize adultism by having knowledgeable peers facilitate learning.

A central tenet of Ari’s argument about the validity of peer education was that youth are empowered to grow their intellect and skills as a means of disseminating emancipatory knowledge throughout their communities. However, less evidence exists to

support that peer-led sexual health or sexual assault education programs impact behavioral changes or the long-term decline in the incidence of sexual violence (Anderson & Whiston, 2005; Mellanby, Rees, & Tripp, 2000; Sun, Miu, Wong, Tucker, & Wong, 2018). In a meta-analysis on the effectiveness of 69 sexual assault education programs, researchers found that peer education was less successful in promoting behavior change, compared to adult-led programs (Anderson & Whiston, 2005). Findings were contradictory as to whether peer-led sexual assault prevention education was successful in changing severity-related outcomes overtime.

If PEs receive adult-led training and support, peer-led healthy relationships curriculums may be useful models for modifying social norms, promoting attitudinal shifts, and building knowledge, skills, and a sense of self-efficacy (Edwards et al., 2016; Oudekerk, Blachman, & Mulford, 2014; Weisz & Black, 2010). However, to the best of my knowledge, no evaluation of QTYOC healthy relationships curriculum with a peer education intervention modality exists (cf Edwards et al., 2016; Harris & Farrington, 2014). To evaluate the newly designed Project CLEAR QTYOC specific curriculum, I assessed; 1) the program's efficacy to train PEs to navigate healthy relationships, and 2) the mechanisms by which PEs internalized and 3) transferred their experiential knowledge to peer community members.

**Project CLEAR curriculum.** Project CLEAR leadership stakeholders designed the PE curriculum by borrowing lessons and activities from evidence-based programing (DeGue et al., 2014; Foshee et al., 2005; Kivel & Creighton, 1997), and adapting the

content for a QTYOC audience. PEs received sixteen hours of intensive training by Project CLEAR staff who were licensed therapists. Topics included healthy and unhealthy relationships, broadly. Skill-building focused on helping PEs cultivate a personal facilitation style and develop workshops on topics about which PEs were passionate.

The curriculum covered the following topics; harassment, power and control in heterosexual and same-sex relationships (Munson & Cook-Daniels, 2003; Pence & McMahon, 2008), queer and transgender relationships, media representation, rape culture, various types of abuse, trauma, commercialized sexual exploitation, social media, online safety, assertive communication, accountability, establishing boundaries, and practicing self-care (Defur, 2016; Montfort & Brick, 2007). Key curriculum elements were the power and control wheel for heterosexual and LGBTQ relationships (Munson & Cook-Daniels, 2003; Pence & McMahon, 2008), “Heartshields” exercises and education on elements of healthy relationships (Kivel & Creighton, 1997), training to recognize types of abuse and red flags in toxic relationships (Defur, 2016), consistent messaging on the definition of boundaries, and an unyielding focus on self-care and consent (Montfort & Brick, 2007). The nectar of Project CLEAR was at the intersection of the PE cohort, the staff-youth interpersonal relationships, and the curriculum that centered the needs and experiences of QTYOC.

Charlie explained to me that through the Project CLEAR curriculum, they were “able to more directly see [themselves] because of how the curriculum was written.”

Charlie said that the specific examples from the “LGBT Power and Control Wheel” (see Appendix E) allowed them to see “red flags” in toxic relationships. During PE training, Charlie explained, “I was like, ‘that! I did that. That is what is happening.’” The “LGBT Power and Control Wheel” includes abuse tactics from the heterosexual wheel (Pence & McMahon, 2008), as well as specific examples of power and control related to homo, bi, and transphobia, and HIV stigma (Munson & Cook-Daniels, 2013). Specific examples were things like not allowing a loved one to transition their gender or threatening to out someone.

Previous experiences with minority stressors, relational violence, and LGBTQ+ specific abuse tactics affect individual’s perceptions within their current relationships. The idea of “heartshields” is that people build shields around their hearts to protect themselves from the pain they felt in previous toxic relationships (Kivel & Creighton, 1997). During a reflection training activity, all PEs complete Kivel and Creighton’s (1997) heartshields activity, I provide an example of a PEs’ heartshield for reference in the appendix (see Appendix F). Erin elucidated, “Heartshields, it’s like our boundary armor. You have your heart, and you may have had or had not good experiences. If it was a bad experience, you now have a shield for your heart from that. And those build up.”

Through their recognition of heartshields, PEs galvanized toxic relationship attunement. A catchphrase within the program was “noticing red flags.” PEs already possessed an astute knowledge of unhealthy relationships; however, Project CLEAR provided vocabulary and examples of six types of abuse, physical, psychological,

emotional/verbal, financial, sexual, and stalking (Defur, 2016). PEs added to the types of abuse in their narratives, briefly discussing experiences with spiritual, cultural, identity, and environmental forms of relational violence. For example, Ari discussed environmental degradation; Anais revealed cultural appropriation of Puerto Rican heritage, intergenerational violence, historical trauma, and Andrew mentioned religious persecution. “Heartshields” explains the adaptive behaviors QTYOC employ for self-protection because of previous experiences with violence.

Andrew, who is currently adeptly navigating homelessness, told me that Project CLEAR gave her the “skills to break free.” I asked Andrew, “What skills?” She educated:

Well, if you see red flags, what you need to do is get out of the relationship. But if you can’t get the person to stop, you call the police. Even though that’s always... POC are always afraid to do that because it’s like police don’t help, nothing ever happens, and [abusers] get away with it, they just get out [of jail], or they come back around. Still, it’s better for you to call the police. Use the whitest voice as possible because then they will get there as fast as possible.

Andrew created “Color 4 You,” a POC-only workshop, to discuss the violence of silence and erasure against QTYOC and males experiencing sexual assault. Andrew lamented, “people don’t talk about that. There are people who say, ‘be a man!’ ‘Oh, you asked for it.’ There’s POC who are LGBT who are not ready, and they don’t want that, and they develop PTSS [post-traumatic stress symptomology] because of it” (Duke & Davidson, 2009; FORGE, 2011). Andrew is adamant that most of society does not understand the experiences of QTYOC and feels a tremendous responsibility to train others on self-protection, boundaries, safety, and care.

I analyzed PEs' narratives to describe and make visible their nuanced experiences (Fields, 2016; Marciano & Warren, 2019) and to evaluate Project CLEAR programming and curriculum. This section integrated PEs narratives with the extant literature to set the context for this study. PEs' narratives directed me to examine specific minority stressors related to racism, sexism, heterosexism, and adultism. Through our co-creation of knowledge, we illuminated how minority stressors thwart interpersonal relationships, and a sense of self, thereby creating vulnerabilities for the proliferation of adverse internal and external health outcomes. Also, I oriented readers to a peer-education intervention modality and the aspects of Project CLEAR that counteracts a legacy of silence and erasure of QTYOC experiences in school and community-based sexual education curriculums. In the next section, I outline the theoretical lenses I used to examine Project CLEAR's efficacy.

### **Conceptual Frameworks**

Positive youth development (PYD) theory (Lerner, Almerigi, Theokas, & Lerner, 2005) and master narrative theory (McLean & Syed, 2016) provided the frameworks for me to assess PE outcomes. I used master narrative theory to analyze PEs' negotiation of master and alternative narratives relative to their self-concept. I referred to PYD to analyze Project CLEAR outcomes across the "five C's;" competence, confidence, connection, character, and care (Lerner, Lerner, et al., 2005). The conceptual frameworks helped distinguish PEs' sense of growth and empowerment, as well as their attitudinal and behavioral changes, and growth in healthy relationships skills and knowledge.

PYD theory posits that organizations can promote desirable changes in youth outcomes through fostering internal motivation, youth empowerment, and civic engagement (Lerner, Lerner, et al., 2005). Master narrative theory is a conceptual framework to account for ways in which alternative narratives arise counter to mainstream societal stories about different groups and cultures (McLean et al., 2017; Syed & McLean, 2016). For example, a master narrative in society is that Black men enact toxic hyper-masculinity by divesting from femininity (Lee & Kwan, 2014). Anais countered this notion saying, “Not all Black men have toxic masculinity. I know that for a fact! My dad had to wear my [quinceañera] dress [for tailoring], and he put it on and started twirling.” Similarly, transnormativity represents the cultural aversion to expansive transgender identities. By promoting biological determinism, the gender binary, and medicalized transition, transnormativity reinforces internalized transphobia, sexism, and cisnormativity (Bradford & Syed, 2019).

PEs surfaced counternarratives consistently, and the Project CLEAR curriculum represented an alternative to mainstream sexual education. Master narrative theory exposed silence and erasure in mainstream curriculum, and, through wrestling with negative master narratives, PEs defined new modes of self-definition derived from power and resistance (McLean et al., 2017; O’Quinn & Fields, 2019). For instance, outcast members from within the transgender community resist transnormativity by exposing master narratives, expressing opposition, and reframing negative messages as strength and pride (Bradford & Syed, 2019). In Project CLEAR, PEs expressed identity pride and

confidence through countering master narratives, as Anais showed. PYD provided a framework to assess the efficacy of Project CLEAR to inspire exploration of master narratives and provided discernable outcomes for the growth and improvement in youth's competence, confidence, connection, care, and character, tools that contribute to society.

**Positive youth development.** In PYD, competence represents youth's knowledge to act effectively in social situations, and confidence refers to a sense of mastery and autonomy (Benson, Scales, Hamilton, & Sesma, 2007). Few studies have applied a PYD framework to QTYOC; however, research has found that gay-straight alliances (GSAs) helped students feel safe and connected to something bigger than themselves (Poteat et al., 2015). Lerner and colleagues (2005) conceptualized care as sympathy and empathy for others and a commitment to social justice. In this study, I reconceptualized care into two dimensions, such that compassion referred to external social justice and stewardship (Bowers et al., 2010), while care accounted for the self-care component that Project CLEAR promoted within the intervention. PYD programming aims to improve youth's character through civic engagement and growth (Anyon et al., 2018; Bowers et al., 2010).

Organizations employ a PYD framework to promote youth development by supporting youth-directed programming (Lerner, Lerner, et al., 2005). Adult and institutional support are essential components of providing the space, time, resources, and structure that enable youth to practice skills and grow through self-directed pursuits (Anyon et al., 2018; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Well-trained and supported staff stabilize programming, while consistency among staff assures continuity and an easier time of

reproducing a fidelitous intervention (Anyon et al., 2018; Benson, Scales, Hamilton, & Sesma, 2007; Whitaker et al., 2006). A key finding reported in the literature is that longer interventions with continuity in adult-youth relationships were more efficacious at reducing incidences of sexual violence and promoting positive youth development (Anderson & Whiston, 2005; Benson et al., 2007). Hence, a PYD framework is suitable for analyzing PE outcomes, as well as the mechanisms that Project CLEAR and adult staff employed to influence those outcomes.

In PYD, promoting youth growth in the five C's corresponds to the outcome of a sixth "C" contribution (Bowers et al., 2010). I analyzed Project CLEAR's contributions through PEs' narratives of growth in character, competence, confidence, connection, compassion, care, and empowerment. I also consider PEs' peer education as queer worldmaking efforts and contributions to their communities. Yep (2003) said, "queer worldmaking is the opening and creation of spaces without a map, the invention and proliferation of ideas without an unchanging and predetermined goal, and the expansion of individual freedom and collective possibilities" (p. 35). I assumed the Project CLEAR curriculum was an alternative narrative (McLean & Syed, 2016) to heteronormative sexual education (O'Quinn & Fields, 2019), which carved space for PEs to explore identity, connect with others, promote self-care, and empower their communities.

**Master narratives theory.** Master narratives function to maintain an oppressive status quo (Galeano, 2000; Muñoz, 2010). The theory posits five principles that enable the perception of master narratives by exposing their utility, ubiquity, invisibility,

rigidity, and the compulsory nature of such stories. The utility of master narratives is that they provide individuals with a guidebook to internalize how to belong; this includes (dis)information about histories, societal values, and worthy societal goals and achievements. Master narratives are shared references across a group or culture (McLean et al., 2017). Whether a person resists or embraces a master narrative, all members of a particular social group know the social norms that govern it.

The ubiquitous nature of master narratives confers invisibility, erasure of counter experiences, and the covertness of master narratives (McLean & Syed, 2016). Master narratives are often taken-for-granted because mainstream society saturates us with socializing messages about how to be a good member of society; white, heterosexual, cisgender, middle-class, and conformist to master narratives (d’Emilio, 1983; Foucault, 1977; Rahilly, 2015). McLean and Syed (2016) posited that master narratives are rigid, value-laden, and contain morality clauses. Adherence to master narratives confers “goodness” onto an individual and deviations beget risk or punishment (Oswald et al., 2005). Therefore, individuals tend to match personal narratives with master narratives to avoid societal backlash, while those who either cannot or do not want to attain membership within the master narrative live alternative narratives that often go unspoken.

Despite the presence of alternative narratives, dominant stories persist because they are compulsory (Rich, 1986) and rigid (McLean & Syed, 2016). Society incentivizes repetition and the ossification of master narratives (Butler, 2004; DeCuir & Dixon, 2004). “To maintain the validity of the original narrative, structures of societies constrain

and confine interpretive activities where the subjectivity of interpretation meets the facts on the ground” (McLean & Syed, 2016, p. 340). Project CLEAR curriculum fostered PEs’ recognition of negative master narratives and empowered PEs to articulate their lived experiences as valid alternative narratives. I conceptualized the Project CLEAR curriculum as an alternative narrative because the youth described its strength to generate knowledge about different types of relationships, provide nuance, address trauma, and apply to a non-conformist and non-binary existence.

### **Phenomenological Methods**

Per phenomenological methods for reflection, I used van Manen’s (1990) lifeworld existential to analyze PEs’ lived experiences in the domains of lived body, time, space, and relation. Phenomenology is a reading and writing method to “grasp the world pathically,” described as “the general mood, sensibility, sensuality, and felt sense of being in the world” (van Manen, 2007, p. 20). Van Manen (1990) suggested that four lifeworlds contribute to a phenomenological reflection that promotes perspective-taking to understand another’s experience pathically.

Lived temporality refers to a subjective sense of time. The PEs discussed a sense of “already” and “becoming,” suggesting the transitional nature of their current lifeworld experiences; goals met, and goals to achieve. Lived time and space often intersect, events happen at a time and place, or we move through time and space. Lived spatiality represents the stage of a performance. Husserl (1931) noted how his perception of a table changed —change is temporal-- as he moved positions, orienting to the object from a

different space. The PEs, account for the lived body dimension, and their connections, lived relations, play out in Project CLEAR spaces. Analytic awareness of space and time is central to understanding PEs' pathic and relational experiences.

I examined PEs' lifeworlds through participant observations at Project CLEAR gatherings and a one-on-one interview. Although I only discuss the interview data, the "explicitation interview (EI)" technique allowed me to gather detailed meaning-making information about the PEs' lifeworld experiences in the program, some of which I observed while evaluating Project CLEAR (Guba, 1978; Høffding & Martiny, 2016). In light of EI, I designed the interviews to be conversational, with interviewing prompts to move PEs from general descriptions and explanations about their past experiences to particular descriptions of experience via storytelling (Høffding & Martiny, 2016). I probed about different lifeworlds to understand how the PEs felt time, experienced spaces, engendered and revealed embodiment, and navigated interpersonal relationships.

**Self-as-researcher.** I used reflexivity to locate my standpoint—personal experiences that may affect my hermeneutic interpretation (Doyle, 2013; Ferguson, 2013; Harding, 2004). I claim the experience of being a white, transmasculine, university-based researcher with lived experience of healing from several forms of relational violence. I came out as queer in high school at a public institution that taught heterosexual abstinence-only sexual education. I did not attend a program like Project CLEAR. Recognizing these aspects of my life exposed my biases and blind spots as I conducted this research. Bracketing my experience equipped me to ask nuanced questions about

what I had not experienced, take the perspective of my participants, and understand the meanings they tried to convey during our interviews (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Harding, 2004).

**Participants.** My total analytic sample consisted of six PEs, five participants from cohorts one through three, and one participant from the sixth cohort (see Table 1). I recruited interview participants from the PEs involved in Project CLEAR. I observed and recruited from six cohorts of PEs. As background, Project CLEAR recruited QTYOC from the local community and schools via fliers (see Appendix G), word of mouth, and the housing organization's therapeutic services. The program offered PEs a stipend of \$250 for training to become a PE, with the possibility of another \$250 stipend for facilitating two peer-led workshops.

I stipulated my recruitment inclusion criteria this way, any PE participating in Project CLEAR who received a majority of PE intensive training, and conducted two peer educator workshops (i.e., those receiving the 500\$ stipend and "completing" the program). A massive wave of attrition hit cohorts one through three resulting in a response rate of 25%; only five of twenty participants remained in the program. I invited PEs who left the program to evaluate it. Of the twenty PEs, five agreed to interview, nine never responded, two responded with no follow-up, two provided written feedback, and two requested "do not contact." Several PEs left after receiving the full stipend, due to time constraints, and related to programmatic reorganization.

I also intended to interview PEs from cohorts four through six; unfortunately, the SARS-CoV-2 forced me to close the study abruptly. Given the first wave of attrition, I planned to open my study to PEs after they conducted at least one facilitation on the assumption that leading a workshop would serve a change promoting event containing lifeworld data about PEs' experiences training their peers. Ari was a PE from Cohort 6 who frequently attended the weekly huddles. I observed Ari facilitate workshop creation with PEs from all cohorts. I invited Ari to participate in an interview, resolving that I witnessed him act as a leader among leaders. Ari's interview was different in that we discussed a future orientation of his growth after facilitating at the upcoming conference. A few days before the conference, social distancing restrictions took effect, and the interviews I scheduled for after PEs facilitated in that conference fell through.

**Data collection.** For a broader evaluation of Project CLEAR, I employed ethnographic participant observations of PEs, which allowed me to build relationships with them before our interview, a method that improved the overall quality of the conversational semi-structured interviews (Ellis, 2004; Kvale, 1996; see Appendix D). I interacted with the PEs from the final analytic sample nearly weekly, some for over a year. With each PE, I had informal conversations that built on their sharing and my observations, resulting in familiarity and trust. For example, I gave Erin the nickname "The Bone Collector" because of our mutual affinity for the macabre. At my last in-person PE observation, I wrote, "Erin showed me their new tattoo, it's a skull. They had a look of pure joy on their face" (Journal Observations, February 24, 2020). Similarly,

Anais requested the nickname “The Puerto Rican Woman,” reflecting our several conversations about her journey into womanhood and Puerto Rican heritage pride.

***Human Subjects Consent.*** The IRB at my home institution approved the participant observations and PE interviews with my academic advisor serving as the primary investigator. In the IRB, I outlined a safety protocol to mitigate psychological risk and ensure the autonomy and rights of my participants. Project CLEAR staff collected permission from parents for youth to participate in the program. I also collected parental permission to participate in the evaluation and interviews (see Appendix H). Further, for the interviews, I collected consent from PEs over the age of majority (see Appendix H) and assent from underage participants whose parents gave permission (see Appendix H). My only incentive was refreshments during the interview.

***Interview Protocol.*** I provided PEs with my questions before the interview so they could familiarize themselves with what I intended to ask (see Appendix I). I employed a motivational interviewing strategy. Motivational interviewing, a tool promoting youth reflection, was an effective technique to unearth pre reflexive detail about PEs’ motivations, behaviors, and perceptions (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Høffding & Martiny, 2016). I probed PEs’ descriptions about Project CLEAR spaces, the time they spent in the program, their subjective sense of learning and growth, and how their relationships evolved throughout their participation. I also conversed with PEs about the relevance of the Project CLEAR curriculum and their peer education contributions to their community members (Ellis, 2004; Kvale, 1996).

**Data analysis.** I transcribed, verbatim, my audio-recorded interviews with PEs, analyzing the transcriptions in Dedoose Version 7.0.23. Dedoose is “a web application for managing, analyzing, and presenting qualitative and mixed-method research data” (Dedoose, 2016). I employed phenomenology as a writing-based method, wherein I authored analytic interpretations about PEs’ textual narrations (van Manen, 1997). PEs’ stories generated interpretive descriptions through my reflective writing practices at each stage of coding; wholistic, selective, and line-by-line coding procedures (van Manen, 1990; Sloan & Bowe, 2014). Included in Appendix J are examples and a thorough description of my coding procedures.

In Dedoose, I wrote wholistic summaries, created analytic memos, developed multiple thematic code trees, and iteratively analyzed PEs’ experiences across lifeworld dimensions (Sloan & Bowe, 2014). After I wrote interpretive summaries for each participant in the wholistic coding stage, I isolated lifeworld and PYD themes via a selective thematic analysis process. Table 2 contains my initial deductive codebook with definitions of each lifeworld and the PYD theme. During the selective coding stage, I generated several descriptive and analytic memos, which informed the line-by-line process. After the line-by-line procedure, I organized a final code-tree by combining my deductive codes and emergent themes not reflected in the initial codebook. Table 3 contains the final code-tree and narrative exemplars indicative of each theme and subtheme appearing in the findings section. I conducted a final analysis to ensure I

correctly situated my participants' narrative excerpts according to the finalized, a posteriori codebook.

**Data trustworthiness.** A limitation of the phenomenological coding procedure is that the writing method is a part of the analytic procedure, which is difficult to replicate from another's perspective. Hermeneutic insights arise from subjective interpretations of intersubjective awareness (Husserl, 1931). Intersubjective reality constitutes the researcher's subjective reality and their first-person perception of their participants' subjective textual descriptions (Brudzińska, 2015; Sloan & Bowe, 2014). Thus, inter-rater reliability (Gwet, 2014) is an ill-suited measure of data trustworthiness for this method because the iterative process is dependent on the researchers' subjective experience engaging with participants in the interview and subjective reality in interpreting that process for analytic insights. Instead of inter-rater reliability, I offer a code-recode strategy for judging reliability and truthfulness, and excerpt exemplars as evidence of validity and transparency (Cutforth, 2013; Denzin, 2014).

The code recode strategy replaces a measure of reliability for dependability (Chilisa & Preece, 2005). The term code-recode refers to dependably coding textual and media content similarly over several iterations. I determined the quality of coding replication through coding comparisons via Dedoose and Microsoft Excel. In Dedoose, I selectively coded the four existential lifeworlds and PYD themes. Dedoose produced a code co-occurrence matrix showing the number of excerpts containing a lifeworld domain and the PYD theme (see Table 4).

In Excel, I blindly recoded each lifeworld (body, relation, time, and space) sub dataset for PYD (character, confidence, competence, connection, and care) themes. For example, the body lifeworld sub-dataset contained ( $n = 203$ ) excerpts across all participants' mention of the corporeality lifeworld domain. I line-by-line coded the 203 excerpts for PYD themes. I repeated the line-by-line coding procedure for all four lifeworld sub-datasets, using the find function in Excel to tally the number of times I coded a PYD theme in each lifeworld domain. Using Pearson's correlation coefficient, I conducted a code-recode comparison. The recode correlations for the coding comparison of the co-occurrence of lifeworld and PYD themes were all above ( $r = 0.77$ ), with an overall coefficient of ( $r = 0.93$ ) (see Table 5).

While calculating the dependability, the line-by-line code recode procedure generated an exhaustive list of nascent themes and subthemes within each lifeworld domain. For more information on line-by-line coding outcomes, I provide several figures containing PYD themes across affirming and thwarting lifeworld domains (see Appendices K-L). Through the descriptive detail that emerged from line-by-line coding, I created a conceptual map outlining my hypothesis about Project CLEAR's theory of change (see Figure 1). The findings show how I arrived at my hypothesized conceptual map.

## **Findings**

According to my conceptual map, Project CLEAR's (PC) theory of change suggests that a QTYOC focused curriculum (CUR), adult support (SUP), and time and

space resources (T & S) intervened in PEs' life course experiences (LCX). Lifeworlds (LW), master and alternative narratives (MAN), relational violence (RV), embodied confidence, relational competence (EIS), and empowerment (EMP) make up PEs' life course experiences (LCX) at each time point. I use the PEs' narratives as evidence of Project CLEAR's efficacy to reduce the severity and incidence of sexual and relational violence by improving PEs' lifeworld experiences, sense of empowerment, and embodiment, as well as their ability to counter master narratives and competently navigate interpersonal relationships.

I highlight Project CLEAR's efficacy in terms of the program's contributions to stakeholders and the PEs' contributions to building healthier and more empowered communities buttressed by caring, boundaried, consensual relationships. PEs narrated intimate experiences with several forms of relational violence before attending Project CLEAR (see Appendix M), setting the context for the benefits they derived from participating in the program. I used their storytelling about negative lifeworlds and previous life course experiences with relational violence to organize the relevant literature review. In this section, I discuss key elements of Project CLEAR implementation, PEs' life course experiences, their knowledge, growth, relationship building, positive youth development, and future orientations, given the opportunities they received in the program.

**Project CLEAR intervention (PC).** During the program, Project CLEAR's curriculum, adult staff, and therapeutic support, and the time and space they devoted to

PEs represented vital program assets. Zinnia acknowledged, “It was really nice for me to go to school the next day [after Project CLEAR training], and facilitate my GSA. Because I was like, ‘I have more tools to talk to you with!’” The curriculum was empowering, representative, relevant, and customizable. “I think it ends up being the individual’s preference, how they prefer to go about teaching or leading a workshop. Andrew did a really great job with “Color 4 You,” and I feel like my pride and joy is the healthy relationships curriculum,” Charlie stated. Adult staff supported PEs’ self-directed knowledge production. Although there was a sizable staff transition, the housing organization prioritized continuity while new staff stabilized the program.

AS became the new program manager. Anais said, “she’s trying to bond with us, but she’s conscious of the [transition]. She became part of our family quickly.” Although new staff members were white, Charlie said, “everybody is humble and able to identify that they should not be speaking for POC.” Similarly, Zinnia told me she asked AS about creating something similar to the “Color 4 You” workshop. AS told her, “I can’t help you so much in building the curriculum because I don’t know what that’s like, but I am here to support you” (Zinnia). The staff intentionally fostered connections and curated the curriculum, space, and time for PEs to self-define and determine the direction of Project CLEAR.

Ari signed up for the therapeutic prong of Project CLEAR because he wanted to work on emotional vulnerability. “I don’t wear my heart on my sleeve, and so, that’s something I want to become stronger at, too,” Ari explained. The participants frequently

used the word “becoming,” representing a temporal lifeworld of present possibility and opportunity to shape future history. Erin instructed that “anyone can become open to new ideas,” an ability PEs used to teach peers and build healthier relationships with their family by educating them about LGBTQ+ and multiethnic cultures. Similarly, Anais celebrated her quinceañera while participating in Project CLEAR, and told me after that, at the celebration, she came out as “bi” to her family. She resolved, “If I’m gonna become a woman, I better be real about who I love.”

Project CLEAR provided a space where QTYOC could be open and authentic with each other, which helped Anais come out to her family, for instance. Before participating in the program, Anais said of her peers and herself, “we don’t want to open up to anybody because we are kind of scared our sexuality is going to be used against us.” At Project CLEAR, several PEs explored, changed, and or revealed their sexual and gender identities. Narratives suggested that Project CLEAR provided PEs with a reaffirming environment where they could learn, grow, connect, and build relational resources within their communities and personal relationships.

**Life course experiences (LCX).** During Project CLEAR, PEs had weekly access to supportive peer leaders, PE cohorts, and adult staff. During that time, PEs designed workshops to improve relationship skills among QTYOC. “I just want to be there for the youth, the kids or people like me, who are Black, who aren’t afraid of coming out, aren’t afraid to be themselves,” Andrew remarked. PEs explained they were already leaders in their communities. Andrew said, “I jumped on to [the program] because I want to help

my community as much as possible, and there's not a lot of representation for POC or of leaders who are POC." The program provided PEs with opportunities to share their lived experiences with others, thereby countering master narratives from society and high school curriculum about youth's ability and knowledge, and how they should identify and structure their relationships.

*Master and alternative narratives (MAN).* The interplay of adultism, racism, heterosexism, and sexism disempower QTYOC. Isms threatened PEs' sense of self. Zinnia elucidated on sexually objectifying media portrayals, stating, "In the media especially, queer people are supposed to be really in tune with their sexuality, and they're sexualized; boundaries aren't a thing for queer people." PEs were extremely mindful of the erasure and stigmatization of their core identities in the mainstream sexual education curriculum as well. Erin highlighted, "people want [sexual education] to just be a binary because we want to disregard the in-between. [Project CLEAR] did a good job of touching on the in-between." To counteract the erasure of QTYOC in school-based sexual education curriculum, Andrew created a POC-only workshop, and, as other cohorts of PEs arrived, they built upon what Andrew started.

In "Color 4 You," Andrew, recognizing the tangible threat to her community, taught peers about the fetishization of QTYOC, male sexual assault, and how to distinguish and protect oneself from toxic relationships. They explained;

I was like, where is a class for POC? Where is somebody who's there for us to say this is going down? We should bring this up. This is what was is going on. This is how we need to be safe in the streets because POC, now definitely POC who are transgender, they're actually getting targeted, getting killed for it.

On the one hand, QTYOC are disallowed to establish boundaries that make them feel safe and comfortable because they are sexually objectified, fetishized, and targeted. On the other hand, QTYOC are heavily boundaried by intersecting isms at play because they constrain self-definition, agency, and a sense of confidence. “I have really strong beliefs about things. But, I haven’t had a good platform to share my voice,” Ari admitted. “Color 4 You” and several other workshops, such as “Passing with Confidence” and “The Trans Toolkit,” exposed negative master narratives, cultivated alternative stories of empowerment, safety, and care, and provided a platform for PEs to “page their voices” (Ari).

The PEs countered several master narratives predicated on isms with alternative personal narratives elevating their generations’ voice, visibility, and growth. PEs generally agreed that, while they knew about healthy and unhealthy relationships, “Project CLEAR gave us the vocabulary,” multiple PEs acknowledged. Through the connections they built while participating in Project CLEAR, PEs improved in character, confidence, competence, self-care, and compassion. Anais confessed, “I grew my voice here. I was always the shy kid in class, now I’m like, ‘Hey, guys! You all should come and see me present. For me, myself last year, I wasn’t expecting me to be like this now. I know that for a fact!’” Anais grew through her connection with Erin and Zinnia, PEs, who were by then in their first year of college. She said, “I look up to them, greatly; how passionate they are, how they are handling college. I am inspired.” Representation and

visibility were significant programmatic ingredients, which allowed younger QTYOC to envision a future life of happiness and love.

Erin lamented that the mainstream curriculum is heteronormative, silencing, and void of relational skill-building components. School-based sexual education excludes QTYOC from the message that they can have loving, caring, healthy relationships. Erin taught the Project CLEAR curriculum to their cousins from Wisconsin. They felt disheartened because the cousins asked simplistic consent and boundary questions. Erin reflected;

Y'all should have been taught these things so much earlier. I was taught some of that stuff in middle school. Freshman year, I was taught more, but it was heteronormative. Boundaries weren't a thing. That wasn't taught in my sex education. It was just "Yes or no. Abstinence! Okay". My cousins weren't even taught that! It was just silence."

PEs engaged in a high frequency of informal peer education, along with the structured opportunities to present at local queer and transgender youth conferences sponsored by the school district. The cousins took Project CLEAR fliers back to peers in Wisconsin. Erin ruminated, "It reminds me that what we are doing is so important...these are the things I orbit around."

Project CLEAR provided PEs with an alternative curriculum that gave them a vocabulary and enabled them to share knowledge "in a way that makes sense" (Erin). The program also empowered the PEs to restructure or reaffirm their existing relationships, making their relational behaviors consistent with their teachings. For example, Zinnia said, "I just got out of a two-year relationship. Not because anything bad happened, more because it was too soon in my life to meet THE love of my life. I'm not ready for that."

Zinnia communicated with her ex and established physical boundaries for their friendship.

“I wanted to create space where if either of us wanted to have a new relationship, it wouldn’t be weird,” she explained. The PEs built skills to communicate their desires instead of ending relationships because they were afraid of altercation or hurting others.

Erin remarked;

One thing that dumbfounds me is, I was in a relationship for a long while, and then we stopped because it fizzled out. And still, friends and people are like, ‘What!?’ I am like, ‘Yeah, you can do that. You don’t need to have this dramatic breakup and then cut people off and delete every photo. Y’all! You can be friends! It’s okay.’ That also applies to friendship, and it applies to family. If you disagree with a family member, you don’t need to stop talking to them completely. That’s your family!

Communicating healthier relationships positioned PEs with insider situational experience from which they educated the local communities on healthy relationships, consent, and boundaries. Participants showed pride in their perspective and used personal growth and lived experiences to embody relational care and, through representation and voice, taught others who might relate to their experiences.

***Embodied confidence and intersubjective competence (EIS).*** In the past, several PEs said they believed they “didn’t need it or deserve care” (Erin), that “self-care [was] the first thing to go” during stressful times (Charlie). PEs learned to expect not receiving care from society, as made evident by Andrew instructing QTYOC to “use a white voice” when calling the police for help. Project CLEAR curriculum centered knowledge and skill-building around self-knowledge, boundaries, and self-care. “One of my goals is to internalize that I’m a part of the queer community,” Ari confessed. Project CLEAR

provided space, time, and supportive relationships for PEs to build embodied confidence and develop patterns of self-care, which empowered them to negotiate internal and external boundaries in interpersonal relationships competently.

*Embodied confidence.* When PEs explained that they possessed knowledge already, they meant a self-awareness about comforts, desires, passions, values, abilities, limitations, and their subjective standpoint and self-definition. “We know what consent is even if we don’t have the words for it. I feel like we got a lot of the knowledge from our personal lives, but then a lot of the vocabulary from our training,” Zinnia measured. Vocabulary reassured PEs’ of their self-knowledge, gradually building confidence to assert themselves.

Andrew told me, his mom always said, “Closed mouths don’t get fed.” The message signaled the importance of speaking up about what feels safe and comfortable to ensure personal needs get met. Andrew educated me about neglecting self-care. “We do need to have self-care. Some people don’t know what to do for self-care. Some people do self-harm, or they just keep it bottled up inside. Don’t do that too yourself. We need to let it out” (Andrew).

Self-knowledge, the ability to recognize personal needs and desires, allowed for self-care because the PEs could use their strengths and adapt to their limitations. Zinnia ended a relationship because she was becoming too infatuated with her partner. Andrew told me, “you can’t stop depression,” and said, “I do struggle with binge eating because my emotions take over.” Recognizing depression as a powerful force and binge eating as

a coping mechanism that “does make [them] feel better,” Andrew resolved, “I try to do something that is self-care to treat myself better.” Andrew’s alternative “go-to self-care practice [was] to make music, write songs, do little things here and there.”

Self-care and self-knowledge helped PEs establish boundaries. Referencing Andrew using music to self-care, I asked, “Is self-care about expression?” Andrew refined the definition;

Self-care is about treating yourself right, how to make yourself comfortable, safe, and also safe for others. Opening your mouth and saying, ‘hey, I’m not feeling well. I need ‘me time.’ I need to get something to eat. I need to run. I need to maybe, yell. Like, ‘alright, I did a scream, but I’m good now.’”

Project CLEAR empowered self-discovery so PEs could learn what makes them feel comfortable. Charlie described the weekly meetings, saying;

We fell into a pattern with our meetings. Starting with the opening grounding question, that doesn’t have anything to do with what we are talking about that day, taking time to check-in individually and as a group. Then, using that same way to connect and kind of come back into ourselves and our experiences at the end.

Weekly, PEs conversed with each other about real feelings and emotions, sharing intimately with their cohorts and trusted adults. Erin said, “It’s not necessarily like education; it’s more like a reassurance.” Empowerment, confidence, and competence resulted from reaffirming lived experience, internal feelings, and the fact that PEs possessed a level of relational mastery already.

Again, Erin reiterated that youth know what makes them feel better and their boundaries. However, QTYOC require greater empowerment and reassurance that what they want is attainable and think is correct. Zinnia explained;

Project CLEAR has helped me in being confident. I know myself. I know what I'm comfortable with, actually! I remember talking to AS, and she said something like, she always felt like she was bad at setting boundaries. But, then later, she thought about it was like 'maybe I'm not bad at setting boundaries, maybe other people just aren't good at following what I'm comfortable with.' And I was like, 'YEAH!' I felt that.

Through self-reflection, AS helped Zinnia become conscious of asserting boundaries, and when people are disrespecting them. PEs' self-knowledge and growth in confidence and the ability to practice self-care and establish boundaries, helped them communicate healthier, more authentic, and safer relationships.

*Intersubjective competence.* Project CLEAR substantially improved PEs' relational competencies. Initial connections through Project CLEAR began to reestablish trust and safety interpersonally. Charlie said, "my most significant experience with Project CLEAR that made me excited about it was meeting the people." Self and relational knowledge and care combined to approach relationships built on authenticity, intimacy, and trust. PEs engaged with adults, community leaders and healers, school students and staff, peers, family, romantic partners, and professional acquaintances. At a queer conference, Charlie described meeting a queer elder and healer who held a restorative circle. Collaborating with them "opened a whole world of queer artistry to me. That was an amazing experience!" Charlie said joyfully. PEs also accounted for restructuring relationships as they sharpened relational tools.

Anais shared several skilled stories about managing the disclosure of private information with her family, while also communicating with them about her desire for greater emotional connection. During our interview, Anais was repairing the relationship

with her mom and beginning to connect with her biological dad. With her mom, she recalled;

Me and my mom, we didn't have a good relationship before I started, but now we kind of have like a stable relationship. And it's like I noticed that I worked on some things, and we work on things together to make our relationship better. We both have toxic things we're trying to work out.

With her dad, she said that he contacted her, and she was open to starting a relationship with him; nevertheless, she holds "great boundaries." Specifically, she is not out as bisexual to him. Anais was a decisive agent in improving the relationship with her parents. When she modeled these behaviors for her siblings, they asked her to teach them. She replied, "I got you" and disclosed empowering even the youngest family members, saying, "even the baby knows how to say, 'No.'"

Project CLEAR provided PEs with opportunities to discuss the difficulty of setting boundaries within their PE cohorts. Ari said, "Boundaries are something I struggle with a lot of the time. Because I care about my relationship with my friends, I want them to be deeper relationships. But a lot of the time, when they're crying, I have no idea what to do." Ari knew an asset of Project CLEAR was PE training on how to care for their peers and communities. Ari wanted to learn for his friend, who was the friend that always helped others without reciprocation. While Ari joined because he wanted to learn that skill, others joined to contribute their ability to uplift others.

Instead of disengaging from emotional or difficult conversations, through Project CLEAR, PEs felt more confident and competent to "stand with others while they live their truth" (Zinnia). I asked the PEs outright if Project CLEAR changed their relational

behaviors. Charlie pondered, “I think I was able to see [boundaries] in hindsight and be able to at least think about changing them. I don’t know if, in practice, I necessarily did or not. I got better at least noticing when the boundaries were being violated.” Project CLEAR exposed boundary violations for Charlie and Zinnia.

Zinnia’s held a gathering at her house for a friend visiting from out of town. The out of townner maneuvered to be near another friend, showering them with unwanted affection and attention. The friend on the receiving end tried to set a boundary with nonverbal communication by moving away from the pursuant. Zinnia said her friend felt guilty and uncomfortable because they were in a relationship, and the other friend was not respecting the non-verbal boundary cues. Noticing her friend’s discomfort, Zinnia kicked the visitor out of her house; then, she consoled her friend. To her friend, Zinnia said, “it’s okay to feel guilty. Also, you have every right to your own body. You’re completely allowed not to want to, even innocently, cuddle with someone. You don’t have to do that if you’re not comfortable.” Zinnia noted that what she told her friend, “was such a big part of our curriculum.”

The efficacy of Project CLEAR to change behavior was dynamic in that self-knowledge, as well as knowledge about toxic and healthy relationships, impacted PEs’ attitudes and ability to change their behaviors and restructure significant relationships. Although Charlie did not recognize the behavioral change, noticing when others violated boundaries, implicitly changed Charlie’s behavior toward self-protection. Project CLEAR positively impacted PEs’ development through a relevant curriculum that provided

several opportunities for connections to scaffold character and leadership growth, and improve relational competencies, which fortified PEs' confidence, self-care, and stewardship in their communities.

**Conclusion and contributions.** Through youth empowerment and positive youth development, Project CLEAR, directly and indirectly, intervened in the negative lifeworld experiences QTYOC resultant from minority stressors. Empowerment means “being confident enough to be able to take action towards or against whatever you think is right” (Zinnia). Project CLEAR promoted PEs' confidence by providing time and space autonomy, wherein participants had access to a consistent, safe, affirming learning environment.

Within the curriculum and organization, PEs became exposed to and created alternative narratives about relationships among QTYOC. Erin expressed that, “it’s fun that Project CLEAR is not heteronormative because I think I can actually speak up. [At Project CLEAR], I was able to speak without being questioned.” Program curriculum offered PEs autonomy, cultural visibility, positive representation, and voice. The curriculum, scaffolding relationships, and interpersonal connections reassured PEs of their embodied confidence to speak up, trust their knowledge, and grow relational competencies to engender self and interpersonal knowledge and care, as well as to teach and train their peers on how to negotiate healthier relationships.

## **Discussion**

Engrossing myself in PEs' life course narrations, I found that Project CLEAR intervened in several forms of relational violence. Project CLEAR's efficacy followed its nuanced and empowering curriculum, training PEs to curate trusting interpersonal relationships in safe and affirming spaces and reassuring them of their worth and knowledge. Project CLEAR curriculum centered on how QTYOC can create desirable relationships instead of centering on risk conferred by oppressed identities and life-stages (Russell, 2005). The staff admittedly designed the program by borrowing from evidence-based programs for white, heterosexual populations (DeGue et al., 2014; Foshee et al., 2005, 2009; Kivel & Creighton, 1997). However, its value and effectiveness resided in the programs' ability to hold space for and narrate the "in-between" (Erin) experiences of QTYOC.

Project CLEAR mediated negative lifeworld experiences, wherein PEs felt they "didn't have time" (Anais), or "supportive adults in their lives" (Zinnia), to help them "try and figure out how to be the best person [they] can be" (Erin). Engaging with the alternative curriculum, PEs became empowered to design workshops that reflected them and personal passions. Over time, and through patterned implementation, PEs began to change their attitudes toward self-care, sense of confidence, and relational behaviors. With the platform Project CLEAR provided and knowledge it helped fortify, PEs facilitated emancipatory, healing, protective, and affirming informal and formal peer education on healthy relationships within their communities and families.

**Lifeworld experiences and PYD.** The lifeworld and PYD analytic approach revealed Project CLEAR's contributions in the form of promoting PEs' external and internal developmental competencies (Parker, 2016). I examined programmatic impacts across temporal, spatial, relational, and corporeal lifeworld dimensions (van Manen, 1990). Time and space are linked, setting the context for PEs' subjective and intersubjective positive or negative lifeworld experiences (Sloan & Bowe, 2014). The absence of space and time autonomy thwarted participant's self-determination, sense of confidence, and motivation to grow competencies in that action was not self-directed or relationally supported (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Moreover, hetero and cis-normative and white supremacist sexual education erased PEs' identities and voices in classes and prevented them from envisioning future relational intimacy. Imagining the future is an influential intervening factor for QTYOC because it counteracts internalized stigma and hopelessness, emotions that contribute to suicidal ideation, anxiety, and depression (Katz-Wise et al., 2017; Kwon, 2013; Mustanski & Liu, 2013). PEs' said Project CLEAR empowered them to put boundaries around personal space, be authentic in spaces, and cultivate internal space. By fostering their time and space autonomy and teaching the value of care, PEs began to structure time to self-care, and invested time in caring for others.

***Care and confidence.*** With the external developmental assets of time and space autonomy and connection (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Parker, 2016), PEs grew in care, confidence, character, competence, and compassion (Bowers et al., 2010). To

accommodate the curriculum, I reconceptualized five PYD factors into six by framing the care and compassion factor as two separate concepts. PYD theory operationalized caring and compassion as a sense of empathy toward others (Phelps et al., 2009). Through my conversations with PEs and thematic findings, I operationalized compassion in line with the previous definition (Phelps et al., 2009) and self-care to reflect Project CLEAR's aims of empowering PEs to nurture and prioritize their physical, psychological, spiritual, emotional, recreational, social, and relational health.

Although I cannot say the directionality of influence, I found that self-care, protective boundaries, and self-knowledge contributed to PEs' embodied confidence. Self-care was a pivotal component of the Project CLEAR curriculum, and, through repetitive program activities, it became an embodied praxis. Consistent cohort interactions and communication cemented PEs' confidence and collective coherence (Bird, Kuhns, & Garofalo et al., 2012; Walsh, 1996). Zinnia mentioned that PEs' already knew their needs and desires. Connections reassured PEs collectively of their self-knowledge and provided them with language to communicate protective boundaries, articulate their care needs, and educate their peers.

***Character, competence, and compassion.*** PEs tended healthier relationships through competently communicating their internal worlds intersubjectively. Previous negative lifeworld experiences thwarted PEs' character and sense of self, their confidence to self-determine, and the relational resources to grow social competencies (Chamberland & Saewyc, 2012; Nadal, Davidoff, Davis, & Wong, 2014; Pflum, Testa, Balsam,

Goldblum, & Bongar, 2015; Wong, Schragger, Holloway, Meyer, & Kipke, 2014). Erin argued that young adults had a propensity to end relationships before enacting a relational approach of communicating and that instead of providing QTYOC with relationship skill-building, school curriculums offered risk-based suicidality intervention pamphlets. Erin asked;

What's given out more than anything in public school for health classes? [Q: I don't know]. Suicide hotlines! Rather than maybe therapy centers, discussion groups, or sexual education things, suicide hotlines! Is that what you want us to resort to; you have a bad relationship; you want to kill yourself?

Conversely, Project CLEAR sought to intervene in adverse mental health outcomes with programming to promote internal confidence and relational competence, while empowering youth to explore their character and self-define autonomously.

Project CLEAR's implementation process involved PEs learning from supportive staff, designing healthy relationships modules of personal interest, delivering formal and informal training to the community. Erin said, "talking to people and discussing, getting feedback, it all plays into developing your character." I agree with Erin, and add that it is through feedback that competence is developed, wherein people feel like they understand how to achieve their goals (Deci & Ryan, 2000). In PYD, competence is about acting effectively in social situations, at school, with family, engaging with peers, or navigating systemic oppression (Bowers et al., 2010; Singh, 2013).

PEs demonstrated relational competencies by narrating when they used the Project CLEAR curriculum to care for themselves and others. Anais enacted competence by working on her toxic traits with her mom. Charlie noticed red flags in their

relationships, and Andrew instructed me on projecting whiteness to receive care in life-threatening violent situations. In domestic violence situations and unhealthy relationships, POC often do not involve family or police; police are especially known to brutalize and incarcerate POC and further victimize survivors of violence (Brown, 2007). Hence, “Color 4 You” workshops emerged as vitally necessary spaces to educate peers to recognize helpful resources and negotiate safety. Showing considerable character, all PEs valued community stewardship, and compassionately endeavored to uplift and empower each other.

*Connections as contributions.* Project CLEAR contributed time and space autonomy, relevant curriculum, and supportive adult-youth relationships, as well as fostered positive cohort, peer, family, school, community, and professional connections. Representation, visibility, and voice countered negative master narratives about QTYOC and their ability to nurture healthy relationships. Similar to previous findings with QTWOC, when participants narrate their lived experiences, complex relationships between self and society emerge (Graham, 2014). Through Project CLEAR programming and vocalizing their subjective reality, PEs’ surfaced their rejection of negative master narratives and proliferated empowering alternative modes of embodiment and relationality (McLean et al., 2017; McLean & Syed, 2016). PEs’ contributed to themselves and building a more utopian society by actualizing care and compassion.

**Implications: Theory of change.** I discussed the research findings and provided my final evaluation assessment supporting the initial efficacy of the Project CLEAR pilot

implementation. I organized my evaluative findings according to how I hypothesized Project CLEAR's theory of change (Patton, 2008). Consistent with previous literature, findings showed that PEs' previous experiences with adultism, racism, sexism, and heterosexism contributed to participants' intimate knowledge with relational violence and efforts to grow their capacity for resilience (Singh, 2013; Singh & McKleroy, 2011; Singh et al., 2014; Weiss, 2008; Yep, 2013). I theorized that PEs' previous life course experiences (LCX, Time 1) either directly or indirectly, through the effect of Project CLEAR (PC), influenced PEs' life course experiences during and after the program (LCX, Times 2 and 3). My proposed theory of change allows for controlled group comparisons, QTYOC who receive the effect of Project CLEAR over time, and those who do not (Svensson et al., 2018).

**Future directions and limitations.** Future research is required to assess my hypothesized theory of change. For that, I designed a quantitative evaluation of Project CLEAR, which includes comprehensive, summative, multidimensional instrumentation for longitudinal research. I did this to counteract criticisms against the qualitative, phenomenological methodology and lack of controlled experimentation with randomized group assignment (Phillips, 1987; Scriven, 1991). While my methodology negated claims to causation and generalizability (Svensson et al., 2018), my approach accounted for the limited sample size, program stakeholder attrition, and stage of the study (Guba, 1978). Phenomenology enabled analytic depth, which revealed subtle processes in Project CLEAR's instructional processes and programmatic mechanisms of change.

Through my analyses, I expanded the scholarly focus from sexual violence to multidimensional experiences of *relational* violence, added to PYD theory with the inclusion of a care dimension separate from compassion. I also contribute to family and evaluation literature by providing research centered on intersectional experiences of QTYOC. Findings contributed to the body of evaluation studies scholarship, which lacks LGBTQ+ representation (Edwards et al., 2016; Harris & Farrington, 2014), and the family science discipline through innovative theoretical tools. Currently, scholars conceptualize relational violence as interpersonal harm threatening an individual's sense of belongingness (Duru et al., 2019). However, I posited that relational violence involves complex encounters with several forms of violence resultant from cascading minority stressors (Arditti et al., 2010; Meyer, 2003), thereby thwarting the ability to effectively engage in interpersonal relationships (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

PEs' descriptions of lived experiences that brought them to Project CLEAR reflected a timeless ordering of society positioning men above women, women and men above non-cisgender people, adults above children, and heterosexual people above non-heterosexual people, all within the context of capitalism, colonization, and systemic racism (Brown & Mar, 2018; d'Emilio, 1983; Freire, 2000; Galeano, 2000). My analysis accounted for complex and nuanced intersecting oppressions among QTYOC and their intimate experiences with several forms of violence, a finding that could have been rendered invisible by a narrow focus on sexual violence. Additionally, reconceptualizing care and compassion as two separate constructs within PYD theory, exposed Project

CLEAR's efficacy to cultivate self-knowledge, internal space, and self-care, components intrinsically linked to PEs' capacity for compassion and stewardship. The theoretical contributions necessitate future research to assess their validity.

**Conclusion.** PEs' narratives demonstrated Project CLEAR's efficacy to reduce negative lifeworld encounters with relational violence, thereby promoting youth empowerment and positive youth development (Anyon et al., 2018; Phelps et al., 2009). The pilot qualitative analysis generated initial evidence that the Project CLEAR curriculum and staffs' implementation of it was relevant and appropriately centered on the experiences of a diverse group of QTYOC. Additionally, supportive interpersonal relationships, affirming spaces, and self-directed time for workshop development fostered PEs' embodied confidence, self-care, character development, relational competence, and compassion for others (Bowers et al., 2010; Turner & Shepherd, 1999). PEs disseminated the seeds of emancipatory knowledge that have the potential to build a queer utopia where QTYOC are represented, affirmed, and validated in their ability to cultivate nurturing, loving, and healthy relationships.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Emotions Are Not a Liability: Conclusions on Queering Evaluation

*“I know that there’s a place for us  
For we are glorious  
- This is Me, Kesha*

Positivist scholarship is patriarchal and racist, norming research on whiteness, and an assumption that emotions are a liability, and relationships obscure objectivity (Harding, 2004; Rooke, 2010). In social science, emotions, relational care, and sharing community knowledge (i.e., “old wives’ tales”) are situated as feminine, thus worth-less (Davidoff, 1995; Folbre, 2001). “Oppression – overwhelming control – is necrophilic; it is nourished by the love of death, not life” (Freire, 2000, p. 58). Positivism is a perversion that eradicates, and then uses embodiment, relationality, and care for knowledge production and scientific advancement (Lorde, 1984; Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1983). Despite the harm caused by positivist research, academic systems reinforce it by privileging researchers in social hierarchies who keep an analytic distance from participants (Dahl, 2010).

To counteract positivism’s focus on power-over, economic productivity, and pseudo-objectivity, my queering praxis centered self-care and relational compassion in program evaluation and social science research (Fields, 2016; Spry, 2011). Through feminist, developmental, and queer theoretical lenses and a subjective-centric queering methodology, I conducted relational research to evaluate Project CLEAR, a healthy relationships program designed for QTYOC. I conclude my dissertation with a synthesis of the ways that each study achieved the objectives of disrupting traditional research

norms, challenging normativity, centering subjective experience, and creating space for alterity (Halberstam, 2011; Muñoz, 2010).

### **Designing Disidentification: Dismantling the Master's Ideology**

Lorde (1983) argued that the “Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House.” I diverged slightly from Lorde’s (1983) premise, positing that scientific tools advance social justice; however, the ideology behind the tools is oppressive.

Disidentification is a queering process that “scrambles and reconstructs,” exposes societal narratives, and “recircuits its workings to account for, include, and empower minority identities and identifications” (Muñoz, 2010, p. 31). Hence, I confronted positivism to dismantle the master’s ideology of *using* participant knowledge, repurposing the master’s tools as a platform to share authenticity, trust, and truth toward social justice.

In autoethnographic confessional tales, I unveiled the research process of evaluating Project CLEAR through participant observations and peer educator (PE) interviews (Van Maanen, 2011). Engaging analytic subjectivity and evocative prose, I welcomed readers to sit with me in the backstage of research— writing vulnerably to model the relational evaluation that generated rich data collection and scholarly insights. In the realist tales (Van Maanen, 2011) of Study 2, I wove participant subjectivity into the framework of a traditional research approach. I reverted to scholarly norms, producing a manuscript more closely aligned with the language and methods of objectivity. In each study, I endeavored to elevate QTYOC voices and deconstruct

researcher-participant hierarchies through *sharing* knowledge, rather than *using* knowledge.

Study 1 showed a blueprint for reorienting research insights through methods of inward reflection and outward connection and perspective-taking (Fields, 2016). I built relationships with stakeholders by participating in their program, sharing vulnerably, and creating containers for stakeholders to do the same. Study 2 highlighted Project CLEAR's efficacy through relational research that produced an extensive depth of knowledge about how the program operated, and the aspects PEs found relevant, representative, and impactful. Phenomenological inquiry and analytic writing processes permitted researcher self-reflection and interpretation while carving space for peer educators (PEs) to narrate their assessment of Project CLEAR.

### **Unshroud: Self Recognition and Care**

Autoethnographic confessional tales surfaced relational competence and self-recognition in research by unveiling the research process and the researcher's experiences through narrative stories. Positivist research shrouds *researchers' subjectivity* for bad faith, self-fulfilling objectivity (Sartre, 1967). Scholars of positivism constitute an objective language by disassociating with the self and reducing people to functions and identities, economically useful only if subjugated and productive (Foucault, 1977).

Conversely, Lorde's (1984) "Uses of the Erotic," guided my researching and writing from a paradigm of internal recognition, improving my ability to build genuine connections that resulted in authentic stakeholder revelations. My work moves away from

building bridges of knowledge on the backs of the disempowered (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1983), toward empowering scholarship built on relational bridges between diverging standpoints and life course experiences (Fields, 2016; Primeau, 2003).

### **Interpersonal Bridge-making**

Positivist research also shrouds *participants' subjectivity* for “objective essence” by aggregating experiences through scientific interpretation (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004, p. 32). Conversely, my queered evaluation research design provided an avenue for an often-silenced population to evaluate the program designed to improve their lives. Building interpersonal relationships and researching with care helped PEs share their experiences vulnerably. Further, to counter the effects of adultism, I listened intently to PEs narrate their lifeworld experiences, and meticulously analyzed their stories to curate findings that remained objectively true to their meaning-making.

In Study 1, I showed that narrative stories represent, empower, validate, liberate, and heal. Lorde's (1984) work served as a lens to view organizational, stakeholder, and personal healing as a form of assessment. I described my process as stumbling through evaluation and research design and exploring in the dark (Campbell, 1984), using pop culture references to discuss how I navigated difficult relational processes in community-based research (Halberstam, 2011; King et al., 2001). My confessionals illuminated researcher self-awareness and reflexivity, and care and compassion for participants (Doyle, 2013; Fields, 2016; Primeau, 2003).

Without reflexivity (Doyle, 2013) and stakeholder participation (Johnson & Guzmán, 2013), findings more closely resemble scholars' fabrication than scientific truth (Warner, 2004). Study 1 unmasked my research performance and exposed subjective biases influencing my analytic findings (van Maanen, 2011). Study 2 represented disidentification in the form of queer worldmaking, reconstructing space for the voices of QTYOC within traditional research (Muñoz, 2010). Reimagining scholarly writing norms situated PEs as producers of knowledge and elevated their voices and wisdom on healthy relationships and self-care into the impenetrable "ivory tower" of academia (Spry, 2011).

### **Between Erotic Space and Exchanges**

Through "erotic exchanges," sharing vulnerably and transparently, the PEs taught me to explore and cultivate erotic space-- internal knowledge, self-care, self-recognition (Fields, 2016; Lorde, 1984). Autoethnographic reflection on ethnographic observations and interviews demonstrated the scientific usefulness of self-recognition in research (Ellis, 2004; Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1983). Phenomenological interviews created a container for pathic reflection and empowering PE participation and self-determination.

**Lifeworlds and pathic awareness.** Van Manen's (1990) lifeworld domains offered analytic awareness of lived body, lived space, lived time, and lived relations, revealing researcher and participant subjective and intersubjective consciousness. The PEs' and my lifeworlds overlapped in the Audre Lorde and Anzaldúa Rooms. Participating in Project CLEAR, spending time in the programmatic lifeworlds, and

orienting the PEs to my presence, sharing my past lifeworld experience as a queer youth helped build interpersonal bridges.

During participant observations, PEs gave me the status of “Just Jory.” This showed I was not a threat; they were familiar with me, such that it did not deter authenticity. Ari reflected on my observation, in the interview he said, “none of the adults were there and...” he stopped to think and picked back up, “you were there, I guess, but you were sitting in the corner and just like ‘I’ll watch.’” Anais and Erin similarly commented that they only told me what they had because we had a good relationship. I asked Anais, “Can you imagine us having this conversation if you never knew me?” She snapped back, “it would never happen.”

**Courage to reveal failure.** In Study 1, I vulnerably expressed my researcher standpoint, publicly narrating my past, drawing on its strength to connect to my participants’ experiences, and exposing areas of potential researcher interpretive conflict (Harding, 2004). Modeling care in phenomenological interviewing (Høffding & Martiny, 2016), I held space for vulnerable conversations and asked permission before probing tender experiences. Moreover, I shared with each PE the times we had similar experiences across different lifeworld domains, managing my emotions while deepening the conversation (Ellis, 2004).

In my writing, I shared stories of pain, stress, heartbreak, loss, depression, sadness, and failure, receiving mental health treatment, spotlighting sexual and relational violence personally and culturally. What I discovered through my confessional tales (Van

Maanen, 2011) was that the program's own curriculum held the knowledge of how to heal from perversions of the erotic (Lorde, 1984). The PEs and I used the curriculum to cope when the program confronted a violation of its space, which threatened stakeholders, and the evaluation. Study 2 represents the PEs teaching me the curriculum and assessing the value of it within our one-on-one conversation, which allowed me to understand and articulate to an audience how and why Project CLEAR works.

**Perspective-taking.** The Project CLEAR curriculum reflected the perspective of QTYOC, providing relevant relational tools that mirrored their interpersonal realities. During my observations and interviews, I became knowledgeable about the curriculum and programmatic instructional processes (Hemwall, 1991; Parlett & Hamilton, 1972; Guba, 1978). However, personal transformation and scholarly knowledge production resulted from analyzing PEs' interviews and reflecting on the process of participating in Project CLEAR as a form of evaluation. In each interview, PEs narrated specific aspects of the Project CLEAR curriculum that resonated with them, changed their attitudes and knowledge, improved their skills, and stimulated new relational behaviors. The findings presented in both studies supported my claim from Chapter 1 that every stakeholder cultivated "relational and self-knowledge that resulted in authentic, safer, healthier and more intimate relationships in and out of the program" (p. 29).

**Storytelling empowerment.** Understanding PEs' meaning-making pathically (van Manen, 2007), that is, the general sense of their lived experience in Project CLEAR exposed vital features of the programming and curriculum. My storytelling allowed me to

articulate critical aspects to consider when intervening in minority stressors that promote relational and sexual violence among QTYOC. The PEs' storytelling manifested a web of relational violence resultant from racism, sexism, heterosexism, and adultism.

PEs described how the intersectional minority stressors adversely affected their sense of self, time, space, and relationships (Meyer, 2003; Meyer, 2010; Meyer et al., 2008; van Manen 1990). As we conversed, we interrogated systemic oppression, and the PEs revealed the master narratives in their lives against which they grate. Moments of conversational tensions, PEs tugging on the strings of hetero, cis, and white normativity, resulted in revelations about Project CLEAR and the staff support, curriculum, space, and time the program provided.

Findings from my queering evaluation of Project CLEAR's efficacy pointed to three programmatic cornerstones: self-care, relational competence, and compassion. Self-care was a pivotal component of the program and missing from positive youth development theory. Stories revealed that self-care, protective boundaries, and self-knowledge contributed to a sense of confidence and improved PEs' ability to communicate healthier relationships. Most PEs entered the program with a thwarted sense of internal space and recognition, they "felt wrong" (Anais), felt like they didn't deserve care (Erin), or admitted that they sacrificed self-care in distress (Charlie). By our interviews, PEs sang about the importance of self-care personally and were thrilled to impart the knowledge within their communities.

Relational competence was another vital ingredient. Boundaries are difficult to communicate, negotiate, and sometimes enforce. Confidence to assert oneself followed PEs' awareness of negative master narratives that reinforced toxicity and silence (Syed & McLean, 2016), and competence to act effectively in social situations (Bowers et al., 2010). Project CLEAR curriculum provided PEs with vocabulary and opportunities to connect, practice new skills, speak their intentions, and passionately empower peers with the resources of safety and self-recognition.

Compassion "to stand with others while they live their truth" (Zinnia) represented the final cornerstone of Project CLEAR. Compassion is the essence of perspective-taking, interpersonal understandings stemming from witnessing and affirming the inner world of others. Through compassion, Project CLEAR curriculum and PEs sought to move beyond reprieve from relational violence (Russell, 2005), to a future orientation of thriving, loving, authentic, empowering, healing relationships (Katz-Wise et al., 2017). In the evaluation, compassion was an influential tool for queering. Narrating the highs and lows of my evaluation journey, and how it forced me to grow and heal along the way to a public audience, showed self-compassion, acceptance of my story, and self-as-a-researcher. Interpreting the highs and lows of PEs' life experiences and participation in Project CLEAR engendered deep empathy, respect, and valuable knowledge about healing from relational violence.

### **Tables and a Queer Utopia**

I wrote this dissertation and grew to love myself as a writer at a table I bought and placed in a room of my own, a space I created explicitly and temporally for this project. At my desk, strewn with queer theory and evaluation texts, methodology articles, personal journals, and a bell that reminds me of my grandmother, I composed “queering evaluation.” I designed and employed a relational evaluation and research methodology that reflects a new paradigm, one that is not “research with,” but rather “heals with.” It is emancipatory research derived from self-care, self-recognition, mutuality, compassion, and sharing authentically (Fields, 2016; Lorde, 1984).

Through autoethnographic storytelling, I addressed Ahmed’s (2006) analysis of a table as a place where life and family gather, a space to claim the identity and voice of a writer and a way to orient research and perspective-taking (Husserl, 1931). I connected the table as an object of embodiment, relationships, time, and space to the importance of a room of one’s own, the Audre Lorde room where I conducted interviews, and Project CLEAR’s ability to empower PEs to disseminate seeds of emancipatory knowledge.

In “A Wolf at the Table,” I employed the table to orient boundary-making and organizational healing. Through my writing, I de-silenced pervasive negative master narratives about the LGBTQ+ and POC communities (Lancaster, 2011). I offered a compassionate analysis revealing how racist and homo and transphobic rhetoric disadvantages QTYOC, hence the need for Project CLEAR.

Lastly, I drew on Husserl’s (1931) analysis of the table to highlight consciousness and perspective-taking, crucial elements of autoethnographic and phenomenological

methods. As Husserl (1931) moved around the table, he noted that he conjured other sides of the table; having no direct line of observation, he reflected on his experience of it. In my research, I systematically analyzed and interpreted mine and other's subjective experiences with relationships, coming out as LGBTQ+, relational violence, and healing from trauma. The principles of relational research enabled compassionate perspective-taking, which resulted in interpretative insights on the experiences of QTYOC who are growing up now and navigating revolutionary change, youth who are hungry for thriving with love, safety, and embodiment.

I situated queering evaluation as research at odds with systems of positivism, showing how imagination and invention as a researcher created space for a relational form of scholarship to thrive (Halberstam, 2011; hooks, 2014). I conceptualized queering evaluation to model ways of deconstructing, disrupting, and dismantling a limiting paradigm that suggests research without enough numbers to conduct statistical analyses or enough power to support an objective claim, is "soft" or less valid (Richardson, 2003). With each study, I substantiated the emancipatory power of research that embodies self-recognition, tends to participant relationships, and centers the praxis of care and compassion. My goal in queering research was to dedicate my knowledge and skills to more utopian systems of evaluation and research that improve the lives of QTYOC because their lives matter.

### Table Section

Table 1. Project CLEAR Peer Educator (PE) Participants' Demographic Background

	<b>Pronouns</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Sexual Orientation</b>	<b>Gender Identity</b>	<b>Ethnicity/ Cultural Heritage</b>	<b>Date Recruited</b>	<b>Date Interviewed</b>
<b>Charlie</b>	They/them /their(s)	19	Queer	Genderqueer/ Transmasculine	Hispanic/Latinx Colombian	6/26/18	08/14/19
<b>Zinnia</b>	She/her(s)	19	Pansexual/ exploring	Cisgender, Female	Asian Cambodian	11/18/18	08/19/19
<b>Andrew</b>	All	19	Gay	Gay & Sassy	Black & Native American	10/03/18	08/21/19
<b>Erin</b>	They/them /their(s)	18	Gay	Cis & Nonbinary	White	11/18/18	10/21/19
<b>Anais</b>	She/her(s)	15	Bisexual	Female	Puerto Rican/Latina	01/05/19	01/13/20
<b>Ari</b>	He/him/his	15	Heterosexual & Panromantic	Male	White & Jewish	11/1/2019	02/24/20

*Note:* I never asked demographic information. This table was created from Project CLEAR intake forms and interview narratives. “Date recruited” is the time at which participants became PEs in Project CLEAR

Table 2. A Priori Codebook, Definitions, and Examples for Project CLEAR

<b>Code</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Example</b>
<b>Lived Space-Spatiality</b>	Where, Felt space; dimensions, distance, direction; roads, paths; the landscape. The space in which we find ourselves affects the way we feel	Homelessness, workshops, conference, Color 4 You, personal space, inner space, private space
<b>Lived Body-Corporeality</b>	Who, Embodiment, face, name, story, body, clothes/material, style, presence, motion, gesture, mobility, feelings, and emotions	Role/identity performances, coming out, the fetishization of YOC, bodily consent
<b>Lived Time-Temporality</b>	When, time, subjective sense of time; fast (enjoy), slow (boring), past, present, future, trajectory, change, memory, duration, sequence	X many years since, weekly meetings, constrained time, time afforded to something
<b>Lived Relation-Relationality</b>	With what/who, Interpersonal, with others, social, communal, conversational, dialogue, relationships with space, time, self, others, ideas, etc.	Teaching, facilitating, cohorts, family, peers, staff, community, adults, supportive and non-supportive environments, master narratives, etc.
<b>Competence</b>	Having sufficient knowledge, the ability to act effectively in school, in social situations, and at work	Describing elements of Project CLEAR curriculum, teaching me elements of workshops, “red flags”
<b>Confidence</b>	A sense of self-worth and mastery; having a belief in one’s capacity to succeed, future orientation, ability to self-define	Instances when PEs try new skills, take safe actions to help friends, and feel a sense of mastery over the skills they’ve learned.
<b>Character</b>	Integrity, taking responsibility; a sense of independence and individuality; connection to principles and values	Being leaders and teachers to improve communities, Personal values, and goals
<b>Care</b>	Sympathy and empathy for others; commitment to social justice or stewardship. Character (internal/self) vs Care (external/relational)	Talking about understanding how others feeling, acts of kindness, expressing compassion or concern towards friends and family, helping
<b>Connection</b>	A feeling of safety, structure, and belonging; positive bonds with people and social institutions. This will overlap a lot with LWs relationships node	The feeling of being a part of something, relationships with family, peers, teachers, RC Staff, school, RC organization
<b>Contribution</b>	Outcomes of the five Cs- Active participation and leadership in a variety of settings, making a difference.	Youth offering what they have to give; time, ideas, knowledge. Facilitating and building workshops

Table 3. Final Code Tree and Exemplars for Project CLEAR

Code Tree	Exemplars
<b><i>Life-course Character &amp; Heartshields (1082)</i></b>	In order to be a leader, you're talking to people and discussing and getting feedback, and it all plays into developing your character (Erin).
<i>Affirming (n = 360)</i>	The way that I explain it to other people is, we start with this kind of base amount of education. We come in with our own preconceptions, and then we have somewhat of a curriculum that we all learn (Charlie).
Build confidence in knowledge ( <i>n = 39</i> )	We know what consent is, even if we don't have the words for it...I feel like we got a lot of the knowledge from our personal lives, but then a lot of the vocabulary from our training (Zinnia).
Embodied confidence ( <i>n = 42</i> )	With facilitating, I get excited, because it's like, I get to teach. Do what I love. I get to show who I am. And I get to be there for everybody else (Andrew).
Healthy rel competence ( <i>n = 45</i> )	And they saw me setting boundaries, and my brothers were like okay, 'can you do the same thing for us?' and I'm like 'I got you.' Even the baby knows how to say 'stop' (Anais).
Toxic rel competence ( <i>n = 23</i> )	As the relationship went on, their world got smaller. I loved that so much! Because I see it happen. I was so infatuated [with my ex]. They became the center of my world. I don't want that anymore (Zinnia).
Time & space autonomy ( <i>n = 35</i> )	Say like, "Hey, I need my space, and you should understand that I need to be alone for a bit because I'm not doing too well. Please don't go over the boundary. I need to be by myself right" (Andrew)
<i>Thwarting (n =444)</i>	I feel like when you see unhealthy relationships, you always see POC in unhealthy relationships. That's how we are always like portrayed in the media, and that's what like influencing our brains. (Anais).
Identity Stigma ( <i>n = 36</i> )	With heterosexual relationships, you are not concerned about being outed. You are not concerned about necessarily fitting in. Gender doesn't play as significant of a role. Within trans relationships, their genders can get invalidated (Charlie).

Lack rel development  
(*n* = 21)

Lack time and space  
(*n* = 36)

Poor mass  
representation (*n* = 26)

Relational violence &  
oppression  
(*n* = 219)

***PCLEAR outcomes***  
(*n* = 819)

Alternative narratives  
(*n* = 25)

Connection/Scaffold  
(*n* = 46)

Empowerment  
(*n* = 179)

Life-course intervention  
(*n* = 108)

First of all, QT youth aren't taught that we have the right to have boundaries. It's like we're taught the heteronormative way (Erin).

We barely have time to socialize; I barely got time to eat during lunch. Twenty minutes to eat!? There's long lines and no space. Like over 2000 kids in my school, that's not gonna work.

I've never actually heard from a person that comes from an immigrant family being queer... I'm fresh [Laughs]. So I feel like I bring a different experience, and I've never heard from someone that is anything like me. And, it'd be really nice to hear other people's stories, and if I were anyone else, it'd be beneficial to hear my story (Zinnia).

Transwomen are trying to live their normal life from wherever they transition to now, and they didn't do nothing to you, and they end up missing and dead. And it's hard enough for POC who are gay males because they will get targeted too. They will get like shunned, judged, mocked, and mimicked (Andrew).

It's a chance for youth to have a platform for and training youth to be able to spread their voices like adults. It is really empowering, I must say, symbolically, you know, like filling out tax forms and stuff, but it also like you're teaching other people, and it's great (Ari).

My biggest take away was the importance of boundaries and consent and how it all interlaces together, specifically within queer and trans relationships—power and control things. Being able to see everything and anything through a queer lens was super helpful for me. That is something I will take away (Charlie).

I feel definitely more connected to like to the community, to my cohort, to my friends because I feel so much more confident [Laughs]. [Peer educating] makes me feel more whole. Like, more a part of something bigger and less just thinking about myself and my own life (Zinnia).

I feel like I'm more confident to talk to people now, to talk to crowds. I feel like I can stand for what I think is right. I have proof of what I'm trying to say. I'm challenging people more. Yeah, and I'm not being obedient to anybody or just like sitting down (Anais).

Boundaries are something I struggle with a lot of the time. Because I really care about relationships. I care about my relationship with my friends. I really want them to be better, have deeper relationships. Learning more about boundaries as a whole and specifically about their boundaries, too, is helpful for me (Ari).

Compassion  
(*n* = 83)

Andrew created a space for POC! And you could see how many different POC were influenced by that. To have a safe space that was specifically catered to them and their community. I think it was a lot more effective than anything a person not of color would be able to teach (Charlie).

Self-care  
(*n* = 72)

Self-care is more about treating yourself right, how to make yourself comfortable, safe, and also safe for others. Some people who do self-care, they do like yelling stuff just to get it out, because they just stressed. And you just need that relief (Andrew).

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*Note:* “Rel” denotes relationships. The number in parentheses is the number of excerpts coded within the theme.

Table 4. Code Recode Comparison of the Co-occurrence of Positive Youth Development Themes in Lifeworld Existential Excerpts

<b>Dedoose Co-Occurrence Matrix</b>							
<b>Lifeworlds</b>	Caring & Compassion	Character	Competence	Confidence	Connection	Contribution	<b>Total</b>
Relationship ( <i>n</i> = 173)	45	34	44	30	73	24	250
Body ( <i>n</i> = 203)	52	71	54	59	45	31	312
Space ( <i>n</i> = 96)	25	32	31	15	30	20	153
Time ( <i>n</i> = 92)	23	20	25	22	20	15	125
<b>Totals</b>	145	157	154	126	168	90	
<b>Excel Co-Occurrence Matrix</b>							
Relationship ( <i>n</i> = 173)	44	44	41	28	69	45	271
Body ( <i>n</i> = 203)	56	72	59	50	54	38	329
Space ( <i>n</i> = 96)	26	33	35	24	44	22	184
Time ( <i>n</i> = 92)	22	24	27	24	25	16	138
<b>Totals</b>	148	173	162	126	192	121	

*Note:* *n* represents the total number of lifeworld existential excerpts across the study sample I found in the selective coding stage.

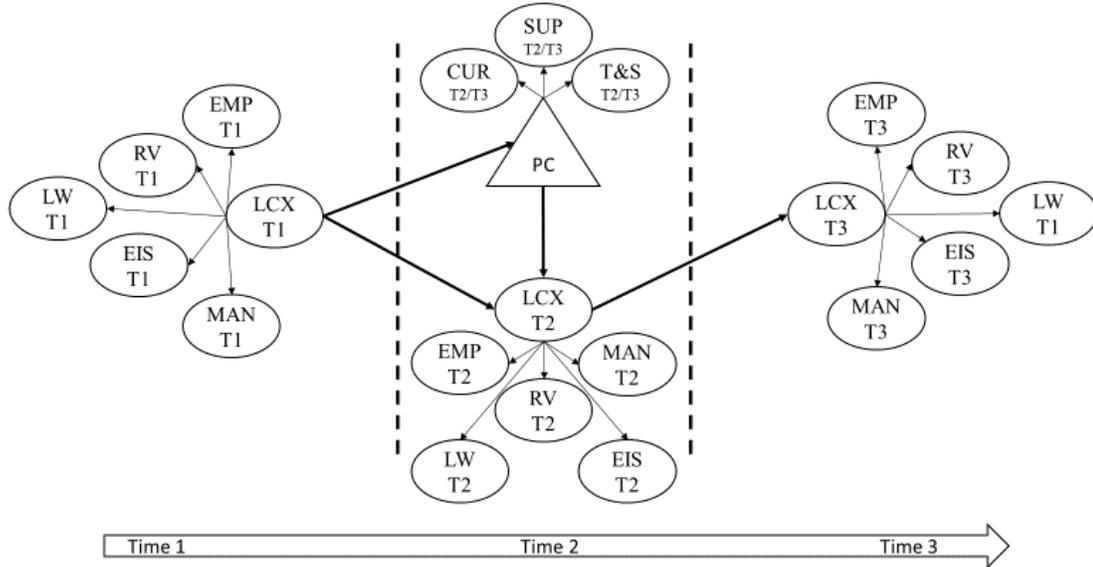
Table 5. Recode Correlation Coefficient for Code-Recode Comparison

<b>Deductive Themes</b>	<i>r</i>
Relationship	0.82
Body	0.88
Space	0.77
Time	0.83
Caring & Compassion	0.99
Character	0.98
Competence	0.97
Confidence	0.98
Connection	0.96
Contribution	0.79
<b>Overall</b>	0.93

*Note:* *r* represents Pearson's correlation coefficient showing the strength of the relationship between the coding I conducted in Dedoose and the separate, blind coding I conducted in Excel.

### Figure Section

Figure 1. Conceptual Map Hypothesizing Project CLEAR's Theory of Change



*Note:* LCX represents a latent dimension of Life-course Experiences and three time-based intervals. LCX consists of five secondary, latent dimensions; MAN= Master and alternative narratives, EIS= Embodied confidence and Intersubjective competence, LW= Lifeworld, RV= Relational violence, EMP= Empowerment. PC= is the Project CLEAR intervention consisting of a curriculum (CUR), adult support (SUP), and time and space resources (T & S). Bracketing Time 2 are two dotted lines, representing the period during the intervention.

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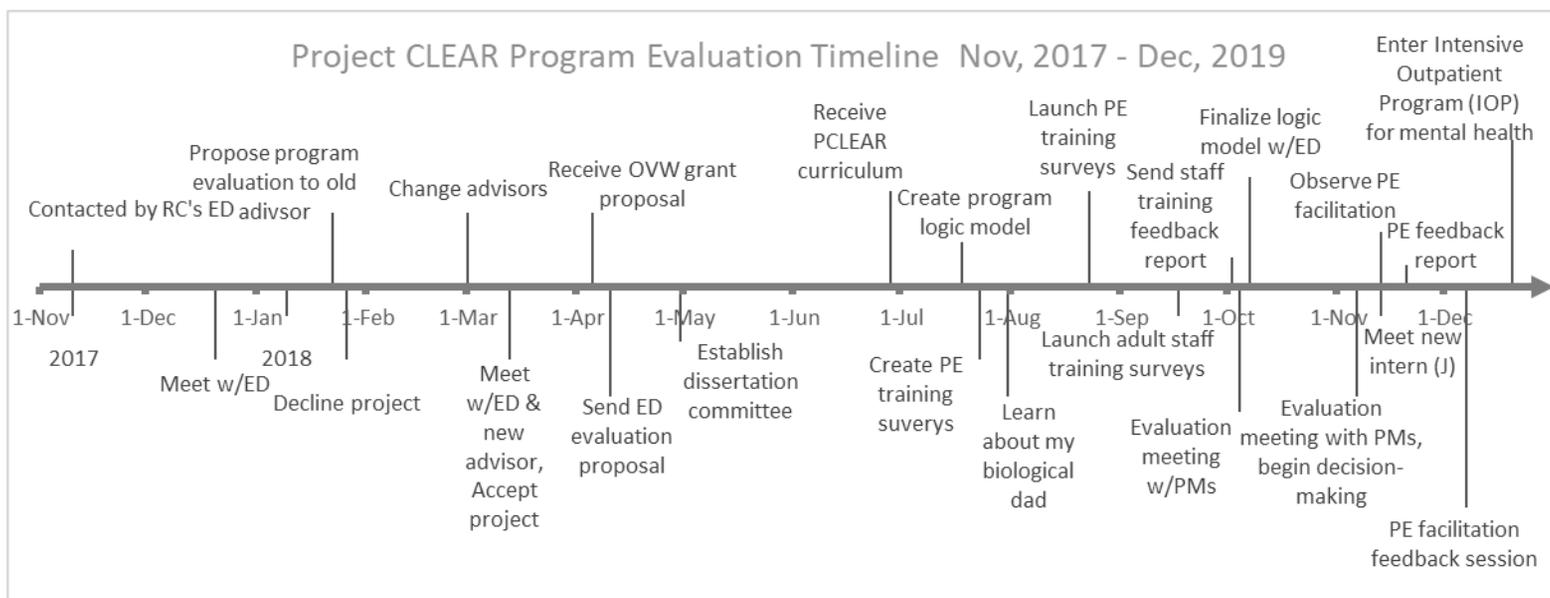
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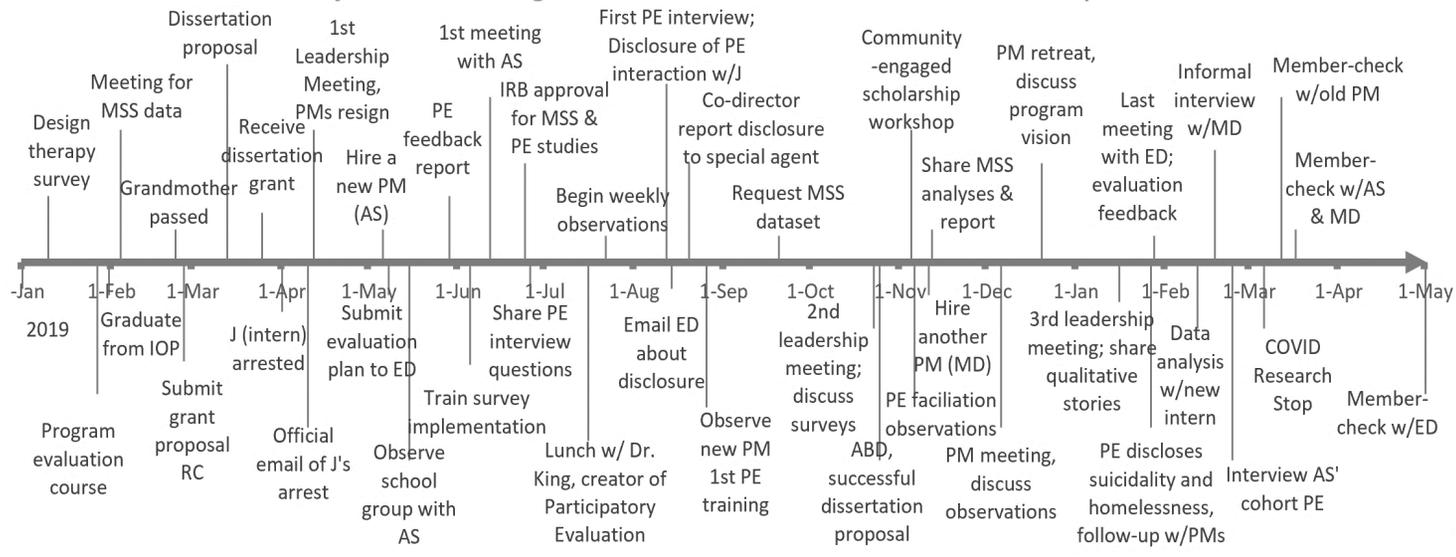
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## “Appendix A”

### Project CLEAR Program Evaluation Timeline November 2017 - May 2020



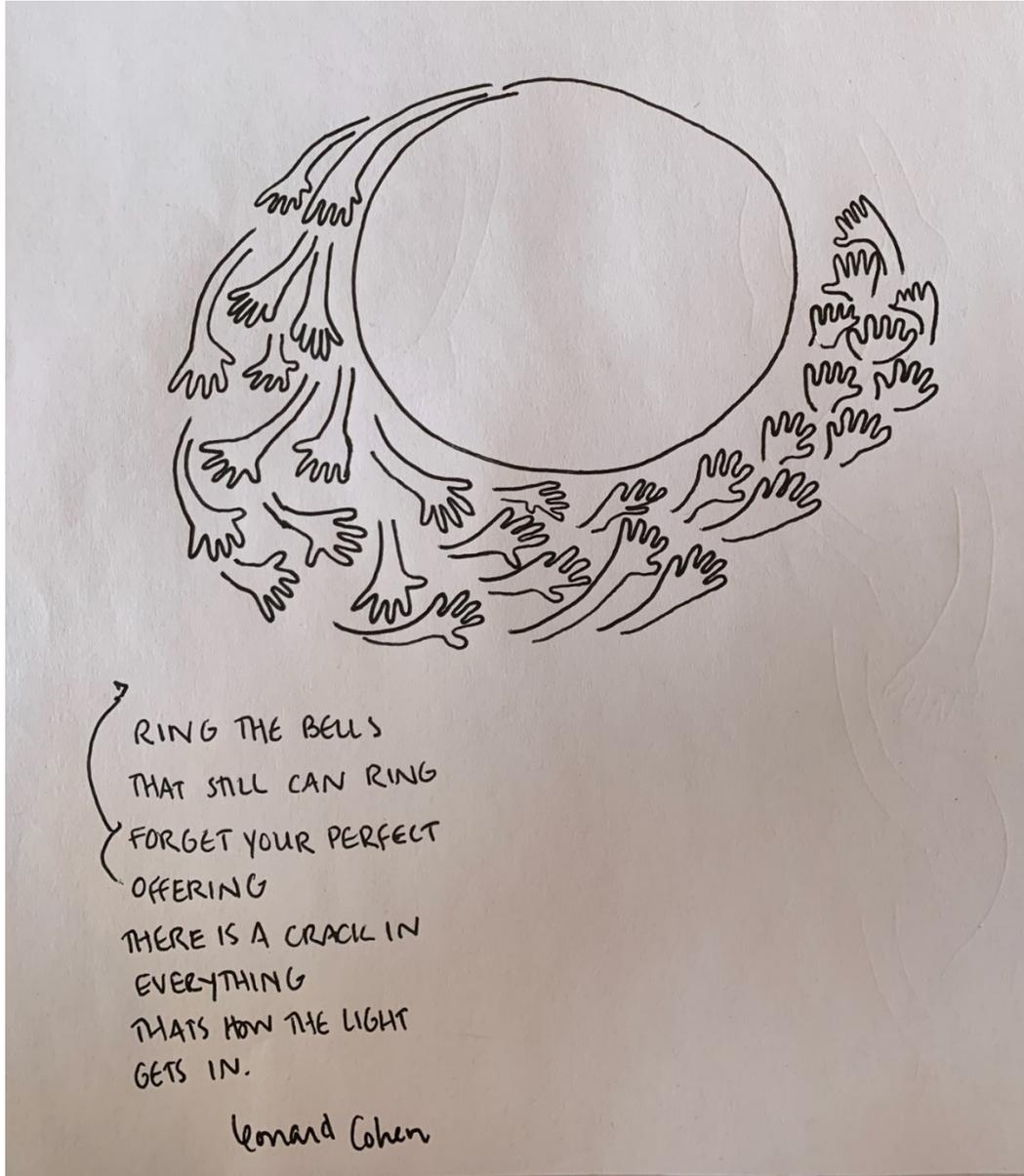
## Project CLEAR Program Evaluation Timeline Jan, 2019 - May, 2020



*Note:* PM = Program Manager(s), PE = Peer Educators, ED = Executive Director, OVW = Office of Violence Against Women, MSS = Minnesota Student Survey & ABD = All but Dissertation

**“Appendix B”**

**“Anthem” a Song by Leonard Cohen and Artwork by AS**



## “Appendix C”

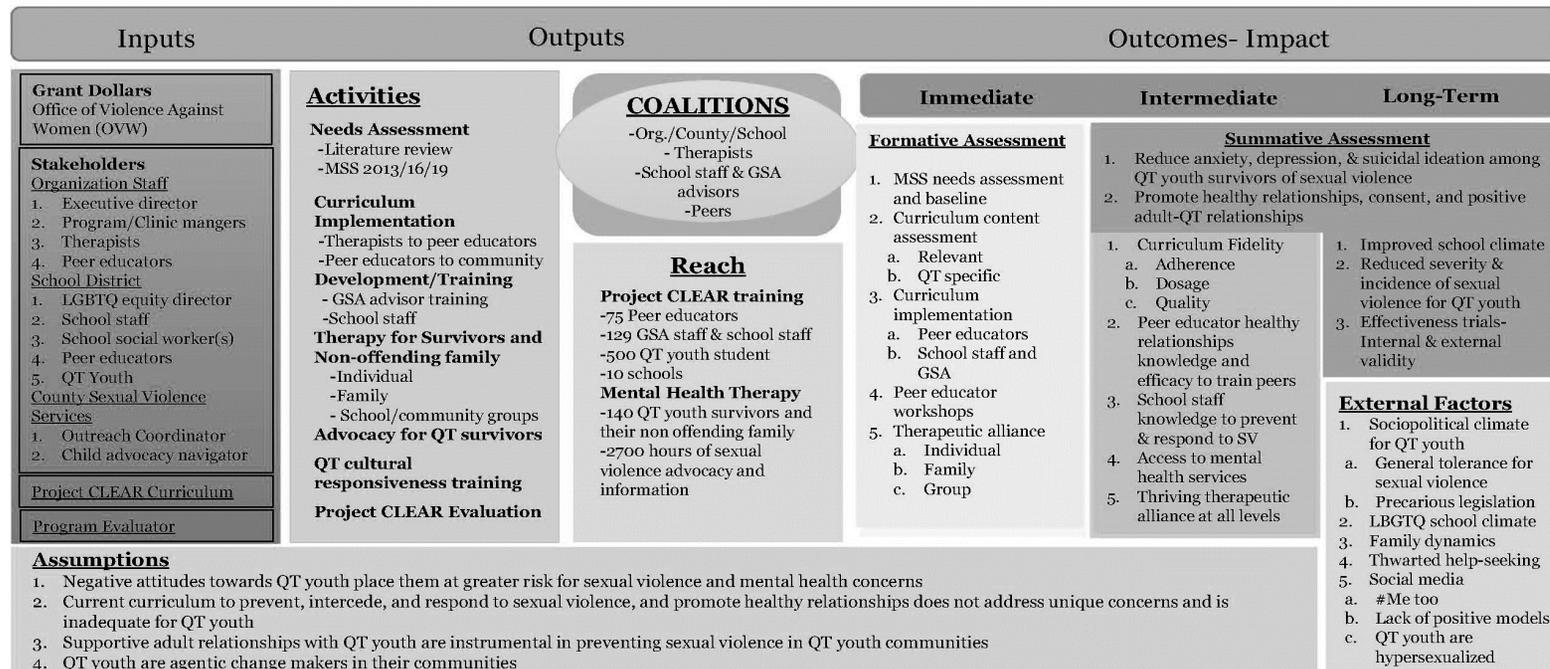
### Project CLEAR Logic Model

#### Project CLEAR Logic Model

**Objective:** Create an intervention that addresses the severity and incidence of sexual violence (SV), and a prevention that addresses building healthy relationships and negotiating consent for queer and transgender (QT) youth. Improve access to mental health resources.

**Target:** Queer and transgender youth, local school district GSA advisors & staff, and non-offending family members of QT youth.

QT youth = Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, two-spirit, queer, and questioning youth ages 11-17 and young adults ages 18-24.



## “Appendix D”

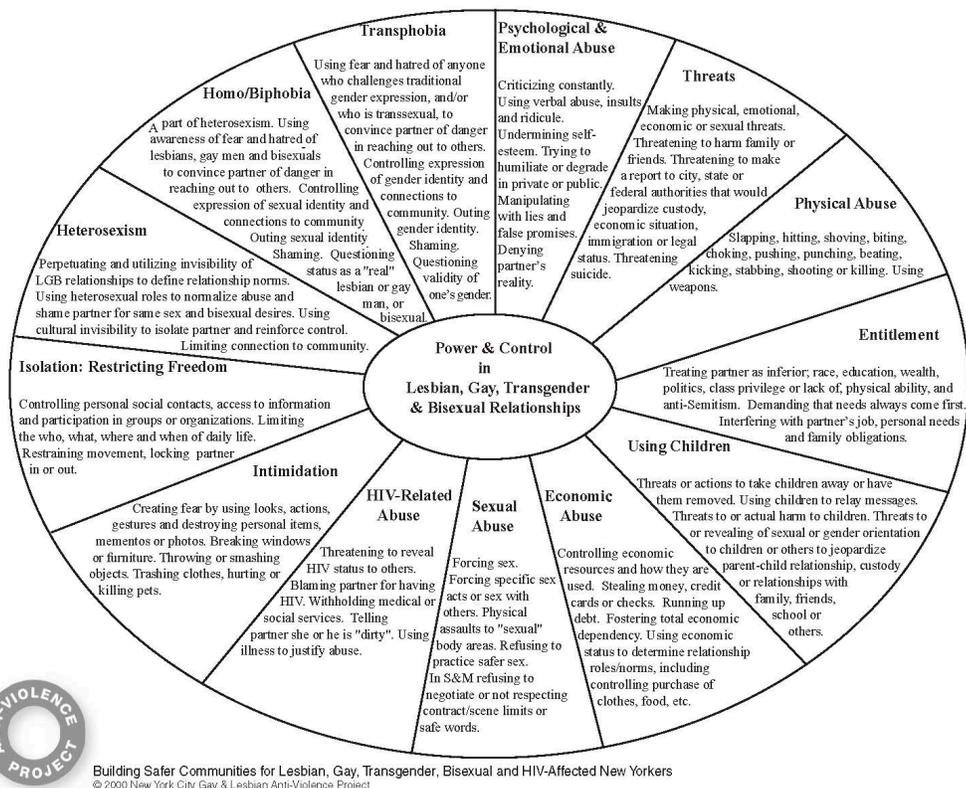
### Mixed-Method Evaluation Plan, Program Elements, Methods, and Outcomes

Program Elements	Outcome (s) Measured	Evaluation Method(s)
<b>Project CLEAR Curriculum</b>		
Content & Implementation	Curriculum relevance, content & level of participation	<b>Qual-</b> Facilitator and participant surveys, observations of facilitation, field notes of planning & implementation (descriptive)
<b>Project CLEAR Training</b>		
Peer Educator (PE) Workshops, School Staff Training, & School Student Training	Knowledge (recognizing healthy and unhealthy relationships)  Skill acquisition (PE skills delivering curriculum to peers & Staff skills in mandated reporting to Ramsey county; Student safety plan development) Interpersonal bonds  Reduced incidents of SV	<b>Quant-</b> PE, Staff, & peers take self-assessment pre/post-test surveys, analysis of variance <b>Quant-</b> PE & Staff take self-assessment pre/post-test surveys, analysis of variance  <b>Qual-</b> Interviews with PEs, phenomenology <b>Quant-</b> Secondary data (MSS) trend data on the incidence of SV in the school district from 2013 to 2021.
<b>Project CLEAR Therapeutic Intervention</b>		
Individual, group, and family therapy	Reduce adverse mental health outcomes (depression, anxiety, suicidality, & resilience)  Increase in use of Organization’s Services (Use and attrition)	<b>Quant-</b> Clients take repeated measures self-assessment pre/post-test surveys (intake, regular session, three-session check-in & termination), analysis of variance <b>Qual/Quant-</b> Organization and therapist logs and interviews (descriptive)
<b>Project CLEAR empowerment program evaluation</b>		
Therapists and PEs	Participation in Project CLEAR program evaluation	<b>Qual-</b> Observations and reflexive self-evaluation

*Note:* PE refers to peer educator, SV denotes sexual violence, MSS is the Minnesota Student Survey

## “Appendix E”

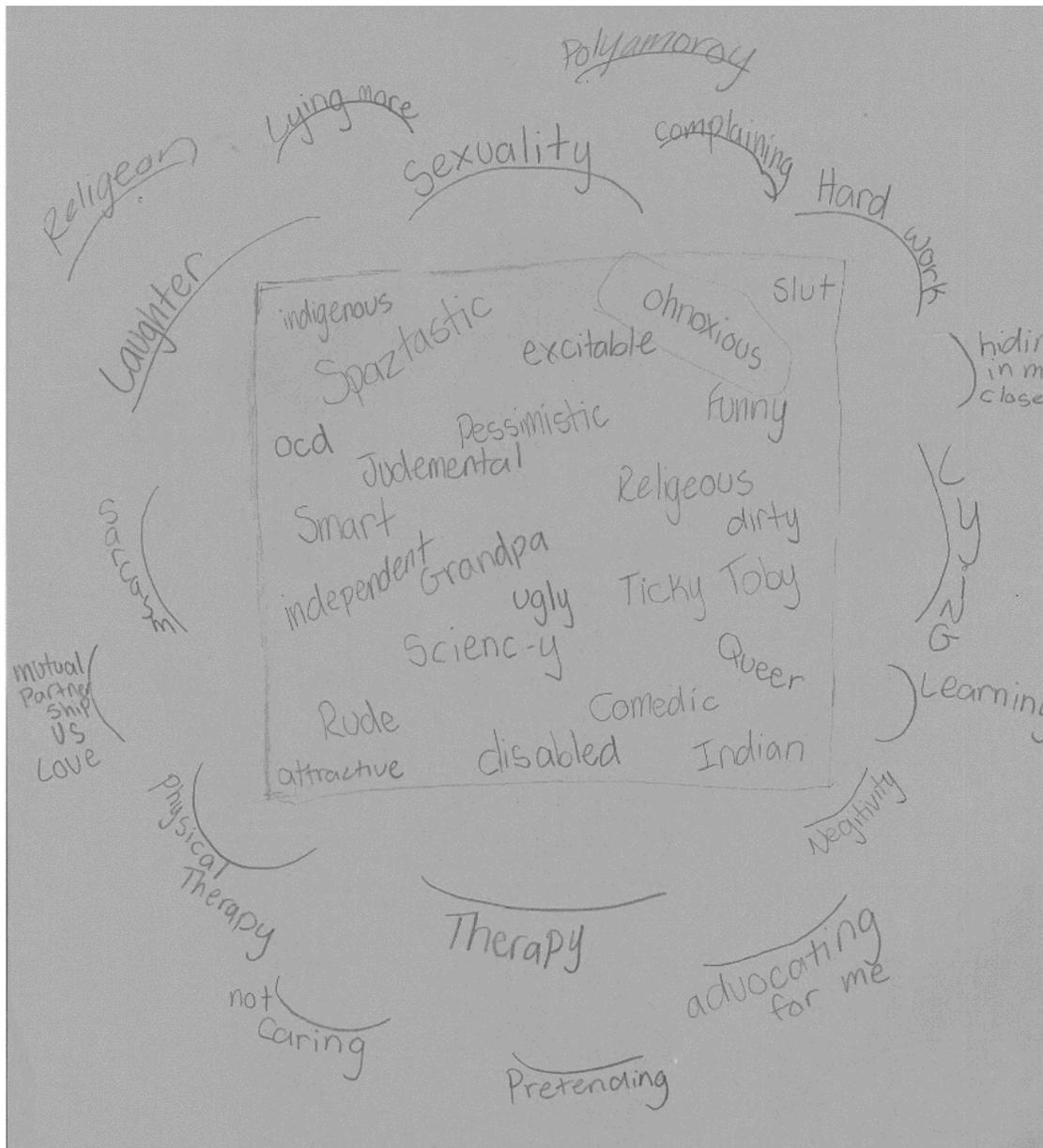
### Power & Control in Lesbian, Gay, Transgender & Bisexual Relationships



*Note:* From Munson, M., & Cook-Daniels, L. (2013). New York anti-violence project's LGBT power and control wheel. Copyright [2000] by FORGE 2013 (<https://forge-forward.org/event/power-and-control-tactics/>). In public domain.

**“Appendix F”**

**Project CLEAR Peer Educator, O tet tet’s “Heartshield”**



*Note:* O tet tet identified as a “polyamorous, Ojibwe, queer man with Tourette’s,” aged 17 years old. The descriptors within the box represent the heart, which is protected from the arch shields outside of the box.

“Appendix G”

**Project CLEAR Program Recruitment Flier (redacted)**



**Queer & Trans Teen Peer Educators Needed!**

We’re recruiting **teens and young adults** who identify as **LGBTQIA+ (and allies)** for a **leadership program** so you can educate your peers about **consent and healthy relationships**.

We provide **food, a \$ stipend, and a really fun time!**

**Interested? Apply online at:** [https://tinyurl.com/y853\[REDACTED\]](https://tinyurl.com/y853[REDACTED]).

Or contact [REDACTED], Program Manager (*she/her/hers*):  
call/text [REDACTED] 2936 or email [REDACTED]

Project CLEAR is a partnership between [REDACTED]

This project was supported by Grant No. 2017-CY-AX-0005, awarded by the Office on Violence Against Women, U.S. Department of Justice. The opinions, findings, conclusions, and recommendations expressed in this publication/program/exhibition are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of Justice, Office on Violence Against Women.

# “Appendix H”

## Consent and Asset Forms: Age of Majority and Underage Peer Educators with Parental Permission (redacted)

### Participant Consent Form

**Title of Research Study:** Peer Educator Experiences among Queer and Transgender Young Adults

**Investigator Team Contact Information:** Primary Investigator Dr. Catherine Solheim, Ph.D.  
For questions about research appointments, the research study, research results, or other concerns, call the study team at:

Faculty PI: [REDACTED] Research Affiliation: [REDACTED] Phone Number: [REDACTED] (202) Email Address: [REDACTED]	Researcher Name: Jon Collins, MA Research Affiliation: [REDACTED] Phone Number: [REDACTED] Email Address: [REDACTED] Study Staff (if applicable): [REDACTED] Phone Number: [REDACTED] Email Address: [REDACTED]
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#### Key Information About This Research Study

The following is a summary to help you decide whether or not to be a part of this research study. More detailed information is listed later on in this form.

- What is research?**
- The goal of the research is to learn new things to help people in the future. Investigators learn things by following the same plan with several participants, so they do not usually make changes to the plan for individual research participants. You, as an individual, may or may not be helped by volunteering for a research study.
- Why am I being invited to take part in this research study?**
- We are asking you to take part in this research study because you have participated in Project CLEAR (Consent Leads to Empowering and Affirming Relationships) as a peer educator, and we are interested in understanding your experiences training your peers on healthy relationships and consent.
- What should I know about a research study?**
- Someone will explain this research study to you.
  - Whether or not you take part is up to you.
  - You can choose not to take part.
  - You can agree to take part and later change your mind.
  - Your decision will not be held against you.
  - You can ask all the questions you want before you decide.
- Why is this research being done?**
- (1) The purpose of this research is to learn about peer educators' experiences participating in the Project CLEAR program. It is an opportunity to evaluate yourself and Project CLEAR.

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- ### Participant Consent Form
- The interview will include you, the program evaluator (make a note later). The observations will include you, your peer educator colleagues, the program evaluator, and the program managers
  - Interviews will take place at your local organization
  - Your participation in this study will conclude after our interview, and after I close the study for observations.
  - Audio recording of the interviews will be done.
  - Observations will be recorded through written fieldnotes

**\*What happens if I say "Yes," but I change my mind later?**  
You can leave the research study at any time, and no one will be upset by your decision. I will stop doing observations if my presence makes you feel uncomfortable or hesitant to join meetings.

**Will it cost me anything to participate in this research study?**  
There will be no cost to you for any of the study activities or procedures.

**What happens to the information collected for the research?**  
Efforts will be made to limit the use and disclosure of your personal information, including research study and medical records, to people who have a need to review this information. We cannot promise complete confidentiality. Organizations that may inspect and copy your information include the Institutional Review Board (IRB), the committee that provides ethical and regulatory oversight of research, and other representatives of this institution, including those that have responsibilities for monitoring or ensuring compliance

We will not ask you about child (or vulnerable adult) abuse, but if you tell us about child (or vulnerable adult) abuse or neglect, we may be required or permitted by law or policy to report to authorities.

**\*Whom do I contact if I have questions, concerns or feedback about my experience?**  
This research has been reviewed and approved by an IRB within the Human Research Protections Program (HRPP). To share feedback privately with the HRPP about your research experience, call the Research Participants' Advocate Line at 612-625-1650 (Toll Free 1-888-224-9636) or go to [hrpp@uic.edu](mailto:hrpp@uic.edu). You are encouraged to contact the HRPP if:

- Your questions, concerns, or complaints are not being answered by the research team.
- You cannot reach the research team.
- You want to talk to someone besides the research team.
- You have questions about your rights as a research participant.
- You want to get information or provide input about this research.

**Will I have a chance to provide feedback after the study is over?**  
The HRPP may ask you to complete a survey that asks about your experience as a research participant. You do not have to complete the survey if you do not want to. If you do choose to complete the survey, your responses will be anonymous.

If you are not asked to complete a survey, but you would like to share feedback, please contact the study team or the HRPP. See the "Investigator Contact Information" of this form for study team contact information and "Whom do I contact if I have questions, concerns or feedback about my experience?" of this form for HRPP

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### Participant Consent Form

- (2) Peer educators receive and provide Project CLEAR trainings. This study aims to understand how peer educators are impacted by the Project CLEAR training they received and their role as peer educators, providing training on consent and healthy relationships to their peers.
- (3) The potential benefits of your participation are a sense of involvement and self-determination in the process of evaluation. Interview questions are designed to elicit positive self-reflection and assessment of your experiences as peer educators.

#### How long will the research last?

I expect that you will be in this research study for one interview session lasting about 60 mins.

#### What will I need to do to participate?

You will be asked to participate in a 60-minute face-to-face interview with the program evaluator. You will also be asked to participate in group sessions with your peer educator colleagues while the program evaluator observes. You will be asked to respond to open-ended questions about your experiences as a peer educator.

More detailed information about the study procedures can be found under "What happens if I say yes, I want to be in this research?"

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

There is minimal risk to your child's involvement in the study.

Interview about relationships with Project CLEAR staff may present psychological risks. I will provide resources and referrals to help should you become upset.

#### Will being in this study help me in any way?

We cannot promise any benefits to you or others from your taking part in this research. However, possible benefits to you include a sense of involvement and self-determination in the process of evaluation.

We cannot promise any benefits to others from your taking part in this research. However, possible benefits to others include the improvement of the Project CLEAR program.

#### What happens if I do not want to be in this research?

There are no known alternatives other than deciding not to participate in this research study. You do not have to participate in this research.

#### Detailed Information About This Research Study

The following is more detailed information about this study in addition to the information listed above.

#### How many people will be studied?

We expect about 7-12 peer educators will participate in individual interviews, and we hope to host ongoing group observations.

#### What happens if I say, "Yes, I want to be in this research?"

- You and I will coordinate a time to interview
- The Project CLEAR staff and peer educators will coordinate observations times
- You will be asked to participate in one 60-minute interview and group observations

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### Participant Consent Form

contact information.

#### Optional Elements:

The following research activities are optional, meaning that you do not have to agree to them in order to participate in the research study. Please indicate your willingness to participate in these optional activities by placing your initials next to each activity.

Yes, I agree	No, I disagree	
_____	_____	The investigator may audio or video record me to aid with data analysis.
_____	_____	The investigator will not share these recordings with anyone outside of the immediate study team.
_____	_____	The investigator may audio or video record me for use in scholarly presentations or publications. My identity may be shared as part of this activity, although the investigator will attempt to limit such identification. I understand the risks associated with such identification.

#### Signature Block for Capable Adult:

Your signature documents your permission to take part in this research. You will be provided a copy of this signed document.

Signature of Participant \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Printed Name of Participant \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Printed Name of Person Obtaining Consent \_\_\_\_\_

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Parental Consent Form

Title of Research Study: Peer Educator Experiences among Queer and Transgender Young Adults

Investigator Team Contact Information: Primary Investigator Dr. Catherine Solheim, Ph.D. For questions about research appointments, the research study, research results, or other concerns, call the study team at:

Form with fields for Faculty Name, Research Affiliation, Phone Number, Email Address, and Researcher Name: Jory Catalpa, MA.

Key Information About This Research Study

The following is a summary to help you decide whether or not you want to allow your child to be a part of this research study. More detailed information is listed later on in this form.

What is research?

- The goal of the research is to learn new things to help people in the future. Investigators learn things by following the same plan with several participants, so they do not usually make changes to the plan for individual research participants.

Why am I being invited to take part in this research study?

We are asking you to allow your child to take part in this research study because they have participated in Project CLEAR (Consent Leads to Empowering and Affirming Relationships) as a peer educator, and we are interested in understanding their experiences training their peers on healthy relationships and consent.

What should I know about a research study?

- I will explain this research study to your child and gain assent from them.
Whether or not they take part is up to them.
They can choose not to take part.
They can agree to take part and later change their mind.
Their decision will not be held against them.
They can ask any questions before deciding to participate.

Parental Consent Form

Why is this research being done?

- (1) The purpose of this research is to learn about peer educators' experiences participating in the Project CLEAR program.
(2) Peer educators receive and provide Project CLEAR trainings. This study aims to understand how peer educators are impacted by the Project CLEAR training they received and their role as peer educators, providing training on consent and healthy relationships with their peers.
(3) The potential benefits of your child's participation are a sense of involvement and self-determination in the process of evaluation. Interviews and observations are designed to elicit passive self-reflection and evaluation of your child's experiences as peer educators.

How long will the research last?

I expect that your child will be in this research study for one interview session that will last about 60 mins.

What will I need to do to participate?

Your child will be asked to participate in a 60-minute face-to-face interview with the program evaluator. They will also be invited to participate in group sessions with their peer educator colleagues while the program evaluator observes. Your child will be asked to respond to open-ended questions about their experiences as a peer educator.

More detailed information about the study procedures can be found under "What happens if I say yes, I want to be in this research?"

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

There is minimal risk to your child's involvement in the study.

Interview about relationships with Project CLEAR staff may present psychological risks to your child. I will provide resources and referrals to help them should you become a parent.

Will being in this study help me in any way?

We cannot promise any benefits to your child from them taking part in this research. However, possible benefits to your child include a sense of involvement and self-determination in the process of evaluation.

We cannot promise any benefits to others from your child taking part in this research. However, possible benefits to others include the improvement of the Project CLEAR program.

What happens if I do not want to be in this research?

There are no known alternatives, other than deciding not to participate in this research. Your child does not have to participate in this research.

Detailed Information About This Research Study

The following is more detailed information about this study in addition to the information listed above.

How many people will be studied?

We expect about 7-12 peer educators will participate in individual interviews, and we hope to host ongoing group observations.

Parental Consent Form

What happens if your child says "Yes, I want to be in this research"?

- Your child and I will coordinate a time to interview.
The Project CLEAR staff and peer educators will coordinate observation times.
Your child will be asked to participate in one 60-minute interview and group observations.
The interview will include your child, the program evaluator (maybe a note-taker).
The observations will include your child, your child's peer educator colleagues, the program evaluator, and the program managers.
Interviews will take place at your child's local organization.
Your child's participation in this study will conclude after our interview, and after I close the study (for observations).
Audio recording of the interviews will be done.
Observations will be recorded through written fieldnotes.

What happens if my child says "Yes", but change their mind later?

Your child can leave the research study at any time, and there are no consequences or penalties to that decision. I will stop doing observations if my presence makes your child feel uncomfortable or hesitant to join meetings.

Will it cost me anything to participate in this research study?

There will be no cost to you for any of the study activities or procedures.

What happens to the information collected for the research?

Efforts will be made to limit the use and disclosure of your child's personal information, including research study and medical records, to people who have a need to review this information. We cannot promise complete confidentiality. Organizations that may inspect and/or copy your child's information include the Institutional Review Board (IRB), the committee that provides ethical and regulatory oversight of research, and other representatives of this institution, including those that have responsibilities for monitoring or ensuring compliance.

We will not ask your child about child (or vulnerable adult) abuse, but if your child tells us about child (or vulnerable adult) abuse or neglect, we may be required or permitted by law or policy to report to authorities.

Whom do I contact if I have questions, concerns or feedback about my experience?

This research has been reviewed and approved by an IRB within the Human Research Protections Program (HRPP). To share feedback privately with the HRPP about your research experience, call the Research Participants' Advocate line at 612-625-1100 (Toll Free: 1-888-224-0636) or go to r.unm.edu/participants. You are encouraged to contact the HRPP if:

- Your questions, concerns, or complaints are not being answered by the research team.
You cannot reach the research team.
You want to talk to someone besides the research team.
You have questions about your rights as a research participant.
You want to get information or provide input about this research.

Will I have a chance to provide feedback after the study is over?

The HRPP may ask you to complete a survey that asks about your experience as a research participant. You do not have to complete the survey if you do not want to. If you do choose to complete the survey, your responses will be anonymous.

Parental Consent Form

If you are not asked to complete a survey, but you would like to share feedback, please contact the study team or the HRPP. See the "Investigator Contact Information" of this form for study team contact information and "Whom do I contact if I have questions, concerns or feedback about my experience?" of this form for HRPP contact information.

Optional Elements:

The following research activities are optional, meaning that you do not have to agree to them in order to participate in the research study. Please indicate your willingness to participate in these optional activities by placing your initials next to each activity.

Form with Yes/No columns and checkboxes for: The investigator may audio or video record me to aid with data analysis. The investigator will not share these recordings with anyone outside of the immediate study team. The investigator may audio or video record me for use in scholarly presentations or publications. My identity may be shared as part of this activity, although the investigator will attempt to limit such identification. I understand the risks associated with such identification.

Signature Back for Children

You agree documents your permission for the named child to take part in this research.

Form with fields for Printed name of child, Signature of parent or individual legally authorized to consent to the child's general medical care, Date, and checkboxes for Parent and Individual legally authorized to consent to the child's general medical care.

Assent Form

Assent to Participate in Research

Title of Research Study: Peer Educator Experiences among Queer and Transgender Young Adults

Researcher: Jory Catalpa

Sponsor: Local nonprofit organization hosting Project CLEAR

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?

We are asking you to take part in this research study because you have participated in Project CLEAR as a peer educator, and we are interested in understanding your experiences training your peers on healthy relationships and consent.

What should I know about being in a research study?

You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to do so. It is up to you if you're going to participate, and if you want to, talk to your parents about any questions or concerns you have about the study. You can choose not to take part now and change your mind later if you want. If you decide you do not want to be in this study, no one will be mad at you. You can ask all the questions you want before you decide.

Why is this research being done?

In this study, I want to find out more about your experiences as a peer educator.

How long will the research last?

I expect that you will be in this research study for one interview session that will last about 60 mins.

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

If it is okay with you and you agree to join this study, you will be asked to participate in a face to face interview with the program evaluator (maybe a note taker present). You will also be asked to join in group observations with your peers, the program evaluation, and program managers present.

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

- Psychological risks- Questions about relationships with Project CLEAR staff may be upsetting for you. If you become upset, I will ask for your consent about further questions. I will also provide

Assent Form

you with resources or referrals to help you.

What happens to the information collected for the research?

The researchers will share your information, including research study records, to only people who have a need to review this information. For example, sometimes, researchers need to share information with the University or other people that work in research to make sure the researchers are following the rules.

Who can I talk to?

For questions about research appointments, the research study, research results, or other concerns, call the study team at:

Table with contact information for Faculty PI, Researcher Name, Research Affiliation, Phone Number, Email Address, and Study Staff (if applicable).

This research has been reviewed and approved by an Institutional Review Board (IRB), a group of people that look at the research before it starts. This group is part of the Human Research Protection Program (HRPP). To share concerns privately with the HRPP about your research experience, call the Research Participant Advocate Line at 617-625-1650 (Toll Free: 1-888-224-8636) or go to uminn.edu/participants. You are encouraged to contact the HRPP if:

- Your questions, concerns, or complaints are not being answered by the research team.
You cannot reach the research team.
You want to talk to someone besides the research team or your parents.
You have questions about your rights as a research participant.
You want to get information or provide feedback about this research.

Assent Form

Optional Elements:

The following research activities are optional, meaning that you do not have to agree to them to participate in the research study. Place your initials by each statement below to let us know your willingness to participate in these activities that may be required or optional.

I agree I disagree

The researcher may audio or video record me to help do the research. The researcher will not share these recordings with anyone outside of the immediate study team, University, or other people that need to for the research.

The researcher may audio or video record me for use in scholarly presentations or publications, like a journal article. My identity may be shared as part of this activity, although the researcher will attempt to limit the ability to identify me. I understand what it means if my identity, in some way, is shared with others.

Signature Block for Child Assent

Signature of child Date

Printed name of child

Printed name of person obtaining assent Date

Signature of person obtaining assent

## “Appendix I”

### Peer Educator Interview Questions

*Thank you for agreeing to the peer educator interview. This is your opportunity to evaluate the Project CLEAR curriculum and the training and support you’ve received from program staff. This is also an opportunity to reflect on your experiences as a peer educator.*

Specific situation: 1. what happened? 2. Who was involved? 3. What did you do? 4. What was the outcome?

*Note:* The \* denotes the finalized revised interview questions, after some initial analysis for key themes.

1. \*Why did you decide to become a peer educator?
2. What knowledge about the LGBTQ+ community do you think you brought to the table initially as a peer educator?
3. What does peer education mean to you?
  - a. \*What skills do you feel you bring to the table?
  - b. Who do you define/consider as your peers?
  - c. What is the pathway for the transmission of knowledge?
4. Talk about why a peer education model is important (why peer-to-peer education may be more important than having teachers, counselors, or social workers in charge of teaching).
  - a. \*Why might it be easier for queer and trans youth to talk with a peer?
5. \*Talk about the most significant experience you’ve had being a peer educator (tell the story of this experience. What you were doing, where you were, how you felt etc.)
  - a. \*What was the main thing you’ve taken away from that experience?
  - b. How does that experience inform your facilitations with peers?
  - c. How can you take this work into your everyday life?
6. \*What was a difficult experience you’ve had being a peer educator (tell the story of this experience? What you were doing, where you were, how you felt etc.)
  - a. How did you navigate this experience? (i.e., did you talk with your someone or reflect on the experience to learn from it?)
  - b. What did you learn from that experience?
7. \*In what ways do you think Project CLEAR is culturally competent, both for queer and trans and for POC? If it is or if it isn’t?
8. Do you have a favorite facilitation topic? If so, what is it, and why is it your favorite?
9. \*Talk about the importance of boundaries for queer and transgender youth
  - a. \*How has Project CLEAR helped you to establish boundaries in your personal life?

- b. Think about a time when you talked with a peer (or peers) about boundaries.  
\*What was the main piece of knowledge you wanted to communicate to them about boundaries?
- 10. \*Talk about the importance of self-care for queer and transgender youth
  - a. \*How has Project CLEAR helped you to practice self-care?
  - b. Think about a time when you talked with a peer (or peers) about self-care.  
\*What was the main piece of knowledge you wanted to communicate to them about self-care?
- 11. Is there a facilitation topic that you avoid? If so, what is it, and why do you avoid it.
- 12. Are there times that you engage in peer education outside of Project CLEAR (i.e., having informal conversations with peers at school or in other community settings)? If so, please describe how those opportunities come up and how you navigate them.
- 13. \*Talk about a time when you felt that participating in Project CLEAR helped you...
  - a. \*to identify healthy and unhealthy relationships
  - b. \*to feel more confident
  - c. \*to connect (with your peers, adults at school, Project CLEAR staff, family, &/or community)
  - d. \*Grow as a leader
  - e. \*to care for your queer and trans community
- 14. How would you like to continue to be involved in Project CLEAR as you go off to college?
- 15. Based on your experiences, what advice would you give to the new cohort of peer educators?
- 16. Evaluating your training as a peer educator (the eight-week session), do you have any recommendations on ways to improve the training and support you've received from Project CLEAR staff?
- 17. \*Thinking back over all your experiences as a peer educator, what the main takeaway was?
- 18. \*Is there anything else you'd like to discuss your peer educator experience?

## “Appendix J”

### Hermeneutic Phenomenological Coding Procedure

#### Conducting Thematic Analysis

- **Theme:** an element which frequently occurs in the text
- **Theme analysis:** the process of recovering the theme or themes that are embodied and dramatized in the evolving meanings and imagery of the work.
- When we analyze a phenomenon, we are trying to determine what the themes are, the *experiential structures* that make up that experience.

**Isolating Thematic Statements-** Three steps toward uncovering or isolating thematic aspects of a phenomenon in text:

1. Wholistic or sententious approach
2. Selective or highlighting approach
3. Detailed or line-by-line approach

**Research Question(s)-** What are we looking for in the text?

What are peer educators’ *experiences* participating in Project CLEAR?

- a. Experiences with Project CLEAR staff (receiving support and building trusting relationships with adults)
- b. Experiences teaching and training peers about healthy relationships and consent (peer education and facilitation)
- c. Experiences applying PCLEAR training to their personal lives (knowledge, behavior/relationship/attitude changes)

#### Coding Procedures

**Wholistic.** We attend to the text as a whole and ask, what phrase may capture the fundamental meaning or principal significance of the text as a whole? We then try to express that meaning through writing, aiming to formulate such a phrase

1. **Read the full transcript:** This enables you to become familiar with the participant’s account/experience—comment anything that appears exciting or significant (open coding).
  - a. *Note:* important for coders who did not conduct the interview (get familiar with the full narrative)

2. **Write** an overall impression of the whole text. Writing is the method by which we apply hermeneutics (interpretation). When we write our first impression of the text, we are reflecting and interpreting at the same time.

### Wholistic Summary Memo Example

Z's interview: Zinnia discussed feeling whole because of participating in PCLEAR. She mentioned already holding a leadership position within their community/at school and a desire to apply that skill set to Project CLEAR. Zinnia said Project CLEAR made her feel like she was doing something right. A common theme was that Zinnia felt knowledgeable about healthy and unhealthy relationships; however, Project CLEAR reiterated that knowledge and made her feel more confident that Zinnia's internal knowledge and previously held beliefs were correct. Project CLEAR helped by giving PEs the language to express themselves and feel more confident. Zinnia mentioned several times that she aimed to support others to "live their truth."

There were several stories about helping friends and family members with setting personal boundaries and practicing self-care.

Zinnia discussed not trusting adults, that adults had hurt her, denied her experience, and they were out of touch with Zinnia's lived experience as a young queer second-generation immigrant and POC. She discussed a unique positionality of coming from a refugee family and coming out as LGBTQ+. They said there was a lack of representation for this intersectional identity, and they wanted to be the person they needed when they were coming out.

*Note:* This is my interpretative summary of Zinnia's entire interview after having read it.

**Selective.** Now that we have a feel for the arch of the text, reread it. This time select statement(s) or phrase(s) that seem particularly essential or revealing about peer educator experiences. The statements that we want to select are *experiential*, avoid coding opinions. For reference, the Sloan & Bowe (2014) article has excellent examples of the difference.

1. **Highlight** instances of lifeworld existential domains. Definitions and examples are in the codebook.
  - a. **Lifeworlds:** *Lived body, lived time, lived space, lived relations*
  - b. **PYD themes:** *Competence, confidence, connection, character, care, & the outcome of contribution*
2. **Write** an interpretive description as a reminder of what lifeworld or PYD theme you interpreted and why.

Selective Coding and Interpretive Memo Example	
I was like I want to be up there. I want to share more things, and I want to know more things. And I want to do good things. And I was like I want to do that. And they were like you can	<b>SPACE/RELATION/BODY/TIME-</b> “Up there” is a <i>space</i> , a space that designates a leader. <i>Seeing other</i> peer educators made her want to <i>share</i> and <i>learn more, future</i>

**Line-by-line.** Taking the selective coding of the four lifeworlds, line-by-line for the six C’s of PYD, and any other emergent themes. Meaning, for every line of text, ascribe a code that is thematic of the line, sentence, or phrase. Continue to recode as new themes emerge, and the organization of ideas becomes clearer. Add memos as necessary, especially for new and emergent themes.

1. **Underline** phrases in each line that confers meaning in each excerpt. Several codes will emerge across every excerpt in each lifeworld subset.
2. **Write** memos and interpretive descriptions connecting the code to each line in the excerpt.
3. **Organize** the codes periodically. Create process notes about moving, reordering, combining, or further conceptualizing themes
4. **Repeat** multiple times for excerpts in each lifeworld selection
5. **Recode** for the most current code tree. Remove excerpts that no longer apply and capture new excerpts that fall with the refined conceptual definition

Line-by-line Coding and Interpretive Memo Example: <i>From Body Excerpts</i>		
Text Excerpt	Line-by-line Code	Memo
Z: Like when I came out to my family as queer. It was really <u>hard for me to have that self-confidence</u> because everyone was like that is a stupid part of you. Or, like <u>me as a whole</u> was not very good to them anymore. And <u>I feel like a lot of queer youth go through the same thing.</u>	Lack of <b>confidence</b> <b>Compassion-</b> Empathy for QT youth <b>Self-care-</b> self- reflection	Body/Relation  Previous negative LW experiences  Compassion toward QTYOC

*Note:* LW refers to lifeworlds. Notice that negative lifeworld experiences emerged as a critical analytic theme

## “Appendix K”

### Affirming Lifeworlds Line-by-Line Coding by Positive Youth Development Outcomes

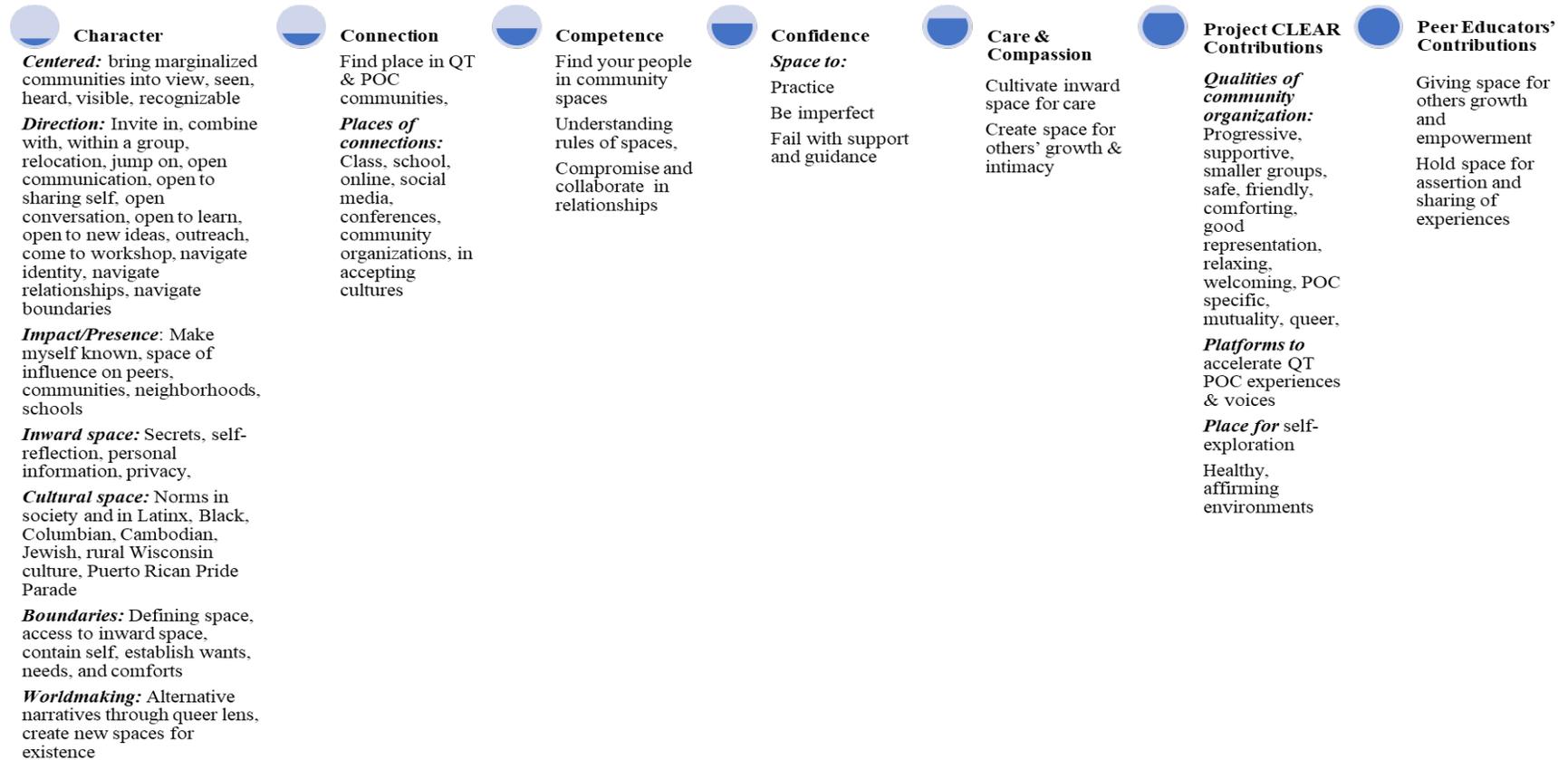
**Figure 1. Corporeality Line by Line Coding for Positive Youth Development (Affirming)**

<p> <b>Character</b></p> <p><i>Feelings:</i> passionate, happy, joyful, inspired, whole, comforted</p> <p><i>Values:</i> Connection, experience, honesty, respect, effort, self-knowledge, sharing, vulnerability, intimacy</p> <p><i>Identities:</i> Leader, Teacher, Activist, Advocate, POC, QT, Peer educator, Role model, Mentor, Queer artist</p> <p><i>Lived experiences:</i> POC, QT, coming out, QT in school, QT youth, mestiza, activism, GSA leader, peer educator, w/mental illness, homelessness, surviving abuse</p>	<p> <b>Connection</b></p> <p>Join groups to promote voice and expose personal experiences, express emotional vulnerability</p> <p>Easier to connect with people of similar experience</p> <p>In the mix: socializing</p> <p>Part of something bigger/a team/an organization</p> <p>Tend to relationships</p> <p>Express needs and desires to others</p> <p>Representation: see self in and feel affirmed and inspired by others, accepted for authentic self</p> <p>Empowered by bonds to</p> <p>Disconnect from toxic relationships</p> <p>Work on selves together</p> <p>Positive representation of QT POC leadership and queer success</p>	<p> <b>Competence</b></p> <p><i>Knowledge to:</i> teach, notice red flags, escape unhealthy relationships, handle situations, how to relate to peers, power of their voice, protect and defend self, distinguish safe and unsafe situations, LGBTQ culture, types of abuse, signs of power and control in straight/queer relationships, boundaries, consent, self-care, coming out safely, Heartshields, mental health, online safety</p> <p><i>Skills:</i> Vulnerability, building connection/networks, personality/charisma, intuition, self-sufficiency, coping, protecting self, moderating trust and self-disclosure, caring for self, caring for others, leveraging experience for resources, challenge negative stereotypes, unlearn bad habits, contain toxic traits</p> <p><i>Facilitation:</i> PCLEAR curriculum, organizational, build/prepare workshop, engaging audience/fielding questions, in indicators of quality workshop</p>	<p> <b>Confidence</b></p> <p><i>In self:</i> Definition, identity, worth, sexuality, experiences, a lot to offer</p> <p><i>In abilities to:</i> withstand judgements, check in with self, communicate, facilitate learning, promote change</p> <p><i>In relational knowledge:</i> Communicate, establishing boundaries, negotiating consent, boundaries, identifying healthy and unhealthy relationships, QT relationships</p> <p><i>Empowered to:</i> Self-define, self-care, trust voice, grow voice, engage with the world, love self out loud, feel no shame, stand for what's right, not be obedient, discuss knowledge, be imperfect, make things happen and have positive impact on others</p>	<p> <b>Care &amp; Compassion</b></p> <p>Self-compassion</p> <p>Self-care</p> <p>Improvement</p> <p>Growth</p> <p>Empathy</p> <p>Stewardship</p> <p>Compassion for others</p> <p>Care for others</p>	<p> <b>PCLEAR Contributions</b></p> <p><i>Youth advocacy and empowerment:</i> Uplift, stand with others as they live their truth, fight others' fights with them, support, and advise others in the service of helping them find their voices and strengths</p> <p><i>Teach others:</i> coming out safely, how to leave toxic relationships, how to navigate and sustain healthy relationships</p>	<p> <b>Peer educators' Contributions</b></p> <p>Expose alternative narratives about QT and QT POC families</p> <p>Unlearn negative master narratives about social milieu</p> <p>Teach effective communication</p>
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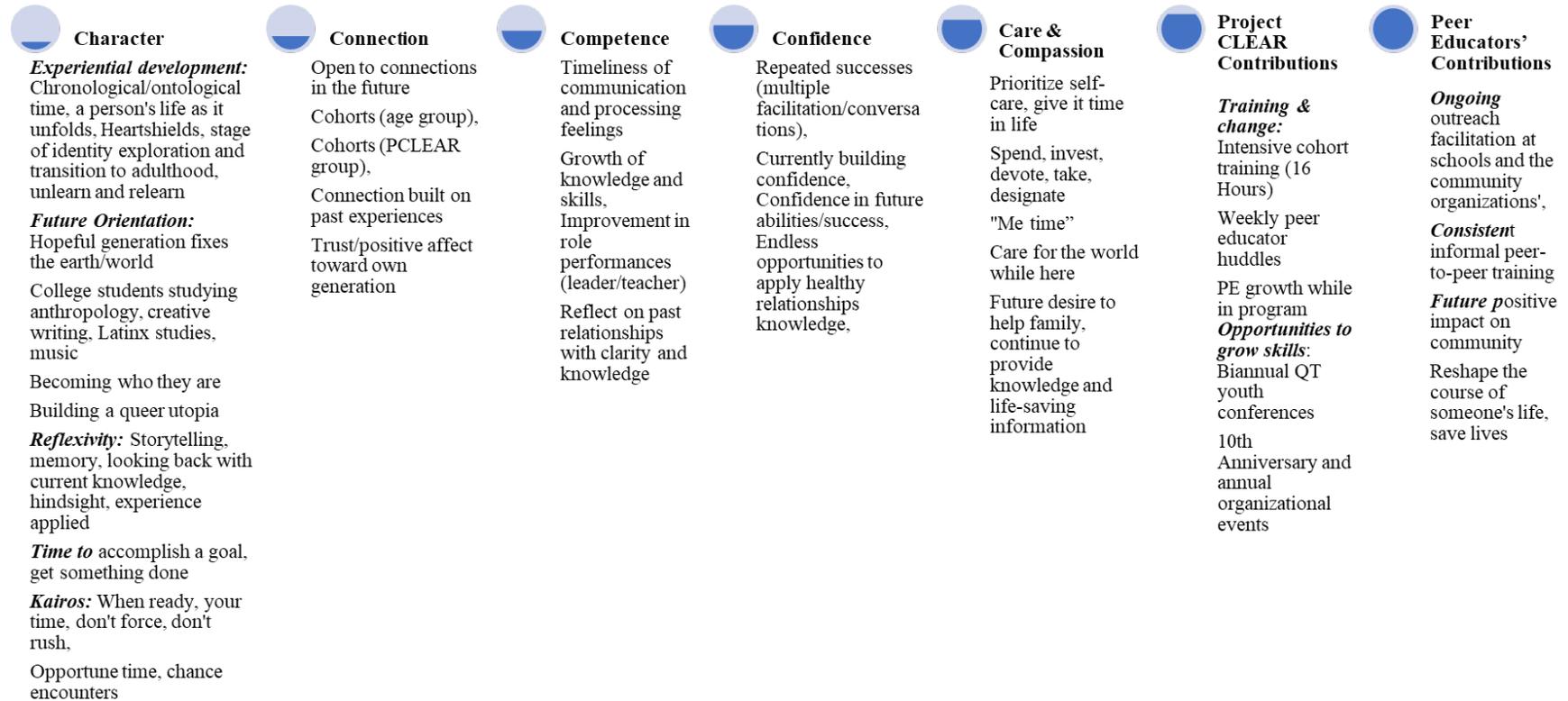
**Figure 2. Relationality Line by Line Coding for Positive Youth Development (Affirming)**

<p> <b>Character</b>          Shaped by relationships          Reflexive          Intersubjective awareness          Out to family          Authentic with others          Oriented by heritage, ethnicity, communities and customs          Expand horizons and learn about self from others          Be an accessible resource          Teacher educator          Represent for the QT POC communities          Relatable</p>	<p> <b>Connection</b>  <i><b>Social Milieu:</b></i> Peers, friends, family, self, communities, community          organization, society, generation, college, high school GSA, PCLEAR staff/cohorts          Mentor to QT and QT POC middle schoolers          Being mentored, queer elders, queer kinship  <i><b>Alternative Narratives:</b></i> Healthy relationships with POC parents, POC men have healthy relationships with gender/masculinity, POC parents accepting of QT identity          Negotiate mutual desires and comforts          Mutual sharing of experiences          Collaborate/collective action with leaders and activists</p>	<p> <b>Competence</b>          Learn from others' success and failures          Healthy relationships are built on mutual vulnerability and sharing          Lead/advise others          Take advice/get help from others          Velocity/Viscosity of relationships          Establish self as distinct from others          Flex boundaries          Strategize collective action          Intervene on behalf of others          Navigate healthy relationships</p>	<p> <b>Confidence</b>          Positive and constructive feedback          Seeing others' success/thriving          Confidence in support/acceptance          Reassurance in self-worth for care, correctness of thoughts          Seeing others' vulnerability, builds trust in others          Helped to learn, grow/given vocab, knowledge          Can use experience, abilities, knowledge to help/advise/teach others</p>	<p> <b>Care &amp; Compassion</b>          Receive care and support          Respect, feel cared for, empowered          When others hold space for them to assert self          Protect and support others          Care for loved ones          Give others knowledge          Emancipate communities          Get involved to relieve struggle/suffering          Advocate for QT youth</p>	<p> <b>Project CLEAR Contributions</b>  <i><b>PCLEAR curriculum:</b></i> nuanced, able to identify with it and see self in it, important, provides access to lost relational development opportunities in heteronormative school curriculum, applicable and relevant to peer group and everyday life  <i><b>PLCLEAR staff connection:</b></i> positive role model and representation, shared/applied curriculum to life, transparent, trustworthy, approachable, structured respectful of autonomy, reassuring  <i><b>PCLEAR program:</b></i> Empowered PE's to self-care and care for others, provided opportunities to accelerate voice  <i><b>PE's felt:</b></i> safe, comforted, supported, affirmed, fed, nurtured, supported, loved, paid  <i><b>Improved PE's connection to:</b></i> Family, communities, friend groups, and adults "</p>	<p> <b>Peer Educators' Contributions</b>          Collective empowerment          Empower voices          Secure relationships  <i><b>Leading discussions on</b></i> PCLEAR curriculum/LGBTQ cultural knowledge/QT POC experiences  <i><b>Topics:</b></i> QT POC youth safety, relational self-defense, ally ship and LGBTQ culture/terminology, students' rights (trans tool kit), negotiating consent, establishing boundaries, practicing self-care, LGBTQ specific types of abuse and power and control, red flags in relationships, sexual exploitation, online and social media safety, sharing personal narrative with power</p>
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**Figure 3. Spatiality Line by Line Coding for Positive Youth Development (Affirming)**



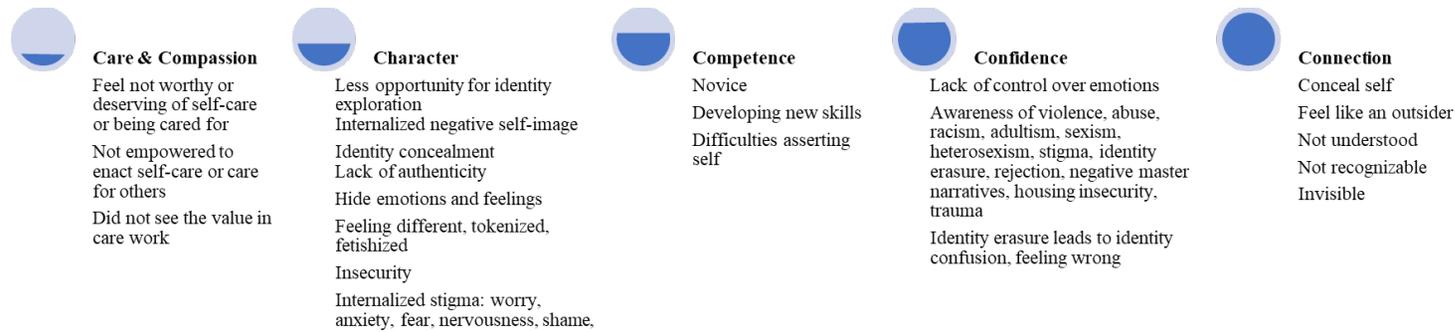
**Figure 4. Temporality Line by Line Coding for Positive Youth Development (Affirming)**



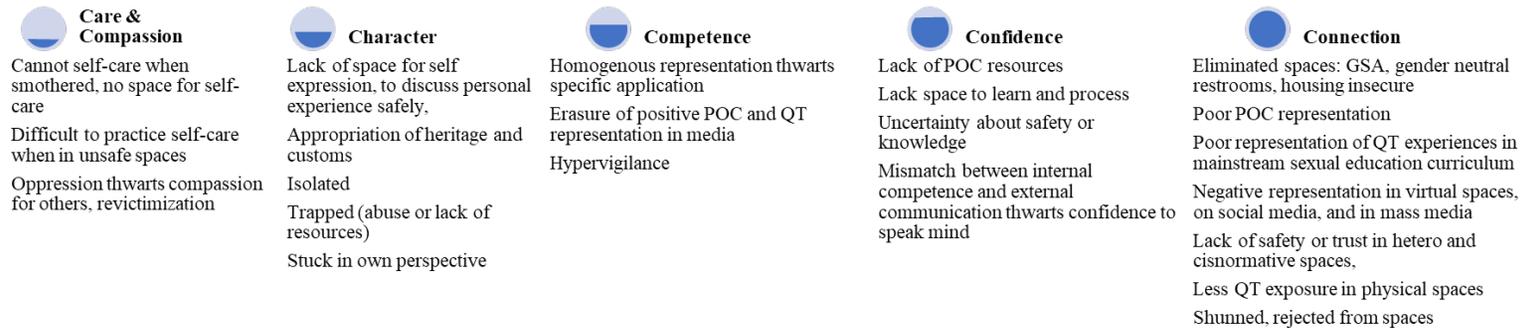
## “Appendix L”

### Thwarting Lifeworlds Line by Line Coding and Positive Youth Development Outcomes

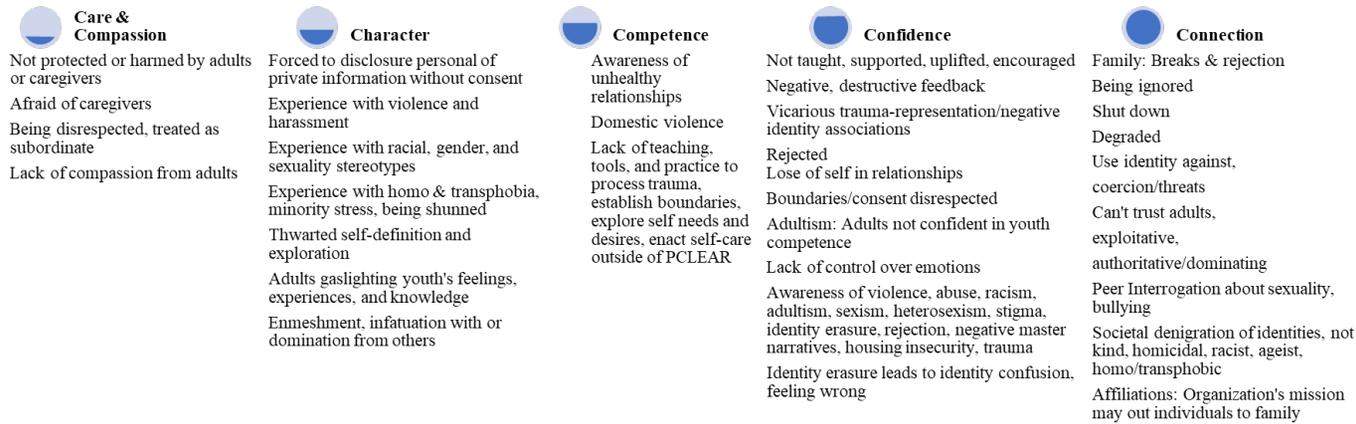
**Figure 1. Corporeality Line by Line Coding for Positive Youth Development (Thwarting)**



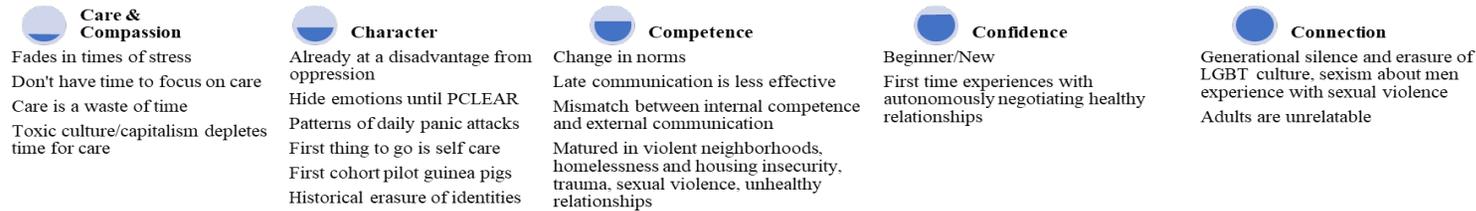
**Figure 2. Spatiality Line by Line Coding for Positive Youth Development (Thwarting)**



**Figure 3 . Relationality Line by Line Coding for Positive Youth Development (Thwarting)**



**Figure 4. Temporality Line by Line Coding for Positive Youth Development (Thwarting)**



## “Appendix M”

### Participant's Mentions on Experiences with Relational Violence

Figure 1. PEs' Mentions on Experiences with Relational Violence

