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Developing More Equitable and Critically Conscious Organizations: *Testimonios* and *Critical Platicas* with Black and Latino/x LGBTQ+ Male CHRD Leaders

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DEVELOPING MORE EQUITABLE AND CRITICALLY CONSCIOUS ORGANIZATIONS: *TESTIMONIOS* AND *CRITICAL PLATICAS* WITH BLACK AND LATINO/X LGBTQ+ MALE CHRD LEADERS

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ABSTRACT

DEVELOPING MORE EQUITABLE AND CRITICALLY CONSCIOUS ORGANIZATIONS: *TESTIMONIOS* AND *CRITICAL PLATICAS* WITH BLACK AND LATINO/X LGBTQ+ MALE CHRD LEADERS

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This dissertation connects the recent DEIB movement within organizations to larger social justice movements, specifically those that impact workers and the workplace. Critical human resource development (CHRD) professionals, who serve as "insider activists", are highlighted due to their work to continue movement objectives within organizations. Through *testimonios* and *critical platicas*, this study explores how Black and Latino/x LGBTQ+ CHRD professionals, in particular, are experiencing the workplace, especially as it relates to their engagement with how DEIB is practiced within organizations. Through this study, these professionals provide insights into the ways that workplaces can be redesigned and reimagined to be more critically conscious and equitable spaces, especially for those from marginalized backgrounds. Their reflections can work to enhance the ways that DEIB is practiced within organizations. This dissertation is available in open access at AURA (https://aura.antioch.edu) and OhioLINK ETD Center (https://etd.ohiolink.edu).

Keywords: DEIB, Critical Human Resource Development, Black, Latino, Latinx, Queer, LGBTQ+, workplace, organizational leadership, workplace movements, social justice movements, critical consciousness, equity, IPA, Phenomenology, qualitative research

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The idea that workplaces are removed from the structurally discriminatory practices of the larger social world has been challenged in many publications (Cortina & Kirkland, 2018; Dietz & Kleinlogel, 2018). This is especially true for LGBTQ+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and the spectrum of sexual and gender minorities) persons of color (POC), who are keenly aware of bias and discrimination that persists within organizations. Despite the successes of social movements and activists over the years, bias and discrimination continue to be a pervasive and highly problematic component of organizational cultures. For historically excluded groups, bias and discrimination starts during the recruiting process and extends throughout the Employee Life Cycle (Garcia Johnson & Otto, 2019; Hebl et al., 2002). A 2018 study shared by the National Black Justice Coalition, a national organization focused on the empowerment of Black LGBTQ+/Same Gender Loving (SGL) persons, supported this claim when it revealed that LGBTQ+/SGL people of color have higher rates of unemployment, are more likely to avoid taking time off to care for loved ones due to financial constraints and concerns around losing their jobs, and are "more than twice as likely as White LGBTQ people to encounter hiring bias based on their LGBTQ identities"(as cited in "Human Rights Campaign Foundation, 2018). For non-heterosexual, non-cis and non-White persons, this means that organizations are often not built or sustained in ways that affirm our whole selves. Instead, many LGBTQ+ persons of color find themselves having to navigate multiple "not-so-micro" aggressions in the workplace.

For decades, though, organizational leaders have been working to address these issues. Human Resource Development (HRD) professionals and scholars are among those leading change efforts due to their specific duties related to managing the people function within

organizations (Osmun, 2019). Even with their efforts, LGBTQ+ persons of color continue to face daily challenges within their respective organizations. Organizational leaders, then, must stay open to learning with these communities about ways in which organizations can be transformed into more equitable and critically conscious spaces. This research provides a space for this dialogue and offers an opportunity for organizational leaders to hear directly from LGBTQ+ persons of color about their organizational experiences and ways in which organizations can improve.

Rationale for This Study

In this study, I am particularly interested in the workplace experiences of Black and Latino/x LGBTQ+/SGL men, as the worldviews of these populations are not often centered within the context of organizational scholarship. They have a long history of organizing together against exclusion and dehumanization in society. Additionally, focusing on Black or Latino/x, and LGBTQ+ persons is important, as they are typically among the populations within the US whose negative work-related experiences have not been resolved over the years. While various scholars have researched the experiences of LGBTQ+ persons (Holman et al., 2019; Lloren & Parini, 2017) and Black (Roberts et al., 2019) or Latino/x (Chavez-Haroldson, 2020) persons in the workplace, few have focused specifically on those whose intersecting identities are inclusive of all these dynamics. This study, then, used the lens of phenomenology to provide space for Black and Latino/x LGBTQ+ workers to work in collaboration with one another to share their workplace experiences and then transform any concerns into something tangible that can be used by HR leaders, particularly those that belong to the emerging field of Critical Human Resource Development (CHRD). The culmination of this study is a list of actions which can be shared

with CHRD professionals who can use this information at a future point in their quest to develop more critically conscious and equitable organizations.

The focus on CRHD is significant for this study as it points to an emerging field that has been created to address various shortcomings that exist within the field of HRD. Over the years, scholars have discussed concerns with whether HRD operated with employees' best interests at heart when the field and some of those who lead it have been perpetuating managerial processes that restrict, confine, and replicate cultures that are embedded with various "-isms" and "-phobias" that are counter to full human development (Bierema & Cseh, 2014). Some scholars have also pointed to the limitations of traditional HR practices in sincerely addressing bias and discrimination in the workplace (Hirudayaraj & Shields, 2019). The result has been that scholars who operate from a CHRD lens are specifically and intentionally seeking to transform traditional HRD into organizational practices that are visibly anti-racist and not just "colorblind," anti-homophobic and not just tolerant of LGBTQ+ persons, anti-xenophobic, and pro-disability among many other things (Bierema & Cseh, 2014). While all organizational members should want to embody these values, this study positioned CHRD as the organizational leaders who are most likely to work in community with Black and Latino/x LGBTQ+ persons in elevating their voices within the workplace. Not only is the objective consistent with the duties of HR persons but CHRD professionals have taken on a personal mission to address social inequities and the concerns of historically excluded populations.

The Purpose of this Dissertation

The purpose of this study is to highlight the workplace experiences of Black and Latino/x LGBTQ+ CHRD professionals. Specifically, I established a space where they listened to one

another's experiences and concerns and collectively developed solutions that can be shared with other organizational leaders in their quest to lead and establish more equitable workplaces.

The Research Questions

The following research questions guide this dissertation study:

RQ1: How do Black and Latino/x LGBTQ+/SGL CHRD professionals experience the workplace?

RQ2: What actionable steps can Black and Latino/x LGBTQ+SGL CHRD leaders provide that will assist CHRD leaders in developing more equitable and critically conscious workplaces?

Black and Latino/x LGBTQ+/SGL persons who participated in this study shared their experiences and collectively worked to offer solutions to the concerns that emerged. Their insights are documented below.

Definitions and Key Terms

There are various terms that emerged throughout the course of this project that require further explanation for those unfamiliar with specific communities or organizational roles. When referring to sexual and gender minorities, for instance, the acronym LGBTQ+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and others) is often used as an abbreviated way of speaking or referring to this community. The "+" symbol here denotes the spectrum of sexual and gender identities, relationship and partnership styles, and queer identities that are lesser known, unknown, or yet to be discovered. It is also worth noting that the term *trans* is used as shorthand when mentioning persons who identify as transgender.

Additionally, terms around race and ethnicity are important. Because this study highlights the experiences of racial and ethnic groups, the acronym POC (People of Color) or more

specifically, BIPOC (Black and Indigenous People of Color) is used to reference various non-White groups. I use terms such as *Black* and *African American* interchangeably. I am aware that some individuals prefer one term over another while others use them interchangeably. Oftentimes, the identifier Black can be used to refer to anyone in the diaspora who identifies with their African heritage while the identifier African American specifically speaks to the multigenerational experience of Black persons in the United States. For this study, these terms are used interchangeably, as the study focuses on persons within the United States. It is also important to mention that the term Same Gender Loving (SGL) is used as an identifier that is unique to Black individuals who do not identify with terms such as gay, lesbian, or other terms that do not reflect the intersectionality of Black experiences. Oftentimes, "LGBTQ+/SGL" is used to highlight the experiences of this population within the context of discourse on sexual and gender minorities.

When writing of persons of Latin American descent, I use the identifier *Latino/x* to refer to individuals whose heritage and/or identity is based in this community. I am aware that there is ongoing dialogue about "Who is Latin"? in relation to language, culture, and European conquest. Because I do not belong to this population, I want to stay mindful of using appropriate language, so I have chosen to use phrasing that is most inclusive of persons. When writing of the LGBTQ+ community, research has shown that while some have taken on the Latinx or Latine identifier, where the "x" or "e" refers to those who identify along the spectrum of gender variance (i.e., transgender, agender, gender nonconforming), others have a preference to returning to the term "Latin" that was more widely used previously due to its gender-neutral orientation (Lozano et al., 2021; Salinas & Lozano, 2019). Either way, this study provides language that is inclusive of all

choices. As a result, the identifier “Latino/x” will be used here as it specifically represents the participants of this study.

Before jumping into the research, however, I should note that there are different perceptions about how concerns around diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging should be addressed. When defining the different terms, I adopt scholar-practitioner Maria Chavez-Haroldson’s definition, where she shares that “equity is the why, diversity is the who, and inclusion is the how” (Chavez-Haroldson, 2020, p. 9). This study adopts this orientation in understanding diversity as being about differences between and among individuals and groups, inclusion as the means in which space is created to proactively engage with difference, and equity as the reason why the first two issues are important. While the issue of belonging was not specifically addressed by Chavez, I present organizational “belonging” as the “what” of sorts that speaks to “what” we hope the outcome will be once many of the “-isms” and “-phobias” of a DEI engagement become addressed. To understand how these issues are often presented to the larger public, it is important to note that there is not 100% consensus on the use of these terms. Some people prefer to use the acronym DEIB (Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging) while other acronyms such as DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) are used. Some even use acronyms such as IDEA (Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Accessibility) to denote the significance of centering the experiences of persons with disabilities. Despite differences in acronyms, scholars and practitioners share the objective of discussing how organizations can be more equitable and critically conscious by ensuring that persons form historically underserved and excluded populations are part of the fabric of organizations. With that being said, the acronym DEIB is most reflective of how this research project is presented.

For this study, when I reference CHRD (Critical Human Resource Development), I am referencing a broad field of study and practice and not a specific job role or title. In research, CHRD scholars approach research from various fields including organizational development, human resources, and critical studies. In practice, CHRD leaders can exist in roles such as Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Officers, Diversity Officers (DO), Chief Diversity Officers (CDO), People and Culture Officers, and traditional roles related to Human Resources. Also key in the distinction that I hope to make is that any person within the organization can take up the mantle of CHRD, regardless of their titles or roles, which is a thought shared by Torraco and Lundgren (2020). CHRD is most likely to be successful when this work is shared in collaboration with others and, as such, should not be limited to any singular research lens or field or role within an organization.

Researcher's Positionality

Creswell and Poth (2018) remind us that as researchers get close to participants, they should clearly articulate their values, beliefs, biases, and other axiological assumptions that lead their research inquiry. In doing so, researchers "position" themselves in relation to the participants and other study contexts. For participants and other scholars to trust a researcher's stance, it is imperative that the researcher expresses this positionality within the study and to those choosing to participate in the study. While researchers are being transparent about their positionality, they also must choose methodologies that allow the voices and experiences of individuals to be amplified from the ground up. These methodologies are influenced by the researcher's experience in data management (Creswell & Poth, 2018). These qualitative methodologies are constructivist and grounded in individual experiences as opposed to more positivist methods that are pulled from theory.

I identify as a Black, gay/SGL, cisgender male who uses “he, him, his” pronouns. This research is significant for me because I have had many issues with navigating organizational cultures in ways where I have felt the need to silence my own voice and that inhibited my ability and/or willingness to fully engage, for fear of real or perceived negative consequences. This work speaks to my interest in “diving deeper” into how others who share similar backgrounds as myself navigate their own organizational spaces. Personal stories and anecdotes from friends, coworkers and strangers in online groups have convinced me that many of us may share the same concerns. I am also under the impression that we do not often give voice to our concerns for various reasons that include not knowing who the most ideal person/s would be to enact change and help transform our organizational spaces.

Over the last few years, I have made a shift in focusing my professional career on becoming an executive in the field of Human Resources. Now that I have made the move to exist in this space more intentionally, I am hoping to find ways that scholars and practitioners in the field can work toward creating more critically conscious and equitable environments. For this dissertation, I hope that organizational leaders, namely CHRD professionals, will have the opportunity to actively listen to the concerns of Black and Latino/x LGBTQ+ workers and the insights that they have developed around organizational change and take those insights into their respective organizations to do the work to make appropriate changes.

Overview of the Research Approach

This study is a qualitative, exploratory study using phenomenology. Phenomenology as a methodology involves the “participation” of researched communities into defining, identifying, and solving everyday problems with “action-based solutions” (Kidd & Kral, 2005). For the purposes of understanding organizations “through the eyes of participants,” this study employs

both individual *testimonios* (critical and reflective interviews) and group-based *critical platicas* (focus groups).

Outline of Dissertation Chapters

Chapter II of this study dives deeper into relevant literature and specifically provides information on social movements and the rights that activists have secured and are working to secure for historically underrepresented and excluded persons in the workplace; the efforts of organizational leaders to address these concerns via DEIB initiatives; and a summary of some literature that is relevant to Black and Latino/x LGBTQ+/SGL experiences. Chapter III lays the foundation for the study design and choice of methodologies. Chapter IV presents the results of the study. Chapter V serves as a space for discussing findings in more detail as well as the limitations, the implications for leadership and change, and future research.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

This review of literature is designed to provide a foundation for the factors that impact the workplace experiences of Black and Latino/x LGBTQ+ workers. It starts with a historical snapshot of the ways the different ways that organizations have influenced and been influenced by activist and movement activities. The review then transitions into research on critical consciousness within organizations which includes a reflection on Critical Human Resource Development leaders as change agents and the use of diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB) as the newest iteration of a history of workplace movements change. This review then offers insights into some concerns of historically excluded workers in relation to discrimination, microaggressions and intersectionality. It concludes by highlighting issues around identity that are significant for Critical HRD professionals to understand if they are to address the concerns expressed by historically excluded workers, especially those who identify as Black and Latino/x LGBTQ+.

Organizations as Spaces for Social Transformation

To gain a more in-depth understanding of the workplace experiences of marginalized persons, especially Black and Latino/x LGBTQ+ men, it is imperative to take a step back to first understand the mutually influencing relationship between social changes happening outside of organizations, such as social movements and the development of legislation designed to protect marginalized workers, as well as efforts that are happening within organizations, which includes progressive organizational policies enacted by "insider activists" (such as Human Resource Development professionals) as well as decades of efforts to create more equitable and critically conscious organizations through efforts such as Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion initiatives. These phenomena do not exist in a vacuum and often ebb and flow in ways that remind us how

organizations are not removed from the societies in which they exist but are indeed a product of them.

A History of Workplace Activism

The ebb and flow that exists between these shifting dynamics results in social movements and organizations that have a love-hate relationship that has existed for over a century. This "hate" ("frustration" might be more accurate) is rooted in a history of organizations that have often perpetuated, and still do, systematic "-isms" and "-phobias" in ways that were, and are, problematic for internal and external stakeholders (Bartels et al., 2013; Bradley-Geist & Schmidtke, 2015). Because organizational leaders did not always incite change on their own in ways that honored every worker's dignity and personhood, internal and external activists used various modes of resistance to protest the injustices that they experienced to destabilize and resist these institutional problems. Often, the result was to change organizational policies, procedures, or culture (Briscoe & Gupta, 2016) or even the law. Social movement scholarship and organizational scholarship also share instances of these efforts being successful in ways that I categorize as the "love" part of the social movement-organization dynamic. This "love" ("appreciation" might be more accurate) of organizations manifests in organizations and organizational leaders that have, even with some resistance, taken the steps to resolve issues of inequity and injustice—within its walls and even beyond those walls—in ways that impact citizens who are not immediate stakeholders. Within organizations, this looks like AT&T having non-discrimination policies protecting lesbian and gay people since the 1970s, despite the country as a whole not having such protections in place for over 40 years (Raeburn, 2000). These achievements were the outcome of intentional efforts of external protestors and "insider activists" who collectively organized through spaces such as Employee Resource Groups.

Outside of organizations, this looks like recent news reports of Disney Corporation, with its billion-dollar Marvel studios franchise, as well as Time Warner, the parent company of CNN and HBO, threatening to take their business out of the state of Georgia if the Georgia Governor passed an anti-gay bill (Chokshi, 2016), and similar moves by the owners of Netflix who threatened to leave Georgia if a law banning abortions was sustained (Turner, 2019). All of these instances, and many more, point to the success that "insider activists" have had in ensuring that their workplaces are spaces for change.

What is clear is that social movements influence and are influenced by organizations and insider activists. Understanding this connection allows us to understand the kinds of dynamics that manifest within organizations that are reflective of the concerns, grievances, and problems that are occurring externally in the larger society. Organizational leaders who lead change in these ways create critically consciousness organizations that are at the heart of organizational practices related to organizational change. Critical consciousness becomes a key component of organizations that are sincerely invested in organizational change that impacts all staff, especially the most marginalized.

Social Movements and the Fight for Workplace Rights

The Civil Rights Movements became a turning point where many workers with marginalized identities were able to begin to see changes in how organizations welcomed their presence. While often associated with the visible and long-standing efforts of Black Americans to organize for dignity and full citizenship in all areas of life (Morris, 1984), the Civil Rights Era can be considered a collective of multiple issues and movements of activists working to ensure rights for different populations, especially in the workplace (Hall, 2005). It is common for people to have knowledge of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and specifically Title VII, which protects

employees from discrimination based on sex, nationality, color, race, or religion. This piece of legislation has become foundational for many historically underrepresented and excluded populations seeking to gain civil rights. Movement efforts on behalf of various other populations have extended civil rights protections to their respective populations as well and these efforts led to the development of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission which enforces workplace protections for various legally protected groups (Germain et al., 2019). Additionally, activists within the Labor Movement, often spearheaded by Latino/x or Chicano/a/x activists, advocated on behalf of "blue collar" and "brown collar" workers and involved multiple iterations of union-based protections that includes increased fair wages and better working conditions (Jepsen & Norberg, 2017).

Other lesser-known movements have also been successful in securing rights for different populations within workplace settings. For instance, the Townsend Movement was a movement in the1930s to protect retirees' pay after the Great Depression and is associated with being foundational in establishing the Social Security Act and income protections for retired seniors (Amenta & Zylan, 1991). Similarly, the Disability Rights Movements, gained prominence during the Civil Rights Movement era and has continued today with various legislative protections, such as the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), that has expanded the definition of disability to encompass a broader sense of what is considered "disabled" and thus provide workplace protections against discrimination (Germain et al., 2019). Additionally, movements like Occupy Wall Street, which called attention to global corporate greed and wealth inequality, have directly influenced the conversation around Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and introduced terms such as the Triple Bottom Line of People, Planet, and Profits to new audiences (Sisco et al., 2019). Specifically related to this project, the LGBT Workplace Movement resulted in various

benefits provided to LGBTQ+ workers that included the following: domestic partner benefits, Family Leave options extended to parents with adopted children, medical benefits for trans people through their transitioning process, and the availability of LGBTQ-specific Employee Resource Groups where employees can build community and voice their concerns (Kosbie, 2015; Raeburn, 2000). In all these cases, movements have directly impacted the lives of historically underrepresented and excluded persons within the workplace.

While the successes of previous movements might suggest that battles to protect employees had been won, the reality of movement activity is that movements are never really "over." Movements are continuous, and movement actors and activists, including insider activists, are almost always "moving" in the struggle, even when the media spotlight does not highlight or exponentially increase the moment-in-time of specific movement activities (Calhoun, 1993). The last 10 years support this claim, as familiar struggles once again receive the level of media attention that would have many realizing that the work of change was not over. For instance, because of the Black Lives Matter Movement (Carney, 2016), a massive resurgence of concerns around policing and the use of Black bodies for labor (Larson, 2016) has received media attention and has positively resulted in the Creating a Respectful and Open World for Natural hair Act, or the C.R.O.W.N. Act, which prevents employment discrimination based on hair (Donahoo, 2021). These efforts can be seen as a resurgence of conversations from the 1960s and serve as a reminder that Black people continue to deal with discrimination and bias in the workplace over half a century after Civil Rights legislation was enacted at the federal level. Additionally, the successful turnout of activists and allies across the country and world for the Women's March in 2017 (Sisco et al., 2019), coupled with the workplace sexual harassment concerns that were recentered during the MeToo Movement, prove that women still face inequity

and inequality in the workplace (Boyle & Cucchiara, 2018; Rodino-Colocino, 2018). A resurgence of ICE arrests, incarcerations, and deportations of undocumented Latino workers (Hing, 2021; Sumption, 2021) have highlighted the ongoing problems of carceral punishment of Latino bodies and the history of US institutions to use said bodies for labor and then discard workers once their interests have been satisfied (Jepsen & Norberg, 2017). These concerns reflect the decades that Chicano/a activists, and especially Chicano queer activists such as Cherrie Moraga, have fought against in relation to liberating all from the tyranny of oppression (Chang-Ross, 2010). Finally, the active prevention of trans persons in the US armed forces from accessing and maintaining employment and in restricting their ability to use restrooms that are associated with their gender (Parco et al., 2016) has become a visible battle for LGBTQ+ rights in and out of the workplace. This quick history shows how movement actors and organizational leaders are mutually influencing one another. This symbiotic relationship is a space that should constantly be reevaluated and reimagined to ensure organizational leaders stay responsive to increased consciousness in relation to the human experience at work.

While this reflection on social movements was not exhaustive or comprehensive by any stretch of the imagination, I want to highlight some key points. A deeper dive into these movements allows us to see the cyclical nature of movement progresses and setbacks and the role that insider activists played as change agents. Additionally, we see the active and intentional role those organizational leaders can play in choosing to create inclusive and equitable spaces within organizations for historically excluded populations. What is clear from movement scholarship is that organizational leaders invested in creating equitable organizations will leverage their positions and resources to ensure that change occurs both within and outside of their respective organizations. These types of organizational leaders become social movement

change agents, or "insider activists" (Briscoe & Gupta, 2016) whose efforts for more critically conscious spaces are connected to transformations that happen at the societal level. These insider activists are able to align their efforts to larger social movements and adopt language that makes their collective interests easily identifiable. When this occurs, the connection between external social movements and the "micro-mobilization" (Scully & Segal, 2002) of internal activists that carry those movement goals into organizations becomes clear. It also becomes clear that just as external movements are constantly in flux, so too are intraorganizational movements led by internal activists whose goals may shift in and out of favor over time.

Critical Consciousness within Organizations

When speaking of critical consciousness, I am specifically referring to Paulo Freire's "theory of conscientization" (Freire, 1970). This theory proposes that if we are to engage in social transformation, people must engage in a cyclical process of reflection and critique of their political and social worlds in order to gain a better understanding of their own realities and lived experiences (Straubhaar, 2014). Freire (1970) offers that this process of critical consciousness starts with the ability to "name the world" in ways that point to intersectional layers of oppression. These intersectional layers manifest themselves into issues such as capitalism, White supremacy, caste-based discriminatory practices and cis-het (cisgender-heterosexual) dominant worldviews that weave and intertwine into all aspects of our lives. Through a process of *praxis* (critical reflection, dialogic "problem posing," and action), individuals begin to develop critical consciousness, which is a deeper awareness of the interconnectedness of oppressive systems and how those things impact our lived experiences (Freire, 1970). Critical consciousness, then, becomes the vehicle in which radical social transformation is possible.

Followers of Freire's exist across the globe and have adopted and adapted principles of critical consciousness within various professional spaces, including organizational settings. Scholars have presented case studies that speak to the spectrum of positions that organizations have taken in their pursuit of bringing Freirean ideals of critical consciousness to the workplace (Straubhaar, 2014). I believe that organizational critical consciousness can be revolutionary or more specific to organizations. Ghonim (2019) would seem to agree with me. In his research on social movements, which are the vehicle in which Freire's social transformation would occur, Ghonim assists us in better understanding this difference when he breaks down social movements into different categories. Most relevant to this project is the difference between a "revolutionary movement" that seeks to change large scale societal institutions versus a "reform movement" that seeks to change specific aspects of society without seeking to replace or restructure society or social institutions as a whole (Ghonim, 2019, p. 27). I would offer that Freire's focus was on a "revolutionary movements" perspective while many organizational efforts focus more on a "reform movements" approach to organizational change. While a revolutionary movement might focus on replacing capitalism with a more humanistic system of financial cooperation and participation, and in doing so seek to dismantle the intersectional oppressions that result from capitalism, for example, a reform movement might look more like the Civil Rights Movements of the 1960s that sought to change culture and policy on issues of equality. Reform movements also occur within organizations where actors have focused their efforts on managing and sustaining the ongoing work of equity and change within organizations that is needed to ensure that movement efforts filter into small towns, spaces with the most resistance, spaces that do not adopt larger transformative agendas, and other spaces where larger social transformation projects have not been realized. This work includes: (a) stories of tempered

radicals (Myerson & Tompkins-Stange, 2007) and courageous resistors (Thalhammer et al., 2007) engaging in seemingly mundane projects that support organizational critical consciousness, (b) work into the interpersonal and organizational relationships that are needed to unpack the barriers that prevent adoption of specific policies, and even the (c) incremental change efforts around "re-education" agendas in spaces where problem posing and praxis were not provided or maintained as tools to better understand the need for specific humanistic change efforts.

The impact that insider activists have had on social movements and legislation is proof that workers can serve as a catalyst for Freire's ultimate outcome of social transformation, even when their approach is more reformist rather than revolutionary in nature. Scholars studying social movements and organizations offer great insight into this relationship. While these scholars and practitioners still pursue the goal of a humanistic project, their praxis has more specific implications as it focuses on transformation within established institutions or organizations as opposed to seeking to disrupt and or replace said institutions. Some might argue that actors who engage in such a way do not hold true to Freire's intention of societal transformation as incremental change in many ways will just sustain the oppressive behaviors and restrictions imposed by those in power as a result just reinforce the status quo. To some extent, I would agree with such a purist interpretation of Freire's words. What happens, however, to those who are impacted by a revolutionary movement but who are not connected to the processes that come after to sustain the changes that have been presented? What happens with leaders who do not receive the intention behind the transformation or who feel disconnected from the cause? What happens in places where the minority is such a small percentage that they are made invisible by large-scale change? What happens when the leaders of a movement move

on? Who is left to carry the torch to ensure that the intentions of the larger revolutionary movement are embedded into the fabric of organizational cultures? And ultimately, who is responsible for ensuring that we minimize and eradicate the instances where we are revisiting or recycling social ills and oppressive structures after those things are brought to our attention? To answer these questions, I do not turn to the purist interpretation of critical consciousness that is connected to revolutionary movements but a more tempered radical (Myerson & Tompkins-Stange, 2007) version that is connected to a reform movements perspective and that speaks to the insider activists who are tasked with constantly educating and providing space for others to be liberated on a daily, ongoing basis. For these insider activists, social transformation is still the main goal; however, considering that major social change has happened in the form of democratic processes, or other consciousness-raising that has occurred because of major societal change, work may still need to be done at the more interpersonal and organizational level to ensure that such transformations "stick." Within organizations, these actors are tasked with ensuring that organizational stakeholders, especially leaders and workers, have the opportunity to engage in praxis as it relates to their own professional lives and how these spaces impact and are impacted by oppression and negative societal issues.

As the previous section illustrated, when insider activists collectively organize for change, they can also transform society through reform movements, and it is this type of change that I am centering in this project. Freire's background in engaging mine workers in *praxis* through techniques such as problem-posing allow us to see the consciousness-raising that can occur for workers who are provided the space to critically reflect, discuss, and engage in action on issues that impact their professional and personal lives with scholars and practitioners such as Freire (1970). Education and literacy were central components of this work. Within

organizations today, this type of education and literacy project is maintained through training and development initiatives. These initiatives are often connected to scholarship on Best Practices that is produced by scholars and scholar-practitioners and their work that centers organizations. Human Resource Development (HRD) professionals are often those tasked with leading and supporting these initiatives within organizations. Ideally, the efforts of scholars working within the context of HRD and practitioners, such as HR leaders, working within organizations engage in a symbiotic relationship to offer a "critical" lens that is informed by and informs the efforts of each space.

From HRD to "Critical" HRD

While many scholars openly admit that there has been a struggle to define what Human Resource Development (HRD) means, I adopt the purpose statement offered by Chalofsky et al. (2014) that reads, "The purpose of HRD is to enhance learning, human potential and high performance in work-related systems" (p. xlvii). While there is not an absolute consensus on the definition of HRD, a critical component is related to interrogating and exploring the experiences of workers and organizational dynamics that shape how they move. Chalofsky et al.'s (2014) purpose statement is particularly insightful because it distinguishes between three historical aspects of HRD research that include:

1. performance, which is reflected in scholarship that centers performance as the outcome of developing human resources and developing organizational cultures to support increased performance.
2. learning, which adopts adult learning lenses to make the case that learning organizations that prioritize employee development through learning are more likely

to develop workplaces that are more productive and that have higher levels of skilled workers who are engaged in their work.

3. and the humanistic approach, which focuses on (a) developing the whole person in relation to an individual's social, emotional, ethical, and psychological Self and/or (b) developing a systems-orientation to organizational development where HRD values are interconnected to a larger social world; one where social responsibility is interrelated to facets of organizational development.

These aspects of HRD have been studied across various fields, including management studies, where theories and concepts around leadership and organizational structures are discussed; industrial/organizational (I/O) psychology, where concerns around motivation and behaviors are discussed; industrial anthropology, where organizational values and norms are discussed; sociology, where group and team-based dynamics are examined; education, where adult learning and instructional design are explored; and philosophy, where ethics, morals, and values are explored within organizational settings (Chalofsky et al., 2014). Similarities in scholarship are reflected in how these fields address training, employee and organizational development, and "interventions" that can be used to enhance organizational effectiveness and productivity.

Those who have studied the history of HRD offer, though, that while the field has taken on many attributes of White, cisgender, heterosexual men, centering competition, profits, and restrictive processes, the origins of HRD are rooted in humanistic approaches to organizational engagement (Bierema & Cseh, 2014). Early scholars expressed these core values as being focused on individual and organizational learning and later extended these to include integrity, human rights and dignity, and social responsibility (Bierema & Cseh, 2014). There was a clear gap, though, between expressed foundational values and how those values manifested in

practices. Bierema and Cseh (2003) highlighted this discrepancy in their research on over 600 conference papers presented at the Academy of Human Resource Development from 1996 to 2000. They discovered major gaps in how concerns around equity, diversity, and the voices of historically excluded persons were addressed. They also found that papers rarely called for organizational or institutional change, which reflects on the dominance of White, male, cis-het established norms going unchallenged. With this knowledge, it becomes clear how the field of HRD has become co-opted and reimagined to reflect the worldviews of those who are able to control the narrative about what is HRD and what it should be. It should be no surprise, then, that a project such as this would be necessary to ensure that those who do not identify with these dominant identities will have space to have their voices and experiences elevated as vehicles for change.

The good news is that scholars and insider activists such as CHRD professionals and other organizational leaders have been working to resist this co-opting of HRD and combat discrimination and bias within organizations for decades. Many scholars who approach organizational scholarship from the lens of Critical Theory have challenged the status quo of organizational and management studies that reflect dominant world views. Adopting a "critical" lens typically means that these scholars are intentional about interrogating the status quo of systems and structures that privilege dominant ideologies while silencing or minimizing the experiences of non-dominant social groups (Bierema & Cseh, 2014). Some of these scholars have been working for decades in the field of Critical Management Studies. In fact, Bierema and Cseh (2014) suggest that core principles of Critical Management Studies are part of the "critical" component present in CHRD and include the emancipation of employees, intentionally

addressing "-isms" and "-phobias" that contribute to inequities, and calling attention to managerial dynamics that place value on organizational hierarchies in ways that silence others.

Even with the adoption of a "critical" lens, however, questions still linger around the limitations of such an approach for both scholars and practitioners. These limitations point to concerns around how the utilization of this approach may inhibit, rather than engage, individuals from fully participating in critical consciousness and thus developing a greater sense of their own intersectional oppressions. From an academic lens, questions might include: What power dynamics are inherent in who leads critical HRD and what voices are highlighted, and which ones are not? If a critical HRD approach is interruptionist by nature, can we expect full-on engagement by the organizational structures that are in place that we are purporting to take power away from? And finally, while there are many examples of "critical" pedagogies in academia, there is clearly a gap in how these frames are impacting and transforming organizations on a larger scale. Does this suggest that a critical HRD is an ideal that has more relevance behind the walls of academia than in the lives of workers? From a practitioner lens, questions on the limitations of a "critical" approach for HR practitioners include: Would critical HR leaders just reinforce organizational mechanisms of control and manipulation, considering HR roles are often designed to support management instead of employees? What impact can critical HR leaders truly have within a capitalist system where profits are the driving force for organizational success and concerns about worker welfare may be secondary or tertiary goals? Is the strength of organizational structures so strong that critical HR efforts will only become adopted to the extent that that do not really transform organizational spaces and instead just continue to serve managerial ends while placating and espousing rhetoric about equity and inclusion? Scholars such as Sambrook (2014) have posed these types of questions, which are

significant in any project seeking to unpack what the "critical" means within an HRD context. While critical HRD scholars, who approach this discourse from an academic lens, and critical HR leaders, who join the conversation as organizational practitioners, are in process of evolving the concept of "critical" within the field of HRD, both have been engaged in work within organizations that showcase different ways that organizations can adopt critical elements in their journey to become more critically conscious.

DEIB as Workplace Movement

The heightened awareness of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging (DEIB) work is the newest "reimagining" or revisiting of at least one path in which organizational leaders can choose to engage in critical consciousness within the workplace. A spike in attention to these issues, that manifested as a result of the murder of George Floyd and the creation of the Black Lives Matter movement, provided opportunities for real change for scholars and practitioners seeking to address systemic "-isms" and "-phobias" in ways that could positively transform the ways that marginalized persons exist within and advance throughout the employee life cycle. The current spotlight on DEIB initiatives and programming point to both the opportunities, and the setbacks, of this work as it emerges in real time as a critical solution to social and institutional problems. At the helm of this work are internal activists who serve as agents of change. Within organizations, these change agents are tasked with carrying the torch of social movements into daily interactions (Walker, 2012). As the previous section illustrates, organizational leaders can choose to become agents of change. Insider activists who choose this path must be invested in the journey of transitioning organizations from spaces of complicity into spaces where members are informed and actively invested in creating more critically conscious and equitable workspaces for everyone.

While there is no cookie-cutter model of what critical consciousness looks like in organizations, many HR leaders have used various tools and interventions to engage in praxis that permits the development of critical consciousness within workplaces. One of those tools is the development of Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) that have direct impact on organizational cultural dynamics. These groups are employee-led special interest groups that are often designed to address an issue or provide a safe or brave space for specific populations in the workplace. Raeburn (2000) offers a great breakdown of the history and impact of LGBT ERGs. Raeburn's research shows that ERGs can be critical spaces where praxis can occur as employees critically reflect and discuss topics, such as how discrimination and/or intersectionality manifests within organizations, and collectively work with or without organizational leaders' approval to transform these spaces. An additional tool is the use of training and development initiatives that are designed to incite critical reflection and engagement. Over the years, these initiatives have taken the form of training on bias and discrimination in the workplace, unconscious or implicit bias and the rights of workers and employees.

Specifically, as it relates to this project, Human Resource (HR) professionals are typically the persons who lead the charge for critical consciousness within organizations as they are generally responsible for creating organizational policies and employee experiences. These professionals adopt DEIB as a critical lens in which conversations and practices around social inequities can be addressed (Hirudayaraj & Shields, 2019). The focus that has been placed on DEIB is rooted in the fact that it has evolved over the years as a critical tool used by both HR practitioners and HRD scholars to engage in the work to develop more critically conscious organizations. For these reasons, it is important to understand the types of efforts that HRD scholars and practitioners have undertaken through the lens of DEIB. While this section will

present a snapshot of these efforts, a distinction is made between "traditional" HRD and the emerging field of "critical" HRD (CHRD) to illustrate the limitations of the former and how those limitations resulted in the development of the latter. While these DEIB issues will be presented and discussed in a linear fashion, it is important to note that these issues have always been overlapping and simultaneous and as such, there is no moment in time to separate the different parts in neat, manageable boxes. To do so would do a disservice to scholar-practitioners who have been doing the work before more recent language existed to describe their efforts.

Some "traditional" HRD leaders have worked across various roles and disciplines to address social issues within the workplace, especially in relation to social identities (Stewart, 2005). Initially, these initiatives were compliance-based and designed to specifically respond to the successes of that came from The Civil Rights Movement, specifically requirements of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which required organizations to ensure that they did not discriminate against employees based on "protected classes" such as race, ethnicity, sex, religion, color or creed, or national origin (Offermann & Basford, 2014). Over time, the role and duties of traditional HR professionals grew as a means of specifically addressing these and other worker-related concerns within organizations (Chalofsky et al., 2014; Stewart, 2005).

Over the last few decades, HRD professionals addressed these concerns through multiculturalism and diversity policies and initiatives. While these concepts are interrelated, "multiculturalism" was an earlier iteration of what evolved to be "diversity," which usually reflects organizational demographics based on social and cultural identities. An optimistic picture could be that as these changes took place, HRD leaders and scholar-practitioners, often for reasons of legality and liability, stayed vigilant of ongoing issues that impacted the workplace experiences of diverse persons from various historically excluded groups. Dialogue and practices

increased in relation to developing diverse talent pools (Thijssen et al., 2014) and addressing diversity-based concerns across the Employee Life Cycle (Davidson, 2015).

With the increase of historically excluded identities and women in corporate America, and the problem of increased reporting of sexual harassment and discrimination that resulted in increased rates of turnover (Kapor Klein, 2007), the interest in consciousness within organizations evolved from ensuring that "diverse" minorities were able to occupy positions within where they had a "seat at the table" to ensuring that said "table" was welcoming when they arrived in their roles. This shift to more inclusive organizational cultures became the major focal point during this time. In her dissertation research on inclusive leadership and positive organizational scholarship, Dezenberg (2017) explains that inclusive scholarship and concepts have at their heart concerns around creating organizational climates that promote connectedness, openness, support and thriving. The development of inclusive organizational spaces involved more research on the impact of accepting and affirming organizational policies and cultures (Badgett et al., 2013; Barron & Hebl, 2010; Booysen, 2014; Cunningham, 2011); increased dialogue on cultural competency that allowed organizations to understand gaps in how they engage with stakeholders (Gelman, 2004; Holland, 1998; LaVeist et al., 2008; Uttal, 2006) research that highlights successful case studies of organizations that have created inclusive organizational cultures (Silva & Warren, 2009; Stephens, 2018) and the development of more benefits offerings that specifically target specific populations, such as those that targeted LGBTQ+ persons that included domestic partner benefits (Raeburn, 2000). In an edited collection of articles on workplace inclusion, Ferdman and Deane (2014) present various scholarly articles that cover these issues and more. Oftentimes, early research that focused on workplaces through the lens of inclusion was often rooted in making the business case for

inclusive change practices by anchoring this necessary change to organizational bottom lines and concerns around competitiveness or productivity (Badgett et al., 2013; King & Cortina, 2010; Powers, 1996). While the ongoing need to do so is problematic, as it suggests that organizational leaders have still not embraced the full dignity of all stakeholders outside of placing a financial value on their human experiences, such moves continue to be necessary in order to make the argument for honoring the full dignity and participation of historically excluded groups in spaces where their identities are not present, visible, or honored. Documented practices and inclusive allyship are a step above merely focusing on the demographic diversity of staff. There still remained a missing piece, however, in clarifying issues that were not addressed with practices and policies that promoted inclusive organizational cultures, on paper, while historically excluded minorities and women continued to face issues in the workplace. Booysen and Nkomo (2007) addressed this issue in their case study of a workplace incident that spiraled out of control despite the fact that non-discrimination processes and practices that promote inclusion were being documented.

Even with the great strides that were made by traditional HRD professionals, many observed that a missing piece within traditional HRD is related to how HRD scholars did not engage in the type of critical introspection and practical change that would result in organizations that had become more equitable spaces for employees and other stakeholders, not just tools to enhance profits and performance (Gedro et al., 2014; Hirudayaraj & Shields, 2019**)**. This can be seen in the evolution and critique of "cultural competency" interventions that many scholars found to have elements of paternalistic othering of cultures that exist outside of or on the margins of dominant paradigms (Azzopardi & McNeil, 2016; Malatino, 2015; Sakamoto, 2007). Scholars offering a critique of cultural competency models sought to "go deeper" into the systematic,

institutional layers of power/privilege and oppression/marginalization to address such issues as cultural consciousness (Azzopardi & McNeil, 2016), cultural humility (Fisher-Borne et al., 2015), and cultural responsiveness (Bertrand, 2006). They perceived, and rightly so, that work on inclusive organizational practices, through the lens of cultural competency, had some major gaps that needed to be addressed in future scholarship and practice.

As a response to these and other concerns, the field of Critical Human Resource Development (CHRD) has been developing as a specific lens to address deeper social justice issues within organizations. The "critical" of CHRD is rooted in academic applications of the term "critical," which is often linked to analysis of social inequities as they manifest in power relations and practice (Sambrook, 2014). CHRD, then, is positioned as an evolutionary alternative path of sorts from traditional HRD where issues of equity, social justice, advocacy, and fairness are centered (Byrd, 2018). This social justice and advocacy work intentionally and specifically fills the gaps in transforming organizational cultures into more equitable spaces. Scholars who exist in this space seek deeper investment in HRD that moves beyond "the HR holy trinity" that focuses on training, career development, and organizational development, and instead engages in more critical dialogue and practice concerning how organizational cultures foster relationship-building, support change, and promote collective learning and growth (Bierema & Callahan, 2014).

Whereas traditional HRD has often linked human-centered approaches to organizational competitiveness and financial gains, CHRD has roots in organizational equity and justice. Fenwick (2004) speaks to this shift when stating that scholars studying equity within organizations are invested in transforming normative organizational structures to be more equitable spaces that call into question various intrapersonal and interpersonal dynamics that

perpetuate various "-isms" and "phobias." While some of these scholar-practitioners may not necessarily identify themselves with the terminology of CHRD, they have also been studying feminism and HRD (Bierema & Cseh, 2003), LGBTQ+ issues with HRD (Collins, 2012), Critical Race Theory and HRD (Rocco et al., 2014), and a litany of various intersectional engagements with HRD in ways that point to interrupting systems of power, privilege, and oppression within organizations. Collectively, these Critical HRD scholars have connected HRD to deeper social concerns that impact internal and external organizational stakeholders.

CHRD leaders studying equity also have a core interest in connecting the lessons gained from social movements with efforts to enact change. These CHRD professionals have used their knowledge of various social movements as a lens to interrogate organizational practices, especially in relation to specific historically excluded populations (Byrd, 2014). Language around Social Movement Learning (SML) has developed to describe these efforts. SML centers the collective learning that can be gained from the actions of social movement actors (individuals, groups, and collectives; Sisco et al., 2019). This learning can include the planned and intentional aspects of movement organizers, such as highlighting sexism and patriarchy as a result of the MeToo Movement, or unintended consequences, such as the impact of Black Lives Matter on the workplace experiences of employees. Either way, SML provides a lens for HRD scholars and practitioners to answer important questions that include: "What have we learned from this moment"? and "What are we doing about it"? The "what" is a reference to issues of power/privilege and suppression/oppression have been made visible after being historically rendered institutionally invisible or insignificant. The "we" refers to society as a whole and, more relevant to this research project, to organizational and CHRD leaders. "Learned in this moment" references the socio-politico-historical significance of issues of social movement

activists' critique and why they are significant. SML provides the lens to have these conversations.

By linking social movement learning (SML) to workplace cultures, CHRD leaders begin the major step of addressing equity-based issues within organizations. Sisco et al. (2019) posit that connecting SML and DEI work is most effective when CHRD professionals focus on finding solutions to social issues. By choosing to root organizational cultural dynamics in a social justice or equity framework, CHRD leaders can choose to center the collective learning of organizational stakeholders into what Freire (1970) refers to as "conscientization." Conscientization is defined as an advocacy-based dialogic process of "problem-posing" that interrogates power relations and contradictions in society in order to find solutions (Freire, 1970). Contextualizing the value of SML within the context of Freire's work with critical consciousness and workers can drive home the employee-centered perspective that is at the heart of SML within organizations.

Because CHRD professionals are the gatekeepers for organizational learning efforts in many organizations, their knowledge of SML can assist organizations in carrying the torch that social movements ignite during their most visible and heightened moments. SML offers an opportunity for these collective, humanistic learning efforts to occur within spaces such as diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives, as these spaces are spaces for acknowledging and supporting collective learning efforts (Grenier, 2019). Connecting DEI initiatives to SML also allows CHRD professionals to use their oversight of policies and procedures, training and learning, organizational strategy, as well their influence over organizational cultures, to address issues of "empathy, agency, sensitivity to context, cultural fluency, problem solving, design processes, productive use of emotion, and shared values for justice, relief of suffering, and

importance of social condition" that are reflected in SML (Bennett & McWhorter, 2019, p. 231). Taking these steps allows SML to be brought into the organization in ways that enhance all DEI efforts, especially those related to equity-based concerns.

Even with the decades of insights produced by CHRD scholars and practitioners, there still remained a missing element to the ongoing conversation around DEI issues. At some point, the implication was that equity-based goals were the "end game" of sorts for workplace movements that sought to build and sustain critically conscious organizations. As the popularity of DEI work has increased and organizations have become more diverse, the question still lingers as to whether specific communities and individuals feel connected to their workplaces. Over the last decade, however, some scholars and scholar-practitioners have been focusing on the concept of "belonging" as the goal of this work. Belonging within organizations is often associated with increased connectedness, validation, support, and acceptance (Bryer, 2019). Belle et al. (2015) adds that belonging is about finding meaning at work that is connected to an individual's sense of self and fulfillment of psychosocial needs.

This sense of self within the context of the workplace manifests in different ways. Some scholars studying belonging examine organizational connectedness through the lens of positive identity (Dutton et al., 2010; Ferdman & Roberts, 2014), while others call attention to the consequences and the opportunities that can occur when organizations do not provide space for increased belongingness. Harris (2014) studied how Black queer college students start negotiating their identity before entering the workplace in ways that point to low levels of a sense of belonging and internal fears around inclusion. Harris's research pointed to pressures for racial expression management that manifested in pressures to "act White" and to maintain gender role expectations that are reflective of heteroprofessional expectations. Reddy-Best (2018) also

speaks to this level of expression management in her research on LGBTQ women and the pressure they feel to conform to unwritten dress codes in ways that impact self-esteem. Sehmi (2021) concludes that organizational leaders can mitigate this disconnectedness, isolation, and rejection that occurs when people feel that they do not belong through active listening, shared decision making, and the alignment of individual work with organizational goals. Belle et al. (2015) shares that gaps in belonging or expressions of disconnectedness provide opportunities to imagine new ways of being that can highlight gaps in organizational leaders' awareness of DEIB-related issues. In doing so, they can provide a focused map on where to grow and to lean into increased involvement and participation of historically excluded persons. da Costa et al. (2020) found that leadership that privileges participation and normalizes open and supportive dialogue are positively associated with well-being within organizations. Bryer (2019) supports the idea that increased participation in organization decision-making serves as a catalyst to incidents of increased organizational belonging. In their research on belonging, Bryer (2019) addresses tensions between organizational claims of fostering a culture of belonging versus the exclusionary management practices that are still normative in competitive markets, such as those related to budgetary decision making. Bryer (2019) suggests alternative organizations, such as social movements and co-operatives, can be useful in imagining how traditional organizations can reimagine exclusionary management practices. Bryer finds that bringing a humanistic approach to exclusionary management practices, such as budget groups and hierarchical decision making, can serve to be appropriate interventions in shifting organizations in existing in more critically conscious ways.

When speaking of workplace activism related to DEIB, HRD, and CHRD leaders as insider activists have been able to evolve the level of engagement, interruption, and

accountability that organizational leaders have to their internal stakeholders, namely the staff that report to them. As change agents, these leaders have carried the torch of social movements from the metaphorical "streets" and into the boardroom and the consciousness of workers at all levels of an organization. Their work has manifested in policies, procedures, trainings, and workshops on a litany of topics that center the human experience within organizations. While newer iterations of terms such as "equity" and "belonging" have highlighted the problematic features of institutional and organizational structures that reflect the larger social context, it is also worth noting that these conversations have existed for decades and will require ongoing monitoring, evaluation, and interrogation as we learn more about the human condition and how specific types of noise impede our ability to engage fully with one another's dignity.

The Concerns of Historically Excluded Workers

Critical Human Resource Development (CHRD) professionals cannot engage in the types of equity and belonging work that is needed within organizations without developing some basic understanding of the workplace experiences of historically excluded minority populations and the role that intersectionality plays in everyone's life. As King and Cortina (2010) point out, having some basic understanding of how multiple dimensions of lived experiences exist for individual employees, and the relationships that these individuals have with others, is important in preventing discriminatory practices and the interrelated structures of power and dominance that allow such practices to exist.

The focus on Black and Latino/x LGBTQ+ populations for this study is not arbitrary, as, in some spaces, Black and Latino/x LGBTQ+ communities have shared experiences with discrimination and bias that have permitted community building across decades. These connections are reflected in various queer-centric Black and Latino/x coalition-building efforts

over the years. Researchers have also pointed out the connectedness between Black and Latino/x cultures as well. Scholar Milian Arias (2006) writes of "how Blackness looms in Latina and Latino brownness and brownness commingles with African American Blackness" (p. 546). Milian Arias (2006) also highlights how Anzaldua's (1987) and DuBois's (1968) inquiry into their plural identities is similar in ways, though it should go deeper into how these concepts operate "within Chicana, Chicano, and African American inquiries of the self in relation to US structural life" (p. 546). She further calls into question the "rigidity of 'Blackness" that references US-based perceptions of an essentialist or monolithic Blackness and the idea of Latina and Latino as equating to fixed "brownness" that exists between "Blackness" and "Whiteness" (Milian Arias, 2006, p. 546). She expands upon this connection:

> The borderlands and double consciousness both have as their socially activating footing the centering of normative Americanness. Whereas border cultures emphasize identity aspects not so readily apparent in double consciousness like gender, sexuality and Brown Chicananess and Chicanoness, double consciousness accentuates a Black outsiderness that is not the result of, nor specific to, one particular US geographical location. . . . Together, they intensify the call for a different grammar, externally and internally, that goes beyond the facile popular perception of brownness as exclusively Spanish-speaking and Blackness as solely English-speaking. The borderlands and double consciousness demand an altercation in the ways that these subjects are heard, seen, positioned, and interpreted. (Milian Arias, 2006, p. 547)

This reflects the connection that Arias sees between Black and Latino/x cultures. Other scholars also speak of similarities and differences between Black and Latino/x identities (Bradley-Geist & Schmidtke, 2015). In her text, *Salsa, Soul, and Spirit*, Latina scholar Juana Bordas (2012) also draws connections between Black, Latino/x, and Indigenous American communities whose histories reflect a collectivism and sense of connectedness that is unique and similar across these cultures. Collectively, these scholars speak to the variance of phenotypic, genotypic, and geographic "otherness" that connects people who can celebrate their shared experiences while

simultaneously understanding that there are clear differences between and among group members.

These efforts also include the development of groups such as the Black and Latino/x lesbian group Salsa Soul, founded in 1974 in New York City (Rodriguez, 2003) and the chosen family structures or "queer kinship networks'" of House and Ball Communities (Lemos et al., 2015; Young et al., 2017). While neither of these specific communities are the focus of this study, developing an understanding of House and Ball communities provides a small window into the lives and struggles of some Black and Latino/x LGBTQ+/SGL persons. House and Ball communities are a unique collective of chosen family structures composed primarily of Black and Latino/x LGBTQ+/SGL persons who have established communities with one another in major cities throughout the US. Research on House and Ball communities shows that these communities have existed for over 50 years, with some reporting the origins back to Harlem in the 1920s when African American male performers were able to entertain one another as "female impersonators" (Castillo et al., 2012; Kubicek et al., 2013) and evolved to include much more than entertainment and impersonations. Often, these communities have existed as a means of combating the bias and discrimination that Black and Latino/x LGBTQ+ persons, especially youth, experience within familial, organizational, and larger social and institutional structures (Holloway et al., 2014; Young et al., 2017). Within these communities, "houses'' are familial structures that mimic biological family hierarchies and can include a house "mother," house "father," and house "children." Each "house" also competes in pageant-like competitions known as "balls," where participants perform in different categories and are judged on their performances. As with pageants, trophies are associated with being the best "house" in the specific category and brings a level of prestige for a specific duration of time. The combination

of “houses” and “balls” allows Black and Latino/x LGBTQ+/SGL persons to feel affirmed, safe, and connected.

One of the reasons that those within the House and Ball community are worth noting within this project is that these communities point to a multi-decades-long relationship between Latino/x and Black LGBTQ+SGL persons who, among other things, are often linked due to shared experiences with facing structural barriers related to broken family structures, social isolation and economics that include barriers accessing employment, which House fathers are known to assist in navigating (Arnold & Bailey, 2009). This exclusion is often connected to the bias and discrimination that exists within society and organizations, where issues of injustice and inequity persist. One avenue in which we see this manifest, for instance, is related to background checks on new employees. While this decision to undergo background checks on employees has obvious implications for ensuring workplace safety and minimizing the fault of misconduct on behalf of employers, without trained discernment and individual assessment of lived experiences, such a decision can negatively impact many Black and Latino/x LGBTQ+/persons who have higher than normal experiences with violence, harassment, and homelessness, which is consequently associated with increased instances of incarceration and arrests (Panfil, 2018). Arrest records that result from these systematic issues prevent or inhibit Latino/x and Black LGBTQ+/SGL persons from being able to access traditional employment. For many, this results in individuals resorting to “street economies,” such as survival sex or selling drugs (Panfil, 2018), and other forms of self-preservation outside of traditional, legal employment channels. This issue is made worse when a person’s experiences in these spaces creates gaps in work histories, which research suggests comes with its own level of employment bias (Melloy & Liu, 2014). Although House and Ball communities represent a very small population of Black and

Latino/x LGBTQ+ persons, these types of experiences highlight the compounding issues that exist when trying to access traditional employment. CHRD leaders should be aware of these types of barriers and intentionally create equitable and critically conscious organizations that are responsive to these issues. This could look like developing policies that prevent discrimination in hiring based on whether time was served, or a certain amount of time has passed since a crime was committed. It could also look like developing processes for compassionate listening during the interview process where stories of hardships shared by applicants will not be used against them when the time comes to select a candidate.

Bias and Discrimination in the Workplace

Various scholars have produced great insight into bias and discrimination within organizations and specifically in relation to employees' experience within the Employee Life Cycle. Concerns start before an applicant even steps foot into an organization and can manifest in biases in established modes of recruiting (Marcus, 2013; Ruggs et al., 2011) and biases toward persons with culturally specific names that may result in their being overlooked for positions (Cotton et al., 2008). These biases continue throughout the application process, where bias in intelligence testing masks the supremacist nature of these tests (Helms, 2012) and bias in background checks prevents dialogue about structural racism (Kuhn, 2013), especially issues like the school-to-prison pipeline and the prison-industrial complex. Additionally, bias in government-mandated citizenship requirements prevent deeper dialogue about international safety, asylum-seeking, and the inherited nature of nationality that is based on choices of our ancestors and not necessarily choices of our own. For those selected for interviews, biases in hair presentation and design (Donahoo, 2021; Lynch, 2020), accents or perceived "foreignness" (Bradley-Geist & Schmidtke, 2015), and even the perception of being gay or trans

(Gonzalez-Alvarez, 2017; Sabat et al., 2017) manifest in discriminatory practices that prohibit many from gaining employment. The "lucky ones" that are able to secure employment further face on-the-job "not-so-micro" aggressions that interfere with their ability to be fully invested in their jobs.

While there are various issues that contribute to on-the-job bias and discrimination dynamics, two of these issues that work against the full investment of Black and Latino/x LGBTQ+/SGL workers are the idea of "heteroprofessionalism" as well as the evasiveness of "color-blind" rhetoric. The term "heterosexism" references an "ideological system that denies, denigrates, and stigmatizes any non-heterosexual form of behavior, relationship, or community" (as cited in Ragins et al., 2003, p. 4). Within workplace settings, heterosexism manifests as heteroprofessionalism. This default heteroprofessional positionality is normalized to such an extent that workplaces are experienced and reinforced as being asexual and void of sexual orientation of all forms instead of actually upholding heterosexist worldviews (Mizzi, 2013). For LGBTQ+/SGL workers who exist outside of these heteronormative positions, however, there is a keen awareness that workplaces are not only established on heteronormative worldviews but those same worldviews play a critical component in the bias that manifests in discrimination in the workplace.

Just as heteroprofessional negatively influences the workplace experiences of LGBTQ+/SGL persons of color, so too does the rhetoric of being "color-blind." "Color-blind" rhetoric was the normative lens used for decades to combat racism through an understanding of "sameness" across racial and ethnic demographics (Farr, 2009). More recently, however, scholars have sense recognized the limitations of such a paradigm that erases cultural differences. Phrases such as "I/we don't see color" or "we're all the same" work to erase

instances of clear bias and discrimination faced by ethnic and racial minorities. Research on hiring, for instance, has shown that race and ethnicity does influence hiring decisions, as Black and Latino/x persons are more likely to be hired by managers who belong to these communities (Giuliano et al., 2009) because managers are likely to focus on "culture matching" when hiring (Rivera, 2012). Considering that managers are predominantly White, though, and thus do not belong to these communities, it is important for us to interrogate the various dynamics that produce and reproduce discrimination based on race and ethnicity and the reasons why Black and Latino/x persons are hired less by White people. While "colorblind" rhetoric might evade this question by focusing on the singular lens of "qualifications," researchers who explore bias and discrimination are able to have a more holistic understanding of these dynamics.

Both heteroprofessional and "colorblind" rhetoric work in conjunction with one another to establish organizations as toxic and hostile toward LGBTQ+/SGL persons of color. It is imperative that organizational leaders learn about the concerns of various historically excluded groups and work to transform organizational cultures. Oftentimes, HR professionals are leading this charge. As a result, this study is focused on the lessons that Black and Latino/x LGBTQ+/SGL CHRD leaders can offer to other CHRD professionals.

"Not-So-Micro" Aggressions

Heteroprofessionalism and color-blind rhetoric often result in specific types of stressors that have been often referred to as microaggressions. Microaggressions are described as "brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional" (Resnick & Galupo, 2019). In their research on Latino/x experiences with microaggressions, Torres and Taknint (2015) offered that the subjective nature of these microaggressions results in increased possibilities for depression which, for Latino/x persons,

can be mitigated by a stronger sense of connectedness to a Latino/x identity. These insights are shared by Rivera and Frias (2021) who conclude in their research that manipulation and coercion are often present in spaces where White supremacy, heteroprofessionalism, and patriarchy are normalized, which have a direct impact on the well-being of Latino/x queer professionals. When considering the persistent, daily impact of these aggressive behaviors, it would make sense that members of minority communities are able to rely on their sense of collective identity and belongingness to make sense of these issues. This rings true for Latino/x persons, Black persons, LGBTQ+/SGL persons, and various other historically excluded groups and those with intersecting marginalities. This also makes sense when considering why intentional spaces such as House and Ball communities develop as affirming spaces.

It is worth noting that even within spaces that are either predominantly based on a more narrowly perceived identity, such as White male LGBTQ+ spaces or spaces where race or ethnicity is the thread that connects everyone, microaggressions are also present for LGBTQ+ racial and ethnic minorities. In their research of multiple minority stress within the LGBT community, for example, McConnell et al. (2018) report that Black LGBTQ+ men have some of the highest reports of microaggressions and feelings of being disconnected from LGBTQ+ spaces based on race or ethnicity. Organizational leaders working in diversity and inclusion spaces should be mindful of how, for instance, a LGBTQ+ Employee Resource Group can be inviting and exclusionary at the same time.

Particularly insightful in this conversation around microaggressions is a breakdown of microaggressions into different categories. Resnick and Galupo (2019) share that microaggressions can be subdivided into the following categories:

1. Microassaults—overt, intentional discriminatory behavior that can be verbal or nonverbal that is meant to cause harm to a targeted individual or group.
2. Microinsults—subtle, intentional, or unintentional communications that are inconsiderate or disrespectful toward a person's identity.
3. Microinvalidations—communications that invalidate a person's lived experiences or thoughts.

This breakdown clarifies the nuances of bias and discrimination that many minorities experience, especially in workplace settings. Being able to differentiate between a "micro" assault and a "micro" invalidation helps minorities and organizational leaders such as CHRD professionals to specifically name a problem and in doing so, develop tools to address the issue in ways that support the growth of both parties.

One major lingering question is the nature of the "micro" in microaggressions. I call into question the idea that aggressive behavior, whether nonverbal or verbal, is indeed "micro." This is especially true for those who must navigate compounding "micro" aggressions, especially LGBTQ+ persons of color. Imagine being hit by a stick. While the first hit might be painful, an aggregate of many hits weakens the skin, hurts more, and can potentially kill you. Then, imagine getting hit one time on Tuesday, and then on Wednesday, a different person hits you when you walk in the door. While the individual hits might seem to reflect a "micro" problem, the aggregate produces bruising and scarring, and it weakens the skin in ways that can expose muscle. Similarly, what might seem like a "micro" aggression from one specific person on one specific day becomes highly problematic against the context of a searing number of "micro" attacks or inconsiderations that are part of a larger social and relational context that is persistent and pervasive. Essed (1991) addresses this in her work on women of color and their daily

experiences with racism. Similarly, for LGBTQ+ people of color, “micro” aggressions occur at lunch Monday through Friday, during staff meetings, during staff retreats, during performance reviews, and during client meetings. They are wielded by coworkers, supervisors, clients, and customers in various ways. To reduce the aggregate impact of all these things is to pretend that the hit that you received on Tuesday has not been followed by similar hits on Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday. Of course, it matters. They all do, and “micro” does not quite account for the persistent pervasiveness of their compounding impact and the inevitable wounds that we carry in our skin, psyche, and our feeling of connectedness and belonging. For the rest of this study, what are often referred to as microaggressions will be referred to as “not-so-micro” aggressions to reflect the perpetual and aggregate nature of these behaviors.

Problematizing “Passing” and “the Closet”

With various compounding stressors placed upon them, LGBTQ+ racial and ethnic minorities have many options available to them when responding to such pressures. While some scholarship often positions LGBTQ+ identity disclosure or concealment on a binary of “outness” vs. “in the closet,” more recent conversations argue that concealment or disclosure exists on a spectrum and that an individual’s positionality on the spectrum is strategic and based on many factors. In the workplace, these factors can include workplace climate and internalized homophobia or heterosexism and perceptions of heteroprofessionalism (Speice, 2019). In response to these issues, some people choose to conform to heterosexist expectations via passing (Lasser et al., 2010). Others live openly and unapologetically, and even more find a mixture of these methods as tools in different settings (Speice, 2019). Managing these identities comes with various opportunities and challenges.

Those who conform or assimilate are often labeled as “passing,” which describes how individuals engage in behaviors or allow themselves to be perceived in different ways. This project presents a more complex understanding of passing as opposed to the historical view. Speer and Green (2007) discuss this difference when they point out that while historical definitions of passing define passing as “representing oneself as a member of a different ethnic, religious, or sexual orientation or gender identity group,” they found this definition to be problematic in that it suggests: (a) those who “pass” are being deceptive; (b) there is an implied sense of an authentic, natural, “real” self that is in opposition to an inauthentic, “unreal” self that is created; (c) mixtures are not available that allow for the movement between different identities so the option of passing between binaries is called into question; and (d) validity or authenticity is in the hands of “others” and not the individuals themselves. Instead, Speer and Green (2007) offer that passing should be seen as a performative behavior that everyone engages in in some way or another. They posit that passing should be seen as a “person doing something in order to be taken as she/he intends” (Speer & Green, 2007, p. 336). This definition, unlike the previous ones, illustrates passing as more complex and less concerned with deception and manipulation.

From this view, it becomes easier to understand how passing in ways that conform to White, heteroprofessional expectations becomes a strategic choice for LGBTQ+ persons of color. A study by Harris (2014) of Black queer persons looking for employment addressed the issue of how intersecting identities, and the degree of disclosure of LGBTQ+ identities, impacts the careers of Black queer persons. Similar to Lasser et al.’s (2010) research, the results of the study confirmed previous research that argued the performative nature of passing by LGBTQ+ persons of color speaks to racial expression management pressures to “act White,” coupled with gender role expectancy to perform gender in prescriptive ways that only support gender as it

relates to a man-woman binary and how deviation from these expectations is often labeled as "unprofessional." As a result of the pressure to appear heteronormative and to align themselves with heteroprofessional expectations, the daily lives of LGBTQ+ persons of color are filled with a "heightened sense of theatricality or performative deliberateness" (as cited in Speer & Green, 2007). Because of these pressures, passing for LGBTQ+ persons of color also includes an additional layer of voyeurism, where these persons are constantly checking in with others to see how well they are passing (Speer & Green, 2007). This type of hypervigilance is reflected in behaviors such as adjusted speech patterns and dressing to align with gender role expectations (Lasser et al., 2010). For LGBTQ+ persons of color, this deliberate action includes the internal management of performative passing, which involves an ongoing monitoring of masculine and feminine presentation in relation to LGBTQ+ identity, as well as the monitoring of race-based stereotypes in relation to ethnicity or race.

Often, those who engage in any of these passing behaviors are viewed as being "in the closet" or inauthentic. Such minimization of the complexity of concealment and disclosure choices ignores the agency that individuals have in choosing who, when, where, and why such a choice would be most beneficial or not. In fact, LGBTQ+ individuals are constantly "coming out" when they enter new settings and new relationships. However, a "closet" paradigm assumes that disclosure occurs at one specific time, and a choice not to continue to disclose with any particular person or audience can be perceived as being inauthentic or "in the closet" in relation to LGBTQ+ identities. What is clear is that people disclose when they are most comfortable and when they feel a high level of support and connection. An environment that focuses on connectedness through belonging, then, can serve as a safe space where LGBTQ+ persons can feel most comfortable disclosing their identities.

For those who cannot or do not pass—through denial/concealment or assimilation/conformity—an additional course involves existing in ways that most openly and transparently express and affirm their LGBTQ+ identities. These persons are typically identified as being "out" in the workplace. Lasser et al. (2010) adds that those who are "out" perceive more barriers in the workplace. I wonder if those who chose to disclose their sexual and gender identities view more barriers because they enter the workforce with a clear expectation for equity and equality in relation to processes and outcomes. Instead, they find their open disclosure may be misaligned with heteroprofessional expectations that place them on the margins of organizational cultures that regularly reinforce issues of bias and discrimination. Because these persons are more likely to identify barriers in the workplace, it is imperative that organizational leaders and CHRD professionals work collaboratively with LGBTQ+ racial and ethnic minorities to design the type of workspaces that are conducive to more persons feeling safe and supported enough to want to disclose, if and when they choose to do so.

For many, managing contested social identities in this context is a survival technique, as it can be argued from previous research that multilayered bias and discrimination can result in LGBTQ+ racial and ethnic minorities' inability to obtain or maintain employment. Without jobs, these persons are not able to live independently and are at greater risk of being underemployed or unemployed, especially when conformity and assimilation are not options that are readily available or part of one's toolkit of identity-management strategies. This is especially true for transgender persons because reintegration into society may be dependent on this level of passing. For those who choose to pass, passing behaviors may include various image modifications, such as linguistic changes (for example, changing the sound of their voices), physical changes (reconstructive chest and/or facial surgery), or hormone therapies (Speer & Green, 2007, p. 337).

While there is a growing trend for LGBTQ+ acceptance in many workplaces, intra-organizational biases and discrimination still remain.

Wherever they find themselves on the spectrum of concealment or disclosure, many Black and Latino/x LGBTQ+/SGL men understand their sexualities and sexual identities as existing outside of the language of "gay" and "bi" identities. Earlier, I referenced the use of the term "Same Gender Loving" as a means of describing some Black men's affection (whether romantic or sexual) toward one another that resists mainstream (read, White) discourses of LGBT identity (Panfil, 2018). This same idea holds true for many Latino/x men who may find that "gay" and "bi" labels are not an ideal fit. In their research on Latino male sexuality, for example, Gilbert and Rhodes (2014) conclude that Latino/x male sexuality may be more "nuanced than previously thought" and that more research is needed in interrogating the significance of being "out" outside of an Anglo-American context. Vidal-Ortiz (2011) addresses some of these nuances in Latino/x linguistic language when it comes to sexual and gender minority identities. As in the case of the Same Gender Loving identifier, these terms are not simply replacements for LGBTQ+ identities but are unique culturally informed linguistic identifiers that have their own histories and implications. These cultural differences are worth noting when considering how Latino/x and Black LGBTQ+/SGL persons choose to disclose or conceal their sexual or romantic behaviors and identities and the value each individual places on doing so.

Disidentification speaks specifically to this kind of strategy of adopting identities that simultaneously resist, acknowledge, and reimagine what it means to be Latino/x and Black LGBTQ+ persons. In *Disidentifications: Queer of Color and the Performance of Politics*, Muñoz (1999) argues that disidentification is a survival strategy used to negotiate "a phobic majoritarian

public sphere that continuously elides or punishes the existence of subjects who do not conform to the phantasm of normative citizenship" (p. 4). Considering the daily, layered aggressions that manifest because of bias and discrimination, it is unsurprising that some individuals choose to identify in strategic ways that challenge the very labels that society places on them. In relation to gender, disidentification is embodied in terms such as "queer" as well as terms such a "genderqueer," "gender nonconforming," or "gender neutral," as persons who adopt these identifiers often exist in ways that resist, adopt, and reimagine gender norms. For those interested in how minorities and historically excluded persons "show up" in different spaces, having some understanding of the "performative resistance" of disidentification provides insight into those identities that are not just intersectional but those that exist on the margins of disruption, acceptance, and futurity. Latina scholar Juana Maria Rodriguez (2003) addresses this when she offers that the "right to name ourselves" (p. 57), however partial and circumvented, can take place only outside the tyranny of binary categories. This "right to name ourselves" means that LGBTQ+ persons of color take agency in using language that is most reflective of who they are at any given point in time.

Intersectionality

For CHRD leaders interested in interrupting these systematic barriers and learning more about the lived experiences of historically excluded persons and the systems that oppress them, reading scholarship on topics such as intersectionality is a great starting point. Scholars studying systematic issues have offered multiple theories that provide specific lenses to examine these intersecting dimensions of the lived experience of exclusion. Over the years, various terms have been developed to provide insight into the multiple dimensions of ways of being, the lived experience and a sense of identity that individuals navigate all at once and the multi-layered

struggles that they endure as a result. Activist and scholar W. E. B DuBois coined the term "double consciousness" in the early 1900s in his classic text *The Souls of Black Folk* to refer to the fact that for African Americans, there is a tension between their own perception of their experience as Black community members and the exposure of White dominant views of Blacks which manifests into a criticizing oneself through the lens of others who do not hold the most positive worldviews of your humanity (DuBois, 1968). DuBois presents the idea of "the Negro problem" as the inability of White people to see the struggles that Black people face. As a result, Black people are looked upon as a "problem" to be fixed" (Mobley & Johnson, 2019). This inability, or unwillingness, of White persons to "see" Black persons as equal manifests in a "double jeopardy" and results in the oppression and discrimination that Black people experience. These concepts around "double consciousness" and "double jeopardy" laid the foundation for inquiry into research on multiple identities and the layered ways that "-isms" and phobias overlap in the everyday lives of historically excluded persons. Over the years, various scholars and activists have offered terms, such as "multiple consciousness" or "triple consciousness" (Arroyo, 2010; Flores & Jimenez Roman, 2009), that have expanded DuBois's initial ideas to include the additional layers of identity related to ethnicity, class, immigration status, sexual orientation, gender, and ability, and many other issues.

Kimberle Crenshaw (1989) added to this conversation with the term "intersectionality," which asserts that some overlapping social positionalities are historically rooted in co-existing, co-influencing experiences of marginalization and exclusion. While initially rooted in legal scholarship, intersectionality has also been applied to social and individual experiences with marginalization. As a result of these multiple layers of life experiences, research and practice must consider how mutually influencing these layers are to individual and group-based

worldviews, as opposed to attempting to separate them into singular areas of exclusion (Cortina & Kirkland, 2018). Understanding lived experiences as multilayered and co-occurring is significant in accounting for the experiences of LGBTQ+ racial and ethnic minorities and how their lives are impacted by these systematic issues within the workplace. This is especially true when we consider Essed's (2020) conclusion that these overlapping negative experiences of women and historically excluded minorities are often connected to experiences of dehumanization and the simultaneous journey to reclaim their dignity.

Black and Latino/x Queer Frameworks

Various scholarly frameworks exist to help CHRD professionals develop a specific awareness around Black and Latino/x LGBTQ+/SGL shared and unique life stories. For this project, I will focus on specific frameworks, such as Quare Theory as a lens to examine and explore Black queer experiences and queer Latinidad as a means of understanding queer Latino/x experiences. These frameworks have been useful tools in specifically addressing the colorblind and asexual bias of research, activism, and practice (Bhambra, 2015). These approaches speak to the significance of race/racism and/or ethnicity in the lives of different historically excluded groups.

These frameworks pull from various theoretical lenses to provide insight into the experiences of queer people of color. From Queer Theory, these approaches adopt concepts around arbitrary and false (attributed) identity and experiential categories, especially if those categories exist in binaries; the social construction of reality that is rooted in interpretation; the importance of understanding all human behavior as being rooted in context; the idea that "recitations of dominance" are historically based and found in texts based on power and knowledge; and the significance of a queer reading of normativity and deviance that can

highlight issues of behavior and performance (Smith, 2003). These approaches also pull from Critical Race Theory and Latino Critical Race (LatCrit) Theory and call into question the implication that research that addresses race, culture, and ethnicity is only for non-White persons. It also sheds light on the idea that sexuality is only significant when referring to sexual and gender minorities, especially in situations such as the "coming out" process (Riggs, 2008).

Like many theoretical approaches, Black and Latino/x queer theoretical lenses are rooted in the incredible work of women of color, many of whom are queer women of color. Black queer scholarship is built on the contributions of writers such as Audre Lorde, Angela Davis, and Alice Walker, whose work offered new insights into the experiences of what it means to exist at the intersecting identities and experiences of Black, queer, and woman. Similarly, Latino/x and Chicana/o scholarship is built on the scholarship and *testimonio*s of scholars such as Cherrie Moraga (Moraga & Anzaldua, 1981) and Gloria Anzaldúa (Anzaldúa, 1987; de Lima Costa & Avila, 2005), whose work on "mestiza" or mixed-race consciousness laid the foundation for dialogue on the intersecting spaces of Chicana, queer, mestiza, feminist, and the transnational experience of existing at the "the borderlands." While they were not the only ones in this space, these predominantly queer women of color were able to collectively build a foundation for much of the scholarship about the experiences of queer people of color within and outside of academia.

Knowledge gained from Queer Theory provided significant information into the experiences of Black and Latino/x queer persons. As an interruptionist paradigm developed in the 1990s by Judith Butler and Eve Sedgwick, Queer Theory has been used over the years to deconstruct sexual identity categories of gay/straight and gender-based categories of man/woman in favor of understanding these identities as existing on a spectrum that includes nuances, negations, and subversions (Gedro, 2012, p. 61). The term "queer" itself, which has been used by

activists, scholars, and individuals alike, has been adopted and used as an identity of resistance, especially when current labels are insufficient to speak of the "between" that they feel in relation to available labels (Gedro, 2012, p. 61).

Scholars studying Latino/x and queer experiences have found connections that further explain this "between space." In relation to a queer Latinidad, Latino scholar, Jose Esteban Muñoz (2009) shares that there is a connection between mestiza/o consciousness (awareness of mixed or intersecting social identities) and Queer Theory. These two paradigms speak of multilayered identities that are disruptive to binaries. He explains that mestizaje is the manifestation in the material world of what it means to be theoretically queer. The queerness of mestizaje relies on its amorphous status as a space and place of disruption that exists within, outside of, and in between binaries. Existing in this "gray" space offers possibilities for deconstructing and reconstructing identities in ways that move beyond the limitations of labels that are historically limiting. This perspective is foundational in understanding the workings of a queer Latinidad that situates identities in an in-between space.

Many scholars offer insights into a mestiza (or mixed) consciousness in relation to Latino/x experiences. Speaking of mestiza consciousness, Machado (2015) offers:

> Latinos are a mestiza people and their mestizaje is a reality that is not limited to only racial hybridity. The term mestizaje is a multivocal one that can be also used to describe other realities of life for the Latino community. Latino mestizaje is also about the hybrid reality of belonging and not belonging; about centers and margins; about national identity and national rejection; about how others see the Latino community and how they interpret their existence. . . . And it is this very paradox of belonging yet not really belonging that the history of Latinos begins to be understood. (p. 39)

As Machado writes, a mestiza (or mixed) consciousness speaks to multiple layers of identity and belongingness that position Latino/x persons "in" and "out" and "between'' various social identities. This "in/between" space, or "nepantla," reflects the fact that, by their very existence, Latino/x people experience the world in ways that are always layered with "otherness" (Cordova,

2021). This “otherness” is indicative of the heterogeneity of what it means to be Latino/x (Estrada et al., 2011). The Latino experience, then, can never be understood by simply grouping every person who identifies as Latino into one large category. While there are foundational similarities that cut across many Latino groups, it is also important to keep in mind that there are clear and important differences as well.

The experiences of Latino/x queer persons are reflected by various scholars who, through *testimonios* (critical reflections) and *critical platicas* (critical conversations), discovered moments of frustration, concern, and growth in their research. For instance, in their work on early higher education queer Latino/x professionals, Rivera and Frias (2021) found that the following themes were prevalent in their shared experiences: The Labor of Being La Unica (unique, the token, or only); Eliminating Historias (erasure or the invisibility of historical contributions from queer Latino/x persons); Fuerte: Sin Remedio (the perception of being internally tough to get through a world that places many barriers before you versus the perception of being strong, which is often placed on you by those who take advantage of you); Viviendo Con Caraje (a reference to having both courage and rage); and La Arcoiris Fragmentada (a reference to a “fragmented rainbow” as a means to understand how queer Latino/x persons are not able to be exist fully in all of their identities). However, they concluded their research with the following consejos (advice) for Latino/x queer professionals and other professionals of color: (a) know your history and gain insight from the struggles of your antepasadas (ancestors); (b) find language and practices to name your experiences so you can begin to heal from those that are counterproductive; (c) trust your intuition as spirituality is a form of knowledge; (d) find and create space for equitable care in community with others; (e) stay mindful of and be intentional about addressing the wounds that you gain from all facets of

life; and (f) find meaning in what you do. Other Latino/x queer scholars have explored similar concerns around their social identities and what it takes to thrive in spaces that are not designed or sustained in ways that uplift their whole and best selves (Henderson-Espinoza, 2015).

Earlier iterations of queer analysis, however, has been criticized as existing within a White/Eurocentric lens that excludes persons of color. In many ways, queer Latinidad and Quare Theory are a response to the exclusion of persons of color from applications of Queer Theory. In the anthology *Black Queer Studies*, editors E. Patrick Johnson and Mae G. Henderson present multiple scholarly articles that address issues relevant to Black queer identity (Johnson & Henderson, 2005). Johnson and Henderson (2005) lay the groundwork for understanding the significance of a Black queer/Quare lens. They mention the shortcomings of both Queer Theory and Black Studies scholarship in applying an intersectional frame for understanding Black LGBTQ+/SGL lives. They suggest that relying on "single variable" lenses to understand intersectional identities is problematic, as doing so does not sincerely address and dismantle hierarchical and interconnected systems of power and privilege but instead prioritizes one identity over many others. Johnson and Henderson (2005) continue by stating that such limitations interfere with "the potential to overcome the myopic theorizing that has too often sabotaged or subverted long-term and mutually liberatory goals" (p. 6). Cohen (2005) shares these sentiments in the article "Punks, Bulldaggers and Welfare Queens," when she speaks of how queer theorists and activists who do not offer an intersectional lens in their investigation of queer experiences often just reinforce gender and sexual orientation binaries and do not address access to resources and power that are prevalent in the lives of queer people who occupy various other identities. As a site for investigation and exploration of Black queer experiences, the term "quare" was offered by Johnson (2005) in the often-cited article "Quare Studies (or Almost

Everything I Know about Queer Studies I Learned from my Grandmother).” In the article, he anchors the term “quare” in the linguistic interpretations of the word “queer” from his Black grandmother and suggests that “quare” is unique in how it centers intersections of queer, race, and class-based experiences.

Queer Theory complements Critical Race Theory in many ways, as both frames have the potential to challenge White, cisgender, patriarchal, heterosexual hegemony. As is the case with Queer Theory, race-based and ethnicity-based theoretical lenses have been critical in understanding the lived experiences of Black and Latino/x LGBTQ+ persons. When thinking of Critical Race Theory (CRT), Trevino et al. (2008) write that:

> At its core, CRT is committed to advocating for justice for people who find themselves occupying positions on the margins-for those holding “minority status”. It directs attention to the ways in which structural arrangements inhibit and disadvantage some more than others in society. It spotlights the form and function of dispossession, disenfranchisement, and discrimination across a range of social institutions, and then seeks to give voice to those who are victimized and displaced. (p. 8)

As Trevino et al. (2008) explain, CRT refocuses issues of inequality, inequity, and racism from individual to group-based dynamics where some groups are historically positioned to have access to more resources and power and, as a result, use said resources and power to influence, control, or limit minorities who have less. CRT scholars, then, are the type to discuss income inequality despite similarities in qualifications and DEIB initiatives that challenge “color-blind” narratives of racial equality. These scholars are also the type to call out the pervasiveness of Whiteness to minorities (that also seems invisible to White people) and the tendency for “color-blind” advocates to equate race consciousness and calling attention to race-based issues to racism (Gedro, 2012, p. 60).

Using the lens of Critical Race Theory (CRT), Latino/x scholars started to use the term “LatCrit” (Latino Critical Race Theory) as a term to embody their work that examines the

experiences of Latino/x people (Espinoza, 2020). These scholars address issues of multi-consciousness across racial, sexual, gender, and geographic boundaries and have scholarship rooted in the LatCrit tradition. A LatCrit framework helps situate Latino/x experiences as being influenced by culture, ethnicity, language, and immigration status in addition to race, class, sex, and LGBTQ+ status.

Scholars studying a mestiza consciousness and the Chicana/o "borderlands" also speak to the layered identities that exist. At the heart of all of these perspectives is a reliance on boundary-crossing, intersecting identities that are in a constant state of being "inside," "between," and "out of" narrowly perceived experiences. When discussing her experiences within Latina and Chicano lesbian spaces, Rodriguez (2003) writes:

> Identity politics' seeming desire to cling to explicative postures, unified subjecthood or facile social identifications have often resulted in repression, self-censorship, and exclusionary practices that continue to trouble organizing efforts and work against the efforts of full human rights, creative individual expression, and meaningful social transformation. (p. 41)

Like much of the research on Black and Latino/x LGBTQ+ lived experiences, Rodriguez highlights a critical point of all research on intersecting identities: we are all simply, and not so simply, an amalgamation of parts that influence who we are, how we engage with others and how we experience the world. Minimizing any single person down to one of these parts will never provide the type of significantly nuanced understanding of how humans show up in their fullness.

Literature Review Summary

Social movement activists inside and outside organizations have been working for years to transform institutions into more equitable spaces for various historically excluded populations. While there is still work to be done, employee-activists, such as Critical Human Resource Development professionals, are some of those within organizations continuing the everyday fight

to bring that dream to fruition. One of the main tools that CHRD professions use to achieve this goal is engagement in diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging work. This work takes an intersectional approach to intentionally interrupt the reproduction of biases and discriminatory practices related to “-isms” and “-phobias” within organizations so more voices and worldviews are elevated, honored, and welcomed. This is especially true for historically excluded persons, such as Black and Latino/x LGBTQ+/SGL leaders, who occupy various institutionalized spaces where they still face discrimination.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Research Question and Methodology Rationale

Introduction

Chapter III of this dissertation lays out the decisions and processes that I utilized in designing the study. This section serves to explain the steps I took to support the research questions that lead this project. The first part of this chapter includes information on methods, research questions and methodology. The later part of this chapter is broken down into the study design. This section includes decisions about ethics, sampling and recruitment of participants, data collection, and data analysis.

Research Questions

There are two research questions for this project. They are:

RQ1: How do Black and Latino/x LGBTQ+/SGL CHRD professionals experience the workplace?

RQ2: Based on their shared experiences, what actionable steps can Black and Latino/x LGBTQ+SGL CHRD leaders provide that will assist other CHRD leaders in developing more equitable and critically conscious workplaces?

Qualitative Method

I explored the workplace experiences of Black and Latino/x LGBTQ+/SGL leaders from the direct experiences of participants who identify with these social identities. While value can be received from quantitative methods, engaging in qualitative methods was most appealing to me due to its constructivist orientation that generates knowledge directly from those engaged in or experiencing a particular phenomenon. As Denzin and Lincoln (2011) clarify:

> Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. Qualitative research consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. (as cit4ed in Creswell & Poth, 2013, p. 8)

As Denzin and Lincoln write, qualitative methods seek to understand the worldviews of participants through various "representations" that can provide an insider's perspective on the phenomena in question. Because I was interested in the workplace experiences of Black and Latino/x LGBTQ+/SGL leaders, this method seemed fitting. I was also interested in engaging in this method to share the experiences in ways that can inform and/or transform how scholars, practitioners, and others engage with this population. In many ways, I was invested in how these stories could "transform the world" in meaningful ways for both Black and Latino/x LGBTQ+/SGL leaders and those who work with them in various professional and social environments.

Engaging in qualitative inquiry is not unstructured, however, and as a social science, it has many philosophical assumptions that must be adopted by researchers using qualitative methods. These philosophical assumptions are beliefs about "ontology (the nature of reality), epistemology (what counts as knowledge and how knowledge claims are justified), axiology (the role of values in research), and methodology (the process of research)" (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Creswell and Poth (2018) expand upon all of these assumptions in detail. They offer that at the core of qualitative inquiry is the assumption that multiple realities exist, including those of the participants and the researcher. By sharing how various research participants experience a particular phenomenon in different and similar ways, researchers reinforce the idea that reality is indeed subjective and not absolute. What follows from this view in multiple realities is the

epistemological view that through these individual experiences, knowledge is created. Because individuals' experiences shape knowledge creation, researchers engaging in qualitative inquiry need to be able to elicit these stories directly from the source by getting as close to participants as possible.

Creswell and Poth (2018) continue by reminding us that as researchers get close to participants, they should clearly articulate their values, beliefs, biases, and other axiological assumptions that lead their research inquiry. In doing so, researchers "position" themselves in relation to the participants and other study contexts. For participants and other scholars to trust a researcher's stance, it is imperative that the researcher express this positionality within the study and to those choosing to participate in the study. While researchers are being transparent about their positionality, they also must choose methodologies that allow the voices and experiences of individuals to be amplified from the ground up. These methodologies must be "inductive, emerging, and shaped by the researcher's experience in collecting and analyzing the data" (Creswell & Poth, 2018). These qualitative methodologies are opposed to more positivist methods that are pulled from theory.

Considering these core philosophical assumptions, I created a study that is attentive to the ontological, epistemological, axiological, and methodological considerations mentioned above. Through the lens of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA; methodology), I used a "representative" sample of the target population to understand their varying realities (ontology) related to their experiences in the workplace. I entered this project understanding that individual experiences can produce knowledge (epistemology) that can be shared with others. Through an "About Me" statement that is included in my email brief (Appendix A), I shared with participants the specific values, biases, and connections that I brought to the table. In doing so, I

hoped to “bracket” my own lived experiences or set it aside in order to engage in the research (van Manen, 1990). Bracketing becomes one of many tools used by phenomenological researchers to minimize bias and explore the deeper meaning-making behaviors of participants.

Also worth mentioning are the transformative frameworks that serve as the background for this project. These frameworks fit Denzin and Lincoln’s (2011) call for “a social science committed up front to the issues of social justice, equity, nonviolence, peace, and universal human rights” (as cited in Creswell & Poth, 2018). These frameworks are emancipatory in that they help “unshackle people from constraints of irrational and unjust social structures that limit self-development and self-determination” (Creswell & Poth, 2018). For this study, I applied Quare Theory and Queer Latinidad to shed light on the intersecting identities of Black and Latino/x LGBTQ+/SGL CHRD leaders and how these identities manifest in the workplace experiences of participants.

Methodology

Phenomenology

Given the nature of the questions that I have proposed, I engaged in exploratory, inductive inquiry using phenomenology. Phenomenology was appropriate because it is invested in the subjective worldviews of participants. Phenomenology is a useful tool for investigation when the research project focuses on individual experiences of a particular shared event or “phenomena” (Creswell & Poth, 2018). By centering individual experiences, phenomenology explores the meaning-making behaviors of individuals in their everyday lives. At the core of this methodology is the assumption that individuals are not passive recipients of the events that occur in the world around them but are conscious participants who make choices in the creation of their everyday lives (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998). Through phenomenology, researchers can explore how

individuals interpret their everyday lived experiences and offer insights that participants themselves may not have known or recognized in how they exist in the world.

Phenomenology was also appealing because the approach seeks to "understand" instead of "explain" phenomena of the "human experience" (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Gill, 2014). This was particularly interesting to me as I was not sure how Black and Latino/x LGBTQ+/SGL CHRD leaders make meaning of their work experiences. Bentz & Shapiro (1998) further explain that scholars who use this method are not interested in explaining the causes and effects of phenomena but are instead invested in the different shared experiences that help us better understand the nature of "essential features" of a phenomenon.

This focus on understanding individuals' experiences with a phenomenon instead of searching for cause and effect dynamics means that researchers interested in phenomenology are invested in stepping into the world of individuals to understand how they make sense of their world. It means that researchers are tasked with being present and mindful of the verbal and nonverbal cues that individuals use in expressing themselves in relation to the phenomena at hand (Gill, 2014). This type of attention appealed to me as a researcher seeking to understand a population of people who share similar intersecting social identities with me but who may have completely different perspectives or interpretations of how those identities manifest in their professional work. Considering that I was interested in how Black and Latino/x LGBTQ+/SGL CHRD leaders (the individuals) make meaning of their workplace experiences (the phenomenon), this approach allowed me to better understand these experiences directly from the participants themselves and to find commonalities that speak to the "essence" of the participants' collective experiences in the workplace.

The concept of "essence" or "essences" within phenomenological research warrants specific attention. A key component of phenomenology research is that participants have shared experiences that point to the "essence" of a particular phenomenon at hand. Unlike a narrative inquiry that might focus on a single individual or multiple individuals, within a phenomenological study, the inquirer "collects data from persons who have experienced the phenomena and develops a composite description of the essence of the experience for all of the individuals" (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Patton (1990) describes these "essences" as "core meanings mutually understood through a phenomenon commonly experienced" (p. 70).
In this way, phenomena are understood in relation to how multiple individuals engage with the phenomena in question. Along the way, researchers utilizing this methodology share their path to inquiry and their axiological values and biases.

There are some additional key features of phenomenology that help guide most research projects that use this particular lens. Creswell and Poth (2018) propose that these features include:

- A focus on a specific, singular phenomena of the human experience. For this project, the phenomenon was "workplace experiences."
- An exploration of the phenomena with a group of people who have experienced the phenomena that can range in number from three to four or 10 to 15. For this project, the group is composed of five Black and Latino/x LGBTQ+ CRHD leaders.
- Philosophical discussion about what is required to engage in a Phenomenological study. This list offers the starting point for requirements needed to engage in this type of study.

- When appropriate, some researchers engage in "phenomenological reflection" when they discuss their personal experiences with the phenomena in question to "bracket" themselves out of the study. While it does not sincerely take a researcher out of the study, it does contextualize the researcher's positionality. The "Researcher's Positionality" section in Chapter I serves as my own *testimonio* into my personal experiences as a Black gay male in the workplace.
- A systematic data analysis that accounts for the "what" and "how" of individual experiences. The data analysis process is offered below in its own section.
- A conclusion to the study that includes how the individual stories connect to illustrate the "essence" of the phenomena in question. Chapters IV and V serve as space to discuss insights gained from participants and offer conclusions about those insights as they relate to the larger dissertation project.

As this list shows, it is common for phenomenological researchers to focus on how a group of people experience a specific phenomenon. These researchers use systematic analysis to explore individual's experiences and, by the end of their study, to make claims about the common ways that the individual experiences intersect.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

Gill (2014) reminds us that there is not one way to "do" phenomenology. Instead, there are various types of phenomenological methodologies that are rooted in different philosophies around "assumptions, objectives, and analytical steps" (p. 7) that define how scholars engage in each approach. Gill (2014) offers five main phenomenological methodologies that include Patricia Benner's interpretive phenomenology and Jonathan Smith's Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Each approach includes decisions around: (a) descriptive vs.

interpretive approaches; (b) participants and sampling; and (c) data collection and analysis. For this particular project, I entered with specific interest in not describing data from a general perspective but by sincerely finding commonalities in shared experiences. Additionally, I was most interested in exploring shared experiences through group-based dialogue such as small focus groups. Finally, I was seeking an approach that provided clear guidance related to data analysis.

I chose Jonathan Smith's Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), as I think it most aligned with the goals that I had for this project. As a more recent iteration of phenomenological methodologies, this approach seeks to explore how participants assign meaning and engage in meaning-making behaviors to better understand their lived experiences (Gill, 2014). While Smith's and Benner's approaches are similar in many ways, clear distinctions are made in relation to Smith's focus on idiographic analysis compared to Benner's use of focus groups, and on Smith's focus on smaller sample sizes compared to Benner's approach of exhausting sampling until no new information is discovered.

Initially, the idiographic nature of IPA was not appealing to me, as I was invested in engaging participants in the group-based practice of *critical platicas,* which occurs through a focus-group setting, as opposed to the interview style used often by IPA practitioners. However, Palmer et al. (2010) suggest that IPA can be and has been used in group-based settings such as focus groups. When this occurs, however, specific considerations should be taken into account in relation to the impact that preexisting relationships may play, issues around privacy, supportive versus contested experiences that are shared, and the impact of having multiple voices and the complexities of social interaction (as opposed to hearing directly from individuals; Palmer et al., 2010, p. 101). One solution is to utilize both idiographic interviews and to gather rich data on

individual lived experiences, as well as data from focus groups, that can provide more context into the social workings and shared meaning-making that exists for multiple participants. This study utilized both.

Rationale for Using IPA in Organizational Studies

Gil (2014) suggests that IPA is a great tool to help us "refine our understanding of organizational identity" (p. 28). This justification is rooted in a social constructionist perspective that suggests that the development of organizational identity is a phenomenological process. Those who adopt this perspective assume that organizational identity reflects individual member's shared interpretations. By focusing on individual member's experiences, we then get to acknowledge that the goal is not always to generalize those lived experiences but to understand them in context to social, cultural, historical, and individual factors that contribute to specific perspectives. Consequently, it was important to sincerely understand how organization members are interpreting their experiences. This task is consistent with the leading research question for this project.

***Testimonio* Shared through Semi-Structured Interviews**

This IPA project pulled from Chicana Feminist liberating methodological practices of *testimonio* (individual, critical reflections) and *critical platicas* (group-based, critical dialogue). *Testimonios* are individual narratives that are reflective and critical and that situate individual lived experiences within various social, historical, and cultural contexts. *Critical platicas*, on the other hand, focus on situating those reflexive narratives within informal dialogue with others so participants can better understand how their individual concerns and experiences are interrelated and mutually impacting (Carmona et al., 2018; Huante-Tzintzun, 2016). Both approaches were positioned within this study to shed light on the lived experiences and meaning making of

individuals and communities who are connected to one another and who seek to reflect upon their experiences and share and grow in community with one another.

Huante-Tzintzun (2016) offers that *testimonio* started in Latin America around the 1970s as a tool of solidarity and resistance against imperialism that was occurring in developing nations but has since been adopted by scholars in North America to give voice to various lived experiences with marginalization, oppression, resistance, and intersectionality. While it is often rooted in the field of education, the practice of using *testimonio* as a methodology has extended into various other fields. *Testimonios* can take many forms of reflexive narrative including poetry, memoirs, song lyrics (Abril-Gonzalez, 2020), and photography. At the heart of *testimonio* is an exploration and investigation into power dynamics and the process in which individuals make meaning of those dynamics. The *testimonio* is designed to bring attention to a concern or to share a point of view in a way that intentionally names injustices by empowering those who are impacted to speak their truth (Blackmer & Rodriguez, 2012). The *testimonialista*, or participant in this case, is the subject and the *testimonio* is the methodological path that is used to assist the testimonialista in reclaiming and finding agency in the process of sharing their lived experiences (Bernal et al., 2012). Bernal et al. (2012) note that it is important to remember that *testimonio* is different from methodologies such as oral histories or autobiographies in that individuals take a critical reflection of their *papelitos guardados* (lived experiences that have not been shared, especially ones that have been silenced) against the sociopolitical world in which those experiences are situated. The goal is that *testimonios* can be shared with others for the healing of individual testimonialista's mind-body-spirit and for the greater liberation of other historically excluded persons.

Critical Platicas Shared within a Focus Group

After *testimonios* were shared during interviews, multiple participants came together for a focus group where they engaged in *critical platicas* by reflecting upon, contextualizing, and discussing shared themes that were common in many of their experiences. The plan was that participants not only understand similarities and differences between themselves and others but also find moments of reflection to consider the implications of how they exist within their work environments and how those environments promote or hinder their full participation.

It is worth noting that some scholars do not make clear differentiations between the methods of *testimonio* and *critical platicas*. When a difference is expressed, the difference is typically discussed in terms of the individual nature of *testimonios* compared to the more collectivist orientation of platicas. This is not always the case, however, as some scholars differentiate between individual *testimonio* and group *testimonios* or individual platicas and group platicas (Espinoza, 2020). Regardless of the decision, all scholars have similar intentions of differentiating between individual versus group-based critical reflection and engagement.

Study Design

This study was qualitative in nature and designed with specific attention to standards of practice. This study design was adopted from O'Connor's (2022) dissertation, where O'Connor uses IPA as a method of analysis. This section presents those steps which include the following:

Step 1: Preparation for the Study (ethical considerations)

Step 2: Select Participants (participants, sample, and recruitment)

Step 3: Interview Debriefing

Step 4: Data Collection: Interviews

Step 5: Prepare Interview Transcripts

Step 6: Preliminary Analysis of Interviews

Step 7: Data Collection: Focus Groups

Step 8: Prepare the Focus Group Transcript

Step 9: IPA Data Analysis

Step 10: Validation and Member Checking

Step 1: Prepare for the Study

Professional Ethics

Many ethical considerations are predictable and can be resolved with appropriate pre-planning. To ensure that this research project reflects professional and ethical standards of care, I engaged in the following practices: complete CITI Training, submit and receive IRB Approval for the study, and create three documents that will be available to *participants* to review. These documents were adopted from Kia Darling-Hammond's (2018) dissertation on Black LGBTQ+/SGL youth and young adults and thriving and includes: an email brief (Appendix A) and a consent form (project goals, expected time investment, how images will be used, stipend or anything participant receives as a result of participation, risks and harm prevention, and process for complaints with contact details for staff; Appendix B). To design a study that is focused on the participant's best interest, it was critical that I completed the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) training. While I had completed this training in the past, I wanted to ensure that my training was updated and that I engaged in the study with the utmost sense of ethical and professional care throughout the process. The CITI training provided this level of due diligence for researchers. This training was very helpful for those working with historically excluded populations, especially those who belong to racial, gender, and sexual orientation social groups.

Once I completed this training, I submitted my study to Antioch University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB reviewed my study proposal and decided if my study was appropriate and did no harm to participants. The IRB provided the green light to start the interview process. I drafted a sample participant information sheet that included a section about me. This statement intentionally served to position me as a researcher who self-identifies as a Black, cis-gender male who is a member of the LGBTQ+/SGL community and uses "he/him/his" pronouns. It also has the added objective of minimizing power dynamics between me and the participants. Researchers suggest that participants from historically excluded groups are more likely to share more openly with those who share similar identities (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In conjunction with the IRB consent form, both statements were shared to ensure transparency between the researcher and participants about the goals of the study and what their roles are in helping this researcher find answers to specific research questions. The statements were also important in conveying the length of time for the focus groups, whether participants will be paid for the study and various other pertinent information. The consent form also included an opportunity for participants to opt-out of the interview or being able to skip over or not answer questions without any problems.

As data analysis was the cornerstone of this project, it is important that I work to minimize ethical problems that can occur during this process as well. To minimize harm, I masked participant names by having everyone choose a pseudonym early in the process so I could also start the habit of using and referring to the chosen name. I also used "composite profiles" to refer to clients to reduce additional means from which they can be identified. When disclosing data, I did "embed member-checking strategies and opportunities for sharing procedures and results" (Creswell & Poth, 2018) by allowing participants to review anything that

I wrote about the process, to provide feedback about the accuracy of the text, and to provide them the opportunity to read my results at the end of the study.

Step 2: Select Participants

Participants

The primary sample consisted of five males who self-identify as Black and/or Latino/x LGBTQ+/SGL CHRD persons. Participants were included in the study only if they self-identified with all of the following categories:

1. Participants were 18+ years old and lived in multiple states across the US. Additionally, they existed in an array of educational, socioeconomic, job and position types and life experiences.
2. Identified with at least one race OR ethnicity: African diasporic (including Black, African American, Afro-Latino, bi-racial or mixed race with Black as a racial identifier) and/or Latino/x (Hispanic, Chicano).
3. Held at least one identity that falls on the LGTBQ+/SGL sexual and gender minority spectrum. This included being gay, bisexual, same gender loving, pansexual, queer, transexual men, fluid, etc. Participants were selected regardless of whether they had chosen to disclose their LGBTQ+/SGL or are "out" within organizations. Because this study focused on the experiences of cisgender males, cisgender females and transgender women and transgender men were not included in the study as participants.
4. All participants self-identified as someone whose practice includes an investment into the "people function" of their organizations or communities. While this self-identification will include persons who occupy organizational positions that have

influence over human or people functions, it is not a requirement for participants to hold formal HR titles (i.e., HR Manager, VP of People and Culture). Instead, CHRD leaders, for the purpose of this study, also included activists, community leaders, and change agents who have a passion, interest, or role-related responsibility to enhance the people function of their respective organizations or communities.

5. Participants also had to be willing to openly share their work experiences with current or previous employers.
6. Finally, participants had to have the ability to download the Zoom application that allows for video conferencing.

Sample

Participants were recruited through two primary methods: convenience sampling and the snowball technique. Because I self-identify as a Black gay male and have been working with this population professionally for the last 10 years, my personal network includes friends, former clients, and former employers that I contacted to find participants for this study. I am also a member of multiple social and professional groups that are focused on Black LGBTQ+/SGL persons that served as a recruiting pool for participants. This convenience sampling allowed me to connect with those within my network who fit the participant criteria for this study. It was particularly useful because it "saves time, money and effort" (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

I also utilized the snowball technique to connect to individuals outside my personal network. The snowball technique relies on word-of-mouth referrals (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Noy, 2008) and was valuable in allowing me to reach participants beyond my personal and professional networks. With this technique, I relied on the networks of individuals within my network as well as those being interviewed to find additional participants. During this process, I

remained mindful that I was less connected to non-Black, Latino/x spaces; however, I relied on the aforementioned networks and the fact that many participants in my networks identify as Afro-Latinx (Black and Latinx) to reach this population.

Recruitment

Considering that I expected that most participants were recruited from a convenience sample of my personal and professional networks, I did not think I had to engage in many attempts to convince participants to join the study. However, because I expected to also rely on snowball sampling to reach additional participants that I did not have personal relationships with, I communicated with participants briefly during an introductory phone or email conversation where I provided an overview of the study, why I thought the study is meaningful and how each individual can participate in the study.

Step 3: Interview Debriefing

For those who met the participant criteria and were interested in moving forward with the study, I followed up with a more detailed email that included the consent form and an email brief with an "About Me" statement. This email communicated to participants that they had to sign the consent form prior to the study. I worked with each individual to schedule a time and date for their respective interviews. After completing individual interviews, I emailed out a link to a Doodle poll to decide on the best times and dates for the focus group.

Because participants were located in various states across the US, focus groups occurred virtually via Zoom. Because I did not know whether participants would mostly come from convenience or snowball sampling, I could not predict which region or states that they resided in within the United States.

Step 4: Data Collection: Interviews

Data were collected and triangulated through three methods: (a) the Literature Review (completed in Chapter II); (b) individual *testimonios*, and (c) a focus group *critical platicas*. While the literature review provided data and case studies on previous scholarship, the individual *testimonios* and focus group transcripts and observations as well as my own *testimonio* offered specific insights into this project.

Individual Interviews: Testimonio

RQ1: How do Black and Latino/x LGBTQ+/SGL CHRD professionals experience the workplace?

This question laid the foundation for this project. Through semi-structured one-on-one interviews, participants shared *testimonios* of their workplace experiences. Smith et al. (2009) offer a preference for an interview format lasts anywhere from 45 minutes to 90 minutes in duration of time and that includes four to five participants, one-on-one sessions to create intimacy and build rapport, and semi-structured interview questions of no more than 10 questions. These recommendations are offered to keep interviews timely and centered around the participants' individual experience. In particular, utilizing semi-structured interview questions ensures that participants' responses and insights can be further developed and elaborated upon as opposed to relying solely on prescriptive questions provided by the researcher. This elaboration will occur via follow up questions that offer clarification about any information that is presented. Considering these recommendations, I interviewed five participants, for 45- to 90-minute interviews. I utilized the questions within the Interview and Focus Group Guide as a means of ensuring that the interviews were semi-structured. Participants were recruited, screened out via email or an initial phone call, and then invited to participate in the study if they met the

participant criteria. Before joining the interview, participants were provided all necessary documentation that included an email brief and a consent form.

Step 5: Prepare Interview Transcripts

I reviewed the automated transcripts from the interviews to ensure that what was reflected on the final transcript were the exact words, phrasing, and other notes from the interviews. Both the interviews and focus groups were digitally recorded within the Zoom application for purposes of future transcribing. Using Zoom as a digital recording device was intentional because the device allowed me to be present for the process. Recording the interviews and focus group was intentionally meant to dissuade researchers from attempting to analyze the interview process during the data collection process, especially as such an activity could result in the researcher missing pertinent information shared by the participant. Bentz and Shapiro (1998) support this perspective when they offer that a recording device allows researchers to minimize injecting their preconceived ideas into the analysis by minimizing instances where the researcher could prematurely censor or recategorize information. Instead, a recording operates as raw data that can be visited and revisited as many times as possible to ensure the study's validity.

After each session was recorded, I downloaded the recording and uploaded into a platform called Otter.ai, which transcribes video content into textual data. This transcription allowed me to add any additional words, pauses, or other notations that I recognized during the interview process. Then, I compared the video recordings with the textual data to ensure consistency. I used this time to "scrub" the textual data of any identifying information. Finally, I engaged in "member validation" by providing participants with copies of the scrubbed transcription to verify that the textual data captures their words and intentions accurately.

Step 6: Preliminary Analysis of Interviews

Smith et al. (2009) recommends contextualizing the focus group experience by offering "materials" that speak specifically to the project at hand. In her dissertation that utilized both interviews and focus groups within an IPA study, O'Connor's (2022) chosen "materials" were a preliminary analysis of the interviews in order to influence focus group questions and to present shared themes to the focus group that they could work from in relation to the topic at hand (p. 56). I engaged in the same process, using emergent themes from a preliminary analysis of the interviews to modify focus group questions and to contextualize focus group *critical platicas* at the start of the meeting with this knowledge.

Step 7. Data Collection: Focus Groups

Focus Group Process: Critical Platicas

RQ2: Based on their shared experiences, what actionable steps can Black and Latino/x LGBTQ+SGL CHRD leaders provide that will assist other CHRD leaders in developing more equitable and critically conscious workplaces?

This phase of the study was an iterative phase developed from the first phase. After concluding the interviews, participants were invited to participate in a follow-up focus group. Similar to the interviews, the focus group was virtual, recorded, and automatically transcribed and uploaded into Otter.ai. Here, participants met in a focus group to engage in *critical platicas*.

During the focus group, I set the stage by sharing themes from my preliminary analysis of the interviews. Afterward, I asked some open-ended questions taken from the Interview and Focus Group Guide. Participants shared and discussed their thoughts with the group around similarities, differences, and deeper explanations related to the themes that emerged.

Finally, participants were asked to reflect on their collective ideas for solutions, in the form of actionable steps that point to solutions that organizational leaders can utilize in enhancing the workplace experiences of Black and Latino/x LGBTQ+/SGL CHRD leaders. This list of recommendations speaks to the types of changes needed to assist organizational leaders in developing more equitable and critically conscious organizations for everyone.

During this entire process, it was crucial to stay mindful of my role as a researcher and co-participant in the research process. As facilitators, researchers have the task of being present for the focus group conversation process, seeking further explanation when necessary, and probing deeper to explore participant perspectives. Bentz and Shapiro (1998) propose that researchers should engage in active listening and facilitation skills. These specific techniques remind researchers of their role as co-participants and facilitators in the research process. With open-ended questions, researchers can serve as guides for participants in helping to clarify and amplify their voices without directly influencing what participants choose to share with me or focus group members.

As a facilitator, I took notes throughout this process. I noted some of the following things: discussions that existed about choosing (and not choosing) themes and subthemes, and dialogue about the messages participants thought were most important and those that were less so. I was also interested in what things were worth negotiating with the group and which experiences seemed to be considered unworthy of debate. These notes were summed up and expanded upon in the discussion section of the dissertation.

Step 8: Prepare the Focus Group Transcript

I utilized the same process in preparing the transcript for the focus group as I did with the interviews. Some differences include any significant dialogue that I noticed in relation to how

experiences are discussed, any new insights that contextualize shared experiences and dialogue related to actions steps that are recommended to organizational leaders.

Data Organization and Storage

To protect participant information, I took the following steps. I stored all materials, including signed consent forms, any video recordings, and any notes that I took, in the Google cloud. I chose to use the Google cloud because it is a safe, secure, password-protected virtual space that reduces the chance that the information obtained during interviews could be lost and/or viewed by others who are not part of the study. I did not use hard copies at all. To keep accurate records of where information was stored, I created a master list of the information that has been gathered. In all these documents, aside from the consent form, pseudonyms were used to mask participant's real names.

Step 9: IPA Data Analysis

There are various data analysis techniques that can be used to assess data acquired from phenomenological inquiry. Generally, this analysis process includes multiple steps that involve revisiting the data to find commonalities in the language used by participants. Bentz and Shapiro (1998) describe this process as

> a deconstruction and reconstruction process somewhat similar to grounded theory analysis. Through imaginative variations, the researcher asks if all constituents, distinctions, relations, and themes could be different, or even absent, while still presenting the participant's psychological reality. The researcher is thus regarded as the co creator of the transcribed narrative, generated through interviewing or through an experimental situation. Once the basic record is created, the material may be treated as a public document and handled accordingly.

As they explain, researchers engage with the raw, transcribed data in attempts to better understand how multiple participant realities converge in their understanding of the same phenomena. During this process, researchers revisit the available data multiple times to find themes that emerge from the participants' own words.

For this project, data analysis occurred using the phenomenological analysis process proposed by Palmer et al. (2010). This process was chosen because it accounts for researcher positionality and breaks down the analytical process into steps that most resonate with this researcher. For idiographic interviews/*testimonios*, Palmer et al. (2010) offer the following flexible principles to guide the iterative process:

1. Reflection on preconceptions and processes.
2. Close, line-by-line analysis (coding) of the experiential claims, concerns, and understandings of each participant, including specific attention to language.
3. Identifying emergent patterns of themes in the narratives.
4. Dialogue between research and the data about what it might mean for participants to have these concerns in context.

Each of these steps serve as an iterative process that guides researchers in uncovering and discovering what participant responses reveal about their experiences.

For the focus groups, Palmer et al. (2010) also provide steps to assist researchers in analyzing data. They offer the following steps for data analysis that include:

1. Review the transcript for commonalities in experiences and then summarize and sort these into emergent patterns.
2. Take note of facilitator positionality and the role that the facilitator plays in the process from questions asked, prompts offered to move along the conversation, etc. Also, record statements made by participants.
3. Record references made to other people and any attributes of power, position, or other dynamics that are discussed and the consequences associated with each.

4. Investigate how organizations, institutions, and systems are described and the meaning and expectations associated with each.
5. Investigate the stories told by participants with special emphasis on structure, expectations, images, tone, and outcomes. Note instances where participants support, contradict, or challenge one another.
6. Pay attention to the use of language throughout stages 1 through 5, especially metaphors, euphemisms, with special focus on Patterns Repetition (words or phrases that stand out and determine whether or not these things are common across multiple members or just specific individuals); Context (emotional language, jargon or technical terms, and the impact of the facilitator); Function (how/why specific language is used-to shock, elaborate, provoke, "play the devil's advocate," etc.)
7. Modify the emergent themes from step 1 to reflect insights from steps 2 through 6 while answering the questions related to what experiences are being shared, what is the goal of sharing those specific stories with the group, what meaning-making is occurring between participants and how are they engaging as a collective, and finally, what are the points of agreement, dissent, or unsurety. (p. 118)

These steps offered a step-by-step guide for me in assessing the data from the focus groups. I used an Excel sheet to help with coding the transcripts.

Step 10: Validation and Member Checking

To ensure validity in the transcribed data, I shared final data from the *testimonios* with the respective participants and shared transcribed materials from the *critical platicas* with the group as a whole. These shared transcriptions included any notes on themes as Cho and Trent (2006) recommend sharing with participants the types of conclusions you are reaching related to

the information that they shared. I used this time to gain additional insights or points of clarification that were needed for the study.

Chapter III, in summary, was designed to familiarize readers with the design of this research project. Two research questions were proposed that would drive interviews (testimonio) and focus groups (*critical platicas)* with participants. These participants engaged in this phenomenology project through multiple stages that include: (a) *testimonio,* where they engaged in critical reflection of their workplace experiences, and (b) *critical platicas,* where they engaged in critical dialogue around commonalities in experiences and actionable plans to share with other CHRD that would aid them in building more equitable workplaces.

CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH FINDINGS

This chapter provides an overview of the findings that have been collected from participants. These findings were collected from both individual *testimonios* (interviews) as well as group *critical platicas* (focus groups), where participants responded to a set of open-ended questions relating to their workplace experiences (Appendix C and D).

Participant Profiles

A key component of this Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis is to honor individual accounts of their experiences (*testimonio*) while also contextualizing shared experiences from the collective (*critical platicas*). In this section, I present a profile of each participant and then share how specific themes emerged during both the *testimonios* and *critical platicas*.

Aleph's Profile

Aleph is a 47-year-old public servant who resided in California at the beginning of the interview process but then moved to another state. He described himself as a working-class, Latino Mexican American gay male. He states that he is a "public servant. I consider myself a compassionate leader. With regards to my racial and sexual orientation, I consider myself Latino-Mexican . . . Mexican American and I consider myself gay. Yeah, and that's it." Aleph's Mexican American identity is rooted in his being a naturalized citizen who takes pride in his Mexican heritage and culture. While he understands the evolving nature of language that speaks to varied experiences of LGBTQ+ persons, Aleph identifies as gay, more so than queer, and prefers to be identified as Latino as opposed to Latine or Latinx. When speaking of his race or ethnicity, Aleph mentioned that these categories are different in Mexico as everyone is mostly White and indigenous, but everyone just identifies as Mexican. Being in the US has helped him evolve his language around these issues to the point where he now identifies as mixed race due

to the historic nature of indigenous and European/Spanish ancestry that comprises his ancestral background.

Additionally, Aleph has obtained his PhD and identifies as middle class. At work, he came out in his twenties in the early 2000s while living in Texas. During this time, he shared that he never experienced discrimination based on his sexuality. Aleph is currently looking for work after leaving his previous place of employment due to negative experiences, which he speaks about in his *testimonio*.

Joey's Profile

Joey is a 45-year-old educator, artist, and filmmaker. He describes himself as someone who takes pride in both his Afro Latinidad cultural heritage and identity as a New Yorker. He shares that:

> I'm Puerto Rican and Dominican. I'm very bad at being both of those things if that actually means anything. And so, so to be Latino for myself, Growing up, there was a very specific look to being Latino and so I, I've tried to find ways of embracing that Latin element of myself, while still being a New Yorker, if you're a New Yorker, you're pretty much like a stew with, with every . . . a little bit of everything in you, because everything is here. So, so I'm a New Yorker, probably more than anything else. But I think just really affirming those elements of my identity, like my afro Latinidad, that has always been really important. More recently affirming my, my identity as, as part of the LGBTQ community, trying to try to decide the label that best fits . . . and at the same time being like, I refuse any labels, we should all just exist.

The pride he has in both his Afro Latinidad and New Yorker identities was clear in how he spoke of both. Additionally, it is worth noting that Joey has recently learned into being more open about his LGBTQ+ identity. With feedback from friends about his sexual fluidity and interest in intimate partners beyond their physical bodies, he thinks that the term "pansexual" best captures this part of his identity. Pansexuality refers to having an interest in a person beyond their physical bodies, and as such, pansexual persons could potentially find romantic partners in cis or trans men or women as well as nonbinary and nonconforming genders. He shares that coming to

terms with this identity took some time as he comes from a conservative religious background.

Additionally, Joey has a master's degree and identifies as middle class. He notes though that "It's New York so even the middle class are poor." He currently works in a leadership capacity at an organization that serves historically excluded and underserved youth artists where he has been working to make change. Highlights from his experiences are shared below.

Petey Pablo's Profile

Petey Pablo is a 37-year-old educator. He is also a New Yorker, Brooklynite more specifically, who takes pride in his cultural Honduran heritage as well as his queer and Black identities. He shares:

> I identify as a Black Honduran from Brooklyn, New York, a third generation Brooklynite, queer, same sex loving, desiring all that great stuff. And then what else? I feel like there's so many multiple intersecting identities, but those are some of the key ones Black, Honduran, queer and Brooklynite. That really mattered to me. Also, coming from a working-class immigrant home, which really shaped my politics, deeply shaped my politics. So yeah. . . . Yeah. So, you know, my folks are from Honduras's Caribbean coast. They're from the Caribbean coast of Honduras. They are Garifuna, which is a Black indigenous community, in Central America, Central American's Caribbean coast. So, the Black identity was something that was most certainly affirmed and definitely upheld in my household, particularly because both of my parents identify as Black folks, they identify as Black indigenous people, they identify as Black indigenous immigrants. So that identity was very, very much just part of our living and breathing experience, right?

Petey Pablo's sharing of his personal and cultural identities provided insight into the origins of his sense of pride in relation to his social identities.

While his Black, Honduran, and New Yorker identities were affirmed early on, he mentioned that the journey to coming to terms with his queer identity came a little later. Growing up in a conservative Pentecostal church space situated him within an environment where he struggled with his masculinity and maleness. He mentioned he was

> never really great at being a boy. Particularly because growing up in church, Black and Brown boys don't get the luxury of being soft, vulnerable. You know, and I think there's always . . . especially growing up in a working-class neighborhood, right . . . there are

> layers to constructing Black and Brown masculinity around aggression right around violence around hostility around the inability to actually use words as a form of communication, right? So I always found myself outside of, I've always found myself outside of what are normative understandings of being a boy. So, the queer thing actually didn't come up until later on in high school, it was cemented a lot more in college for me.

It was clear that, like many LGBTQ+ or queer men, Petey Pablo had known about his queerness early on but struggled to contextualize his internal sense of things with an external world that did not seem to carve out space for his full acceptance. College, though, served as a catalyst in providing him with the language and support to step more fully into his authentic self. Petey Pablo's reflection on masculinity, boyhood, and manhood speak to how these concepts are limited and limiting, especially for Black and Brown queer persons. He mentions that to be a boy, in a very generic sense of the state of boyhood, is to be someone who uses aggression and violence to communicate as opposed to using their words. Because he exists outside of these notions and does not exist in ways that are hyper-masculine or aggressive, Petey Pablo's sense of self resulted in his distancing himself from concepts of "being a boy."

Additionally, Petey Pablo holds a PhD. While he admits that his tax returns may suggest that he exists in a tax bracket that is above middle class, he still maintains a sense of connectedness to his working-class immigrant roots, which are also influenced by being the first generation born in the US and to have finished high school and college. During the time that he provided his *testimonio*, Petey Pablo was working at two institutions and transitioning to a permanent stay at the newest of those. His experiences are highlighted within the context of the emergent themes below.

Mac's Profile

Mac is a 39-year-old DEI executive and consultant. He identifies as a Black, gay/queer male. While he attributes his Black identity to being a social identity that "is inherent and inherited," he has specific "time stamps" on the moments of recognizing and honoring his

identities as a queer person and a DEI executive. In relation to his identity as a gay male, he mentioned being aware of certain aspects of his queerness as early as 10 but then truly reaching a place of personal acknowledgement at 17 years old. At 18 years old, he started to disclose his identity to others during his freshman year in college. Mac holds an MBA and considers himself upper middle class.

When speaking of his professional identity as a DEI executive, he mentioned two paths that he acknowledges with others. He shares:

> In terms of my identity as an executive, that one also has a timestamp. It happened in specifically in 2020. I actually wrote a LinkedIn post, saying, as of this moment, I consider myself an executive and watch what happens next. And so and part of that was wrapped up in my also creating my own identity as a coach. And so I was in a coaching programme at the time, and being a part of that kind of helped me crystallize that that idea as well and what that meant for me, in terms of my confidence, the way I acted, the way I spoke, and the way I kind of carried myself, both in and outside of work as this kind of the next level professional, kind of giving myself permission to be all that I say that I am. And then in terms of DEI, specifically, DEI is something that I've been working in the longest in my career without really realizing it for a long time. And so I kind of have like two stories of my professional development one that doesn't include DEI until the very end, and then one that brings the DEI part of it all the way through from junior year in high school. And then me kind of realizing that that is huge value that I bring, but saying DEI professional or DEI executive, just kind of putting a stamp on and saying, I am the subject matter expert. And in my line of work. I come with my kind of opinion . . . professional opinion of what something is. And because it is this type of work that I do, I have to have a certain level of confidence. Because people will try it.

Mac's choice to create and own his identity as an executive is influenced by various organizational experiences that helped shape how he engages in his work. Those experiences are highlighted below and contextualized within the major themes of this project.

Tom's Profile

Tom is a 34-year-old human resources professional. He identifies as Black, gay and a hard worker. He shares that his Black identity was easier to acknowledge than his gay identity as he is a dark-skinned person. He shares that:

> As far as being Black, I mean, there's no way that you can't not identify as Black because, I mean, as far as the features and everything else they're there you have it. And, and as far as coming to in terms of accepting it, as far as the Blackness, it was a, it was overtime as far as growing up, because, you know, if you're, I'm on the darker hue as far as of the Black spectrum. [laughs] So you, when you have other people joking and talking about your skin tone and stuff like that it makes you makes you more of like kind of recoil back into yourself and not really be who you are. But it took me some time with reading books and talking to other people and just accepting myself the way that it is.

Tom mentions that there was a journey that allowed him to accept his skin tone as colorism absolutely impacted his sense of self-worth.

His journey into accepting his gay identity was influenced by his growing up in the South and realizing that he was not attracted to girls in middle or high school. While he has become more accepting of his gay identity, a move out of his home state and into a place that is more accepting has been beneficial. Seeing people who were more open and accepting of their queerness had impacted his sense of acceptance.

Themes and Subthemes

Five main themes emerged from all three stages of the research process. These themes included: "not-so-micro" aggressions, surviving and thriving, failures of DEI, day-to-day leadership, and Black and Latin/e/o/x queer identities and bodies as inherently disruptive. Table 1 provides a breakdown of the main themes and subsequent subthemes and shows which themes are relevant to specific participants. Each theme is discussed, and examples are provided from *testimonios* to serve as examples.

Table 4.1

Main Themes and Subthemes

Themes and Sub Themes	*Participants*				
	Aleph	*Joey*	*Petey Pablo*	*Mac*	*Tom*
"Not-so-micro"aggressions					
1.1 "Professionalism' and the Presence of Black and Brown Bodies"		*X*	*X*	*X*	*X*
1.2 Black Male Aggression		*X*	*X*	*X*	
1.3 Coded and exclusionary language	*X*	*X*	*X*	*X*	
1.4 Negative workplace conflicts with White women	*X*	*X*		*X*	*X*
2. Surviving and Thriving					
2.1 Code-switching		*X*	*X*		*X*
2.2 LGBTQ+ Identity Disclosure			*X*		*X*
2.3 Honoring Whole Self	*X*	*X*	*X*	*X*	*X*
2.4 Connecting with Others	*X*	*X*	*X*		*X*
3. Failures of DEI					
3.1 Performative DEI	*X*	*X*	*X*	*X*	
3.2 Disconnect from DEI	*X*		*X*	*X*	*X*
3.3. Benchmarking Previous Experiences	*X*			*X*	*X*
3.4 DEI infrastructures need attention	*X*	*X*		*X*	*X*
4. Day-to-day Leadership					
4.1 Fair and Respectful Workplaces	*X*	*X*	*X*	*X*	*X*

Themes and Sub Themes	*Participants*				
4.2 Changes in Leadership	*X*			*X*	
5. Black and Latin/e/o/x queer identities and bodies are inherently disruptive					
5.1 "Disruptor" or "resistant" Positionalities	*X*	*X*		*X*	*X*
5.2 Emotional Labor	*X*	*X*	*X*	*X*	X

Insights from *Testimonios* and *Critical Platicas*

The following themes emerged from both individual *testimonios* and *critical platicas*. These themes are divided into subthemes with descriptors provided for each that provide more clarity into how they are being defined.

1. "Not-so-Micro" Aggressions

"Not-so-Micro" aggressions appeared in multiple *testimonios* from participants. As its name implies, this theme centered workplace experiences that are related to encounters with what Essed (1991) refers to as "everyday racism" or what other scholars often cite as "microaggressions." Sub themes included "Professionalism' and the Presence of Black and Brown Bodies"; Black Male aggression; Coded and Exclusionary Language; and Negative Workplace Conflicts with White women (or White passing Latinas).

1.1 **"Professionalism" and Black and Brown Bodies.** Mac, for instance, in referencing the subtheme of "Professionalism" and the Presence of Black and Brown bodies" offered that:

> In consulting, you wasn't growing your hair, any kind of length. There was no curls. The only thing you had in your hair was maybe some waves . . . low cut with some waves. Other than that, your hair was not growing beyond a centimeter, and you weren't locking it, or dreading it or curling it. You weren't doing all that. Now, I like trying to do stuff, you know, [like] mohawks and faux hawks and doing all types of lines on my hair. And,

> you know, that was something that I used to be very consciously jealous of White guys. [They get to] walk into work, with [their] hair looking all the way fucked up, and its [considered] professional. [I want to ask White guys?]You ain't have no gel? You ain't have no comb? You literally took some water and was like this [motions as though massaging water into hair in your hair]. And that looks good? And then later, when the gays started getting more popular, post-recession, everybody was souping their hair up high to the gods.

Mac's words specifically pointed to how seemingly mundane things, like concerns over having autonomy in exploring and choosing hair styles that reflect his personality or mood, exist differently for him than say a White colleague. His concerns also suggested that as opposed to just showing up in his full authentic self, with the ability to explore various hair styles and textures as his colleagues are able to do, he had to be hyper aware of how choices to do so must also be weighed against notions of what is and is not considered professional. Finally, he offered that having to navigate professional spaces in these ways is not fair or equitable.

Tom had similar concerns in how his choice to wear his natural hair in Afrocentric styles could be seen as being unprofessional. In relation to his current workplace, Tom shared that:

> I wouldn't say that I feel very comfortable with, say, walking in with my natural hair or walking with my gayness and stuff like that. I have all the natural features of being Black. I can't, you know, not say that I'm not. I'm Blackity, Black, Black. I'm culturally Black. I'm all types of Black. I love that about myself. And so, I'm definitely going to come and bring that but as far as like the gayness and, and my natural hair and stuff like that, I still have lingering thoughts of how all of these people may treat me. But I still will walk in with my natural hair. I still will walk in and if I feel like having a feminine moment, or if I'm talking in a certain type of way, I'm not stopping myself from doing that.

Tom expressed his feelings of being uncomfortable bringing his authentic and full self to work. For him, this meant some degree of managing his hair and his feminine mannerisms that might serve as a clue that he is gay. While he was unable to and uninterested in changing his skin color due to having clear African American features, he shared that he did think about the possible impact of wearing his natural hair while at work. Ultimately, his choice was to "walk in with my

natural hair"; however, he was aware that doing so could come with concerns around the ways in which his colleagues treated him. Tom did not share any specific examples of being treated differently due to his hair, skin color or mannerism; however, it was clear that concerns around mistreatment are part of his professional experiences.

1.2 Black Male Aggression. While dealing with multiple "not-so-micro" aggressions, Joey discussed concerns from his colleagues around his reactionary and aggressive behavior. While he acknowledged the anger that he felt in moments where he was presented with "not-so-micro" aggressions, these moments of frustration were often the result of feeling dismissed and silenced about inequities and/or clear biases in how he was being treated or what he was witnessing in how others were treated. He recalled:

> It was infuriating. I began just being angry and shouting at people. And they were like, "Why are you so angry about it"? and I'd be like, "This individual just told a lie. I tried to correct that lie [but] you asked me to let them finish. You built on the story that they told you. We went to the next point, [but] I still hadn't spoken. I raised my voice for us to have to go back to the other point. And you asked me why I'm angry? That is the very definition of gaslighting. Let's go back and look at how that works". And they'd be like, "Well, you know, next time, I'll ask you if that's true". I was like, "You should always seek out the truth and not assume." There were just like, a lot of moments.

Joey's willingness to be vulnerable, enough to share how he has reacted to being gaslit while working, shed light on the ways that he felt constrained in the workplace. He shared that his choice to raise his voice and to engage in ways that he described as angry were not appropriate means of addressing his concerns. Those moments, though, seemed to be last ditch efforts at seeking to be heard when he was feeling mistreated in spaces that were public and where others participated in the silencing of his voice. Joey added that it took years to find his voice and even after he did, he learned not to lash out in ways that were similar to the problematic ways in which others engaged with him.

Mac also shared experiences of being perceived as aggressive. After a DEI-related training that was led by two White women, he was informed by them that a Chief Diversity Officer, who was another Black male participant, perceived his engagement in DEI work as aggressive. After checking in with the participant that supposedly provided this information, he discovered that they had not actually communicated this to the two women that mentioned it to Mac. Mac confronted them about it.

> At the end of that day, the organizing woman came to me and said that the Black Chief Diversity Officer, of that other company, felt that I had been disruptive [and] aggressive. I sent him a follow up email and he basically wrote back and said, "No need to apologize. I totally understand. I know why you're passionate about this and I also like the things you're saying." Not only did he not corroborate the content of what she said, but he didn't even corroborate the general sentiment that she led with. So really, at the end of the day, what that translates to me is that these are her words that she isn't taking accountability for.

After shattering the notion that others shared the sentiment of his being aggressive, Mac concluded that the colleague who shared the information was expressing her views instead of discussing feedback from others. A few weeks later, he ended up losing his position even after defending himself and the misinformation about how he approached his work. From Mac's perspective, there was a direct connection between his being perceived as hostile and angry and the ability of White colleagues to use that language in ways that resulted in his losing his job.

When discussing Black male aggression during the *critical platicas*, Tom and Mac spoke of their experiences. They expressed the social and emotional impact of these perceptions as well in the following discussion:

> Tom: I honestly feel [that] it is kind of frustrating [walking into a] space [where] you have to be overly nice or overly open for people to open up to you or for them to say that, "This person is a nice person and I know that they will be able to do good at this job or whatever". But it is a little frustrating because you want to show up as yourself, but you don't want to have to show up and, you know, times your personality by 10 in order for people to feel comfortable around you. It's a little frustrating.

> Mac: I just feel really bad for my old self. My new self no longer cares. My new self is not in a place where I spend much time self-auditing or editing or whatever. I walk in the door of an interview letting you know exactly what it is and what it's not. And in it, sometimes it's helpful for me to explain that I'm from the Northeast, and I've been living in New York for 10 years. I really will say what I say and I'll say it how I say it. I'm an expert and I have years of experience and if you don't like it go buy some other talent, right?
>
> There was a time when I was running this hamster wheel. [I was] exhausted with trying to cover and trying to not only figure out what is the analysis [the game I have to play], what is the message [and] what is actually going on, but then [also] trying to figure out professionally how to say it well. Then, adding an additional layer of by the way, I'm Black and this person is not or I'm this and this person is different. And so now I have to add this other layer to massage their ego as well and/or their ignorance. There's a lot of wasted energy that goes into that. And to me, that's kind of the tragedy of it. It's the stealing of that energy, whereas that could go into much better and more useful and productive places.

The wasted energy spent being overly nice to move in ways that resist narratives about aggression or self-managing in ways that are inauthentic and draining are part of what it means for Black men to exist in spaces where they have to tiptoe around negative perceptions of their raced bodies. The span of emotional impact includes the frustrations that Tom spoke of as well as the sense of liberation that Mac spoke of when he finally decided to just move with all of his authentic self.

1.3 Coded and Exclusionary Language. Through the process of sharing his *testimonio*, Aleph shared multiple instances where he encountered "not-so-micro" aggressions in the workplace. At first, he shared that he was unfamiliar with the term "microaggressions" but later sought out confirmation from others about workplace experiences that he found to be problematic. He commented that:

> At first, I started noticing low patience, [then] another low patience. I am an immigrant and the term microaggression didn't exist [up until now] or maybe it's an academic term in academic circles. But in the general population, the term microaggression is relatively young. It didn't exist or at least I didn't know about it when I was in my 20s. So, it's something relatively new. So, for many years, I didn't really subscribe to the [concept of] microaggressions until I started becoming a victim or witnessing microaggressions from

> the top from White people. I [also] started noticing things. When I was talking to other people [of color] on my team, then I realized that they were always on the same page. [I realized that] this [issue with microaggressions] is something.

Although he did not have the language to initially understand and contextualize his experiences, Aleph noticed a problem with how he was being treated in the workplace. Having sought confirmation from others allowed Aleph to better understand how his experiences with White people were shared by other people of color. Additionally, he recalled multiple encounters with a leader who he identified as "racially insensitive" and who questioned his ability to be on the leadership team as the "straw that broke the camel's back" when making his final decision to leave the organization. These "not so micro" aggressions included dismissing and under-supporting programs that focused on people of color and leaders, like himself, that managed these programs. These aggressive behaviors were indicators that people of color were not valued in the organization.

Another specific incident worth noting occurred in relation to a meeting where Aleph attended with the head of his department and a direct report. During this meeting, Aleph noted multiple times where coded and exclusionary language and behavior from White people. He reported that:

> We were doing meetings where the department head was present and [the] deputy was also there. Several times, comments were made that "Oh, that meeting that's for high level people. That's for high profile people". And when that [message] "those are for high level people," is mentioned to you, often and often, that triggers trauma that leaders of color, like yourself [the interviewer] and like me, have endured, throughout our careers. We are constantly reminded by our society, that just because of who we are, because of the color of our skin, just because of nationality, or accent, right, we are not "high profile". We are lower. So those were just an example of the type of problems that we were subjected to.

During this reflection, Aleph called attention to the exclusionary language of "high level" or "high profile" that were used by leaders in the room. In doing so, he also pointed out the "us vs

them" dynamic that was reinforced in the space that impacted those in the room who were not seen or experienced as "high profile". In this instant, coded terms such as "high profile" were experienced by Aleph, and his deputy, who he later refers to as a "White passing Latina", as a means to also differentiate a predominantly White leadership that was referenced to as "high profile" from a predominantly non-White "low profile" populus. As he noted, this particular use of divisive language was experienced differently by historically excluded groups as it reminds persons who are non-White and who speak with an accent or are from a different country that there is a hierarchical value placed on individuals. As a person from a historically excluded background, then, he was reminded that the types of everyday structural and systemic "-isms" and "-phobias" that he experiences outside of the workplace have indeed manifested into institutionalized versions of these issues.

Over the course of Joey's *testimonio*, he shared instances where he had encountered everyday racism and "not-so-micro" aggressions in the workplace. Many of his encounters reflected moving from "the old guard," where the worldviews of White leadership were upheld, to new ways of existing and being. He explained that:

> There were some microaggressions from leadership. Because they are the "old guard" and they come from a different era. The work that they're doing is good but there was this sense of "We're doing so much good, we should be thanked. People should be thanking us for all the good that we do. You're welcome. Praise me." Like, there was a little bit of that, and it would come across in conversations where we were forcing applicants to our space to constantly be like, "Thank you. Thank you. Thank you" and to tell their sob story so that we can put sob stories out there and then be thanked because we're doing some good. When I was in communication with them [leadership], they constantly wanted to hear about the troubles of my past and how I connect with the kids. They constantly wanted to hear about my own troubled past and how I overcame that troubled past. And I'd be like, "Everyone's overcome some troubled past". Or they'd be like, "Is that because your father wasn't there"? I was like, oh, man, you want to be my therapist. [There was] this praise that secretly had this undertone of, "Despite your troubled past . . . " There was always this thing.

Joey felt that there was an implicit desire for him to perform these stereotypical notions of race to appease his supervisors. In sharing this particular reflection, Joey illustrated how coded and exclusionary language and behavior from White people speaks to a deeper concern of how they perceive people of color. Additionally, he shared the experience of being asked to regurgitate his family traumas in ways that supported this savior mentality that suggested that poor people of color need White people to save them from their dire conditioning. Joey found this cultural norm to be highly problematic and one of the many reasons that he often resisted the status quo at his organization.

Petey Pablo also had direct experiences with coded and exclusionary language and behavior as well. He referenced instances of being told that he was "loud" and "not approachable." After connecting with a student who was a fellow New Yorker, he recalled a moment where a colleague reported him to the dean as opposed to speaking to him directly about her concerns of his being "loud". He explained that

> I was talking to a student who was actually from the Bronx, right? So sure, I was loud, right? But my colleague felt the need to report me to the Dean of Faculty. [The interviewer's eyes bulge and facial expressions reflect surprise that]. Right? That part. [Offered as an affirmation in response to the interviewer's facial reaction]. The Dean of Faculty apparently had time on their schedule. And I was like, "Ain't you busy? Like, what you calling for"? [He] proceeded to call me, wanting to have a conversation around the loudness of myself. I was just, like, got it. So, this person couldn't come to me and tell me directly, but you're gonna have the Dean of the Faculty approach me about it? Got it. Understood. [Once again recognizing the shock on the interviewer's face] That part. That part. So, I'm just like, okay, that's fine. "Loud" is coded for so much, right? Absolutely. Loud is racially coded.
>
> I've had a lot of colleagues, you know, in many coded ways say that I'm not approachable. [I thought to myself] What you mean I'm not fucking approachable? You the one that don't say hi to me. [But, for some reason] I'm supposed to say hi to you? I'm gonna [say Hi to you] but I'm not approachable? You don't say hello, or good morning. [Even when] my door's open, you make eye contact, [but] you keep walking. [As though speaking to one his colleagues] Good morning. Good morning. How are you? Like, manners? Like, do we not have manners? I guess White folks just don't got manners.

Coded language around being “loud” and being “not approachable” alluded to how these words were experienced as “not-so-micro” aggressions. Instead of bringing these concerns to him directly, his colleague chose to escalate her issues to his supervisor. The implication that he seems to make is that she must have some awareness that escalating her concerns would get a level of support that would then work to correct the behavior of others that she found problematic. In this example, Petey Pablo admitted that others may have perceived his volume as being loud, but he struggled with the idea that something so minor as being perceived as loud would not have warranted a conversation between colleagues as opposed to being escalated to the point of creating a perception with others that he is problematic and unapproachable in some way.

In his elaboration of his experience with the two consultants, Mac shared how coded behavior and language around his work with DEI was used to label him in ways that were perceived negatively by organizational leaders. In the same conversation about his being perceived as disruptive and aggressive, it was made clear to Mac that his approach to DEI, which was placed under the category of JEDI (Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion) by others, was deemed inconsistent, not appropriate, and thus misaligned with the organization’s values. In this particular instance, Mac perceived that there was a sense that JEDI work was too radical for the organization’s mission and instead, the organization may have been seeking something more superficial. He reflected:

> She started out with feedback by saying, “You know, there are some people who consider themselves JEDIs.” JEDI is a term for Justice Equity Diversity and Inclusion and what I told her was, you know, “Thank you for the lesson in DEI, to me. [I] appreciate that. One, I never call myself a JEDI and I don’t appreciate you putting me in that box, right? Like, that’s not a label I gave to myself. You’re trying to put this label on me. Two. I understand that you don’t think that JEDIs are good, that they’re too activisty and that justice is not really the brand of DEI that y’all are about. Therefore, what you said was, it's not our way of doing DEI and therefore it’s not the private equity firm way of doing

> DEI, which I felt was again, coercive and threatening." I told her that just because I don't use the term JEDI for myself doesn't mean that I don't think that justice is important. It's just that I don't think it's in the control of the management or me and my role at work. And there's a difference.

While Mac shared that he did not identify himself or his work under the JEDI label, he believed it was clear that being labeled in this way was done so as a coded means to suggest that the organization was not interested in deep, meaningful work and were not interested in this work being led by a Black gay male whose approach was rooted in real, accountable change. Mac experienced this moment as a clear means of determining that he was unfit for the organization in ways that, in his opinion, became a rationale for him losing his position.

1.4 Negative Workplace Conflicts with White Women (or White-passing Latinas).

When reflecting upon one of his most contentious moments within the organization, Joey shared that there was a White woman colleague who constantly interfered with his ability to do his job. These negative workplace conflicts with White women were at the heart of much of his frustration at work for years. He mentioned that this White woman colleague, who served in his role in an interim capacity before he was hired on, spent a year "squashing his ideas," sabotaging his plans, and sending multiple emails communicating how wrong he was in proposing new ideas. He mentioned being overwhelmed with the negative engagement with this person. It took two years for him to realize that he was not wrong in his approach to her more traditional methods. He was just offering a different perspective that was valid. His engagement with her reached a boiling point, however, that resulted in his creating an email that almost resulted in her termination. The "almost" part was impeded by her crying to his boss (also a White woman) during a meeting where she would have been fired and the boss admitting to him that she sees herself in the woman and understands her perspective. He stated that:

> There have been moments where this woman was about to be fired, went, and cried, and my boss literally said, “She cried so hard, I couldn’t fire her". And I was like, “Can I cry and get a promotion? Is that how this works”? [The boss stated that] “She reminds me of myself.”

It is also worth noting that Joey mentioned that he did not have the privilege to have his real, or feigned, emotional space supported like his colleague. Instead, the responses to how he was being treated were often minimized and generalized into stereotypes around Black aggression that do not often hold space for what it means to respond to White “not-so-micro” aggression, manipulation and problematic means of wielding control that is supported within organizational spaces. The outcome was that his White woman colleague became a person who was viewed as relatable and misunderstood when it comes to her inappropriate behaviors while he became an “angry Black man” for his response.

Tom’s experiences with aggressive behavior at work also included a negative workplace experience with a White woman. He recalled:

> I’m in the [office] space and I’m actually just, you know, reading and I’m writing and taking notes. And so [a] coworker walked up to another person. Obviously, I’m actually hearing what she’s saying. She’s just like, “What is he doing over there? It just seems like he’s not doing any work.” And mind you, this co-worker is a White female. And she was asking another person, [before she] walked up to me, and she was just like, “Well, you know, I need you to do this. And I need you to look through your files and stuff like that.” So, it wasn’t even saying that “I need [something from you] or can you help me”? [asked in an inquisitive tone]. It was more of like, “I need you to do this” [stated in a demanding tone] like I was sort of her slave. And I felt like that was sort of a microaggression to me. I actually did feel some type of way about it. I felt like I was gonna say something about it. But I was just like, you know what, I’m new. Walking into the space, let me try to shake this off and not allow that to hurt my coin and hurt my money. I just left it alone. But it had happened a couple of times where I just thought I need to hold myself and hold back. Some people need to learn how to talk to other people, I guess.

Tom’s recounting of this story is interesting given how he contextualized his experiences through the lens of being treated like a “slave.” There is a sense of powerlessness that came into play when considering that this was his chosen word to describe his experiences. From what he

recalled, it seems as though he was being told to follow commands in ways that minimized his voice and by someone who seemed to act in ways that suggested that they believed that they possessed some type of authority over him, which he clearly disagreed with. It was only due to his ability and willingness to "hold back" so as not to "hurt his coin" (impact his pay negatively) that he chose not to address the issue. As he states, though, this incident was not isolated.

Aleph, Joey, Mac, and Tom all engaged in dialogue and reflection about their experiences with White women in the workplace and how their experiences are connected to larger issues. Mac, in particular, noted that those who are in fields that are occupied mostly by women, are more likely to experience being supervised by White women.

During *critical platicas*, participants chose to expand upon their experiences with White women. The reflection below is an example of the critical dialogue and reflection that spoke to their experiences:

> **Mac:** I work in a space that is HR communications. There are a lot of organisations [where] you may not find as many women, in like engineering roles, but you are gonna find a lot more women in HR and communications roles and those are roles that I'm kind of in. I think that I'm going to encounter a lot more White women at work than maybe others in other parts of a company. That said, I know that my experience is not the same with all White women. But when I have had situations of contention where there was some kind of consequence to it, or I'll say even perceived consequence, whether that's a real kind of career defining or limiting consequence, or one that's just that psychological, it often involves a White woman.
>
> **Aleph:** As far as I'm concerned, I am in the social services and traditionally, social services has also been traditionally selected by women generally, not just White women. And unfortunately, in a lot of cases, when the person in power happens to be a woman, it also happens to be a White woman.
>
> **Tom:** I can completely agree with that.
>
> **Aleph:** (picks up conversation after signal drops) So what I was saying is that sometimes women, particularly White women, see things by the fact of being a woman. They are also part of a population that has been marginalized historically. I think a lot of them believe that gives them a pass to utilize microaggressions that they don't even believe that there is anything wrong. But by saying or doing what they do, they are like, "Well, I'm a woman. I already know what it is to be discriminated. I already know what it is to

be marginalized. So how am I going to be micro aggressive? What are you talking about"?

Tom: I do agree with you [that] some White women have been marginalised and been put into certain scenarios, or in certain positions, because they are women. But I feel with me personally, [if I] was just walking outside, I'm automatically going to be judged because of the way that I look with my natural hair, and my darker skin and stuff like that. But when you walk into like [the] office space, when you're dealing with [a person] one-on-one, when I'm dealing with this one particular person, [I think] "You know, you can change the way that you talk to me, or you can change the way that you talk to or interact with other people. I understand that you want to get certain things done, but it's not what you say, it's how you say it". In my particular situation, this was one of my scenarios that I brought up [during the *testimonio*], because it's one of those things where I just don't take mess from people in general. But when I go into the workplace, I'll expect everybody to be professional. And so, when I don't see a lot of professionalism when it comes to just this particular person [White colleagues], I'm gonna have to figure out how am I gonna handle myself professionally.

Joey: I feel generally seen. I appreciate all the people on this zoom. It's super interesting. I've never found myself in a situation where I felt like I was in like a Mean Girls movie until I started working in the space where I was at and the only person, I've had any conflicts with the entire organisation has been one woman who is completely unaware of how micro aggressive she is all day long. It was like this infuriating moment where all of my grievances that were legitimate enough to cost this woman her job were kind of like washed over, because this woman cried. And I was like, "Whoa, that is wild, because this person has had a conflict with three quarters of the organisation, and somehow keeps getting saved over and over again".

I didn't think of it as a White person thing because I've been there for a long time. There are plenty [of] other White women in the org and they're all just fantastic people. And there are only four men in the entire org. And there are like twenty women, which is usually like great. Everyone's super competent at what they do and that's all that matters at work for me. But it's just been super wild to see the kinds of things that happened with this particular individual over and over. And like, the reasons that came back to me were always like, "Hey you're such an understanding person. Can you just be more understanding"? And like, "Let's try to forget about all these things that that you mentioned before". And that's happened twice. But at the same time, when I became angry about it, my anger became a problem. And the reason that the quieting [of my voice] was happening was because if I had sent my email to the board, versus just them [my boss and her partner who are founders and executives], it would have been an instantaneous fire, because our board is also filled with women but it's half filled with Black woman who know what's happening. And so, I found that to be super, super interesting. I've had that experience twice.

Mac: If that person were not a White woman cry baby in that moment, she would be [fired] is what I'm hearing, right? And so, it sounds like this person needs to be let go and was held on for what was literally no reason. And for that [the person's presence in the

> organization] to still be literally a cost centre [a reference to a business function that costs more than it yields in profits] for the organisation, it hurts the organisation, right? And it also disengages Joey. It creates a lack of trust and transparency, and could lead Joey to leaving, which would be a double cost there. So, it's very inefficient for those types of irrational decisions to be made.
>
> And then the other thing that we kind of talked about related to White women in our spaces is that when you get into a place where you're in either the overall culture of the organisation, as in the case with Joey, or in a subculture, like some of us, the overall organisation may be still more male dominated. When the more immediate department or area that we're in is maybe more women dominated, then the gender piece falls away. And what you're left with is the race piece. You're left with everything else. So now you're not worried so much about all of those pieces, because what you're confronted with and what you're really navigating in, what you're really left with, and what you really see is how women amongst women are and women amongst minoritized men are. And that is a different story altogether. So now it's more pronounced than ever.

As the participants noted during this exchange, there have been specific instances with White women who leverage their agency or authority in ways that are problematic. One explanation as to why this occurs was due to the industries in which they work, such as HR or nonprofit spaces, which are predominantly led by women. Aleph's assessment was that some of this was due to the fact that White women have more agency over, say, women from historically excluded groups, which means that there is a tendency for them to supervise those whose backgrounds are similar to the participants. It was made clear, though, that no one was stating that all White women were problematic. However, as Mac stated in the beginning of discussion, when there were situations of contention, the participants shared stories where White women leveraged their authority in a way that was problematic, dismissive, and definitely reflective of "not-so-micro" aggressions.

Also, worth noting was a brief exchange between Aleph and Mac where Aleph pointed out that many of the issues he faced was not with a White woman but a "White passing Latina." He suggested that:

> **Aleph**: The person that is above, the woman that I had a terrible experience of being supervised by, is not White, but she is [a] White passing Latina. And, she also has a reputation of displaying microaggressions. She also has a reputation of having a very authoritarian style of leadership. However, the county that I used to work for, would give

> her the pass because for them, it was like, "Well, she's a Latina . . . she's a Hispanic woman." Because she's a Hispanic woman, then, she automatically must understand the struggle. And we know that that is not the case, especially among White passing Latinos. There is a lot of anti-Blackness. There's a lot of colorism.
>
> **Mac**: Sounds like she's a Latina, White woman.
>
> **Aleph**: Mhmm.

In this exchange, Aleph points out, and Mac acknowledges this issue of a "White passing" Latina woman who engaged with Aleph in ways that he found to be problematic. Mac offered confirmation that this person may actually exist at the intersection of White and Latina in ways that Aleph agreed was an accurate statement. This was the first time that any participant noted an issue around "passing as White" or being both White racially and Latina culturally in ways that present a potential problem when the person in question does not embody a sense of collective liberation for Latino/x person specifically and marginalized persons more generally.

2. Surviving and Thriving

Surviving and Thriving is the second main theme. The theme of "surviving" centered reflective moments where participants noted tactics and tools that they utilized at work in order to get through their everyday experiences with "not-so-micro" aggressions or spaces where they did not feel the most psychologically safe. In these moments, participants leaned "away from" their intersecting identities. Sub themes included *Code-switching* and *LGBTQ+ Identity Disclosure*. On the other hand, the theme of "thriving" reflected moments where participants leaned "into" their sense of self and identity. These themes included *Honoring whole self* and *Connecting with others*.

2.1 Code-switching. Petey Pablo's experiences with code-switching at work spoke to a journey that took him from a place where he code switched frequently to a place where he abandoned code-switching altogether. He addressed his previous experiences with code-switching in the workplace when he reported that:

> I'm also about to be 38. So, I'm also hitting that moment in my life where I'm starting to give less fucks. In the 20s, I was definitely performing code-switching every single day and then [I] realized, oh, this shit don't matter. They can get rid of you in a heartbeat. You know what I mean? Like that code-switching ain't gonna do shit if they want to get rid of you . . . if they feel threatened by you, right?

Although he did not share a specific incident of how he engaged in code-switching, Petey Pablo did reflect on the idea that he had experiences with code-switching. When faced with the choice to code switch within an organizational context earlier in his career, Petey Pablo chose to acquiesce to expectations around White heteroprofessionalism. Considering that he posited that code-switching ultimately "don't matter" as organizations will terminate employees for a variety of reasons, there was sense that nothing protects the employee, not even performing "Whiteness."

Code-switching was also one of those tools that existed in Joey's toolbelt. In speaking about code-switching, Joey commented:

> I make jokes about code-switching. Like, I'll say something and keep calling it my "Sorry to Bother You" voice [a reference to a 2018 movie of the same name about a Black man who adopts a White accent to be successful at his job] and I make a joke all the time. I'll say something and they're like, "Wow, that was great." I was like, "Yeah, I could have said that in three words, but I had to say it in the Whitest way possible." And like, I'll say that to my boss, and he'd be like, "You should have just said it the regular way." I'm like, "That's not true. This was like, I gotta use my master's degree right here". I think that most folks of color have learned the sounds and the White code. They've had to learn the White code, but White folks haven't had to learn the other codes.

Joey's take on code-switching spoke to the necessity of his having to adjust his communication style in order to be seen and heard in the workplace. Joey's ability to make light of the situation

with humor potentially served as a reminder to him, and others on the receiving end, of the ridiculousness of the act of code-switching. His reference to the Sorry to Bother You film was connected to Joey's note about the fact that persons of color have had to learn to navigate "White codes" of professionalism and appropriateness while White persons have not had to learn the codes of others.

Whether the decision was made to protect "his coin" or his mental health, Tom had experience with surviving and thriving in the workplace. Sometimes, this meant engaging in code-switching behaviors. When speaking of his experiences and challenges, specifically with code-switching, he stated that:

> I still kind of, you know, recoil into myself sometimes. What [do] they call it? I can't think of the term right now. It's a term where you kind of . . . it's code-switching. When you think about business and also personal life, you try to code switch; but code-switching in a way that you're not really forgetting your own self, if you understand what I'm saying? There are certain [elements of] African American Vernacular (AAV) language but when it comes to the professional space, [AAV] is not always looked at as professional. That's looked at as hood, or that's, that's this or that. It's just one of those things where, culturally, our culture isn't always seen as like, the professionalism culture, I guess.

Tom's story of his struggles to reconcile African American language with ideas of professionalism highlighted the limited ways in which "professionalism" is seen through a very specific lens. As he mentioned, it created dynamics where those whose identity-based lenses did not reflect the limitations of White worldviews were relegated to code-switching behaviors in order to be seen and experienced as competent and worthy of being recognized.

2.2 LGBTQ+ Identity Disclosure. In Petey Pablo's case, disclosing his identity at work had been a "tricky" endeavor. His decisions to disclose, or not, were intertwined with the sociopolitical climate that exists in higher education. When speaking of being "out" at work, he stated that:

> You know, I've always had a tricky politics with that one. Because I work in education, and I know what it is. I know what it is to be a Black, brown queer person in education and open about it. The stigmas that families have around it . . . that students have around it. I think sometimes we think these students are like, "It's the 21st century, its 2022." Yet, homophobia is still rampant. We still have a lot of stigmatization around queer folks in the classroom, right? We currently live in a country where the state of Florida is banning LGBTQ anything, right? But I've been lucky that a lot of my teaching here has been mostly in New York City, which allows for a bit more openness. But [queerness] is not the first thing that comes to mind, right? I'm much more. You know, the Black Latinx thing for me is a lot more part of my pedagogical openness rather than the queerness, right? I think the queerness, once I feel safe in this space, is when I disclose to students and I share, but it's not something I start with, if that makes any sense?

As he shared, it was easier to be open about his racial and ethnic identities than it was his queerness due to "stigmatization around queer folks in the classroom." While he admitted that higher education does provide a different, more liberal, space when it comes to LGBTQ+ workplace experiences, his direct experiences also spoke to the nuance of disclosure. Being in New York City, for example, was one of those nuances as the metro city is known for its progressive views.

Tom had similar experiences with his comfort level in disclosing his identity at work as he also worked in an industry that has more of a conservative sociopolitical environment. He mentioned working for the government and having to exist in spaces where there is a higher percentage of military persons and military families, who happened to lean more conservatively and often, less inclusive to issues such as those faced by LGBTQ+ and Black persons. When speaking of disclosing his gay identity at work, he claimed that:

> We still have to remember that this is a government space. And it has the majority of military people or military spouses or kids that had military parents and stuff like that. So, they still have that misconception about LGBTQ people and also Black people. So, there's still already a dynamic that there's some lingering things with other people as far as misperceptions about certain groups. So, I would be in the middle of the road as far as how I feel about my workspace.

Tom's statements highlighted the differences between professed messages from senior leadership versus direct experiences with organizational cultures. Here, he pointed to that difference and the fact that the conservative organizational culture cannot be ignored when considering the impact of disclosure.

2.3 Honoring Whole Self. Having to constantly navigate between code-switching and "not-so-micro" aggressions became taxing for Joey. To better navigate organizational spaces, he had to make a choice to honor his whole self and engage in less self-management tactics. When speaking of a meeting to address the behavior of the White female colleague that blocked and gaslit Joey's work, despite not being his supervisor, Joey recalled a conversation with his manager where he was essentially informed that he should learn to survive this person's toxic behaviors. He noted that:

> The feedback while it was happening was that "This is how she's always been. And everyone's kind of received the brunt of this. You just got to accept that some people are just like that." I was like, "I can't accept that just because someone has always thrown paper at the back of people's heads, it doesn't mean I have to accept them throwing paper to the back of my head." That's the excuse we use. That's like the thing we use for like racist grandmothers and toxic men, right? [We say things like] "That's just who they are. It's who they've always been. What are we going to do at this point"? [My response is to] tell them that they're not allowed to slap that woman in the ass because they've never met her, you know. Tell the grandmother, she can't call him a nigger. You just can't do it. Sorry … not sorry. You just can't do it." So, when I started pushing back hard, because they'd never seen that before, they were like, concerned for me, because my personality had changed.

Joey's account of this story is a reflection on moments where he had felt that he was being asked to essentially "shut up and move on" in order to survive the workplace, even after bringing

legitimate concerns to the appropriate parties. Joey decided, however, not to acquiesce to the problematic colleague or the unwillingness of his White leaders to hold her accountable. While doing so was part of how he expressed his truth, the consequence of stepping into his truth meant that he started to be seen and to ultimately existed in the organization in ways that even he felt were inauthentic over time as it meant a shift in his personality while at work.

When faced with concerns at work, he mentioned that he now chooses to vocally dissent in order to call attention to the issue at hand. By dissenting, he is able to honor the parts of himself that are often silenced or ignored while at work. He posited that:

> I've spent a lot of time just being very, very upfront. The moment I sense the slightest microaggression, I finally reached the space where I'm like, we're pausing right now. And everyone's like, "Fuck." Even if they're all angry at me, I'm very happy that I'm not the one who's angry all the time. Now, although I am the one who was calling people out on a constant basis, there's a sense of like us [all] being kind of ushered in to do so.

Joey's sense of relief from not being the "angry Black man" of sorts was achieved by not bottling up his frustrations when faced with "not-so-micro" aggressive behaviors. Instead, he created space to have those issues addressed in real time when they occurred. In doing so, he shifted the onus from being a problem with this behavior, that he must manage, to being a problem that all people were responsible for resolving. He was also able to shift from feeling frustrated into being more relieved with the fact that he was not the only one who must come to terms with problematic behaviors.

Mac also shared experiences with having to make the choice to honor his whole self and engage in less self-management tactics over time. In relation to his willingness to code switch while at work, he responded:

> Not anymore. No, I just don't do it [code-switching]. I mean, in my past, absolutely. I mean, [at] my first company, all the time, I was master of it. And not only was I a master but I taught it. It certainly happened even more when I got to be home. I started working from home about a year before the pandemic started. [Overtime] I just started to be more

> comfortable and relaxed and worried less about it. I think being in DEI kind of helps push you that way to say like, "I'm gonna walk this walk of authenticity, right? Like I'm gonna walk this walk of authenticity and talk it. I gotta walk in and do what I want to do as well." I think there's that and then there's just like a continuously growing sense of empowerment. Coaching even helped with that. I said [to myself], "I'm an Executive and this is what it looks like." I started posts and I posted my haircuts on LinkedIn. I created whole posts about my new haircut. It's a faux hawk with the lines on the side and it's got this thing and people are like, "Oh, that's so cool." I'm like, "Yeah, but like 10 years ago, I could not have done this, right." So, yeah, I think times have changed and people are much more willing to step into who they are.

Mac's growth from a young professional in his twenties to a more seasoned professional in his thirties included a shift to show up as more of his authentic self. The pandemic and the move to become a DEI professional were at the heart of his reasoning for such a shift. Additionally, his previous negative experiences served as reasoning to lean into bringing his whole self into his work without feeling the need or desire to switch things up to appeal to White heteroprofessional expectations.

Code-switching was also a strategy that Tom utilized on his journey of surviving and thriving in the workplace. Sometimes, he chose to just show up as his authentic self regardless of how others might perceive him. This choice to honor his whole self and disengage in less self-management tactics had been a focal point of his desire to just be himself. He claimed that:

> My plan has been this whole entire time: I want people to know me who for who I am, you know. Yeah, we all come with these labels and people have misperceptions about you or about those labels. I want them to get to know me, for me, and if they feel like they know me, or even if they don't, I'm going to just be myself. And if they don't accept my gayness or they don't accept my Blackness, then that's on them. That's not on me. But I just have to try to continue walking in my own space, if that makes sense?

This choice to just show up in all his Blackness and gayness was a strategy that Tom was growing into as he navigated his workspace. Showing up authentically was important to him and so he ultimately made choices about what worked best for him to exist fully as himself, despite how others may have perceived him.

2.4 Connecting with Others. Another tactic that helped participants thrive in the workplace was connecting with others with similar backgrounds. This tactic was highlighted when participants shared moments of recognizing that they were "the only person of a particular background" within their work environment. This tendency to assess the workplace for those with similar identities speaks to the tendency of persons from historically excluded backgrounds to find safety and comfort with one another in light of the "-isms" and "-phobias" that they experience within organizational settings.

Tom used this strategy when he first arrived at current place of employment. Assessing his environment for familiar identities and faces looked like him first assessing for Black faces and then his assessing for gay people. In relation to his seeking affirmation from the presence of Black faces, he noted that:

> The lens that I had, when I first walked in [to work] was "Okay, how many Black people [are] in this room? How many Black people are in this building"? [I needed] to see if there were some people that look like me in this space. I have natural hair [but] not a lot of people in my building actually have natural hair. Especially [when] dealing with the government, you walk into a space and everybody's sort of clean cut. If they were in the military, they had to shave their head. It wasn't a lot of braids or wasn't a lot of natural hair or people walking out with their hair [in patterns and styles that reflect] the way that it actually is and the way that it grows outside of your head. So that was the lens that I had when I was walking into the space. And so, when I walked into the space and I saw some of the leaders and I saw some of the peers that I actually have, it was a good mixed space where everybody there had a mix of everything . . . Asian, Black Hispanic people in that space. So, it was good to actually feel like "Okay, this is like a very cultured place as everybody is a mix of things."

Tom scanned the organization for other Black folks when he arrived at his organization. He was looking for the number of Black folks and those with natural hair to determine whether the environment was a safe and affirming space where he could feel a sense of belonging. Even though there were not many people who also had hair styles associated with a traditionally Black aesthetic (such as braids), when it came to racial diversity, he found that the organization did indeed have an array of diverse staff.

While his experiences with finding Black faces, and generally an array of faces that were not just White, were affirmed, his assessment of gay identities had a different outcome. Considering that he did not choose to disclose his sexuality when he arrived, he struggled with connecting with other LGBTQ+ persons and/or in recognizing that the space was safe for more open disclosure. He offers of his assessment of how the space functions as an affirming environment or not:

> The next lens that I had was "Okay, so there's a good cultural space as far as different races in this room or this area office but are there other gay people in this area"? And that was another concern of mine. I was just like, "Okay, well, you know, I got the Black thing down." That was a check. There are more than just Black folks here too. But now I have to go into this gay space. So, it's like another space to be like, "Okay, well, I need to feel like I'm comfortable in that space." And to be honest, it wasn't [comfortable]. I was just like, "Okay, I'm gonna walk in here and do what I need to do. And I'm not gonna let anybody in here determine that I can't get my raise or get to potentially grow into a different part of human resources because of how they feel about my gayness." So, at first, I wasn't open about it [being gay]. But a couple of months after, there were mass meetings and one of the things that the commanding officer was explaining is that we accept all people, and they were spelling it out really, really well. [He stated that] if there's anybody that feels any certain type of way about anybody saying anything about them … and the commanding officer did [specifically] say, "if you were you know, gay, straight, trans, racially [diverse], [facing discrimination related to] age, or anything like that, I need for you to personally bring that to me. Because that's not what we're about at this organization." And so that made me feel like I have somebody that has my back, in a way. I felt like I can sort of be myself. I'm still going to have a little of my cards close to myself, because I still don't want people to necessarily be all up in my business, but also try to treat me in a different way.

> So, after a couple of years of being in this office space, I have been more open with a couple of my co-workers about who I am. The position that I held before was in customer service and I was completely open there because I was there for eight years. It took time to get to that point but I was completely open with everybody. Everybody knew who I was, and everybody knew that, you know, I was with a man. But you know, not a lot of people talked to me about it, which I'm fine with because, you know, that's my personal thing. But when you think about somebody else's cubicle, like when you walk into their cubicle, or go into their space, they have some pictures of their family. So, you know, one of my coworkers [now] has a picture of her children and her husband. And another coworker had the same thing. A couple of other people have pictures of their children in their cubicles. It made me think like, "Well, what if I, you know, one day when I am married, what if I actually have a picture of my partner and I on my desk? One day when we have children a picture of them as well? I wonder what a person would feel if they walked past my desk, and they see that picture at a time when I'm not at my desk"? That's where I'm currently at right now, as far as my headspace.

As Tom explained, navigating his LGBTQ+ identity at work took a particular kind of balance that was unique from his identity as a Black man. While he was "completely open" and out at his previous organization where he worked for 8 years, he has yet to get to that same level of comfort in disclosing to others at his current organization. Tom shared that he avoided social outings with colleagues for the very notion of preventing colleagues from getting to know him as a Black gay man so he can create a safe space, of sorts, that protects his privacy. Even with affirming messages from one of the leaders about creating safe spaces, he still kept his cards "close to himself" in ways that suggested that barriers still existed that impede full disclosure.

Petey Pablo also spoke to this dynamic of seeking out and connecting to others who share similar identities. He recognized that he was the only person, that he was aware of, that existed at the intersection of his racial, ethnic, and queer identities. Like Tom, he assessed his organization for similar identities when he stated that:

> I will tell you this, I was quite literally, the only Black Latinx queer person on that campus. There was no other colleague who was a Black Latinx queer person, let alone a Latinx person, right? I can think of three Latinx people on that campus. And then I can think of maybe seven Black people on their campus faculty-wise, right?

In seeking to find support, or at least connect with others who can speak to his intersecting identities, Petey Pablo shared that he is the only person whose background exists at the intersection of Blackness, Latinidad and queerness. Having this knowledge speaks to the fact that he must have assessed the organization and discovered this to be true. His conclusion that he was "the only" person whose identities exist at these particular intersections, in addition to the small numbers of Black and Latinx staff, held a note of disappointment as well as a sense that the numbers were not a major surprise.

Even when Petey Pablo found that he was the only person with his particular intersecting identities, he noted that he finds it to be a meaningful experience to connect with students where there he found community. In fact, he expressed a greater sense of belonging with those being served (students) than colleagues. He offered that:

> I get to be my true self with students, right? Like, I get to be 100% who I am with students, right? And especially in this Black queer diaspora class, right? I'm able to unpack with students, a lot of the complexities around Blackness and queerness and students always feel at home for me, right? Like, I always feel really comfortable with students. I always feel like, "Yep, this is something I can do, something that I want to do, right."

Petey Pablo's ability to unpack "complexities around Blackness and queerness" with students who make him "feel at home" point to relationships that are not just based on demographics but the ability to be vulnerable with others who also bring their vulnerabilities to the table. Additionally, this sense of being connected to "those being served" is directly related to the emotional labor that he experiences as a result of these connections.

For Aleph, Latino staff were excited to be able to connect with someone who had similar backgrounds. Despite his ultimate choice to leave his most recent employer, Aleph did mention that he felt the most seen and affirmed when he was with these staff persons. He mentioned that these spaces were spaces where he felt most connected to his work. He posited:

> When I was with my teachers, particularly with the Latino teachers, they were thrilled to have a leader who [shared their] background [and] spoke their language. So, whenever I go to [worksites], I felt the most empowered.

Aleph's sense of connectedness to the Latino teachers was an example of how persons from underserved or minority backgrounds find value in having representative leadership. As Aleph mentioned, having shared language and cultures has direct impact on both leaders and followers. His sense of feeling "the most empowered" during these engagements showed that he felt seen and affirmed by those who share similar backgrounds, potentially in ways that were dissimilar to interactions with those who do not share his background.

3. Failures of DEI

Failures of DEI is an additional theme that emerged from participant *testimonios*. This theme highlighted participant experiences with DEI efforts in the workplace. Sub themes included: Performative nature of DEI not rooted in deep change; Sense of disconnect from DEI initiatives which results in limited to no participation; Positive engagement with previous organizations becomes benchmark in assessing orgs; and DEI infrastructure need attention.

3.1 Performative DEI. Almost all of the participants struggled with this theme. Joey was no exception. When participants spoke of the performative nature of DEI, Joey commented that:

> It's one thing to put a bunch of Brown faces into a place that has a bunch of White faces but it's another thing to teach those Brown faces that the rules that are in that place are also fake, right? We're sending them [Black and Brown youth] in there [into external organizations] but are we sending them in there saying like, "Be like them"? or are we sending them in there saying, "Fuck shit up and this is how you can fuck it up, right"? I've been in a little bit of a fight with the old guard. [I've been saying to them that] I love what you started [but] here's what else needs to be different: We can't teach them [underserved, mostly Black and Brown youth] that it's okay to talk down to people, just because they are in a lower position than you. We cannot teach them that it is okay to claw your way to the top at the expense of others. I'm like, "We are trying to make the world better. Not Browner." Those are the things that shifted my perception a little just to be like, "This is bigger than the brown faces out in the universe."

Here, Joey pointed to the performative nature of DEI within his organization where Black and Brown bodies are brought in to address Diversity concerns without also addressing deeper institutional concerns around Inclusion and Equity. As Joey pointed out, the goal is not to just make organizations Browner, per se, but to sincerely develop more equitable and critically conscious organizations. Understanding this reality means taking the deep dive into transforming interpersonal engagement so Black and Brown people are not "clawing their way to the top at the expense of others," leadership dynamics where they understand that "talking down to people" is not appropriate, and many elements of organizations that have gone unchecked that allow the world to better.

Aleph was also very vocal about his perception of the failures of DEI initiatives within organizations where he has been employed. He provided examples during both his *testimonio* and *critical platicas* that spoke to shortfalls of DEI initiatives. One of his criticisms was related to the performative nature of DEI and the disconnect between what organizational leaders espouse about DEI and the misalignment of these messages with internal, day-to-day workings. Regarding this disconnect, he responded: "Yes, I think on the surface, on the face that the organization puts to the community, it wants to give the impression that those [DEI] policies and strategies are part of the everyday management of the agency." Below the surface, however, Aleph presented experiences that are inconsistent with this external messaging. His expression of a disconnect pointed to how he experienced the organization as only being interested in "performing" DEI as opposed to sincerely being invested in institutional changes that impact historically excluded persons in the workplace. He admitted that there was an effort taken to address DEI concerns with the development of an Inclusion Committee, but it was performative in nature and had many internal problems including only a couple meetings in over a year's time.

Aleph alluded to the fact that these limited meetings suggested that the committee is not developed for serious and intentional change within the organization. These performative efforts included the fact that the organization was reactive to social movements such as those that emerged after George Floyd's murder. While many organizations had been engaging in what is now referred to as DEI for decades, many that have jumped on the "DEI bandwagon" over the last few years have done so in various performative and superficial ways. Aleph recognized this from his previous employer. He noted that efforts were limited and only included:

> very performative letters and emails to department heads [and] offers to the staff, who felt emotionally affected by it, to go to our Employment Assistant Program. We [my staff] brought in a therapist to have sessions, especially during the shooting [of George Floyd]. It came from the department, from my team.

As Aleph pointed out, the change that occurred within his organization happened at the departmental level where team members worked together to show up for one another and provided appropriate counseling for those that expressed a desire or need for it. From his experience, these changes were not related to organization wide DEI initiatives and as a result, he implied that the real work was not happening as a result of DEI efforts led by leadership but due to team members seeking to support one another.

Petey Pablo also noticed a surge in DEI initiatives after the murder of George Floyd. He noted that organizational efforts at addressing various "-isms" and "-phobias" have proven to be problematic and have not been sincerely designed to transform organizational cultures. On the performative nature of DEI, he vocalized that:

> Well, you know, after George Floyd, all of these colleges and universities created DEI as if it was going to dismantle White supremacy, right. As if it was gonna magically just be like, "Oh, it's over guys . . . reparations were done . . . Black and Brown people are as smart and not inferior." [My university] in particular is a liberal bubble, right? When people like my colleague that [assumed I was a janitor], did that to me, [he] wouldn't even see how fucked up that shit was, right, because they're like, "Oh, I'm sorry." And

> then it's done, right? Like, oh, [you offered] an apology, and it's done. And you're moving on.

The failure of DEI to dismantle racism and to address end microaggressions, which he noted, is significant in pointing out its limitations. While addressing "-isms" and "-phobias" is purported to be part of a DEI agenda, Petey Pablo still had to deal with the daily aggressions of his colleagues who show up in ways that do not suggest that they are deliberately seeking to address their biases. Part of the issue, as Petey Pablo points out, may be the reactionary and performative nature in which organizations have responded to George Floyd's murder. The performative nature of change and short sightedness on behalf of the organization was reflective in the last part of the quote where despite encounters with aggressive behaviors, Petey Pablo informed us that there is an expectation to just ignore incidents and move on.

Petey Pablo continued sharing his sentiments about the performative nature of DEI when he spoke of it as a "Band-Aid" being applied to cancerous "-isms" and "-phobias" that plague society. He continued by sharing that:

> From how I understand it as a faculty member, DEI, are these like, institutional Band-Aids that are trying to repair something when the ground itself is rotten, right? So, it's like, you really can't repair something if you have a deep-rooted infection. And the deep-rooted infection is the cancer of racism. It's the cancer of homophobia. It's the cancer of all of these "-isms", right, that we continue to experience in our society. DEI is trying to put a Band-Aid on a rotten infection, right? And what that's only going to do is just make the Band-Aid rotten, right? Getting pulled to the [DEI] spaces, then, becomes a performance of tokenism, right . . . becomes a performance of, "Hey, we have faculty of color. We have these people on campus having "these" [DEI-related] conversations, doing "this" [DEI-related] work. And I'm just like, "Well, yeah, you've had it since the '60s. There's been a Black Studies department here since the '60s. And so yeah, you've had it, right"? And I think when DEI don't recognize the scholarship that's on campus by faculty of color on topics and themes that DEI [that have] already [been] worked through, it's a slap in the face, right? It feels like a slap in the face and it doesn't feel student-centered, and it doesn't feel student friendly. Because of this, DEI for me is just more of an institutional Band-Aid or like an institutional umbrella rather than really making this campus safe for Black and Brown people.

Petey Pablo's statement about DEI agendas and goals only serving as "institutional band aids" was consistent with the vocalized experiences of other participants. From his point of view, DEI efforts seemed to, in some ways, only address superficial concerns instead of deep-rooted "-isms" and "-phobias" that plague society and institutions.

His insights about those from historically excluded groups being "pulled into these spaces" to perform DEI also called into question "for whom are they performing"? He stated that DEI initiatives, that he has experienced, seemed to be developed for the gaze of White people as opposed to those being treating inequitably. He further elaborated upon this when he posits that:

> What I ultimately end up thinking is [those creating DEI initiatives are] not thinking about Black and Brown students. They're thinking about White students, right? Because it's White students who need to take a class entitled thinking through race, right? Because White folks are really uncomfortable about race, right? And White folks don't see Whiteness as part of the conversation already about race. So that's their approach. They'll do these events. They'll do a whole bunch of shit, you know . . . Taco Tuesdays, Soul Thursday's, you know, all of this multicultural shit, which isn't for me. It's making DEI into a corporation, right? It isn't for me. It's marketing. It's the branding. And I'm just like, "This is not what our ancestors had in mind. But here we are." So that's their approach.

In Petey Pablo's view, it was White people's discomfort about race that was leading much of the work that he has experienced around DEI within organizations. As opposed to addressing this discomfort specifically with White people, Petey Pablo concluded that DEI efforts are blanketed towards everyone under the impression that all groups of people are engaging with race in the same way. He did not think White people engaged with race the same as others as he mentioned that White people do not even understand their Whiteness through the lens of race. Instead of addressing this flaw in DEI, Petey Pablo concluded that multicultural events were added to the mix in ways that reinforced the superficiality of DEI projects that are ultimately not reflective of the kinds of change that he imagined that his ancestors would be proud to say were occurring at this moment in time.

Petey Pablo expressed similar sentiments about queer presence and politics on campus. While he acknowledged that colleges have a reputation for being more supportive of LGBTQ+ identities, there were still concerns that emerged due to the fact that colleges are organizations with cultures rooted in heteronormativity. He reflected on this when he stated that:

> And I think one thing about my perception so far about [my most recent college], like most colleges and universities, right, they're all going to be LGBTQ+ friendly, right? I think [just because] queer folks at the university level experience a lot more kindness doesn't mean homophobia doesn't exist. It doesn't mean that people don't have assumptions about queer folks [which occurs when] people around the watercooler [say things like], "Oh, why don't you have kids"? [my response is] "Like, why? You're gonna pay for it? Like why"? Heteronormativity is so much part of function, right? Heteronormativity is about surviving a certain kind of structure. And for me, queerness is always in resistance to heteronormativity or just normativity in general. Period. I just think there's something there that institutions continue to thrive on, normativity.

That normativity that Petey Pablo spoke of is the normalizing of cisgender, heterosexual worldviews, and experiences over others. Because one worldview is normalized over others, through the lens of systemic and institutional biases, Petey Pablo still felt the pressure to not show up as his whole self. He suggested that DEI efforts that do not address these issues may suffer the same outcome of being "institutional Band-Aids."

As a DEI practitioner and consultant, Mac had unique opinions on the nature of DEI. During both the *testimonio* and *critical platicas*, he shared these opinions in detail. He noted concerns around DEI practitioners not knowing what they are doing in relation to the work and provided the example of the two White women who had conflict with not understanding the definition of the term Inclusion. He also noted that there are Black professionals engaging in DEI work who are not DEI professionals. He shared:

> Usually, I end up advising those people to not play in those [DEI] spaces too much because we got a lot of Black professionals out here who are trying to cave for the wrong things. And I'm like you didn't get paid for that. And then they get gagged when I tell them. Stop doing DEI stuff. There's a lot of people out here being DEI experts and don't really know what the hell they're doing. That's a whole other topic.

He also noted that reactionary efforts of DEI professionals, considering George Floyd's death, that allowed many persons to exist as DEI staff who also do not have appropriate tools to build organizational plans that are strategic in nature and not just checking off boxes. This lack of awareness of what DEI truly is and the avenues in which it is best adopted for the sake of transformation all spoke to his sense of the performative nature of DEI.

The performative nature of DEI efforts were also reflected in an encounter that Mac had where he did not feel supported by a Chief Diversity Officer, which was someone that he expected to show support given the role and his concerns about being mistreated. In relation to his contention with not feeling supported after reporting concerns around his being overlooked for opportunities, he shared that:

> I felt their responses were supportive. I thought their actions were not. At that point, I was over it anyway. In hindsight, for a couple years, I was pretty pissed about it and pretty pissed at that Chief Diversity Officer because I knew her personally. And I was really pissed that I felt like, "What was this for? Like, what"? I was one of the few people who actually said something, right? It was to the point where I was like, "I don't care, I'm gonna say whatever I need to say."

In this particular reflection, Mac shared his experiences with not receiving support from the Chief Diversity Officer at a previous organization. The support that he expected to receive was in relation to speaking up about a concern in the workplace. Because he did not receive what he felt was an appropriate response, he essentially began to experience the Chief Diversity Officer (CDO) role as performative and not designed to sincerely resolve concerns brought by employees. As he shared, he internalized and struggled with the situation for years because of not understanding why his behavior did not warrant a better response from the CDO.

3.2 Disconnect from DEI. A consequence of organizational leaders who only engage in DEI for performative purposes is a sense that staff can become disconnected from DEI initiatives. Aleph shared a moment when he was interested in joining the Inclusion committee at work but was encouraged no to do so by a member of the Inclusion committee. While his previous supervisor thought that he would be a great fit for the committee due to his life and professional experiences as a Latino gay male, a White member of the committee mentioned that she did not think that he should participate. Her logic was that due to other staff persons having longer tenure at the organization than Aleph, they should have the ability to step away from their work to engage in DEI initiatives. As a result of this conversation, Aleph chose not to participate in the committee. For Aleph, then, being disconnected from DEI work was directly related to his being informed that his participation, and thus is ability and willingness to share his lived experiences and insights, were not invited to the table that was specifically designed for team members that were from historically underrepresented groups.

As a result of Petey Pablo's sense that DEI efforts were only performative, he did not choose to engage or participate in many efforts either. In relation to his participation, or lack thereof, in DEI spaces, he noted that:

> So yeah, there's language around DEI, as you know, and I get pulled to do that shit. One of the things about being Black is like, I get pulled on the Black side. [Then] I get pulled on the Latinx side. Then I get pulled on the LGBTQ plus side, right? Like, I'm constantly being pulled in different directions to get students, right? And then, you know, there's a whole first gen situation too, right? So like, people are constantly pushing me to these DEI stuff. And I just . . . I can't. I can't. I can't. I can't. And it's not even about tokenism. It's just, I can't. I can't be part of a structure that isn't interested in dismantling, but literally blowing up the problem, right?

Here, Petey Pablo offered insights into his experiences with being asked to participate in the performance of DEI due to his intersecting identities. For him, there was an expectation or assumption for him to be present in multiple spaces that ultimately were not making the requisite

change to transform organizations from being complicit and perpetrators of "-isms" and "-phobias" into being change agents for positively imagined futures. He mentioned that he understood how these spaces could offer community and support to some extent, however, the fact that they also were not organized to dismantle oppressive structures was frustrating to him and ultimately a waste of his time.

Part of this performative agenda was the litany of affinity groups, or employee resource groups (ERGs) and courses that were also not resulting in deep change. Petey Pablo mentioned how he really wished to be left alone in relation to affinity groups because they had become venting spaces for persons from historically excluded groups to "talk about how unhappy they are in these White spaces" which he did not perceive to be constructive as there was no actionable change that resulted from a group's formation. He mentioned going to one group meeting and never going back due to these dynamics. Similarly, he offered criticism on the nature of bringing in Black and Brown persons to lead DEI training that is marketed towards everyone but that was designed for White people. He shared a moment when his organization invited in a guest speaker, a Black woman, to lead DEI training. It took him a moment but he realized that the training was not for people of color but was really designed for White people so he decided to leave.

Mac also sited multiple accounts of situations where he either decided to step back from proposed DEI work or advised others to do so due to the work not serving a sincere purpose in transforming organizational cultures. He cited an example where he communicated that he would not join monthly DEI meetings that were happening virtually because of his sense of that presence in the meetings negatively impacted him and also a direct report. He has also shared that he has given advise to someone to not participate in DEI work where they were not being

compensated for the work and that created a false sense of change by making false connections between ERG or affinity group participation and actual organizational power and agency to make change.

Tom had mixed experiences that highlighted the limitations of his current place of employment and his initial sense of disconnect, and then engagement, with DEI initiatives. This disconnect was rooted in limited communication about DEI initiatives that spoke to their intended goals and outcomes as well as limited communication about what involvement and participation should look like for both those from historically excluded groups versus those from historically included groups. He shared that:

> I think that they have a diversity and inclusion group, but I don't even know what the diversity and inclusion group even looks like. I have seen a couple of people that are on the diversity and inclusion group and I'm just like, "Is this really diversity and inclusion If there's only one set of a race [read: White people] that's actually in this diversity and inclusion [group]? How diverse are we really going [to be]? Are you just trying to have this out there just to say that this is it? This is what you have because you know [that] this is where the country is going, where businesses are going? Are you truly trying to understand what it is to walk into a workspace that that you don't feel comfortable in"? I wouldn't say that there's like a lot of things in our command or agency that will show that they are really truly willing to show some diversity. Now, there's diverse people. Within my agency, I can completely, hands down, say that there are a lot of people that are in the agency that are all an array of colors. But as far as like, diversity and leadership and stuff like that, it's a far and few between.

Tom's comments about not knowing what was going on with the diversity and inclusion group became a rationale for his lack of participation when he first joined the organization. He referenced a lack of knowledge about the group's creation and purpose as well as concern about the makeup of the group, as it seemed mostly White. Additionally, he shared that he never heard the group being promoted by his direct supervisor as an avenue for him to get further involved in elements to enhance the organization's culture. He also shared hesitancy about the organization's intentions as he began to question whether the reason these things were not better organized was

a result of the organization not being sincerely invested in DEI. His perception of the organization being led predominantly by White persons despite having a diverse body of works added to his concerns about his organization's intentions.

During the *critical platicas* stage of this process, however, Tom shared that he reached out to a leader to spend more time learning about and engaging with DEI initiatives. He found that the group at his work was indeed diverse and seemed to be a space where he would be able to engage in change. He shared:

> I know the last time that we actually talked, Mario, [during] my interview, [the organization where I work] was having like a DEI focus group and stuff like that and they were starting to set it up. I actually emailed the directors and told them that I want to be a part of it. And we actually want to have one on Monday. I saw some of the people that actually are in it and it's a good majority of people of color. So, you know, I definitely want to break down some things about company culture and stuff like that.

Tom's experience during the *testimonio* stage sparked a curiosity to learn more about the DEI group at his organization and to find ways to participate more actively.

3.3. Benchmarking Previous Experiences. A component of Aleph's frustrations within organizations, that he experienced as having toxic workplace cultures, was his previous experiences with organizations that had supportive cultures where he has felt empowered. Having positive engagement with previous organizations became a benchmark in assessing organizations in relation to their DEI efforts. While reflecting on these experiences, he shared that:

> In my previous jobs, in Mexico, even in Texas, I always felt that I was given the autonomy to be creative, to utilize my own leadership skills, my own experience, my own skills and I felt support . . . I felt supported. I never felt that because of the color of my skin, or because of my accent or because of my background, or because of my sexual orientation, I was put aside . . . until my latest boss.

Having autonomy and the room to be creative and engage in his own leadership style were opportunities afforded him in his previous roles. Having those things challenged or completely

nonexistent in his most current role, then, created a gulf between his expectations for how he should be treated and the reality of supervisory dynamics that prevented this from occurring. An outcome of not being afforded opportunities to lean into his own leadership style is that Aleph experienced an environment where he was not supported in his ability to satisfactorily carry out the duties of his job in ways that made sense to him. His assessment of the situation was that these issues are rooted in bias and discrimination from his supervisor at the time.

Mac had positive experiences with previous organizations that served as a benchmark in his expectations related to how he could expect to be treated. In sharing his experiences with LGBTQ+ policies beyond domestic partner benefits, he spoke of how the previous organization where he worked had not done the work to the extent that a previous employer. He mentioned that his previous organization had a full-time staff person creating policies but even with domestic partner benefits in place, there benefits were lacking when it comes to more fully developed and inclusive offerings and ultimately that did not exist "at the level of his previous employer" Being able to compare how different organizations engage in LGBTQ+ supportive policies allowed Mac to gauge the distance between where his organization was and the fact that, like his previous employer, more could be done to address concerns and rectify inequities.

Tom expressed visible differences in how his previous organization engaged with LGTBQ+ persons versus his current employer**.** At his previous organization, the culture was so affirming of LGBTQ+ identities that representation could be seen in various ways. He communicated that:

> The place that I came from, there was constant LGBTQ+ people. It was so many people. You would see trans people. You'll see all types of people walking into that space and just being who they are. You'll get some people that will roll their eyes or whatever, but you know [you have each other's] backs and stuff. But in this space, I don't see that as much. So, you know, even though it's in text (written policies around LGBTQ+ inclusion), I still feel a little leery with truly being settled in my queerness. As far as

> [being] in the office space, it's nice to hear it from the CEO and [for him to] say that if anything really happened in that space, then, you can file complaints and stuff like that.

Coming from a place where his identity was affirmed to a place where he was not fully comfortable being out spoke to Tom's sense of security at his current place of employment. While he had agency to make decisions about with whom, when, where and how he chose to disclose his gay identity at work, having experienced a culture of LGBTQ+ visibility created an atmosphere where he felt more comfortable. Because the current organization lacked this culture, he was more reserved and intentional in how he discloses his LGTBQ+ identity.

3.4 DEI Infrastructures Need Attention. An additional concern around the failures of DEI is connected to the fact that DEI efforts and initiatives need more attention in relation to being structured differently within organizations. One of the aspects of this theme is related to how the HR department, where many organizations place DEI management, may not be the ideal space to resolve DEI-related concerns. Aleph had direct experiences with this dynamic. When bringing his concerns around "not-so-micro" aggressions to the attention of an HR staff member, Aleph assumed that he would be supported. Instead, he had a different experience. He found that:

> I spoke with our personnel officer or HR officer, and she basically said, [Aleph], you can file a complaint [against your supervisor]. Just remember that on your level . . . on the executive level, people talk. If you go and apply to another county, people are going to talk, and they are going to complain and they are going to sabotage.

In this reflection, Aleph shared how he felt unsupported by the HR department where he should have found a resolution around his complaints of discrimination from his supervisor. Instead of support to resolve the issue, he was presented with the decision to file a complaint, and ultimately exist as a Whistleblower. Doing so, however, had to be weighed against long-term professional consequences. One of these consequences was professional suicide where rumors and sabotage may have been a staple of his career moving forward. The direct or implied

message for Aleph was that he must be quiet as those in power can potentially ruin his entire career.

A working component of the organizational culture where Joey works was the fact that they were a small team that, for the most part, embodied much of the values of DEI from the leaders to the frontline workers. While his direct supervisor struggled a bit with new language around identities and at times with unpacking the "White savior complex" that had been a key component of the organization's founding, he mentioned that both organizational founders, a White couple that included his boss, were actively engaged in openly addressing their biases, in being wrong and in checking in with him when they have questions, which he admired. Outside of the organizational leaders, he shared that there was a DEI culture present in ways where DEI is not centered within an HR alone. He believed that due to the small size of the organization, they were able to benefit from a decentralized and accountable culture that supports DEI engagement. He noted that:

> We have the policies in place whenever we hire someone new. We're a small organization. There are about 15, maybe 20, full-time people. It's a small org [with] lots of part-time folks. But nobody there is gonna yuck anybody else's yum, right? We wouldn't hire you if you're that person. The moment someone drops a judgement bomb on anybody else, there's some quick shunning, right? There's a quick course correction. We have some people that are very, very Christian and there's even a little bit of conservatism in them. Some of those people are White. I have like, my best LGBTQ conversations because they don't care about that, right. They're the kind of Christian who cares if you're good hearted, if you care for the poor, if you give to the widow that you know. They're that kind of Christian, right? They don't care who your bed buddies are. And so that's cool.

Joey's reflection provides great insight into the impact of developing a decentralized culture around DEI where all staff embody cultural values that permit openness of ideas and worldviews. While much of this may be attributed to the small scale of the organization, this

component of the organizational culture seems to be effective nonetheless, at least from Joey's perspective.

While having a culture that has decentralized DEI accountabilities seems to work for Joey's organization, Joey mentioned a downside. He discussed the fact that the organization lacks a centralized point of contact that would be responsible for holding leaders accountable for problematic behaviors that impact the organizational culture. He shared the following comment in relation to private dialogue between his supervisor and himself: "My boss is very loose with her language. So, she confesses stuff that HR would eat up if we knew exactly where HR was in our org." Joey implied that having a centralized person, or HR point of contact, may actually serve as a means of controlling the level of freedom that his supervisor feels in expressing things in ways that are inappropriate. In this way, he seemed to suggest that there are positive and negative outcomes to a small organization with decentralized engagement in DEI and HR practices. Considering his earlier comments about not being supported, this comment highlighted the question of whether having an HR point-of-contact, especially earlier on in his tenure, would have prevented some of the earlier "not-so-micro" aggressive behaviors that he experienced that ultimately shifted his personality for a bit.

During the *critical platicas*, everyone had thoughts to share about their experiences with DEI infrastructures. During this time, Tom provided an update on his choice to join his organization's DEI employee resource group (ERG) in hopes of learning more about the groups' functioning, while others shared their direct experiences with DEI failures and vision for a more impactful DEI. After providing an example of a Black woman who shared a story with him about her boss telling her to stop engaging in DEI work, Mac started by sharing that he agreed with the boss. He went on to share that many organizations are not invested in DEI work. He shared that:

Mac: They do not care, really, about DEI. I don't care what they say, they clearly haven't invested in the ERG, they haven't invested in you. They haven't set up any process or structures in place where the work that you do for your ERG is going to be formally recognised such that you get a bonus, or compensation, or a promotion for doing some of that, or you know, for that being a factor in that performance process. I said all of these things are what's required to tell me that you're serious about your ERG or any of your other DEI program initiatives, right? And my specialty is building out DEI strategies. I don't do like the unconscious bias training or whatever. Anytime I see DEI initiatives or programmes, I'm over it, right, because that's not it. It can't be. It has to be structural or really systemic and needs to be institutionalised and needs to go through all areas of the company in the business. And if it's not doing that, then you're actually harming it. And in the case, specifically, of ERGs, because Mario brought up ERGs specifically, what happens is that you're essentially asking those who are minoritized in a given environment and situation to solve the problems that they are there on the margins of and yet are the ones who didn't create it. And so that is wholly problematic. And a lot of institutions just continue to forward that. And unfortunately, you have people who don't realise it, who think that they're helping, and it's completely out of their hands and out of their purview.

And my last role as head of DEI, I talked to the head of the women in tech group which is within engineering. That group [was comprised] of 600 people in engineering, and they had about no more than 10 Women in what we would call "roles of distinction" or whatever, like VP plus, or whatever roles and the rest of the women were much lower level. So, all the women in tech, for the most part, none of them were above director level, right. No one [was] at the VP level in this group. And it goes like VP, Senior VP, and then it goes into like, closer to the C suite, right. I said, "What are your goals"? and [they said] "We want to help more women get into those senior roles". I said, "You can't do that". And they're like "What"? I said, "That is not for you to solve". I said, "Who told you to solve that? Who sponsored this group being together"? They're all male leadership so they just handed it off to them as a problem that they cannot solve, have no responsibility, accountability, or power to resolve and gave it to them, which is just completely the wrong way to do it. So, I see a lot of that nonsense going on all the time. And I have to come in and say like, this is just totally false. And I also tell people stop treating DEI like this very special function or group. You would not have someone who is chief marketing officer who's never worked in marketing before, or never worked in finance before. But you saw all of these chief diversity officers pop up out of nowhere because they're Black, or because they're whatever, right and it's like, okay, they're all of a sudden qualified to lead this work? No. Right? And we expect for magic to happen. We expect for us to all become this diversified and inclusive organisation that's suddenly equitable, with no budget. With a couple of trainings, right? Who has that magic wand because I'd love to see it right? But that doesn't exist. And so, I think Mario, that's kind of what you're getting to is basically, this misalignment between the messaging of like, how good everything can be instantaneously without actually doing the work, and without actually putting in the investment. And so, at the end of the day, my job is to come to companies and say very much, "You have to invest just like any other innovation, just like any other process, you need to invest in it. You're gonna have to work through it, it's gonna fail a couple of times. You're gonna have to tweak it and

> adjust it. You're gonna have to do change management for it and try again several times to get it right. And by the way, you're doing it with topics that we were specifically taught up until maybe the most recent generation, never to talk about at work. So, everyone's super uncomfortable on top of that, and doesn't even have the historical schooling or language to even talk about it in the first place. So, you're really going to have to put in some work.
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> **Tom:** That was perfect.
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> **Joey:** Mic drop moment! (A reference to Joey agreeing with Mac's statements and essentially "dropping the mic" as though there is no need for any further clarification or speeches on the topic)
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> **Tom:** I think my eyes are going to be wide open going into this group on Monday. As Mac was saying, I don't know if this is actually going to make any changes or anything like that. I don't know. After what Mac said, I don't even know why we are having this group in the first place . . . I guess giving a voice to everybody on what the company or the agency should do to make changes to try to do better for everybody else within it.

Mac's reflections and insights on some of the concerns of DEI resonated with participants. This looks like not having appropriate DEI systems and structures in place, not having DEI professionals who are trained in the work to lead the work, and not compensating staff for their participation in the work. Mac also offered up the idea that a problematic theme that he has noticed in his own practice is the tendency for those from historically excluded groups to be placed in DEI affinity or employee resource groups under the impression that they have power and authority to sincerely impact and change dynamics of the organization. They do not often have said power or agency as they do not exist in leadership roles that have authority to make change. These insights were new to Tom and served as advice that he can take with him when he officially joins his company's ERG.

An additional thought that emerged during the *critical platicas* session, in relation to the failures of DEI, was the idea that some organizations have been intentional about diversity but stop at the "D" without realizing that while DEI is referred to as an integrated whole, there are

unique parts that require specific attention in order to build more equitable workplaces. Below reflects how this conversation unfolded:

> **Joey:** And I'm like, "Are you serious? Are you asking me to confirm the thing that you just said about Blackness"? Like, we need to sit down and talk about Blackness, and talk about, like racism that's happening in our spaces. And so, we sit down to have that conversation and I don't like that conversation because what happens is, if I do not affirm the things that are already problematic, [such as pointing out that] something's wrong with the conversation, we're not going to have this conversation again. The belief that there are mixed faces solving all of the problems when it comes to DEI is super problematic. Yeah, all the mixed faces exist. But everyone's concerned that like, if I say a thing, that is just true. And there's been cases where a Latina woman that is the head of development, wrote a big old essay to the board, because that's who you would have to go to, in order to fix the thing that is happening. [She was] like, "Hey, this behavior here super problematic." And it became huge. Needless to say, the founders both just happen to be married also. If one does something problematic, the other's just kind of cover for them no matter what. And so, we find ourselves in a super weird space where we're all being super, like, "Diversity is like being inclusive here. Look at how diverse we are, and how great we are." And we're also having to kind of like perform. Like, the space is so damn diverse. Why is everyone like, on edge about like, being too much of who they are, right? We still perform the Whitest we possibly can while we're there. I work for the boss from Issa Rae's, We Got You [reference to the HBO tv show Insecure]. That's who my boss is. I don't know if y'all ever seen [the show]?
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> **Mac:** That came to mind when you were talking about that whole situation. I'm like, this sounds like Insecure.
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> **Joey:** It is exactly. That is my boss. Every time I watch that show, I can't even find it funny because I work for this person. And like, it's too true. And I constantly find myself in a situation where I'm like, "We cannot use the phrase when we referring to the Black kids". And everyone's like, kind of quiet, despite the fact that we are the "greatest champions". I'm air quoting hard, really hard. We're the "greatest champions" of DEI, one of the most diverse organisations you're going to find, all right? We practically have one of everything, because I think that's how they're doing it in order to establish that we are the most diverse thing. But like, culture is definitely one of like, alright, we're not going to talk about these things now. And we're not going to do these things.
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> **Aleph:** Sorry about that I keep coming in and out [internet signal keeps dropping]. I just have one very brief thing to say about the DEI efforts. On one hand, I believe that representation is important. I agree that seeing somebody that looks like me, when I was younger, or when I was growing up and when I was developing my values and my goals, etc., really helped me to see you know, [that] it's possible to get there. It's possible to get a PhD. It's possible to become a CEO, etc. However, from the macro level, I believe, and this is going to be a little bit of a controversial perspective, I believe that the DEI efforts are nothing but, from a macro perspective, a tool. They are like crumbs. They are a Band-Aid. They are to a certain degree, a distraction from the real effort when the real problem

> is the need to dismantle and abolish the systemic hurdles that have kept us people of color where we are. A lot of people think that DEI is just having a diverse board and having diverse staff having a diverse department of defense, having a diverse CIA, having a diverse FBI, when we all know that all these machines are instruments in the oppression of us people of color. DEI just diversifies our oppressor. So, at the same time, like I said, I don't want to, you know, remove the micro impact that DEI has on people. But from the macro level, in my perspective, DEI is just a Band-Aid.
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> **Mario:** Aleph, if Petey Pablo was here, you would have gotten a second with that. Petey Pablo is very vocal about a similar perspective that you just shared about like DEI being a Band-Aid of sorts. And I think Mac has also [shared similar thoughts] in our conversations.
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> **Tom:** I think if you really look at what you all were really saying about what DEI is, I think a lot of places probably will be a little bit too scared to even, like do a deep dive into some situations like that. With the previous job that [I] actually worked before, it was like a communication position. And they had ERGs and stuff like that. But it wasn't like a deep dive. It was more of just saying that "Oh, this is something that we actually have. And you know, if you want to come over to our team, or if you want to be hired here, this is something that, you know, we look into some of these things, and we talk about some of these things. So, the work environment is actually good." And where I currently work right now, as far as the federal government, I don't know if they will be able to go and do a deep dive like that. I don't know if they're gonna bring somebody in from the outside and say that "I need you to just destroy this old building, and rebuild it right back up". I think it's gonna take a lot a long time for my area to see any changes.

The failures or shortcomings of DEI are presented in this exchange between participants. This work was reflected in Joey's statements about his highly diverse organization that still struggles with unpacking the language that is used to describe Black clients. These struggles that are apparent in Joey's organization may also be at the heart of the types of issues that Aleph has with DEI programming that stops at representation, and as such only exists in ways that are superficial. While Tom's comments about a sincere investment in DEI taking a long time speaks to the experiences that all participants have had in their workplaces, the reality of a sincere DEI investment that seeks to undo and replace old systems and ways of being with new, more equitable ones is that it will take time.

Closing out conversations during the *critical platicas* was a reflection on the scope and breadth of a sincerely invested DEI strategy. The themes of "it will take time" and "interrogating

and reflecting upon each of our own privileges" helped close out the discussion on DEI. I asked these questions: "What is our final expectation in regard to DEI work? To burn down the building, of sorts? What is practical"? Mac's facial expressions read clearly as "Listen, I have thoughts. Many thoughts". I opened the floor for him to share:

> **Mac:** First of all, to some degree, every little bit in the right direction helps. So that's one thing. I'll say that you need multiple playbooks and multiple types of efforts. I was just listening to an old podcast and Brene Brown interviews Barack Obama. And one of the things that they talk about is when it comes to a movement, the moderate group actually makes more headway and raises more money when there is the presence of the radical version of them. Even though the moderate group can sometimes seem to hate the radical version, like they're destroying the message or they're trying to usurp the movement. The greater Middle moves further because of the more radical fringe group tugging it along. And so, you're going to have to have different levels of effort along the way. I don't walk into a situation saying you have to do chemo [a reference to deep, ongoing, systematic work to address the "-isms" and "-phobias" in the world]. I asked where on the scale of topical to chemo are you and what are you willing to invest so that I know what kind of energy you're bringing, and what kind of budget you're bringing in. I'm not going crazy trying to do one thing and you're doing another. And then I think in the grand scheme of things, I think we're always going through various levels of topical cream to chemo all the time. We had 200 years of people in total bondage, right. And while we know there's still trafficking and different levels of slavery, it's not the same as it was 200 years ago. Channing Brown, or whatever, she wrote a book. And at the end of the book, one of the last things she writes in this book is, "there was a time in which there were at least four or five generations of slaves who were both born into, and died enslaved, without being able to look back and see how things used to be in terms of liberation and [without being able to] look forward and having any view that there was liberation coming. In some sense, they still felt this need to press and to push, and therefore that should bring some level to cope". And I love that quote, because, to me, even when we don't know how much this arc is bending, this arc is not bending fast enough, or we need to push more, or, if the lens is our lifetime, we may not see it all done. But if the lens is, for the next few generations, we may see more than we ever imagined. And I think that's why it's so fun to watch those Michelle Obama clips when she's meeting with centenarians, people who are turning 100. Because those women and men who are Black and turned 100, and then they meet Michelle and Barack Obama, they cannot imagine them. They could not have imagined them when they were children, right? The idea that they are going to meet a former president and first lady who is Black is just so amazing to them. They're just so excited. It's like their 100th birthday gift, right? And so, I think that we have that kind of answer to some of the questions of how much can this change and what's practical? I think it's all useful. And I think it depends on the timeframe and the lens, to really be able to say what's practical tomorrow. It's not all going to be fixed. But over time, it could be and we're doing both topical and chemo along the way.

> **Aleph:** Yeah, you know, I completely agree with you. I believe that every effort towards liberation, as moderate as it might seem, is needed and is valid. I personally have a hard time with moderate approaches, sometimes. Please don't hate me for saying that because I've gotten into a lot of problems with Black friends, when I speak not very favourably about the Obamas. But from a very leftist perspective, the Obamas have contributed to the oppression of Black and Brown people, domestically and overseas. But from the micro level, Obama has inspired so many people, and keeps inspiring so many people. And my hope is that all those people that he keeps inspiring, realise that they need to leave that approach and hopefully engage in a more aggressive and radical approach to liberation. So, I agree with you. Every approach towards liberation, as moderate as it might be, is needed and is valid.

This brief dialogue speaks to Mac's and Aleph's sense that movement building is an ongoing journey. While Mac has adopted a more moderate approach to what they change looks like, Aleph speaks to the idea that moderate approaches are often what contribute to the slow pace of movement.

This conversation continued in relation to progress within organizations as it relates to DEI and the concern around why DEI efforts, when contextualized against larger social movements, seemed to be an ongoing battle, or struggle that organizations, and society as a whole, have yet to fully realize. Aleph, Joey, and Mac all offered insights into why the US still struggles with conversations around equity and inclusion. Aleph starts by sharing that:

> **Aleph:** You know why? Malcom X would say . . . the White liberal.

> **Joey:** I agree. I agree with that, in a lot of ways. I gotta say something and I don't want to leave the space, sounding pessimistic so I'm gonna say something real optimistic at the end. We live in a world obviously [and] we live in a country specifically that's just steeped in White supremacy, right. And I think that as we undo that, some people realise how it benefits them. And that slows down the effort, of course. And so, every time it's like, "Yeah, absolutely this needs to happen" [there is a realization that] "Oh, that means that affects me this way. Oh, let's slow that down." And I've seen that happen in small ways. And it's very clear the way that happens in big ways. I genuinely believe that it's [progress] slow because people will constantly realise that a more equal world is not what they personally want at this point. They think it's great for the next generation. The next generation is going to be so used to not having to [deal with conversations such as] "Man, does that mean that I gotta stop saying the N word? That was then. Does that mean that I suddenly have to use they pronouns? That's a lot. Now I gotta consider all of these other people. I have to view this person as my equal, despite the fact that I do not in any way, shape or form believe that they are, right"? Some of it is unsaid. Some of it is said, right?

> I see that, right. Some of our jobs are based on the fact that this is a capitalist system and we're getting paid big money because we have a piece of paper that says something while this other person who's clearly got all this thing who wasn't raised with [similar] opportunities didn't get it, right.
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> I'm gonna say something optimistic now because there has been progress. And I genuinely believe that. You're right. The world is better now than it was, in many ways, fifty years ago. It is better than it was two hundred years ago. And it is better than it was 500 years ago. You're right. We don't club women and drag them into caves. Like that's true. Like we don't hang people. We just electrocute them. It's true. We don't do some of the things that we used to do. I think it's slow because human beings are inherently opportunistic. And to say, I will give up my opportunities for the sake of like a moral thing goes against human nature. And if you got a whole lot of power and your Human Nature says hold on to it, it's going to be a slow, slow burn before like getting to another place. With that said, I do believe we're doing it. That's the positive thing.
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> **Mac:** That's real. Not positive, but that's real. The visual that I always tell my clients is [that] we exist in a stream with a current that is moving, and we're all moving downstream. And so, for the first time, especially with the murder of George Floyd, you realize that what you have to do is actually swim against the current. You need to swim upstream and that takes skill. That takes endurance. That takes things that you weren't doing. And it also takes you realising that there are people around you who have been swimming upstream, and you're just now joining them in that swim. And that until now you've been doing nothing, which means that you've been floating downstream with the current, which is the equivalent of being complicit in the supremacy that's there. And, you know, that's really another way of saying why the progress is slow. [It] is because it takes realization, one, that they're going in this direction, and are probably a part of the problem. And two, that they have to about-face and swim frantically upstream, and getting other people to do the same. And not everyone [who] *wants* to do that is *willing* to do that without some, you know, other kind of incentive.
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> **Aleph:** Yeah, actually, I can't agree with you more. I, myself, am very anti-capitalist but as you said, how would I feel if suddenly we are transitioning to a regime that is more socialized. And suddenly, I will lose my privileges of being the CEO of an agency. And my salary would get put in half in order to make it more equitable with all of my team. How would I feel right? So yeah, full liberation is going to be very painful for everybody, especially, for those of us that have privilege.

While Joey acknowledges that society has improved from where it was hundreds of years ago, in many ways, Mac's statements about the road to progress being more like a river offer insights into why this journey seems to have no end for those seeking to do the work. Joey's affirmation that those who benefit from White supremacy are most likely to stall progress is revelatory as it relates to a project that focuses on social identities in the workplace. Participants' experiences

with White women, for instance, reflect this idea that even those from historically excluded groups can embody and regurgitate supremacist and exclusionary practices on one another. Aleph's confirmation that even he would struggle with actualizing a just and equitable society, considering the work that he has done in relation to be the CEO of an agency, is proof that the work that needs to be done is as much "in here" (internal work) as it is "out there" (relational work to dismantle and reimagine organizations, institutions, and systems of oppression).

4. Day-to-Day Leadership

Day-to-day Leadership is a fourth theme that emerged from participant *testimonios*. This theme alludes to instances from *testimonios* where participants felt as though problems in everyday organizational management created problems or concerns in how they experienced the workplace. Sub themes included: Fair and Respectful Workplaces and Changes in Leadership.

4.1 Fair and Respectful Workplaces. While Aleph shared experiences with bias based on various identity-based issues, he also noted that many of the issues that he has had within organizations were related to everyday organizational and leadership practices that interfere with his ability to carry out his duties as opposed to bias and discrimination. In essence, he had more concerns around fair and respectful workplaces than identity- based micro-aggressions. Aleph explained that he recognized problems at his organization early on that ultimately influenced his decision to leave. Regarding signs of organizational problems, Aleph noted that:

> I became aware of how dysfunctional the organization was at very early stages of my career. And approximately, probably of January of this year, that's when I made the decision that I wasn't going to stay there longer. I wanted to complete at least one year so you know, it wouldn't look that bad on my resume. So, it wasn't like it was an easy decision. However, back then, my discontent was not related to race or micro, racial aggression.

As Aleph pointed out, he recognized signs of organizational dysfunction early on. Despite this realization, he made a choice to stay to prevent his time in the organization reflecting negatively on his resume in the form of only a few months of employment.

He further addressed the fact that much of his discontent was rooted in his experience of the organization becoming a place that restricted his ability to innovate and bring his creative problem-solving skills to the role. This interference of his autonomy and agency was reported when he shared that he:

> never felt that the organization was not supportive of me showing the parts of my identity. I didn't feel that the agency was supportive when it came to being innovative . . . when it came to offering solutions outside of the box.

Here, Aleph addresses the fact that identity-based or DEI-based concerns are not the only factor that influences staff engagement in the workplace. Specifically, for him, some of his biggest concerns were around agency and autonomy in being able to use his skills and experience to offer creative solutions to some of the concerns that he encountered. He cited organizational bureaucracy as a major barrier to his ability to lean into his own skills and abilities. Stifling or impeding his ability to show up in his work created a workspace that was toxic for him.

Another concern that he faced was being overlooked for an increase in his pay. Aleph mentioned that he felt that the choice to bypass him for a promotion was rooted in factors outside of his control. Ultimately, he decided not to address the concern with his supervisor due to a choice he had already made to leave the organization. However, he felt that a lack of transparency in the process posed a problem around fairness and equity. He shared that:

> I believe that I deserved that increase. However, my new supervisor decided not to give me that performance increase, which I think wasn't fair. I didn't fight it because I was going to leave anyway. I was going to request: "Okay, well, I want to know what is the best practices when it comes to providing this increase? I want to see how other bureau directors were handled in the situation. And you know, what, what has been done in the past"? But anyways. Because I'm gonna leave, keep it.

In this incident, Aleph points to the fact that a lack of consistency and transparency in pay and performance processes can result in inequities, or even just the feeling of being treated unfairly. Aleph did not necessarily equate the issue of his not getting a performance increase to discrimination, but he did suggest that not having transparency in the process created a sense of inequity. For Aleph, this sense of inequity seems to be easily resolved with higher levels of transparency in decision making.

For Petey Pablo, a "fair and respectful workplace" also included expectations around pay. He discussed being underpaid in light of his "five motherfucking degrees" which seems in conflict with his awareness of the institution's financial positioning, especially as it relates to a large endowment. He mentioned that the organization's decision to limit pay was communicated as a decision "based on equity"; nonetheless, he felt that there was discrepancy between his expectations for pay vs what was being offered. In contrast, Petey Pablo started working simultaneously at a new institution where he was asked about his pay expectations during the hiring process. With this new institution, he expressed greater alignment between his pay expectations and what the organization finally concluded that they could offer him. Petey Pablo's expressed expectations around pay alignment seems to also resolve the issue of worthiness as being paid what he is worth created a greater sense of fulfillment in relation to his job.

Mac noticed concerns that pointed to larger issues within the organization. In particular, he shared that trends in organizational attrition rates, turnover, and layers of organizational resistance to change pointed to organizations that are unstable due to "a disconnect between . . . senior leaders and the rest of the organization". He noted that:

> In terms of who I work with on a regular basis, I felt kind of fine and well organized and in control of my life and work life. But there was a storm brewing around me that [had me considering] will I or will I not get swept up in that? And so that and it just became

> more and more messy, right? Buildings being tossed around and just leaving in its wake a mess.

The "mess" that Mac references speaks to the varied levels of problematic organizational dynamics that led to turnover for him. Despite being secure in his abilities and follow through, he remained aware of the dynamics that were happening around him that absolutely impacted organizational cultural dynamics. In the midst of these organizational problems, he felt faced with the challenge of figuring out whether he would stay and be directly impacted by the shifting dynamics or leave. Ultimately, Mac was not interested in waiting around for the dust to settle on that toxic workplace culture, especially as he seemed to have concerns that he could potentially be adversely impacted.

Both Mac and Tom had specific concerns around their work ethic and performance. Mac explains his experiences with red flags related to being passed over for positions by persons who were less tenured than him. He posited that:

> I've certainly been passed over. I think one of the reasons I ended up in DEI is because of some of my personal experiences. My first company I was with for many years, and as a part of that many years, I got passed over many times. [I] literally saw people come in at levels lower than me, then get promoted to the same level as me and then get promoted beyond me. Me getting to the point where I was documenting my feedback [and] because you could have a numerical rating, I was documenting numerical ratings and [questioned] "This is literally [the total] when you add this these numbers up. [However], how do I have this [total] and then [I am] still not getting promoted"?

He shared that these things were happening in situations where his performance reviews did not indicate that there was a problem that would warrant being passed over. He cites these types of dynamics as some of the rationale for why he moved into DEI work, where he felt that he would have to deal with these dynamics less often.

For Tom, a concern that he had was ensuring that his supervisors and colleagues had the opportunity to engage with him through the lens of his work ethic as opposed to any

identity-based issues. For him, this meant being seen and recognized as a hard worker for his efforts to go above and beyond what is expected of him. He reflected:

> I feel like there is support for my hard working. I can honestly say that. As far as like being a Black gay man, I'm still a little iffy on it. And the reason why I say that is because when I first started, a lot of people didn't know my work ethic, especially [my] supervisor or a director or anything like that, because they never really put me in a space where I was able to actually do some of these things, or some of the duties that are required of my position. So, they really didn't know what skills that I actually have. So, once I actually got into the space, and once I started doing the duties and going above and beyond of what my actual duties are supposed to be, then it was kind of like a spotlight that was shined on me that "Oh. Well, this person is like a rock star. And this person is doing everything and beyond what we [have] even known that we can do in our own group." So, the hard-working part kind of shined the light on me.

Having the opportunity to show his skills was a concern when he first started as he felt as though he was not provided with the opportunity to truly engage in his work due to issues outside of his control. An outcome of his sense of being restricted in his capacity to shine early on was that he was informed that he did not qualify for a promotion which he mentioned "sucks" because in many ways he showed up for a job that was not completely ready to receive him.

Being recognized as a hard worker also became a means of minimizing the impact that his Blackness and gayness had on how others perceived him. He shared that:

> My direct supervisor doesn't know that I'm gay, but she probably has an idea. But the Director [her boss] actually knows that I'm gay. I think with me [being perceived as] hard working, it kind of opened the door up to other people accepting me for who I am with my natural hair, and my Blackness and stuff like that. Because they were just like, "Okay, well, this person is doing what they're supposed to be doing. They're doing way beyond so I know who they are and how I see them. Even if I see them in their natural hair, or whatever, that doesn't even matter because they're doing what they're supposed to be doing. They're doing above what they're supposed to be doing."

This quote highlighted Tom's perception that he could gain trust and build greater rapport with his coworkers if they could learn to first experience him as a colleague who is professional and will get the job done, even if they might have issues with his Blackness or gayness. In this regard, he found comfort in his ability to go above and beyond as a means of showing his

coworkers that he just wanted to do a great job and did not want them to be able to hold his Blackness, gayness, or choice to wear his natural hair against him.

During the *critical platicas*, many participants spoke of their experiences with feeling as though their agency and autonomy to accomplish tasks and complete the duties of their jobs were stifled in some way or another. The conversation is reflected in the dialogue below:

> **Aleph:** Yes, I want to expand upon that because I experienced that. I experienced that and it was experienced by other leaders of color in my organisation. That was something that we did not see [coming] when it came to this White woman questioning [us, but not questioning] other White women that were on the same level as me or even lower level than me. I really seen that as a microaggression because I'm not the only person that felt that way; it was actually a feeling shared by other leaders of color in the organisation. And something that I was gonna say and I hope I'm not going a little bit off subject of what you just said. But the person that I had a terrible experience of being supervised by is not White, but she is a White-passing, Latina. And she also has a reputation of displaying microaggressions. She also has a reputation of having a very authoritarian style of leadership. However, the county that I used to work for would give her the pass because for them, it was like, "Well, she's a Latina. She's a Hispanic woman. Because she's a Hispanic woman, then, she automatically must understand the struggle. And we know that that is not the case, especially among White-passing Latinos. There is a lot of anti-Blackness. There's a lot of colorism."
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> **Mac:** Sounds like she's a Latina, White woman.
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> **Aleph:** Mm hmm.
>
> **Mac:** I've had multiple instances of people questioning, not just the decision making, but also then questioning [my motives] behind the decision making, right? And I've just gotten to a point where I don't really have time for much of it. I am all about questioning decisions in general or asking questions about decisions. That's not the issue. The issue is [continuing to question my motives] after I've already given the answer, after I've already considered alternatives, after I've done whatever the necessary due diligence is, and after I've already established that I am the person who is going to make the final decision. If I know that that's the case, I'm really not interested in taking on the additional stress of trying to make a decision for somebody else. If it's not in my world, or in my realm, it's not my hands, I don't care anyway, right? Like, I'll give you as much as I can give but then you have to go make it. But if it is mine to make, then it's mine to make. And what I've seen is I have seen people kind of come around with feedback to somebody else, who will then say, maybe the decision made sense, but they didn't enjoy how I communicated it, or they didn't.
>
> **Joey:** So close to home man. That's too close to home. I appreciate you. I constantly have to answer questions from someone who just was not in any way, shape, or form, my

> supervisor or related. I pushed back on that in order for [my] performance to go up, because I'm like, "I can't keep changing the thing that I started doing. And then questioning why I did that thing in the first place. Because it's not your job. So, you can't do that". This impacted my relationship [with my boss].
>
> I kept going for so long, that at some point, I blew up at my boss, which is why she felt like I was being aggressive, right? I explained to her what was happening. I sent her the definition of gaslighting. I went all out, and she backed off. But at some point, it got so bad that this person kept going to my boss to have us go into a meeting for every decision I was making because she felt like I wasn't like coming to her with my decisions. And I kept reiterating that nowhere does it say I need to come to her with my decisions. The sense of entitlement was just so strong. That despite it being nowhere, like she just ran that belief and so my boss has recently been like, "He's right. This actually isn't in your purview at all". But the fact that my boss would allow that meeting to even exist, where something I already told this person, I now have to tell my boss to then translate back to this person is problematic, and will likely lead to me leaving, right, unless something major happens.

As Aleph, Mac, and Joey point out, the questioning of decisions or decision-making in ways that seem to challenge their autonomy and agency has happened often. As Mac suggested, it is not the notion of questioning that is problematic but the implied notion that the person may indeed be questioning their leadership and motives. To do so is experienced as a personal attack as opposed to a professional inquiry into the feasibility or successfulness of an idea.

When discussing with the group their feelings and thoughts on being "aggressive" and on "not being a team player," Joey, Aleph, and Mac offered their thoughts on how these words and phrases are often coded language that speaks to ways in which Black and Latin/o/x persons are subtly, and not so subtly, forced to silence or minimize their voices. Joey continues the previous conversation with:

> **Joey:** I became "aggressive" in the space when I stopped allowing myself to be questioned, right? And then I was not a "team player", although the entire team loves me minus this one individual. So, I realized that "not a team player" means you are not rolling over to this person who, nowhere does it say that you should be doing that. So, there's this kind of . . . this weird dynamic [where] I had reached the point where I then got very angry at my boss. And I was like, I think I will have to talk to somebody else about this. And that concept, that idea [of talking escalating the issue], made her so nervous that she actually changed a bunch of things. But it messed up my relationship with my boss. So, for me to be able to maneuver the space without constantly being

questioned, I had to destroy the relationship I had with my boss, which we have slowly been rebuilding. But that's what it costs. And even to this day, she just no longer allows this other person to do those things. But, she doesn't necessarily stop the other person from making attempts.

Mac: Can I just say one thing? And then Aleph, I know you wanted to say something to this situation. There's one thing that I'm going to [say]. I'm an executive coach, so [I] don't just come out with these things. Your relationship with your boss was messed up from the jump. You didn't break the relationship. It's only now getting to the point where you see how broken it is. And now you can start to get on the path to getting it to where it needs to be. But this situation didn't break your relationship with your boss. It was broken and this woman was pressure testing what was already a broken levee.

Joey: I feel you man. That's true. That's true.

Aleph: Yeah, that's exactly what I was told: "You are not a team player."

Mac: I was gonna say that the whole "team player" type thing is this whole cultural disengagement piece, right? Whether it's what Joey's dealing with [or] what Aleph is dealing with, both being called "not a team player" is essentially the same thing in my story, where, you know, it's performance versus relationship. I was not brought up to sacrifice my performance in the face of trying to make other people feel comfortable or feel that I'm a team player [just to make them] feel happy.

If, after all the good work has been done, and I've done the thing that I was supposed to do, I'm supposed to just put that on the side for other people's comfort and happiness, in order to be a team player or for the cultural satisfaction this place? Then, we are at a cultural impasse, and therefore, this may not be the place that I need to be for very long.

Tom: You know, that was one of the questions [that occurred to me] when you were talking, "What are some of the things that you actually can do to make that change"? And the only change that I can see in those situations is just like, you know, starting somewhere else. But if you start somewhere else, and that same situation, that same scenario is happening, how do you actually change that? And I think this is what we [are] all here for?

Joey: All that I receive when they say that "He is not a team player" is that submission is what's necessary, not collaboration, right? It's like, "We need you to just do the thing that she asks. She's just trying". I've actually heard the words, "She's just trying to make sure everything is organised". And I'll be like, "Changing my plan is not organising. Changing the thing I'm gonna do does not bring more organisation and actually brought a lot of chaos". And when I confront the thing being said the topic just gets changed. And so, I realized at some point that the plan is not to find the truth, it is to protect this individual, right? Because when I confront with the truth, [the response I received is that we are] either "out of time" or that "this is exaggerated, let's change the topic."

You know, I don't know what to do anymore. [I want to say], "You two figure this out on your own". There's always this thing where there's this false equivalency that happens,

> right? Because my boss has come to me and been, "I get complaints about you all the time." I'm like, "Oh, I would really like to know, who has a concern with me." And I realized all those complaints are coming from that same one individual. Because the rest of the team, like, we actually worked really, really well together.
>
> Once I broke the relationship, which Mac you're right, that relationship was broken to begin with. But once I was like, "I am done." I was done. And I say exactly what I'm thinking, exactly when I'm thinking it. And that's actually been super helpful and a little cathartic. But the last conversation I've had with [my coworker] was [when] she came in to apologise for the 15th time, but it doesn't matter because she just goes and does the same thing. But like, she came in to apologise because she felt like the entire rest of the team was turning on her somehow [due to our tension] becoming a popularity contest. And I'm like, "No, you've had issues with everybody on the staff. This is not how popular I am, it's that I'm probably not an asshole." So, I didn't say that word, but I implied it heavily. And so, there's this thing right now where [my coworker is] trying to figure things out because she's running out of people [who will] defend [her]. She has one person left to [come to her defense and] that person just happens to have a lot of power. But even that person is running out of ways to defend [her] because more people keep coming forward to be like, "There's a problem with this individual. Why is this individual allowed to speak to people like this? Why are they allowed to be so intrusive in other people's departments? Why are they allowed? Why are they allowed this free rein when their position just doesn't allow for that." And I think that, that's been making my boss nervous enough to make some adjustments. And I think that that has caused this individual to start questioning other elements.

All participants contextualized their experiences with "not being a team player" in ways that suggested that they should be silent, or docile, or in some way or another minimize themselves and their experiences to not disrupt the normative organizational culture. This normative organizational culture, though, was experienced by the participants as one in which they receive multiple messages that suggest that they do not belong. When participants like Joey chose to honor his voice and vocalize dissent, he was labeled as aggressive. The result is that participants felt stuck, in some ways, between being silent and minimizing their voices, in order to maintain the status quo, or risk being labeled as aggressive.

4.2 Changes in Leadership. For Aleph, it was worth noting that the decision to leave his previous organization was not a simple stay or leave scenario. The decision was also connected to theme of Changes in leadership. Aleph commented that:

> The previous leadership was more supportive of creativity in leadership [and] the decision-making process was definitely more inclusive, which was one of the other things that I was completely unsatisfied with [in relation to] the new leadership. The decision making was completely top down from the get-go. And I experienced a level of micromanagement that I have never experienced in my previous experience . . . never.

These Changes in leadership resulted in Aleph moving from reporting to a supervisor who empowered him to be creative to one that was more rigid and bureaucratic about processes.

Mac also expressed experiences with changes in leadership and how those changes could bring or reignite feelings of being dismissed. Mac had moved from one department to another within the same organization. In his previous role, he witnessed how a senior leader advocated for someone and as a result, that person was granted a promotion within a year's time. After moving to a new department and working at the organization for over a year, he approached his new manager to advocate for himself knowing that a promotion was not only possible but overdue. He shared that:

> And in 2020, with everything going down, I said to [my supervisor at the time], "I know that I'm already a year, as far as I'm concerned, a year overdue to be a director." And she didn't disagree with me. But she said, "You know, headcount issues, and we have a senior director on the team and once she leaves, you know, they'll open up." [I thought] "Okay. Cool. Fine. Whatever." So, I said, "Alright." Meanwhile, I had already started interviewing for other roles.

In this reflection, Mac pointed to his sense that his tenure and work ethic should be honored by the organization just as it had been for a colleague. He did not feel that changing his supervisor should impact his ability to advance within the organization. As he pointed out, his supervisor agreed to this but was unwilling to make the change due to various reasons that were provided to him. Because Mac had witnessed others get promotions, he did not find that the rationale for not

making him a director was sufficient to keep him at the organization as he experienced this decision as being inequitable. As a result, he felt dismissed and ultimately chose to start looking for employment elsewhere.

5. Black and Latin/e/o/x Queer Identities and Bodies as Inherently Disruptive

Black and Latin/e/o/x queer identities and bodies as inherently disruptive is the fifth and final main theme that emerged from *testimonios*. The "Disruptor" or "interrupter" or "resistant" positionalities connected to the idea that to be Black or Brown and Queer is inherently disruptive; LGBTQ+ identity disclosure at work is still influenced by socio political climates that impact industry, location and consciousness and openness of colleagues; Black and Brown Queer people in power don't always have agency to sincerely engage in change; Being Black and Latinx and queer can bring a level of emotional labor that is draining, even if worthwhile; and Greater sense of belonging with those being served than colleagues.

5.1 "Disruptor" or "Resistant" Positionalities. During Petey Pablo's *testimonio*, he reflected on the theme of Black and Brown queer bodies being inherently disruptive in ways that set the tone for how this theme emerged in the *testimonios* with all participants. While his reflections were not specifically rooted in his experiences in the workplace, his notes about the hypervisibility of his Blackness and queerness shed light on the idea that Black and Brown queer people do not have the option to "hide" some aspect of their identities due to these things being clearly visible (as in skin tone of Black and Brown persons) or arguably "read" through stereotypes about mannerisms, speech patterns, or behaviors (as in the case of queerness). When asked about his experiences with disclosing his sexual orientation, he shared a moment in his youth when it was clear to him that he had been "read" as queer. He shared that:

> I also just intellectually and politically don't believe that Black and Brown men get to have the luxury of a closet, right? I don't think we necessarily have the privilege to come

> out of a closet, right, when we're very much always hyper visible in society, right? So, because of our maleness and because of our Blackness, there's something there that is always hyper public. There's something that is the first thing people see when you walk into a space. And this idea of coming out of the closet is a very Western Europe, Eurocentric idea. It's also one that comes out of gay White culture, right? There was truly never a moment of me having to come out. I recall a conversation with my mom in our kitchen. I was 13 years old, and she was like, literally telling me, "God told me you're struggling with homosexuality." And I was like "Did God? Did he? Or did you feel it in the womb, right." So, it's just this idea, like, this idea of the closet has just never really worked for Black and Brown queer folks.

Petey Pablo's accounts of growing up and ultimately in being hyper visible due to his Blackness, maleness and queerness are important to note. For him, this meant that his identities were not things to be revealed at some juncture but that they are always present in his engagement with others, even when he himself had not named or disclosed them.

Although they did not manifest themselves in the same way as Petey Pablo's, Aleph's experiences in the workplace also offered insights into the idea that to be Black or Brown is inherently disruptive. For him, though, he reached the conclusion about the nature of his identities disrupting the status quo during engagements with organizational leaders. He cites instances of leadership skills, knowledge and decision-making being in constant question in ways that he concluded were rooted in his identities. He shared that:

> Our leadership skills were always assumed. Our status in the agency was always questioned. Our ability to make a decision was always questioned. Our knowledge was always questioned. And that scrutiny was not applied to our White counterparts.

As Aleph noted, the mere presence of his body seemed to create space to question his leadership for reasons that he associates with his excluded identities. In many ways, the "not-so-micro" aggressions that he experienced, and that he discovered were shared by others, reflected the idea that some aspect of this identity seemed to trigger White leaders in ways that seemed to disrupt the normal flow of meetings and engagement.

He goes further to add that these moments were not isolated events but a recurring theme in how he, and other persons of color, would have their ideas placed on the backburner, distorted or even overlooked but then regurgitated by White folks in ways that were later received as "good ideas." When speaking of his capacity to interrupt the status quo with dissenting opinions, he offered that:

> I'm going to refer to before the department head left and after the head left. Before the department head left, in my experience, from what I witnessed, dissent and different opinions were allowed and heard. I appreciate it. On many occasions, I expressed to my supervisor, disagreements with her decisions and I wasn't shut down. Not with the new department head. Every time that I expressed concern, I was told I was not gonna be a good team player.

In instances where he sought out paths to be heard and to vocalize dissent, he shared that he was continually faced with opposition. His experience was that a dissenting opinion was framed as his not wanting to a team player. From his perspective, dissent was welcomed in others' spaces and not tied to not being a good team player.

Joey offered accounts of intentionally disrupting or resisting the status quo within his organization, especially in instances where doing so was connected to his Black and Latinx identities. Joey often reflected on moments where he felt the need to "fight" or stand up to ensure that his experiences as an Afro Latino/x person were not relegated to mere stereotypes. He stated that:

> We have to fight the idea in their mind that even someone with a troubled past, or rough neighborhood or missing dad doesn't necessarily, you know, come out like . . . I'm not some sort of hero because I had a troubled past, you know and the belief that I'm a hero really only makes you feel like you're doing something great by having me. I don't want you to stroke yourself by saying, "I brought on this wonderful aspirational guy who fits my paradigm, you know." I don't have time for that.

Joey referenced his experiences at his job where he had to disrupt stereotypes related to his upbringing. Here, he speaks of both the stereotypes that are problematic in White culture about

Black and Brown persons as well as the artificial support that is attributed to tokenized persons who exist in this space. He has had to address and overcome stereotypical narratives that frame tokenized people as extraordinary "heroes" for their ability to overcome their upbringing in ways that mirror and support narratives around Whiteness being a standard for achievement and all others being ones of struggle. Just by being present, he interrupted the idea that to be Black and Brown is monolithic and reinforced the idea that disrupting stereotypes about Black and Brown communities includes interrogating and interrupting how everyone engages with them.

Joey also mentioned concern around what would happen if he were not the "disruptor" or "interrupter" of problematic organizational traditions. When asked what would happen if he did not take on the role, Joey stated:

> I think that some people would interrupt. But I think that I'm the most rowdy of the interrupters. I think that if I left my department alone, like if I gave my department back to her [problematic colleague], that things would revert to what they once were because they felt like that works. Something worked for 15 . . . 20 years. Like, it can't be broken, if it worked for 15 . . . 20 years. And I'm like, say that about a used car. You gotta admit when something needs refreshing, or dumping. And so, I think that I am the furthest out in this direction when it comes to the idea of how we should see people as people. And so, what happens is, when I say something, I don't say it by myself. A good amount of the staff, like 80% of the staff, is very quick to be like, "He makes a good point." But I think that that same 80% is like, "I don't want to be the person who says that point." And so, I have to be the squeaky wheel.

The burden of having to be the de facto disruptor or "squeaky wheel" and to know that most of the staff agree with his rationale for speaking up may be the space that reminds Joey that his words have impact and are not just the ramblings of someone who simply seeks to complain. Having to unpack and question decades of organizational practices and community engagement, though, is not without tension and conflict that Joey has had to navigate, even while knowing that he is supported by most of the staff body.

Throughout Mac's *testimonio*, he provided examples of times where his "Disruptor" or "interrupter" or "resistant" positionalities were connected to the idea that to be Black or Brown and queer is inherently disruptive. In these stories, Mac highlighted how his vocal opposition to inequities that impacted Black and Brown and queer persons, especially ones that he has directly experienced, were not received with support and appreciation. In sharing an experience in a training session where he was placed in a group and tasked with creating a talent development strategy for marginalized staff, which he understood and experienced as performative, Mac stated:

> I was originally assigned to create a strategy for Talent Development for employees from underrepresented or marginalized groups. So, I was assigned to that [group] and I very specifically said that I do not want to be a part of that breakout session because if you're looking to actually get some tactical plans done, I will probably be wholly disruptive because I don't feel that this is a good use of my time. And I don't really believe that this is a strategic priority for any company to really do. When it came to that breakout session, I offered that while the texts that were laid out were fine, I don't really think that focusing on talent development for underrepresented minorities, among all the other things that you can be focused on, is really something that one should do because at the end of the day, in most cases, those from underrepresented groups who get to the same level as their White counterparts, or other counterparts, are wholly and highly developed. And it's not them that needs development. It's those from the overrepresented populations that need the training and development so that they can understand the value that those from underrepresented groups are bringing and actually promote them properly and evaluate them properly. They didn't want to hear that. So, it was kind of very much, you know, parking lotted and put to the side or whatever.

Here, Mac shared his experience being placed in DEI spaces where he felt that he was essentially asked to "perform" in ways that he felt were problematic. Instead of doing so, he opted to vocalize his dissent to resist the narrative that was being fed to him and others and to really drive the point home that the real issue is that White people need more of this kind of professional development and not people of color. For Mac, there was no other option but to "disrupt" the false narrative that existed about a need for marginalized professionals to increase their

professional development while not recognizing that many are often overqualified for their roles in comparison to their White counterparts.

When speaking of the conflict that he had previously with the White female colleague, Tom spoke of making a choice to resist the things asked of him, considering that this person had no authority or agency to request things from him. When speaking of his response to the colleague, he shared some of his internal processing around the situation when he vocalized that he thought to himself:

> I'm gonna be a little bit stubborn, and I'm gonna be like "I'm not gonna do that. You can ask me to do that. But I'm new to this space. I can't be like that. I'm gonna need to go ahead and, for lack of a better term, "take these lashes and just go on" if you understand what I'm saying?

The idea that Tom felt that he had to "take these lashes and just go on," or essentially deal with whatever repercussions result from him not acquiescing to the situation or his colleague, showcases how he had processed through potential consequences of resisting how he felt he was being treated in ways that were demanding and dismissive. Even after doing so, his conclusion was that he had to create boundaries early on by deciding upon what he is willing and unwilling to do while at work.

5.2 Emotional Labor. In relation to the sub theme of how Being Black and Latin/e/o/x can bring a level of emotional labor, Tom shared his feelings of inferiority after the incident with the White female colleague who directed him to complete tasks despite not having the authority to do so. He shared that:

> It made me feel like the stories that my grandfather used to tell me [about] being back in the Deep South and having to open a door for a White woman . . . And while he was opening the door, my grandfather told him, "You need to look at the ground. Open the door and don't look at her face, look at the ground." And when that happened, that kind of flashed in my mind. I was just like, you know, if this was decades ago, this will be a whole different situation. I wouldn't even be in this place in the first place, if it was that

> long ago. But it made me feel like oh, "Am I her uncle Tom? Like, is she gonna be telling me to dance? Do I need to dance"?

Tom's feelings of inferiority, when confronted with "not-so-micro" aggressions, had the effect of reminding him that his experiences had historical contexts. As a Black man raised in the South, he grew up with stories on how his older relatives had to engage in very specific behaviors to avoid conflicts with White people and to avoid any misperceptions of their motives or actions when engaging with White women in particular. These stories bubbled to the surface when confronted with aggressive behavior in the workplace. This connection only served to reduce Tom to psychological and emotional period when Black people, and Black men in this particular context, had to hold their tongue and silence their voices when given commands by White people. Stories of that kind of emotional labor were passed down to Tom and were triggered in the moment when his coworker spoke to him in ways that were "not-so-micro" aggressive.

Aleph spoke of the emotional impact that he had around simple everyday engagements with his boss. These engagements were often anxiety-producing. He noted that:

> Waking up . . . the first thing that I wake up in the morning to is fear of opening my email. Because now I don't know what crazy meeting, what crazy decision, what crazy email am I going to get from my supervisor. So I'm stress to see how my authority was being diminished by my supervisor, how all the decisions that I was making were questioned publicly, in front of my staff, how I was being disrespected in front of my own staff, how sometimes I felt like I was being treated like a server. I mean, at one point, for instance, we were in a meeting with federal partners, with my staff there [as well]. My supervisor was, like, "Hey, hey," [in a manner that suggested that he was calling Aleph over as though he was being asked to serve him]. Many people were there. Those are the types of things that we have to face.

Aleph's concerns around communications in emails and meetings points to the multiple spaces where he felt anxiety over having his leadership questioned. Whether reading an email on his own or showing up in a group space, no space was off limits for him to feel devalued and dismissed.

Aleph also shared that these moments of workplace tension had a direct impact on his sense of self-worth and mental health as well. From his *testimonio*, he shared those moments had him questioning:

> "Am I really built for these types of jobs? Do I really have what it takes?" It puts your entire sense of professional self-worth in question. I mean, not in a very natural point where I ended up depressed, you know, completely, [or feeling] like I'm worthless. But those thoughts cross your mind and that's when I decided I had to leave. So, I was like that was not good for my mental health. This is not an opportunity for growth. My leadership, my leadership skills are going backwards. I'm not advancing.

Aleph's willingness to be vulnerable helped open dialogue about how feelings of being "worthless" or insignificant crossed his mind. While it was clear that he overcame much of the negative thinking that was a result of his toxic workplace experiences, doing so meant that he had to leave his previous employer for an opportunity that was much more supportive in ways that are meaningful for him. For him, leaving was how he engaged in responsive self-care that ultimately allowed him to remove himself from the situation that he could not change on his own and that was emotionally draining.

Like others, Joey's journey with navigating his emotions in his current organization had seen ups and downs. Joey had gone from feeling silenced and dismissed, to being angry in response to this dismissiveness and ongoing "not-so-micro" aggressions, to being experienced as what he calls "the Black police" who operated as a squeaky wheel to call out inappropriate behaviors. Joey mentioned that over the course of his tenure at his current organization he changed for the worse, for a time. He shared that:

> [I] became somebody that I wasn't. I became a very angry person. And I became this tyrant. I became this tyrant who was asserting power for the sake of asserting power. And then there was a point where I was like, "Fuck, this is the thing that I hate. I hate this. This is the cultural thing that I hate. It's like people asserting power because they have a position of power." And that's normal. You get to be a dick because [you are the] boss.

> And so like, there came a point where they had actually sent me [and the colleague who I was in conflict with] to interventions. We still have conversations and we're still on opposite ends of the spectrum, but we finally reached the place where they are not attempting to structure anything that I do. They are attempting to help when I do things. And it's become a very different thing. And we're working through [things] and we're in a much, much better place than we've ever been.

Joey's sense of becoming angrier and a "tyrant" of sorts speaks volumes to his sense that aspects of the organizational culture were so problematic that he felt that the only way to respond was with anger and by inappropriately yielding power and control. The anger, though, seemed to be an aggregation of the multiple instances of aggressive behavior that he was subjected to. His journey of dealing with multiple aggressions, his being dismissed, and then his having the antagonizer maintain their job even after his boss admitted that she should be fired, is worth noting as cultural dynamics that contributed to his sense of becoming "a tyrant." The intervention that was held between Joey and his colleague ultimately served as a resolution to Joey's sense of having to become someone that he was not as space was created to intentionally address his concerns.

Petey Pablo also mentioned his experiences with emotional labor a work. Specifically, for him, that labor included being pulled to perform DEI for being Black, for being Latinx, for being queer, for being Latinx, and for being first generation. Being tokenized within organizations placed Petey Pablo in a space where he became the de facto staff for conversations and check-ins with students who come from historically excluded backgrounds and who sought to speak to someone with similar identities. He shared that this lack of diversity at his organization resulted in the fact that:

> both my pedagogical and service labor was really intensified because all of the Black and Brown queer students were coming to my courses [and] were coming to visit me during office hours where [they] were always asking for me, right, which can be really draining. But, it's also rewarding, but draining, right? Because it's also like, yeah, there's not other faculty member that looked like me in the spaces.

Petey Pablo reflected on the emotionally draining task of carrying the experiences and expectations of historically excluded students in ways that are emotionally draining. Although there were rewards that he recognized in building these relationships with students, the labor of it all manifested when the weight of their experiences and expectations were solely placed on him in ways that other predominantly White and heterosexual faculty may not have to manage. Ultimately, Petey Pablo found that the duty to hold space in this way, on top of everything else, was overwhelming.

Mac's experiences with emotional labor were influenced by examples of feeling "betrayed" and "devastated" when his unpaid labor of participating and advancing an ERG (Employee Resource Group) were not recognized by the organization and instead, were used against him. He offered commentary on his sense that White persons engaging in the same work were able to receive a level of advancement or recognition that Black and Brown persons were not provided and that may actually work inversely against Black and Brown persons as it did for him. In relation to his work supporting the growth and development of an Employee Resource Group, he shared that:

> I felt very betrayed because I had put a lot of work into the ERG. And it wasn't just ERG work, but it was ERG work that actually turned a profit. I had been told that one of the reasons I did not get a promotion is because somebody feels that I put too much time into my ERG work. And so that was really devastating for me, because I did put a lot of time in that [ERG] but I still performed my day-to-day [duties]. And so, for that to actually be a detriment, whereas for most people who did not look like me doing that will put them above and beyond, somehow for me that turned into a detriment. And so, in that case, I was like, "No . . . screw y'all. I do not feel supported."

Here, Mac reflected on how his feelings of being betrayed and devastated were rooted in his work with supporting an employee resource group. He felt that his time spent growing the ERG were not appreciated despite the fact that others doing the same work were rewarded for their efforts.

Mac further shared his experiences with emotional labor through an example where he spoke of engaging in DEI work. For him, problematic dynamics in DEI work have real negative consequences for practitioners. These consequences illustrate how the DEI landscape, from Mac's view, was a minefield where practitioners have to navigate resistance, fragility, and sabotage from leaders and staff. He noted that:

> DEI is fraught with danger. I'm not doing like basic Excel spreadsheet work. It's not a simple two plus two equals four, and everybody can move. And even when it is, this is a space for somebody to go and try and argue with me on that, right. Understand that in my line of work, because of the fragility that exists, I could at any moment be let go. And is that okay with me? The answer is yes. Because I have very much graduated from someone who was 10 years and loyal at a company to seeing how they treated me over time back then and the microaggressions that [I experienced as a result]. [My goal is to be] more and more okay with being wherever I am, for however long I'm there. And if I'm not there, that long, if it doesn't work, I keep on moving.

This "danger" that Mac spoke about is about being hired to engage in DEI work but then knowing that he could get fired at any time despite the emotional complexity of the job where he has to navigate "not-so-micro" aggressions directed at him as well as the fragility of staff in not wanting to lean into change. Being okay with these dynamics occurred because Mac decided that he would show up as his authentic self with the understanding that his time could be limited. With the mindset that he would "keep on moving," he did not have to hold space for organizational leaders or cultures that were unwilling or unable to do the work that he is leading, that is necessary for change.

This study centered the workplace experiences of Black and Latin/o/x LGBTQ+ male leaders. Through individual *testimonios* and collective *critical platicas*, five participants shared, unpacked, and contextualized their lived experiences. Aleph shared his negative workplace experiences that ultimately led to his departure from his most recent employer. Joey's negative experiences with a White woman colleague was reflective of the type of problematic behaviors

that are supported even in diverse organizations. Petey Pablo's insights on the performative nature of DEI provided insights into the reasons why he finds it difficult to participate in DEI programs. Mac's expertise in DEI helped provide deeper understanding of DEI challenges and opportunities for growth. Tom, on the other hand, is still in the process of navigating his organization in ways that are supportive of all of his identities.

Over the course of sharing their thoughts, participants were able to critically reflect upon their experiences. Emergent themes highlighted patterns related to "not-so-micro" aggressions, the failures of DEI, conflicts with White women, and their experiences with existing in ways where their bodies and orientations are disruptive to White cisgender, heteroprofessional organizational cultures. While not all themes were shared by all participants, Table 1 shows which themes and subthemes manifested.

In Chapter V of this dissertation project, I discuss the findings of this study in more details and provide my thoughts on the implications of this study for scholars and practitioners.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

As reflected in the literature review, this study started with a curiosity that I had to understand how organizations can be designed, in a systematic way, to be more equitable. It then grew to a project exploring how activism led by and on behalf of workers from historically underrepresented and excluded groups resulted in major changes to how organizations are experienced in their current format. Understanding how much change has been made in relation to workers' rights became even more motivation and hope in understanding that more can be done in actualizing more equitable workplaces. I knew that I would have to connect this work to the trending issues around DEIB. Understanding the high visibility of workplace DEIB initiatives within the context of organizational activism and workplace movements clarifies how this "new wave" of identity-based consciousness is part of a longer history of persons from all walks of life working to resist, interrupt, and transform the internal and external forces that influence organizations. My task then was to connect DEIB with the voices of those who can provide insight into major issues that exist within organizations. Through this avenue, I hoped to contribute to moving the needle toward more equitable workplaces.

To better understand what the dynamics of these workplaces might look and feel like, I turned to a population of historically excluded persons that I am most familiar with: Black and Latin/o/x LGBTQ+ males. From their stories, I hoped to learn more about some of the challenges that currently exist in workplaces that inhibit them from being more equitable spaces and, considering these issues, what might help change the current state of things. Black and Latin/o/x LGBTQ+ men were especially important due to scarce research on their workplace experiences, especially as it relates to the capacity to lead and be led. Holding space for their stories, through individual *testimonios* and *critical platicas*, allowed for this project to address this scarcity.

Listening to each participant's *testimonio* and then to their collective *critical platicas* provided data for this project that helped answer these research questions: How do Black and Latin/o/x LGBTQ+ males experience the workplace and what solutions can they offer to create more equitable organizations? From the *testimonios*, five main themes and various subthemes emerged that spoke to some of the challenges that participants faced in the workplace. Insights related to their engagement with White women, the failures of DEI and the hypervisibility of Black and Brown queer bodies, were among themes that stood out from the data. Because this project has the additional goal of moving the needle forward in developing more equitable workplaces, data was pulled directly and indirectly from participants that highlighted some solutions that would help organizational leaders on their journeys.

In this chapter, I offer a conclusion to this study by addressing the following issues: (a) An overview of the findings by addressing emergent themes and solutions. I contextualize research findings against prior scholarship from the literature review; (b) Contribution of the results to scholarship on organizational leadership and change management. I offer insights on how this research adds value to current scholarship; (c) Limitations of the study; and (d) Personal reflections.

Discussion

Overview of Findings on Themes and Subthemes

Much of what manifested from *testimonios* and the *critical platicas* in relation to the themes that I discovered were consistent with scholarship around Black and Latin/o/x and LGBTQ+ issues in the workplace. In particular, Riveria and Frias's (2021) work on Latino/x queer professionals in higher education. Of the five themes that they cited as insights into the experiences of Latino/x queer professionals, four manifested in this study. These four themes

included la unica (being unique or tokenized), fuerte: sin remedio (the perception of being internally touch or strong against a litany of external barriers), viviendo con caraje (existing with both courage and rage), and la arcoiris Fragmentada (a reference to queer identities where queer Latino/x persons may not feel comfortable bringing their full identities into the workplace). The participants' experiences confirmed this prior research and is a reminder that organizations are still not places where persons from marginalized identities feel a complete sense of belonging and connectedness due to known issues that may be easily resolved. Below I offer greater insights that connect the emergent themes to literature.

Theme 1: "Not-So-Micro" Aggressions. The topic of having to deal with "not-so-micro" aggressions was experienced by every participant. In particular, the data from *testimonios* and *critical platicas* supports Resnick and Galupo's (2019) research on various types of microaggressions, specifically microinsults and microinvalidations. Microinsults were present in Petey Pablo's *testimonio* where he shared experiences with being identified as "loud" and "unapproachable" by a colleague who refused to have this conversation with him directly but instead went to his supervisor to complain. They were also present in Mac's *testimonio* where he shared that it was communicated to him that he was "disruptive" and "aggressive" by White women colleagues working in the DEI space who ultimately were speaking of their perceptions of him and not their claims that others had these experiences. Additionally, microinsults manifested in Aleph's experiences with feeling isolated from "high level" people and Tom's experience with a White woman colleague whose words implied that he was being lazy at work. In all of these incidents, the participants reflected on how these particular coded communications can be insulting to people of color.

Microinvalidations were also present in the experiences of participants. One example was Joey's experiences with "the old guard" leaders at his organization that wanted him and the minorities that they served to regurgitate their assumed traumas in order to justify the "White savior complex" that the organization adopted to rationalize their work. This expectation invalidated the totality of their lived experiences in ways that replicated stereotypes. Joey's experiences with microinvalidations also included his experiences with being gaslit by his supervisor after bringing concerns forward about a White woman colleague. Despite his supervisor agreeing with his concerns, the colleague was able to remain in her role because of the pity and empathy that she afforded his supervisor who shared similar identities as a White

woman of a certain age. As he mentioned, he did not have the ability to cry his way out of a situation, which he implied is a tool that his White female colleague was able to utilize in the moment. Also, Mac shared experiences with microinvalidations in his experiences with the DEI consultants who dismissed and ignored his concerns around DEI work that felt performative. In this way, they chose to invalidate his experiences as a gay Black DEI professional whose lived experiences informed his practice.

Tom, Mac, Joey, and Aleph all shared negative encounters with White women (and White passing women) during both the *testimonios* and the *critical platicas*. These encounters with White women (and White passing women) were prime examples of research discussed in Chapter II on intersectionality in which even spaces that are occupied by marginalized persons can be spaces that are problematic. Identifying with marginalized groups does not necessitate having done the work that would suggest that a person values and invests in critical consciousness and equity for all marginalized persons. The presence of women and minorities in leadership roles, as well, does not mean that organizational spaces were automatically spaces for increased feelings of belongingness.

In the Black community, we have a saying that reflect this dynamic which is "All skin folk ain't kin folk." This saying speaks to the fact that possessing shared identities, in this case a racialized "skin," does not mean that someone sees, experiences, and thus will treat you as though they have your well-being in mind, which is alluded to with the reference to being treated like "kin" or family. While rooted in the Black American community, this saying can be extended to include our understanding of intersectionality and collective liberation within all marginalized groups. Adopting this perspective reminds us of the layered ways that oppressive ideologies are designed, to the extent that pulling back one layer only reveals additional layers of

hierarchical values-based systems. This is one of the many reasons why critical HRD leaders seeking to create critical conscious organizations must also embed insights into intersectionality into their practices.

Theme 2: Surviving and Thriving. Participants' experiences with surviving and thriving were connected to their experiences with "not-so-micro" aggressions. As a result of these negative experiences and the desire to be recognized as "professional," participants engaged in code-switching to survive and make it through everyday encounters with various "-isms" and "-phobias." This looks like Joey's contrived "Sorry to Bother You voice" which he leverages to remind White colleagues that he is educated and qualified for his position and Tom's reflections on monitoring, or not, how he looks and his speech patterns. Participants shared that they utilized code-switching early on in their careers before they learned to honor their whole selves.

The theme of surviving and thriving is particularly aligned with the research on belonging in the workplace. For instance, most participants had experiences with managing their identities at some point in their careers in order to survive and thrive in the workplace. This phenomenon is supported by Darling-Hammond's (2018) study on Black queer men and thriving where her social dimensions of thriving around "community" and "selfhood" were similar to themes in these project around "connecting with others" and "honoring self," respectively. Additionally, themes around surviving were consistent with Harris's (2014) study that offered insights into how Black students at HBCUs negotiate their identities as a result of racial expression management and the pressure to "act White" and uphold heteroprofessional gender norms. Having to manage themselves in such ways impacted their sense of being connected to the workplace. The outcome of this level of disconnection resulted in the lack of participation in

DEI efforts that Petey Pablo discussed as well as Tom's account of not wanting to hang out with his fellow colleagues after work.

While thriving was often associated with participants choice to "honor their whole selves" while at work, surviving was often associated with participants learning to utilize specific social skills, such as code-switching, that permitted them access into White, heteroprofessional climates. It would be feasible to assume that, based on participants' *testimonios* and *critical platicas*, surviving and thriving were not static states to be achieved but rather fluctuating states that were influenced by many of the themes that manifested in this project related to "not-so-micro" aggressions, fair and respectful workplaces and the disruptive nature of intersecting identities and oppressions. Darling-Hammond's (2018) research supports this sense of fluctuating states of being. These states fluctuated as a result of shifting interpersonal and organizational dynamics that are often out of the control of participants. Fluctuating in and out of experiences and feelings of thriving and surviving absolutely influenced participants workplace experiences and sense of belonging.

Theme 3: Failures of DEI. Everyone had experiences and thoughts on the nature of DEI initiatives and programs. Aleph and Petey Pablo were the most critical of the performative nature of DEI, while Mac offered both criticism and hope for something more meaningful. Mac offered two major insights that I think explain the breakdown in successful implementation of transformative organization work around DEI. The first being that organizations need to establish clarity around whether they are interested in superficial DEI programming and initiatives or something more meaningful. The superficial aspects seem to center diversity hiring and superficial distractions of employee resource groups that have no power, resources, or agency (financial or human) to enact change. On the other hand, more substantial and meaningful DEI-related change is systemic, woven throughout all areas of the organization and, like a budget, is led by leadership with accountability structures and responsibilities that exist with every staff person.

It was clear from participant stories that there is often an expectation from Black and Latin/o/x LGBTQ+ persons that their organizations are invested in the latter when in fact what they tend to experience is the former. This gap creates a cognitive dissonance, as many persons experience this as some form of deception at worse and performative at best. Ultimately, Black and Latin/o/x LGBTQ+ persons enter conversations around DEI hoping for investment in the breadth and depth of a proposed DEI project but are left with understanding that diversity hiring is often the beginning and ending of a company's willingness to engage in the work.

Theme 4: Day-to-Day Leadership. This theme manifested because of participant statements around having concerns in relation to the everyday operations and leadership of the organization. Mac, Joey, and Aleph all shared experiences with organizational dynamics that included subthemes around lack of agency and autonomy in work and the impact that changes in leadership can have on staff. Their concerns reflected problematic organizational leadership practices that ultimately resulted in either their contemplation on or ultimate decision to leave their organizations.

These normative practices, though, are often exclusionary or restrictive practices that have been normalized under bureaucratic, hierarchical organizational leadership structures that have a history of silencing or minimizing the voices of marginalized persons. Gaining collective insight from participants served as a reminder that these normative practices are also part of the larger problem with the failure of inclusion and equity-based initiatives to take hold in organizations. In many ways, these normative practices that are designed to control employee behavior are often reflective of similar experiences with control, dominance and indignities that marginalized workers experience in relation to their lives outside of the workplace. Experiencing controlling mechanisms within organizations serves as a reminder of the ways in which power, privilege, dominance, and control are replicated within organizations and have specific and historical implications for those from marginalized groups. Participant *testimonios* and *critical platicas* speak to ways in which agency and autonomy are leveraged under the guise of "business as usual", even when DEI initiatives are in place.

Their concerns of problematic organizational leadership were consistent with research from da Costa et al. (2020) and Sehmi (2021). da Costa et al. (2020) concludes that organizational well-being is associated with the ways in which leaders create spaces for open

dialogue and shared decision making. Sehmi (2021) also posits that shared decision making and active listening are solutions to concerns around agency and autonomy. Both studies support the idea that rigid bureaucratic leadership dynamics that inhibit autonomy and agency of workers negatively influence how workers experience the workplace. Data from *testimonios* and *critical platicas* support these conclusions as many issues experienced by participants could be seemingly resolved through the development and cultivation of organizational cultures and leadership practices that provided participants with the authority to bring their lived experiences and ideas into their work in ways that enhanced the larger organization.

Sincerely challenging the idea that "normative" or "traditional" is appropriate or equitable is the reason that this project also highlights the work of critical Human Resource Development professionals and critical consciousness. Critical consciousness becomes the long-term goal to constantly unpack the ways in which organizations reproduce inequities and injustices (Freire, 1970). CHRD leaders are the persons within organizations, not just HR professionals, who are tasked with leading this change. Chalofsky et al. (2014) remind us that this critique needs to happen in spaces related to performance, learning and an overall humanistic approach to organizational leadership, design, and accountabilities.

Theme 5: Black and Latin/o/x Identities and Bodies Are Inherently Disruptive.

The language for this theme was pulled from Petey Pablo's *testimonio*, where he spoke about his experiences growing up as a Black queer kid who never had the privilege of a "coming out" of a closet essentially due to already having a queer identity being assigned to him by others. While he was specifically speaking of his childhood experiences, it was evident to me that what the other participants were alluding to in some ways was this idea of the hypervisibility and the disruptive nature of Black and Brown and queer bodies and how it manifests within

organizations. This looked like Joey's frustrations with having to police race-based language and practices because no one else was choosing to interrupt and disrupt the White savior mentality that had been normalized within his organization. As the only Afro Latinx male, he felt that it was his duty to disrupt the "old guard" in ways that showcased the major concerns in how they spoke about and engaged in patronizing and condescending communications and/or behaviors with clients, including poor Black kids and those from single families. It also looks like Mac's experiences with offering dissenting opinions on what it means to truly engage in DEI work. Opinions that ultimately resulted in his termination. In these situations, participants experienced backlash and isolation just for existing in ways that challenged how people from their backgrounds were being treated.

Additionally, the theme that emerged around emotional labor was particularly interesting to me as scholarship does not generally make connections between men (and particularly not Black and Latino/x men) and emotional labor, especially not in the workplace. Petey Pablo, Joey, Mac, and Aleph's *testimonios* really highlighted the emotional labor that Black and Latino/x queer men hold in the workplace not just for themselves but also for other marginalized persons who may be experiencing similar concerns. On an individual level this looks like Aleph and Mac's discussion of the mental toll that that they have experienced due to their workplace experiences. This also looks like Joey's reflection on being perceived as "the angry Black man" due to his sense of being frustrated with the "not-so-micro" aggressions that he experiences while his White female colleague was able to cry in ways that allowed her not to be accountable for her toxic behaviors. These narratives were supported by Torres and Taknint's (2015) work that mentioned that microaggressions can lead to mental health concerns, including increased possibilities of depression.

Solutions for Creating More Equitable and Critically Conscious Organizations

An important component of this research project was to not only gather insights from Black and Latin/o/x LGBTQ+ males about their workplace experiences, but to also create space to hear directly from them about what solutions they would recommend in creating more equitable and critically conscious organizations. Solutions to many organizational issues were proposed in various ways throughout the *testimonios* and more specifically during the *critical platicas* stage of this project. Some solutions came directly from the participants' mouths and others were implied from their reflections. Below are some of the solutions that emerged from dialogue with participants, with notes about which were taken directly from participants, and which were implied.

Accountability Check-ins

Joey mentioned during his *testimonio* that one of the tools that he had in place to essentially move the focus from himself as potentially an "angry Black man" who is constantly bringing up concerns about "not-so-micro" aggressions or problematic engagements to a focus on accountability and assessment from the whole team was to develop a process for reassessment. He shared that:

> Because we are in the place that we are, there is this triggering of reassessment that needs to happen if we are to maintain our identity. And so sometimes I use that [trigger of an assessment] almost like a weapon to be like, "Have we considered how this [problematic behavior] is doing this thing [contributing to problematic outcomes]"? Oh, yeah, we're launching the reassessment mode right now [in response to problems that occur]. And it's been good.

As a tool for pausing to reflect and engage in introspection, these "accountability check-ins" are designed to hold everyone accountable for how they show up and by default, how the organization permits or prohibits specific engagement. They can be used by anyone and provide a reference point for constantly questioning systems, processes, and decision-making that may

have negative impacts, especially on those who have been historically excluded from decision making.

Required Coaching and Mentoring

Aleph, Joey, and Mac mentioned having experiences with supervisors who exhibited problematic behaviors in terms of supporting them. Oftentimes in organizations, persons are promoted without appropriate training in how to manage teams in ways that are encouraging and empowering for the whole person and not just for the skills that they bring to the table. While HR professionals know that employees often leave organizations due to concerns with their managers, these issues are compounded when managers engage in "not-so-micro" aggressions that are detrimental to those from historically excluded groups who often show up skilled but then face ongoing aggressions with everyday "-isms" and "-phobias." Organizations need to openly acknowledge these challenges and coach supervisors in supporting the emotional labor that is part of the daily experiences of historically excluded populations. Training that centers Relational and Servant Leadership could provide supervisors with tools for introspection, reflection and critical thinking that can serve to help them when showing up for the whole person.

Reimagining "Agency" and Autonomy within Organizations

Aleph, Joey, and Mac all shared concerns around having agency and autonomy in the way that they carry out the duties of their roles. While all persons are highly qualified and credentialed in their respective fields, they all felt that organizational mechanisms, that oftentimes manifested itself through control from supervisors, stalled their ability to bring forth both their professional and lived insights to improve processes and organizational outcomes. Much of their negative experiences are rooted in the bureaucracy of organizational structures.

One way to essentially address this is to create new paths for conversation. Belle et al. (2015) concluded that increasing capacity for belonging and connectedness within organizations can create new realms for organizations to understand how they should exist in the world. This could look like a new process where all organization-wide decision making has to go through a "Subject Matter Expertise" Council which could be a diverse, cross-functional council of shifting employees who are brought into conversation due to both their professional and lived experiences to offer insights and suggestions and potentially even serve as pilot testers for ideas. This would also require organizational planning around which ideas are reserved for top leaders and which can be discussed and agreed upon by a select body and/or the larger organization. Additionally, openly discussing power dynamics: who has it, how is it yielded, who is adversely impacted, and how do to resolve any problematic concerns that emerge can serve as a critical tool for reimagining power dynamics.

Establishing Best Practices around DEI

Almost all participants had constructive feedback about what is and is not working in terms of DEI. The following solutions were offered:

Separating the D from the E and the I. Mac also responded to conversations about the individual parts of a DEI initiative. As Mac stated:

> When it comes to DEI, people need to understand what is the D, what is the E or the I? So like, Joey's example, yeah, maybe they have the representation piece down to a certain degree. But when it comes to inclusion and equity, they're totally failing. they don't realise that because they're saying DEI like it's one phrase, like it's one word, instead of saying DEI is three distinct words with three distinct meanings, and that have relationships to each other. I usually have to tell people that as diversity increases in the short term, inclusion decreases, unless you manage it properly. People just assume that as diversity increases, inclusion increases, equity increases, that is not how it works. They're inverse relationships in the short term, if you want to take the time to actually think about that and go through that process. And so again, take it like any other discipline, right, where you would have a much more critical thought process around it. People aren't having that level of criticality in this space. And so, I think that's something that works,

> because then you start getting everyone to ask proper questions, "Why are we doing this? What are we getting out of it? Who's leading it? Who should be leading it? How are we being valued? Who's getting compensated"? You start to naturally ask those questions when you start to take it much more seriously. And to me, that's a big part of the solve.

Making appropriate separations between the four different functions allows CHRD leaders to specifically name the problem and engage in the type of praxis that Freire mentioned that would allow for appropriate action-based solutions. This would ensure, for instance, that organizations that struggle with marginalized persons in leadership positions are not creating strategies to that focus on diversity when they may actually have an issue with inclusion and equity practices that prohibit upward mobility of the persons who are already employed.

Topical Cream or Chemo for DEI Interventions. Mac mentioned during the *critical platicas* that we should think of all the "-isms" and "-phobias" in the world as a cancer on society. He approached organizations with the question of whether they are invested, with funds and resources, into superficial treatment of said cancer (topical cream) or in the deep, guttural transformation that takes time, that the body will reject and that will potentially take one step forward and multiple steps back when it comes to advancement (chemo). Normalizing this distinction creates internal and external transparency around the value that organizations place on DEI efforts. Those sincerely invested in change will have language and practices and cultures in place that speak to the chemo of it all and not just a checklist of DEI tasks that suggest that the work is complete.

> **Mac**: I agree that DEI is a Band-Aid for people who use DEI as a Band-Aid, and that can be true for anything, right? Like that was that deep kind work you're talking about. That could be called DEI, or we can choose to call it something else. We'd call it whatever we need, right. But there is this Band-Aid work. And then there's this non-Band-Aid work and how people try and assign the name is going to be up to them. I think there is now kind of two separate groups, and you see it a lot on LinkedIn. You see a lot of people, especially, I'll say Black people, maybe that's just my sphere on LinkedIn. A lot of Black people working in DEI are like, "We are no longer going to allow for some other DEI practitioners to be out here just selling crap, right? Like, we're going to be talking about

> these deeper issues". And what Mario was just referring to is that when I go into an interview for a role, or now for potential clients, I ask a very simple question when they're considering me. I would ask: I need to know do you want topical cream? Or do you want chemo? Topical cream is not dealing with the underlying issues, it's just dealing with the symptoms. The symptoms, the visual bumps, the irritation, you're going to put some cream over top on this skin, smooth it out, make it feel better, but the underlying issue is still there. Chemo is a whole deeper radiation going into the body. The body's going to want to throw it up. It's going to want to rebel against it. It's going to be doing things on the cellular level. Do you want that and it's going to cost a lot more. It's going to hurt a lot more. It's going to take more time. I would say that because I didn't want to come in with a chemo mindset and all they're going to do is give me a topical cream budget and responsibility. And so, to me if you want the Band-Aid and if you're going to call it DEI you can say this is DEI, and it's really just a Band-Aid. A lot of companies do that. And I think as this continues to evolve, I think it'll be more and more moving into, frankly, culture transformation and going beyond just kind of this high level, we're going to slap an ERG together, we're going to slap some initiatives and programmes, we're just going to call or hire some person who's had like, two seconds of DEI experience and call them Head of Diversity and feel good about ourselves. So it just kind of depends. But I agree a lot of people are just doing the Band-Aid work, the topical cream work.

In seeking to move beyond the superficial work that Mac refers to as "topical cream," it is important for all participants of a DEI project to understand the mindset of a topical cream vs chemo approach and what it means in terms of organizational investment.

In summary, a "chemo" approach is a more critical, humanistic lens that centers elevating the human experience whereas the easily managed but less impactful "topical cream" approach is superficial in nature. The participants experiences were reflective of the influx of DEI initiatives and positions that on one hand are presented as critical, humanistic approaches but in practice are merely "topical cream" approaches masking as solutions to the "-isms" and "-phobias" that infect organizational systems and practices. The participants noticed this problem and Mac offered language to conceptual how the problem lies in the miscommunication about which path organizations are seeking to pursue but not necessarily in the potential of a fully actualized critical DEI plan that is rooted in equity and critical consciousness.

Inclusive Cultural Benchmarking. While this term was not stated specifically like this, Mac, Tom, and Aleph all shared examples where they had left organizations that had managed their DEI efforts better than their most recent organizations. This means that full engagement in DEI is feasible, and it is the responsibility of leaders to scan their environments, or even interview their staff, to design DEI systems in ways that are clearly working. This looks like Tom's reflection on a previous employer where LGBTQ+ persons, including trans persons, are clearly present and seen and Aleph's reflection on existing in spaces where he did not experience his identity as Latino and his foreign accent as barriers to advancement. Tom offered:

> Because of the last position that I was in, because I was so open, I had a group of people, my teammates, that knew who I was, and really didn't care. It just allowed me to flourish and become even more happy with who I am. And, you know, I would joke and talk about me being gay and talking about my life and stuff like that.

As Tom offered, having an open environment created space for him to feel more comfortable sharing his full identity. This could be achieved by simply interviewing staff and providing agency to a cross functional, multicultural DEI body to plan, implement, and constantly monitor DEI goals and objectives in collaboration with internal staff, external partners, and the larger community.

Transformative Employee Resource Groups (ERGs). Considering that there was a major concern around the performative nature of DEI within organizations, a potential solution is the development ERGs that are transformative in nature. Unlike the many performative versions that may only serve as sounding boards for venting (which has its place as well) or housing multicultural celebrations throughout the year, which Petey Pablo vocally opposed, transformative ERGs can be designed with critical consciousness and equity in mind. In practice, this looks like a direct line to the senior leadership team to ensure that the issues and concerns that they group poses gets the direct attention of those who can make change. This also looks like financial resources to engage in DEI work, allocated and approved amounts of time for staff to engage in the work, and a clear scope of work that ensures that the group can actually influence the organizational culture. With these things in mind, ERGs elevate beyond the realm of just being performative into the space of critical consciousness where the issues that they bring to the table become important to leadership and the larger organizational body. Raeburn (2000) presented some of the ways in which ERGs can be designed to exist in ways that transform organizational cultures for the better and in ways that increase equity for marginalized workers.

Organization-Wide Accountable DEI Systems. Mac also mentioned during the *critical platicas* that DEI should be managed in the same way that budgets are managed. While the chief financial officer may oversee the final budget, for example, budget responsibility lies in the hands of every single employee from top executives to front-line workers, who at the least are responsible for working within a set amount of time and reducing waste. Similarly, DEI systems should be developed where responsibility rests on every single employee to ensure that DEI values and accountability structures exist at the top, bottom, middle and in-between and amongst various roles. This move would have the added benefit of not isolating DEI work to an HR

department that is already designed to favor managerial decisions over the collective welfare of employees. Additionally, Mac mentioned that staff should be rewarded and recognized for their time spent helping to build out these systems. This could take the form of quarterly bonuses for participation in an employee ERG and an incentive program that rewards staff for helping the organization find board members, staff, and community partners that ensure that DEI efforts are embedded into the fabric of the organization. He stated that:

> **Mac:** So, in terms of solutions that have worked, it is just getting the accountability, right . . . It needs to be engaged by everyone, but it still needs to be led in a genuine sense by leadership. I think that's a big piece. If you're gonna have people leading an ERG, that should be people who are close to the situation or living in it. But that means that they can't be seen as doing something outside of their job. They can't be in a position where they're going to be punished for spending extra time doing it. Or just the act of doing it is seen as separate within their day-to-day job. If it's seen as not a part of the work of the of them contributing to the company in a way that's valuable, then all you're doing is putting them at risk. Either risk of wasting their time, psychological risk, [or you could be] putting them at risk of actually being punished for doing work that's not theirs by their manager. So, there's ways to do that properly. And then there's ways not to do it. When it comes to diversity, equity inclusion, there's a lot of things that need to happen there. And everyone needs to participate in some way shape or form, but it has to be led, like most things at the top, from the top to start. I think anytime people are like, oh, yeah, we're gonna do DEI from bottom up, it's a hard no for me. I have not seen that work. And to me, it's an excuse too for leadership to circumvent doing what they need to do as leaders.

Mac's insights pointed to DEI investment that is led be leaders, accountable to everyone within the organization, and supported across the organization.

Conclusion

Two questions led this research agenda that are important to revisit. The first question asks about the workplace experiences of Black and Latin/e/x LGBTQ+ CHRD leaders. Through *testimonios* and *critical platicas* from Aleph, Joey, Tom, Petey Pablo, and Mac, I was able to answer this question. Their experiences were as diverse as their backgrounds, but five main themes reflected in their similar experiences. These themes allowed us to understand that their workplace experiences included various instances of "not-so-micro" aggressions, surviving and

thriving, failures of DEI, day-to-day leadership, and the hypervisibility and emotional labor that comes with holding their specific intersecting identities in the workplace. While individual accounts of various successes were also shared, the aforementioned themes were most reflective of experiences that were shared across participant *testimonios* and *critical platicas*.

The second question asks what insights can be gained from participants that speak to solutions in creating more equitable and critically conscious organizations. Many of the insights were rooted in designing critically conscious and equitable organizations that are intentional in how they address issues of power, privilege, dominance, and equity. Critical consciousness and equity should be baked into specific strategies that highlight diversity, equity, and inclusion; inclusive cultural benchmarking and specific and intentional organizational practices that reimagine how power, access, and autonomy unfold and are yielded within organizations.

Ultimately, the experiences of Black and Latin/e/x LGBTQ+ CHRD leaders are reflective of the ongoing issues that many marginalized persons face in the workplace. CHRD leaders seeking to create space for better experiences for marginalized persons must stay vigilant, intentional, and steadfast in understanding what actions are necessary to ensure this happens. These actions include being grounded in Social Movement Learning and the experiences and grievances of marginalized workers; understanding how to create organizations that are critically conscious and equitable, and holding space to continuously learn directly from staff and insider activists about their direct experiences. With these foundational ideals, CHRD leaders can then take the advice offered in this project to develop greater accountability check-ins, coaching, and mentoring for supervisors, reimagined practices around agency and shared power, and increased engagement in DEI Best Practices. With this approach, CHRD leaders can ensure that the vision

and actionable steps to transform organizations are as deeply rooted, pervasive and long term as the "-isms" and "-phobias" that these efforts seek to eradicate.

Implications for Leadership and Change

This study has multiple ways in which it adds to the field of organizational leadership and change management. One way is related to the discussion around DEI as lots of research has come out more recently in relation to DEI in the workplace. The theme related to the "failures of DEI" speak specifically to how those on the ground are experiencing the influx of DEI initiatives that have become pervasive in many organizations. Organizational scholars studying DEI can gain insights about why people from historically excluded communities choose not to participate in DEI initiatives and ultimately end up leaving organizations. They can also learn about DEI pitfalls related to the performative nature of many initiatives and the need for DEI programming that is systemic and operates as a "chemo" to combat the systemic and oppressive structures that are currently in place.

The conversation around "negative experiences with White women" also stands out, as I have rarely come across scholarship that addresses the White women/Black or Latin/o/x LGBTQ+ male dynamic. This study points to the shifting nature of power, privilege, and access and what it means for those from historically excluded backgrounds to perpetuate and enact oppressive dynamics on to one another either due to individual biases and/or the nature of existing in systems where these dynamics are normalized and supported while resistance is penalized.

Additionally, conversations around "not-so-micro" aggressions, surviving and thriving, and the disruptive nature of Black and Latin/o/x LGBTQ+ bodies are themes that should be considered by servant leadership and relational leadership scholars and practitioners. From this

study, these scholars and practitioners can gain insights on how to support those from historically excluded communities in ways that elevate their voice and minimize or reduce the emotional labor that they have to endure within organizations.

Limitations of the Study

A major limitation of this study is that the limited sample size prevents generalizability. While a small sample size was an intentional choice that I made for reasons related to the chosen IPA methodology and my own time constraints, a known consequence is that the data retrieved from *testimonios* and *critical platicas* is very specific and unique to the participants involved and does not necessarily speak to conditions that exist for others with shared identities. An additional limitation may be related to the fact that the participants worked in different sectors and professions. As many noted, working in higher education is a very different culture than working in the government sector or with nonprofits.

It is worth noting that I had a preexisting relationship with Tom, as we acknowledged one another as "extended family members" who have known one another since we were both teenagers. He is the only participant that I had a preexisting relationship with before the study. In fact, he was one of many persons within my personal network of HR professionals that I considered when organizing this project. Reflecting back upon my engagement with him versus that of the other participants, I do not think that our relationship provided a greater or lesser impact on the final results of this study. I think this may be rooted in the fact that he is in the early stages of his career, which means that his experiences are more limited than the other participants'. This difference resulted in their having more space for critical reflection, which ultimately meant more dialogue to transcribe and contextualize for this project.

An additional limitation may be related to the employment status of participants. At the time of the interview, two were "between jobs" of sorts and had recently left their previous place of employment in ways that were not ideal. This could serve to bias their reflections, as there may be resentment from not having the security of employment, especially if they perceive these things to be at no fault of their own.

Suggestions for Future Research

Future research exploring the experiences of Black and Latinx LGBTQ+/SGL people in the workplace needs to be continued and expanded. This should include quantitative and mixed methods, longitudinal studies with university-backed funding that can really speak to the specific experiences of this population. This could also include more action-based and participatory research projects that could serve as case studies for how midsized and larger organizations can take intentional steps to transform organizations from being complicit in social ills experienced by marginalized workers into something more equitable. It could also be worthwhile to have more research that creates greater understanding around the interpersonal dynamics between specific marginalized groups, especially dynamics such as Black and Latino/x LGBTQ+ persons experiences with White women. Hearing of these dynamics in this study reminded me of my own experiences and interest in learning more.

An interesting, yet still unanswered question, that emerged during this research project was whether "Equity" is something to be decided upon by organizational leaders or something that should be automatically present no matter who is leading an organization. It occurred to me over the duration of this project that "Equity" is the type of value that needs more substantial backing and support so that organizations do not have the option to ebb and flow in and out of equitable practices. Additionally, is the development of unions the only tool available to

essentially mandate this level of accountability at all times and for all organizations? If so, how can unions be leveraged to provide increased Equity.

Future Practices in Leadership

Leadership practices are foundational in understanding how to move beyond the status quo of what many marginalized persons experience in the workplace to something more substantial. After completing this study, it is clear to me that leadership practices must include an investment and entanglement into critical consciousness and equitability. My thoughts on some immediate ways that leaders can modify or upgrade their practices to better support marginalized workers include:

- Immersing themselves into theories, practices, and case studies on how to design organizations that operate from a critically conscious and equitable perspective.
- Creating collective space within the organization to learn about different social communities and social identities through the lens of Social Movement Learning.
- Evaluating and assessing power dynamics that manifest in bureaucratic structures and the impact of those dynamics on the agency and autonomy that staff have to make decisions. This study points to the fact that inhibiting agency and autonomy may be experienced differently by marginalized workers so addressing these dynamics has the benefit of breaking down the organizational power dynamics that often are experienced by marginalized workers as barriers.
- Creating intentional Servant and Relational Leadership practices for leaders who lead from a space of ensuring that their staff needs are met as opposed to merely centering their own needs.

- Creating learning cultures where diverse voices, such as those offered by tempered radicals and courageous resistors, can challenge the status quo with dissenting opinions and worldviews.

These changes could transform organizations in ways that permit more critically conscious practices.

These insights and reflections from participants come during a time when there is a "DEI backlash" across many organizations that has resulted in the elimination, watering down or complete opposition to DEI programs and initiatives. Research from Chapter II on social movements and the rights of workers coupled with insights from participants about their experiences with DEI should serve as a reminder about the ebb and flow of movement progresses and setbacks and how these things are very normative. It is critical, during these times especially, for CHRD leaders to ground their practice in critical consciousness, social movement learning and the long-term approach to a reformist agenda that is rooted in humanist approach to CHRD. By doing so, they can extend their practice beyond any temporary fad related to DEI and into a long-term agenda of critical consciousness and a humanistic approach to exclusionary management practices that Bryer (2019) suggests is important for transforming organizations.

While working through this project, one of my best friends completed her dissertation that centers Black speculative fiction within Africana Women's Studies. Having dialogue with her sparked an interest within me to find more opportunities for social scientists to use speculative fiction and alternative futures that are presented in literature as road maps, of sorts, for the future that many of us are seeking when we discuss DEI projects and other initiatives. For instance, I would be interested to see how the works of Octavia Butler, Nalo Hopkinson, or other Black, Latinx, queer, indigenous scholars, writers, and activists from the global majority, who

have written futures that are better than the ones we currently find ourselves in, could be intertwined into DEIB and leadership research projects. Future leadership practices that can build upon the progressive efforts of this project might be able to move forward more quickly if there was a shared vision about what we are actually seeking to make real.

Future Policy Consideration for Human Resources

This research project sits at multiple intersections of identity, scholarship and practice that can inform future policy decisions for Human Resources. Future considerations for policy could include establishing Best Processes and Best Practices for developing DEI Infrastructures. In order to be successful, long-term, DEI projects need to be deployed at all levels in ways that are just as systematic as the systems that we seek to change. This means that there needs to be clarity about the resources, leadership, allotted time, financial support, and staff support that is needed to make the work lasting. Organizational policies that support infrastructure development is one way that HR professionals can lean into helping make this work more sustainable.

Final Reflections

As a scholar-practitioner, I am grateful to have designed and facilitated a study that is grounded in the voices and experiences of people who have been historically excluded from organizational scholarship. I am reminded of moments where Joey mentioned “feeling seen and heard” during the *critical platicas* and where multiple vocal affirmations of “Mm hmm” or “Agreed” spoke to shared experiences with intersectionality. Sometimes, the same tokenism that ensures that those from historically excluded groups get access to organizations is the same tokenism that results in isolating their experience in ways that may have them questioning their abilities, skills, and experiences. Hopefully, this project joins the ranks of others where persons from historically excluded groups get to experience spaces and places where they can vocalize

their concerns and simultaneously find solutions, or at least coping strategies, to navigate organizational spaces.

On a personal note, this study has been a fulfilling journey into not only understanding how other Black and Brown LGBTQ+ males experience the workplace but to be able to contextualize my own lived experiences alongside theirs. Being present for their *testimonios* and collective *critical platicas* allowed me to better understand how the things that I thought were my own isolated experiences, with "not-so-micro" aggressions and DEI engagement, were really shared with others. These shared experiences are often rooted in the aggressive organizational environments where navigating various forms of "-isms" and "-phobias" is a normative part of the day. Historically, though, people from historically excluded backgrounds do not just simmer in their frustration but engage in individual and collective efforts to work toward change. With this project, the solutions that were implied or stated by participants speak to the ways in which they too can participate in moving the needle forward. I hope this dissertation project allows me to participate in building more equitable and critically conscious organizations, even if in some minute way.

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APPENDIX A: BRIEFING EMAIL EXAMPLE

Dear [Participant],

I am so excited to interview you for my study on the workplace experiences of Black and Latino/x LGBTQ+ leaders.

In this email, I have included three things:

1. A note about me,

2. A note about the study,

3. Some interview logistics.

Please let me know if you have any questions. Also, feel free to call me at xxx-xxx-xxxx.

Thank you for the opportunity to hear your story.

With deepest gratitude,

Mario

ABOUT ME

I am doctoral candidate in the Leadership and Change program at Antioch University. I have spent the last 13 years working with non-profits and various historically excluded populations, including LGBTQ+ youth and young adults. Throughout my professional career, I have worn multiple hats, which most recently includes being an HR executive. From an HR lens, I have been interested in the experiences of historically excluded populations in the workplace. Through this research project, I plan to deep dive into some of these experiences and to learn more about how Black and Latino/x persons, specifically, perceive their experiences and can work with others to leverage those experiences to offer some insights to organizational leaders.

I identify as a Black, gay (or same gender loving (SGL)), cisgender male. I also identify as being Southern (as I was born and raised in Alabama). These identities have helped inform how I experience and make sense of the world around me. I also identify as a caregiver for a mom with dementia, as a brother, friend, and community advocate. All of these identities aggregate and intersect to inform my worldviews. These identities are also key to how I show up for others as I also identify as a community participant and leader in various proverbial "Villages" where I seek to leverage my privileges to support those around me.

ABOUT THE STUDY

The purpose of this research is to explore the workplace experiences of employees who identify as Black and Latino/x LGBTQ+/SGL leaders. This study has two parts. The first part is a one-on-one interview where participants share their overall experiences through a process called *testimonio*. The second part of this study, the *critical platicas*, is a focus group where the participants from the interviews come together to discuss their shared experiences and based on those shared experiences, work to draft a list of recommendations to make organizations better places to work for Black and Latino/x LGBTQ+ persons.

My research questions are:

RQ1: How do Black and Latino/x LGBTQ+/SGL CHRD professionals experience the workplace?

RQ2: Based on their shared experiences, what actionable steps can Black and Latino/x LGBTQ+SGL CHRD leaders provide that will assist other CHRD leaders in developing more equitable and critically conscious workplaces?

LOGISTICS

What: Participants are asked to participate in both a 60-90 minute one-on-one interview with me as well as a focus group with about 4 additional participants that may last about 90-120 minutes.

Where: We will meet virtually via the Zoom app.

Taking Care of You: Your safety and comfort are critically important. During the interview I will ask some questions that might bring up memories of pain or trauma (times when you were not thriving). If this is likely to happen for you, you might want to ask a trusted friend or counselor to stand by in case you need them after the interview. Also, please know that you do not have to answer any question that you do not want to. Your participation in this interview is completely voluntary. You can opt out at any time.

Consent: Please take a moment to read through this consent form that is included. We will also review it together at the start of our interview, at which point, I'll ask you to sign it if you still wish to move forward.

Please also know that you can change your mind at any point - even during the interview - and choose not to participate. This is your right and I completely support it. There is no penalty for choosing not to participate.

APPENDIX B: CONSENT FORM

This informed consent form is for Black and Latino/x LGBTQ+/SGL leaders who I am inviting to participate in a research project titled "[TITLE OF RESEARCH]".

Name of Principal Investigator: Mario Burton

Name of Organization: Antioch University, PhD in Leadership and Change Program

Name of Project: Black and Latino/x LGBTQ+/SGL Critical Human Resource Development (CHRD) employee-activists on developing more critically conscious organizations: A project *testimonio* and *critical platicas*

You were given a copy of the full Informed Consent Form

Introduction

I am Mario Burton, a doctoral candidate in Antioch University's Leadership and Change PhD program. As part of this degree, I am completing a project to better understand the workplace experiences of Black and Latino/x LGBTQ+ persons. I am going to give you information about the study and invite you to be part of this research. You may talk to anyone you feel comfortable talking with about the research, and take time to reflect on whether you want to participate or not. You may ask questions at any time.

Purpose of the research

The purpose of this research is to explore the workplace experiences of employees who identify as Black and Latino/x LGBTQ+/SGL leaders. At the conclusion of this project, I hope to add to the scholarship on how minorities within the US experience the workplace and by sharing the direct experiences of participants.

Type of Research Intervention

This research will involve your participation in both a one-on-one interview and a focus group, where your experiences were captured. Both the interview and the focus group were recorded via the Zoom app-for research purposes, but all of the participants' contributions were de-identified prior to publication or the sharing of the research results. These recordings, and any other information that may connect you to the study, were kept in a locked, secure location.

Participant Selection

You are being invited to take part in this research because you self-identify with all of the following categories:

1. *Participants* were 18+ years old and lived in multiple states across the US. Additionally, they will exist in an array of educational, socio-economic, job and position types and life experiences.
2. Identify with at least one race OR ethnicity: African diasporic (including Black, African American, Afro-Latino, bi-racial or mixed race with Black as a racial identifier) and/or Latino/x (Latino/a/x, Hispanic, Chicano)
3. Hold at least one identity that falls on the LGTBQ+/SGL sexual and gender minority spectrum. This may include being gay, bisexual, same gender loving, pansexual, queer, transexual men, fluid, etc. Participants were selected regardless of whether they have chosen to disclose their LGBTQ+/SGL or are "out" within organizations. Because this study focuses on the experiences of those who identify as men, cisgender and transgender women will not be included in the study as participants.

4. All *Participants* must self-identify as someone whose practice includes an investment into the "people function" of their organizations or communities. While this self-identification will include persons who occupy organizational positions that have influence over human or people functions, it is not a requirement for participants to hold formal HR titles (i.e. HR Manager, VP of People and Culture). Instead, CHRD leaders, for the purpose of this study, can also include activists, community leaders, and change agents who have a passion, interest, or role-related responsibility to enhance the people function of their respective organizations or communities.
5. Participants also had to be willing to openly share their work experiences with current or previous employers.
6. Finally, participants must have access to a smart phone with a camera, have access to an email that would allow access to the Google software suite, and have the ability to download the Zoom application that allows for video conferencing.

You should not consider participation in this research if you do not meet these criteria.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may choose not to participate. You will not be penalized for your decision not to participate or for anything of your contributions during the study. Additionally, because this study involves conversations about your workplace, it is important for you to know that your position will not be affected by this decision or your participation. You may withdraw from this study at any time. If an interview has already taken place, the information you provided will not be used in the research study.

Risks

No study is completely risk free. However, I do not anticipate your being harmed or distressed during this study. You may stop being in the study at any time if you become uncomfortable If you experience any discomfort as a result of your participation, employee assistance counselors were available to you as a resource.

Benefits

There will be no direct benefit to you, but your participation may help others in the future.

Reimbursements

You will not be provided any monetary incentive to take part in this research project.

Confidentiality

All information will be de-identified, so that it cannot be connected back to you. Your real name will be replaced with a pseudonym in the write-up of this project, and only the primary researcher will have access to the list connecting your name to the pseudonym. This list, along with tape recordings of the discussion sessions, will be kept in a secure, locked location.

Limits of Privacy Confidentiality

Generally speaking, I can assure you that I will keep everything you tell me or do for the study private. Yet there are times where I cannot keep things private (confidential). The researcher cannot keep things private (confidential) when:

• The researcher finds out that a child or vulnerable adult has been abused

• The researcher finds out that that a person plans to hurt him or herself, such as commit

suicide,

• The researcher finds out that a person plans to hurt someone else,

There are laws that require many professionals to take action if they think a person is at risk for self harm or are self-harming, harming another or if a child or adult is being abused. In addition, there are guidelines that researchers must follow to make sure all people are treated with respect and kept safe. In most states, there is a government agency that must be told if someone is being abused or plans to self-harm or harm another person. Please ask any questions you may have about this issue before agreeing to be in the study. It is important that you do not feel betrayed if it turns out that the researcher cannot keep some things private.

Future Publication

The primary researcher, Mario Burton, reserves the right to include any results of this study in future scholarly presentations and/or publications. All information will be de-identified prior to publication.

Right to Refuse or Withdraw

You do not have to take part in this research if you do not wish to do so, and you may withdraw from the study at any time without your job being affected.

Who to Contact

If you have any questions, you may ask them now or later. If you have questions later, you may contact Mario Burton via email. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact [insert name and office phone number of local IRB Chair].

This proposal has been reviewed and approved by the Antioch International Review Board (IRB), which is a committee whose task it is to make sure that research participants are protected. If you wish to find out more about the IRB, contact Dr. Lisa Kreeger.

DO YOU WISH TO BE IN THIS STUDY?

I have read the foregoing information, or it has been read to me. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about it and any questions I have been asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study.

Print Name of Participant_____

Signature of Participant _____

Date _____

Day/month/year

DO YOU WISH TO BE AUDIOTAPED IN THIS STUDY?

I voluntarily agree to let the researcher audiotape me for this study. I agree to allow the use of my recordings as described in this form.

Print Name of Participant_____

Signature of Participant _____

Date _____

Day/month/year

To be filled out by the researcher or the person taking consent:

I confirm that the participant was given an opportunity to ask questions about the study, and all

the questions asked by the participant have been answered correctly and to the best of my ability. I confirm that the individual has not been coerced into giving consent, and the consent has been given freely and voluntarily.

A copy of this Informed Consent Form has been provided to the participant.

Print Name of Researcher/person taking the consent_____

Signature of Researcher /person taking the consent_____

Date _____

Day/month/year

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW GUIDES

Participant:

Participant-selected Pseudonym:

Interview Date and Time:

Interviewer's Name:

Interview Location / Modality:

Send Participation Incentive To:

How are you today?

Before we begin, I'm going to ask you a bunch of questions, but is there anything you would like to know about me or my work?

Thank you for agreeing to sit with me and participate in my study. The plan is to briefly review the consent form, then move on to the interview itself.

As you read in the Consent document, I am hoping to use these interviews to begin understanding how today's queer young adults of color think about and experience thriving.

(Review consent here.)

As we talk, please let me know if you need to pause for any reason. We may be interviewing for as long as an hour, maybe even longer. It's very important that you feel comfortable during this interview. In fact, you can take a moment now if you'd like to grab a beverage, get a pillow to sit on, or take a bio-break, whatever you need…

I want to remind you that you can choose not to answer any question that I ask or can decide to return to one later if you want to. This interview is about your voice and your needs. We can stop at any time.

My first batch of questions asks you to share how you define yourself along several dimensions of identity. Are you ready to begin?

1. What are some aspects of who you are that seem most important to you?

2. Can you tell me a story of how you came to know who you are?

PROBES:

o How do you identify?

o What does this identity mean to you?

o Were there critical incidents? Particular people?

ADDITIONAL DETAILS TO COLLECT if not offered

o How old are you?

o How much schooling have you completed? Has it all been in the USA?

o How do you describe your economic situation? (i.e. middle class, affluent, experiencing poverty, etc.)

o How do you describe your race and/or ethnicity?

o How do you describe your gender identity?

o How do you describe your sexual identity?

0 Have you chosen to disclose your sexual orientation or gender identity at work?

3. What are some of the other dimensions of your personal identity that you think are important to understanding who you are? (i.e. writer, artist, sister, etc.)

These next questions are about your perceptions and experiences.

What was your initial impression of your workplace when you first joined and what aspects have been introduced to sustain or shift your sense of connectedness?

   a. Have you experienced any microaggressions in relation to your social identity? If so, what did this look like and feel like for you?
   b. Are there policies in place, such as domestic partner benefits or parental leave options for adoptive parents, that communicate that the organization supports LGBTQ+ relationships?

2. Tell me about a time that you felt the most seen and affirmed within your organization?
   a. What parts of your workplace culture seem to invite you to bring your Whole Self to work?
   b. Are there aspects of the workplace environment that you have experienced as supportive or unsupportive? What are they and why do you think you felt this way?
   c. Is your direct supervisor or manager supportive of you and all of your social identities?

2. Tell me about a time where you felt the least seen and affirmed within your organization? Please share any instances where you experienced a disconnect between your social identities and organizational culture?
   a. What parts seem to restrict your sense of Belonging?
   b. Have you ever felt dismissed, overlooked, or bypassed for a promotion, pay increase, or other opportunity in the organization?

   c. Have you ever decided not to participate in an activity or opportunity because of your identity? Please share what the issue is and why you felt this way.
   d. Do you feel the need to "pass" or code switch in ways that you find to be disingenuous to how you see yourself?

3. How does your organization engage with issues of diversity, Equity and Inclusion? Is there alignment between words being communicated by leaders with the reality of the organization? How do you feel about these dynamics?
   a. In what ways is your organizational leadership diverse? Can you name members whose backgrounds support your claims.
   b. What opportunities are available for historically excluded groups to organize and support one another (i.e. employee resource groups around race, ethnicity, or sexual orientation and gender identity)?
   c. What training is provided around DEI issues? Is the training helping to drive change?
4. How does your organization encourage or discourage dissent, challenges to authority or workplace activism?
   a. Have you experienced any intentional efforts from your organization in connecting current social movements to changes in the organization? What are your thoughts and experiences with how organizations respond to social movements such as MeToo, BlackLivesMatter, LGBTQ+ Rights, etc?
5. What paths or procedures are available for bringing concerns around DEI issue to management or upper leaders?

a. Have you experienced any intentional efforts from your organization in connecting current social movements to changes in the organization?
b. What are your thoughts and experiences with how organizations respond to social movements such as MeToo, BlackLivesMatter, LGBTQ+ Rights, etc.?

As we close this interview, I want to say I am so grateful to have learned about you and your thoughts. Before we close, I would appreciate your feedback about this process.

1. How did you feel before we began the interview and how do you feel now?
2. How, if at all, has answering these questions been helpful?
3. How can I make this a better experience or a better interview?
4. Would you be willing to refer a friend to participate in an interview process with me?
5. Would you be willing to participate in a follow up interview with me?
6. Would you like to review your interview transcript and my research notes?

APPENDIX D: FOCUS GROUP GUIDE

Participants (Pseudonyms):

Date and Time:

Interviewer's Name:

Interview Location / Modality:

Thank you for agreeing to sit with me and participate in my study. The plan is to briefly review the consent form again, then move on to the focus group itself.

As you read in the Consent document, I am hoping to use the interviews and this focus group to begin understanding how Black and Latino/x LGBTQ+ leaders experience the workplace.

(Review consent here.)

As we talk, please let me know if you need to pause for any reason. This process may take anywhere from 90-120 hours even longer. It's very important that you feel comfortable during this interview. In fact, you can take a moment now if you'd like to grab a beverage, get a pillow to sit on, or take a bio-break, whatever you need…

I want to remind you that you can choose not to answer any question that I ask or can decide to return to one later if you want to. This process is about your voice and your needs. We can stop at any time.

For the first part of this focus group, I will be reviewing some themes that emerged from the interviews. I will offer specific quotes to support how I grouped themes.

Next, we will discuss your perceptions of these themes and collectively discuss any new insights or additional thoughts that may emerge. Here are some questions that will help guide the *critical platicas* portion of the study:

- Are there any themes that surprised you?
- Are there themes that triggered other memories of your experiences in the workplace?
- How are these themes connected to larger social issues?
- Based off the themes that emerged, what are some specific action items that everyone can share with other CHRD professionals to assist them in addressing these issues and other issues within the workplace?