

**Queering and Trans-gressing Care:
Towards a Queer Ethic of Care in QTBIPOC Education**

by

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Abstract

This research details the findings from three interviews with QTBIPOC educators in Ontario. Using qualitative interviews and art-based responses, teachers in this study theorized about a queer ethic of care while offering their best practices to illustrate how they move from theory to pedagogy when working with QTBIPOC youth. This research asked the following questions: *How do QTBIPOC educators understand and practice a queer ethic of care?* Two findings emerged from this study: (1) a queer ethic of care is nuanced and expansive, disruptive and transgressive and an individualized practice that takes place within a care web and (2) care as it exists in schools right now, is inherently white, colonial and violent and has forced QTBIPOC educators to imagine new forms of care practices. These disruptive practices include creating (1) authentic, fluid, mutually vulnerable relationships with students (2) explicitly anticolonial, antiracist moments in their teaching and interactions with students and (3) affirmation and recognition as moments of

healing. Collectively, these disruptive and transgressive practices create space for mutual healing for both queer and trans racialized students and teachers and paves the way for queer futurity and thriving. The findings from this study indicate a few things: educators must continually reimagine and disrupt their knowledge of care and care practices that are built upon white, colonial, cisheteronormative assumptions; educators must engage in anticolonial and antiracist care practices that are trans-gressive to the understandings of care in schools; teachers must learn how to create care webs in community with their students in ways that are vulnerable, authentic and fluid; a queer ethic of care is possible to implement at the grassroots, individual level first, but must move towards systemic practices in order to be sustainable and effective for QTBIPOC students in the long term; and a queer ethic of care offers a way for QTBIPOC teachers and students to feel recognition, affirmation and mutually heal by imagining new futures through thriving, joyful care.

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I started this degree in Fall 2019, a few months before the COVID-19 pandemic. Almost my entire doctoral studies has been working from home, connecting with work through Zoom and conducting research through my computer. This work was often done in isolation. So while my name will be credited with the writing of this dissertation, this whirlwind of a degree would have not been possible without the community that supported me through this unbelievable time.

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enough, and that what I have to say is important. My time working on the LGBTQ Families Speak Out and Addressing Injustices projects reminded me every day that research and learning is most powerful when done in a community.

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Dedication

For the people who care, love and feel deeply—it's okay.

You are held, safe and celebrated here.

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A Note on Language

One of the many aspects I love about being queer and having queer community is our fluid use of language as a way to signal, define and understand ourselves and one another. I sincerely believe that language is a way we attempt to understand each other in kind and caring ways. Despite this, language is deeply personal and especially within queer and trans communities, always in flux. It is also generational and context specific. In what follows, I will outline my understanding and use of some of the terms I employ in this dissertation. I strongly encourage folks to ask people how they see, feel and know themselves, ask what language they want others to use, and ask what it means for them. I understand language as fluid, deeply personal and constantly evolving. I want to make explicit the connections and differences between the experiences and histories of BIPOC and queer and trans folks and hold space for the contentions, contradictions and harm that could arise with using acronyms, words or terms that do not align with how others use them.

Gender and Sexuality

I define understand queer as political stance, personal identity, verb and more recently (*and commonly*) used as an umbrella term interchangeably with LGBTQ+. The participants in this study, as well as myself, all use the term queer to define our sexuality. For me, that means that my sexuality is fluid, complex and not limited to the gender identity, expression or body parts of others. Some might define this as being pansexual, but queer feels more flexible and free. Some of my participants noted they also use the terms gay and bisexual to refer to themselves, while still using the term queer. This was sometimes because of the use of queer as an umbrella category to encompass anyone who is not straight. The use of the term queer is a

reclamation; queer used to be a slur used against those who were not straight and has been taken back by the queer community as a source of power.

In this dissertation, I use the terms trans or transgender as a way to describe anyone whose gender identity does not match the one they were given at birth and identify as anything other than cisgender. This is inclusive of genderqueer, genderfluid, agender, bigender and nonbinary people. Some folks who are genderqueer, genderfluid, agender, bigender and nonbinary do not consider themselves to be transgender, as there is a medicalization associated with being trans and a social assumption one must take hormones or have surgery in order to be transgender. Again, language is personal and differs from person to person. For the purposes of my writing, I will use trans and transgender to refer to anyone who is not cisgender.

Race and Indigeneity

Often throughout this dissertation, I employ the term racialized (as a verb) to illustrate the ongoing racialization that is put onto people of colour and/or people who are visibly not white. I also use the acronyms BIPOC and QTBIPOC frequently throughout my writing. BIPOC stands for Black, Indigenous, people of colour, whereas QTBIPOC stands for queer, trans, Black, Indigenous, people of colour. I was hesitant to use acronyms in my writing because they group together people whose identities do not always align. For example, the anti-Black racism that Black folks experience is entirely separate from the racism a Brown person might experience. Both are forms of racism but the impacts, histories and implications differ. I also wanted to make sure that I did not use the acronym BIPOC unless I had participants who were Black and/or Indigenous. To use the term BIPOC to refer to visibly nonwhite people who were not Black or Indigenous felt unethical to me as I would be talking about people whose experiences were not

documented in this thesis. All of the participants in this dissertation noted they resonate with the term BIPOC and fall somewhere within that acronym. Because of this and for the ease of writing this dissertation, I use the term BIPOC and more frequently, QTBIPOC, to refer to queer, trans, Black, Indigenous, people of colour and the communities they come from. When I refer to whiteness I am referring to whiteness as an ideology that permeates every social structure we know (Hanna, 2019).

Situating the Land, Myself and My Commitments

It has become commonplace to read or write a land acknowledgement to denote the physical land in which research, teaching or ceremonies occur. I believe this is an important practice as a beginning step to recognize the land in which we live, work and enjoy. I do not think it is the only and/or final step in understanding our responsibility as treaty people to the Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island (Canada). Land acknowledgements have become a signifier of an acknowledgement of land and can be an act of acknowledgement without action. The land acknowledgement I write cannot and will not change the living circumstances of communities of people living without access to clean, fresh water who are under boil advisory, nor will it increase Indigenous sovereignty or make the Canadian government take serious the demands for finding the missing and murdered Indigenous women across Turtle Island or prevent the government from destroying sacred, Indigenous land to build pipelines.

What it will do is situate the land in which I live, work and was born on. Our work towards reconciliation is long, and as settlers we must understand and work tirelessly towards a future in which we are comfortable being held accountable and taking action to ensure the survival of this land and the thrival of the Indigenous peoples.

This research took place on the traditional territories of the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat peoples and is now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples. Tkaranto (Toronto) is covered under Treaty 13 with the Mississaugas of the Credit River. In entering into this treaty, by being born, raised, and/or immigrating to this land, we all become treaty people.

My relationship to this land is always evolving. I was born in downtown Tkaranto in the early 1990s, raised in Scarborough and Pickering for the first decade of my life, before moving to Oshawa at the age of 11. When I was 19, I moved back to Tkaranto and have lived here since. I was not educated about the violent genocide and assimilation Indigenous peoples across Turtle Island were subjected to. I was not taught about residential schools or the communities and land in which many FNMI (First Nation, Metis, Inuit) people live. It wasn't until I had almost finished my undergraduate degree (in 2016/17) where I started learning about the atrocities Indigenous folks have experienced and continue to be faced with. In graduate school I struggled to grapple with my own complex understanding of my family history of colonialism and my role as a settler in Tkaranto.

My family come from many different places; my mother was born in Guyana (at the time British Guyana) and her parents were immigrants from China, Portugal and India. My father was born in Egypt and is Egyptian and Italian. These connections seem curious and odd when we forget to understand the implications of colonialism and the trading of humans and their labour. On my mother's side, my grandparents were indentured slaves, brought to Guyana to harvest cane sugar under British imperialism. My mother still remembers having to attend primary school under the British government, witnessed seeing British police officers on horses ride

through streets, and walked home passing mansions in which the white people of Guyana lived in. These and the many stories she has relayed to me took years of questioning to unearth; there are still things she refuses to tell me, likely shielding me from the more violent experiences of her childhood and young adulthood. My mother immigrated to Turtle Island in the 1980s and became a settler on Treaty 1 Territory, the traditional lands of the Anishinabe (Ojibway), Ininew (Cree), Oji-Cree, Dene, and Dakota, commonly known as Winnipeg, Manitoba. The impacts of colonialism forced my mothers family to immigrate to Guyana in the first place, and was also the reason she left.

My family's own history with the violence of whiteness and colonialism means my relationship as a settler on this land—knowing I have been shielded and largely divorced from my own history—is confusing, complex and meaningful. I have become comfortable with acknowledging my own family history alongside the ongoing violence of colonialism happening on Turtle Island; the two must and do coexist together. Therefore, my role as a queer, trans, genderqueer, Brown, disabled and neurodivergent settler on this land is deeply personal and important to me.

I am committed to working in community with Indigenous folks, learning from them, teaching with them and honouring the ideas and practices they gift me as a way towards reconciliation. I am also committed to putting money into the pockets of Indigenous activists and organizations who ensure the survival, thrival and futures of FNMI communities. I've made it a regular practice of donating funds through whatever means available to individual fundraisers, community initiatives in Tkaranto and guest speakers in my classrooms. I encourage and crowdsource these funds with my students, matching their total with funds I apply for as an

educator, researcher and sometimes out of my own pay cheque. These actions are meant to show my commitment to how I repay Indigenous and Black community educators, scholars and activists for their labour, their words and knowledge.

The most important way I practice my commitments as an educator and researcher beyond research and teaching is through conversations. Sometimes these conversations are formal (invited guest talks) but more often than not they are spontaneous. They are conversations I have with acquaintances who go silent when I tell them who I am and what I do for a living; people in line at the checkout, folks I befriend in dog parks, dates and my friends' family who struggle to understand how the Canadian government "didn't know children were being murdered at residential schools." These are moments of activism, where I engage in a conversation with them, working in solidarity with the Indigenous peoples of this land to do the work of educating other settlers whose complicity in white supremacy and colonialism has yet to be unearthed. I am committed to continuing this work and un/learning throughout my career, working on this beautiful and magnificent land I am grateful to live on and call home.

Chapter 1

Care: A Burgeoning Problem

“Feeling “too much” or being “too soft” or dreaming “too big” in a world where our minds and bodies are violently constrained by capitalism and colonialism is perhaps the deepest act of love for this universe and for one another”

— Erica Violet Lee

Within gender and sexuality education, queer and trans youth rarely experience a practice of care at school (Goldstein, 2019; Owis & Goldstein, 2021). When considering the implications of intersectional identities in gender and sexuality work, queer and trans youth of colour are rarely recognized, anticipated and welcome in schools (Brockenbrough, 2013, 2015; Laing, 2021; McCready, 2015; Wilson, 2008) and do not experience caring practices or environments (Owis & Goldstein, 2021). This is because queer people are often assumed to be white, male and middle class (Brockenbrough, 2013; Connell, 2016; McCready, 2010) and much of the research on gender and sexuality excludes discussions about race and colonialism. This means that the research available on gender and sexuality, fails to grapple with the embeddedness of whiteness and colonialism as it relates to gender and sexuality. Invitations to discuss homophobia in the classroom are often used as attempts to create sameness between straight and queer youth (MacIntosh, 2007) rather than challenge a system that reinforces and requires students to be straight and cisgender and white in order to thrive (Greteman, 2016, 2018). As a result, gender and sexuality education erases the history and ongoing violence of colonialism and whiteness in schools. This work also fails to understand how care practices between teachers and students often reinforce white, colonial concepts of what care looks and feels like. When considering the implications of this form of care imparted on QTBIPOC youth, we recognize that there is a need

to explore, critique and dismantle the privileging of whiteness and coloniality in queer and trans educational work and enact antiracist and anticolonial pedagogies that center community care and thriving for QTBIPOC youth.

My doctoral dissertation is a qualitative, art-based, interview study with practicing K-12 teachers and community educators in Ontario. It asks the following questions: *How do QTBIPOC educators understand a queer ethic of care? How do QTBIPOC educator practice a queer ethic of care?* The findings of the study were analyzed through a variety of academic conversations about the pedagogies of care (Reyes, Banda & Caldas, 2020; Motta & Bennett, 2018) and by my own theoretical framework (*a queer ethic of care*) that draws from several areas of research including, queer/trans of colour critique, ethics of care, care work, futurity/worldbuilding/thriving, anticoloniality work and gender and sexuality studies in education. The study's analysis will also be informed by Robin Kelley's (2002) writing in *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* to tease apart how educators conceptualize their pedagogies and practices with QTBIPOC youth.

This chapter focuses on some of the literature related to gender, sexuality, care, race and colonialism in schools, while also exploring my own positionality and the methodological framework for this study. Chapter two details the theoretical framework in which this research pulls from (*a queer ethic of care*) while chapter three and four detail the findings in the analysis chapters. I finish this dissertation by noting the importance and significance this study holds and suggest further research to be explored in both the community and academia.

Literature Review

Care Work

Care work and ideas of social welfare and community have consistently pushed aside individualized notions of resilience, wellness and self-improvement, promoted through the self-care industry (Chatzidakis et al., 2020). Knowing the margins in which queer and trans youth of colour find themselves in schools, we should ask ourselves: what would happen if care was the organizing principle for our world? For our educational system? In many quiet ways over the course of history, oppression, neoliberalism and capitalism have become the foundation in which our society operates on, so much so that it is easy to forget these are not natural or given things (Chatzidakis et al., 2020). The legacy that we are left with—Western colonialism, white supremacy, settler-colonialism, cisheteropatriarchy, racism and classism—have become embedded in our daily lives. The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the violence perpetrated by neoliberal markets and policies which has left us unable to provide care as well as receive it (Chatzidakis et al., 2020). This reality finds its way to education, specifically for queer and trans youth of colour who are rarely seen, affirmed and anticipated in schools. Providing a simple definition of care work is not easy. Scholars in education and psychology have spent years teasing apart the different conceptualization of care and care work in both fields, frequently disagreeing with one another. In what follows, I outline how care work has been imagined by various scholars, while outlining my own definition and understanding of care work.

What Does it Mean to Care?

Simply put, “care” is a state of engrossment: to care is to be in a mental state, one of anxiety, fear, or responsibility about something or someone (Slote, 2007). Nel Noddings¹ 1984 book *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education* was groundbreaking at the time; it was taken up by some qualitative researchers who saw it as a way to think about ethics in research (Caine et al., 2020). Both Carol Gilligan (1982) and Noddings (1984) write that an ethic of care is modeled on personal relationships. Noddings (1984) takes this one step further, arguing that caring involves a “displacement” of our self-interest. In other words, someone who cares deeply and genuinely for someone else engages in an empathic exchange with that person, thinking of the thoughts, desires, fears of the other person (Slote, 2007; Nicol et al., 2010). They do not impose their own ideas of what they would want, but what the person they are caring for would be (Slote, 2007; Noddings, 1984; Nicol et al., 2010). Initially, Noddings (1984) saw care ethics as requiring individuals to act caringly, meaning that we act rightly or permissibly in our motive of caring toward others.

Ambivalences in Care: Autonomy

One of the major critiques of an ethic of care is autonomy. Distinctions between caring for, caring about and caring with that feminist scholars have developed (Gilligan, 1982; Noddings, 1984) are useful but do not account for the conflicting emotions that are inevitably arise during care work. Disability rights activists continue to argue for self-determination or

¹ Please note that I will cite Nel Noddings and Carol Gilligan’s work in the literature review section of this dissertation and briefly in my theoretical framework. I will refrain from citing them or delving into their work for the majority of this dissertation, as many of their ideas and arguments do not align with the queer/trans feminist approaches to ethics and gender and sexuality that I support, despite their work being contextually relevant.

forms of independence in which autonomy and control over their lives is possible; wanting the same choices and control in their everyday lives like nondisabled folks. Here, we can see the need for a break in the way dependency and pathology are conceptualized. Imagining a relational care that takes into account autonomy, we must center our interdependencies by recognizing our survival and thrival is always contingent on others. A caring politics grapples with both an interdependence and ambivalence by acknowledging our need to both give and receive care (Tronto, 1993).

Care Work as Feminine?

Both Noddings (1984) and Gilligan (1982) have been critiqued for their understanding of care work and an ethic of care as part of a feminine disposition and identity. Gilligan (1982) claimed that women tend to think of moral issues in terms of emotionally involved caring for others and connection to others, whereas most men see things in terms of autonomy from others and the rational application of rules or principles. Feminists are divided on the value of an ethic of care. Some view an ethic of care as growing out of women's oppression while also as contributing to the perpetuation of that oppression (Clement,1996). While advocates of this feminine approach do not necessarily believe that all or only women use this ethic, their interest in the ethic arises because (they believe) women especially use it. For instance, Carol Gilligan's work is based on psychological research which she believes demonstrates women's particular use of the ethic of care. Others, like Nel Noddings do not rely on empirical research, but explore the ethic implicit in and arising out of traditionally female practices like child-rearing (Clement,1996). Because care work is associated with women and the feminine, it continues to be devalued, under-paid, and undermined. Part of this is how autonomy and independence has

historically been understood in the North; as a deeply gendered “male” identity that represents manhood in the public sphere in opposition to the “soft, caring, dependent world of domesticity, women and the feminine” (Chatzidakis et al., 2020, p.23). These positions on care work as an inherently feminine attribute do not align with my understanding of care work or feminism. This work is cited here because it gives context to the understanding of care work as family and “female” oriented, which is entrenched in cisheteropatriarchal and sexist colonial values and understandings of women and domesticity. For this reason, the world of Nel Noddings and Carol Gilligan remains in this dissertation as a critique and as a historical understanding which I aim to challenge in chapter 2 when I discuss my theoretical framework.

Gender and Sexuality Education

Within a Canadian setting, schools often offer student support groups (Gender & Sexual Alliances, Gay-Straight Alliances, Queer Alliances etc.), antibullying days like the pink shirt day and initiatives like Sexual Orientation Gender Identity 123 in British Columbia. These efforts align with policy changes such as Ontario’s Accepting Schools Act in 2012 (Martino, Airton, Kuhl & Cumming-Potvin, 2019) and the addition of gender expression and identity within the Canadian Human Rights Code in 2017 (Bill C-16, 2017). Overall, these inclusive strategies promote tolerance, visibility and positive school practices which increase protective politics, educate all students about LGBTQ identities and begin to think about social justice practices in school settings (Goldstein, Russell & Daley, 2007; Kumashiro, 2001; Lin, 2017).

Queer and Trans Inclusion

Queer-inclusive education is typically defined as the commitment to acknowledging sexual and gender identities outside of the traditional heteronormative, cisnormative binary

found in many classrooms. It moves beyond LGBTQ-inclusive education, toward an inclusive, critical education for all children (Lin, 2017). Several frameworks that map out different approaches to achieving this commitment have been proposed by many scholars (Goldstein, Russell & Daley, 2007; Kumashiro, 2001; Lin, 2017). These frameworks organize LGBTQ education and more broadly antioppressive education into four major categories: (1) Safe school practices that promote tolerance and visibility (Goldstein, Russell & Daley, 2007; Kumashiro, 2001; Lin, 2017) (2) Positive school practices which increase protective politics, educate all students about LGBTQ identities and begin to think about social justice practices in school settings (Goldstein, Russell & Daley, 2007; Kumashiro, 2001; Lin, 2017) (3) Queering practices that disrupt and interrogate heteronormativity by critically questioning whose experiences and voices are privileged (Goldstein, Russell & Daley, 2007; Kumashiro, 2001; Lin, 2017) and (4) Actionable practices that advocate for change by challenging discourses that reinforce and reproduce cisheteronormativity (Kumashiro, 2001).

Limitations of Queer and Trans Inclusion

The very nature of cisheterosexist ideas and assumptions often means that a commitment to respecting and normalizing sexual diversity is not enough (Lin, 2017). Invitations to discuss homophobia in the classroom are often used as attempts to create sameness between straight and queer youth (MacIntosh, 2007) rather than challenge a system that reinforces and requires students to be straight and cisgender in order to thrive (Greteman, 2016; 2018). The first two approaches described (safe and positive) are arguably the most popular approach to gender and sexuality equity work. While they are the easiest and most approachable model of sexuality and gender-diversity equity work, it is often used as a “band-aid” (MacIntosh, 2007): an attempt to

heal the symptoms of discrimination and violence without addressing the causes rooted in cisheteronormativity. It is widely argued that safe school models do not create long-lasting, equitable gains for queer and trans youth (Khoja-Moolji, 2016; Bryson, M., & De Castell, 1993; MacIntosh; 2007). A safe school approach pathologizes queer and trans students (MacIntosh, 2007; Goldstein, Russell and Daley, 2007) by including them under the disguise of inclusion and tolerance. This renders systemic forms of violence and oppression against queer youth as individualized, and upholds codes of conduct and safety regulations that rarely, if ever, change or challenge systemic forms of oppression (Goldstein, Russell and Daley, 2007). Parts of these collective approaches stop just short of problematizing the underlying issues. In other words, they fail to question who these safe spaces are actually keeping safe. These “inclusive” approaches illustrate that what is often missing from gender and sexuality equity work is a critique of systemic cisheteronormativity and homonormativity that reproduces and reinforces privilege and power (Shlasko, 2005; Armstrong, 2008; Goldstein, Russell & Daley, 2007; MacIntosh, 2007; Airtion, 2013; Britzman, 1998; Luhmann, 1998). These models further negate an interrogation of how whiteness and coloniality operate and intersect with one another (Armstrong, 2008). Thus, it is critical that antiracist, anticolonial queering education models of care are implemented in schools.

Care Work as Equity, Diversity and Inclusion

Gender and sexuality education is consistently framed in terms of equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) work in schools. This work is meant to be a caring response to what educators, school boards and the public see as “at risk” youth. What they fail to understand is that EDI work is not care work. They are, in many ways, reinforcing practices of performative care schooling

practices that promote progressive policies, safe spaces and academic achievement for at-risk youth (Dadvand, 2020). Structurally, there are little to no spaces within our educational system to create an ethic of care that fosters authentic care, embodied vulnerability and deep relationships; these things would occur on an individual level, not a systemic one. This sentiment is further complicated when considering the intersectionalities of queer and trans youth of colour.

Thompson (1998, as cited in Reyes, Banda and Caldas, 2020) notes that caring cannot be colourblind or powerblind: “to truly see white, Black, and Brown relations in a raced and racist society—both as they are and as they might be—we must care enough to abandon our willed ignorance and political blindness” (p. 48). Thompson (1998, as cited in Reyes, Banda and Caldas, 2020) suggests that intersectional caring is necessary in order to attend to relational power dynamics. How this form of care work is taken up within schooling contexts has yet to be researched.

Pervasiveness of Whiteness and Colonialism

Queer and trans youth of colour report they do not feel empowered in their education, or feel that they have control in changing their school environment (Grossman et al., 2009, as cited in Wagaman, 2015). They also do not perceive designated safe spaces as welcoming or affirming as their white peers and are often forced to make spaces safe when they are not created with them in mind (McCready, 2004, 2015). Queer and trans youth of colour also face violent acts of misrecognition. Misrecognition happens when queer and trans youth of colour, who have consistently rejected binaries and categories are denied full expression of self by authority figures and institutions; youth are assigned categories and labels and forced to adhere to the social norms prescribed to them (Fine, Torre, Frost & Cabana, 2018). These practices of

misrecognition continue to thrive in schools despite research that shows race is deeply gendered and sexualized (Chow, 2002), creating a false dichotomy between race, gender and sexuality that goes unchallenged. When discussions about gender and sexuality arise in schools, there is no critical evaluation of how whiteness and coloniality is constructed as normative and natural through social norms, media representations or personal interactions (Logie & Rwigema, 2014). Queerness has been and continues to be reinforced as a white, colonial concept (Kumashiro, 2001) effectively removing moments for educators to discuss intersectional identities. The whiteness of queerness and transness not only reinforces the idea of being white as dominant and normative, it makes communities of racialized, queer and trans people invisible (Logie & Rwigema, 2014). When queer and trans people of colour are represented, either in the media or in educational settings, it is often riddled with stereotypes, hypersexualized references and deeply traditional gender norms (Logie & Rwigema, 2014; Gaztambide-Fernández & Rivière, 2019). Though we know that race, like gender, is a social construct, there have been criticisms of solely presenting race as a social construct without the nuances of how race creates lived realities of systemic violence and oppression. These critics argue that a social construction of race pays attention to people's "representations" rather than to "people themselves" (Saldanha, 2006, as cited in Zembylas, 2018). As it is suggested, the notion of race as a social construct fails to capture how bodies, spaces, events and encounters become *racialized as a verb*. By not addressing the embeddedness of whiteness and coloniality in gender and sexuality education, we deny queer and trans youth of colour the ability to thrive (Greteman, 2016, 2018) and receive authentic caring practices in schools.

In writing this dissertation I searched for research and writing that links care work and an ethic of care with the lives and experiences of queer and trans youth of colour in meaningful ways beyond an example. I was not able to find any research, other than the work I've been able to publish (Owis & Goldstein, 2021). In a book chapter I coauthored with Dr. Tara Goldstein, we theorize about what care practices look like when working with LGBTQ families and youth. In our work we set out to create a list of principles and practices that honour the stories we are gifted as part of working on the LGBTQ Families Speak Out project (Goldstein, 2019). Our third principle, centering practices that demonstrate a stance of care (Owis & Goldstein, 2021), notes how LGBTQ families and youth are rarely treated with care in schooling contexts, followed by our explanation on how we continue to practice acts of care within our research. While there is emerging literature on the ethics of conducting research with queer and trans youth in some research and writing contexts (Brockenbrough, 2013, 2015; Laing, 2021; McCready, 2015; Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018) there are no studies that look at how a matrix of whiteness and coloniality impact the care that queer and trans youth of colour receive in schools. In what follows, I detail the framework I will work within to conduct my research into this gap in the scholarly literature. I center work from racialized queer and trans scholars, and community knowledge as a way to situate an ethic of care that is relational, queered, antiracist, anticolonial, feminist and trans-gressive. I will discuss this further in chapter 2 that focuses on the theoretical framework for this dissertation.

Positioning Myself in This Work

I believe that who we are in our work, teaching and research is perhaps one of the most important things we can be transparent about. Knowing that people like me rarely make it to this

point in their lives, I feel responsible to share myself authentically and honestly about who I am and the things I have worked through to get here. This is emotional and vulnerable writing and documenting it forever in this dissertation makes me nervous. My hope is that someone will read this dissertation, find themselves in my words and continue the radical care work I propose. And that can only be done through stories, so here's mine.

I am a queer, trans/genderqueer, Brown settler in Tkaranto. I came into my sexuality and gender identity later in life. I graduated from high school with average grades, finished my undergraduate degree at X University (formerly Ryerson University) in global studies and history with a cumulative gpa of 2.3. It took me six years to finish my undergraduate degree. I was conditionally accepted to the Masters of Teaching program at OISE/University of Toronto, which I completed in 2019 before starting my doctoral studies. I've always loved learning, just not the format in which learning was presented to me. My mental health has always been the most challenging part of my educational and personal life. In recent years I have been re-diagnosed with bipolar II, borderline personality disorder (BPD) and complex post traumatic stress disorder (CPTSD) and autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Those diagnoses come with anxiety, depression, panic attacks and manic episodes so severe I can finish several weeks worth of work in a couple of days, not needing to sleep or eat. Because of what has often felt like a war waging in my head and heart, this dissertation is very personal to me.

How to Hold the Things I Love Without Holding it all too Close

In the last two years I've come to realize that I care, love and feel quite deeply. Perhaps, more deeply than the average person. I've always struggled with big emotions; I either feel them too deeply or not at all, often oscillating between the two in what can only be described as a

rollercoaster that suddenly breaks down mid-ride. Truthfully, I've tried to hide that I'm an emotional person for a very long time and it was only in becoming a teacher that I realized I care and feel deeply.

Becoming a teacher was a dream come true because I idolized my teachers growing up. I spent much of my childhood in the foster care system, moving from foster home to group home and back again several times; I didn't have many parental figures in my life I could model myself after. My teachers were these caring, nurturing adults in my life who pushed me to want better for myself, who praised me for the work I did and how creative I was. They taught me to love music and art, to find my voice in writing, that I was very bad at math and should not pursue a career that required math skills beyond middle-school and that I was capable of doing anything I wanted. And I believed them. I knew when I was six, on one of my first few days of kindergarten, that I wanted to be a teacher. I kept that promise until I was twenty-six, finally becoming a teacher before promptly deciding to never teach in a K-12 classroom ever again.

Teaching elementary and middle school was very difficult for me. I struggled to put in boundaries with the children I taught, often seeing their struggles with their learning, their personal lives at home, their mental health, and taking it on as my own. I worked in some of the most challenging and privileged neighbourhoods in Toronto, struggling to reconcile the disparity between the two. Staff rooms were the things made out nightmares; the teachers I once idolized and looked up to would speak poorly of their students, venting their inevitable frustrations out on children who (in my eyes) were victims of a system that cannot and would not help them. I spent a month crying when one of my students tried to end their life during recess. They were 10.

Teaching was the most rewarding and challenging experience of my life thus far. I was not prepared for feeling emotionally drained but also fulfilled by these children, nor was I prepared for the grief and trauma I had not processed from my own childhood to come to the surface.

In a practicum debrief during one of my teacher-education courses, I was recounting how difficult it was for me to teach. Not in the lesson planning, the grading—the things we often hear teachers talk about—but emotionally. Someone responded, “you can’t care that much. You’re not going to be able to solve all their problems in the month you’re there. You just have to do the best you can.” I remember feeling instantly ashamed that I could not push it down and move on. Why was I so emotional teaching? What was it about these kids that really got to me? *That classmate was right*, I thought. I can’t solve their problems. But that did not stop me from caring about them.

My ability to care—to see pain, injustice, grief, and suffering—is a gift, one I’m trying to learn how to not feel a deep sense of shame about, while also not letting it consume me. I haven’t quite figured it out yet. This gift is also an incredible burden, one that I carry everyday and can unfold in behavior that is suffocating, smothering and overwhelming to some.

Finding Care

This dissertation was born out of a deep sense of personal responsibility to others; to the families whose stories I worked with on the LGBTQ Families Speak Out project, the community of people who continue to support me and the radical QTBIPOC educators and activists whose ability to care and seek justice remind me that learning how to care for others is a lifelong journey.

I knew writing about care would feel fulfilling, afterall, it's an ethos and a way of living that I have been unintentionally practicing my entire life. What I was not expecting was to learn how to take better care of myself. In my frantic efforts to ease the pain of the world around me, I somehow forget to take care of my own mental, emotional and physical well-being. The writing of this dissertation, the countless labourious hours spent talking to QTBIPOC teachers, analyzing their words, sending "*what am I doing?*" emails to my supervisor was difficult. This, coupled with the grief of an ending relationship, the realization of being autistic and disintegrating mental and physical health inevitably took its toll on me.

But this was different. I couldn't do what I wanted to actually do (self-implode and disappear). I had collected all this data, bore witness to some of the most beautiful and heartbreaking stories of care and carelessness and felt so profoundly responsible to make sure these stories were read. So I did what I never do and decided it was time to care for myself. I quit many of the jobs that took up my time, dedicated myself to being more vulnerable and honest in therapy and started accepting care from the people in my life. I sobbed and had panic attacks every day while writing this dissertation, frequently abandoning it completely for a week at a time and returning reluctantly. And while the reason that always brought me back to writing was never out of joy or excitement, writing this dissertation ultimately created space for joy and self-care in my life where there had previously been none.

I share these parts of who I am and this story for many reasons. I believe stories have a way of connecting us in ways we have yet to fully appreciate in the academy. Beyond that, this dissertation is about care; care between educators, between racialized, queer and trans people, and caring for ourselves in the work towards justice and joy. Who I am, the things I have

experienced, witnessed and desire for our future, is sewn into every word of these chapters that theorize and argue for a queer ethic of care in schools. That work, of community and individual care, was brought to life in the classrooms of the QTBIPOC educators I interviewed. Their ability to show up for others and themselves while addressing systemic issues of white supremacy and colonialism is the pinnacle of care work, the foundation for this dissertation and the reason I continue to do this work.

Methodology

Qualitative Research in the Interpretive/Critical Paradigm

This research study is situated within qualitative educational research in the interpretive and critical paradigm. Patti Lather (1991) separates qualitative research into three categories: understand, interrogate and deconstruct. While some of this language is problematic, I find it helpful in clarifying my epistemological, ontological and ethical orientations to my research. Traditionally, interpretive research is meant to simply understand and explore in an in-depth manner and not to generalize (Bhattacharya, 2017). Whereas if the purpose of a qualitative research project is to then we would take into account the social location, identities and experiences of the participants for the purposes of highlighting issues of inequity and power (Bhattacharya, 2017). Interpretivism takes into account the cultural and historical interpretations of our world (Bhattacharya, 2017) while not “testing out” ideas or theories before the research has begun (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2011).

The critical paradigm focuses on “emancipatory” research that is meant to empower, critically examine and take action against power imbalances and injustice (Lather, 1992). Emancipatory research requires theoretical and methodological approaches that create pathways

to enact change through praxis: critical self-reflection, gaining a deeper and richer understanding of oppression and action against those oppressions (Lather, 1986).

Critical theories such as critical race theory are situated within the critical paradigm and look at how different forms of oppression (either singular or intersecting) impact the lives of people who face systemic marginalization (Bhattacharya, 2017). A central part of engaging with critical research is to investigate how critical bifocality functions: situating educational conflicts and controversies within a larger framework of structural injustices that interrogate larger power systems and the conditions they create (Fine, 2016).

As I pull from both interpretive and critical paradigms, my goals of this research is both to understand and then interrogate in a cyclical process that is iterative. I pull from both of these paradigms as a way of situating the nature of the research, while also honouring the theoretical conversations I engage with and my own social justice perspective. Because of my own identities and experiences, I know I'm likely to look deeper into my research for information that centers issues of power, access, whiteness and coloniality. I have already discussed in depth my orientation towards care work and an ethic of care, one that is informed by Chatzidakis et al. (2020) who situate an ethic of care within a larger network of care practices from the individual to the global. Because of this approach in my own work and the theoretical discussions I engage with, my work aims to both understand and then interrogate at the same time.

Methodological Framework: Interviews, Stories and Art-Based Reflections

I used semistructured interviews as well as natural conversations as my primary mode of inquiry, supported by art-based responses from the participants. Semistructured interviews were best suited for this work as it created a structure that can be prepared in advance with probes and

thematic questions, but allow for flexibility. This helped create a sense of consistency across interviews and allowed me to compare responses for each question for the participants in the study during data analysis (Bhattacharya, 2017). Natural conversations in qualitative interviewing involves an equal exchange between the researcher and the participant (Bhattacharya, 2017). This type of interviewing allows the participant to ask the researcher questions. These two interviewing approaches allows for two things to occur: (1) research questions will be addressed through prepared questions in the semistructured interviews and (2) more nuanced, relaxed conversations could bring light to the tensions educators face when engaging in care work with QTBIPOC youth; this might not be revealed in the semistructured portion of the interview, as the formality of it might not give space for these tensions to arise. When we talk in community or in relationship with people, in an exchange that is more mutual like in natural conversations, participants might feel more safe and open to express the difficulties they encounter.

Re/Storying

This research details the stories and experiences of QTBIPOC educators working in classrooms to provide care for their students. It was only after I had finished data collection and began data analysis that the emerging theme of stories appeared. While qualitative researchers often refer to the words they have collected in interviews as “data” I have begun to see them as stories. Viewing the words and art shared with me as stories allowed for a more expansive and nuanced understanding of how QTBIPOC people have historically and continue to position themselves within a timeline of resistance and resurgence. In trying to ground this understanding of storying or re-storying, I turned to Indigenous and BIPOC literature within and outside of the

academy.

Shawn Wilson (2008) notes that it is impossible to research without acknowledging the researcher and the people they are researching. In centering our emotions, relationships and environments in which we are all collectively a part of, we begin to cultivate relationships with one another and the land. Wilson's (2008) writing continues to argue for and envision a future in which relationships and the stories created from relationships are central to the ways we conduct research.

Broadly speaking, storying is one way many Indigenous communities have not only kept alive their traditions, cultures and beliefs, but have ensured their future. Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012) writes in their book *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and Indigenous peoples*, that re-storying is one way that Indigenous communities can fight for decolonization. The focus on dialogue and conversations in community with others provides a space to individually and communally understand each other. Dr. Jamaica Osorio (2021) shares the same sentiment. Their work, which explores Native Hawaiian concepts of ethics, relationality, desire, land and memory, also argues for a methodological approach to (re)membering Indigenous forms of intimacies (Osorio, 2021). In writing about embodied ways Native Hawaiians have (re)membered themselves throughout history despite the ongoing colonialism and pillaging of Hawaiian land, Osorio argues for a queer, feminist form of storying that recenters the land, the stories of the people who live on it and the desire for a Hawaiian future free of colonialism. The focus on storying and restorying can be found within the literature of many queer and Indigenous scholars (Smith, 2012; Osorio, 2021; Patel, 2016; Mahuika, 2015; Pedro, Carlos and Mburu, 2016) who remind us that "our collective desires for educational, political, and social change are forged

because of our commitment to sustaining meaningful relationships as well as our refusal to ignore our impact on each other” (Pedro, Carlos and Mburu, 2016, p. 667).

Storying and restorying is also a way that Black scholars who work in critical race studies have come to understand their role in advocating for just futures. They have often done this through a process of counterstorytelling. Counterstorytelling is rooted in critical race theory; it centers and celebrates the lived experiences of people who are silenced and erased from dominant narratives (Delgado, 1989; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001, 2002). Counterstorytelling as a methodological approach allows researchers to enact a form of resistance by making visible the structures that have defined Black communities while creating space to re story experiences by reclaiming the power to tell stories (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001; Wagaman, Obejero & Gregory, 2018). This methodology also creates space for more nuanced understanding and discussions of identity through an intersectional lens (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002; Wagaman, Obejero & Gregory, 2018).

What is evident is that Black and Indigenous communities have relied on the power of stories to not only situate themselves within a history of oppression they have faced, but also provide a means of looking beyond the present, towards a future of thriving and justice. Methodologically, this approach fits within the research I have conducted and uses the idea of storying and restorying (or counterstorytelling) to understand the ways in which QTBIPOC educators understand and practice a queer ethic of care. They do this by vulnerably sharing their stories, theorizing about ways they understand and practice a queer, disruptive form of care in schools as a way to imagine or story desired futures for themselves outside of colonialism and whiteness.

Art-Based Reflections

Art-based reflections were also employed as part of this research study. Arts-based approaches to qualitative research combine art-making with qualitative research methods, in this case, interviewing. The basic premise of arts-based approaches is to integrate scholarship, the creative arts, and research methodologies (Bhattacharya, 2017). Not only is this information more accessible during data dissemination, art-making can create moments of deep reflection that allow for more embodied emotions to arise. Robin Kelley (2002), whose work informs my analytical framework, has written about poetic knowledge. Kelley's (2002) understanding of poetic knowledge comes from Aimee Cesaire (1945), noting that it is a "form of knowledge that, for a moment, allows us to transcend the immediate everyday realities that confine our capacity to dream, imagine, and hope" (Kelly, 2002, p. 29). Kelley reminds us that our collective imagination may be the most revolutionary power available to us, and "yet as intellectuals we have failed miserably to grapple with its political and analytical importance" (Kelly, 2002). For Kelley, poetic knowledge allows for ruptures through art that reveal insights and ways to reimagine a new social order. This process of rupture and repair, fuelled by affect, embodiment, is brought on by art and art-making. I have always believed that art allows us to feel and heal more deeply and authentically than we can imagine. It helps us feel connected to our bodies in ways that our minds often limit or intellectualize. For this reason, art-based reflections were a crucial part in the research process as they allowed for deeper, more layered understandings of the experiences of the participants in ways that the interview could not. Doing this enabled the participants to have more range in the ways they expressed and understood themselves.

Data Collection

Design and Methods

Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, all interviews took place online using the video conferencing platform Zoom. Each participant engaged in two in-depth interviews (one semistructured and the other a natural conversation) with me in July 2021.

I designed the interview questions with both my research questions and my conceptual ideas in mind. This means that I aligned how my two larger research questions (*How do QTBIPOC educators practice a queer ethic of care? How do QTBIPOC educator practice a queer ethic of care?*) with some of the concepts that emerged in the literature, such as the care work and labour of QTBIPOC activists and care pedagogies in K-12 schools. I did this to ensure that the answers to the interview questions I asked would answer my larger research questions and also be rooted in the literature I was engaging with. (see Figure 1).

The three participants in this study also created art-based responses to prompts throughout their interviews. I asked them to answer each prompt throughout the two interviews, documenting how their ideas of ethics and care work evolved and deepened in their art. These prompts aligned with not only the available literature about care work but with my theoretical and analytical frameworks. This was done to ensure that the art the participants provided could be analyzed alongside the interviews and speak to one another. Some of these prompts included: explore your first memory of care in school(s); a meaningful experience in your education, a moment that showed you what care was, a moment that you remember feeling not cared for; explore your identities (queer/trans/POC, etc) as an educator, how you see yourself and your identities in education/schools, barriers you might face to doing care work; explore your

understanding of what care could look like for QTBIPOC youth; what do you want for your students/youth that you work with? What would your version of caring schools, practices, curriculum, bodies, etc, look like? All participants were given the option to present their art in the format of their choosing; collectively, they submitted poems and visual art. In total, there were three art-based pieces from each participant. I wanted to provide an opportunity for participants to reflect and document before, during and after our interviews because the idea of care and ethics often brings up a lot of emotions and tensions for people once they start to think about it.

Study Participants and Recruitment

All of the participants in this study were recruited using social media. I posted a flyer on my Twitter account and as people retweeted the post, it was shared across the platform reaching QTBIPOC educators across Ontario. Two of the three participants who reached out to work with me completed the requirements of this study. After finishing their interview and art-based responses, the third participant withdrew their data from the study, and I found another person to participate in the study. I ensured that at every possible instance, the participants were guaranteed that I would follow institutional ethical protocols, meaning their names, ages, exact locations and place of employment would remain anonymous. I received consent verbally and through writing. I also made sure the participants were guaranteed my own sense of personal ethics. This meant that during member checks (sending interview transcripts back to participants to check) I made sure to let them know of the potential impact having their words and art documented in a dissertation could have on them. While I wanted all of their words and art to live in this dissertation, it would have been unfair and indeed, unethical for me to not tell them that having

their words and art documented in writing forever could change what they wanted included.

Given this, we exchanged many emails, spoke on the phone and had video calls to talk through some of the parts that they did and did not want to include.

Participants

So far, I have referred to the people I interviewed in this study as participants. Moving forward, I will make every attempt to use their chosen pseudonym to refer to them. As part of my own ethics, I want to be able to name whose ideas, experiences and words I am referring to. Talking about them as “participants” makes them feel removed and somewhat distant from me and potentially the reader of this dissertation. As this research is about care and is deeply personal, I wanted their names attached to the beautiful and difficult stories they shared with me. Their names, identities and social location are as follows:

Table 1. Participants’ identity

NAME	PRONOUN	IDENTITY MARKERS
Jude	They/Them	Queer, trans nonbinary, South East Asian
Nour	They/Them	Queer, cisgender, Pakistani, Iranian
Blake	They/Them	Queer, trans, nonbinary, Black, Indigenous, Mohawk

Data Analysis

Analytical Framework: Radical Imagination

This study's analysis is informed by Robin Kelley's (2002) writing in *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* to tease apart how educators conceptualize their ideas and practices about care with QTBIPOC youth. Ginwright (2008) notes that we need to dream, imagine, and hope for a new future. He conceptualized this through Kelley's (2002) work in *Freedom Dream: The Black Radical Imagination*, in which he wrote for "anyone bold enough to still dream" (p. 7). His writing goes on to detail how revolutionary dreams come from political engagement and collective social movements that generate new knowledge, theory and questions. Education has always been political, and research within the educational context remains a political project for me in which I explore how care is understood and practiced. I adapt Ginwright (2008) and Kelley's (2002) framework of "dream, imagine and hope" to my own understanding of how revolutionary work begins. I propose a framework called a "radical imagination" (based on Kelley, 2002) that analyzes how educators "dream and care" for their QTBIPOC students. Dreaming begins the process by asking and analyzing how educators are imagining and conceptualizing what a queer ethic of care looks like. Some of this theorizing has started to come together through the literature available on care work, but is largely designed by Jude, Nour and Blake. Care is the final stage of analysis, where I can understand how educators are actually practicing an ethic of care with QTBIPOC youth through the tensions they encounter. These points of analysis along with thematic analysis (Bhattacharya, 2017) will guide my inquiry into my research question, which also focuses on the ways educators envision and practice a queer ethic of care.

Analyzing the Data

After all the interviews were completed, I began the process of analyzing them thematically first and then following the radical imagination framework described earlier. I read through the interviews several times to familiarize myself with their words, often listening to their interviews while reading along. As a first pass of analysis, I printed off their interviews. During this process, I circled words that stood out to me, phrases that were evocative and highlighted any recurring themes that I wanted to look deeper into with my analytical framework. For the second pass, I used the ideas of “dream” and “care” from my analytical framework to look deeper into the words and art I had collected. This process was made easier as I had already organized my research questions, conceptual ideas, literature and interview questions to line up. After finishing data analysis, I was left with several overarching themes and findings that were intricate and interconnected. This became difficult to parse out which findings would be written about in this dissertation and also became a challenge separating what literature would support the data. Ultimately, I settled for writing both analysis chapters to answer one of my broader research questions and tried to separate them despite their evident overlap. This ended up looking like: chapter 1, where Blake, Nour and Jude theorize their understanding of a queer ethic of care, and chapter 2, where they talk about their practices that put a queer ethic of care into place.

Table 2. How do QTBIPOC educators understand an ethic of care? (RQ1)

RQ 1: How do QTBIPOC educators understand an ethic of care?

CODES	ANALYTICAL CONCEPT	CONCEPTUAL QUESTIONS/IDEAS	LITERATURE	QUOTES FROM DATA
For RQ 1	DREAM (understand)	Care Work <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ as systemic ○ anti-racist, anti-colonial, queered, feminist, eco-justice, etc. ○ Justice vs Care Relationships/relations ○ Autonomy (agency/disability) ○ Care work as feminine/white ○ POC versions of care ○ Queer/transgressive forms of care 	(Chatzidakis et al, 2020) (Clement, 1996) (Caine et al., 2020; Vlieghe, 2019; Slote, 2007; Chatzidakis et al, 2020; Wilson, 2008).	

Study Findings

Two major findings emerged in this study that answer my research questions “*How do QTBIPOC educators understand a queer ethic of care? How do QTBIPOC educator practice a queer ethic of care?*” The first: (1) a queer ethic of care is nuanced and expansive, disruptive and transgressive and an individualized practice that takes place within a care web and the second: (2) care as it exists in schools right now, is inherently white, colonial and violent and has forced QTBIPOC educators to imagine new forms of care practices. These disruptive practices include creating (1) authentic, fluid, mutually vulnerable relationships with students (2) explicitly anticolonial, antiracist moments in their teaching and interactions with students and (3) affirmation and recognition as moments of healing. Collectively, these disruptive and transgressive practices create space for mutual healing for both queer and trans racialized

students and teachers and paves the way for queer futurity (Munoz, 2009) and thriving (Darling-Hammond, 2020). The following chapter delves into the theoretical framework of this study (a queer ethic of care) which was initially developed as an idea of mine, but expanded upon and fully theorized by Jude, Blake and Nour. This is then followed by the analysis chapters where the stories and experiences of Jude, Blake and Nour are shared.

Chapter 2

Weaving Conversations of Care, Gender, Sexuality and Race

“Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare.”

— Audre Lorde

Theoretical Framework

A Queer Ethic of Care

In the previous chapter I outlined some of the foundational elements of this dissertation: the literature in which I pull from to understand care work, care pedagogies and gender and sexuality work, the methodological approach to this study and how I positioned within this writing and the components of data collection that led to the findings documented in this dissertation.

Towards the beginning of starting this research, I came up with a preliminary concept which would become this theoretical framework chapter. I had started writing about ethics and care with Dr. Tara Goldstien (Owis & Goldstein, 2021) and my colleagues Dr. Pam Baer and Dr. Jenny Salisbury (Owis et al., 2022) and that work which explored how care, gender and sexuality collided together in research settings, influenced the creation of this chapter. While I had some preliminary writing done and a few directions I wanted to explore deeper from the emerging literature, most of the theorizing about a queer ethic of care comes from Blake, Nour and Jude who detail their understanding of a queer ethic of care in their interviews and art. As a result, some of this theorizing is iterative and collaborative. My contribution to this chapter is bringing together the various conversations happening (or missing) from the academic literature on a

queer ethic of care, while including some of the concepts and practices Blake, Nour and Jude shared with me. For the purposes of writing this dissertation, these chapters are separated. What will become clear after reading the analysis chapters of this dissertation, is the ways in which the theoretical framework, the interviews and analysis inform one another and are intertwined in ways that are rich and informative. Much of the literature in this chapter comes from nonacademic sources that support the theorizing Jude, Blake and Nour provided in their interviews. What this indicates is there is a gap within academic literature on how to support, care and affirm QTBIPOC teachers and students in K-12 settings and that academic conversations about K-12 care theories and pedagogies could benefit from looking at the literature and writing available in public, community writing.

I begin this chapter by reminding readers of the findings of this study, before outlining the various conversations that begin to explore a queer ethic of care. One of the major findings of this study detailed how QTBIPOC educators understand a queer ethic of care, some of which is documented in this chapter, supported by existing writing. Blake, Nour and Jude understood a queer ethic of care as nuanced and expansive, disruptive and transgressive and an individualized practice that takes place within a care web. The other finding outlines how QTBIPOC practice a queer ethic of care, which is supported by some the pedagogical literature in this chapter. These practices are a response to care as it exists in schools right now which is inherently white, colonial and violent. As a result it has forced QTBIPOC educators to imagine new forms of care practices. These disruptive practices include creating (1) authentic, fluid, mutually vulnerable relationships with students (2) explicitly anticolonial, antiracist moments in their teaching and interactions with students and (3) affirmation and recognition as moments of healing. Because

this theorizing is quickly emerging and has yet to find roots in academic literature, some of the ideas and practices later explored in the analysis chapters are not written about in this chapter. This is because there is no literature yet available on how QTBIPOC educators understand and practice affirming queered, trans-gressive care with students and is indicative of the necessary nature of this research.

Care Work: An Untold History

Care work continues to draw from critical feminist scholars who write about care ethics in psychology and education (Lorde, 1988; Noddings, 2013; Tronto, 1993; Gilligan, 1982; Noddings, 1984). It is important to note that the theorizing of care work and labour is and should be credited to women of colour (hooks, 2000; Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1981; Lorde, 1988) and BIPOC communities (Rose, 2021). Women of colour (specifically Black, Indigenous, Latinx trans women) are the leaders and frontline activists in queer and trans communities who engage in solidarity work across lines of difference to sustain and care for one another (Tronto, 1993). We note this because our current understanding of care work is deeply gendered, racialized and sexualized (Owis & Goldstein, 2021) and is rooted in cisheteronormative ideals of the family that come from white, Eurocentered, colonial gender systems (Lugones 2007, as cited in Malatino, 2020; Chatzidakis et al., 2020). For this reason, care work has been conceptualized in the context of white cisgender women giving care (Tronto, 1993; Chatzidakis et al., 2020) instead of the care that exists in queer and trans communities outside of familial structures. Within this existing structure, care work often neglects the needs and contributions of disabled queer, trans, Black, Indigenous, people of colour (QTBIPOC). While second wave feminism paved the way for white women to enter the public workforce, this meant that more poor,

immigrant, nonwhite women shouldered the bulk of the care work. This unfolded in exploitative transnational care chains where women from the Global South migrate to the Global North to find jobs as care workers (Chatzidakis et al., 2020). Racism combined with gender and global inequality to devalue the labour of care, ensuring the low pay and exploitation of many racialized care workers to this day (Hughes et al., 2005). With this in mind, knowing my own positionalities, commitments and orientation towards social justice work, I move beyond Noddings (1984; 2013) work by recentering the work of racialized queer and trans women in my work moving forward, as their ideas and labour often go unrecognized and uncited in academia.

Disability, Feminism and Care Webs

White feminism and disability studies, including disability justice scholars, have historically had incompatible meanings of care work (Hughes et al., 2005). For many people experiencing different forms of disability, “care” is a word to be resisted. The word “care” can inhibit independence, self-determination and agency (Hughes et al., 2005; Chatzidakis et al., 2020; Motta & Bennett, 2018) while for many white feminists care is an emotional aspect involving the caring for and caring about others (Noddings, 1984). Disability activists have consistently argued for a more expansive definition and understanding of an ethic of care, one that recognizes how women and disabled folks are similarly marginalized and both share an embodied interdependence (Hughes et al., 2005; Motta & Bennett, 2018). There is an emerging call within community settings to recenter the QTBIPOC community and their advocacy in the disability justice movement. They argue that the movement has been co-opted from white disability justice activists whose bodies and ideas take up space and deny QTBIPOC folks access

to care (Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018). A queer/trans and racialized definition of disability justice comes from Patty Berne (2017) who shares,

While a concrete and radical move forward toward justice for disabled people, the Disability Rights Movement simultaneously invisibilized the lives of peoples who lived at intersecting junctures of oppression—disabled people of color, immigrants with disabilities, queers with disabilities, trans and gender non-conforming people with disabilities, people with disabilities who are houseless, people with disabilities who are incarcerated, people with disabilities who have had their ancestral lands stolen, amongst others. . . . Disability Justice activists, organizers, and cultural workers understand that able-bodied supremacy has been formed in relation to other systems of domination and exploitation. The histories of white supremacy and ableism are inextricably entwined, both forged in the crucible of colonial conquest and capitalist domination. One cannot look at the history of US slavery, the stealing of indigenous lands, and US imperialism without seeing the way that white supremacy leverages ableism to create a subjugated “other” that is deemed less worthy/abled/smart/capable. . . . We cannot comprehend ableism without grasping its interrelations with heteropatriarchy, white supremacy, colonialism and capitalism. Each system benefits from extracting profits and status from the subjugated “other.” 500+ years of violence against black and brown communities includes 500+ years of bodies and minds deemed “dangerous” by being nonnormative. A Disability Justice framework understands that all bodies are unique and essential, that all bodies have strengths and needs that must be met. We know that we are powerful not despite the complexities of our bodies, but because of them. . . . Disability Justice holds a vision born out of collective struggle, drawing upon the legacies of cultural and spiritual resistance within a thousand underground paths, igniting small persistent fires of rebellion in everyday life. Disabled people of the global majority—black and brown people—share common ground confronting and subverting colonial powers in our struggle for life and justice. There has always been resistance to all forms of oppression, as we know through our bones that there have simultaneously been disabled people visioning a world where we flourish, that values and celebrates us in all our myriad beauty. (p.149)

This definition of disability justice not only recenters racialized, queer and trans bodies and knowledges as the core of disability justice, it explicitly names the systemic violence which is perpetuated against these communities as a way of addressing institutional harm within a capitalist, white, colonial matrix (Driskill, 2011 as cited in Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018). It is important to note that the psychological and emotional violence which has been ingrained into

QTBIPOC communities was created as a form of social, economic and political control (Clare, 2017; Schweik, 2010; Taylor, 2017; Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018). When considering how white activists have continued to co-opt the disability justice movement and the forms of queered care work QTBIPOC activists engage it, we can begin to grasp the harm that is being inflicted.

Understanding the principles of disability justice is one entry point into engaging with the calls for action from QTBIPOC activists. These principles include centering intersectionality, having leaders whose lived experiences align with the causes they aim to address, using an anticapitalist politic, solidarity across social justice movements, recognizing the wholeness of each person, sustainable activism that is well paced, a commitment to cross-disability solidarity, celebrating interdependence and ensuring collective liberation and access (Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018).

This is a stark contrast to the hegemonic ways in which disability and care has been practiced outside of QTBIPOC communities. Family and cultural ideas of the family have depended on cisheteronormative definitions as the center of care (Malatino, 2020) whereas a queer and trans concept of care might involve the use of care webs (Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018). Piepzna-Samarasinha (2018) describes care webs as webs of care between other queer and trans people of colour. Care work as it is conceptualized by QTBIPOC activists and educators centers on disability justice which is a movement and network of interlocking communities of care (Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018). These communities center “sick and disabled people of colour, queer and trans disabled folks of colour and everyone who is marginalized in mainstream disability organizing” (Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018, p. 22). Care work, then, as a branch of disability justice, positions QTBIPOC disabled people as experts in creating networks of

community care (Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018) in a social system that does not guarantee ethical care for everyone. Care webs are networks that provide pathways to all forms of care without shame or judgement, and take into account the realities of gendered, raced and classed dynamics that are embedded within our medical and educational systems (Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018; Fink, 2021). These care webs have always existed are perhaps best illustrated during the HIV/AIDS crisis in the 1980s and 1990s where queer and trans communities formed communities that responded to state denial of care (Fink, 2021). QTBIPOC activists came together during this time to provide care for one another in the face of systemic neglect and widespread misinformation. The HIV/AIDS crisis, which disproportionately impacted Black, Brown, Indigneous and other racialized queer/trans communities, created a resurgence of grassroot, counter-hegemonic forms of caremongering that radically redistributed funds and resources not limited to food, medical supplies and information, housing, transportation and mental health supports (Fink, 2021). Because care work is so poorly remunerated (Malatino, 2020) and difficult to access given the barriers for queer and trans communities, there has been a rise of grassroots movements and care collectives that resemble care webs: mutual aid funds, caremongering, providing support such as food sharing, rides, medication, and advice for QTBIPOC (Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018). In recognizing this work, we collectively shift our understanding of care work to a queered and transgressive model: one that continues to develop an ethic of care that ensures survival (Malatino, 2020) enhances joy (Noddings, 2013) and paves the way for queer thrival (Greteman, 2016, 2018).

In keeping with these and other scholars who have written about the ethics of care, my understanding of care work is one that is political and as a form of resistance (Ahmed, 2014;

Lorde, 1988; Malatino, 2020; Owis & Goldstein, 2021; Tronto, 1993). Feminist scholars have regularly indicated that we cannot understand care work without positioning it within a political context that takes into account “institutionalized structures of power in inequity . . . that perpetuates forms of racial, gender, and class exploitation while, at the same time, veiling their operation” (Tronto, 1993, p. 110). In making visible the systemic power dynamics operating within care work, we can better understand the importance of enacting an ethic of care when working with queer and trans youth of colour who exist at multiple and simultaneous intersections of oppression. Other scholars have also noted that understanding self-care and community care is “an act of political warfare” (Lorde, 1988, p. 130). Self and community care is often dismissed as neoliberalism (Ahmed, 2014) when in reality self and community care is a way of resisting harmful and unethical systems that ask you to disappear. These collective ideas about care work have indicated the need for a relational, queered, antiracist, anticolonial, transgressive form of care work that resembles care webs one that radically reorganizes our community and centers healing and justice (Malatino, 2020).

Feminist, Queer, Antiracist, Eco-socialist Care

The ideas detailed above have informed my own perspective and understanding of care work and an ethic of care. I understand care work as attending to the physical and emotional needs of others but also as a social capacity and activity involving the nurturing of all that is necessary for the welfare and thriving of life (Chatzidakis et al., 2020). Care means recognizing and embracing our interdependencies including our ability to provide the political, social, material, and emotional conditions that allow other people, living creatures, the planet and nonhuman things to thrive (Chatzidakis et al., 2020).

A fundamental piece of writing that has guided my inquiry into care work is *The Care Manifesto* (Chatzidakis et al., 2020). In this book, the authors, known as the care collective, create a framework for thinking and practicing care that resonates with my work, politics and perspectives. They situate an ethic of care within a framework of careless worlds, markets, states, communities and kinships. They trace how care, and a lack of care, connects the various levels of our society, creating a care crisis (Chatzidakis et al., 2020). Careless worlds focus on neoliberal economic growth, creating an inherently careless practice of prioritizing the economy over the wellbeing of people. Multinational corporations thrive under this model, and inequities between the Global North and South are intensified. Careless worlds create careless markets that uphold capitalism. These markets enable certain modes of market-mediated and commoditized care in which neoliberalism undermines all forms of care and caring that do not serve its agenda of profit extraction for the few (Chatzidakis et al., 2020). This is a colonizing market tactic that is uncaring by design. Neoliberal markets are controlled by extremely powerful marketplace actors that are reliant on governments for their “free” markets to function (Chatzidakis et al., 2020). This paves the way for careless states, where the notion of care is individualized as we neglect to recognize interconnectedness. Here, the defunding of social programming, social welfare, privatization of healthcare and education is rampant. From this uncaring communities thrive. Those employed in the care sector are routinely exploited, understaffed, paid poorly and given little to no job security (Chatzidakis et al., 2020). Community resources are depleted in a culture that places profit over people, policing and surveillance rise and the community is weakened (Chatzidakis et al., 2020). The last function in this framework, careless kinships, shows up in the traditional nuclear family. While queer and trans people are included into the mainstream, they

are only permitted there so long as they reproduce the traditions of a nuclear family under expectations of homonormativity (Chatzidakis et al., 2020).

The argument that Chatzidakis et al. (2020) make in their book is that the everyday careless acts on every level—globally, economically, community, individual—need to change in order for care work and an ethic of care to really work. This is no easy task. Similar to when thinking about how to dismantle the patriarchy, decolonization, or cisheteronormativity, the work that is needed in order to be successful in creating a caring world, relies on everyone and every level of human organization. This means we need to reimagine the world as it is, including our educational system. We must reclaim forms of genuinely collective and community life, adopt alternatives to capitalist markets and resist the marketization of care and care infrastructures (Chatzidakis et al., 2020) in order to ensure we can all partake in the joys and burdens of an ethic of care. They argue for a “feminist, queer, anti-racist, eco-socialists perspectives where care and care practices are understood as broadly as possible” (Chatzidakis et al., 2020, p. 22).

These collective ideas are similar to the ways in which some Indigenous scholars and writers have talked about their relationship and responsibility to one another and the land they are on. Kimmerer’s (2020) work in *Braiding Sweetgrass* is an excellent example of this. They write about how all living beings, whether that be plants, the land, insects or animals, all offer us lessons of how to be in relation with one another in harmonious, queer ways. They write that the awakening of our ecological consciousness, something that has been stripped from us as we become more removed from the land, can help us understand how we are living in a reciprocal relationship with one another and the land (Kimmerer, 2020; Chatzidakis et al., 2020; Regan,

2010). This is a queer ecologist perspective, one that intertwines both queered ideas of relationships and dynamics and Indigenous ways of being in community with one another.

What a queer ethic of care offers then—knowing I situate care work as a web of relational, queered, antiracist, anticolonial, feminist, trans-gressive ideas and practices—is a way of thinking about care practices in educational settings with queer and trans youth of colour as many of our schools face a crisis of caring (Slote, 2007).

Care Pedagogies

How do teachers understand how to practice care in their classrooms? What does a care pedagogy look like? Freire (2005) wrote, “it is impossible to teach without the courage to love, without the courage to try a thousand times before giving in. In short, it is impossible to teach without a forged, invented, well-thought-out capacity to love” (p. 5). Research has proven this, showing that when teacher candidates experience authentic caring within the space of supportive relationships in schools, they emerge equipped to care in more authentic, culturally responsive ways for their students (Zygmunt et al., 2018). According to Noddings (2013), care is expressed as teachers learn how to best meet the needs of students through everyday classroom experiences. There is no single model of caring, but rather it is through everyday interactions that we arrive at what it means to care and be cared-for, enriching both students and teachers (Reyes, Banda and Caldas, 2020).

Pedagogy of Care Concepts

Wasner (2019) writes that if educational practice is to be ethical, there needs to be a connection between values and practice; if caring is what we value, then our practice should reflect this. The importance of a pedagogy of care has been well documented and is consistently

shown to be a crucial part of the teaching profession (hooks, 1994; Mehrotra, 2021; Owusu-Ansah and Kyei-Blankson, 2016). How we conceptualize care as a practice is complicated, after all, we all have different perspectives, histories, values and identities that inform our idea of what a pedagogy of care is. Milligan and Wiles (2010) argue, “care and care relationships are located in, shaped by, and shape particular spaces and places” (p. 736). When considering the implications of race, culture, class, sexuality, gender along the axis of power and privilege, a broad understanding of a pedagogy of care becomes difficult to define. Despite the necessity to unravel and examine the ways a pedagogy of care is understood individually and collectively, caring and its politics often remain unexamined in teacher education (Pennington, Brock, & Ndura, 2012; Zygmunt et al., 2018). This is particularly troubling when white, middle-class educators continue to work in historically marginalized communities, where their notions of care is deeply colonial, deficit-based and patronizing (Gay, 2010; Mehrotra, 2021). Here we can see that whiteness and coloniality operate together in schools where caring practices can easily become a way to reinforce the normative and oppress rather than liberate (Zygmunt et al., 2018). As Bonilla-Silva (2003) argues, “people cannot like or love people they don’t see” (p. 141) and given that we tend not to “see through our eyes or hear through our ears, but through our beliefs” (p. 46), it is imperative that preservice and in-service teachers interrogate their cultural lenses and positionalities (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2011; Zygmunt et al., 2018). This is particularly important to consider within the context of my own research. I’m interested in exploring how teachers conceptualize but also practice an ethic of care when working with queer and trans youth of colour. Their understandings of care may be steeped in colonial, white, middle-class notions of care that are in fact, deeply uncaring towards QTBIPOC youth. As a beginning point, I outline

several ideas and practices across the field of a pedagogy of care that encapsulate how scholars and educators alike understand how to practice an ethic of care.

Recognition

Seeing our students for who they are, where they come from and the endless possibilities of their future is an act of recognition. Care as recognition manifests as care-full pedagogical practices which acknowledge the complexities and wisdoms of students that come, often following on from experiences of exclusion and misrecognitions (Fraser 2003; Motta & Bennett, 2018). This means moving beyond deficit narratives of students and their learning and committing to strengths-based knowledge. Recognising the knowledge and capabilities of all students also renders redundant deficit misrepresentations about students who transverse alternative pathways into education (Motta & Bennett, 2018). Care as recognition, means embracing the whole student without reducing them to the careless, neoliberal notions of success. Fostering care as recognition involves developing practices where students can begin to recognize their own value, worth and ability to achieve their own definitions of success (Assmann, 2013; Motta & Bennett, 2018).

Relationships, Relationality and Community

At the core of care work and an ethic of care, is the idea of love and caring as part of relationships in all forms (Caine et al., 2020). For Noddings (1984) this means that we enter into a relationship with others when we engage in care work. This involves reciprocity, where both “carer” and “cared for” take part in the relationship. These labels are not fixed or permanent but rather illustrate how two people or communities enter a continuing relationship (Caine et al., 2020; Noddings, 1984). There are, however, limitations to these positions. Unequal arrangement

in relationships, as seen in schools (teacher and student) the medical system (doctor and patient) care is not always reciprocal (Noddings, 2012; Vlieghe, 2019). These arrangements are based on normative understandings of care as a simple exchange where care is not a reciprocal act. An ethic of care is not contractual, meaning you cannot expect mutual care (Vlieghe, 2019). Caring actions are not motivated by self-serving decisions, but rather for the needs of others. Thus an ethic of care has been characterized by a concern not only for individual welfare but for good relationships (Slote, 2007). While Noddings (1984) notes that relationality and reciprocity are important for caring and requires the creation, building, and sustaining of caring relationship, they write that it is possible to have a caring stance towards people we know, but not towards people we are unlikely to meet (Noddings, 1984). In other words, Noddings defends caring not as a complement, but as an alternative to justice (Clement, 1996) and therefore is limited and outdated for the research ethic I center.

This brings an important distinction between an ethic of care and what others call an ethic of justice, where care can be extended beyond those we are in community with. These two ethics have been kept separate from one another and have focused on one dimension of human relationships to the exclusion of the other. This has resulted in extreme forms of the two ethics, in uncaring forms of justice and unjust forms of care (Clement, 1996). The individualized initial concept of an ethic of care could be interpreted as caring for those we know: family, friends, groups, nation-states and so on (Clement, 1996). *How do we extend an ethic of care beyond those limitations? How do we learn to care for others we do not know yet?* Clement (1996) argues for an ethic of justice, a form of care work that allows us to care for those who are different from us. Situating these ideas together under a shared understanding of care work, is how we can pull

from a social justice perspective while also understanding the interdependence of both an ethic of care and an ethic of justice.

Understanding how we are in relation with others is a central tenet of care work. Wilson (2008) writes about respect, reciprocity and responsibility as part of holding an Indigenous ontology and epistemology. This idea of relational accountability (Wilson, 2008) extends to all those we are in community with, including nonhuman entities, such as the land, water and animals (Slote, 2007; Chatzidakis et al., 2020; Kimmerer, 2020; Nxumalo, 2021; Patel, 2016). Building off of this, many researchers have conducted research which advocates for an ethic of care that centers a relational politic (Caine et al., 2019; Clement, 1996; Patel, 2016). Being able to practice a relational ethic of care can create space for educators and researchers alike to care for one another across lines of difference in solidarity (Chatzidakis et al., 2020; Smith, 2016; Lorde, 1988; Rose, 2021; Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018; Patel, 2016).

Given the affective component of education and the need to be in dynamic relationships with our students, using an ethic of care as a pedagogical anchor is crucial in situating care work (Mehrotra, 2021). Caring is not located in individuals, but rather in the relations with one another. Caring is an action; it is something that is done in community with others (Nicol et al., 2010). Centering a pedagogy of care within education can create space for dialogical relationships that disrupt the dominant culture and neoliberal forces in academia to feel seen and valued as whole people (Mehrotra, 2021; Motta & Bennett, 2018). Care as dialogic relationality allows for both students and teachers to be learners in relations with one another that are dynamic, multidimensional and empowering for everyone (Motta & Bennett, 2018). Caring as a dialogical approach can create a sense of healing in our relationships and communities (Motta &

Bennett, 2018). Understanding inter/intrapersonal dynamics is important for thinking through the complexities of a pedagogy of care (Motta & Bennett, 2018) especially in educational relationships between a teacher and student where there is often a power difference (Nicol et al., 2010). It should be noted that these roles of “caregiver” and “care receiver” are not fixed. In other words, students can become caregivers and teachers can receive care. This coconstruction disrupts dominant, hierarchical power dynamics between the teacher and the student, so that the wellbeing of everyone can be fostered (Reyes, Banda and Caldas, 2020). In practice this would look like, establishing a consensus of what care looks like and how it should operate in daily practice as part of an ongoing discussion between teachers and students as a way to care across differences of social location, histories and experiences (Reyes, Banda and Caldas, 2020).

I have already noted the importance of relationships above, but want to reiterate their significance in the creation of caring spaces among queer, trans and racialized communities. Caring collectives and relationships can be affirming in the face of ongoing oppression and violence (Butler, 2019; Lorde, 1988; Malatino, 2020). Relationships are often conceptualized as between individuals, whereas collective caring involves larger communities of people. Butler (2019) writes about the importance of “othermothers” in African American culture and the kinship bonds of care they created in order to support each other. Othermothering has been described by Collins (2000) as an African-American, community-based parenting strategy whereby members care for the biological children of others. This ethic of care includes the provision of educational, material, and emotional support (Butler, 2019). Caring othermothers can be relied upon for advice, informal counseling, and leadership in communities (Collins 2000). hooks (1984) contends that othermothering is a form of revolutionary parenting because it

challenges the Western idea that parenting should be limited to legal or biological relationships (Butler, 2019). Latinx/Chicanx feminists have also created caring collectives by embracing the wholeness of a person in order to address the academic, emotional, and personal needs of students (Calderón et al., 2012; Reyes, Banda and Caldas, 2020). This is similar to how disabled, queer and trans communities of colour come together to work community (Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018; Malatino, 2020) to support one another. These collectives exist outside the familial structures and are interdependent forms of care that seek to address the inequity and injustice facing QTBIPOC communities.

Authentic Care

Rolón-Dow (2005) asserts that “authentic caring” involves the concerted examination of power, social location, culture, and access to resources in any relational context, to minimize inequity and make relationships reciprocal and justice-oriented. This is juxtaposed against “aesthetic caring” (Rolón-Dow, 2005) which are characterized by “paternalistic and infantilizing ethics, [which] appeal to the archetype of teacher-as-savior, [and] employ deficit scripts as a way of framing the students’ need for care, ultimately producing symbolic violence” (Toshalis, 2012, p. 27). Aesthetic care is a “commitment to ideas or practices that purportedly lead to [school] achievement” (Valenzuela, 1999, p. 61). This is most commonly seen in teacher practices that resemble caring about students’ attendance, academic performance, and standardized test scores (Katz, 1999). This is in contrast to “authentic care” (Noddings, 2013; Valenzuela, 1999; Rolón-Dow, 2005) through which care is curated to suit the needs of students.

Embodiment and Vulnerability

The role of emotion, vulnerability and embodiment is regularly ignored within educational literature (Felten, 2017). In order to think about what a pedagogy of care looks like in practice we need to think about embodiment and vulnerability as an affective embodied practice (Motta & Bennett, 2018). The affective and embodied elements of pedagogies of care are the foundation in which care work and an ethic of care operates. In practice, this looks like sharing mutual vulnerabilities between teachers and students (Motta & Bennett, 2018; hooks, 1994; Mehrotra, 2021) recognizing and honouring the emotional labour required to center a pedagogy of care is overwhelming (Mehrotra, 2021; Motta & Bennett, 2018) and sharing personal experiences to break down power dynamics (Mehrotra, 2021). Using an affective embodied practice in care work also means having a shared understanding of care and developing a community of care (Reyes, Banda and Caldas, 2020). This means centering the body in a practice of coconstructing a shared understanding and practice of care, developing rapport and caring relationships with students so that a caring culture is cofostered in educational spaces (Reyes, Banda and Caldas, 2020). Part of this process means coconstructing knowledge and practices with students, so that all bodies regardless of social location, identity, or position have equal access in shaping care practices (Reyes, Banda and Caldas, 2020). Though education is a profession steeped in care work, it is easy to neglect how vulnerability and care work in tandem to deepen human connection (Brown, 2012).

Because of this, embodiment and vulnerability is a common thread throughout my work. My colleague, Lindsay Cavanaugh and I have started to document what we call an embodied vulnerability.. This idea is informed by trauma-informed, trans, femme and queer pedagogical

approaches. Embodiment, noting bodily sensations and affective responses while working together, relates to how some scholars have written about trans pedagogies. The body is important within trans literacy and pedagogy because trans, nonbinary, two-spirit and queer people are often hyper aware of how their body is coded and scripted within space (Galarte, 2014; Keenan, 2017). An attentiveness to the body can therefore be a way of unearthing important learning, as well as a site of liberation. This aligns with how some Black and Brown queer scholars have centred vulnerability in their world (Lewis, 2012; Nnawulezi et al., 2015; Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018). Finally, embodied vulnerability connects with Marilyn Preston's (2016) call to queer pedagogy through critical intimacy: a process where people are able to work through uncomfortable learning because they build trusting relationships that allow for nuance, messiness, risky dialogue, rupture, and repair. This process, of paying attention to our bodies as we navigate a praxis of an ethic of care, can help us create more meaningful and deep relationships that are based on authentic care.

Disruption and Action

The collaborative nature of teaching and learning in communities inevitably paves the way for moments where disruption can occur. How we foster a sense of community care within learning environments is one way we share power and disrupt the traditional hierarchy between students and teachers (Mehrotra, 2021; Wasner, 2019). This is a disruption to the individualism of the neoliberal university and to patriarchal, white, western and colonial cultural norms that are embedded within our educational system. In practice this looks like creating spaces to talk about how students can support one another, vulnerable and honest group check-ins, and caremongering and offering mutual aid between students and teachers (Mehrotra, 2021). This

process of disrupting the normative idea of care work in educational settings, provides a space where authentic and affirming care can be fostered.

Queer/Trans of Colour Critique and Critical Race Theory

While gender and sexuality frameworks often fail to critically look at how race operates in schools, conversations happening in the fields of critical race theory and queer/trans of colour critique center an analysis of how race is intertwined in systems and practices of power, privilege and oppression.

Feminists and scholars of colour (Crenshaw, 1989; Gutierrez & Lewis, 1994; Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1981; Collins, 2000; Lutz, 2015) mobilize intersectionality as a way to understand the interconnected nature of different identities and social locations. Intersectionality is interested in the overlapping of social identity categories and how these intersections are created and experienced as lived realities. It has been conceptualized as both a theory (Hill Collins, 2019) and a pedagogy (Lutz, 2015). Crenshaw (1989) argues that Black women cannot be understood through either feminist theory or antiracist discourse because both are predicated on different and conflicting histories and experiences without looking at the intersections of both identities with one framework.

Queer of colour critique (QOCC) is defined by Roderick Ferguson (2004) as a mode of critique that “interrogates social formations at the intersections of race, gender, sexuality and class, with particular interest in how those formations correspond with and diverge from nationalist ideals and practices” (p. 149). In other words, QOCC is a site of rupture and critical possibility (Ferguson, 2004) that can be mobilized as a form of critique designed to unsettle the dominant discourses and normative beliefs (McCready, 2013) across local, national, and

transnational contexts (Brockenbrough, 2013). Cathy Cohen (1997) argues that the radical potential of queer politics lies not in simply including queer people of colour into existing canons and social movements, but rather “if there is truly any radical potential to be found in the idea of queerness and the practice of queer politics, it would seem to be located in its ability to create a space in opposition to dominant norms, a space where transformational political work can begin” (p. 438). Queer of colour theorists (Ferguson 2004; Muñoz 1999; Johnson, 2016; Somerville 2000; McCready, 2013; Brockenbrough, 2016) note that though discussions about QOCC are happening outside of educational contexts, a QOCC would make a meaningful and important contribution to the educational discourses on difference, power, and social justice (Brockenbrough, 2016). Using a QOCC is central to my work in understanding how educators understand and practice care with queer and trans youth of colour. It enables me to look at how race, gender, class, sexuality interplays with schooling and education and the possibilities to disrupt and transform singular narratives of oppression and marginalization (Marquez, 2016). QOCC creates space for educators to disrupt white, colonial epistemologies that dominate knowledge production and pave the way for more transformative pedagogical practices that benefit queer and trans youth of colour (McCready, 2013). A QOCC lens seeks to unveil the social and historical forces that have produced QOC marginality, as doing so provides a backdrop for exploring strategies of resistance. Importantly, those resistances are rooted in the lives and ways of knowing and being from within QTBIPOC communities (Brockenbrough, 2015, 2016). By analyzing how queer of colour are resisting oppressive power and asserting their own agency (Brockenbrough, 2013, 2016) a QOCC provides a robust analysis and lens to look at

how neoliberalism, educational systems and social structures of power (whiteness, colonialism) operate.

Similarly, a trans of colour critique (TOCC) is an intersectional theory and pedagogical practice that places trans people of colour at the center of theorizing (Mattias de Vries, 2015; Snorton, 2017) within systems of power. Scholars have documented the need to centre the voices of trans youth of colour and their agency through an empowerment lens that moves away from deficit based narratives (Brockenbrough and Boatwright, 2013). While the literature on trans of colour critique is limited, scholarship has noted that similar to queer of colour critique, students need mentors whose identities resemble theirs, access to spaces that are intentionally racialized and trans and access to more affirming services that anticipate the needs of trans youth of colour (Brockenbrough and Boatwright, 2013).

Critical race theory (CRT) centers racialized and gendered epistemologies that recognize youth of colour as creators of knowledge outside of the white, Eurocentric ways of knowing (Delgado-Bernal, 2002). CRT has its roots in legal studies, ethnic studies and women's studies (Solórzano, 1998) though it has expanded to other disciplines such as education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). CRT in education follows five tenets: (a) the centrality of race and racism and their intersectionality with other forms of subordination, (b) the challenge to dominant ideology, (c) the commitment to social justice, (d) the centrality of experiential knowledge, and (e) a transdisciplinary perspective (Yosso, 2002). CRT addresses the social construct of race by examining the ideology of racism while shifting the center of focus from notions of white, middle class culture to the cultures of communities of colour and the wealth of knowledge, expertise and cultural capital they have (Yosso, 2002, 2005). CRT in education can be both a

theoretical and analytical framework that challenges the ways race and racism impacts educational structures, practices, and discourses (Yosso, 2005) by challenging whiteness. It is important to note that while critical race theory and queer/trans of colour critiques are essential to conceptualizing a queer ethic of care, they do not adequately address the embeddedness of colonialism. These theories argue for a more intersectional approach to queer educational scholarship that centred race. And while there is a demonstration of attentiveness to intersectionality there is little to no discussion of how coloniality reproduces whiteness (Owis and Cavanaugh, 2021). This is a common theme throughout the literature and one I struggled to address when working with the participants of this study to theorize what a queer ethic of care encapsulates. In chapter four (the second analysis chapter) I explore the connections between whiteness, colonialism, race, gender and sexuality as it relates to how educators are forced to practice disruptive forms of care work in their classrooms as a response to colonialism and whiteness. There is much work to be done in connecting the histories of colonialism, whiteness, race and gender and sexuality and the limitations of these theories (CRT and queer/trans of colour critique) should be contextualized with the understanding that these concepts and areas of study have been separated because of the ongoing realities of whiteness and colonialism and its ability to divide areas of scholarship that can and should inform one another (Owis and Cavanaugh, 2021).

Futurity, Worldbuilding and Thriving

Many researchers, organizations and schools have advocated for the safety, inclusion and acceptance of queer and trans youth in educational settings. Their research and advocacy often include large-scale quantitative survey reports that detail the additional burdens, challenges and

risks that face queer and trans youth of colour. These findings are frequently found within the literature on LGBTQ youth in schools (see Truong, Zongrone & Kosciw, 2020a,b; Zongrone, Truong & Kosciw, 2020a,b; Taylor et al., 2012; HRC, 2018) and while important in many contexts, it does not serve a larger purpose for my research. Beyond noting them in my references and as a precursor for this conversation, I will not cite them. The framework used by these studies centre safety and reinforce narratives of queer and trans youth of colour as helpless rather than empowering them to change their circumstances. Gender and sexuality education as it exists now, centers a concern for the damage done to queer and trans youth, particularity youth of colour, while ignoring the larger systemic issues like racism, colonialism, the pervasiveness of whiteness and cisheteropatriarchy that is reinforced and reproduced in schools (Connell & Elliot, 2009). Because these systemically entrenched ideas are not challenged and the recommendations from these studies are not implemented, it can create a form of lateral violence. It's important to me to centre desire based research (Tuck, 2009). That means centering queer world-making (Duong, 2012) joy (Slote, 2007; Noddings, 2013) futurity (Muñoz, 2009; Goltz, 2013) and thriving (Greteman, 2016; 2018; Darling-Hammond, 2020). Collectively these scholars advocate for a future in which QTBIPOC lives are enriched and become about joy and thriving outside of survival. I recognize the importance of the data and narratives that detail the harm and pain inflicted upon queer and trans youth of colour, but worry that that narrative has become too loud in the educational system. I centre my research this way because I believe we have forgotten that QTBIPOC communities deserve thriving, full lives because it's a human right, not because data shows us that they are at a high risk.

Gender and Sexuality Education

Queering Pedagogy

Queer pedagogy is rooted in queer theory and looks critically at what queer theory can teach us about teaching and learning (Shlasko, 2005). Despite its continual evolution, queer pedagogy adhere to some principles, mainly in its support and embrace of messy, fluid practices and multiple, conflicting and intersecting knowledge systems that recognize that all practices and models shift and can become alienating, exclusive and oppressive over time (Neto, 2018; Luhmann, 1998). Queer pedagogies engage educators in a process of inquiry into what we know and how we have come to know it, is critical of inclusion that is naturalized by heteronormativity, problematizes school systems and structures while acknowledging there is no singular, correct answer to many pedagogical dilemmas (Neto, 2018; Britzman, 2012; Luhmann, 1998). Within a school model, a queer pedagogy disrupts and challenges narrow understandings of sexual and gender identity and experience (Lin, 2017) and implements critical aspects of a queer(ed) curriculum framework (Goldstein, Russell & Daley, 2007; Kumashiro, 2001; Lin, 2017). How educators and students are able to engage in a queering of their pedagogy allow for space for hegemonic, normative structures and practices of care to be critiqued and addressed.

Critical Transpedagogy

An antigenderism model is supported by scholarship on critical transpedagogies. A critical transpedagogy understands that teaching and learning about transgender identities and experiences take place beyond the confines of schools (Galarte, 2017) and requires unscripting, unlearning and constructing new ways of thinking (Keenan, 2017). Critical transpedagogies individualize gender identity, resist prescribed gender norms, create space for gender affirmation

and celebration, center the transgender body as a site of knowledge, critiques social hierarchies and gender socialization and seeks to understand how transfolks navigate a deeply gendered world (Galarte, 2017). A critical transpedagogy then invites the fullness and complexity of trans identities into schools as it wrestles with resisting definition and essentialist understandings (Keenan, 2017). A move towards a critical transpedagogy is a radical and necessary act in educational settings, as it enables educators to critique and ultimately transform how educational authorities leverage power over trans youth (Galarte, 2017). Thus, transpedagogies care “practices of freedom” that can connect education to activism and social change (Galarte, 2017). These practices of freedom can provide ways to envision a form of care that goes beyond the familial limitations in a cisheteropatriarchal context and imagine systems like a care web (Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018) that includes the interdependence of QTBIPOC communities.

Summary

This chapter explored the theoretical concepts which outline a queer ethic of care. By weaving together conversations about gender, sexuality, race as well as concepts of care work, care pedagogy and futurity and thrival, we can begin to understand the ways in which QTBIPOC educators understand what it means to care is queered, trans-gressive ways. In what follows, I detail the findings of this study through the interviews and art of three QTBIPOC educators in chapter three and four, looking specifically at how they understand and practice a queer ethic of care in their classrooms.

Chapter 3

Theorizing a Queer Ethic of Care

“To theorize is to reimagine a world. Theory is essential to a revolution, it gives life to the purpose you feel so deeply for. For people like us, who haven’t had access to this language previously, theory provides the tools to express what your body and soul have always known”

—Vivetha

This is the first of two analysis chapters that focuses on how QTBIPOC educators conceptualize and understand a queer ethic of care.² As outlined in previous chapters, this research took place during the summer of 2021 with three educators who identified as queer and/or trans and as a racialized person. From the stories and art-based responses with Jude (queer, trans, nonbinary, South Asian) Nour (queer, cisgender, Pakistani, Iranian) and Blake (queer, trans, nonbinary, Black, Indigenous/Mohawk) two major findings emerged:³ (1) a queer ethic of care is nuanced and expansive, disruptive and transgressive and an individualized practice that takes place within a care web and (2) care as it exists in schools right now, is inherently white, colonial and violent and has forced QTBIPOC educators to imagine new forms of care practices. These practices include creating (1) authentic, fluid, mutually vulnerable relationships with students (2) explicitly anticolonial, antiracist moments in their teaching and interactions with students and (3) affirming and recognizing their students and whole, complex people in their identities.

² Please note that while the participants in this study didn’t use this term and could not collectively agree with the use of the word “ethic” I use it throughout my dissertation. This is in part to reclaim and reframe the language commonly associated with the word ethic which is defined throughout this chapter.

³ I will be using gender neutral pronouns to refer to Jude, Nour and Blake throughout these chapters as a way to anonymize their identity and leave space for how their gender identities might shift over time.

This chapter answers my first research question: *how do QTBIPOC educators understand a queer ethic of care?* As this chapter theorizes about what a queer ethic of care looks like, it largely draws from the existing theoretical literature on care work. As I have already noted, there is a gap within the literature on what care work with queer and trans youth of colour could look like. Literature that connects care practices to anticolonial, antiracist and affirming queer and trans educational scholarship is slowly emerging through my own writing and the writing of other QTBIPOC (Rose, 2021; Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018; Wilson, 2008; Owis & Cavanaugh, 2021; Owis & Goldstein, 2021; Owis et al., 2022) who write about care and community outside of schooling contexts. Both these areas continue to inform the evolving and necessary nature of this research.

A Note About the Interviews

All three participants in this study generously and vulnerably shared their lives and experiences with me. Despite the relationship we developed and the anonymity of this study, all three participants cut several large parts of their interviews out before I began data analysis. One participant (whose interview and art is not included in this study) withdrew their data completely. Part of sharing this information is to give some insight into the precarious conditions and culture of fear teachers are working within as they try to create caring, thriving classrooms and relationships with their students. Their stories of joy and harm and difficulty stay with me as I write these chapters, knowing that their words might never be shared publicly. I invite you to read these stories with grace and care, knowing how hard it was for Jude, Nour and Blake to let me bear witness to their words.

Queer Ethic of Care: A Work in Progress

The idea of a “queer ethic of care” came from writing I did with my supervisor, Dr. Tara Goldstein on her project LGBTQ Families Speak Out. That writing evolved into a chapter entitled “Promising Ethical Principles and Practices for Research with LGBTQ Families: A Living Document” (Owis & Goldstein, 2021) and an article entitled *Out at School: Imagining a Slow Ethic of Care in Research-Based Theatre* (Owis et al., 2022). To date, these are two of the few published works that explore how researchers engage with the idea of care with LGBTQ youth and families. I grew frustrated as I looked for articles and books that referenced how queer and trans youth, especially racialized youth, need and want to be cared for. Because of this, my interest in care as a concept and pedagogy peaked and evolved into my doctoral research. This theoretical framework was in development; pieces from care work, care pedagogy, antiracist, anticolonial literature informed it but it lacked any empirical data.

In what follows, Jude, Blake and Nour conceptualize what a queer ethic of care is. They describe it as (1) nuanced and expansive (2) disruptive and transgressive and (3) tailored practices within a care web. This conceptualization informed my theoretical framework for this study and contributes not only important language to the literature on care work in education, but pushes the limitations of current care work in schools by imagining new possibilities for QTBIPOC communities.

Care as Nuanced and Expansive

In beginning this study, I wanted to learn how Jude, Nour and Blake understood care. Some of the first questions I asked my participants were: what does care look like to you? How

do you recognize it? What does it feel like? What are some of your first memories about care in school?

In their art-based response, Blake chose to share their first memory of care at school in a poem:

I drop my bag in my cubby and ask for a snack /
you don't look like my parents / thank heavens for that
We don't know each other yet / I am still quite young
I wonder what life will feel like once I've learned who I've become /
Do you think it's normal to feel this way / I don't think it is
You comfort me in ways they don't / but I am just a kid
I cry out for you when I'm upset / but you are not around
My chest heaves up and down / but I'm not making a sound
We play, we practice writing / I am so damn bored
You teach me how to share with others / when I used to hoard
Holiday breaks are awful/ I dream of back to school
There seems to be a disconnect / between home and the rules
Other kids must feel this way / I'm sure I'm not alone
But they seem much more happy / not scared of going home
I drop my bag in my cubby / and ask for a snack /
Maybe you are someone who / I might just lack

After I read Blake's poem, I asked them why school felt like a safe space for them to be cared for. They responded:

Look, all education is moral, we know this. Though I grew up on the land and in touch with my culture and background and language and everything, I felt extremely isolated at home. Home was a violent place and I couldn't be that gay kid I wanted to be, I couldn't feel safe and celebrate who I was without the fear of god being put into me, but my teachers certainly did. I like to think they saw that little weirdo queer kid, my like . . . gender bendy parade that took place every morning, and loved me regardless . . . it definitely felt like that. I felt held by my teachers. Which I know a lot of Indigenous kids don't, I was very lucky to be able to make it through that place mostly unscathed.

Nour also reflected on their experience as a teacher trying to care for their students and the complicated feelings that arose when engaging in care work in their poem:

When I consider
The identities I carry with me
Into the classroom on a daily

I don't take my being there lightly

I know for most of these kids
This is the first time they've met
Someone like me

For some of these kids
it's the first time they've met
Someone who looks like them
Talks like them; shakes their head
and laughs like them—

who's queerness is not separated from this complicated identity of cultures and places that I find
difficult to clarify and identify

But it doesn't matter to the kids
Because I joke with them and cry with
them
And they imagine me an older cousin,
an auntie, a friend

Oh—sorry—we're not allowed to be
friends
We're not family
The OCT would have my head
OSSTF won't protect me
The education act is code for prudence
And so I keep my distance

I'm Madame or Ms [last name redacted]
But never Nour
And that's okay
I'm privileged to be their teacher

But I hope the kids know I care about
them
For the four months they have me
And if they stay in touch
Forever more
Because I adore them
Because in my heart they will always
be my babies

Kiddos I call them

And some of them pout and say
Ms I'm a teenager
Oh? So you're a big kid now?

But most of them don't mind
They know it communicates my care

And all the time I hope to communicate
to them
You're young adults now
You're in the process of becoming
Who you want to be
The world is yours to shape now
When I want them to take responsibility

For who they are in the process of
becoming
For who they are in this very moment

And I hope
I hope when they hear me talk, and
laugh, and cry in my own voice
In my own accents
In any language I please
Both with queer and cultural signalling
And without

I hope it gives them permission
To be

Already we can see that the kind of care Blake needed and wanted was present at school and not at home. School was a place they could explore their identities and feel seen and affirmed. For Nour, more fluid dynamics with their students as a mentor or confidant allowed them to enact a form of queer care. In both poems, Nour and Blake illustrate that care exists in untraditional dynamics between teachers and students outside of the Eurocentric, white, colonial ideas of care that centers family and cisgender women (Chatzidakis et al., 2020; Clement, 1996; Malatino, 2020; Butler, 2019; hooks; 1984). Care is often conceptualized as cisgender, straight

women giving care and has been historically understood as a “feminine” quality (Gilligan, 1982; Noddings, 1984). This definition of care lacks nuance and room for expansive ways of being in relation with one another that are complex and constantly evolving in schools outside of gender binaries and leaves little room to think about how care is created between teachers and students.

A move towards a more nuanced understanding of care work in schools would also mean challenging the inherent gender binary that traditionally defines care work in schools.

Researchers have written about the importance of centering transpedagogies as a way to navigate deeply gendered spaces such as schools (Keenan, 2017; Galarte, 2017). This approach asks us to reconsider social hierarchies and gender socialization of both teachers and students by questioning and resisting gender norms. In this instance, questioning and resisting both gendered understandings of care work as well as the teacher-student power dynamics as a way to think about care more broadly. Thus, thinking about care work as a nuanced and gender expansive approach to care work in schools could potentially enable educators to think about and transform their power over queer and trans youth.

This notion of power dynamics between students as care receivers and teachers as caregivers leaves little room to think about interdependence and that we all require the care of others (Tronto, 1993; Malatino, 2020). I have written about the importance of moving through ethical decisions with care when working with LGBTQ families in research and teaching contexts (Owis & Goldstein, 2021; Owis et al., 2022). That writing provided some insight into how the research team I was working with needed to be flexible and fluid in our approaches to working with LGBTQ families because the families we worked with rarely (if ever) experienced caring practices in schools such as feeling seen, respected, expected (hicks, 2017) and affirmed

in their identities (Owis & Goldstein, 2021). That research highlighted that care takes place in a process of connection and entanglement between researchers and participants and the same is true for teachers and students. Despite the importance of this dynamic and nuanced connection and the power it has for healing and community building, it's often undocumented with the scholarly literature and within empirical data findings (Toombs et al., 2017). Within a schooling context with the understanding of the Ontario College of Teachers (OCT) guidelines around interactions with students, this might be because teachers fear the repercussions of being in community with their students in ways that are authentic, nuanced and dynamic.

In Nour's poem, they reference the OCT and the Ontario Secondary School Teacher Federation (OSSTF). The OCT is a governing body that regulates all teachers who practice within Ontario, whereas OSSTF is the union for all secondary school teachers in Ontario. The OCT has published ethical standards for teachers working in Ontario, outlining four standards: care, trust, respect and integrity (Ontario College of Teachers, n.d). As it reads from their mandate:

The Ethical Standards for the Teaching Profession represent a vision of professional practice. At the heart of a strong and effective teaching profession is a commitment to students and their learning. Members of the Ontario College of Teachers, in their position of trust, demonstrate responsibility in their relationships with students, parents, guardians, colleagues, educational partners, other professionals, the environment and the public. The purpose of the ethical standards is to “inspire members to reflect and uphold the honour and dignity of the teaching profession, identify the ethical responsibilities and commitments in the teaching profession, guide ethical decisions and actions in the teaching profession and promote public trust and confidence in the teaching profession. (Ontario College of Teachers, n.d)

When we consider care as the first ethical standard set out by the OCT, we recognize that teaching is an inherently caring profession. The OCT defines care as “compassion, acceptance,

interest and insight for developing students' potential. Members express their commitment to students' well-being and learning through positive influence, professional judgment and empathy in practice" (Ontario College of Teachers, n.d). What is troubling about the OCT definition and expectations of care is that it is limited and rooted in the white, colonial context of the Ontario educational system. Racial and cultural notions of care such as community building, mutual care and sharing resources (Rose, 2021; Ware, Hudson & Diverlus, 2020; Regan, 2010) do not exist. This understanding will be further explored in chapter 2, where Jude, Nour and Blake expand on their experiences as QTBIPOC educators working and resisting the embedded whiteness and colonialism in Ontario schools. Care as it is understood within the context of the OCT is not framed within an ethical, personal practice, but rather as an objective (Campbell, 2000) to achieve. Paradoxically, care is framed as an individual practice that is left up to teachers to navigate despite the standards of the profession being written in language that is inflexible and rigid (Johnston, 2009). Thus, it begs the question, *how exactly are teachers allowed to practice care? What is acceptable and not?* Former teachers and researchers have written about this conundrum as it relates to queer teachers and their relationships with students. Russell (2010, 2002) writes that their time as a queer teacher in classrooms was steeped in fear, despite the potential to connect with their queer students as a way of mentorship, shared identities and experiences and guidance. This is a common discourse held by preservice and practicing teachers (Goldstein, 2019) fuelled by fear of their names appearing in the blue pages or a parental complaint.

Jude expands on their frustration of care in schools noting that

it's so disturbing, when kids are visibly upset, and you can't put an arm around them. At best, you let them lead the action, and you just bear and hope that no one writes you up. Because sometimes that's all they need, they just need a really big hug. And like, I feel like sometimes that lack of touch in a classroom is actually a loss to kids, because some kids are so touch deprived. And like I understand why those policies are there. But to be honest, sometimes I wish I could just like hold them close and cuddled them or like, just like rub their head gently as they're reading something to me like those little like, very caring gestures that I've I see the deprivation of and I see the need for because just because of the way they'll engage with me, and especially at grade eight, like people think of them like you know, little teenagers about to go to high school, but they're so emotionally vulnerable.

As outlined in the documents published by OCT on their website, they recommend teachers avoiding “inviting students into their homes, seeing students in private isolated situations, exchanging personal notes or emails, becoming personally involved in students’ affairs, giving or receiving personal gifts, sharing personal information about themselves and making physical contact” (Ontario College of Teachers, 2002). Because of the 2002 advisory issued by the OCT about professional misconduct in schools, teachers are often afraid to be in community with their students in ways that could invite a complaint or charge of grooming, sexual assault or harassment. This instinct to cut off connections between students and teachers, comes from a definition of care that is inherently white, colonial and inflexible based on the idea of professionalism (Russell, 2010). It does not leave room for the expansiveness and nuance needed as queer and trans educators navigate schools and provide meaningful relationships with their queer and trans students despite the importance of a pedagogy of care being well documented in the teaching profession (hooks, 1994; Mehrotra, 2021; Owusu-Ansah and Kyei-Blankson, 2016; hicks, 2017) and the literature review outlined earlier in this dissertation. The regulations and expectations set out but the OCT are a legal response to the unethical actions by teachers who have caused harm and violence to youth. It should be understood that these

expectations of the OCT are for legal purposes, and should not be used as a moral or personal ethical guideline for teachers to abide by. When we consider the intent behind the The Ethical Standards for the Teaching Profession and the 2002 advisory issued by the OCT about professional misconduct in schools as a legal one we are to parse out the differences between “ethical” and “ethics” as a means of legality, and ethics as a sense of personal responsibility to students. It’s important to note that if the 2002 advisory issued by the OCT about professional misconduct in schools was successful, there would be no more sexual assault and harassment charges against teachers who groom, harm and abuse their power over youth. This is not the case. Because of this the OCT’s legal framework is not only unsuccessful in stopping abusive educators from preying on youth, but it stops caring and loving educators from providing affirmative care. Thus, a question emerges: *what is the purpose of the 2002 advisory issued by the OCT if it doesn’t work? And what kinds of care is neglected because of it?*

The OCT was a regular point of discussion that connected my interviews with Jude, Blake and Nour. Without prompting them to talk about the OCT, they made the connection between the OCT’s language of “ethics” and the rigidity of trying to be a caring teacher in schools. I asked Blake how they felt about the term “ethics” as it related to their understanding of care. They responded,

I’m almost resistant to it? But not like . . . because I don’t like the term or how it’s connected to care. . . . It’s just the connotation that it has in our profession as teachers . . . it’s very scary. Like those blue pages put the fear of god in you and even though you know you’re not doing anything wrong or creepy by hugging a student or going above and beyond in your care for them, it’s always in the back of your mind . . . like am I acting ethically like I’m supposed to as a teacher? . . . And honestly . . . yeah, okay, so ethics feels like a very white philosopher type thing and I just don’t vibe with that language. Like teaching is already built off of that [whiteness and colonialism] and so is the ethical protocol stuff they teach you as a preservice teacher and I wonder if there’s a

better way to talk about what ethics and care look like outside of the colonizers language and like . . . the assumption of whiteness.

While the professional standards for the teaching profession includes care, it implicitly defines what kind of care teachers should be giving their students, and leaves little room for teachers to connect with their students in more vulnerable, nuanced ways as it relates to gender and queerness. Nour points this out when they wrote in their poem “and they imagine me an older cousin, an auntie, a friend, Oh sorry, we’re not allowed to be friends, we’re not family, the OCT would have my head, OSSTF won’t protect me, the education act is code for prudence, and so I keep my distance.” As a result, a queer ethic of care as Jude, Blake and Nour have conceptualized, is not compatible with the ways care has been understood and practiced in teaching (white and colonial) and must turn to disruptive, trans-gressive forms of care explored in the next analysis chapter.

A more expansive definition of care, one that makes space for queered versions of care that are not defined by ethical protocols, is a notion that Blake and Jude build upon. They both noted that their understanding of care is inherently queered because of their identities and the way they see the world. As Blake explained,

[as teachers] we’re teaching them how to be good people. How we teach them to care about themselves and others who are different from them is extremely important. Systemically, how do we teach kids to care about people that are different from us, how do we teach them to hold two truths at the same time, that someone can be hurting them and that’s not okay, but people have a reason for doing that. And that doesn’t mean it’s excusable, but it creates space for them to maybe start thinking about empathy and educating one another instead of hate. A lot of my own ideas on this like . . . come from my own upbringing like . . . caring for the land, caring for that connection between the living even if you don’t understand it quite yet.

Similarly, Jude noted:

Queerness is more expansive, [it] can hold multiple realities at once. Yeah, whereas the cishetero framework is pretty rigid. You're allowed to feel and act in multiple, nuanced, complicated way and be like "fuck it!" and it's almost like . . . permission. Permission to be more than a singular thing, to be pigeonholed, and to be something beyond.

Both Jude and Blake express their desire for an understanding of care that goes beyond the limitations of care that is practiced and understood in schools today. They note the importance of being able to hold two truths at once, making space for restorative and transformative justice (Kaba & Nopper, 2021) and community healing. This conceptualization is disruptive to the way care and ethics is taught to preservice and practicing teachers (Campbell, 2000) where there is little room for gender and queer nuanced interactions with students under a more expansive idea of care work. Here we can see the beginning of a focus on relational ethical care, one that centers the connection and community built between people that goes beyond the standards of care set out by the OCT.

In recognizing the need for more queer and gender nuanced relationships between teachers and students, we are able to center anticolonial and antiracist ways of being and knowing. Blake notes that their understanding of relationships and nuance comes from their own identity as an Indigenous/Mohawk person. By entering into relationships that are not fixed or permanent and that are not innately hierarchical (Caine et al., 2020) educators and students can begin to be in relation with one another in ways outside the colonial system. Wilson (2008) has written about the ideas behind relational accountability, where care extends to all those we are in community with including nonhuman entities such as the land. This relational ethic and the nuances in it, allows for more space to be able to care for one another across lines of difference (Chatzidakis et al., 2020; Smith, 2016; Lorde, 1988; Clement, 1996) by recentering the

knowledges of Indigenous and BIPOC communities that center nonhierarchical practices, community growth and connectedness between all living and nonliving things (Rose, 2021; Wilson, 2008). This is particularly important as queerness and transness is often conceptualized and reinforced as a white, colonial identity (Kumashiro, 2001) which leaves little to no space for educators to think about how their relationships and caring practices with QTBIPOC youth are actually harmful. Understandings of gender and sexuality has historically centered white bodies, specifically cisgender white men with the most attention and literature produced focusing on white lesbian and gay communities (Shelton, 2017). This is important to note for many reasons. The lack of literature, research and discussion of racialized, transgender, queer communities is not because they do not exist, but rather illustrative of how powerful whiteness and coloniality is in determining who is legible in LGBTQ+ communities (Owis & Cavanaugh, 2021). As Indigenous and racialized communities were colonized, their traditions and cultural understandings of gender and sexuality were radically changed from a more nuanced, expansive understanding of gender and sexuality, one with many gender identities and sexualities (Laing, 2021; Chacaby, 2016) to one that was more aligned with white, colonial, religious beliefs about gender and sexuality, where there were two sexes, two gender and people are straight. This shift reverberated throughout generations of QTBIPOC communities, whose learned shame and internalized queer/transphobia is actually a result of white supremacy and colonialism, rather than there simply being “less” queer and trans racialized and Indigenous people. As a result, whiteness has become associated with discussions and research about gender and sexuality, effectively removing all ability to explore how white supremacy and colonialism have and continue to operate as a function of oppression. This happened despite the gay liberation rights

movement in the 1960s being built off and informed by resistance movements by Black and Brown queer/trans communities who have never stopped fighting for visibility, safety and thrival (Fink, 2021).

As this relates to schooling practices, Thompson (1998, as cited in Reyes, Banda and Caldas, 2020) suggests that intersectional caring, one where race, social class and dis/ability is considered, is necessary in order to attend to relational power dynamics that arise between teachers and students. While this need is beyond the scope of this study, I do address how racial and cultural forms of care can become ways to mitigate the whiteness and colonial traditions of care work in schools. I write about this in my second analysis chapter.

Care as Disruptive and Trans-gressive

In the following exchange with Nour, they were able to describe their teaching philosophy and the ways their practice is an interruption of whiteness and colonialism by transgressing the limitations of care work as it exists in schools today.

Bishop: If “ethic” isn’t a word you would use, what word or words feel better for you? To describe your approach to caring for your students?

Nour: You’re asking the hard questions today, eh? Ah, okay. Well . . . you know I’m not sure. Ethics makes sense but it’s too . . . fixed, to explain what I’m actually doing.

Bishop: Well how about you try and describe it for me? Describe your understanding of queerness in teaching.

Nour: . . . Queerness by definition is kinda limitless and boundless, which is frustrating and wonderful, it’s expansive. And maybe that’s what I’m bumping up against in trying to find another word besides ethic. There likely isn’t another word and that’s fine, but a queering of care . . . a disruption? An interruption of care? As we know it now of course . . . an expansive form of care that is . . . like outside of whiteness and colonialism and how we currently understand care? Yeah I think that’s it . . . uh like a . . . queering of care that goes beyond. Yeah, so . . . no to ethic or ethics [laughs] yes to queering and transgressing.

This portion of their interview gave me language that I was struggling to find myself and helped

create the theoretical framework which this study explores. The idea of trans-gressing and queering became a focal point for this study; how and when teachers engage in disruptive acts of care to affirm their QTBIPOC students became moments of activism. I focus on these pedagogical moments and practices in my second analysis chapter where I explicitly connect disruptive and transgressive practices to a form of queer pedagogy (Shlasko, 2005; Luhmann, 1998; Britzman, 2012).

Similar to Nour, both Blake and Jude shared their desire to teach and practice care in disruptive ways that transgress the norms of care work in schools. Blake shared:

I know you're researching queering care and I think it's an interesting idea that I hadn't thought about before actually. Just the idea of taking care, which I've always understood through my own lens like. Black, Indigenous, bisexual, those things influence how I see care so my care is queer as hell. But I guess in the context of education care is pretty white, right? So like . . . how do you go about queering the colonizer's idea of what it means to receive and give care. It's a good question. I think just being . . . just being transformative and innovative in your teaching . . . both pedagogically and also the content of what you're teaching. But pedagogically, I think there's a lot of room to queer care with all students but definitely my students of colour, people usually just don't do it because it goes against what we're "supposed" to do as teachers. But for me . . . knowing my values of my identities and communities and the history and ongoing presence of racism and colonialism, it means going past a lot of spoken and visible boundaries that I'm supposed to have as a teacher. And of course, that's scary when you're a new teacher . . . the work is precarious, and there's a million other teachers waiting for your job the day you get let go because you've taught or interacted with a kid in a way that's outside of that white very normative, rigid version of care. But you have to do it, and I'm lucky enough that I'm at a support school and we're mainstream but the culture of this school is to do the right thing not the "white thing" [laughs]. Okay that was cheeky of me, but it's true! And that means I can be fearless in my teaching, and like . . . we know that not everyone has that.

Blake makes an important point here, noting that in order to effectively care for their racialized students, they have to be transformative and innovative in their teaching, often meaning they go against the normative practices of care in schools. In trans-gressing some of these spoken and

unspoken rules, such as not hugging children or sharing personal information about themselves (Ontario College of Teachers, 2002) they are pushing the limitations of what care could look like by rejecting the inherent whiteness of care work (Lugones 2007, as cited in Malatino, 2020; Chatzidakis et al., 2020; Owis & Goldstein, 2021) and breaking the rules. Disruptive and transgressive acts are not only essential to providing affirming care for queer and trans youth of colour but it can also function as a lens through which teachers can see their role as an educator to resist oppressive and harmful practices by rethinking about how whiteness and colonialism are operating in their schools (Brockenbrough, 2013, 2016). This move towards disruptive and transgressive practices is crucial, as research has consistently found that queer and trans youth do not feel empowered by their education (Grossman et al., 2009, as cited in Wagaman, 2015) are systemically marginalized within school environments that are meant to keep them safe (McCready, 2004) and adversely harmed by trying to make environments work for them that haven't expected or anticipated them (hicks, 2017).

Blake mentions that their own school climate is supportive of these acts of care, which means job security and safety. But what happens when that's not the case?

Many teachers do not teach in a school climate like Blake. In what follows, Jude shares their experience with having to covertly do social justice work and affirmative care work with their students. Both their words and the art they submitted, illustrate the frustration they feel as they continually encounter barriers:

a lot of my social justice friends are in like these really bougie lefty neighborhoods . . . we're talking about places where social justice isn't like a challenge per se, because that's what the kids are surrounded by. And it isn't even a thing that they think about as disruptive. It's just part of the culture already. But when you walk in schools like mine for example, in these areas, people don't talk about social justice, because they're terrified of

actually empowering people with the language that they need. Like it is systematically shut down. And so I find that like, in my experience, so far, I've been like, the only person in the building sometimes who's doing that disruptive caring explicitly. And I've been told many times that I need to be more covert, that need to be more subtle, and that I need to do it more quietly. And I'm just like, but why? What happens if I do it more quietly, it just creates a perception that's actually more toxic.

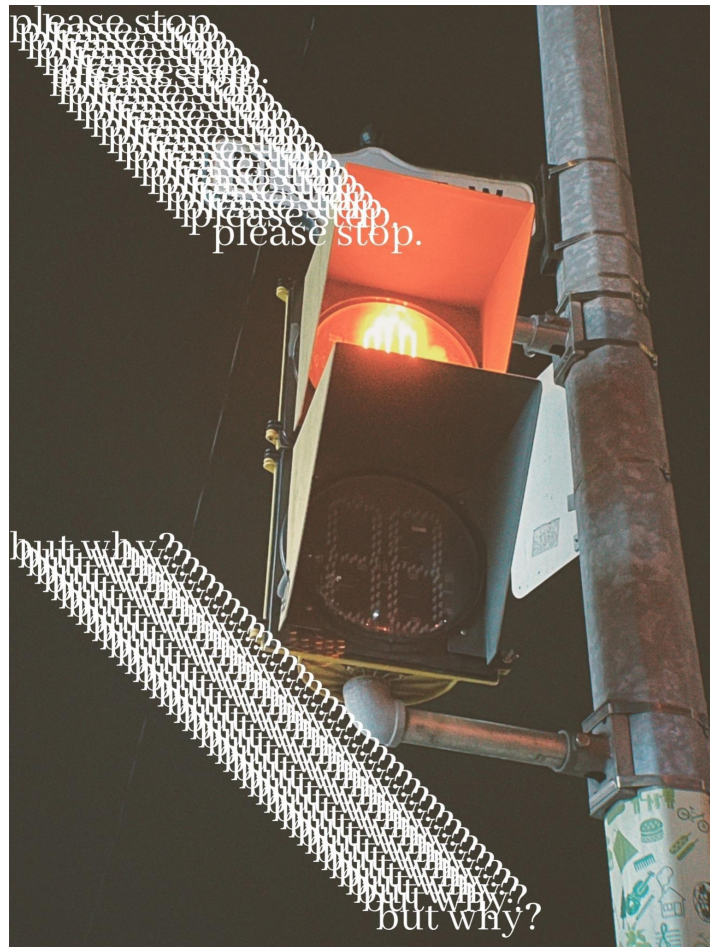


Figure 1. *Please stop, but why?* Jude (2021)

Jude's experience trying to enact disruptive care practices in their school is unfortunately common and has been documented within the literature (Mehrotra, 2021; Wasner, 2019). The rigidity of schools and how teachers are expected to interact with students prevents effective care practices from happening. Jude's frustration with having to care for their students in ways that are covert, subtle and quiet, pushes against their beliefs as an educator trying to engage in innovative, disruptive teaching like Blake. Jude's image is an excellent example of this. The long, drawn out, repetitive text of "please stop" over the pedestrian stop light read like a chorus of push back by administrators and other teachers who repeatedly silence Jude's attempts to care (by responding with "but why") for their students. The barriers that Jude faces in trying to be disruptive and innovative in their care practices are important to note because in order to practice a queer ethic of care, educators need space to disrupt the matrix of whiteness, colonialism and cisheteropatriarchy in their classrooms.

Transgressive acts that enable a queer ethic of care to thrive, such as sharing power, knowledges, being vulnerable and mutual and reciprocal care between teachers and students (Mehrotra 2021; Wasner, 2019) are difficult to implement if there is no support to be disruptive in ones teaching. Because of this, many teachers do not and will not engage in disruptive and

transgressive care practices with their students, ultimately maintaining systems of whiteness, colonialism and cisheteropatriarchy in schools. The importance of Jude's words cannot be overstated; to navigate a system that actively asks you to shrink, be subordinate and follow the rules reinforces the importance making visible the systemic violence that keeps teachers from practicing a queer ethic of care.

Care as Tailored Practices Within Care Webs

The last way the participants in this study conceptualized a queer ethic of care was thinking through tailored individual practices and how they saw it connected a to systemic issue of a crisis of care (Chatzidakis et al., 2020). Both Nour and Blake shared their insights into how they recognize individual and community care. When asked how they recognize this Blake said,

Yeah, I mean . . . like that's a hard question! Wow. Okay, so care is obviously different for every person, just gotta say that and get it out of the way. And it's hard when you want to care for someone else who has a different idea of what care is and you learn quickly that you can't care for someone in ways you want to be cared for . . . it has to be for them. Which makes it hard because you have to tailor it for everyone but it's necessary, definitely as a teacher but also as a person.

Nour also shared the same perspective noting that,

I think, I think when we think about ethics and care, really, is it ethical to care? Yes. But are we informed by our own perspectives and worldviews on what that means? Of course we are. And so if we are to truly care for other people, and that care has to be informed in the way that they would want to be cared for, right? It's not . . . it's never ever, ever going to be doing to others how you want done unto you, because how you want done unto you doesn't necessarily mean what others want done unto them, right? So like, this whole care for others as you would yourself is total bullshit. And we need to move past it. And we need to really recognize that care requires us to ethically consider what the other person needs, and then consider our ability to provide that care.

This sentiment is shared among other researchers who have looked into the beliefs about care and care work. Care within the literature is often described as caring for someone in ways

they want to be cared for and decentering ourselves in that process (Slote, 2007; Nicol et al., 2010, Noddings, 1984). Doing this moves us beyond individual welfare and towards a relational form of care (Slote, 2007). What Blake and Nour add to this conversation then, is the notion that care needs to be tailored for each individual which is difficult when in a classroom setting and that we have to consider our own ability to provide the care our students need.

It is interesting to note that in their response where they shared that care is individual and relational, Nour referred to a biblical concept commonly known as the Golden Rule. “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you” is a biblical concept spoken by Jesus in Luke 6:31 and also in Matthew 7:12 where it is stated: “so in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets” (English Standard Version Bible, 2001). This passage explains that we should treat others the way we want to be treated, and in a religious context, treat others the way God has treated you. I had heard this phrase before, so when Nour mentioned it I knew the idea they were referring to, but did not know it had a religious context. This is perhaps most revealing in the ways we understand care and the embeddedness of whiteness, colonialism and religion in determining what care is supposed to look like. Since this is a common phrase and often understood and spoken in a nonreligious context, we can see here how traditional forms of care in schools in Ontario (which have a religious history to them explored more in the next analysis chapter) have been built upon a framework of religion, whiteness and colonialism. Nour actively fights against this and as a racialized, queer educator they understand the importance of individualized care that sometimes has nothing to do with how you personally want to and like to be cared for. They note the

importance of caring for others in ways *they* want to be cared for, not as you would like to care for them, actively decentering themselves in a relational form of queered care.

Both of these stories offered to us by Nour and Blake force us to ask, what happens when teachers are faced with systemic barriers like Jude and are not able to practice disruptive care with their students? Does our current educational system allow for tailored, disruptive and transgressive care practices? And if not, how can educators navigate this?

Research has consistently shown that individual practices are always taking place within a systemic structure that often upholds violent and unjust ways of being, learning and growing (McCaskell, 2005; Rose, 2021; Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018; Malatino, 2020; Chatzidakis et al., 2020; Goldstein, 2019). Because of this, I wanted to learn more about how Nour saw their role in challenging both systemic and individual forms of care, if they saw that as their responsibility at all. When prompted, Nour remarked,

I see other people like really, dreaming of a better system, and I go, wow, amazing. And that's because they care to create a system that works for everyone, right? Because currently it doesn't obviously. And that's why we have so many different efforts to change things. So for example, if we think about a practice, like streaming which predominantly affects Brown and Black children and racialized folks, we will have people like a lot of my Black colleagues that will work valiantly to end the practice of streaming. And sort of get the message out and teach others and go to meetings and do all the grunt work stuff that is absolutely required. And then you'll have people that care about individual students will be like, this kid has been streamed—why has this kid been streamed and then call the parent and then call the guidance, and then like, go through all the jumping of the hoops to ensure that that kid who you have connected with doesn't end up being streamed. . . . We have people that are advocating for the streaming vehemently, and it's good for them because we need it to happen. Because they're working on the broader picture here . . . yeah just all working together doing different things trying to make it happen, you know?

Nour's response pushes us in the direction of community care. While care work at its core must be tailored to each individual child, doing that within a classroom or school setting is incredibly

difficult. And yet, it is the challenge these educators take on everyday while working in their schools. Because there is little to no institutional support for teachers to do disruptive, nuanced, transgressive care work, a community of carers practicing a queer ethic of care is needed. This notion is widely practiced within QTBIPOC communities, often resembling care webs (Piepznar-Samarasinha, 2018) where queer and trans people of colour come together in interlocking communities to provide accessible, affirming care for everyone in the face of structural oppression. These intercommunity networks provide care at both the individual and systemic level, operating as functional and multilevel operations that address the needs of queer and trans people of colour (Rose, 2021).

What Nour is advocating for is a system where both the systemic issues (in the example they used, streaming) is addressed not only at the individual level (the student) but at the systemic level (streaming policies and infrastructure at the board level). This ability, to focus on both the upstream and downstream approaches to care work, moves our collective understanding of care work to a model that is queered and transgressive; one that focuses on the resistance and resurgence of anticolonial, antiracist ways of practicing care as a way to ensure thrival (Greteman, 2016, 2018) and pave new, caring futures for racialized youth and teachers. These practices are explored in the next analysis chapter.

By reorganizing the ways we approach care work in schools and moving away from an individual responsibility to care for all the students in a classroom, educators can create spaces for more relational queered, antiracist, anticolonial, trans-gressive form of care that are modeled under the idea of care webs. This would mean communities of teachers working to enact a queer ethic of care, addressing both the individual and systemic issues that make that work difficult.

This work is not easy. It would be a radical reimagination of the ways our educational system exists and yet it is already slowly being done in classrooms. In the next chapter, I explore how Blake, Nour and Jude engage in some of these disruptive practices that help queer and transgress the limitations of care in their classrooms by addressing racism and colonialism directly, being vulnerable in their relationships with students and affirming their students identities in ways that could be mutually healing.

It's important to remember that Jude, Nour and Blake all work within the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) and are a part of networks of queer and trans racialized educators who talk, meet and work together regularly. Their networks could become places to congregate, mobilize and take action so that the formation of a care web could thrive. This work relies on everyone and is only successful by continued action and sustainable practices. Right now in our educational system, there is little structural support.

Summary

In this chapter, I explored the how QTBIPOC educators conceptualize a queer ethic of care. Their responses answered my first research question, *how do QTBIPOC educators understand a queer ethic of care?* Their stories and creative responses showed that they understand a queer ethic of care as nuanced, expansive, disruptive, transgressive and as using tailored practices within a care web (Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018), a concept that is thoroughly explored in the coming chapter to illustrate the interdependence of racialized queer and trans communities. The theorizing done by Jude, Blake and Nour in this chapter pushes us to ask more critical questions about the care teachers are engaging in at school and imagine a model that is more affirmative for queer and trans youth of colour. The theorizing of a queer ethic of care in

this chapter provides a guideline for future research about care work and QTBIPOC youth and educators. It also indicates the necessity of a radical reorganization of our educational system where care is understood and practices outside of the concepts of whiteness, colonialism and cisheteropatriarchy. In what follows, I explore how the teachers in this study practice a queer ethic of care when working with their students. In particular, I look how they practice a queer ethic of care when working with their queer and trans students of colour.

Chapter 4

Practicing a Queer Ethic of Care

“Without new visions, we don’t know what to build, only what to knock down. We not only end up confused, rudderless, and cynical, but we forget that making a revolution is not a series of clever maneuvers and tactics, but a process that can and must transform us”

— Robin D.G. Kelley

This analysis chapter takes the theorizing Jude, Nour and Blake have done on a queer ethic of care and illustrates how they put it into practice. The practices they talk about highlight how they work with both their queer and trans students who are racialized as well as their straight, cisgender, white students. While their stories encompass both student populations, I pay particular attention to their affirming practices with QTBIPOC youth. As mentioned, there is little to no research has been done in this area and for that reason the focus on racialized queer and trans youth is necessary.

In the previous chapter, I outlined that QTBIPOC educators conceptualize a queer ethic of care as queer and gender nuanced and expansive, disruptive and transgressive and a tailored practice that takes place within a care web. This chapter will focus on the second finding of this

study, where Blake, Nour and Jude see care as it exists in schools right now as inherently white, colonial and violent. As a result, they've had to reimagine new forms of care practices that are queered and transgressive when working with queer and trans youth of colour. These disruptive practices include creating (1) authentic, fluid, mutually vulnerable relationships with students (2) explicitly anticolonial, antiracist moments in their teaching and interactions with students and (3) affirmation and recognition as moments of healing. Collectively, these disruptive and transgressive practices create space for potential mutual healing for both queer and trans racialized students and teachers and paves the way for queer futurity (Munoz, 2009) and thriving (Darling-Hammond, 2020).

This chapter answers my second research question: *how do QTBIPOC educators practice a queer ethic of care?* As this chapter explores practices in education, I draw from the available scholarly literature on care pedagogies. Almost all of this literature draws on studies that centered white, cisgender, straight teachers and students. I actively searched for literature that included queer, trans and/or racialized participants. While I found some emerging literature that I reference extensively (Reyes, Banda and Caldas, 2020; Mehrotra, 2021; Zygmunt et al., 2018; Motta & Bennett, 2018) much of the literature I draw on comes from work done outside the K-12 schooling context (Rose, 2021; Piepzna-Samarsinha, 2018; Chatzidakis et al., 2020) as it relates to care pedagogies. For this reason, I use the literature as a way to ground the findings in this chapter, while also expanding the limitations of their studies which do not take into account antiracist, anticolonial, queered and transgressive caring practices in schools.

A Note About the Contents of This Chapter

Because of the nature of violent and harmful stories, I will not share many of the examples Blake, Jude and Nour shared with me about their time in schools as both students and teachers. Some of these interview transcripts have been removed at their request and what was left was up to me to decide how and if I would include them in the writing of this dissertation. This was an ethical decision I had to make. I have already noted that I do not cite or refer to large scale quantitative studies or scholarly literature that highlights the violence, harm and risk QTBIPOC youth face in schools. This literature is well documented and while important for many policies to be passed at a political level, they do not serve a purpose in my work. I do not center this work because I strongly believe stories of violence and harm are not a rationale for wanting to make systemic change, or in this case, to enact a queer ethic of care in schools. Black, Indigenous and other racialized families, especially those with queer and/or trans children or parents are already working through and processing intergenerational trauma as it relates to school. Their healing, resurgence, resistance and ability to engage in subversive, queered, transgressive caring practices so they can thrive must be the focus of this research moving forward.

Unfolding a Matrix: Whiteness, Colonialism and Cisheteronormativity

The care pedagogies explored in this chapter are a response to the conditions teachers are working under. In what follows, Jude, Blake and Nour share their experiences and practices of how the Ontario educational system continues to uphold values of white supremacy, colonialism and cisheteronormativity that collectively neglect a form of queered care.

When I asked Blake why they thought the school they teach at as well as our educational system is violent, they responded:

A lot of social justice issues are reproduced simply because people just don't care enough, we're selfish people and we're self-serving first, that's why those of us who are neurodivergent, or queer, or trans or BIPOC don't always thrive in a ableist, capitalist society. And if schools are a representation or like, a reflection of our society, then we're trying to educate queer and trans kids and Indigenous kids and racialized kids in a system that was not built for them and that itself is a very harmful and uncaring thing to do . . . and honestly just the whole educational system is really, really harmful. It's difficult to try to like . . . separate them and figure out what's actually working because it's still within this structure that does not work for like . . . Black kids, definitely not Indigenous kids. Like, you know, these Indigenous kids who are taken into foster care or put in homes in places far away from home and off their land and they're thrown into school and told like . . . "learn" and it doesn't work that way? Where's the land? Where's the traditional teachings? Where's the community? It's not there. How do you expect to care for someone if you don't understand something so fundamental about them . . . it's their identity . . . they don't leave that at home when they come to school right? Like it's sitting in the classroom with everyone just staring back at you . . . and like, you know this obviously applies to Indigenous kids but really any child that isn't white or cis het or what not.

Jude had similar frustrations with the systemic injustices built within schooling systems, sharing

there's a lot of ethics in teaching, right, like you know, legal obligations and perceptions. But the issue is that a lot of those ethics and ethics of care are rooted from policies and laws that are rooted in white supremacy. Like . . . 100% they are. They're so different from any form of care I received at home where we come together and share ideas and food . . . always so much sharing of food, there's hugging and like . . . you know aunts and uncles and cousins raising each other . . . it's much more fluid . . . and I think that's pretty common for a lot of racialized kids. And you plug them into these super white schools and it's the complete opposite, they can't be themselves.

The presence of unjust systemic violence in schools is the biggest barrier to creating queered, transgressive forms of caring in schools. This finding showed up over and over again in my interviews with Blake, Jude and Nour, each of them noting their own experiences of being harmed by the Ontario educational system and teachers who practiced white, colonial versions of care. This might include rigid hierarchies between teachers and students, not sharing personal

information or stories with youth, remaining physically distant from children and upholding the standards of the profession set out by OCT that requires teachers to act professionally and not as mentors or friends to their students. These care practices greatly differ from the care that BIPOC youth receive at home, where their families (as immigrants, as settlers and as families whose history and identity is inherently tied to the land) practice forms of care that is community and land based (Styres, 2019, 2020; Wilson, 2008).

Canada's educational system is built upon a religious framework (Brennan, 2011). Egerton Ryerson, after which the Toronto university is named after, created the foundation of the Ontario educational system, which upheld religious (Christian) beliefs and practiced violent forms of assimilation and indoctrination. Prior to this, residential schools for Indigenous youth were formed beginning in the 17th century, the last residential school closing in Canada in 1996. The physical and psychological violence that took place in these schools is well documented (Watters, 2007; Miller, 2017; Brennan, 2011), stripping youth of their identity, language, cultural norms, traditions, beliefs and practices. It is not too bold to say these schools were not only for the purposes of assimilation, but the grounds for cultural and physical genocide (Regan, 2010). This is explicitly connected to the ongoing oppression and unjust structures that continue to deny Indigenous communities their right to full, thriving lives with the Ontario educational system being one of them (Joseph, 2018).

Both Jude and Blake share that Ontario schools are not made with queer, trans and racialized, Indigenous kids in mind. Because of the ongoing legacy and violent present of our educational system, which from the outset was meant as a form of assimilation and genocide, Ontario schools do not practice care in ways that could be affirming for QTBIPOC youth

(Regan, 2010; Joseph, 2018). The system in which QTBIPOC are educated is predicated on the eradication and assimilation of racialized and Indigenous youth and for this reason, uphold and continue to reinforce violent forms of white supremacy, racism and cisheteronormativity (Joseph, 2018). These subtle yet damaging acts are illustrated in the powerful narrative Canada holds as a multicultural country, making it difficult to critique the ongoing settler-colonialism and nationalist policies and practices that ignore Indigenous sovereignty. It's also evident in the lack of action the Canadian government has taken to address safe access to clean water, missing and murdered Indigenous women and land rights to sacred grounds, despite the calls detailed by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (Regan, 2010). Educating and caring for QTBIPOC youth in ways that are culturally and racially responsive and informed would mean a radical reimagination of what our educational system looks like; it would require significant changes to the curricula, pedagogical approaches to teaching, teacher education programs across the country and a serious interrogation into how preservice and practicing teachers decenter themselves in order to care for QTBIPOC youth. And yet, that reality is not out of the question, as many Indigenous and racialized scholars in and outside of the academy have theorized about ways we care for each other and the land as a return to relationships (Love, 2019).

Relational accountability is a term coined by Shawn Wilson (2008), which refers to being responsible to sentient beings and the land. Within Indigenous worldviews, everything is connected; “[c]ircularity is a sacred representation of wholeness and interconnectedness that brings all of creation together in a circle of interdependent relationships grounded in Land and under the Great Mystery” (creative life force) (p. 30). When everything is connected, our actions have ripple effects on everything around us and so we must act with great care and intentionality

to ensure balance. This ethical responsibility of centering relationships (to other humans, nonhuman animals, the land, and more-than-human world) is a practice that has the potential to provide teachers like Jude and Blake (as well as their students) avenues to care and thrival.

The difficulty in implementing changes like the ones I suggest is not beyond me. Changes to the Ontario educational system are regulated by the provincial government and are therefore always changing and subject to the politics of the governing party. Often when policy changes are considered, research is needed. This is where research with QTBIPOC teachers and youth becomes important. Coloniality is rarely acknowledged in queer and trans research, even though coloniality and whiteness maintain each other (Battiste, 2005). It is first worth noting that even though queer, trans and Indigenous queer/two-spirit critiques are growing in academic conversations (Brockenbrough, 2013, 2015; Cruz, 2011, 2013; Laing, 2021; McCready, 2015) many of these dialogues are taking place outside of the realm of education (e.g., in literature studies, sociology, etc.). This is particularly troubling as our Western schooling-as-education system has and continues to be a site of violence for Indigenous and racialized communities (Battise, 2005; Laing, 2018; Patel, 2016; Regan, 2010; Joseph, 2018). While research often argues for a more intersectional approach to queer educational scholarship and some steps have been taken to address this (culturally responsive teaching) very little has been done to address the matrix that is whiteness, coloniality and cisheteronormativity.

The way the Ontario educational system is built and maintained means that the violence embedded into the structure of schools translates into harmful and uncaring practices that denies full existence and care to QTBIPOC youth and teachers. Jude's experience of working in

majority white schools illustrates the ways teachers practice harmful and subtle forms of racism, transphobia and queerphobia in classrooms. They share,

They [white teachers] think the kids are unruly, but they treat them the way you would imagine . . . so horribly and is so disturbing to watch. I don't think they can even book it.⁴ Like, I don't think they register just how much they're replicating that harm. And, like the way kids express themselves, I've seen teachers be like, "you need to pause, calm yourself down and reframe that or reset state that to me" in such a rude way and like, what's wrong with the way the kid just said it? Are they excited? Yes, they're a little bit louder than they should be. Yes. But they're a kid, they're doing their thing. But um, it's just disturbing. A lot of white supremacy in action. Yeah, yeah, a lot of white supremacy that's condoned, and that you can't even file a complaint about because it's so subtle.

The idea of how teachers police QTBIPOC students intrigued me. I wanted to know more about how Jude's experience of working in this school unfolded on a larger scale and how this experience compared to schools where Jude did feel affirmed, safe and seen. Jude expressed,

It's a lot of, Black and Indigenous parents also walking in with their trauma, around schooling and their trauma around how they're going to be perceived as parents, or caregivers. And I have to reassure them. Because what their kids are doing is not bad, right? It's all behavior that's characterized differently, because of their identity. It's all a form of anti-Blackness and racism, or cis het garbage . . . because they're just being themselves and if it's a loud volume that they're used to, like people talking over each other and sharing ideas and what not which happens a lot in South Asian culture, then they're doing things that they're used to, and they're communicating in a way that is culturally appropriate and comfortable for them. But a lot of teaching is so white that they think they're being rude, or aggressive or they don't understand the norms of the school and they're uneducated or something . . . this past year, though, I did join a school that was explicitly considered like an Indigenous community center, or community hub for education. And the vibe is so different. Like they were supposed to, they bumped me out this year because I was the lowest on seniority, and I switched to halftime. I was like, Oh, I'd much rather take a halftime pay cut, just to be able to remain in the school. Yeah. The ethic of care. They don't give a fuck about the OCT. Like, these Indigenous teachers are like, "come here, I'm giving you a hug." You need, like, you know, like "you seem down." Like they're so open and like, to the point where like non-Indigenous staff could approach them and say, like, "I'd like to smudge in the morning, before I start my day" and they would do that. Like, and within the school, its approach, it's like permitted and you smell

⁴ A slang term, meaning to recognize. Often used in the context of police, who will "book" a suspect.

that in the air all morning. And just like really calming. Yeah, it's rooted in their culture and ways of being in the world.

Jude's words remind us that "white supremacy is in action" and often operating in subtle ways that are difficult to name. These aggressions range from tone to body policing of QTBIPOC youth, and differ greatly from the ways racialized and Indigenous families practice care at home. Jude tells us that the school they are at currently often disregards the normative white, colonial practices of care in favour of culturally and racially informed care practices, one where grounding practices such as smudging is welcome and hugging children is welcome. If we connect these subversive practices to broader understandings and research about care in Indigenous, racialized and queer and trans communities we can see how deep these nonwhite, anticolonial ways of care exist in QTBIPOC communities.

Kimmerer's (2020) work in *Braiding Sweetgrass* is an excellent example of this. They write about how all living beings, whether that be plants, the land, insects or animals, all offer us lessons of how to be in relation with one another in harmonious, queer ways. They write that the awakening of our ecological consciousness, something that has been stripped from us as we become more removed from the land, can help us understand how we are living in a reciprocal relationship with one another and the land (Kimmerer, 2020; Chatzidakis et al., 2020; Regan, 2010). This is a queer ecologist perspective, one that intertwines both queered ideas of relationships and dynamics and Indigenous ways of being in community with one another.

Other QTBIPOC writers continue to remind us of what care and community could look like outside of a white, colonial, cisheteronormative framework. Adrienne Maree Brown (2019) writes about the pleasure and joy that must be centered in activist work, Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-

Samarasinha (2018) shares how they create care webs in racialized, disabled, queer and trans community, Sandy Hudson, Syrus Marcus Ware and Rodney Diverlus (2020) write about transformative, abolitionist practices of care in both Black and Indigenous communities and Syan Rose's (2021) illustrated book *Our Work is Everywhere* shares how queer and trans communities of colour continue to resist in anticolonial, antiracist and anticapitalist ways to restructure a society where QTBIPOC communities can thrive. These collective writings, among many others, remind us that care has been and continues to be practiced in subversive ways that are healing and transformative in QTBIPOC communities outside of the confines of schooling. This care takes place at the grassroots level, is inherently anticolonial, antiracist and anticapitalist, works across lines of difference in solidarity, provides access and resources to those who cannot navigate oppressive institutions and radical reorganizes whose voice, identity and needs are heard (Brown, 2019; Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018; Hudson, Ware and Diverlus, 2020; Rose, 2021; Chatzidakis et al., 2020; Malatino, 2021; Lorde, 1988). Thus, a queered, transgressive version of care, one that takes into account and actively combats the whiteness and colonialism of care in schools, is another way of being in relation and in community with each other and the land.

The story shared by Jude shows us the depth in which whiteness and colonialism has taken root in schools. The examples Jude and Blake share illustrate how racialized, land-based notions of care are incompatible with the practice of care as it exists in schools now. Nour's art that they submitted as part of this study also speaks to what it means to exist in a majority white school as a queer, trans, person of colour where your identities, histories and ways of being in relation with one another are regularly ignored and devalued. They question their own identity

and existence within schools writing “do you think they see me?” This particular art piece resonated with me and I brought my own feelings to Nour.

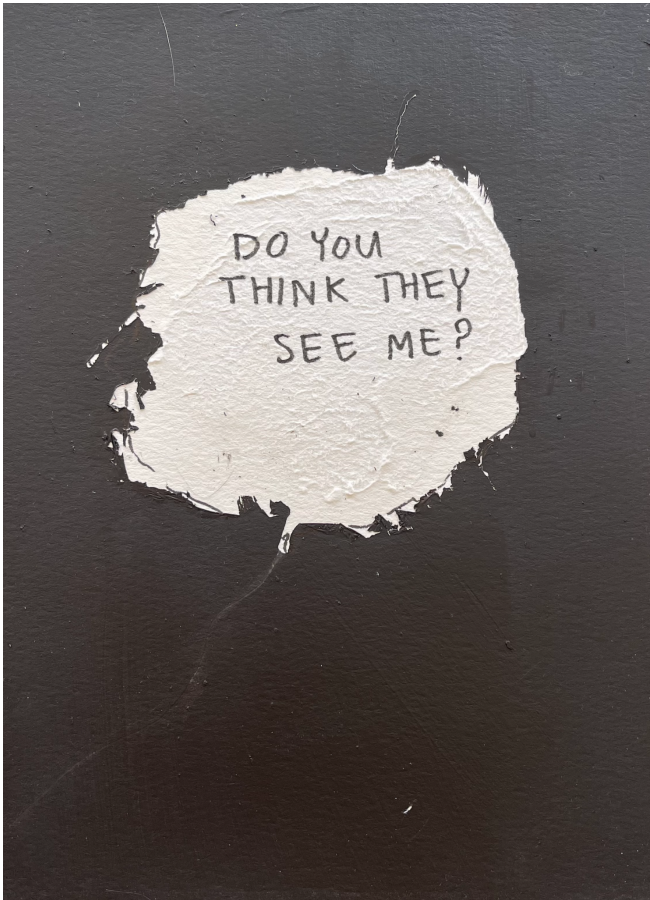


Figure 2. Do You Think They See Me?

We talked about the dichotomy we face as queer, trans, racialized people in the world, but specifically in schools. Our identities are often erased and ignored, and while people outside of a K-12 system can look for validation elsewhere (in their community, relationships, etc.) schooling is so prominent in the lives of students and teachers that we seek validation from it. This is troubling in many ways. Though queer and trans people of colour continue to exist without the affirmation of white, cisstraight educators and schooling systems, their validation is something

we continue to seek. This illustrates the power of white colonial educational systems and their ability to make QTBIPOC folks feel like we need validation from them in order to be seen. Validation, being seen and affirmed is a human need, one that Nour and I recognize we still seek out despite sharing a mutual distaste for how schools operate. Nour's art then shows the extent to which the ideas of whiteness and colonialism are embedded in our lives and practices at school.

What is revealing in Jude's story, is their affirming and welcoming experience at an Indigenous community center. This was the only example shared with me that spoke to a positive experience of receiving care in a school setting. Jude notes that the rigid rules set in place by unions and the OCT were disregarded in favour of an approach to working with students that embraces them as whole people. This is commonly noted throughout the literature, that students attending alternative or specialized schools have different expectations or norms that are a part of their schooling lives (Bascia & Maton, 2016; Flores, 2021). For example, The Freedom School run by Black Lives Matter Canada and the Africentric Alternative School in Toronto. The research that has come out of the Africentric Alternative School illustrates the extent to which care can be transformative to students and teachers. Research conducted by Howard and James (2019) showed that teachers were able to establish strong community ties while also affirming students' lived experiences as Black youth in Toronto. This was in comparison to a wealth of literature that shows that Black youth are often the target of anti-Blackness in mainstream schools that do not center antiracist curricula and pedagogies (Bhattacharjee, 2003; Lewis 1992; McMurtry & Curling, 2008; James, Turner, George, & Teclé, 2017; Love, 2019). What this shows then, is that nonnormative schooling structures allow more freedom and fluidity in the classroom, where a queer ethic of care can be practiced fully. However exciting and revealing

this is, it does not mitigate the ongoing harm and violence that QTBIPOC youth and teachers face everyday in nonalternative school settings.

The ongoing presence and reinforcement of whiteness and colonialism in schools as illustrated by these stories, indicate that there is a need to think about and practice care differently. In the last chapter, Jude, Blake and Nour theorized about what a queer ethic of care looks like. So far, we have explored the embeddedness of whiteness and colonialism in schools and how it pushes up against practices of care that exist in QTBIPOC communities. In what follows, Blake, Nour and Jude share how they combat the whiteness and coloniality of schools by engaging in disruptive, transgressive practices that support a queer ethic of care. These practices include creating (1) authentic, fluid, mutually vulnerable relationships with students (2) explicitly anticolonial, antiracist moments in their teaching and interactions with students and (3) affirmation and recognition as moments of healing.

Queer Ethic of Care: Practices in Action

Authentic, Fluid, Mutually Vulnerable Relationships

The first way Jude, Nour and Blake practiced disruptive and trans-gressive acts in their teaching was to connect with their queer and trans students of colour in ways that were authentic to their own identities, fluid in the power dynamics that typically arise between teachers and students and were mutually vulnerable with their students as a way to create deeper relationships. It should be noted that many of the disruptive practices in the stories they share are subversive, meaning these are not regular and/or commonly seen practices that occur in everyday classrooms. This is important to note because these trans-gressive practices are what enable

teachers to enact a queer ethic of care with their QTBIPOC students, despite not being widely accepted as practices a teacher should engage with.

Blake expressed the importance of working in tandem with their students, noting

I also just have like . . . more fluid relationships with the older kids I teach. Like whenever I'm teaching in high school I can still be their teacher, of course, but also a confidant, a mentor . . . teaching in a lot of ways that often go unspoken is like being a parent to a ton of young adults and children. And I think we should maybe talk about that more? A lot of that labour and work goes unnoticed and especially for the QTBIPOC teachers who are working in low SES communities, their QTBIPOC students *always* find them, and there's this sense of giving back and of guidance that is implicit and yet very important. I have kids in my classroom every lunch hour or break just wanting to talk and connect. It's more fluid than regular teaching and I have a deeper connection with those students because of it. And like, I wish . . . I wish there was more space in our school system for that to happen for all students because I feel like seeing our students and being able to connect with them in more vulnerable ways and on another level besides being a teacher makes a world of a difference in their life but honestly, also mine. It's nourishing. Like . . . getting to teach them to care about each other and like, the planet and the land that they're usually so disconnected from and each other in . . . in very human and honest ways, is very rewarding work, I hope for them but definitely for me. It makes a lot of this social justice work sustainable for me. Obviously to like, a principal or OCT or our unions it's icky, it's grey territory and so not only does that labour go unnoticed but it's also subversive in a lot of ways, because like, because that kind of care and recognition is not appropriate according to like, the standards of teaching profession from OCT or whatever.

Blake's insight into how they practice fluidity and vulnerability with their students in subversive ways also resonated with Nour who shared,

where I work currently, I would say like, 95% of the students are racialized. Yeah, Black or Brown, Asian, West Asian . . . but I would say that, yes, I do treat them differently, that I treated my white students when I was working in York Region. And the reason being is that I experienced less racism, when I'm working with students who are not white, right, when I'm working with students, that is a classroom that is predominantly white . . . there's a white sort of majority dynamic. The relationship between me and the students is very different, because I am constantly battling the sort of microaggressions that the kids don't even realize that they're committing. Anyways, all that aside, um, ya know, I obviously, I treat the kids differently . . . with my racialized students, I don't feel out of place at all. I feel like I can be my full self. I can pull out my accent when I want to, I can throw in words in other languages, I can do a lot more. Just being authentic in all the

versions of myself, right? Like, even right now, as we're speaking, we're speaking in standard English, the most standard English. But that's not what I necessarily do when I'm working with my racialized students.

Both Blake and Nour note that part of their ability to connect with their QTBIPOC students comes from being more vulnerable and authentic with their students about their own identities than they do with other white, cisgender, straight students. This process gives way to a mutual recognition between teachers and students where mentorship and more dynamic, fluid relationships can be established. Research has consistently shown that care is not located within individuals, but rather in relation to one another (Wilson, 2008; Motta & Bennett, 2018; Reyes, Banda and Caldas, 2020). Working within a pedagogy of care and a queer pedagogy (Shlasko, 2005) that centers a queer ethic of care can create space for dialogical relationships that disrupt the white, colonial forms of care practiced in schools (Mehrotra, 2021; Motta & Bennett, 2018). These nonnormative forms of community care already exist in QTBIPOC communities.

Othermothers in African communities are networks of mothers who coparents and raise the children of others (Butler, 2019; Collins, 2000). hooks (1984) contends that othermothering is a form of revolutionary parenting because it challenges the Western idea that parenting should be limited to legal or biological relationships (Butler, 2019). Latinx/Chicanx feminists have created caring collectives by embracing the wholeness of a person in order to address the academic, emotional, and personal needs of students (Calderón et al., 2012; Reyes, Banda and Caldas, 2020). This is similar to how disabled, queer and trans communities of colour come together to work in care webs (Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018; Fink, 2021) to support one another.

Blake and Nour also engaged in what some researchers call “authentic care” (Rolón-Dow, 2005) where teachers establish relationships with students that are reciprocal, justice-oriented and nonhierarchical. These acts, such as code-switching to speak with another accent and talking informally with students during their lunch hour as a mentor, differ from “aesthetic caring” where teachers show care in infantilizing, deficit-based ways (Rolón-Dow, 2005) that ignore the reciprocal and relational aspects of care between two people. The fluidity of roles that is created during authentic caring moments speaks to a queer ethic of care; one that supports the need for more dynamic mentorships and relationships between teachers and students as a way to name what is already happening in schools.

Nour’s story of being able to code switch using nonstandard English in their classrooms with other racialized students led me to want to explore how queer and trans educators of colour were connecting more deeply with their QTBIPOC students and how. What were they doing that made their queer and trans students of colour feel more seen and understood in caring ways that other teachers weren’t doing?

Jude shares two stories that exemplify their ability to connect with their students in ways that are mutually vulnerable and fluid. When I asked Jude how they feel about working with queer and trans youth of colour versus other students in the school they shared,

Um, honestly, those kids I feel more protective about them is what I’ve noticed, and I definitely do tend to favourite them a little bit because, well, fuck it! I doubt they’re gonna have any other teacher who does that for them in the next 12 years. They’re my kids. And so I get very protective of them. I’m much more invested than my other kids. Because I do feel like they tend to be marginalized a lot more or forced into the closet, in their home rooms. And so when they’re around me, like, you can tell they’re being blissfully gay the whole time. And so it’s just nice. And we’re all just kind of queer together. And it’s great. And I feel for them, they’re always very curious about, like, your partner. Like, “what do your parents think about that?” Like, “oh, is your partner white?”

Oh, what's that, like?" and so they really want to know, and I hear a lot about their dating life, which I normally don't tolerate from a lot of students because I feel like it's a boundary thing. Um, and the last thing I want is for those boundaries to be blurred . . . yeah, it's trying to give them different narratives to build off of, because they probably don't have a lot. And again, like, yeah, a lot of the narratives for like queer trans people are like white, like, they're very white. And so you rarely ever see, like a racialized, queer trans life, or story or narrative or lives. . . . I don't know how many people's stories they get to hear, right, like, like people who they actually know. And so I tend to be pretty, pretty honest, right? And like, I'll share a few more pictures of me and my partner and like, us doing things or like, and I've spoken very openly about the fact that my parents don't accept me and that I'm still going to be with my partner and still do my thing. It's also the way the queerness expressed is different. And I find that a lot of white queer folks can't seem to get this. Where like, I have students who are Muslim who are like, I'm a lesbian when I'm at school. But when my parents are here, I'm straight. Yes, I have a girlfriend when I'm at school, but if you see my parents, I don't have a girlfriend. Yeah. And like, they [white teachers] can't seem to understand. I've seen white queer folks be like, "Oh, my goodness, you need to fight for your right to, like, force your parents to understand!" And it's like, no, this child just needs to survive till they get out of this house . . . and I'm a little bit more honest, and like, when I go to high schools, I'm like, very much like, "do this, do that, like, let's do a whole plan." Like, it matters to me. Because I find at least in my own experience, the kids were very prepared from the get go and have much less to fear.

Here, Jude engaged in a fluid, dynamic relationship with their students, moving beyond the expectations of their job description. Jude was able to see and affirm their students, their intersecting identities and as a result find mutual recognition in each other. By embracing their students and their whole identities, and being able to understand the nuances needed when it comes to working with racialized queer and trans students, Jude's students have the ability to recognize their own value and ability (Assmann, 2013; Motta & Bennett, 2018; Petzen, 2012; Logie & Rwigema, 2014) and start to rewrite dominant narratives they have about the whiteness of queerness and transness as it relates to being a BIPOC (Goldstein, 2019). The ability to engage in nuanced discussions about race, gender, sexuality and coloniality was one of the findings I wrote about in chapter one; this is an example of how theory turns into practice.

The stories shared thus far reminded me that teachers are often expected to act and teach in ways that are disconnected from their students and the land in ways that are hierarchical. With this in mind, I asked Jude how they are able to be vulnerable with their students given the rigidity of the teaching profession's expectation of care and relationships between students and teachers. They responded,

I'm just myself, and I should be allowed to be my full self at school. Like I have definitely cried at least once in front of my kids. I remember one time I got shoved really hard. And I don't like being touched at all. And I was just like, in shock, straight up for like, two minutes. I couldn't verbalize anything. And then the kids are like, "what do we do in this scenario?" and I was like, "I need you to just call the office, because I need—I need—I can't respond right now." And like, it was a very strong trigger for me. And so you know, no one from the office team came. And so they went next door and got a teacher and I had to go to the office to state that I needed to take a five second break. And my principal gave me shit about it. And so I had to go back to the classroom. I'm like, in tears, because I'm having this strong trauma response right now. And I just told the kids, I need a minute. I just need a minute. And so they're like, "okay, what do you want to see the door ajar?" And I just kind of like, left, the door ajar did my thing, went back in eyes are all red and face all puffy. And I'm like, "I just want to talk about what just happened to me right now. And like, explain what I was feeling." But really, they thought it was gonna come down with them and that I would be angry. And I was like, "I'm not mad at you for what you did. I'm upset because of this. But my reaction right now is bigger than what it should be in my opinion. Because my experience is this, this of this." Yeah. And the way I just did it very calmly, I said, "You know, you all know, I still love you, and not mad at you, and I don't hate you. I'm not gonna hate you forever. Because of this. I'm just having a bit of an upsetting moment right now." And like, this is just the way I said it to the kids and if I had said that to the principal, like that's how I was going to deal with it she would have told me not to. The response I got from my kids was totally different. They cleaned up that whole area while I was gone, they made sure they were all quietly working the whole time while I was trying to decompress. And once I did share that with them, they were super quiet, polite, acknowledged the hurt feelings, acknowledged and said like, "I'm really sorry," the rest of the week kept checking in on me. Like it wasn't like, oh, our teacher cried in front of us. It was like, uh, we really hurt this person. And so their response also showed a lot of care towards me. And so I really do think you do get what you give when it comes to kids and care.

Jude's story of being vulnerable with their students and receiving support from them is revealing; it shows the depth in which students and teachers are in mutually vulnerable,

supportive relationships that resemble care webs (Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018; Fink, 2021). What is interesting is that the role of emotions, embodiment and vulnerability as it relates to care work in schools is regularly ignored despite teaching being an affective, embodied practice (Motta & Bennett, 2018; hooks, 1994; Mehrotra, 2021; Brown, 2012). Being vulnerable and honest with students in ways that do not compromise learning and teaching requires having established relationships with students and having a shared understanding of what care looks and feels like within a community (Reyes, Banda and Caldas, 2020). In order to do this, Jude communicated what they needed in that moment and engaged in a process of rupture and repair through emotional vulnerability with their students. These embodied vulnerabilities is a trauma-informed, trans, queered pedagogical approach to teaching students, particularly QTBIPOC youth. By centering vulnerability and the mutual care between students and teachers, classrooms become places of un/learning and liberation. Brené Brown (2012) has also written about the role vulnerability plays in deepening human connection. Brown (2012) writes that, “vulnerability is the birthplace of love, belonging, joy, courage, empathy, and creativity. It is the source of hope, empathy, accountability, and authenticity. If we want greater clarity in our purpose or deeper and more meaningful spiritual lives, vulnerability is the path.” Her work on shame, vulnerability and courage has led her to define vulnerability as uncertainty, risk and emotional exposure, which her work as argued is essential for human connection and growth (Brown, 2012).

This aligns with how some Black and Brown queer scholars have centred vulnerability in their world (Lewis, 2012; Nnawulezi et al., 2015; Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018). Establishing mutually vulnerable relationships with students can also bring about a process of uncomfortable learning as trust forms allowing teachers and students to engage in, messiness, rupture, and

repair. This process, of paying attention to our bodies as we navigate a praxis of a queer ethic of care, can help us create more meaningful and deep relationships that are based on authentic care. It also reinforces to us that the inter/intrapersonal dynamics of a queer ethic of care means challenging the white, colonial assumptions about teaching as a profession. It asks us to re-evaluate who is capable of caring by challenging fixed notions of “caregiver” and “care receiver” (Nicol et al., 2010). In other words, students can become caregivers and teachers can receive care. This coconstruction disrupts dominant, hierarchical power dynamics between the teachers and students, so that the wellbeing of everyone can be fostered (Reyes, Banda and Caldas, 2020) within a care web (Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018).

Care as Creating Explicitly Anticolonial, Antiracist Moments

So far I’ve explored how creating authentic, fluid and mutually vulnerable relationships with students makes space for a queered, transgressive form of care to be practiced in schools. Once teachers have established these relationships with students, creating moments to enact antiracist and anticolonial forms of care in schools are possible. Antiracist and anticolonial ways of caring and being in relation with one another are explicitly a form of queered and transgressive care, as they disrupt and challenge cisheteropatriarchy, whiteness and colonialism as the basis of care work often practiced in schools.

I focus on Jude’s experience in schools in this section for a few reasons. Jude is an excellent storyteller and their words are impactful. While I was deciding what stories to tell in this section, I consulted with Blake and Nour and we all agreed their stories of violence and combating queerphobia, transphobia, racism and colonialism in their schooling environments, while beautiful and powerful, were triggering for them to relay and therefore could reinforce

damage centered narratives for QTBIPOC teachers and youth. Not to mention, the implications of having their trauma stories documented in writing forever. For this reason, Jude's stories are the only ones shared in this section. The two stories I share here, exemplify how Jude was able to confront and combat the racist and colonial overtones of their school environment and practice transgressive forms of care with students. When I asked Jude how they confront racism and coloniality in their school they shared,

So 80% of my school is just white in terms of teaching staff, and so the kids [that] will be getting in trouble are racialized and often queer and trans. And in so many ways that were just violent, like I remember one time, I had one student and she doesn't like to do work she loves to talk. There was an ongoing discussion between us about how I just wanted to put some of that talking onto paper. So I could give her a good grade. And so one day she was getting in the door while the teachers were talking, and this was an excited grade eight, right? And she kind of brought it up to the teachers who were talking and one of the white male teachers in the conversation turned around and just yelled at her . . . like, I can't even . . . just like the kind of wild scream that like if it was any adult doing that to another adult, you'd be like, "What? What's wrong with you?" Like, it borders on harassment, or assault, you could say, and she was in tears, in tears. And they are like—this teacher just couldn't let go of it, like started dressing her down for like, being rude and not being courteous and interrupting when two adults are speaking to each other, which I was like, what, what rationale is that? And I'm like, first of all, we're not at a cafe. If a child seeks your attention while you're at work in school, that is who we're here to serve. So she was just really upset. And she was like, getting ready to have her fight and I just kind of put my arm around her. I was like, "hey, Let's go to my room." And, you know, she cried it out, and I talked her down. And I said to her like, "listen, that was white supremacy. That is what you were experiencing. You did nothing wrong at that moment. That teacher, I can't even justify his behavior to you. It was embarrassing." And I'm sorry, we're being treated like that, because she's not going to get that from him. Yeah. And then like, we talked about what it was like for her as a Black girl in that school and how I can be an ally and advocate for her moving forward. And so in that moment there was a lot of care but if you were to ask a governing board like OCT I did 101 things wrong. First of all, I shouldn't be bad talking my colleague in any way—TDSB [Toronto District School Board] is like, Oh, we should be a community. And so if anything, I should have had a pre conversation with them first, to decide the course of action, accommodate, or whatever he wanted, basically, because we have to be in agreement, and he's not going to budge on his students being corrected, and not going to acknowledge how anti-Black it was or problematic it was. And that would have been the correct process. But that in my mind would have been the start of us starting trauma or building

onto an existing trauma, because we're definitely not the first space where they've encountered misogynoir and she's been told to quiet down, to make herself smaller or to shrink. Like, there's so many other ways of handling that situation. And so I don't know a lot of teaching, I find the way of caring in schools right now is really not about caring. It's about maintaining power and disrupting it will always put whoever's disrupted it at risk.

Jude reminds us that teachers often operate as gatekeepers and violent reinforcers of the colonial educational system that upholds whiteness as the standard for what behaviour is acceptable in schools. Because of Jude's own experiences and identities in schools, they were able to hold space for this student in ways that are disruptive and transgressive to the normative, white forms of care that are used in schools. They also note the importance of not reinscribing existing trauma for this student that could belittle her experience of white supremacy while maintaining white colonial structures. The challenge of affirming and caring for QTBIPOC students when they experience white colonial violence in schools is inherently linked to a queered care practice. Queer Indigenous and Two-Spirit community elders and scholars have long written about the need to implement anticolonial practices that take seriously the link between queerphobia, transphobia and social justice practices in schools (Hunt & Holmes, 2015). They name this as part of a decolonial queer politic (Hunt & Holmes, 2015). While true decolonization that is land based is outside of the scope of in my work, establishing anticolonial and antiracist practices of care that can "render it [colonialism, whiteness] abnormal [allows us] to name it and make it visible in order to challenge it" (Riggs, 2010). This is part of the process that Jude has engaged in; identifying the violence that is perpetuated against their QTBIPOC students, understanding it, naming it and actively working to combat and protect their students from further trauma.

Jude goes on to share a similar story in which they advocated for another student that was the target of colonial violence from a white teacher:

I think back to this one moment where I had a kid. It was during one of my preps before lunch. And this one student who I personally could not stand just because she aggravated every bone in my body, but I still love her. She stormed out of my neighbor's classroom because she was done with him and he was a super racist white dude. This girl is queer but no one at home knows and is Black and like and so I felt bad. I was like, I'm pretty sure the reason I can't stand you is because you are aggravated all day by being around this person. And, and so, again, super angry storms out, slams the door in his face, goes to her locker, she's like, "I'm fucking done with the shit. I'm going home. Blah blah blah this shitty ass white guy, think they can tell me what the fuck to do, blah, blah, blah." And I was like, you know, the principal was trying to stand right beside her and in principal's like this skinny ass white woman blonde and like, an absolute Karen.⁵ And she's like, "listen, you can't just walk out of the building" like, and this the student is like, "fucking watch me. And if you touch me, you better watch out." Like she was just very clear about her boundaries. And the principal was like very much in her space. And so like I just, you know, came out of my classroom and had my like, coffee in my hand and I was like, "Hey, where are you going?" Just to like, to change the tone. And she's like, "Oh, she's like cursing about this guy. And I'm like, oh, my goodness, what's going on? Whoa, this is a lot of energy. Like, do you want to come into my room and like, just calm down a little bit. Because at least that way, when you're crossing the street, you won't be angry. It's better when you're walking to be calm and happy. So you can enjoy the sunshine." Absolute bullshit, with the words that are coming out my mouth, but just anything to not talk about what's happening, right? And she looked me up and down suspiciously and was like "okay, I will come into your room for a second, just to drink some water and chill out." And she has her jacket on when she comes in and she's like, "I'm going you can't stop me." And I said, I'm like, "you can go none of us are here to stop you. We can't stop you. You're not a child." And she's not like a child—there are many times where I've come to school early and I will stop at the Metro. And she goes grocery shopping for her whole family. So she's 13 and an adult in her family. So why the hell am I going to talk to her like a child? And so I just brought her in, and she's eating this granola bar, having some water just chilling. And I just said like, "what was going on there. Like you seemed really upset. And I just hate that you would leave school that upset. And I just would love to talk about it if you want to. I don't think we'll solve the problem, but we can just talk about it." That was all she needed to hear. I don't know why that clicked. But she started talking about it very carefully, and how uncomfortable she felt in that classroom. And the principal was just quietly standing at the door hovering. And I said, "so what would make you feel better? Because you clearly are feeling uncomfortable. And you know, what

⁵ A Karen is a white, middle-class woman who acts in ways that are entitled and privileged. They often weaponize their privilege against QTBIPOC folks. The term is used as slang and gained popularity online through memes and social media. An example: a woman who asks to speak to the manager after she didn't like the answer an employee gave her; calling the police on Black youth because she feels threatened, etc.

would make you feel less uncomfortable?” And she said “I want to be in a different classroom. Okay, well, you know, the principal’s gonna want a good reason for that. If I’m going to go talk to her,” and she was like, “Oh, you actually want to go talk to her for me?!” I was like, “Yeah, because I don’t want you leaving school like this. It hurts my heart that you’re upset.” And she’s like, “I didn’t know you even liked me. I thought you thought I was annoying.” I’m like, “I can think that and still want to help. Isn’t that possible? I feel all those things.” And she was like, “yeah, I think you’re annoying too. But I like you right now.” But as I’m saying that, right, like in those moments like that is the queerness coming to play, where it’s like the range of emotion is so much more expansive, I’m allowed to feel more than one feeling at a time. And what was great is like after that incident, not even a hiccup for the rest of the year. She didn’t even get switched out of the classroom, she changed her mind later on. She said, like, “as long as I can take breaks in Jude’s classroom, I’m good to stay here.”

Both of the stories that Jude share exemplify what a queer ethic of care would look like in practice. Jude was able to connect with this student in vulnerable ways, making space for their voice and experiences to be heard and validated. Here we can see that Jude was able to establish what Piepzna-Samarasinha (2018) calls a care web. Piepzna-Samarasinha (2018) describes care webs as webs of care between other queer and trans people of colour that operate outside of hegemonic, cisheteronormative, familial structures (Malatino, 2020). Care webs operate by using the ideas and practices from disability justice movements and creating a network of interlocking communities of care at the grassroots level. This kind of care work emerges when there is little to no infrastructure of affirming care available for people to access, or when the structure that does exist to ensure care cannot and does not provide the type of care QTBIPOC folks need. While the context of this study is within the realm of education, uncaring structures and practices used against QTBIPOC folks is well documented in the literature (Malatino, 2020; Sharman, 2021; Thom, 2019; Fink, 2021). In the story Jude shared, they were able to intervene when a student was facing harm from their teacher and principal, and establish a care web with them that allowed them to thrive and continue their studies. Thus, the importance of Jude’s ability to

establish a care web with their students is crucial; it can help pave the way towards thriving and joy (Greteman, 2016, 2018) and ensure QTBIPOC futures.

Affirmation and Recognition as Moments of Healing

The last disruptive practice these educators engaged in was creating moments of affirmation and mutual recognition that created space for healing. These moments between teachers, staff and students address some of the intergenerational trauma that queer, trans and racialized youth and adults face when entering the classroom. Specifically for racialized and Indigenous youth, whose history of being recognized and seen in their full selves in the classroom is rare and often subject to white, colonial practices in schools.

Both Jude and Blake speak of their desire to engage in disruptive practices of care so that they begin to heal some of the intergenerational trauma they have experienced. Blakes shares their desire to affirm their students and repair some of the own harm they experienced in schools. They mentioned,

I try to treat their problems and issues and things they're facing as real. Like their first crush or relationship falling apart, and they're in like . . . grade six, and we know as adults that life goes on, but it's important for me to remember that for them, this IS their life. It's all they know. And to belittle that experience . . . of being a young queer, racialized kid or trans kid and have their first heartache? That's real! They're going to remember that forever! And I need to honour that and make space for that as a teacher, even though it's nowhere in my job description. Because as someone who didn't get that experience until a lot later in life—again, not being safe to be queer or for people who figure it out later—we experience that later in life and it's like you're a child again because you didn't have it then. So yeah . . . just trying to honour their lives and experiences as real and not giving into this narrative that kids don't know what they're feeling or going through and that it's just "kid stuff" because it's not . . . and it's almost like recognition in them for myself, like it's almost healing for me. The young child in me who couldn't come out because it wasn't safe or for some folks who didn't know they were queer or trans until they were adults they almost mourn that childhood they didn't get. So showing up in my classroom now with my QTBIPOC students means that I can affirm and see them for who they really are, which is something I didn't get as a student. That's part of teaching and

pedagogy for me as a queer and trans educator; doing the things I wish I had as a student and my kids and myself mutually healing at the same time. Like reconnecting them to the land that I was ripped away from, or casually sharing my pronouns with them, or taking time to listen to them talk about what's happening in their lives on a real human one to one level. I needed that.

Blake openly talks about how their pedagogy as a teacher involves teaching and engaging with their students in affirming and validating ways they wish they had received as a queer, trans, Indigenous, Black student in school. By honouring their students and their lives, they try to repair some of the harm and uncaring practices they experienced as a child.

This is very similar to what Jude shared with me. Jude noted their desire to engage in a process of mutual healing with their students by being able to connect with them personally and their emotional abilities. Jude expressed,

I have trauma but also like being on the spectrum [ASD] makes it really hard to filter as a teacher. And so sometimes when things hit me, my emotions are not going to filter or process the way another person's might, or more neurotypical persons might and so I just told the kids like, "I'm feeling angry right now not happy about this, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah." But then what I usually find is that because I'm surrounded by 13 year olds, they also usually are feeling angry or like, feeling their emotions. So we're at the same emotional level for each other basically. And like, I joke to my partner, I'm like, you know, trauma kind of like, stalls, your aging process. Sometimes it ages you in some ways, but that also stalls you. And so in a way, teaching is very much healing for me. Because I spend my day around people who are emotionally at the same age I am. Yes, right. And like, in some ways, I know I'm emotionally much older. But when I get into a trauma space, I really am just like, 9 to 13. And so it's actually trauma healing in a way that I sometimes feel sad that other people in my position don't get to do. Because if you're processing childhood trauma as an adult, a big thing is wanting to relive your childhood. And so this way, I feel less like I'm causing them harm. There's enough distance that mentally that I can still be an adult. But being around my kids in those moments where I just fully dive into being with them, or like trauma healing moments, because I get to actually let the nine year old inside me or the 13 year old inside me come out and I don't think they book that's what they're experiencing. Yeah, we get to heal together.

Both of these stories shared by Jude and Blake are powerful because they illustrate the potential for care, and specifically a queer ethic of care, to pave ways for mutual healing. They are able to do this because they can recognize in themselves the kind of care they did not receive and because of this there is a mutual understanding and recognition with their students. The queered, transgressive caring that Jude and Blake grieve are ways that they themselves try to enact in their relationships with their students. Doing this is a way to restore or return to a form of queered care that should have been but has been ripped away in favour of a white, colonial form of care that continues to dominate schooling environments. These moments of mutual recognition and affirmation as a way towards healing and thriving is well documented in community settings. QTBIPOC community activists, writers and scholars have long written about the affective and healing component of activist work in the educational sphere (Hudson, Ware & Diverlus, 2020; Kaba & Nopper, 2021; Rose, 2021; Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018). Classrooms can be a site of unlearning the normative white, colonial care practices that separate students and teachers, where educators are asked to sever themselves from moments of authentic relationships, vulnerability, and connection with students. While the safety and care of some students (white, cisgender, straight, able-bodied, neurotypical) is seen in schools, these students operate and are cared for within a society and educational structure that was designed with them in mind. Schooling practices as it relates to personal and systemic care that QTBIPOC youth receive has yet to grapple with the larger systemic issues like racism, colonialism, the pervasiveness of whiteness and cisheteropatriarchy that is reinforced and reproduced in schools (Connell & Elliot, 2009). These disruptive and transgressive moments of care, where teachers are able to engage in acts of recognition and affirmation, provide a sense of healing for both students and teachers. This

enables their care web (Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018) to be strengthened and deepened, spreading out to other people and establishing larger systems of affirming, healing care. In doing this, QTBIPOC educators are paving the way for thriving futures (Greteman, 2016; 2018; Darling-Hammond, 2020; Muñoz, 2009; Goltz, 2013) and joy.

Summary

This chapter focused on the second finding of this study, where Blake, Nour and Jude described care as it exists in schools right now as inherently white, colonial and violent. Throughout this chapter, they explored how they've been able to reimagine new forms of transgressive, disruptive, queered care practices in their schools. These disruptive practices include creating (1) authentic, fluid, mutually vulnerable relationships with students (2) explicitly anticolonial, antiracist moments in their teaching and interactions with students and (3) affirmation and recognition as moments of healing. This chapter put the theorizing of a queer ethic of care detailed in the first analysis chapter, into practice, connecting theory to pedagogy. In what follows, I outline the significance and contributions of this work to the field of education and offer suggestions and insights on ways to move forward.

Chapter 5

Care as the Future: Significance and Implications

“Hope is essential to any political struggle for radical change when the overall social climate promotes disillusionment and despair”

— bell hooks

This research details the findings from three interviews with QTBIPOC educators in Ontario. My time working with Jude, Blake and Nour has profoundly shaped how I approach and understand a queer ethic of care in both my professional and personal life. Their stories, insights, art and informal conversations with me, reinforces the importance of having a queer and trans community who see and affirm you in all of our complex, intersecting identities.

My interest in this research emerged naturally; initially from my work on the LGBTQ Families Speak Out project where my supervisor, Dr. Tara Goldstein and I wrote about our principles and practices working with LGBTQ Families in Ontario (Owis & Goldstein, 2021). This led to writing with Dr. Jenny Salisbury and Dr. Pam Baer about a slow ethic of care (Owis et al., 2022) and how we worked in care webs (Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018) to make ethical decisions in slow, embodied ways.

This research asked the following questions:

1. How do queer, trans and racialized educators understand a queer ethic of care when working with QTBIPOC youth?
2. How do queer, trans and racialized educators practice a queer ethic of care when working with QTBIPOC youth?

By building on existing academic conversations about care work and care pedagogies I used the theoretical framework of *a queer ethic of care*, that draws from queer/trans of colour

critique, ethics of care, care work, futurity, thriving, anticoloniality work and gender and sexuality studies in education to situate this research.

In the previous chapters, I outlined that QTBIPOC educators conceptualize a queer ethic of care as queer and gender nuanced and expansive, disruptive and trans-gressive and a tailored practice that takes place within a care web. This was expanded in the second analysis chapter where Blake, Nour and Jude illustrated how care as it exists in schools right now is inherently white, colonial and violent. As a result, they've had to reimagine new forms of care practices that are queered and trans-gressive when working with queer and trans youth of colour. These disruptive practices include creating (1) authentic, fluid, mutually vulnerable relationships with students (2) explicitly anticolonial, antiracist moments in their teaching and interactions with students and (3) affirmation and recognition as moments of healing. Collectively, these disruptive and trans-gressive practices create space for mutual healing for both queer and trans racialized students and teachers and paves the way for queer futurity (Munoz, 2009) and thriving (Darling-Hammond, 2020).

The findings from this study indicate a few things: in order for youth (especially QTBIPOC youth) to feel cared for in schools, educators must continually reimagine and disrupt their knowledge of care and care practices that are built upon white, colonial, cisheteronormative assumptions; educators must engage in anticolonial and antiracist care practices that are trans-gressive to the understandings of care in schools; teachers must learn how to create care webs in community with their students in ways that are vulnerable, authentic and fluid; a queer ethic of care is possible to implement at the grassroots, individual level first, but must move towards systemic practices in order to be sustainable and effective for QTBIPOC students in the long

term; and a queer ethic of care offers a way for QTBIPOC teachers and students to feel recognition, affirmation and mutually heal by imagining new futures through thriving, joyful care. This research ultimately argues for a queer ethic of care as a way forward when working with QTBIPOC youth while acknowledging that these theories and practices have the ability to make all students feel cared for.

Looking back, it's evident this thesis is both a professional project that ended up being personally transformative. Listening to Jude, Nour and Blake's stories, thinking about care and piecing together my own mis/understandings of care in my personal life was difficult work. It was challenging to write this dissertation because there were many moments where I simply did not care. Reading through the data was sometimes numbing, forcing me to come to terms with ways I had not practiced a queer ethic of care in my relationships and the ways I had denied myself true care. Writing these chapters while struggling to take care of myself through the most difficult period of mental and physical instability in my life, made me realize how important this work is. It is that embodiment and grappling with this work, that I believe educators must engage in in order to understand how they can practice a queer ethic of care with their students.

I've already shared my own journey through this work, noting what I see as a dual journey: one that is inherently professional and practiced with students in classrooms, but is also deeply personal and involves a process of un/learning, grappling with new, uncomfortable ideas that could bring up feelings of grief, sadness and anger. This process of rupture and repair is central to being able to work through difficult un/learning. Part of writing about care and practicing disruptive and trans-gressive forms of care means imagining ways we can collectively and individually heal from white, colonial violence and find new pathways to embody and

practice care. In what follows, I expand on how this research is an interruption to the white, colonial versions of care practiced in schools today. I also explore how this research can offer QTBIPOC teachers and students pathways to thriving and joy, and share future directions in theory and practice which are necessary for this research to evolve.

A Note About These Implications

While I think this work can be incredibly important to white, cisgender, straight teachers and students, they are not my primary focus. Research on care has always centered white, cisgender, straight bodies and those understandings have been placed on QTBIPOC communities without their consent. As a result, they were forced to abide by white, colonial version of care that has caused physical, emotional, mental and psychological violence for generations of QTBIPOC youth in our educational system. My research is inherently queer, trans, anticolonial, antiracist and pulls from care work and labour from disability activists, whose lives and wellbeing are routinely ignored and the care they receive inadequate. Ethically I cannot write a dissertation that uses the stories and trauma from QTBIPOC teachers as a way to rationalize and support the care of white, cisgender, straight teachers and students, nor do I think it is appropriate to cater to those audiences in order for this work to remain significant. For this reason, I have not centered white, cisgender, straight teachers and students in my discussions or the implications of this research, despite clear indications that this work can also be beneficial to them. My hope is that another scholar is able to take up that work and explore how a queer ethic of care can be practiced with white, cisgender, straight teachers and youth, but that is not my work to do.

Disrupting and Trans-gressing Whiteness and Colonialism

Educators in this study noted the importance of continually disrupting their knowledge and practices of care that are rooted in white, colonial, cisheteronormative understandings. They illustrated in their stories how they put into practice a queer ethic of care, by intentionally and explicitly engaging in anticolonial, antiracist care practices that are trans-gressive to the current state of care in schools. For Jude, Nour and Blake, some of these anticolonial and antiracist practices included working with their QTBIPOC students when they faced microaggressions, retraumatization of intergenerational violence, gaslighting and reinforcing rigid hierarchies between students and teachers based on white, colonial versions of school and care. They did this by engaging in a process of community building, being vulnerable and open with their students, and creating pathways towards healing together.

The implications of this finding cannot be overstated as it explicitly questions the foundation in which the Ontario educational system (and many other educational institutions) is built upon. While I strongly believe there needs to be a radical overhaul in the systemic organization and practices of our educational system, what Jude, Blake and Nour showed was that they can work in community with students to mitigate some of the harm their students face because of the ongoing violence that is embedded into their schooling structure. This is important to note because it shows the ways in which QTBIPOC teachers are capable of protecting their students from uncaring practices by simply questioning them, affirming their students and the harm they are facing and working in community with their students to find ways that they can move forward, thrive and heal.

If we are to take this implication as an opportunity for more radical shifts to the way preservice and practicing teachers are educated about ethics, care and how to work in community with students in ways that are antiracist and anticolonial, we would be able to start thinking about ways to practice affirming care for QTBIPOC youth. This is no easy task. I've already noted in the two analysis chapters how difficult it is to practice disruptive, trans-gressive forms of care in schools because of the lack of support from the Ontario College of Teachers (OCT) and teacher unions in Ontario like Ontario Secondary School Teacher Federation (OSSTF) and Elementary Teacher Federation of Ontario (ETFO). This often means that preservice and practicing teachers are educated into a culture of fear with their students, knowing they could lose their job if they are deemed as being "inappropriate" with their students. While these regulations by the OCT are put into place with good intention and do protect some of the grooming, sexual harassment and assault that occurs in schools, it also creates a psychological and emotional environment devoid of human connection between teachers and students. I want to make clear here that I understand the importance and intentions behind the 2002 professional advisory set out by the OCT; it is to provide a legal framework in which the college can respond to cases related to sexual misconduct. As I have mentioned earlier, if this professional advisory was successful it would mean the number of sexual assault cases against students would be near zero, and that is not the case; harm and violence continue to be perpetuated against youth. At the same time, the teachers who are trying to practice care in disruptive, transgressive ways fear for their futures as an educator because of the 2002 professional advisory and how it has been instilled in pre-service and practicing educators. Here, we can see the legal safety of a college being put first before the care youth can and should receive. What a queer ethic of care offers

then, is an alternative or a possibility in which teachers are able to practice care in more disruptive ways without the fear of being reprimanded by the college. The difficulty in this is understanding the ways in which regulations or even theories such as a queer ethic of care are co-opted in hegemonic structures such as the OCT. When rules, regulations and expectations are placed upon teachers in sweeping, generalized ways, it leaves very little room for nuanced understandings of care at a community and individual level. Thus, I want to make clear that I do not see a queer ethic of care as one-size fits all solution, but rather a possibility that is meant to be tailored and adapted to each community, individual and context. Teaching is a practice of love and care (hooks, 2000) and to think otherwise is to deny some of our most marginalized students (QTBIPOC) in realizing their potential, the validity of their identities and the joy they could experience in and outside of schools.

More explicit and nuanced education must be done in order for both preservice and practicing teachers to be able to question their own privileges, identities and social location when working with QTBIPOC students. Ongoing professional development that is slow, intentional and continues to build as educators grow in their career is necessary and crucial in order to mitigate the ongoing harm QTBIPOC students face in the educational system. In particular, teacher education programs must take seriously how the information they deliver to preservice teachers about ethics and care is actually a space for fear-mongering to grow. Many of the touching and poignant stories shared in this dissertation are so powerful because the teachers who shared them are fearless; they recognize the structure they are expected to teach in, and how their very presence can actually be a way to reinscribe harm and intergenerational trauma. They know this explicitly, and because of their identities and own experiences as queer, trans,

nonbinary, Brown, Black, Indigenous educators, they work consciously to push the limitations of the standards of the profession set out by OCT (Ontario College of Teachers, 2002) and practice a form of queer care. Not every teacher can and will have these identities and shared experiences to teach with. With that in mind, more work in restructuring teacher education programs and offering more courses about the connections between antioppression work (LGBTQ+, BIPOC, Indigenous ways of knowing and being in the world, land-based understandings of community, anti-Blackness, disability, neurodivergence, etc.) and care are necessary. Chatzidakis et al. (2020) asks us *what would happen if care was the organizing principle for our world?* To this I offer a similar question, *what would happen if a queer ethic of care was the underlying principle in which teacher-education and ongoing professional development was built upon?* More research about how the intersections of race, colonialism, and gender and sexuality play out in school is needed in order to properly attend to this question, one that would mean a radical restructuring in our educational system and an ongoing reasserting of anticolonial, antiracist care practices that take seriously the practices of a queer ethic of care. This research could be conceptualized and conducted in many different ways. From what I have learned during data collection for this study, I believe this work would benefit from more ethnographic and participatory studies that move beyond the limitations of interview studies and provide more rich and dynamic accounts of the care webs formed between QTBIPOC students and teachers as they play out in the everyday classroom. Student voices are left out of this study, and in order to fully understand the depth of care work and care practices in schools, their experiences of care must be taken into account and documented.

Care Webs

The teachers in this study exemplified how they were able to create care webs with their students by engaging with their students in vulnerable, authentic and fluid ways. Doing this meant they were able to form deeper, more honest connections with their students where a sense of mutual care was developed. This is perhaps one of the most significant findings and implications for this research moving forward. Because QTBIPOC youth and teachers rarely experience affirming care in schools (Owis & Goldstein, 2021; Owis et al., 2022) and are often forgotten about in LGBTQ+ conversations in schools (Brockenbrough, 2013, 2015; Laing, 2021; McCready, 2015) the disruptive practices Jude, Nour and Blake were able to enact with their students illustrate how QTBIPOC educators can transgress the limitations of care as they exist now to form care webs.

Care webs move beyond the cisheteronormative understanding of family as the center of care (Malatino, 2020) towards a queer and trans concept of care that celebrates the interdependence between queer and trans people of colour (Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018). Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha's (2018) writing in *Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice* has been a central text in which this thesis is based on and for her writing and theorizing I am indebted to. Care webs and community of care that exist in the margins of a capitalist, neoliberal society which has denied QTBIPOC disabled folks access to affirming care, have been a way queer and trans people of colour have continued to resist harmful institutions that deny their existence. These communities of care have always operated as a way to respond to uncaring, violent and harmful institutions that have actively neglected the care of QTBIPOC people (Rose, 2021; Fink, 2021; Ware, Hudson & Diverlus, 2020). During the HIV/AIDS crisis in the 1980s

and 1990s, queer and trans communities formed communities that responded to state denial of care (Fink, 2021). In their book *Forget Burial: HIV Kinship, Disability, and Queer/Trans Narratives of Care*, Marty Fink (2021) shares how communities of QTBIPOC activists came together to provide care for one another in the face of systemic neglect and widespread misinformation. They note that the HIV/AIDS crisis, which disproportionately impacted Black, Brown, Indigenous and other racialized queer/trans communities, created a resurgence of grassroots, counter-hegemonic forms of caremongering that radically redistributed funds and resources not limited to food, medical supplies and information, housing, transportation and mental health supports (Fink, 2021). In doing this, QTBIPOC communities have continued to ensure their survival and ultimately their thrival in the face of systemic neglect.

In my time as a teacher in K-12 schools as well as a researcher and graduate student at the University of Toronto, I've been fortunate enough to be welcomed into many care webs. Sometimes these are unintentional webs, formed from various research teams, but particularly with the other queer and trans folks I've worked with in graduate school, we have continued to form our own version of care web. Care looked many different ways on the research teams I worked on; we regularly checked in with one another about our own work, how we were feeling and concerns we had, we shared food with each other over work, held space for contestations and difficult conversations that sometimes had to be addressed at a later time and affirmed everyone's right to be heard, seen and valued in their entirety.

The care webs I formed with other graduate students quickly turned into chosen family and deeply supportive friendships. We support one another both professionally and personally, recognizing our shared struggles with one another and providing queer care, resources and

support where possible. This meant showing up for one another when we were sick, or taking on someone else's work when they were overwhelmed, listening to one another's ideas about their research, providing feedback and edits on papers, presentations and course work and perhaps most importantly, supporting one another through the mental and emotional exhaustion we all faced during our doctoral studies. These care webs were sometimes intentionally formed, brought together through the leadership of my supervisor, Dr. Tara Goldstein, whose legacy of community building and kindness fostered an environment rich and loving enough for disagreements, tensions and difficult realizations to be held and addressed. The care webs formed with other graduate students was not intentional but rather the product of being able to connect with folks going through a similar struggle in the same degree, with the same passion for education. In this community, I found queer and trans elders who guided me through the logistics of completing a doctoral degree, but also supported my personal mental and emotional well-being by consistently showing up and holding space for me when I could not take care of myself. These care webs were formed and sustained by a mutual understanding of queer care, where we recognize a commonality in one another and work to support each other as a way of strengthening our community.

Both formations of care webs, intentional and organic, are ways that care webs can be created in the classroom. This is true to any teacher who might have a challenging class one year that does not organically blend well together. These challenges are inherent to the realities of being a teacher, but it does not mean that a care web of supportive students and teachers cannot be established. While the community I built with graduate students was organic and based on similarities and mutual interests, the care webs on research teams were created because of the

professors I worked with. Sometimes this meant having new research team members added to our community, followed by a period of becoming familiar and comfortable with them as they learned the norms of our queer community. Other times it meant working hard to understand everyone's identities, histories, experiences, political and social obligations and expectations as a way to mitigate disagreements and hold space for one another to work through difficult and sometimes conflicting ideas. Ultimately, it was up to my supervisor, Dr. Tara Goldstein and Dr. Rob Simon (whose research project, *Addressing Injustices*, I worked on) to curate, facilitate and negotiate these tensions. Their skill at being able to work through these moments of difficulty illustrate their ability as an educator and is a skill that all teachers must learn how to harness.

One of these care webs is documented in the writing Dr. Pam Baer, Dr. Jenny Salisbury, Dr. Tara Goldstein and I have published together about our research with the LGBTQ Families Speak Out project (Owis et al., 2022). That article documented how we faced making ethical decisions in performing, writing and producing the verbatim theatre play *Out at School* (Goldstein, Baer and Salisbury, 2019, 2021) by working through uncomfortable and difficult unlearning in the community of care we had developed over the years. For example, Dr. Pam Baer wrote about their decision to not use stories of violence or harm in the writing of *Out at School*, as a way for that person not to relive the trauma experienced. This was not the initial direction of the script. The version of the play that was performed did include an excerpt where the person playing the role of the child read aloud the violence they had experienced in schools. The decision to change the script came from a moment when the child whose story was being told, was in the audience of the performance. Pam writes that "we had met our ethical commitments to the university and our research protocols. But the manifestation of ethics in practice, and the

discomfort of watching a child witness a re-telling of [their] own assault, required us to sit with the tension of performing trauma and to adjust the ways in which we were sharing stories about children” (Owis et al., 2022).

This approach is the same one I took in deciding what stories to share during my analysis chapters. I had been privileged enough to bear witness to the stories of trauma, pain and violence by Jude, Nour and Blake and had to make a decision of whether or not those stories needed to be heard. *What would they add to my dissertation?* They would be impactful, for sure, but at what cost? These stories would also live forever in the writing of this thesis, and their relationship to those stories years from now might change. This was one of the reasons I chose not to use many of the stories of harm and violence I was told, similar to how Pam realized there needed to be a change in the script for *Out at School*.

My own story of struggling to address my gender identity after being asked to play Dr. Karleen Pendelton Jiminez is also documented in that article. I wrote about how my internalized fear of presenting more masculine to portray Karleen triggered my own sense of gender dysphoria. I share that I was only able to work through some of that difficult unlearning with the help of a castmate, a Black trans man, who held space for me to express my fears while affirming to me that masculinity and femininity does not and cannot belong to any gender. This support from a new person at the time, who is now a part of a care web of QTBIPOC people in my life, was the initial formation for a care web. This is similar to Jude’s story of how they were able to find community and solidarity in the new school they teach at with other queer, trans, Brown, Black and Indigenous teachers. In their words, Jude notes,

This past year, though, I did join a school that was explicitly considered like an Indigenous community center, or community hub for education. And the vibe is so different. Like they were supposed to, they bumped me out this year because I was the lowest on seniority, and I switched to halftime. I was like, Oh, I'd much rather take a halftime pay cut, just to be able to remain in the school. They don't give a fuck about the OCT. Like, these Indigenous teachers are like, "come here, I'm giving you a hug." You need, like, you know, like "you seem down." Like they're so open and like, to the point where like non-Indigenous staff could approach them and say, like, "I'd like to smudge in the morning, before I start my day" and they would do that. Like, and within the school, its approach, it's like permitted and you smell that in the air all morning.

Both Jude and I experienced the same support by being seen and welcomed into a new community of people, or a care web, who were able to hold space for our fears and experiences while we sorted through the various forms of un/learning we had to do.

This form of slow, intentional un/learning and community care is something I actively modelled in my own classrooms, where my interest in how and why I care so deeply emerged when working with students. This stemmed from my own education, where teachers acted in the role of parents for me. Some of my teachers went above and beyond their duties as a teacher, completely ignoring the expectations of the OCT, often bringing me food for lunch when I claimed I had none, sitting with me and listening to me talk in circles, confused about the future and who I was. I had one teacher in grade twelve who made it her sole priority to help me graduate high school when I had decided I wanted to give up; she waited outside my home for two months every morning, waiting to drive me to school and (gently) insisted I sit in the guidance office to work when I couldn't focus on work or I was too emotional to be around my peers. This kind of care, love and attention seeped into my own teaching. My favourite part of being a teacher was listening to children and teenagers talk about themselves; hearing the stories they wanted to share, their dreams and problems they were facing at home made it easier to teach

them because we knew each other intimately through our conversations. This meant that when a student refused to work in class, or seemed distant, I was able to sit on the floor with them and chat about what was going on, often sharing my own struggles of being in school and coming up with a plan for how they could move forward. I formed care webs with all my students, seeing them as whole, complete and complicated people who need love and care from the adults in their life.

Queer care has always existed in classrooms (see Pendleton Jiménez, 2009; Hicks, 2017, 2020) and yet its importance and power to disrupt violent forms of white supremacy, colonialism and neoliberalism has yet to be explored. This was a key finding to emerge from this study, where Jude, Nour and Blake showed that they were able to mitigate some of the white, colonial violence their students experienced by acting as a shield to protect their students and when that was not possible, working within a care web with that student to affirm their safety, their experience of the event and work together to prevent it from happening again.

This form of relational, interdependent form of care is crucial to the future of QTBIPOC teachers and youth. As Blake, Jude and Nour have shared, their response to working in educational systems that continue to practice violent forms of care, is to engage in disruptive and trans-gressive forms of queered care to support their students. The connection and community that teachers are able to create with their students can provide life saving forms of care and recognition that could make the difference between a student thriving in schools and being pushed out of the system. This reality is even more prevalent for racialized and Indigenous queer and trans youth, whose lives at the intersections of multiple and simultaneous oppressions, means they face more complex barriers. These collective ideas about a queer ethic of care have

indicated the need for a relational, queered, antiracist, anticolonial, trans-gressive form of care work that resembles care webs one that radically reorganizes our community and centers healing and justice (Malatino, 2020).

From Grassroots to Systemic

This study indicates that it is possible to implement a queer ethic of care, both theoretically and pedagogically at the grassroots, individual level first. Despite this, these ideas and practices must move towards dismantling and replacing the current care practices in schools in order to be sustainable for teachers and effective for QTBIPOC students in the future.

I see one of the reasons there is little to no research on how QTBIPOC envision and practice care in academic conversations is because of the maintenance and investment of whiteness and colonialism. Despite the academy, educational structures and other institutions desperately eager to “decolonize” or make “queer/trans friendly” their practices, they have not been ready to grapple with the radical restructuring their systems would need to go through in order to implement the theories and practices required to enable a queer ethic of care. This study illustrated the ways in which the Ontario College of Teachers (OCT) needed to be restructured and the roles and limitations of teachers roles readdressed.

I had not anticipated the OCT being a topic I would discuss in this dissertation. The problems that arose about the limitations of care under the OCT came from the participants in this study and illustrated their frustration with the rigidity of care and love they were legally allowed to give. Blake noted that the form of queer care we theorize about, “to like, a principal or OCT or our unions it’s icky, it’s grey territory and so not only does that labour go unnoticed but

it's also subversive in a lot of ways, because like, because that kind of care and recognition is not appropriate according to like, the standards of teaching profession from OCT or whatever.”

This was also a shared feeling by Nour, who wrote in their poem:

And they imagine me an older cousin,
an auntie, a friend

Oh—sorry—we're not allowed to be
friends

We're not family
The OCT would have my head
OSSTF won't protect me
The education act is code for prudence
And so I keep my distance

The guidelines outlined by the OCT (2002) express that teachers should avoid “inviting students into their homes, seeing students in private or isolated situations, exchanging personal notes or emails, becoming personally involved in students’ affairs, giving or receiving personal gifts, sharing personal information about themselves and making physical contact.” I have already noted in my first analysis chapter that what is troubling about the OCT definition and expectations of care is that it is limited and rooted in the white, colonial context of the Ontario educational system where racial and cultural notions of care such as community building, mutual care and sharing resources (Rose, 2021; Ware, Hudson & Diverlus, 2020; Regan, 2010) do not exist. In order for a queer ethic of care to take root in schools, the rigid regulations set out by the OCT must change. These changes might include how and when teachers can disclose personal information to students, and when they are allowed to be in close proximity with their students, for example, giving someone a hug.

What is not addressed in this study as it was outside the scope of my research questions, was the education future teachers receive about ethics in teacher education programs across Ontario. Anecdotally, I finished my teacher education program in 2019 a few months before starting my doctoral studies. This means that my accounts of the teacher education program as it exists right now is current. Teacher-candidates are required to take several courses throughout their degree, in particular one about the standards of the profession, policies related to teaching in schools and teacher ethics. In the course, I learned that there are rules and regulations about when I must act in the role of a parent (*in loco parentis*), when my duty to report neglect and violence about a child was necessary and most significantly, all the ways in which I could be fired and reprimanded from my job as a teacher. This was often discussed under the guise of “ethics” and what was appropriate to do, talk, teach and wear as a teacher. We regularly looked through the blue pages, read accounts of teachers being reprimanded and losing their jobs and read personal accounts of falsely accused teachers still fighting the OCT to get their case acquitted. What is perhaps most shocking, is that none of this was new information to me or my peers. The culture of fear that follows teachers and educators is profound and well documented in mainstream media and in the literature about teacher ethics and education. In order for the theorizing and practices outlined in this dissertation to become a reality, the rigid regulations that teachers are socialized into and expected to conform to, must change. This is not to negate the importance of stopping predatory educators from having access to children and holding them accountable for the violence they produce, but rather an indicator of those regulations’ ability to deny some of the most marginalized students access to care they might not receive elsewhere.

Earlier in this dissertation I articulated my personal positionality and understanding of care (see Chapter 1). In alignment with the authors of *The Care Manifesto* (Chatzidakis et al., 2020) I understand care work as attending to the physical and emotional needs of others but also as a social capacity and activity involving the nurturing of all that is necessary for the welfare and thriving of life (Chatzidakis et al., 2020). Care means recognizing and embracing our inherent interdependencies including our ability to provide the political, social, material, and emotional conditions that allow other people, living creatures, the planet and nonhuman things to thrive (Chatzidakis et al., 2020). This book asks us to consider the question: what *would happen if care was the organizing principle for our world?* This is one of many points of inquiry that anchored this study, along with the knowledge that we are so deeply entrenched in everyday oppression, neoliberalism and capitalism and in them that it's easy to forget these are not natural or given things but rather the legacy of Western imperialism, neocolonialism and capitalism where a crisis of care as flourished (Chatzidakis et al., 2020).

In order for the findings of this study to find roots in the classrooms, school boards and structure of our educational system, we would need to embrace an understanding of care that “embraces a form of interconnected care . . . an everyday cosmopolitanism [that centers] promiscuous care on a global scale, [one] that moves our caring imaginaries beyond kinship structures, communities and nation states... [it would require] being at ease with strangeness” (Chatzidakis et al., 2020). This queered, feminist, antiracist, eco-socialist political vision of universal care set out by Chatzidakis et al. (2020) would operate with the understanding that we are all jointly responsible for hands on care work as well as engaging with and caring about the flourishing of other people and planet; it would require reclaiming forms of genuinely collective

and communal life, adopting alternatives to capitalist markets and radically deepening our ability to work across lines of difference in solidarity (Chatzidakis et al., 2020). What a queer ethic of care offers then is a way of thinking about care practices in educational settings with QTBIPOC youth and teachers as a way to envision and enact care that can be transformative and healing.

This work must be continued at the grassroots level in the classrooms of individual teachers, whose practice of a queer ethic of care is an everyday act of activism. It must also be supported by future research that demonstrates the importance of addressing the crisis of care QTBIPOC youth are facing in schools and how adopting trans-gressive, disruptive practices of care can better the lives of QTBIPOC students. As mentioned earlier, this work would require a radical restructuring of our educational system in order to implement the theories and practices required to enable a queer ethic of care. This requires more research about the intersections of race, gender, sexuality and colonialism, that is done community with QTBIPOC folks; more funding this research, for teachers to have access to long-term professional development, for universities to overhaul their teacher education programs and louder demands for reform in the political and social spheres for our current educational system. We are at a pivotal moment in our social history, one where more and more people are aware of the changes that need to happen in order for movements (Black Lives Matter, abolitionist, land back, anticolonial, Trans Lives Matter) to be sustained; the longevity and success of these crucial movements towards justice depends on our networks and care webs (Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018) of activists, politicians, educators and chosen families to infiltrate and radically restructure an antiquated and harmful system of care.

Healing, Futurity, Thriving and Joy

The findings from this research are illustrative of the ways QTBIPOC teachers are capable of engaging in disruptive, trans-gressive practices that can create pathways to healing. Because queer, trans, racialized communities are regularly denied access to live their lives to their full potential, their ability to practice radical community care with one another in ways that push against the demands of capitalism and neoliberal institutions is one way to ensure their thrival (Darling-Hammond, 2020; Greteman, 2016, 2018). Jude, Nour and Blake all shared difficult stories of trauma in the Ontario educational system that forced them to deny parts of their identities, conform to white, cisheteronormative, colonial versions of care that made attending and learning in school challenging. Often within the literature, these stories of harm and violence are used as a rationale for policy makers, educators and school boards to implement changes to ensure their safety. This data is often documented in large-scale quantitative studies (see Truong, Zongrone & Kosciw, 2020a,b; Zongrone, Truong & Kosciw, 2020a,b; Taylor et al., 2012; HRC, 2018). While important in many contexts as these studies can lead to policy changes in schools, they also reinforce damaging narratives about QTBIPOC youth and leave little to no space to discuss how queer, trans, racialized and Indigenous teachers and youth can work in community together to change their circumstances and heal together. Gender and sexuality educational research has begun to shift the way writers discuss QTBIPOC communities and how they use their data (Owis & Goldstein, 2021; Reyes, Banda & Caldas, 2020) but this literature is only beginning to emerge as global demands for thrival beyond survival (Darling-Hammond, 2020; Greteman, 2016, 2018) joy and queer/trans/Black/Indigenous futures (Muñoz, 2009; Goltz, 2013) reach academic conversations.

I have always strongly believed the academy is much further behind the front line, community workers, many of whom are Black, Brown, disabled, queer and trans activists already fighting and mobilizing for radical change in their communities. This is supported by the stories collected and documented here, where Blake, Jude and Nour share how they have engaged in disruptive practices at the grassroots, classroom level every day. What this indicates then, is that the many academic conversations I have joined in writing this dissertation, could benefit from working with and learning from QTBIPOC activists and community members, whose lives are inextricably linked to their liberation and thrival. It is important to make clear I am not advocating for white, cisgender, straight researchers to work with QTBIPOC as a way to diversify, corroborate and/or strengthen their research simply because these communities are doing radical and life changing work. What I am advocating for, is a decentering of white, cisgender, straight bodies and theories in care work, care pedagogies and gender and sexuality education, where scholars and educators interested in doing this work alongside QTBIPOC learn and challenge their own investment in whiteness and colonialism. This work must be done with authentic, vulnerable care that requires difficult and uncomfortable un/learning, where QTBIPOC are credited, cited, and paid for their labour.

This research has illustrated the ways in which vulnerable, disruptive forms of care can create pathways to healing for QTBIPOC teachers. Blake shared with me that they are

just trying to honour their lives and experiences as real and not giving into this narrative that kids don't know what they're feeling or going through and that it's just "kid stuff" because it's not . . . and it's almost like recognition in them for myself, like it's almost healing for me. The young child in me who couldn't come out because it wasn't safe or for some folks who didn't know they were queer or trans until they were adults they almost mourn that childhood they didn't get . . . that's part of teaching and pedagogy for me as a queer and trans educator; doing the things I wish I had as a student and my kids

and myself mutually healing at the same time. Like reconnecting them to the land that I was ripped away from, or casually sharing my pronouns with them, or taking time to listen to them talk about what's happening in their lives on a real human one to one level. I needed that.

Jude shared a similar sentiment, noting that

teaching is very healing for me. Because I spend my day around people who are emotionally at the same age I am. Yes, right. And like, in some ways, I know I'm emotionally much older. But when I get into a trauma space, I really am just like, 9 to 13. And so it's actually trauma healing in a way that I sometimes feel sad that other people in my position don't get to do.

These moments of mutual recognition and affirmation as a way towards healing and thriving is well documented in community settings but is largely missing from the literature from K-12 classrooms. Research from outside K-12 classrooms has consistently shown that being able to work in community with others (Rose, 2021; Ware, Hudson & Diverlus, 2020; Fink, 2021; Wilson, 2008) to share vulnerably (Brown, 2012) and honestly with people who can recognize and affirm your identities and stories can lead to community and intergenerational healing, thriving and joy (Reyes, Banda & Caldas, 2020; Darling-Hammond, 2020; Greteman, 2016, 2018; Kimmerer, 2020). This healing imagines and works towards a queer futures outside of the colonial, white construct that the Ontario educational system is predicated on and provide moments to heal in community from generational violence and harm stemming from classrooms.

Looking Forward

There is very little research on care and queer and trans youth, let alone care work with QTBIPOC educators and youth. My own theorizing of a queer ethic of care described in chapter two is one of many "possibility models" (Owis, 2019) that can be implemented in the classroom as well as more broadly in the community as a way to understand how educators envision and

enact a queer ethic of care. This work indicates there is a need to shift the ways teachers are educated about and practice care as a way to affirm QTBIPOC youth beginning in teacher-education programs and continuing into slow, intentional, in depth professional development for practicing teachers. And while this research explicitly focuses on the individual, community level understandings and practices of QTBIPOC teachers, the work must be translated into systemic forms of change in order to be sustainable in the long term. I have written elsewhere (Owis et al., 2022) that it is difficult to teach about and practice the social justice work we want to and often preach to teachers, without understanding that you first need to learn how to care. Learning how to care for and about others when they do not share the same experiences, identities or histories as you, is how we begin to do radical social justice work about race, gender, sexuality and colonialism. When we work in solidarity with one another across lines of difference, lines that could and do separate us, we recognize a common humanity in one another, and center care and connectedness over difference. Doing this means we are able to work towards a justice that liberates all of us from the oppressions of colonialism, white supremacy, capitalism and neoliberalism and pushes towards a more caring, joyful future.

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