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Lavender Liberation Through the Presentation of Praxis

by

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An Honors Capstone

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Honors Bachelor of Arts in Psychology and Sociology
to

The Honors College

of

The University of Alabama in Huntsville

April 23, 2022

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Abstract

In this work, I explore my personal path, following a course to individual and queer liberation, as a narrative expression of thought, detailing the purviews and experiences of my life which have led to a series of achievements that have resonated the sound of success as a representation of myself and my community. I delve into the canon of my life, discussing my history(ies), identity(ies), and opportunity(ies) through the lens of several anthropological concepts of praxis, as an explanatory guide, dedicated to the understanding of social oppression, individual activism, and liberatory achievements in ways which I believe have been previously discounted and devalued. From my smaller, individual victories, such as winning the title of collegiate Homecoming King, to the larger, systemic triumphs of obtaining positions in State and Federal government, I will explore the many ways that embodied personal and queer liberation can impact generations of people in the queer world. By utilizing a first-person voice, directing you through my personal narrative, it is my hope that my manifestations of praxis inspire a sense of empathy and action from allied peoples, and serves as an impression of empowerment and self-actualization for fellow queer folks. This work is intended to highlight the impact my actions have had on myself and the community, but more so, it is intended to be a resource for others to utilize to continue combating queer injustice in ways they may not have been previously considered or understood to be forms of activism. From my lived experiences, I have come to realize that just being seen is one of the most potent forms of activism for queer people, so it is my hope that this work destigmatizes and reinvigorates the power of visibility and inspires revolutionary change achieved through pride, love, knowledge, and action.

Keywords: praxis, queer, liberation, identity, history, opportunity, narrative, lavender

Introduction

During this introduction to my work, I want to take the time to draw out a cursory autobiographical description of myself in hopes that the detailing of my self-proclaimed identities and nods to certain life experiences will help in the connection to my work as well as add to the epistemological cogency of my concepts and perspectives to attempt to ensure that the revelations and discussions brought forward are those taken with the acknowledgement of who is writing and whom they are writing to and for. The premise of this essay is to examine my own forms of praxis by reviewing the experiences and accomplishments I have had in my life through the means of an explanatory and exploratory personal narrative. In doing so, I see it best to understand the lenses that this personal narrative is viewing the world through to put into perspective the realizations that come from lived experience and personalized praxis and to put context to this work in hopes that the reader can find facets or caveats of the essay which speak clearly and truthfully to themselves as animated actors in society.

I am a queer, gender non-conforming, feminine presenting, assigned-male-at-birth, affluent, white-passing, third generation, Korean American, able-bodied, atheist, English-speaking, attractive, university student. I was born and raised in the United States' South, and have lived in Alabama, Virginia, Kentucky, and primarily Tennessee. Although I have relationships with both of my parents, I am a child of divorced parents, and was raised by a single mother. For the majority of my childhood, I was brought up in a Church of Christ private school in Nashville, Tennessee, until being moved to a rural area of Tennessee to attend a public high school for the remainder of my secondary school years. At this time, I also started my formal training in classical ballet. Now, I am a senior Honors College undergraduate student at the University of Alabama in Huntsville, pursuing a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology and

Sociology, with minors in Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies and Criminology. I was previously crowned as the Homecoming King and have been selected as the recipient of the Rising Student Leader of the Year award, the Outstanding Collaborative Program award, the Intern of the Year award, and the Outstanding WGSS student of the year award during my time as an undergraduate. Outside of academia, I have ventured out into the community, the State, and the nation by volunteering for local queer activist groups and interning for the Secretary of State of Alabama and Senator Ed Markey of Massachusetts.

Let it be noted, this autobiographical depiction of me is not all that I am, nor is it meant to act as a medium for any expression of hubris. I have provided these pieces of information because they are all crucial factors in the analysis of my life as a facilitator of diverse forms of praxis. As will be later discussed in this essay, I will be exploring these many facets of my life through the lens of anthropological praxis and scholars who have influenced and informed conceptions of myself and the world around me. By delving into these identities and looking at their ontological importance, I aim to posit myself as an example or model of what I term as *lavender liberation through the presentation of praxis*.

Literature Review

Praxis

In order to properly convey what I mean by the term, praxis, I look to authors like Nonini (2016), Smith (2016), Dillard and Okpalaoka (2011), Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall (2013), Ortega (2016), and Subramaniam (2023), who have explored their own concepts of praxis and have worked to provide further considerations of the term and practice. In these attempts to further explain the evolving value of the ideology of praxis, these authors explore several paths of scholarship, resistance, revolution, and transcendence which, through my work, meld together to

produce the form of praxis I am particularizing in this essay. Nonini and Smith look at praxis in seemingly more traditional ways, but I find it is important to include scholarship about this to grasp how we have come to view praxis in the present moment.. Although they describe the historical notions of praxis, Nonini and Smith do not exclusively follow the original notion. Both authors look to modernity to measure the aptitude of praxis to facilitate thought, discourse, and change surrounding present day social issues. Whereas early forms of praxis, revolving around Marxist schools of thought heavily entrenched themselves in aspects of capital and capitalism, Nonini and Smith call for wider iterations of praxis that encompass larger social issues occurring simultaneously with capitalist hegemony. Specifically, to Nonini's work, it is important to note that a large portion of their stance falls on the idea that praxis can no longer engrain itself in strictly academic sites or areas of discourse. Instead, our concept of praxis must expand past the realm of scholarship and into the land of "direct organizing or other actions" (Nonini, 2016, p. 249.)

Where we begin to see the term praxis as it applies to focus is with the work of Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall (2013) and Dillard and Okpalaoka (2011). These scholars are looking at theories on intersectionality and endarkened transnational feminist epistemology and utilize the concept of praxis to observe how action and practice must work in tandem with theory and academia (Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall, 2013). Additionally, there is a significant point found, particularly in Dillard and Okpalaoka's work, which I feel truly expresses my aim. They find that through examining praxis via endarkened feminist epistemology, "The part of the discussion that still resonates... is the call for scholars of color to turn our attention and desires away from 'belonging' to a particular paradigm... but instead to construct and nurture paradigms that encompass and embody our cultural and spiritual understandings and histories and that shape our

epistemologies and ways of being” (Dillard and Okpalaoka, 2011, p. 147). Extrapolated from this work, referring to scholars of color, is the impression that new paradigms are needed in order to truly form proper, valid, and insightful works, especially through epistemological approaches, for it is only those who embody the experience of living in specific identities and of existing as successors to their historical predecessors that can truly grasp the ontology and epistemology of themselves as social actors in contemporary society.

As seen from Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall (2013) and Dillard and Okpalaoka (2011), this concept of revolutionized praxis has been circulating in the communities of racial discourse for some time. Ortega (2016) advances this work in her own discussion of philosophical phenomenology as she contests the scholars of self preceding her, by vying for the prominence of personal descriptions and explanatory narrated stories of the self. I find Ortega’s work incredibly crucial to this present discussion, as she directly confronts the impression that the general, metaphysical concepts of human existence and experience must be segregated from the more personalized, physical concepts of lived human existence and experience. She describes this as “strong dichotomies” that have been ascribed to knowledge and pedagogy which separate “the general and the particular, theory and practice, prescription and description” (Ortega, 2016, p. 2). While Ortega sees our common perception of first-person narratives as a “digression,” she also posits the question, “But why not follow the so-called digressions to see where they lead, to see how they can transform our visions of ourselves and of philosophy itself?” (Ortega, 2016, p. 2). We oftentimes separate personal testimony and lived experience from the understanding of self which limits our ability to perform forms of praxis, as this is the culmination of theory and practice. By peering through the same lens through which Ortega views the phenomenological world, we may open our eyes to the wondrous revelations of innovative designs of activism and

praxis and bolster the occurrence of personal narrative as a form of scholarly explanations and explorations of lived experience and the self.

Further down this notion of creating new paradigms that best fit the needs and goals of certain marginalized communities or groups, I look to Subramaniam (2023). Through the use of an autoethnography, Subramaniam discusses the impact that the new and innovative forms of activism, which she coins as “artivism,” have begun to have had on the community and culture in India. In particular, art and artistic expression are used as the primary form of activism in this study. Subramaniam goes to explain how these artistic acts created a movement of visibility for the transgender community in India. As such, Subramaniam discusses how art “can bring out our beautiful side” (Subramaniam, 2023, p. 667). Through such a simple phrase, Subramaniam brings forth such an enlightened perspective on the matter of art which works to evoke a brighter image and more hopeful and accepting nature to humankind. It is the aim of artivism to provide direct evidence of the potent impacts unique and innovative forms of activism can have on the lives of marginalized folks from a transnational perspective. By revolutionizing our approach to activism or praxis, Subramaniam seems to suggest that we, as a society, will be better fit to come to places of tolerance and, later, acceptance for queer people and, to further extend her argument, to all marginalized people. It was not until new iterations of activism were attempted that Subramaniam recognized the potential of not only her own self-healing, but also the healing of her entire country via its perspective on the transgender community.

Queer Identity

The queer community is a complex array of identities, sexualities, and genders. It is seemingly ever- expansive and consistently shifting. With this, I find it necessary to provide some background on my own perceptions of queerness which have led me to come to where I am

today with my gender and sexual identity. Looking at Lorber (2023), Butler (2015), and Smith and Smith (2016), I explore the concept of gender as described by these scholars in order to provide context for how I formulated my own understanding of who I am and what it is I am standing for and against as a lived embodiment of queerness. Additionally, I look to Harr and Kane (2008), Hatzenbuehler, McLaughlin, Keyes, and Hasin (2010), and Hall (2013) to understand the certain implications that come with being a queer person, as well as my particular privileges that adjust the way in which I navigate life as a queer body.

Conceptions

I find it best to begin with Lorber (2023), as this work provides a great base for the understanding of gender, but from a binary perspective. Lorber discusses gender as something that is “done” (Lorber, as cited in Shaw & Lee, 2023, p. 125). In her work, she seems to exclusively discuss how womanhood and manhood are done, but this thought will be later discussed as it traverses to queer identity. This revelation is vital in understanding gender because it illuminates the social construction of the term. We are not born with a gender. This gender is placed upon us by social actors and eventually by ourselves. Lorber discusses childhood as evidence of this. An infant cannot clearly state their gender, nor can they express their gender identity. Instead, the social actors in their life work to display their gender or inform how they do their gender. Lorber recalls a time she saw a baby in New York City who was wearing a blue shirt and dark wash pants with a baseball cap placed upon their head. Lorber motions towards the assumption that this child is a boy because their social actors displayed their gender as such. However, upon further inspection, Lorber also saw earrings and floral shoes attached to the child. She says, “Not a boy after all. Gender done” (Lorber, as cited in Shaw & Lee, 2023, 125). We can see that Lorber is showcasing that gender is something that is designed

by society and which is constantly being displayed by our actions and choices and the actions and choices of others.

Like Lorber (2023), Butler (2015) examines gender as a method or procedure of doing; however, in her words, gender is a “practice” (Butler, 2015, p. 145). She takes a philosophical approach to the presentation of gender, viewing it as a metaphysical manifestation of the subject, as selfhood and identity, in relation to the objects (others) around us. Butler looks to argue that identity, such as gender, should be viewed as an “effect” rather than a fixed structure in society, as this opens the “possibilities of ‘agency’” (Butler, 2015, p. 147). By defining identity as an effect, and not predetermined, she simultaneously denies the status of identity as “fatally determined” or conversely “arbitrary” (Butler, 2015, p. 147). This distinction is crucial to my position in the work later to follow, as I recognize the abstraction of gender but want to directly contend for the potent tangibility of gender identity on social movements towards what I call “lavender liberation.”

Finally, in regard to my conception of gender, I look to Smith and Smith (2016) who tie together the thoughts of Lorber (2023) and Butler (2015) and take the conversation about gender to the non-binary and non-conforming approach that has become so important in my life and my identity. Smith and Smith are looking at connections between gender and specific contexts in the form of a qualitative analysis, sampled from college students on the west coast of the United States. In doing so, they begin to define certain facets of gender that they use to explore the physical manifestations of thoughts and feelings regarding gender nonconformity. These facets are “identity,” “gender display,” “appraisal and perception,” and “doing gender” (Smith & Smith, 2016, p. 64-67). By breaking down gender into these sections of existence, Smith and Smith provide a lens through which gender can be viewed and basis for reasoning on how and why

gendered entities behave in certain ways. For instance, they define identity as a “role” that a person performs based on specific “expectations” and “meanings” that are carried by the individual (Smith and Smith, 2016, p. 64). From this role exhibited due to the presence of expectations and meanings, Smith and Smith describe an “output” that occurs which they deem as gender display (Smith and Smith, 2016, p. 65). The output is seemingly intrinsic to the expectations and meanings held, working as indicators of thoughtfully achieved expressions of what one deems as themselves. This output leads itself to interpretation by the other, as humankind interacts in a socially and culturally defined way (in a society). Here, we see the concepts of appraisal and perception arrive. Based on structural symbolic interaction and Cooley’s (1983) “looking glass self,” Smith and Smith argue that the interaction of self does not cease with the displaying of gender. Instead, they argue that because we are social creatures who interact with others, we find ourselves in the position of self-reflection through the mirror of others. In other words, we utilize the other by perceiving their display from an outside perspective, appraising their output, and assessing how their output relates to our self. Additionally, we, as subjects, are able to use the others’ appraisals and perceptions of our otherness as grounds for critical analysis of the self as it relates to our “self-meanings,” as Smith and Smith (2016) describe them (p. 66). Smith and Smith make sure to note that, while these facets allow us to make sense of the world around us through the lens of gender, they are not fixed structures that are placed and then left unattended. Rather, these are facets of the self that are in constant motion and under constant work or construction which they call “doing gender” (Smith & Smith, 2016, p. 67). As put by Smith and Smith (2016), “Gender is more than a display, a structure, a process of identity or a set of meanings; it is an active and ongoing *accomplishment*” (*emphasis added*, p. 67). I want to draw to attention the use of

accomplishment. This description of gender, and specifically, “doing gender” is a vital concept to my study, as we examine queer gender and queer identity as a means of accomplishing great feats of praxis.

Implications

As important as it is to define my conceptions of gender, I also want to provide just a couple of examples of implicative research that looks at certain repercussions of living in a queer body, as a quick reminder or nod to why this work is important and arguably necessary for all those blessed with a divine lavender haze embedded in their very essence. Additionally, I want to specifically address an important note regarding the acknowledgment of privilege. I intend to outline my awareness of my several privileges throughout the work; however, I aim to do this as a way to address the fact, but not demean the beneficial impact of specific identities I was born into.

On this premise, I provide Harr and Kane (2008) as a tool to tackle the conversation of queer identity and privilege, as they discuss queerness, privilege, and queer politics as they interact with one another. Harr and Kane examine demographics of queer college students, all of whom were members of the queer organization on their liberal arts college campus. This study aimed to uncover whether a prevalence existed amongst lower privileged queer students—based on race or class—regarding the support for agendas set by queer politics. They found that lower privileged students were more inclined to support more queer politics. Based on their definition of queer politics, this meant that lower privileged students were more inclined to strive for queer movements that openly addressed the importance and pervasiveness of other marginalized identities that intersect within the queer community, specifically race and class in the confines of this study (Harr and Kane, 2008). In their discussion on their findings, they make it clear that

there is a responsibility that both institutions and higher privileged students must take on to combat this bias that may be present. Firstly, they argue that institutions should work harder and actively strive to enrich their recruiting practices to include and assist less privileged students (Harr & Kane, 2008). In turn, they posit that this will cause more of the higher privileged students to encounter and interact with lower privileged students which would allow for the opportunity for those more privileged to learn from those different from themselves (Harr & Kane, 2008).

I find this study incredibly augmenting to my work, as Harr and Kane address issues that are imperative to understanding the prominence my message. First, their work sheds a light on a matter that must be nodded to which is the white, middle-class wash that has swept over the queer movement. In my discussion on Lavender Liberation, I wish to explore the power of presenting praxis as a way to foster a better tomorrow for not just the queer community, but for all communities that find themselves in the sanctity of queerness. Furthermore, Harr and Kane discuss the opaque veil that privilege can cast on an individual. I want to address this statement because I, too, agree that privilege can be blinding. As I described earlier, I have found myself in positions of privilege from my white-passing skin, to my familial affluency, to my able-body. I recognize these privileges and, as will later follow, I will speak to how these privileges affected my ability to present praxis for lavender liberation. However, I also want to draw attention to Harr and Kane's solutions, mentioned above. I have found myself in lower privileges than I am now. I have actively striven to learn from those whose experiences differ from mine. And so, it is my goal to highlight how as a privileged body, I own my identities, the privileged and the oppressed, and attempt to utilize my privilege as a means to give voice to lavender liberation via the presentation of praxis, but not just for my oppressions, not just for the queer community, but

for any entity that feels as though my experiences may help shape their next courses of action in their own pursuit of liberation.

Looking deeper into the implications of living as a queer-identifying person, I examine the prospective study of Hatzenbuehler, McLaughlin, Keyes, and Hasin (2010). These scholars conducted research which examined the possibility of an increase in psychiatric morbidity on LGB people during the waves on anti-same-sex marriage laws occurring in the United States (Hatzenbuehler, McLaughlin, Keyes, & Hasin, 2010). Hatzenbuehler et al. (2010) found a significant increase in psychiatric disorders in LGB people who lived in states that underwent anti-same-sex marriage constitutional amendments. When comparing this to other groups, including LGB people not living in states undergoing constitutional amendments and heterosexual people living in states undergoing constitutional amendments, Hatzenbuehler et al. (2010) conversely found no significant increases in psychiatric disorders occurring. These results led them to theorize that LGB discrimination via policies may “have pernicious consequences for the mental health of LGB populations” (Hatzenbuehler et al., 2010). While Hatzenbuehler et al. (2010) primarily discuss the issue from an “LGB ” perspective, I believe their findings could be applicable to the entire LGBTQ+ community. This is why I highlight this work; it brings forth conclusions regarding queer identity and discrimination through the lens of scientific repercussive insinuations. A queer-identifying person does not simply have their life hardened or challenged. They have their life threatened. This is not by the identity itself, but by others who refuse to accept and embrace the beauty and power of lavender bodies and express vindictive waves of bigotry and ignorance.

As a final examination of scholarly work, I find it judicious to conclude with a work that both examines wider, more macro-scaled examples of implications, and provides a final definition

based on historical principles that fully shaped various forms of vernacular throughout my work. Hall (2013) delivers written work following the historical events surrounding the Cold War in the United States from the perspective of the Gay Rights Movement. He covers the intrinsic tie between gay rights and internal national security that formed in lieu of the Cold War, citing historians that suggest that “homophobia was an integral part of the anticommunist crusade at home” (Hall, 2010, p. 1110). This connection formed between the two entities created conflict and tumultuous conditions for LGBTQ+ people living in the United States. As a result, the United States began enacting discrimination policies targeted at LGBTQ+ people, removing them from positions in government, as they were deemed as high security risks. Hall (2010) points out specific politicians during this time citing speech such as the suggestion that “‘sexual perverts’ who had ‘infiltrated’ the government were ‘perhaps as dangerous as the actual Communists’” (p. 1110). This era of American history which is rarely taught through our standard educational avenues was later coined as “The Lavender Scare,” as an homage to the concurrent discrimination against the communist ideology named, “The Red Scare.” With Hall’s examination of American History during the Cold War, and its ties to gay rights, I aim to emphasize the historical prevalence of the word “lavender” and shine light on its connection to the queer identity. However, Hall’s work does not include the history of the term lavender going back to the early 1900s, where lavender was just being synthesized and popularized. However, as time progressed, lavender became associated with femininity and accounts of male use of lavender were tied to queer or nonheteronormative behavior. From this background, the Lavender Scare emerged and later lavender was used as a symbol or beacon of queer liberation during the pivotal movements following the Stonewall Riots. It is from this history of queer life that I draw upon the power and notoriety of lavender as a term that goes past the Gay Rights

Movement.. In using lavender as a synonymous descriptor of queer and as the term for the liberative movement I suggest throughout this work, I aim to use its influence and history to contend for liberation for all queer people, using my personal narrative as an example of praxis as a presentation of self.

History

Who I Was

Because we are complex creatures who exist across multiple spectrums of identity and being, I consider where we come from; the point at which we begin is an incredibly powerful force that can shape the person you identify as, the person you express as, and the person you are perceived as (Smith & Smith, 2016). For me, and for several others like me, this existence of former experience was not a straight path, nor did it always contain positive events or moments. I have lived a life which has seen the ups and downs of privilege and oppression as many of us have as intersectional beings participating in society. I have seen the difference between the privilege of affluence and the oppression of poverty. I have seen the difference between the privilege of being cisgender and the oppression of being gender non-conforming. I have seen the difference between the privilege of heterosexuality and the oppression of queer sexuality. Through years of growing and learning, I have seen several sides of several identities, and I have seen vast amounts of privilege and oppression, but they have all made me who I am today and have shaped what I stand for. And although we are so much more than lists of terms that work to assign labels to our very self, I find that these labels help provide a sense of community, collaboration, and relatability that can be helpful when looking for new ways to present praxis.

I have always felt a power within me; an unstoppable force waiting to be released onto the world. What I did not know was that this force had a lavender hue. Growing up in the Church

of Christ cast a shadow on this power. I was taught that my power was one to be changed or repressed rather than celebrated. I never understood why I felt different from those around me, nor did I understand why it was reasonable to be treated differently by my elders and peers. I worked so hard to deny my truth; to deny my identity. I remember asking my mom and my older sister, “If I act in a feminine way, can you please tell me, so I can work to fix it.” To me, being seen as feminine—or going against my assigned sex at birth—was a malfeasance that needed to be addressed and corrected before it contaminated my life any further. Recognizing the beauty and potential of my gender and sexual nonconformity was the furthest thing from my mind and was being consistently denied by all of those around me. It is a strange experience feeling alien in your own body and even in your own mind. I believed so badly that I was born the way I was meant to be. As assigned-male-at-birth, I wanted to prescribe myself to the meanings and expectations that society places on individuals in this category (Smith & Smith, 2016). I wanted to lie. I did *not* want to be feminine. I did *not* want to sneak into my mother’s closet each night to try on her dresses and heels. I did *not* want to desire putting makeup on my face. I didn’t want to own the lies I would tell myself to manifest a sense of conformity to the heteronormative peers I interacted with daily in school. For most of my history, my truth was nothing but a lie; I denied who I was. I lied to myself, my friends, and my family about my very essence. It is this gut-level betrayal and rejection of self that has inspired such appreciation and respect for where I am now. Without my history, I would not have the personal experience needed to truly fathom the oppression that queer identities face, nor would I have the capacity to comprehend the solemnity of queer liberation.

It was not until my mother moved me away from Nashville that I began embracing some of my power through queerness. With her newfound love, she moved me to a small town in rural

Tennessee and into a new school completely different from the one I had known for all my life. What I would not understand until later is that this new public school would save me from an endless cycle of deceit and denial. With the ever-looming presence of Christianity no longer crowding the space of my psyche, I was able to explore greater limits of human existence, of queer existence. With access to digital media such as YouTube and Instagram, I found myself entering queer spaces that began opening my mind to the acceptance of who I am. Despite the religious pedagogy that had been fed to me for so many years, I was now finding myself in spaces that made me question everything I was raised to know. As Butler (2015) described, I was finding myself in experiences with newfound others which began to bring forth new concepts of actuality. Rather than feeling like my identity was fixed, I opened myself to the chance that perhaps I had autonomy over my bodily existence which meant I had autonomy over my gender and sexual identity.

During this time of gender and sexual repression and discovery, I also experienced both highs and lows of economic identity. I find this part of my past important to highlight as this dichotomous relationship gifted me with insight into the effects of privilege and oppression in other factors that contribute to or exist within queer identities, such as those explored by Harr and Kane (2008). I have seen poverty. My single mother worked tirelessly to keep me in a private school that cost as much as some colleges, while also trying to ensure my social success by maintaining the status of material items that my other privileged peers would acquire so easily; however, in private, we were struggling to keep up with the everyday cost of human existence. I have also seen riches. Before falling into poverty and after my mother forged a path for herself and her children from poverty, my family was financially privileged. My two-parent household was doing well with my father working for a bank, but upon the divorce and the

flooding of our house, my mother was left with very little to sustain the lifestyle her children had grown so accustomed to. After working countless amounts of odd jobs, my mom began to fall in love. This love was also a turning point for our family. The meeting of my mother's husband began the shift from private to public school for me, as mentioned above, but it also began our climb out of poverty. Now, with financial resources, my mother was able to provide for her children the way she used to. I never truly understood the difference between when we were lower income and when we were higher income, but I did begin to see the way it affected others' interpretation of me. Without a doubt, my history with class has shaped the way I navigate life. I recognize the privilege I currently hold as an affluent person, but I have also seen the effects of poverty which inspires me and shapes me to contend for queer liberation in a way that depicts all queer people, not just the middle-class queer people who can "afford" liberation.

These points in my history are clearly not the full extent of my past experiences, but they are vital to who I am presently as a presenter of praxis. Because of these moments of time involving my relationships around certain identities, I am able to frame my life as a lavender body in a way that not only exhibits the beauty of queerness but also delivers sets of practices that denounce the oppressions placed on the lavender community as a whole. As Dillard and Okpalaoka (2011) suggest, it is my personal history, culture, and experience that should enlighten and shape my efforts to contrive new models of understanding of my very essence and the being of the queer community in hopes that this new mode of thinking can contribute to the uplifting of a community that has been oppressed and silenced for too long. It is my history that makes it clear to me that I will be silenced no longer, and it is my history that informed me that silence is hard to uphold when the voice is with you in every place you go.

Identity

As I Am

As seen from my discussion regarding my history, I have not always been sure of who I am or what I stand for, and I am here to tell you that you do not have to know any of these things, nor do you have to cement yourself in specific identities once initially discovered. If that were the case, I would still be a cisgender, heterosexual, Christian man, who was drowning in his own sea of lies. It was not until recently that I discovered the extent to which my identities expand past what people view as normal, typical, or mundane. Attending university and working towards a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology and Sociology opened my eyes to the world around me and gifted me with the ability to comprehend the internal metamorphosis occurring in my identity. I traveled to a point in my life where the lies I had told myself during my history were no longer lies. I *did* want to be feminine. I *did* tell my mom I wanted to wear dresses and heels. I *did* want to wear makeup. My personified femininity began to shine, as I let go of the humdrum voices in my head, telling me I was wrong for wanting such things. It is through my education that I discovered the true difference between sex and gender, and gender and femininity and masculinity. These concepts can seem complex in nature, but at their core, are very simple. I may have been assigned male-at-birth, but my gender is gender-nonconforming, meaning I do not identify as a traditional gendered body. My gender is gender-nonconforming, but my presentation is mostly hyper-feminine. I have discovered that these terms bring solace into my life and supply a sense of strength that I have never felt before. These terms could change tomorrow, or they can be what I identify with for the remainder of my life, but it is important to note that I have embraced fluidity as a driving force of my identity.

In reading this, and looking to find connections to your own life or to find a guide for how to present praxis in using your own identity, I want to say that writing about identity is easy. What I mean by this is that these words and the place I am at with my identity were not always my truth. Finding identity can be hard and was hard for me. Throughout my time of self-discovery, I had many hardships, questions, and uncertainties. Moreover, these were accentuated by the exposure my self-discovery underwent. As I was finding myself and my identity, I was also in positions that were under constant surveillance. This is what it takes to present praxis as a lavender body. As people saw my feminine presentation develop, and as they saw my pronouns expand, they remembered the work I have done on campus, in the community, and in our society. This is praxis. I placed myself in these positions. I subjected myself to the appraisal and perception of others as a developing queer body (Smith & Smith, 2016), but by doing so, I represented the abstract nature of gender, sexuality, and queerness and provided tangible evidence, supporting the competence and potentiality of lavender bodies in every space I existed within (Butler, 2015).

Identity and the proclamation of self are essential to the form of activism or praxis that I am promoting. The exhibition of self is one of the most powerful forms of activism for queer bodies, as it connects identity to humanity. As queer people and other marginalized people can attest, our oppression is often rooted in the distinction of otherness, often misconstrued as immorality, or inhumanity. It is my position that this oppressive behavior and ideology can be uprooted through the presentation of identity as a means of praxis by inexplicably connecting the person to identity and ending in the treatment of both as equal and deserving. So, as will follow, I will explore the opportunities I have received throughout my life which have afforded my queer identity to be seen by people from many walks of life. Through these opportunities, I have seen

minds, hearts, and lives changed in regard to lavender liberation, as my positive actualization in their lives has positioned a queer identity as a positive attribute rather than an immoral or inhumane attribute. It is my hope that these opportunities can provide inspiration or ideas for others to promote their own identity in their desired spaces, as a means of presenting praxis in pursuit of lavender liberation.

Opportunities

Where I Have Gone

Because of this embraced fluidity of selfhood, I find myself entering motley displays of spaces, encountering many people and encompassing many more identities. As a student, I found myself working in offices all across the campus, including Student Life, Housing and Residence Life, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, Admissions, and Career Services. Additionally, I joined many social and academic organizations that appealed to a wide variety of interests and membership. Most notably, I joined an all-male fraternity. My membership in this fraternal society is important for several reasons. Firstly, its position in the greater Greek Life community was notable. Renowned as the top fraternity on campus, I knew that this organization would benefit my future goals and success. Further, this organization is a pure example of the diverse range of communities I placed myself in as a queer person. Although different in almost every way, I found my place amidst their brotherhood and forged a place for queer individuals like myself to begin transitioning into these fraternal spaces on campus. Lastly and despite my gender nonconformity, I saw a gap in Greek Life that excluded the color lavender at disproportionate levels, so I wanted to be the first to pioneer into this space and show others like myself that they are welcome too; additionally, I wanted to show the prepositioned fraternal members that queer people, like myself, deserve a place amongst their communities and can advance the society as a

whole if given the opportunity. With this, I found a new identity: fraternity member. Choices like these are why I so strongly believe that just my existence in a lavender body is powerful and influential. I was the first to walk into a fraternity house on my college campus, as a member, in a full face of makeup and six-inch stilettos. I did this not for glory or for hubris. I did this, so I would not be the last. This is how I want my presentation and my identity to be used for praxis. I want queer bodies to become the first. I want lavender hues to enrich every space in society. I want this not for the statement “I was the first,” but for the promise that we will not be the last.

I did not stop with just Greek Life. I wanted to ensure that the university had a lavender mark left on it upon my departure from the community. I wanted to ensure that I was leaving a lasting impression on the campus which echoed messages of safety, acceptance, and encouragement. When I arrived on campus, as I was discovering my identity in the public eye, I had to be the first. There was no one who looked like me, acted like me, or presented like me. I did not want this to be the case for anyone else. I inserted myself in places where students could see me, see my identity, and know there was a place for them too. I wanted to take this even further by representing the lavender community to prospective students, looking at attending this university. As an Orientation Leader and Ambassador for the Office of Admissions, I was, at times, the first person a prospective student would meet from the university. For the queer students, visible or not, I wanted them to see a place that looked like home. I wanted them to see a vision of success represented through a queer body and a picture of hope for their own triumphs and achievements. Still today, I have students with their magnificent lavender aura tell me of the impact I had on their lives just by simply existing in the spaces they were in. They saw a confident and successful gender-nonconforming person in a position of leadership, and they

envisioned a similar life for themselves. These moments shared with me are what consistently reinforce my position on queer-embodied praxis as a tool for lavender liberation.

For my own goals and pursuits, I wanted to display my identity further and in more areas. Because of this, I made it my mission to win the title of Homecoming King at my university. The Homecoming Kings before me were people I looked up to. They were true embodiments of student leadership. I wanted to be this embodiment. I wanted to be the person that people looked up to in that regard. I wanted this because I wanted them to recognize that they were looking up to a gender-nonconforming Homecoming King, not just a Homecoming King. I wanted them to see that queer people are just as deserving and just as capable of winning titles such as these. As an elected position, I knew that the student body needed to know my name and face and come to love and appreciate me as well in order to gain their vote. This inspired me to get as involved as I did. It inspired me to extend my reach across campus as much as I possibly could. This goal was the focal point of all that I did and achieved and has continued to open up opportunities for myself and the entire queer community around me. I won Homecoming King and became the first, openly gender-nonconforming person to win the crown in the history of my university. I find opportunities like this so powerful because a title like this can mean a lot for an individual person, but it can mean so much more for an entire community that is marginalized in our society that can see themselves in or relate to that individual. I knew I was going to win Homecoming King. I had worked so hard for it for years during my time in college, and I knew that I wanted it more than anything and anyone else because of what it could mean for my community. What I did not expect were the opportunities to follow which I fully believe derived from my pursuit of the Homecoming crown.

An important note should be made here that the opportunities you may acquire throughout your life that work to fight for lavender liberation do not always have to be intended actions. They may simply be products of preceding actions you have taken as a presenter of praxis, or they could be miraculous instances of accomplishment that manifest in your life. For me, this was evident in my future internships that directly followed winning Homecoming King. As mentioned earlier, in pursuing Homecoming King, I found myself in many positions of leadership on my college campus including forms of employment in several offices. From these positions, I was given the opportunity to meet the Alabama Secretary of State, John Merrill. This interaction led me to be invited to his internship program where I would be working in the Alabama State Capitol as an Executive Division Intern. I never saw myself entering the political world but through happenstance, I found myself moving to Montgomery, Alabama, that Summer as an intern for his office. Similar to my position as a member of a fraternity, I found myself in a foreign place with people who differed from me in many ways. Secretary Merrill politically identifies as a conservative Republican and has befriended people such as former President Donald J. Trump. As such, his office primarily consisted of Republicans who held certain ideological beliefs regarding queer people prior to my time in their office. My presence in this office shifted the minds of very influential people and educated them on terms and techniques that invite inclusivity of queer bodies rather than discrimination or prejudice. I was an anomaly in that office; a complete disruption to the status quo, but because of this, my voice was heard and my presence was undeniable. My time with the Alabama Secretary of State shows the potency of lived experience as praxis for lavender liberation. Instead of attempting to appeal to metaphysical conceptions of queer identity, I used my personal narrative through working and interacting with the staff in the office in a way that was appealing to them on a personal level

(Ortega, 2016). This fostered a bond between myself and the staff which allowed me the opportunity to explain and display the validity of lavender expression, which is exactly what the use of praxis for lavender liberation can and should do. Even after leaving their office, I maintained communication with several of the staff members who still come to me with questions aimed at expanding their understanding of queer identities such as pronouns or labels. Thus, my physical and personal existence in that office led me to be able to offer insight and theory into the lives of lavender bodies, leading towards liberatory movements for lavender existence.

From the Alabama Secretary of State, I, too, grew, and recognized that I had a passion and interest in politics in the United States. This took me to apply for an internship in Washington, D.C., with the LGBTQ Victory Institute and the Office of the United States Senator Ed Markey of Massachusetts. This opportunity was far different from my time in Montgomery, with the Secretary of State. Instead of appealing to people with opinions far different from mine, I found myself in a place with very similar minds and identities. The LGBTQ Victory Institute works as a non-profit that advocates for the increased inclusion of LGBTQ+ people in publicly held offices. Due to this, I was part of an intern cohort completely composed of queer youth, aspiring to take political action in some way. This was an incredible opportunity for me, as I met with several other students who were similar to me and that found themselves in the same internship as me. This experience heavily inspired this work, as I saw commonalities between myself and the other lavender interns in the cohort. Each of us had placed ourselves in the public eye at some point and in some way in order to advocate for the validity of queer rights and lives. We had each been the first. Their stories and narratives inspire me today and serve as a constant

reminder that I am not alone in this fight. None of us are, and it is my hope that this work reminds others of this same notion.

Although surrounded by fellow queer people with the LGBTQ Victory Institute, I was not in this environment at all times during my time in Washington, D.C. In fact, I found myself in non-lavender spaces for the majority of my time. The LGBTQ Victory Institute places us in congressional offices on Capitol Hill as part of the internship. I was placed in Senator Ed Markey's office as a Judiciary intern, covering topics such as LGBTQ+ rights, gun control, immigration, and more. As one of only a few lavender bodies in the office, and as the only gender non-conforming person, I often found myself providing personal input into conversations regarding topics on lavender liberation. It was with my personal narrative that I was able to shine light on certain issues that others in the office may not have recognized or considered. Our existence informs. It informs ourselves, others, and the world around us. This is why it is so dire to have lavender bodies represented in all spaces. Without the lived, actualized presence of queer people, society would be ignorant about our importance to all things. I say this to posit that praxis can be manifested in several ways. From inspiring those who follow on a similar journey, to changing hearts and minds, to providing valuable insight into matters of great importance, our experiences can shape the way in which the world functions. It is because of this idea that presenting ourselves as manifestations of praxis is an undeniably powerful form of lavender liberation. By being the first, we make room for others to follow, and when others follow, lavender voices become harder to stifle, leading to inarguable perceptions of queer people as worthy and needed as equal members of society. This is the message I aim to broadcast through this work. If there is a space that is not occupied by anyone that represents your identity, occupy it. Be the first. This is our praxis. Our identity, our lavender hue, the thing that makes us who we

are. This is our paradigm for change. It is our own artistic interpretation and implementation of activism that should be spread across the world as a means to contend for lavender liberation (Subramanian, 2023).

Conclusion

After exploring my history(ies), my identity(ies), and my opportunity(ies), I want to provide a reminder that this work is intended to act as a guide for your own personal praxis. Our experiences do not have to be the same in order for this form of praxis to work towards lavender liberation. The goal of this narrative is to showcase just one perspective, highlighting the success of this form of praxis, and to inspire others to place themselves in the spotlight, not as vain expressions of being, but as proclaimed advocates and activists in the lavender liberation movement.

In explaining parts of my past that shaped the course of my life, I hope you see the fluidity and variability of life and how our nature and sense of being will never be fixed in nature (Butler, 2015). Additionally, it is my hope that the reference to my past imparts an understanding of the lenses I view life through that clarify the principles and ideologies of this work. In looking through my different privileges and oppressions, you should see the introspection that occurred prior to creating this explanatory guide. Before explaining the power behind the principles of personal narrative, I needed to examine how my existence might have altered or skewed my perceptions of lavender liberation or praxis. Upon reflection, I found that both my privileges and oppression offered an insight into performing praxis and highlighted the valuable nature of both privilege and oppression in creating new, innovative ways of liberating marginalized people through direct personal action (Nonini, 2016).

A crucial part of all of this is the discovery, development, and deployment of identity. Identity is a complex thing that many scholars have attempted to define or deconstruct. For my work, I hope that you take away the value of identity. All identities—all of *your* identities—are valuable, valid, and powerful. They have the ability to alter the ideologies of people, communities, and societies. Even without knowing my true identity, I was able to demonstrate forms of praxis through my growing comfortability with gender-nonconforming presentations until I found myself in the position to actualize the identity into a term or label that I chose to take upon myself. By explaining this, I want it to be clear that identity is sacred and should be cared for and esteemed. As you begin finding your own form of praxis, understand the potential of your identity; see your potential for abstraction and the potential of tangible activism, and understand that this path is not always easy, but the outcomes of our behaviors lead us to become beautiful lavender diamonds (Butler, 2015).

Finally, as for my opportunities, I insist that these be taken as pieces of anecdotal evidence depicting the form of praxis I am contending for and not as instances of hubris or vanity. I am proud of the work I have done and the accomplishments I have made. I am proud of them for myself, but I am even more proud of them for the queer community. I want them to act as inspirations for whatever goals you aim to achieve. Let them be aides in finding ways of achieving that you may have never considered. My intention is that you leave this with a sense of purpose, fulfillment, and power that you may have been missing prior to reading this. I am special, but I am not anomalous, because you are special too. You have the potential to promote lavender liberation through your own personal presentation of praxis, and I hope that you will find the empowerment to actualize your potential upon reading my version of praxis.

As a community, queer people have a strength that is so special and unique and that is just waiting to be utilized to resist queer discrimination. This strength is often denied or overshadowed which quashes our inclination to act on it, but I challenge this dismissal. By embodying my power and my strength, I have furthered my own liberation and the liberation of my community. The beauty and efficacy of our power lies in its universality. Our power is our history and our identity, and we have the potential to manifest it in every opportunity we receive. Live boldly, proudly, and loudly. Be the first to achieve. Ensure that every step you take leaves a lavender footprint that cannot be ignored and that others may follow. These footprints, this personal narrative you construct, is how you will begin your path towards personal and *lavender liberation through the presentation of praxis*.

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