

**University of Illinois Student Life and Culture Archives
Queer BIPOC Placemaking Oral History Project**

Interviewee: Dr. Shaciarra Hamilton

Interviewer: Alyssa Brown

March 24, 2025

Length: 00:40:58

Alyssa Brown: Hello, this is Alyssa Brown. It is March 24, 2025, and I am here with—

Shaciarra Hamilton: Dr. Shaciarra Hamilton.

AB: —in the Gender and Sexuality Resource Center at the University of Illinois in Champaign, Illinois. This interview is for an oral history project on placemaking among queer people of color at the university. Thank you, Dr. Shaciarra, for joining me today. My first question is, just, how do identify as a member of the queer community and as a person of color?

SH: Yeah, so I am Black, or African American. I prefer Black just because that's what I was born with, and it was always a source of pride for us to be Black. And then, queer—I am bisexual, so. And I'm from rural Mississippi, and so that was definitely an uphill battle [laughs].

AB: Okay, yeah, I would love to hear more about that. My next question is, can you tell me about yourself, please?

SH: Yes. So I'm originally from rural Mississippi, so I grew up on a farm. Like a farm, as in, we had cows and chickens and a couple of work horses, which are really fun to chase around. [Laughs.] And we had a cow named Bessie, who was my favorite cow. And then when I was about maybe six or seven, I moved to the city because I tested into this advanced program, because in rural Mississippi where I lived, we had one school for K through 12, because there really isn't that many students where I live. But they figured out pretty early that I needed to go to a more advanced program, which was really kind of them. So my family, as in my mother and my older sister and I, moved to the city, which is Meridian, Mississippi, and then that's where I did all of my schooling going forward. And then I ran track in high school, which was fun, and that is what paid for me to go to college in Grambling, Louisiana, which is a HBCU. It used to be small, and I still consider it small, but when I was going there, we were really excited to have like 5000 students. It was a celebration. And then I went to grad school and got my doctorate in clinical psych from there.

AB: Wow, yeah, that is awesome. Thank you for sharing. How did you end up here?

SH: Everyone asks that question, which is fair. So, when I was in my doctoral program, we went through the Match program because I was doing clinical psychology, and I knew I didn't want to go to

another hospital. So I was like, 'Oh, I should just like, spread the net,' and fortunately, slash, unfortunately, it was in the middle of the COVID 19 pandemic. So all of the interviews were virtual, which increased accessibility a great deal, because before COVID, you would have to go to the places physically to do the interviews, and the places wouldn't pay for it, you'd have to pay for it. And since that wasn't the situation, and I could afford to log on to a Zoom with anyone anywhere, I applied all over the United States. And I ended up matching here through the Match system, which was good because it was one of my top three choices. And so then I came here for internship. I graduated in 2022, and the Counseling Center here offered me a job. And I was like, 'Wow. This is—wow. This is, like, adult money, real money.' So I stayed here, and I've been here ever since.

AB: Wow, okay! Um, what—I want to go back to your—

SH: For sure.

AB: —growing up. What was it like growing up, and did you know you were queer, or?

SH: I knew something was different, and I think that's how it was always explained to me when I was younger. I knew I was different very early on, because I was attracted to—what I know now is attraction to girls, before I was attracted to boys, if that makes sense. And I also grew up in a very Southern Baptist upbringing where young ladies, to this day still don't wear pants to church, and there wasn't really space to be queer. That wasn't really something that, for better or for worse, there's no judgment about it either way. But that wasn't something that was an option. So I don't think I knew that I was queer, if that makes sense, because I was just like, 'Oh, well, I just like everybody. That's a normal thing.' [Laughs.] And then I really recognized something was different about me when we moved to the inner city, because I was like, 'Oh, wait, no, no, no. I don't just like like girls, as in, like, I want to be friends with them, yes, but I want to date girls.' But that wasn't acceptable just yet.

So I was born in the '90s, so when I was coming up, being queer was still a little—I mean, it's okay, but it's not okay. Kids were still—and to this day, they are still being bullied—but it was very heavy in rural Mississippi. And I went to two schools because I went to this advanced program at a predominantly white school, so it's normally the only Black kid. So to be Black and queer was not something that I was thinking about, and then to be queer would have othered me at my Black school. So I knew that something was different about me, but I didn't know what it was until I was about in like, middle school when I got my first girlfriend, and I was like, 'Oh, okay, all right.' And of course I denied it publicly for a while, but I knew in middle school for sure. I was like, 'This is amazing. I don't know why everyone doesn't like girls.' [They laugh.]

AB: Yeah. Middle school, wow. So you had your first girlfriend then?

SH: Yes. I was in sixth grade going into seventh grade, so it's like, right before summer, at the end of sixth grade, right before seventh grade. And I was like, 'Whoa, this is really cool.' And we just like, held hands and went to the movies and went on dates, and it was very innocent. But it was very exciting, and it felt very fulfilling in a way that I didn't know that I needed before. But that really wasn't something that was accepted just yet in my hometown—I call it my hometown because that's where I did most of my schooling—just yet. And so she also was not Black. And so it was very interesting, because there was no—she didn't see a problem with it, with being—she was gay. And I was like, 'Oh, well, I don't think... we have a very different setup here.' She was in a different SES class. She was in a different race. It just was a lot of different variables. But I was having a great time, and all we were doing were, like, going to ice cream and going to movies and doing all the things that young scholars do that feel so exciting, and so like, oh my gosh, we're dating, and it's just the cutest thing ever. And it was really fulfilling.

And I think I officially came out—and I didn't really come out because I don't personally feel like I need to do that, because no other—outside of being queer, you don't really have to come out. People just kind of assume, you're heterosexual and no one has to do this whole big coming out party or big announcement. And so that's not really something I did. I just was like, 'Hey, I have a girlfriend.' And that was pretty much my coming out. And I didn't really answer anybody's questions about it, just like, 'Yep, I have a girlfriend.' That's just kind of what I said on repeat. And I unfortunately did not do that until I was in college. I guess that would be 2013 my first year of college, when I was like, 'Oh yeah, I don't know if I can hide this anymore.' So I hid it for a very long time. But in high school, I realized that that wasn't something that was going away. I had always heard of it as something you grow out of. And I don't really know what [laughs] leads people to believe that that's something you grow out of, but I always heard it that way, and my family was really religious, and so I was worried about being condemned to this never ending, hellacious place. And then I just realized that I couldn't help it. There was nothing I could do about it. And so, yeah.

AB: Yeah, can you walk me through how that went?

SH: Mhm. About the coming out part?

AB: Mhm.

SH: Honestly—so I have an older sister who is 11 years older than me. And I have a baby sister who's not a baby but she'll always be my baby sister. So she's seven years younger than me. And my mother and my sister, my older sister, always had like speculations that I was queer. I was like, 'No, no, absolutely not.' And then when I went to college, I just sent a group chat. I was like, 'Hey, I have a girlfriend.' And that was pretty much it. And they sent lots of texts, and I was just like, I just copied my original message and put it again. And I was like, 'Pretty much that's the story,' because they were very confused, because I was like, 'No, absolutely not.' So that was pretty much my coming out story. And

then they really didn't kind of keep up with my dating. They were just like, 'Oh, okay, well, you let us know what's happening.' And I didn't. Because you don't need to be updated on every single thing. Because I had, like, short romances and was figuring myself out. And then, right now, I am partnered with a woman, and we've been together for a while, and so now it's just like, okay, they don't really ask any more questions there. They have just grown to understand that I'm gonna kind of do my thing, which is very normal to me, and they have grown to understand that it's a normal thing and doesn't change anything else. But that is not something—that is something that had to develop across time. They weren't sure how it, whatever it was, worked. [Laughs.]

AB: Yeah, yeah. And what about at school? So in—this was in Louisiana, right? Did you, were you out there? And did you, you know, have people who knew?

SH: So I was on the track team at Grambling State, and my track mates, teammates were my family, because we did everything together. Being a collegiate athlete is very time demanding, and so they were like, 'Okay.' Right, because it wasn't really that big of a deal for us on the track team. No one really, no one really cared about that on the track team, but I don't know. And when I say, don't care, it was just like, 'Okay, you like ice cream, sure, whatever. I like cookies.' It was a very, 'All right,' sort of thing. So I'm very grateful about that. However, I never, just like, I never came out with my family, I never came out at my school. So you either knew I had a partner or you didn't. It wasn't something that I really announced, but people knew, if that makes sense. The people that were close to me knew, but I don't think they believed it, because I also dated men. [Laughs.] And so I think they thought that I was not really bisexual. I was just dating men and just, quote, experimenting, unquote, with women. But that really was not the situation. But people knew that I was involved with both men and women, and they just did their own interpretations of it. So yes, and also, I don't think I ever said 'No, seriously, I'm actively attracted to' because I thought that that was just common sense at the time. I didn't think about it as something that needed to be expressly articulated.

AB: Yeah, and I just feel like that's such a common reaction when you say, 'Oh, I'm bi,' or like, 'I like everyone.' They're like, 'Right, okay, sure.'

SH: They're like, 'Right, right, right. You'll grow out of that.' [Laughs.]

AB: Which is really strange, I agree. Was there anyone else queer in college?

SH: Yeah, so the track team was, I want to say, full of queer people. I would say at least a third of us were queer, and that probably also normalized it and made it not a big thing. And we spent so much time together that it—we really just, it was just okay. And so I would say, like, a third of us were queer on the track team. I can't say that I was very in touch with a lot of the queer community outside of the track team, right, of the entire university. One, I don't think I really just had a lot of time to do that. And two, that wasn't, for me, the biggest part of my identity, and so I don't think I focused on it too heavily. I had

the privilege of this not being a huge thing for me. It was just a part of who I was. I was more focused on being Black and from a rural space, and what that looked like and how it shaped my life and coming from a really impoverished background. And so I didn't spend a lot of time focusing on that. But I'm sure there were clubs and organizations. That's just not something that I spent a lot of focus on personally.

AB: Yeah, so it sounds like your—a big part of your college experience was track, and also your community stemmed from being in track, too, and there happened to also be queer people on the team.

SH: Yeah.

AB: Got it. That makes sense. I now want to shift back to coming here. So you came here because—through a Match program, essentially. What did you expect upon moving to the area?

SH: So I was a little, hmm. I'm not sure I had the right idea about the University as a whole, because my focus was specifically on the Counseling Center. Yes, I knew this was a PWI. I knew a little bit of the background. However, I don't think I knew that the Counseling Center was not a direct reflection of the University, right? Because we have a Black student outreach team at the Counseling Center. We have a Queers and Allies team at the Counseling Center. We have a LGBTQI+ space at the Counseling Center. There's just a lot of BIPOC and queer—and it's not just the Black student outreach team. There's a Latine, Latinx, there's a Native American, right? There are lots of different teams around that. And so I was like, 'Wow, if this is the Counseling Center, which is this really small blip of the school that has this thousands and thousands of students,' I figured that that would also be reflected in the University a lot more. And I'm not saying the University is discriminatory. That's not inherently what I'm saying. However, I thought there would be more resources, because the Counseling Center had so many resources for BIPOC and queer folks, if that makes sense. Like, there's at least four or five teams dedicated to just queer BIPOC issues. And so I thought there would be this whole, I'm not even really sure what it would have been, but this whole section of the University and community that was just for community making for Black folks and BIPOC folks and queer folks, and I don't think I have seen that as much here as a whole.

So I know that C Street existed, which was a bar for queer folks, but during the pandemic, from my understanding, it wasn't able to recover and remain open due to the lack of like traffic and business because of the pandemic. But other than that, outside of the University spaces, I know about GCAP, which is the Greater Champaign AIDS Project that has been around for a while. And the public health department that's here. The Uniting Pride Center on campus. Outside of those limited resources, I'm not sure of a lot of spaces locally where there are spaces for queer community and social gathering. And with the loss of C Street, which, from my understanding, was dedicate—was a queer bar, not just a bar that served queer people—I feel like there's a there's still a really big gap in that way. And so I was a

little shocked when I got here to see that the Counseling Center is just the Counseling Center. It is not inherently a reflection of all the other spaces on campus. If that makes sense.

AB: Sure. Yeah, absolutely. Yeah. I have also noticed, well, I didn't actually know that about the Counseling Center. I haven't utilized the resources there, but that's amazing to hear that there's so much attention on queer students, Black students, Latine students, Native American students. There are the houses here on campus, which I also have not utilized either, and I had heard about C Street, and I—there's also Anthem now, which is also a bar, but I—there might have been some drama around its opening, I don't know. It is interesting to me that a lot of the—when we researched, you know, queer spaces in the area, a lot of the history around queer spaces here has been around bars and around—you know, is really white- centered. And, yeah, that was just an interesting thing. And, you know, not everybody wants to spend their time at a bar, so other resources would be nice, I think, yeah.

SH: And there are drag shows here, and they're routinely held at bars. So like you said, a lot of the community spaces, or communal spaces are focused on bars. And that is great that those places are opening their doors for queer spaces to exist, and, like you said, not everyone wants to spend their time at bars, and maybe not all those places have mocktails for those that are struggling with addiction or are recovering from addiction. There's just a lot of different layers that I think aren't reflected as they are at the Counseling Center in the greater community, as I anticipated.

AB: Yeah, and you mentioned Uniting Pride. Are you involved with Uniting Pride?

SH: I am involved with Uniting Pride. So I have been involved with Uniting Pride essentially since I moved here. I used to co-facilitate one of their teen support groups. So I really appreciate—and I'm not just saying this because I am involved with them pretty intimately—but I really appreciate how intentional Uniting Pride has been since I've moved here. I can't speak to, you know, the relationship with the University and all those things before I moved here. But since I moved here, I've tried really hard to help bridge a connection, because it's literally on campus, and I think a lot of students didn't even know it existed. And so I was a co-facilitator for a teen support group. And literally, the goal was just to support students, and it was two hours every week, and it was for students from all over Champaign County. And then it just expanded, expanded, expanded because there aren't a lot of queer spaces for teenagers to just get together and hang out.

SH: And so I did that for a few years. Then I joined the board because I did want to talk about how there seems to be like this gap in BIPOC queer spaces. And so that is actually one of the missions of the Uniting Pride Center going forward, is to make sure—and it's been for at least two financial semesters to increase that space. So we have been working on a lot of things to try to bump that up, but that has been really exciting for me to see how that has grown since I've been a part of it. So there's support groups for three-year-olds and up, which is really exciting, for the elders, there's normally an event or two a week

for a variety of folks, and it's just really, I think it's a really nice help. There's a food pantry. There is a [cincher] and binder program. There are prog—like, educational programs that you can request and they can come in and do a training. There are, there's a little library that can help with emergency housing, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. I can talk all day about Uniting Pride, but I do think it is a very valuable resource that works very hard to hold space for all folks that are queer. So that makes my heart happy.

AB: Yeah, that's great. I—we emailed them, you know, to see if we could find some narrators, and they mentioned you actually—

SH: Okay!

AB: I said, 'We're already in touch, so that's great, thank you.' But they did—I did specifically email their elders group, because, you know, we want our narrators to be diverse in terms of age as well, and they didn't have anyone, [laughs] which I guess makes sense, but I am interested in, you mentioned some of—that they were working on some ways to bring in BIPOC community. Would you mind sharing?

SH: Yes, so I have, unsuccessfully at this point, just because, on my part, have been a little swamped trying to get a BIPOC support space that's just for BIPOC folks that are queer, obviously, and that being the focus. So I'm working on that. And when I say I, really the center is working on it, because I unfortunately do not get paid to do my work over there, so the staff really do a lot of the groundwork. We have a lot of programming. So there is a summer camp, and a lot of the students that came last summer were white presenting, and so we're hoping to expand that so we have connected to—there, I don't know if it's well known, but there is, I don't want to say club, but a teen space, essentially, that's a club that the kids can go to from like 7:00 to 11:00 to essentially keep them from being out and about and doing nefarious things or getting caught into the wrong activities. And the—I'm not really sure of her last name, but her first name is Quita, and she is really intentional about making sure that that's accessible. So I think the cover is like five dollars, if that, and then if the students can't afford it—and maybe they aren't students—but the scholars can't afford it, they can just tell her and she'll cover it, and no one will know the difference.

So trying to connect her with our Youth and Family Coordinator, Anika. They're trying to get together to kind of see, because a lot of the people that visit the teen space are Black or BIPOC students, and trying to see what the disconnect is, because a lot of the people that utilize our services are not BIPOC. And so we're trying to connect them, to see how we can build a better relationship with the community outside of the University to try to bridge that gap there. We also did a Black HIV and AIDS awareness presentation recently on Black HIV and AIDS Awareness Day of 2025. We showed a documentary, had a panel, so focusing specifically on Black identities that also intersect with queer identities has been something we've been intentional about.

When we do our queer prom, which is for kiddos who can't go to prom as their truest identities. So they get to come and they get to have their makeup done and their hair done if they don't already have gender-affirming clothing, they can pick out gender-affirming clothing. So it's like a one stop shop. And we're intentional about getting really diverse makeup colors, having diverse folks doing the hair and makeup, because doing—not everyone can do 4C hair, which is a type of hair that's really common among Black folks historically. And so we make sure we have hairdressers or hair stylists—I'm not really sure what the most respectful term is—that can do all hairstyles, makeup artists that can do all types of skin complexions. So spending time being really intentional around those things.

In our library, we make sure we have BIPOC and queer authors. For the teen space, we have a lot of BIPOC and queer presenters that come so that they can, even if the students aren't BIPOC and queer, they're seeing that representation. So we try to make sure it's not just like an added layer onto our program, but that's integrated into our programming really intentionally. And that looks like, I want to say, small scale things that are just a part of the everyday programming. And then we also have large events that are focused on BIPOC folks.

AB: Got it. It sounds like they're doing a lot.

SH: Yeah.

AB: So that's great. Thank you for sharing all of that. I am wondering if we can—well, actually, first, do you have a time that you need to leave?

SH: Probably like 11.

AB: Okay, perfect. That's good. I wonder if we could shift a little bit to your own personal life. What is your social life like here?

SH: Socially, so I'm very fortunate to have a partner. And we share a kiddo, and she is adorable, even though she also gives us a run for our money. [Laughs.] And I will say socially, actually, most of my friends have stemmed from the Counseling Center, because I feel like there is a, I don't want to say hot spot, essentially, it's a space where there are a lot of queer folks. And because of that, we normally branch off from that in our groups that make sense to us, because a lot of us come and they're like, 'Oh, I thought there would be a lot more queer spaces that were easily accessible than there are', and so normally we end up hanging out and then just hopping around.

I also am fortunate that I have connected with a lot of the Black community spaces around town. And so I also have friends that aren't connected to the University at all, so that has aided in me being able to have, I say, the best of both worlds. So I spend time with dentists, I spend time with hairdressers, I spend time with lawyers, Pilates instructors. I have a really wide variety of folks that I spend time with, which

is really fun, and I don't think my experience is reflective of the general queer BIPOC experience here. I want to be mindful of saying that, but I do feel fortunate in that I have worked pretty diligently. It took a lot of work on my part to find those spaces and connect with those spaces, and it was really exhausting at first, so I'm glad that it has come to fruition. But most of my time is spent with my partner and our shared couple friends.

AB: Yeah, okay, I have a few questions off of that. First, you mentioned it was really exhausting at first, trying to find those networks. How did that look? Like, what were you doing?

SH: Lots of Googling, honestly. So trying to be on—and Googling also includes Facebook searching and Instagram searching. Just I tried, there's Meetup, which is an app that is around meeting friends, and there were places like, there's a writing space and there's a hiking space, and I struggled to find queer specific spaces. Does not mean they don't exist, but I struggled to find them that were not very white-centric. And so I would go to one or two meetings and go, 'This really isn't for me.' Not because anyone was inherently mean to me, but they just weren't what I was used to, as far as welcoming. And then I would go to another one, and it wouldn't work out, and I'd go to another one, and I'd try to connect with people and make—like swap information, and it just kind of would fizzle out. So I spent a lot of time just trying to find my people, and eventually, I think I just got tired and didn't do that, and I fortunately had the safety net of the queer folks at the Counseling Center, so I spent a lot of time with them.

AB: Yeah. And how did you meet your partner?

SH: My partner is a hair stylist, and so we actually met in a salon where I was getting my hair done.

AB: Here?

SH: Yes.

AB: Wow.

SH: In Champaign. So we were—and it was specifically a Black salon. So all the people in there were Black. It was owned by a Black woman. Well, it still is, but. And I did that very specifically. And we met there, and we were friends for a while, just like, 'Oh my gosh, Black people!' I was so excited. And we just kind of hung out in a group. And then one day, I'd say fairly recently, like a year or two ago, she was like, 'Hey, do you want to go out for dinner to celebrate this really cool thing that I did?' And I was like, 'You know what? Yeah.' And I learned recently that that was always a date in her mind. And I just did not catch that that was a date. But we also have been inseparable ever since. But in hindsight, I do recognize now, that was a date! That was our first date. But in my mind, we were just hanging out. So, yeah.

AB: That's so sweet. Thank you for telling me about that.

SH: She bamboozled me a little bit. She's like, 'Yeah, it's really casual!' And it was not casual. [Laughs.]

AB: Yeah. 'It's casual, but by the way...'

SH: Mhm. [Laughs.]

AB: Yeah, that's awesome. And I think that's just such a sweet, like, meet-cute situation. Like in the salon, and then you're friends, and then—

SH: And she brought me flowers, and I was like, 'Oh, this is so nice!' Again, in hindsight, that was absolutely a date! [Laughs.]

AB: Yeah, totally. Flowers? Yeah, yeah. I mean, I think we have covered all of the questions I have actually. I guess more directly—you've already talked about this—but more directly, how do you feel your identities shape your community experiences here?

SH: I will say, first and foremost, I'm Black, and that—I don't think that is just a fact of here. That's just my life. When you see my name, it is a racially and ethnically connected name. Intentionally. My mother did that intentionally. When you see me, I'm very—I'm darker skinned, like you know that I'm Black by the USA's definitions, and so that is normally at the forefront of my experiences, and people don't assume that I'm queer. And so normally that's something that comes secondary when we're talking and I say, 'Oh yeah, my partner and I,' and people go, 'Oh, okay, all right.' Or they'll see me with my partner out, or—I created and co-produced a program called the We Are Here block party for BIPOC queer folks. I noticed that there was a gap for social connection around queer BIPOC professionals, and so one of my special projects when I was an intern at the Counseling Center, all the way until pretty recently, maybe a year or two ago, was to create a block party that was centered on queer BIPOC folks, and it was, it happened in cultural house row is what I call it, because all the culture houses are in a row over there. But it's Nevada, and—it's on Nevada Street.

AB: Yeah.

SH: And we had that street blocked off, and we'd throw a block party, right? There'd be activities. There'd be music. The cultural houses would have food or there'd be a food truck. And we actually did that in conjunction with the GSRC for a few years. And now the GSRC houses it, I call it, because I realized that there wasn't really—you can find things for Black people, you can find things for queer people, but it was really difficult to find the intersection outside of—if you just happen to know the landscape. And so I made sure to find, like, create spaces for that, which is also why I'm trying to get the support group going. And that is on me. I'm gonna do a better job about that.

But I think my experience first and foremost, is Black, and then it's queer. People are always surprised, even though I'm not really sure what looking queer [laughs] would look like, but I think most of my identity is shaped by my blackness and how I try very hard not to participate in respectability politics. So I change my hair pretty frequently, and I wear my fro, and I have colored extensions, and I wear bright colors. And so I don't know that my queerness really comes up for people, because, for lack of a better term, I'm passable as a heterosexual person, just because people don't see me and inherently go, 'Oh, she must not be heterosexual.'

AB: Yeah.

SH: And then when people find out, it also still remains this secondary thing, because I don't know how people—they separate that piece, if that makes sense, for some reason. Kind of like, 'Oh yeah, she likes girls, but she'll grow out of that. We won't even pay attention to that.' It isn't really the biggest part. But when I try to find spaces for both, it makes it very difficult for me, because I personally have not found a lot of spaces that cater to BIPOC queer folks, specifically. Yes, BIPOC queer folks go to these queer spaces, or to these Black spaces, but a space kind of like C Street that was designed for queer folks. I haven't—like Anthem seems like it's designed for queer folks, but not specifically BIPOC queer folks. I have not been able to find those spaces personally. So unfortunately, a lot of the time, I have to choose which part of my identity gets most fulfilled in a space, either my queer identity or my Black identity. And I try to bring both to a space, but the focus definitely is, unfortunately, one or the other. So it makes it a little difficult to be my fullest self in a lot of spaces.

AB: Yeah, absolutely. Yeah, that is the basis of why we're doing this project, I think, is to hear people's experiences with that specifically. Having those multiple identities and looking for places and making places that respect those identities and affirm them. So thank you for sharing that.

SH: You're welcome. And I do want to highlight—I would be remiss if I didn't say—I know that there are BIPOC queer-focused RSOs, but I'm not a student, so that makes a really big difference in my experience. I can't speak to—I know a lot of my students that come in that are BIPOC and queer feel like there aren't a lot of spaces for them, outside of very specific RSOs. Like they don't feel like they can—there's a bar that they can go to like KAMS that's the equivalent for BIPOC queer folks. Not to say that cams isn't affirming, but there isn't a C Street bar, essentially for students. But as someone that's not a student, there are even fewer resources for me to engage with.

AB: Yeah, absolutely, that makes sense. And yeah, I feel like I have also experienced that kind of as a grad student, just like as a slightly older person doesn't, you know, so yes, that makes sense. Yeah, and I guess going off of that and our last question, what would you like to see for queer BIPOC people here?

SH: I think my main thing—and this is not just for here, but especially here—is I'd like for BIPOC queer folks to not be the other. I'd like it just to be an identity that's a part of the community, rather than, yes, we have this other space. I want it to be a part of the main spaces, right? We have the GSRC that attends to BIPOC queer folks, and it's for all queer folks, right? I would love for there to be spaces that were specifically designed for BIPOC queer folks, because those intersecting identities have a very different experience in a lot of ways. And I love that the resources are available to everyone. And it's really different being an externally visible BIPOC person that's also queer, that is a very different experience in a lot of ways. So I would like that to be a part of the community, rather than this other space, right? The fact that we were able to name Anthem, there is a bar that's dedicated to queer folks, and we haven't even been able to like, say, on Thursdays, they have BIPOC-focused queer activities that are open to everyone, but are focused there. I haven't been able to articulate that. I haven't heard you be able to articulate that.

I feel like there's still this really big gap in resources where BIPOC queer folks are like, 'I have to choose one or the other, and normally when I do it's still a really white-centric space.' I would love for there to be spaces where people are like, 'Oh my gosh. There are so many spaces do you want to go to this or this, or this or this?' Where there isn't a gap anymore. And I have yet to find that. I would love for BIPOC queer folks to not feel like, 'Oh yeah, on Thursdays, I can go to this one space.' It's just, 'Yeah, there's this space that's designed for us that—actually there's so many spaces. Which one do you want to visit first?' And for there not to be a gap anymore. I feel like as much as I have learned from my research, and I can't say I've done hundreds and hundreds of years, but in the last few decades that I researched, I haven't found that space to exist, really at all. So I would love for that space to exist. And of course, it would be open to all people, but for it to be the focus, being BIPOC queer folks, where people don't have to choose between those identities, would make my heart very happy. And I would love for there to be a student version, because as much as I love my students, I don't really want to see them on a Saturday night [laughs] when I'm trying to relax. So I'd love a student version of that, and also faculty, staff, local community, maybe grad student version of that.

And it being so normalized that people are like, 'Oh yeah, you haven't heard about this place,' or, 'You haven't gone to this place, you should totally go to this place.' If that makes sense, as far as—I want the Counseling Center experience where I was like, 'Oh my gosh, there's this and this and this and this and this,' to be reflective of the greater Urbana-Champaign environment. I don't want anyone to ever feel like they have to choose between identities to be celebrated. And I know that that might be just a reflection of the greater socio-political climate that we live in in the United States. And I would love for Urbana and Champaign to be the exception to that, in addition to some of the larger cities.

AB: Yeah. That's a nice vision.

SH: [Laughs.]

AB: Well, thank you so much—

SH: Thank you.

AB: —for speaking with me today. Yeah, I'm gonna stop the interview.