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Finding *Comunidad*: Latino Gay/Queer Students'  
Co-Curricular Experiences of Empowerment and Marginality  
at a Public University

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements for the degree Doctor of Education

by

Marco Antonio Valenzuela

2018



## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Finding *Comunidad*: Latino Gay/Queer Students'  
Co-Curricular Experiences of Empowerment and Marginality  
at a Public University

by

Marco Antonio Valenzuela

Doctor of Education

University of California, Los Angeles 2018

Professor Robert A Rhoads, Chair

This qualitative study focused on finding the strategies that Latino gay/queer students used to help them navigate the intersection of their marginalized identities during college. The counter stories of 15 participants offered profound, intimate experiences that provided answers to how Latino gay/queer students managed their intersectionality on campus. Latino gay/queer students faced different types of marginalization that included microaggressions and stereotypes, homophobia and heteronormativity, not feeling Latinx enough, and some campus spaces being “too White.” Key findings indicated that co-curricular activities empowered Latino gay/queer students to manage these challenges by finding *comunidad*, self-policing, creating counter-spaces, engaging in activism, and using microaffirmations. Another key finding highlighted how Latino gay/queer students became more self-aware of their intersectional identities through

involvement in co-curricular activities. The counter stories of participants in this study allowed for a deeper understanding of how co-curricular activities supported and empowered Latino gay/queer students. These counter stories were analyzed through the theoretical frameworks of intersectionality, the reconceptualized model of multiple dimensions of identity, and disidentification. Their collective counter stories challenge the dominant narrative and inform higher education institutions about the impact of co-curricular activities.

The dissertation of Marco Antonio Valenzuela is approved.

Kathryn M Anderson

Robert Cooper

Mark Kevin Eagan

Robert A Rhoads, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2018

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my mother, Maria Luisa Valenzuela and my father, Fermin Valenzuela. May they rest in power, together, forever.

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Finally, thank you to my friends and family for their patience and support during my time as a doctorate student.

## VITA

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## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

### **Statement of the Problem**

Latino gay/queer men face multi-dimensional conflicts that arise from their membership in two communities that reflect their identities. This group of men is at once embraced and neglected based on the factors of being Latino and gay/queer. Some academics have noted that a White, male, middle-class framework has been used to develop gay identity development, therefore ignoring the experiences and voices of LGBTQ people of color (Han, 2009; Villicana, Delucio, & Biernat, 2016). Similarly, LGBTQ organizations have been primarily shaped by White norms, so when Latino gay/queer students engage in such organizations or communities, they may experience marginality on the basis of race (Misawa, 2007; Villicana et al., 2016).

The inherent conflict for Latino gay/queer men presents multi-layered obstacles to achieving a college degree. In addition to challenges of the transition to college, the intersection of race and sexuality for Latino gay/queer men exacerbates the challenge of persisting through to graduation (Adams, Cahill, & Ackerlind, 2005; Almaguer, 1993; Pastrana, 2015; Sánchez, 2014). Statistics show that less than 50% of Latino male students graduated from 4-year universities within 6 years compared to 57.1% of their White and 64.2% of their Asian peers (Snyder & Dillow, 2013).

The challenges confronted by LGBTQ and by Latinx<sup>1</sup> populations across numerous institutions have been documented independent of one another. Prejudice and discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation show up throughout various aspects of daily life in America: the workplace, healthcare, media, education, and politics (Vaccaro, August, & Kennedy, 2011). LGBTQ youth continue to face challenges and be marginalized by various communities across the

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<sup>1</sup> Latinx is a gender-neutral term used to replace Latino/a in order to be gender inclusive.

country (Biegel, 2010; Rankin, 2005; Robinson & Espelage, 2011; Vaccaro et al., 2011).

Research has shown that, in comparison to their heterosexual counterparts, LGBQ youth report higher rates of adverse social stressors, including rejection by family members (Needham & Austin, 2010); bullying and violence at school (Friedman, Koeske, Silvestre, Korr, & Sites, 2006); and physical, verbal, and sexual violence (Roberts, Austin, Corliss, Vandermorris, & Koenen, 2010; Savin-Williams, 1994).

As the least-educated among the three largest racial groupings (Black, White, and Latinx) in the United States (Villalpando, 2004), Latinx students have displayed fortitude to pursue their college education. According to Solórzano and Yosso (2001), Latinx students have faced various forms of racial and gender discrimination. Gaining access to college is only a part of the journey for Latino gay/queer students. Managing their sexuality while pursuing higher education adds complexity to the college experience for Latino gay/queer men.

I sought to examine the Latino gay/queer college student experience at public research universities and thus seek to better cognize how this population manages their intersecting marginalities on campus. My understanding of their intersecting marginalities of race and sexuality is informed by the work of Crenshaw (1991), who defined intersectionality as intersecting forms of marginality based on membership in multiple identity groups. Correspondingly, Muñoz's (1999) work on disidentification of LGBQ people of color also informed my understanding of the Latino gay/queer student experience. Muñoz's disidentification describes how LGBQ people of color disidentify with components of the dominant ideology that defines their own marginalized identities and create new dissident images as a form of social protest to slowly change the dominant culture.

What does support look like for LGBTQ Latinx students on campuses as they navigate the intersectionality of race and sexuality? According to Evans and Wall (1991), lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer/questioning (LGBTQ) Latinx students are forced to decide to find support in accordance with their identities linked either to their race or sexuality. In turn, either their racial or sexual identity is explored and developed more fully than the other. The development of one identity can create conflict and confusion, whereas the understanding of how these multiple identities benefit one another can help these students navigate their intersectionality (Poynter & Washington, 2005). Additionally, the development of a single identity can cause regression or progress in another (Ocampo, 2014), and since there is a lack of research that represents the voice of racial minorities from the LGBTQ community, it is especially important for LGBTQ people of color to hear their voices (Evans & Wall, 1991). Fukuyama and Ferguson (2000) stated that lesbian and gay people of color face discrimination not only from mainstream American culture as well as the gay subculture based on race or ethnicity, but also from their families and communities. LGBTQ Latinx students need guidance and support in navigating their intersection of multiple marginalized identities of race and sexuality (Evans & Wall, 1991; Ocampo, 2014; Poynter & Washington, 2005).

There is a need for research on LGBTQ students of color in order for higher education institutions to better serve this population. The lack of research available that studies this intersection of marginalized identities limits the knowledge obtainable by these institutions, and thus inhibits their ability to take action to adequately support the unique needs of this group. The amount of research that combines LGBTQ students of color and their identity development, the intersectionality of their marginalized identities, and their experiences in college overall is minimal (Denton, 2016; Means & Jaeger, 2013). The research that exists about LGBTQ



individuals is predominantly focused on White and middle class populations (Adams et al., 2005; Denton, 2016; Means & Jaeger, 2013; Medina, 2003; Villicana et al., 2016).

Traditionally, solutions that have been used to address the marginalization of LGBTQ students have been enacted through educational and awareness programming, campus organizations, resource centers, or Gay-Straight alliances in K-12 schools and colleges. As for LGBTQ Latinx individuals, they have generally had to choose which of their identities for which they find support in college (race or sexuality; Evans & Wall, 1991).

### **Research Questions and Method**

This study sought to understand the strategies that Latino gay/queer students use to help them navigate the intersection of their marginalized identities during college. The following research questions guided the study:

1. What, if any, strategies do Latino gay/queer students at a public university enact as a part of negotiating the out-of-class experience and in light of their intersectionality?
2. What, if any, co-curricular experiences do Latino gay/queer students at a public university report as contributing to feelings of marginality and/or empowerment?
3. What forms of co-curricular engagement do Latino gay/queer students see as supporting or undermining their Latinx, gay/queer, or intersectional identities?

In studying Latino gay/queer college students, LatCrit, a subdiscipline of critical race theory (CRT), served to undergird my research methods. CRT studies the evolving relationship between race, racism, and power (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Specifically in education, CRT aims to eliminate racism, as well as to combat and eradicate other forms of oppression in the American education system. LatCrit goes beyond CRT's Black/White binary and studies other forms of systemic oppression that specifically affect the Latinx community, such as immigration

and language (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). LatCrit not only defines the problem of marginalization but also addresses how the problem continues to be perpetuated by current societal systems and structures (Torres, Jones, & Renn, 2009).

More specifically, I utilized counter storytelling, a CRT and LatCrit method of telling unheard stories from those in the margins of society; such stories are seen as challenging dominant narratives (Delgado, 1989). My research approach was to conduct semi-structured interviews of Latino gay/queer students attending a public university. I focused on their experiences navigating the college environment, including the ways in which they are confronted with obstacles and supports contributing to marginalization or empowerment. I opted to study Latino gay/queer students at a public university because such institutions offer unique environments for student learning and development.

Current LatCrit scholars have mainly focused on the intersecting identities of race, gender, and social class, and yet often fail to include sexuality. Semi-structured interviews provided the data needed to tell the counter stories of Latino gay/queer students' college experiences. Conducting semi-structured interviews with 15 students from the California Public University (CPU) provided extensive data about where this population with multiple oppressions feels safe and supported, as well as how they develop and enact strategies to navigate experiences that undermine their sense of identity. I selected CPU because it is a Hispanic serving institution with an active queer Latinx organization.

Abes, Jones, and McEwen's (2007) reconceptualized model of multiple dimensions of identity (RMMDI) helped frame my thinking throughout the study. It also helped guide my analysis, including at the stages of coding the data collected from interviews. The RMMDI shows how it is possible to exist with multiple identities that become more or less visible

depending on their meaning-making and interaction with circumstantial factors such as family and sociocultural environments.

California Public University (CPU) is a Hispanic serving institution with 37.2% of its undergraduate students identifying as Latinx/Hispanic, which increased the potential for finding participants for this study. CPU also has support services for the designated Latinx and gay/queer population of this study. Additionally, CPU has a Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) Resource Center and a specific LGBTQ/Latinx identity-based organization housed under its LGBTQ Resource Center. I sought out participants through contacting my colleagues at both the LGBTQ Resource Center and the Latinx Center to connect me with students in their organizations that identify as Latino and gay/queer.

### **Significance of the Research and Public Engagement**

The counter stories that Latino gay/queer students told in their interviews revealed important data that can help improve support services for those at the intersection of their LGBTQ and Latinx identity. This study is significant to Latino gay/queer college students as they navigate the intersection of their marginalized identities. The importance and power of hearing their own story told through counter stories can help them relate and persist in obtaining their college degree. Improving support services for these two marginalized communities on college campuses will help them navigate their college experience.

The findings from the current study may also be significant to student affairs professionals and higher education institutions working directly with this population, given their responsibility for developing programs that support gay/queer Latino college students. National student affairs organizations like NASPA - Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education, and the American College Personnel Association (ACPA) will benefit from this study by having

my findings presented at their annual conferences. Additionally, ACPA is already working on various dialogue groups, presentations, and online professional development workshops around the topic of intersectionality among its Latinx and LGBTQ knowledge communities within the organization. Hence, my research may inform that trend as well.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The intersection of marginalized identities compounds barriers for Latino gay/queer men to navigate in college (Adams et al., 2005; Almaguer, 1993; Pastrana, 2015; Sánchez, 2014). Latino gay/queer students face challenges that stem from both their racial and sexual identities, as well as problems that arise from inherent conflicts between these two identities. Universities are faced with the challenge to provide support services that help this student population manage their intersecting identities.

The literature review will provide the research context for better understanding the college experiences of LGBQ students and Latinx students. The first section looks at the LGBQ student experience in college. Section two focuses on the Latinx student experience in college relative to issues of race and racism. Section three addresses the intersectionality of race and sexuality for Latino gay/queer college students. Finally, I conclude this chapter with a discussion of the theoretical framework that guides my study.

### **LGBQ Student Experience in College**

In the following sections, I address five areas relating to the college experience of LGBQ students: (a) co-curricular involvement; (b) influences on sexual identity development; (c) experiences in the closet; (d) coming out; and (e) harassment, discrimination, and prejudice.

**Co-curricular involvement.** While navigating their marginalized identities, Latino gay/queer college students can find support for their LGBQ identity through co-curricular involvement, which helps strengthen and develop LGBQ identity (Longerbeam, Inkelas, Johnson, & Lee, 2007; Olive, 2015). Co-curricular involvement refers to activities, programs, and learning experiences that complement what students are learning in class. Co-curricular activities provide opportunities for students to develop leadership skills that help build

confidence and develop security in their identity. Olive (2015) conducted a qualitative study with six LGBTQ students who held leadership roles in student organizations and found that lesbian, gay, and bisexual students can achieve greater self-esteem, learn how to be comfortable with their sexual identity, and develop leadership skills that will benefit them once they graduate. All six participants stated that having a leadership role encouraged them to come out earlier and to a more expansive population (including the campus, self, and family).

Similarly, Bilodeau and Renn (2005) conducted a grounded theory qualitative study to research the connection between students' co-curricular involvements in LGBT student organizations and leadership development and sexual identity. Bilodeau and Renn used the leadership identity development model as the theoretical framework for their study. The model posits six stages of leadership development as students develop a personal and social identity. The study was based on the belief that everyone is able to make an impact and work together with others to achieve results (Renn, 2007). The researchers chose a sample of 15 student leaders who identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender, and who were also activists from three campuses in the Midwest. Bilodeau and Renn interviewed the 15 students and applied the leadership identity model to the results from the interviews. They found that being involved in co-curricular involvement and activism supported leadership identity development as measured by the participants' level of comfort identifying as LGBT. This study revealed that the leadership identity model could be a strong instrument to examine identity-based leadership experiences. The study also suggested that more research is needed on identity-based leadership, specifically lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender student leadership.

Supporting Bilodeau and Renn's (2007) findings, Olive (2015) conducted a qualitative study that explored the previous experiences of six post-secondary students who identified as

LGBQ who were also in leadership roles in campus organizations at one large campus. Each student was interviewed three times over a span of 6 months and was asked about personal life history as well as co-curricular involvements. The researcher used a grounded theory approach to analyze the data and the leadership identity development model as his theoretical framework. The findings concluded that the involvement in campus organizations and co-curricular activities helped develop self-confidence as measured by the impact of friendship on their development of a leadership identity.

Co-curricular involvement stimulates the development of college students and their leadership. Furthermore, students who are involved in co-curricular activities that include identity-based organizations have a positive impact on their overall identity development (Longerbeam et al., 2007; Olive, 2015). Being involved in co-curricular activities teaches students important leadership skills that helped them be more confident and comfortable in themselves.

According to Renn (2007), the more comfortable LGBQ students become with their sexual identity, the greater their desire to take on larger leadership roles that increase their visibility on and off campus. Their increased leadership leads to an increase in being out and proud of their sexual identity. Renn conducted a qualitative study of student leadership at three types of institutions: a research university, a regional university, and a liberal arts college. In this study, 15 LGBQ college students communicated various ways of being leaders based on their individual self-development and concluded that the focus of their leadership positions was based on the type of leadership they supported. At the time of the study, Renn found that students are coming out in favorable settings more than ever. For LGBQ college students, increased

leadership involvement helped students get more comfortable with their sexual identity and their environment (Longerbeam et al., 2007; Olive, 2015; Renn, 2007).

**Influences on sexual identity development.** Stevens (2004) used grounded theory methodology to understand how the environment added to the exploration and development of a gay identity for 11 self-identified gay male college students at a large mid-Atlantic university. The classroom environment had the most impact for the participants. The classroom was a location that made the participants feel less in control due to the professor having the authority in the room. Further, the participants in Stevens's study reported that the classroom was often uncomfortable due to not knowing one's classmates, the large class size, and the fact that the physical temperature in the rooms were often cold and not welcoming. It is also important to note that staff attitudes, actions, and language also played essential roles in all the participants' assessment of a specific environment on campus.

The impact of the environment was also seen in Ostick's (2011) qualitative study that used grounded theory to investigate lesbian and gay leadership self-efficacy development at a large public university. Specifically, Ostick interviewed 10 gay, lesbian, or queer college students and how they engaged in leadership and the meaning they made of their leadership self-efficacy development. All the students in this study found that environments that acknowledged their sexual orientation provided safety and encouragement that allowed them to be completely present in their identity, and contributed to their leadership self-efficacy development.

The college environment has a large influence on the coming out process for LGBTQ students (Evans & Broido, 1999; Rhoads, 1994). LGBTQ students in college find that environments that acknowledge their sexual orientation provide safety and encouragement (Evans & Broido, 1999; Ostick, 2011; Vaccaro et al., 2011).



**Experiences in the closet.** Students who identify as part of the LGBTQ community remain in the closet (keeping their true sexuality a secret) to avoid being harassed, discriminated against, or being marginalized by others (Gortmaker & Brown, 2006). Stevens (2004) found that while all self-identified gay male participants agreed that supportive environments made them feel more comfortable with their sexual identity, every new campus environment (classroom, dining hall, residence halls, etc.) required that they gauge whether they could disclose their sexuality based on their prior experiences and insights. Their fear and worry about other people's opinions created a sense of internalized homophobia for most participants in this study. All 11 participants kept their sexual identity a secret from their families due to fear of being rejected by them, which resulted in feelings of guilt for not disclosing their sexual identity. Similarly, 45% of participants in D'Augelli's (1989) study feared disclosing their sexual orientation to others, so much so that they would avoid being in places that were heavily populated by lesbians or gay men for fear of being associated as part of the LGBT community. Comparably, 55% of participants in Gortmaker's and Brown's (2006) study at a Midwestern college campus remained in the closet and conveyed similar fears of being harassed and treated unequally as a result of their sexual orientation. Also, Gortmaker's and Brown's study showed that the campus climate has a profound effect on how many lesbian and gay students come out on campus overall.

Similarly, in Rhoads's (1994) 2-year study in which 40 gay and bisexual college students were interviewed and observed, 60% of the participants spent over 2 years in the closet. Rhoads found that gay and bisexual students in the closet had to learn to exist in both a gay world and a straight world due to the harmful messages related to homosexuality delivered by family, friends, their institution, and society. Participants in the study felt that by being in the closet, they were protecting themselves from the discrimination, harassment, and prejudice directed toward

members of the LGBTQ community. LGBTQ students deal with marginalization and oppression in college and when they also identify as Latino, they also encounter incidents of discrimination and racism for their racial identity.

**Coming out.** Coming out, the process of recognizing oneself as a lesbian, gay, bisexual, or queer is a significant developmental moment for LGBTQ individuals. The ability to be honest about having same-sex attractions with others is something all members of the LGBTQ community face (Rhoads, 1994). This moment is facilitated by psychological development but is influenced by various other factors. The act of coming out is affected by progressive willingness, inspiration, environment, and context (Evans & Broido, 1999).

Rhoads (1994), who wrote the first book about college men coming out in college, found that over 87% of participants in his study found coming out to be “one of the most significant experiences in their lives” (p. 83). Those who identify as LGBTQ may have both positive and negative coming out experiences. To be able to handle negative reactions, support systems can provide a means to help process this affront to their identity.

Evans and Broido’s (1999) qualitative study addressed the coming out process for college students in the residence halls at a large research university. In interviews with 20 men and women, 80% said that the environment had a strong influence on whether they felt comfortable to come out. The consistency of encouraging words and supportive LGBTQ behaviors created settings in which all of the participants felt more comfortable to come out with their gay identities and be open in the environment where the behaviors took place.

D’Augelli (1994) wrote that coming out is a fluid development that is affected by personal relationships and interactions with others and their environment. Being out can result in unpredictable reactions that range from being harassed to being supported. Students are coming

out at an earlier age and, thus, college support services need to be ready to support an increase in LGBQ students who are already out (Ostlick, 2011; Renn, 2007; Stevens, 2004). Being out can result in unpredictable reactions that range from being supported to harassment and discrimination.

**Harassment, discrimination, and prejudice.** Incidents of harassment, discrimination, and prejudice towards LGBQ students are taking place on America's college campuses (D'Augelli, 1989; Engstrom & Sedlacek, 1997; Evans & Broido, 1999; Gortmaker & Brown, 2006; Rankin, 2005; Rhoads, 1994; Stevens, 2004). D'Augelli (1989) surveyed 125 lesbians and gay men to document their experiences around discrimination and harassment in a college campus. Over 50% of D'Augelli's sample feared for their personal safety due to discrimination and harassment because of their sexual orientation. Results also showed that 26% of the sample said they were threatened with violence and 17% had personal property damaged on campus (Yale University). Per D'Augelli, of the incidents that were not reported to campus officials, 94% of those who had been victims of these incidents reported that fear was the main reason for them going unreported. The fear that students from the LGBT community experience is confirmed by Engstrom and Sedlacek's (1997) study at a large state university. In their research, 224 heterosexual students reported having negative attitudes towards both gay men and lesbians. These negative attitudes can create a hostile environment that affects LGBT students' decisions to come out with their sexual orientation.

Correspondingly, Rankin (2005) surveyed 1,669 self-identified LGBT students from 14 different campuses (four private and 10 public) to study their campus climate for LGBT people. Of those students who participated in the study, more than 36% experienced harassment in the year they took the survey. Also, 51% of those surveyed kept their sexual orientation a secret for

fear of intimidation. Derogatory remarks were the most common type of discrimination reported (89%) by the participants. Twenty percent also feared for their physical safety for identifying as a part of the LGBT community. Regardless of the support services (resource centers, safe-space programs, inclusive practices etc.) provided by the 14 campuses, the results of this study indicate that LGBT students still feel afraid for their safety and will not disclose their sexuality in order to prevent being targeted for discrimination or harassment.

### **Latinx Student Experience in College in Terms of Race and Racism**

Lamont Strayhorn (2008) stated that a majority of Latinx students report their experience in college as one of feeling “marginalized, alienated, isolated, unsupported, and unwelcomed by their peers and faculty members” (p. 303). In his study, Lamont Strayhorn sampled 289 Latinx students and studied the connection between their sense of belonging on campus and their overall college experience from 4-year institutions. The results indicated that there was a meaningful relationship between Latinx students’ academic and social experiences and their sense of belonging. Overall, there was a statistically significant association with Latinx students’ grades and time spent studying positively influencing their sense of belonging. Overall academic success was found to be a strong indicator of Latinx students feeling more connected to their campus.

Similarly, Contreras’s (2009) qualitative study found that its 20 participants became more connected with their campus the more they developed relationships and friendships at Washington State. All 20 participants stated that utilizing campus resources and co-curricular activities such as Latinx campus organizations and community service groups helped them navigate and access on-campus resources. Despite having a campus connection, all participants in this study also experienced various forms of discrimination that negatively influenced their

desire to finish school. All 20 participants talked about having a strong determination to succeed academically while also helping their families with expenses. Despite having a campus connection, all participants in this study also experienced various forms of discrimination that negatively impacted their desire to finish school. Latinx students continuously face discrimination at predominantly White institutions on a daily basis that oftentimes affects their retention.

In a review of the literature, Saenz and Ponjuan (2009) explored the low number of Latino males attending America's colleges. In their study, Saenz and Ponjuan found that Latino and Black men view academic success as *acting White*, resulting in the rejection of obtaining any form of education in order to maintain their racial identity. The authors also found that Latino men's strong connection to and sense of responsibility for family, called *familismo*, often resulted in them leaving school to provide financial support for their families. However, *familismo* does not always result in lower retention rates of Latino men; it also serves as a means to deal with discrimination (Morgan Consoli, Delucio, Noriega, & Llamas, 2015).

Morgan Consoli et al. (2015) surveyed 121 (31 male, 90 female) Latinx students to assess resilience related to students' spirituality, hope, social support, and cultural values (*familismo*) at a campus on the West coast. Results showed that Latinx students with a stronger sense of pride in their racial identity had a stronger sense of belonging on campus as a result of identifying with the Latinx community. Additionally, the results indicated that the Latinx students' strong sense of Latinx pride helped shield them from the discrimination they faced because their parents had instilled in them a positive self-concept of their racial identity. Latinx college students have had to endure oppression as a result of their racial identity from higher education institutions;

however, if Latinx students identified as a part of the LGBTQ community, they may end up experiencing oppression from both their institution and their families and friends.

### **Intersectionality of Race and Sexuality for Latino Gay College Students**

Currently there is a shortage of research literature that studies the intersection of race and sexuality of Latino gay men. In one of the few studies to examine this intersectionality, Peña-Talamantes (2013) examined how six self-identified lesbian and gay Latinx college students navigated between their hometown and their college environment (a predominantly White public institution in Texas). Half of the participants found themselves to be living in conflict at the intersection of their home and college lives. Most of the six participants kept their sexual identity a secret out of fear that they would lose or be rejected by their families. According to most of the participants, the college environment provided an atmosphere where they felt free to be themselves without having to hide who they were. In contrast, Stevens (2004) interviewed 11 self-identified gay male college students about the impact that the college environment had on their sexual identity development and found that LGBT students of color experienced rejection from both the gay community and their racial community.

Rhoads (1994) discussed racial diversity and the conflicting intersection of race and sexuality for nine of his participants who are a part of a racial minority and also identify as gay or bisexual. These subjects experienced racism from White gay men as well as homophobia from their racial backgrounds. Rhoads wrote, “Students who are both gay and members of a minority community not only face dual forms of oppression but also have to come to terms with conflicting sources of self-identification” (p. 137). A Black student talked about how Black men are not as involved or present in the family, so when a Black man identifies as gay, it is taken offensively and seen as negatively impacting the family. Another student who identified as

Asian discussed the threat his sexual identity would bring to his family regarding keeping the family name from continuing due to his sexuality. As a result of these two negative impacts on their families, these students did not disclose their sexual identity. These types of stories from participants provide more data that students of color who also identify as part of the LGBQ community are often forced to decide what identity is at the forefront in different situations due to marginalization. This conflict also appears when students of color seek support on college campuses by being forced to decide between a cultural resource center and a LGBQ resource center.

Comparably, Villicana et al. (2016) conducted a study that compared how coming out affected subjective well-being among 83 Latino and 42 White gay men. The study found that since Latino gay men experience marginalization from their racial identity, they may decide to not come out due to not wanting to add to their marginalization. Another finding from this study indicated that an exclusionary environment for LGBQ people of color may develop as a result of White gay individuals seeking community through their marginalized identity as LGBQ. Villicana et al. stated that this may be why Latinos look for support from their Latino community versus the LGBQ community.

Similarly, Misawa (2005) conducted a study using the multidimensional identity model to study how the race and sexuality of seven gay men of color developed while in college. In their interviews, six of the participants talked about their racial and sexual identities independently of each other. The majority of participants talked about the impact of their sexual orientation before discussing their racial identity. A few reasons for this could be that: (a) participants thought that their sexuality impacted their lives more than their race; (b) participants became self-aware of their race earlier than their sexuality so that sexuality was more present in their

minds; and (c) at first, participants were more comfortable talking about their sexuality than they were talking about their race. This study found that individuals who navigate the intersectionality of their marginalized identities of race and sexuality were conscious of being isolated in both classrooms and on campus developed their perception of the campus climate through interactions with faculty, staff, and students in and out of classrooms and believed that there needs to be a space for them on campus that is run by individuals who share their intersection of marginalized identities.

Correspondingly, Misawa (2006) presented a theoretical concept for the intersectionality of race and sexuality to explain queer race pedagogy (QRP) in higher education. Misawa concluded that it is important to develop a learning environment for queer students of color, and in order for that to happen, educators must first “know how to become more aware of their learners’ positionalities and power dynamics” (p. 261). Utilizing a pedagogical perspective focused on queer race will help educators create learning spaces for students navigating this intersectionality.

Similarly, Hayes (2014) conducted a study that investigated how the intersectionality of race and sexuality influenced the experience of three gay teachers of color. In their interviews, all three participants (one Black male and two Latino males) discussed “racism in the schools, assumptions of Black and Brown inferiority and racism in the gay community” (p. 152). All three participants were found to be culturally and politically responsive in the classroom where they emphasized “teaching to the whole child as a member of a particular social group situated within a particular context and history” (p. 163). According to Hayes, the experiences and lessons of the three participants can help policymakers understand the need to change the conventionally dominant methods of teaching students on the margins of society.



## **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework for this study combines several important theories and areas of inquiry in education. More specifically, I highlight intersectionality, the RMMDI, the concept of disidentification, and LatCrit and counter storytelling.

**Intersectionality.** Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw (1991), a legal scholar, informed much of my research on intersectionality, critiquing the intersection of systemic racism and sexism and how the experiences of women of color are not evident within the discussion of feminism or racism. The way Crenshaw uses the metaphor of the intersection helps show how different identity markers are not mutually exclusive. This study informed my exploration of the intersectionality of Latino gay/queer college students. Crenshaw's discussion of how "the narratives of gender are based on the experience of White, middle-class women, and the narratives of race are based on the experience of Black men" (p. 1298) influences how similarly the narratives of the gay community are based on the experiences of White middle-class men and the narratives of the Latinx population are based on those of heterosexual Latin men. Correspondingly, Jones, Kim, and Skendall (2012) defined intersectionality as a framework that encapsulates the difficulties of daily life and identity by connecting interpersonal and intrapersonal experiences. Jones et al. established four features that describe intersectional research from Crenshaw's work as follows:

- (a) centering the lived experiences of individuals, and specifically those of people of color and other marginalized groups; (b) complicating identity and examining both individual and group identities; (c) exploring identity salience as influenced by systems of power and privilege and unveiling power in interconnected structures of inequality and (d) advancing a larger goal of promoting social justice and social change. (p. 702)

Similarly, Means (2017) conducted a qualitative study that looked at the experiences of Black gay and bisexual male college students and how they dealt with being marginalized during their spiritual development. Means identified an intersectional framework as one that highlights the urgency of comprehending identity intersections as they relate to disassembling the influence of dominant culture and endorsing social justice. Means utilized a framework parallel to Crenshaw's (1991) intersectionality called Quare theory, which, like intersectionality, contradicts the notion that one's identities can be understood individually, asserting instead that they actually intersect to form one's authentic self.

Comparably, Anderson and McCormack (2010) investigated the experiences of Black gay athletes who experience exclusion as a result of their intersectionality. Anderson and McCormack used CRT and intersectionality as a framework to understand the effect of the racial classifications of White and Black as well as the sexual classifications of gay and straight on Black gay athletes. Anderson and McCormack expanded the literature on intersectionality among gay Black men in sports by providing a framework grounded in intersectionality and CRT that examines both institutional and cultural marginalization.

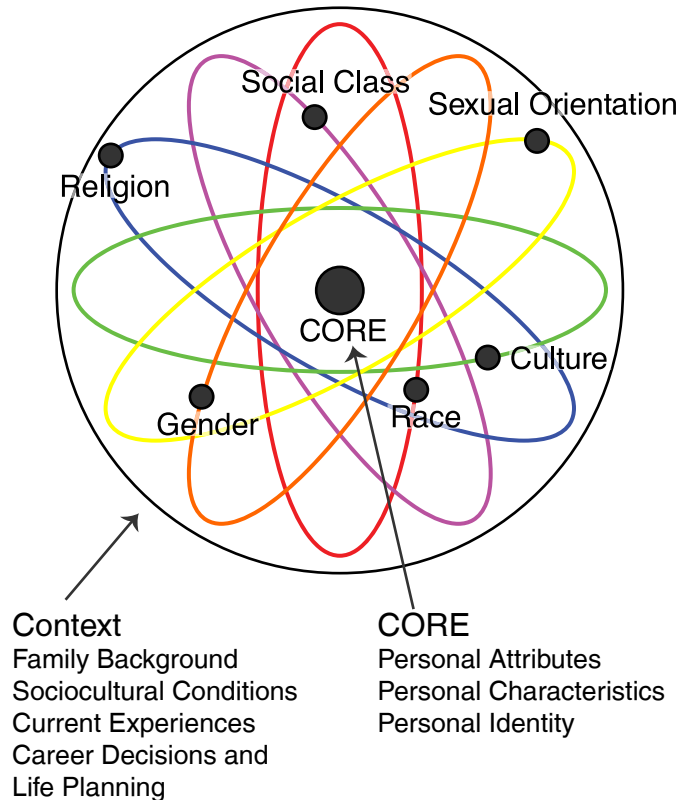
Purdie-Vaughns and Eibach (2008) developed a different approach to studying intersectionality called intersectional invisibility, hypothesizing that individuals with multiple marginalized identities make a person invisible in contrast to those with only one marginalized identity who are not rendered invisible. Similar to Crenshaw's (1991) work on intersectionality, intersectional invisibility is shown through the historical negligence of the stories of African-American women in both Black history and women's history (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008).

Audre Lorde was a writer, feminist, and civil rights activist who also wrote about intersectionality. Specifically, her poetry spoke about being a part of more than one

marginalized group and never feeling like she belonged to one group completely. Lorde also criticized feminism for not talking about intersectionality and was always used as a voice for women who asked feminism to confront intersectionality (Dudley, 2006).

Intersectionality's main principle is that forms of oppression can increase when combined (Anderson & McCormack, 2010; Crenshaw, 1991). In studying Latino gay/queer college students' intersectionality of their marginalized identities, it is important to understand how their identities are influenced and developed. The RMMDI helps foster an understanding of how they make meaning of different forms of oppression on their identities.

**Model of multiple dimensions of identity.** Jones and McEwen's (2000) model of multiple dimensions of identity (MMDI) depicts identity development as a dynamic process that is unsolidified versus being linear or with fixed stages. The MMDI postulates a framework that can be used to study how the interfacing of multiple identities impacts the complication of individuals' dimensions. The model describes identity dimensions as intersecting rings, representing how no dimensions can be understood alone, and that they can only be understood relative to other dimensions. At the center of the model is a core sense of self that is made up of personal characteristics that the individual cherishes. Surrounding the core and identity dimensions is the context in which a person experiences their life, such as family, social and cultural conditions, and recent occurrences. The prominence of each identity dimension in the core is fluid and depends on circumstantial influences.



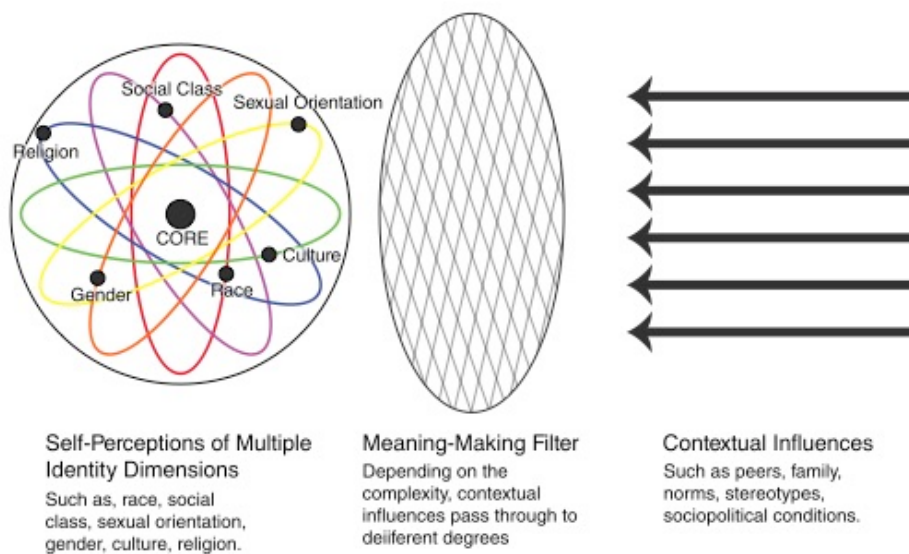
*Figure 1.* Model of multiple dimensions of identity. Adapted from “A Conceptual Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity,” by S. R. Jones & M. K. & McEwen, 2000, *Journal of College Student Development*, 41(4), 429.

A similar study by Abes and Jones (2004) used narrative inquiry to study self-perceived identities among 10 lesbian college students. Abes and Jones combined the MMDI with constructivist-developmental theory to suggest a justification for the impact of context on the participants’ perceptions of identity dimensions. This study examined various facets of identity and domains of development in order to provide an inclusive understanding of lesbian identity construction. The results of this study found that “the relationship between contextual influences, meaning-making capacity, and college students’ perceptions of their identity illuminates how multiple dimensions of identity are thought to interact and extends existing theories of sexual orientation identity development in a more integrated direction” ( p. 624). As a result of this study, Abes et al. (2007) reconceptualized the MMDI.

Abes et al. (2007) developed a new model of multiple dimensions of identity that is more focused on embracing the complexity of intersecting domains of development. According to Abes et al., including meaning-making capacity in the MMDI provides a better representation of the connection between context and salience of identity dimensions as well as the connection between social identities and their core. Incorporating meaning-making capacity into the MMDI also delivers a more in-depth depiction “of not only *what* relationships students perceive among their personal and social identities, but also *how* they come to perceive them as they do” (p. 13). The RMMDI consists of two dimensions that work interactively through its components of the identity development process, which includes context, meaning making, and identity perceptions. In the new model, contextual influences (peers, family, stereotypes, etc.) are represented by arrows that are external to identity, which then go through one’s meaning-making filter before reaching one’s social identity dimensions (i.e., race, sexual orientation, etc.). The manner in which contextual influences go through the filter depends on the depth and permeability of the filter. Abes et al. stated that, “The depth (thickness) and permeability (size of openings) of the filter depend on the complexity of the person’s meaning-making capacity” (p. 6). Irrespective of how thick and permeable the meaning-making filter is, context still influences identity perceptions.

Learning where each participant places the location of his identity dimensions (specifically race and sexuality), seeing when certain identity dimensions were salient to them, and how context influenced their identity will help understand how they navigated college as Latino gay/queer men. Jones and McEwen (2000) also found that when interacting with sociocultural conditions like racism or sexism, the salience of identity dimensions could show to cause a deeper reflection and a more in depth understanding of specific dimensions. The

complexity of their meaning-making filter will influence their interactions with sociocultural conditions, and it was important to determine if my participants gained a deeper understanding of their intersecting marginalized identities based on any interactions with sexualism or racism. Another framework that adds to the understanding of the impact of contextual influences on identity dimensions is disidentification.



*Figure 2. Reconceptualized model of multiple dimensions of identity. Adapted from “Reconceptualizing the Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity: The Role of Meaning-Making Capacity in the Construction of Multiple Identities,” by E. S. Abes, S. R. Jones, & M. K. McEwen, 2007, *Journal of College Student Development*, 48(1), 1–22.*

**Disidentification.** My understanding of the Latino gay/queer student experience is enlightened by Muñoz’s (1999) work on disidentification, which is intended to help queer people of color identify with their “ethnos and queerness” (p. 11), regardless of the marginalization that comes with being a part of both identities. This framework helped inform my understanding of how Latino gay/queer college students navigate their experiences of marginalization or empowerment. According to Medina (2003), Muñoz utilizes disidentification by studying how gay Latinos disidentify with traditional Hispanic images of machismo and recreate them as a form of activism to change the dominant narrative of Hispanic culture.

In his collection of various perspectives on sexual identity formation, Denton (2016) asserted that more research is needed to comprehend the racial and sexual identity development of college students. The culture of today's college campus around race and sexuality plays a large role in how safe and comfortable students feel to develop their identities. According to Denton, to disidentify is "neither to identify with available cultural discourses of identity nor to counteridentify, or oppose them" (p. 65). The idea of disidentification is to recreate a new identification that accepts and rejects the dominant discourse at the same time (Denton, 2016; Medina, 2003; Muñoz, 1999). In the words of Muñoz (1999):

Instead of buckling under the pressures of dominant ideology (identifications, assimilation) or attempting to break its inescapable sphere (counteridentification, utopianism), this 'working on and against' is a strategy that tries to transform a cultural logic from within, always laboring to enact permanent structural change while at the same time valuing the importance of local or everyday struggles of resistance. (pp. 11-12)

Similarly, Means and Jaeger (2013) conducted a qualitative study that investigated the college experiences of Black gay males students at historically Black universities. African Americans and quares of color have used disidentification to comprehend their experiences. Black lesbian, gay, and bisexual people also share the same journey to change the dominant narrative as do Latino gay men: disidentification. These narratives are best understood and heard by utilizing counter stories within the LatCrit framework.

**LatCrit and counter storytelling.** CRT evolved from critical legal studies and was created mainly by minority legal scholars who wanted to construct theories capable of centering racism and its role in influencing the American legal system with the ultimate goal of challenging race-based systems of oppression (Crenshaw, 1995; Matsuda, 1991). Ladson-

Billings (1998) wrote that CRT has three essential principles: (a) dominant systems need to be broken down in order to fully comprehend how they impact others; (b) everyone must be taken into account when we rebuild; and (c) civilization needs to support equity for everyone.

Principles that other researchers have mentioned regarding CRT include: (a) race and racism are at the center of American society, (b) the need for everyone to do their part with social justice and practical application of theory, and (c) experiential knowledge is critical (Bernal, 2002; Matsuda, 1991; Solórzano & Bernal, 2001; Tate, 1994; Villalpando, 2004).

LatCrit comes from applying the basic tenets of CRT to the Latinx identity experience and focuses on issues outside of race (Torres et al., 2009). LatCrit emphasizes the experiences and truths of those who identify as Latinx (Villalpando, 2004). Other topics such as language, immigration, undocumented status, ethnicity, culture, and sexuality are a part of LatCrit that CRT does not examine (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001; Villalpando, 2004). According to Villalpando (2004), LatCrit is a more effective lens than CRT to study the different identities of Latinx as well as the intersections of discrimination that come from racism, sexism, heterosexism, and classism. In order to really hear the stories of Latino gay/queer college students, a method used by CRT and LatCrit, called counter storytelling, helped understand their journey through their stories.

Solórzano and Yosso (2002) wrote that counter stories “can be used as theoretical, methodological, and pedagogical tools to challenge racism, sexism, and classism and work toward social justice” (p. 23). The researchers defined counter storytelling as a method of telling the narratives of those whose stories are rarely heard and of those in the margins (Delgado, 1989; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001, 2002). There are three types of counter stories: personal stories/narratives, other people’s stories/narratives, and composite stories/narratives (Solórzano



& Yosso, 2002). Solórzano and Yosso (2002) defined each type of counter story as follows:

(a) personal stories describe experiences with racism and sexism and are often autobiographical thoughts of the writer; (b) other people's stories tell someone else's story that disclose experiences with sexism and are told through a third person voice; and (c) composite stories take on several forms of *data* to tell the experiences of people of color in regard to racism, sexism, and classism.

According to Solórzano and Yosso (2002), counter stories have four main functions:

(a) building community within marginalized groups by familiarizing educational theory and practice; (b) challenging the dominant story by offering a means to change it; (c) bringing to light the stories of those in marginalized groups to show others that they are not alone in their situation; and (d) teaching others that combining parts of their reality and of their stories can create a new world that is better than both. Utilizing this framework served as the backdrop to my research methods in order to tell the stories of Latino gay/queer college students.

### **CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODS**

Latino gay/queer students are often forced to choose between their race and sexuality, depending on what support they are receiving due to the nature of this intersection. This study investigated the following research questions:

1. What, if any, strategies do Latino gay/queer students at a public university enact as a part of negotiating the out-of-class experience and in light of their intersectionality?
2. What, if any, co-curricular experiences do Latino gay/queer students at a public university report as contributing to feelings of marginality and/or empowerment?
3. What forms of co-curricular engagement do Latino gay/queer students see as supporting or undermining their Latinx, gay, or intersectional identities?

Given the exploratory nature of this study, a qualitative case study research design was used to answer these research questions. A case study affords an in-depth description of a phenomenon: in this instance, the experience of Latino gay/queer students at a specific research institution.

#### **Research Design and Rationale**

This qualitative case study was carried out by conducting semi-structured interviews and campus observations at California Public University. This study utilized counter storytelling as a theoretical framework to guide these aforementioned research methods.

Counter storytelling is a method used by critical race theorists to tell the stories of marginalized populations while also serving as a means to challenge the stories of those in the majority (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). In order to discover the strategies that Latino gay/queer students use to navigate through college, it is best to hear about their experiences in their own words. Similar to Solórzano and Yosso's (2001) study on using counter storytelling to assess

racism and discrimination faced by Chicana graduate students, this study utilized counter stories to share and analyze the experiences Latino gay/queer students have had around their marginalized identities of race and sexuality. Similarly, the counter stories of Latino gay/queer students from this study were analyzed by identifying themes around their own survival and liberation in navigating their out-of-class college experiences around marginalization and empowerment.

Data from in-depth semi-structured interviews were used to tell their counter stories regarding their out-of-class/co-curricular experiences around marginalization and empowerment. Since this population consists of multiple marginalized identities, more information was gathered about their experiences navigating various forms of marginalization or empowerment due to their intersectionality. A qualitative case study enabled me to “preserve the individuality of each participant in their analyses” (Maxwell, 2012, p. 30), and gather richer data to tell my participants’ stories with more accuracy, detail, and authenticity.

### **Site and Population**

This study utilized a site that consists of a large Latinx population due to its criteria. California Public University (CPU) is a 4-year research institution with over 19,000 undergraduate students located in the inland region of southern California. CPU’s Latinx population consists of 37.2% of its undergraduate population, which makes it a Hispanic serving institution. Also, CPU has various identity-based centers for support (both Latinx and LGBTQ), and has an active Queer Trans Latinx student organization. The Queer Trans Latinx population is very active on this campus and hosted a conference on Queer Trans Latinx Issues in February 2017. The relatively high degree of Latinx and LGBTQ support structures makes CPU a unique site to study how Latino gay/queer students navigate their intersection of multiple identities.

To access my site, I contacted colleagues who work at CPU's Housing and Residential Life department and requested an introduction to the staff of the LGBTQ Resource Center. Once I was introduced, I asked the LGBTQ Resource Center staff to communicate my name and study to the La Familia organization. I also asked for the organization's president's name and contact information and contacted them after the LGBTQ Resource Center staff introduced my study. I then asked to attend one of La Familia's meetings to talk about my study and ask for participants. Participants were able to contact me via email or phone.

I selected Latino gay/queer students who are active in the LGBTQ Resource Center, in the Queer Latinx organization called La Familia, or in Latinx organizations, as well as other co-curricular activities or resource centers throughout campus. I began with individuals from the LGBTQ and Latinx organizations and also posted flyers around campus to seek the voices of those who may have wanted to participate yet were not active in the LGBTQ or Latinx campus communities. Students who are involved in La Familia and/or Latinx organizations are likely to be more connected to the LGBTQ and/or Latinx on campus communities.

Recruiting Latino gay/queer students who were active in a co-curricular activity proved to be more difficult than I anticipated. I visited the LGBTQ Resource Center and Chicano Student Programs office a few times, went to La Familia's ¡Presente! conference, attempted to attend a La Familia meeting, and emailed fraternities several times promoting my study. The aforementioned strategies resulted in the recruitment of just four participants. Fortunately, I interviewed an influential member of La Familia, who then helped me recruit other members in La Familia, which resulted in a majority of participants affiliating with this organization.

### **Data Collection: Semi-structured Interviews**

This qualitative case study utilized semi-structured interviews as its main form of data collection. Conducting comprehensive interviews with 15 students from a campus with 37.2% Latinx students provided extensive data about places where this population with multiple marginalized identities feels safe and supported, whether or not co-curricular involvement has any impact on how/where they learn to navigate the college, and the resources and people that help them (if any). The interviews ranged between 60 minutes and 90 minutes in duration and were audio recorded using a micro recorder and transcribed using an online transcription service.

The interview protocol was constructed to gain a deep understanding of how out-of-class/co-curricular experiences contribute to Latino gay/queer students' feelings of marginality or empowerment. The interviews were conducted on campus. Maxwell (2012) emphasized the importance of asking *real* questions that the researcher sincerely wants answered, questions that go beyond the surface, and questions that provide rich data that answer the research questions. To do this with Latino gay/queer students, I needed to begin with surface level questions, and once participants were more comfortable with me, I then asked more personal questions about their lives. I asked about the coming out process (if they were out), how out-of-class/co-curricular experiences have affected their navigation of their marginalized identities, and where they sought support. The interview protocol was piloted with Latino gay/queer men who have graduated from college as well as with other Latino gay/queer students at the college campus where I work.

### **Data Analysis**

This qualitative case study used intersectionality to help explain how participants have utilized co-curricular engagement as a means of supporting or undermining their multiple

identities. LatCrit and disidentification were used to examine how co-curricular experiences contributed to feelings of marginality and empowerment. Lastly, RMMDI was utilized to understand what co-curricular engagement influenced their multiple identities when they were most salient.

During the interviews, I took notes while listening in order to record non-verbal observations not captured in the audio transcript. I reviewed the data from the 15 student interviews conducted before transcribing and analyzing them. A code book was developed from coding the themes and issues that emerged during interviews. Themes related to what contexts and out-of-class/co-curricular experiences are contributing to feelings of marginality or empowerment for Latino gay/queer students were studied and organized into potential categories like discrimination, racism, homophobia, use or lack of support systems, gender norms, machismo, and religion. These themes were then tied to the research questions and units of observation, color coded, and organized in Microsoft Excel (Saldaña, 2015). The categories and themes developed were then triangulated with literature related to the experiences of Latino gay/queer students (Maxwell, 2012; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Interviews were also cross referenced with information associated with intersectionality, disidentification, experiences of marginality, and empowerment of Latino gay/queer students and LatCrit.

### **Ethical Issues**

This study gathered data that contains extremely personal content shared by participants during interviews. In order to ensure anonymity, an informed consent form created by the institution was given to all participants prior to scheduling interviews. All the information was kept in Google accounts that were only accessed on password protected personal computers.

Any hard copies containing information related to interviews were kept in my residence to ensure that I was the only one able to access it.

Due to the fact that my participants identified as part of the LGBTQ community, I made sure to respect their decision regarding whether they have come out as gay/queer or if they are only partially out (i.e., out on campus but not to family). Interviews were conducted in a safe and confidential environment in order for the participants to feel comfortable. I asked participants to select a location for the interview to increase their comfort level when being interviewed. In order to protect my participants' privacy and confidentiality, I asked them to create their own alias to ensure anonymity. Also, confidentiality was discussed at the start of their interview to confirm their anonymity.

### **Credibility and Trustworthiness**

This study addressed the potential bias of the researcher's identity as a Latino gay/queer man, same identity as the participants, by gathering rich data from the interview transcripts. This study's credibility was increased by using direct quotes to help confirm my conclusions as well as confirm or contradict any of my biases. Also, utilizing systematic data analysis and coding helped prevent me from selecting favorable quotes that may be seen as biased. As a Latino gay/queer man, I ensured that the coding for themes came directly from the interview responses of the participants and not from what I wanted to write about. I used the codes that were similar throughout all of the participants' interview responses in order to ensure that the themes I coded emerged among all the participants.

The idea that I may be trying to mislead the audience about the real purpose of my study may also impact my study's credibility. It may seem that this study is too close to me, and as a result I could be perceived as withholding information to push a personal agenda with my study

about Latino gay/queer men. As a result, the manner in which data are interpreted or how conclusions are found/written can also be seen as being biased as a Latino gay/queer man. Utilizing triangulation to corroborate what my participants are saying with multiple literature sources to back it up will help address these concerns (Maxwell, 2012; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Another way that this study's credibility might have been affected is if the participants told me what they thought I wanted to hear. One way to address this was by practicing my interviewing and listening skills so that I could establish good rapport with the participants in order to elicit strong data.

### **Positionality**

My own positionality as a Latino gay/queer man had the potential to raise some benefits and challenges in this study. In the interviews, I presented myself as identifying as a Latino gay/queer man and a doctoral student in order to gain my participants' trust. It was indeed challenging to ensure sure that I did not influence any aspect of the study as a result of my personal experience. Therefore, I utilized peer debriefing (analytic triangulation) to increase the credibility and trustworthiness of my research (Given, 2008). "Peer debriefers may help by clarifying interpretations and challenge researcher assumptions contributing to the credibility of the findings, analyses, and conclusions drawn" (Given, 2008, p. 2).



## CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

The purpose of using counter storytelling as a methodology was to collect data that would provide a means to challenge racism and homophobia. The act of counter storytelling as the primary methodology allowed the participants to provide as much rich data as possible, permitting me to better associate the findings with the research questions. The counter stories of the 15 participants offer profound intimate experiences that generally go unheard. Their collective counter stories will build community within the Latino gay/queer community, challenge the dominant narrative by providing a means to change it, and show others that they are not alone in their situation by teaching them that their stories can also be heard (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

For the purposes of this study and as an outcome of my method of analysis, I gather pieces from my participants' counter stories and present them in this chapter. Table 1 shows the class standing and major of all participants. I will first focus on obstacles and challenges that Latino gay/queer students faced on campus, followed by strategies participants enacted to overcome them. Participants' strategies included participation in co-curricular activities which are described in Table 2. Here, I emphasize excerpts that describe finding *comunidad* and self-policing, creating counter-spaces and activism, and microaffirmations. I then organize excerpts to highlight sources of co-curricular support for Latino gay/queer students. Lastly, passages related to Latino gay/queer students' identity and intersectionality are shared to illustrate my participants' self-awareness, acknowledgment of co-curricular impact on identity, and growth in identity development.

Table 1

*Participant Class Standing and Major*

Name	Class Standing	Major
Agustin	4 <sup>th</sup> year	Psychology
Gregorio	3 <sup>rd</sup> year	English
Antonio	2 <sup>nd</sup> year	Sustainability
Rafael	1 <sup>st</sup> year	Music Composition
Vicente	3 <sup>rd</sup> year	Business Administration
Valentino	3 <sup>rd</sup> year	Philosophy and Gender & Sexuality Studies
Rey	1 <sup>st</sup> year	Molecular Biology
Everardo	5 <sup>th</sup> year	Statistics
Jacobo	3 <sup>rd</sup> year	Ethnic Studies & Education
Enrique	2 <sup>nd</sup> year	English
Jose	4 <sup>th</sup> year	Microbiology
Abel	3 <sup>rd</sup> year	Psychology
Daniel	1 <sup>st</sup> year	Mathematics
Alberto	3 <sup>rd</sup> year	Neuroscience
David	1 <sup>st</sup> year	Biology

Table 2

*Description of Co-Curricular Activities*

Co-Curricular Activity	Description
Chicano Student Programs	Chicano Student Programs celebrates the traditions of Chicano/Latino culture while sharing the spirit of La Raza with the campus and community. This center provides support for Chicano/Latino students with academic, cultural, and social success.
Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Resource Center	The LGBTQ Resource Center provides support, education, and advocacy regarding sexual orientation and gender identity/expression for the campus community and beyond.
La Familia	A campus organization housed under Chicano Student Programs and the LGBTQ Resource Center that recognizes the issues of religious bigotry, heterosexism, and ignorance in the Queer Latinx communities. La Familia's goals are to fight for self and group respect, to ensure cultural preservation, community activism and empowerment, community service, and unabashed, unrestrained self-expression.
Teatro Quinto Sol	A campus organization that is focused on creating cultural awareness through performance arte.
Housing & Residence Life	Housing and Residence Life provides a safe, inclusive, and diverse living experience that supports academic success and personal development.
Community OUTreach Educators (CORE)	CORE (Community OUTreach Educators) are student volunteers that are trained to educate others regarding sexual orientation and gender identity, raise awareness of the LGBTQ and allies community, and represent the LGBTQ Resource Center.

## **Obstacles and Challenges in Co-Curricular Life for Latino Gay/Queer Students**

In this section, I focus on various types of obstacles and challenges faced by Latino gay/queer students in co-curricular experiences. All of my participants shared negative experiences that took place before arriving to college that emphasized their not being accepted by family. Managing this type of rejection of a part of their identity at such a young age provides context in understanding the stories my participants shared around the obstacles they faced in co-curricular life. Participants shared stories of experiencing different types of marginalization that included microaggressions and stereotypes, homophobia and heteronormativity, not feeling Latinx enough, and spaces being “too White.” In managing these challenges, participants described enacting strategies to overcome them. The strategies participants stressed were (a) finding *comunidad* and self-policing, (b) creating counter-spaces and activism, and (c) microaffirmations.

**Obstacles and challenges.** The participants faced obstacles and challenges in some of their co-curricular experiences. Of course, my participants also shared stories about facing obstacles and challenges outside of their co-curricular experiences, but the focus of my study mainly examined the impact of co-curricular experiences.

***Microaggressions and stereotypes.*** The first type of obstacle my participants shared was a combination of microaggressive behaviors and thoughts on ingrained stereotypes around their identities of being Latinx and/or gay/queer. The following three participants captured sentiments around stereotypes and microaggressions:

I feel like because of my racial identity, I have to work twice as hard to get the recognition I deserve. I feel like my racial identity has inspired me to work hard 24/7 and I feel like my racial identity has shaped me into the sophisticated person that I present to

be, only because there is a lot of these negative stereotypes and people just saying, “Oh, they’re lazy. They don’t want to work.” I feel like I work more because I feel like if I don’t do ...I feel like if I do average work compared to everyone else, they’ll just see me as, “Oh, he’s just getting by,” and I don’t know why I have that mentality. I feel like when I speak to people I’m like, “Oh yeah, I’m a research assistant. I’m an RA. I’m taking five classes. I’m involved in research. I’m involved. And so, I feel as if that extra work kind of makes up for the stereotype that I’ve ingrained in my mind.

*Agustin, fourth year psychology major*

It shouldn’t fall on me to educate everyone and tell them, “Hey that’s not okay. Hey you shouldn’t be saying that” [regarding offensive language around race and sexual orientation] and I find myself still having to do that in my position [as a Resident Advisor]. Not just like, to my residents, first years, which I understand, I give them more leeway because they’re still growing as people. But for my co-workers and pro staff, I’m just like, honestly some of you guys really need to check yourselves.

*Gregorio, third year English major*

Just having one-on-ones with people [at the LGBTQ Resource Center] you realize that they say certain things that aren’t...sometimes they’re not bad, but it builds up over time. And it’s really just...it’s just ingrained in microaggressive racism that happens.

*Enrique, second year English major*

As evidenced by these comments, Latinx students tackled various forms of oppression in co-curricular spaces that are meant to support marginalized students. Agustin displayed signs of imposter syndrome as a result of trying to combat the ingrained stereotype that Latinx folks are lazy. Gregorio felt the need to educate others as the token Latinx gay/queer person in his

position in Residence Life, and Enrique captured the frustration of hearing multiple racial microaggressions at the LGBTQ Resource Center.

***Homophobia and heteronormativity.*** A second type of challenge participants described is their perceptions and experiences with a few co-curricular activities around homophobia and heteronormativity. When asked which co-curricular experiences they avoided, 13 out of 15 participants mentioned explicitly avoiding fraternities. For example, Vicente, a third year Business Administration major, shared how he avoided fraternities as a result of the negative stigma of them being homophobic:

Whenever I walk past the fraternities...I don't like walking by there. I think I have this stigma towards fraternities...these stigmas that they're often homophobic or they're often...they sexually harass people and they do all these things. So, there's this very negative view of fraternities.

Similar to Vicente, Arturo, a third year neuroscience major, shared "My identity as a gay man has prevented me from joining fraternities. Because again, I don't know how well they would react." Vicente and Arturo acknowledged that their perceptions of fraternities being homophobic influenced their decisions to not partake in that co-curricular experience.

Fraternities were not the only co-curricular experience that participants avoided. Gregorio, a third year English major, described his experience at Chicano Student Programs (a co-curricular space on campus focused on supporting Chicanx/Latinx students):

I think I just feel uncomfortable...and for the most part, I don't talk to a lot of the people there [Chicano Student Programs], like I said. I know that there are also other queer folks that have told me the same thing as well, and that's mostly with like queer or fem identified people that go to the Chicano center, they don't feel the most comfortable

there. And that to me is one of the reasons why I feel like the center ... or not the center but like the people that go to the center are problematic because I feel like they perform gender, they're heteronormative, and that to me is showed in their orgs, which are separated by sex. And that to me is problematic. Or it makes me uncomfortable because as a queer identified person I don't feel comfortable going up to them.

This example shows Gregorio's reasons for avoiding a co-curricular space that was not inclusive and that supported organizations that were heteronormative due to being separated by sex. The space Gregorio described made him feel uncomfortable, and as a result, he avoided stepping into the Chicano Student Programs center. These comments all offer an understanding of how negative stigmas of specific co-curricular activities influenced which parts of campus the participants avoided. The deep-seated stigma of fraternities being homophobic deterred some participants from getting involved and even being near them.

Latino gay/queer students avoided co-curricular experiences that had the potential to marginalize them. These co-curricular experiences also made Latino gay/queer students feel excluded as a result of heteronormative behaviors and stigmas around homophobia. Heteronormativity and homophobia marginalize Latino gay/queer students because of their sexuality, and many participants expressed their desire not to hide or be ashamed of either of their identities. As mentioned before, my participants dealt with heteronormative and homophobic experiences before coming to college, so it is no surprise that they avoided co-curricular experiences that made them feel ashamed for being gay/queer.

***Not Latinx enough and "too White."*** Another obstacle and challenge that Latinx gay/queer students faced in co-curricular activities was related to their Latinx identity. Four participants felt that their Latinx identity was questioned in some co-curricular activities. Five

other participants described a specific co-curricular space as “too White” and lacking the ability to support their Latinx identity. The following three students all offered support regarding the role certain co-curricular experiences played in creating obstacles and challenges for Latino gay/queer students:

There is a certain pressure to be more Latino or there’s more pressure to be very proud and very open and very expressive of being Latino in a way [at Chicano Student Programs]. Like if I don’t know the words to every song by Chente [a famous traditional Mexican singer] then I’m like ... they’ll call me out on it, that kind of thing. Or I’ll be called a *pocho* [a Latinx person who speaks English and lacks fluency in Spanish] often.

*Vicente, third year business administration major*

I mean a lot of the students in that club [La Familia] expressed their love for their nationality and stuff, and don’t get me wrong I love my country and I love Mexico and my state, but I just didn’t see myself expressing it in the way they did.

*Rey, first year molecular biology major*

I don’t really go into the LGBTQ space unless I have meetings because the space is very White. I don’t know how to describe it. Just the administrators. They’re White, but they’re still really great allies. It’s just they are very...I don’t know how to say it—bureaucratic and corporate.

*Jacobo, third year ethnic studies and education major*

As one can see from these three students’ comments, Latinx students are confronted with some co-curricular spaces that seem to be heavily rooted in Whiteness—or are “too White,” as they reported. This was even true of a social justice-oriented space such as the LGBTQ Resource Center, which two additional students—Rafael and Enrique—described as a “whitewashed

space” (Rafael), noting that students there were often “unaware of other problems in the gay community” such as those linked to being gay and Chicano (Enrique). As one can see from these comments, Latinx students who relied on the LGBTQ Resource Center for support often faced different forms of oppression linked to their racial identity.

**Strategies enacted in overcoming obstacles and challenges.** The following subsections relate to how participants managed and navigated the obstacles and challenges they faced in co-curricular activities and campus wide. Participants tended to describe strategies involving finding others who identified like them and had similar experiences navigating campus life as a Latinx gay/queer student.

***Finding comunidad and self-policing.*** All participants used finding *comunidad* and self-policing as strategies to navigate obstacles experienced during co-curricular activities. The following excerpts from participants’ counter stories highlight how they managed their intersectionality of being Latinx and gay/queer in co-curricular activities. For example, Jacobo, a third year ethnic studies and education major, identified the importance of finding *comunidad*, and found a place where his identities were embraced:

The people who I grew community with were queer and Latinx. La Familia was just a queer, Latinx space where we would have *juntas* [political meetings], we would have *platicas* [talks]. We would go to the pool, have *carne asada*. It’s really been places that embrace and are in solidarity with our identities. I’ve been in spaces where they ignore those identities and ignoring them is not the way to go from my perspective.

This example demonstrates Jacobo’s appreciation for finding *comunidad* in a space where there are others who are also navigating identities linked to both race and sexuality. The *comunidad* that Jacobo described is one where he fully experienced both of his identities.



Similar to Jacobo, Vicente, a third year business administration major, also found a sense of community within spaces where his intersectionality was at the forefront. When asked why he did not want to get involved in anything too racially focused, he stated:

I have experienced the Latino culture throughout in my life, so I was like, “Okay, maybe I want to experience something new, something I haven’t experienced, something I can’t experience at home.” That’s why I lean more toward the queer events and the queer groups and stuff like that. Because I can’t experience queerness at home, really. But I do get like, the Latino experience at home. But LaFa [La Familia] has been a great thing because, again it intermixes it all.

This example demonstrates that Vicente self-policed where he went on campus by going to places and events where he felt comfortable. He found a place where others shared his experience of navigating the intersectionality of race and sexuality. Vicente’s experience at home highlighted many of the other participants’ experiences at home where they had to ignore one or both of their identities. Finding a community that provides friendship and a sense of belonging drove them to self-police where they go on campus. Valentino, a third year philosophy and gender and sexuality studies major, described what this *comunidad* in La Familia has provided for him. He stated,

It’s helped community. It’s helped me build a lot of community too. I feel like, a lot of people laugh, but no, you feel yourself more comfortable, more vulnerable. It allows for more conversation, I feel more honest. It allows me to create a sense of community, a sense of belonging, a sense of importance that we’re going through this, driving together.

Jacobo, Vicente, and Valentino recognized the importance of finding a *comunidad* where one can be vulnerable, speak honestly, and feel a sense of belonging. These three excerpts describe

the strategies of finding *comunidad* and self-policing that all participants used to navigate the obstacles they faced from co-curricular experiences on campus. The fulfillment of finding *comunidad* allowed these men to feel like they were seen and heard. For example, another participant, Antonio, a second year sustainability major, described what it felt like to be a part of La Familia; “I just feel like a person, literally. I don’t feel...on the margins.” Finding *comunidad* allowed Antonio not to feel marginalized; instead, he felt that both of his identities were embraced.

Latino gay/queer students utilized strategies in finding *comunidad* and self-policing in spaces that were made up of other students who identified as similar to them. The *comunidades* that these students found were made up of students who had similar experiences in light of their intersectionality. Many shared the experience of not being out to their religious/Catholic families or having negative coming out experiences with their families. For most participants, being Latino and gay/queer came with feelings of never finding a place that allowed them to be themselves, of never having a *comunidad* that fully accepted them. Finding these *comunidades* had a positive impact. Along with finding a *comunidad*, they also self-policed where they went on campus because there were still other campus locations where they were not accepted. As a result, they avoided those places and focused on going to places where their new *comunidad* resided. The *comunidad* that these Latino gay/queer students found provided them with counter-spaces that accepted them.

***Creating counter-spaces and activism.*** For the students in my study, navigating obstacles and challenges related to co-curricular experiences on campus drove them to create counter-spaces, which are spaces where marginalized students receive educational, emotional, and cultural support (Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). One of the counter-spaces participants

identified was Chicano Student Programs: a co-curricular space on campus focused on supporting Chicanx/Latinx students. Here, Rafael, a first year music composition major, shared Chicano Student Programs' history and what it means to him and other Latino gay/queer students:

So, Chicano Student Programs, I've learned that, that space was nonexistent back in the day. And people fought hard to get that space, and just that tells me how much Latino people have fought to be represented in this White America. And in that Chicano Student Programs, we've also had these talks of tribal lands that our ancestors have had here. I mean, CPU is built on native land. And so, it really just does hit me that the fact that we're still fighting for a lot of things. And the fight never stops, but progress is always what we want.

In this excerpt, Rafael shared the need to fight to create spaces that marginalized students seek to find support. These counter-spaces that students created were not formed easily, and, as Rafael pointed out, people have struggled to create a space for Chicanx/Latinx students. Similarly, Valentino, a third year gender and sexuality studies major, talked about creating spaces within Chicano Student Programs: "I didn't think I'd be so involved in Chicano Student Programs, creating these spaces. It comes from me, myself; they helped me grow, so I have to give back. All of us growing together." Valentino described the need to give back to these counter-spaces that were created to foster an environment where his experiences and those of other Latino gay/queer individuals were validated. This "labor of love" that Valentino talked about is the desire to continue to fight to provide spaces for marginalized communities.

Jacobo went more into detail about what happened in these counter-spaces that made them so important to Latino gay/queer students:

Well it's just a collective consciousness, where we're all there and we're all talking about our experiences with oppression and our experiences with marginalization and how we navigate that and how we actually find empowerment from that and from our families and our mothers. The university was never created for us, but now because of these different kinds of co-curricular activities, I've been really able to say that, "Fuck the university." We have to take these spaces.

Jacobo's quote speaks to the lack of support that the university gives and the need to step up in that area. The student population is changing, and the university needs to adapt to this change. Jacobo formed these counter-spaces as a means of activism. Other participants talked about how they utilized counter-spaces to combat oppressive conditions and as spaces of resistance.

Specifically, Valentino spoke about his role in creating counter-spaces as a form of activism:

Not just the identity politics of, "I'm only going to center on us," but how power has structured the parallelisms in creating community. To destabilize hetero colonialism, to destabilize capitalism, to destabilize racism. I feel like I'm part of doing this. We do this together. We literally are trying to dismantle forms of oppression. I feel that stems from being queer and trans LatinX. Having that intersectional identity of being oppressed. Because queer and trans LatinX folks, especially we're low income as well, we're first generation...that's influenced my co-curricular activities in that kind of way.

Valentino calls to mind the importance of student agency, meaning students' ability to take action and enact forms of resistance. As his comments highlight, his intersectional identities of being queer, Latinx, low income, and first generation have influenced his co-curricular involvement in organizations that promote activism in dismantling various forms of oppression. Two such organizations mentioned by Valentino and other participants were La Familia and

Teatro Quinto Sol. La Familia is an organization for queer trans Latinx students with a goal of fighting for community activism and empowerment and Teatro Quinto Sol works to create activism, which it defines as promoting cultural awareness through performance art. Valentino recognized these co-curricular experiences as counter-spaces where marginalized students came together to challenge their marginalized status.

Daniel, a first year mathematics major, talked about the specificity of support that a counter-space like La Familia, a queer trans Latinx organization, offered him as a Latino gay/queer student:

A lot of the Latinx community is homophobic. And not only that but a lot of the queer community is racist in that sense. So, with this QTPoC [Queer Trans People of Color] overlap there's not a lot of ... well, being that queer is already not the majority and being like part of a racial group is already not the majority, so you're getting a minority of minorities in that sense. So, there's not really a lot of people that you're able to connect to in that sense. But luckily I found a group with La Familia, but with them you're really able to share experiences with that. I've had friends in there that would deal with the same things I do, as in this whole idea of machismo and stuff like that, which comes in the LatinX communities.

Daniel highlighted the dual marginalization that he and his fellow Latino gay/queer participants experienced both on and off campus from both the LGBTQ and Latinx communities. The counter-space provided by La Familia allowed Daniel and other participants to find others like them and connect through the similarities in their experiences as Latino gay/queer students.

***Microaffirmations.*** Most participants in this study used microaffirmations—or small acts that promote inclusion, listening, well-being, and support (Rowe, 2008)—as a means to

combat obstacles in their co-curricular experiences as Latino gay/queer students. For example, Jose, a fourth year microbiology major, talked about providing a space for other Latino gay/queer and transgender students to be themselves:

Well we just had ¡Presente! Conference, which brings all of us together and it was really nice. I saw some people that just came out and they came out during the conference and it was really nice to just be able to provide that space for them.

Jose stressed the ability to provide a space where students felt comfortable to come out and be themselves. Like Jose, many other participants saw ¡Presente!, a conference for queer trans Latinx students, as an event full of microaffirmations for the Latinx gay/queer community on campus. Having space where Latinx gay/queer students felt included, where they saw and interacted with others like them, was empowering for their existence.

Similarly, Gregorio, a third year English major, talked about utilizing his positionality to empower and influence other Latino gay/queer students: “I want to use my position, the space that I take...and show others that you can also be here [a student leader in residence life] as well. Like this is something that’s open to everyone.” Gregorio wants more representation of Latinx gay/queer students in the residence life staff and feels that he can influence others to apply. Gregorio’s microaffirmation of promoting inclusion is an example of an occasion when he used his positionality to show others what is possible despite being part of multiple marginalized communities. Other types of microaffirmations that participants shared ranged from volunteering as peer mentors to being selected to attend conferences.

**Summary.** The participants confronted issues of race, culture, gender, and sexuality in some of their co-curricular experiences. However, they also found and created spaces in these same (as well as other) co-curricular experiences that supported aspects of their intersectional

identities. Co-curricular experiences like the LGBTQ Resource Center, Chicano Student Programs, and La Familia served as places that both challenged and supported Latino gay/queer students. Navigating being a Latino gay/queer student on campus led the participants to find solace and comfort in spaces with others who identified similarly.

Finding *comunidad*, self-policing, creating counter-spaces, and offering microaffirmations encouraged the participants to feel like they exist, like they matter. Being in spaces surrounded by others who are like them and to whom they can relate enabled the participants to finally feel accepted. Participants confronted the dominant power narratives that exist and critiqued their Latinx culture based on their experiences of creating these counter-spaces that became their *comunidades*. My participants' responses to overcoming obstacles presented by some co-curricular experiences led them to *disidentify* with old-fashioned Latinx narratives. Creating *comunidades* as a form of activism to change the dominant Latinx narrative is a form of disidentification that most of my participants shared.

My participants' counter stories included defying heteronormativity and homophobia while also challenging marginalization of queer students of color on campus. What echoes throughout my participants' stories is that the strategies they enacted were created and founded in co-curricular activities. The following section shows the specific co-curricular activities that contributed to participants' feelings of empowerment and support.

### **Sources of Co-Curricular Support for Latino Gay/Queer Students**

In addition to finding strategies to overcome obstacles, participants also shared how they found support in various co-curricular experiences. All participants described experiencing multiple types of empowerment linked to various co-curricular experiences. The following four

students all offered support regarding the critical role that co-curricular experiences can play in supporting Latino gay/queer students:

Biggest impact is probably just putting myself out there and meeting new people. Like I said, I'm very introverted, so I would never go up to people and introduce myself. But being part of these extracurricular activities [Cheer] has allowed me to go out there, meet new people.

*Rey, first year molecular biology major*

I've felt more confident in being gay, Chicana, whenever I'm in a situation that I feel tokenized in, I feel that I have the right to stand up for myself. Also, I gained really nice skills like being able to network, being able to think creatively and challenge myself, especially with programming [referring to his experiences in La Familia, Out in STEM, and Teatro Quinto Sol]. Given me a sense of purpose to some extent because I'm not just here at school grueling away. I'm very much having fun at the same time.

*Enrique, second year English major*

They [Student Alumni Mentorship Program and Out in STEM] made me a better interpersonal person, 'cause I never really liked talking to people, not because I don't like people, but because I'm very shy and insecure in myself.

*Arturo, third year neuroscience major*

They [co-curricular activities] gave me time to do something else and de-stress when I'm not worrying about homework, or trying to get good grades.

*David, first year biology major*

The preceding students' comments highlight the positive impact that co-curricular experiences have on Latino gay/queer students. Rey, Enrique, Arturo, and David recognized the



improvement in their interpersonal skills as a result of being involved in their co-curricular experiences. Enrique gained confidence in navigating his intersectional identities as a result of being involved in a co-curricular experience and also captured the value that co-curricular experiences bring to Latinx gay/queer students outside the classroom. All participants shared counter stories where they confronted and overcame issues of feeling alone, not being able to be themselves, and hiding their identities from others. In particular, the following co-curricular experiences were noted for their support: LGBTQ Resource Center, Chicano Student Programs, La Familia, Residence Life, and Teatro Quinto Sol.

**LGBTQ Resource Center.** The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) Resource Center was identified as one of the co-curricular experiences to provide support for Latino gay/queer students. The LGBTQ Resource Center also houses other co-curricular experiences that were identified by participants such as Community OUTreach Coordinators (CORE), Queer Alliance, and OUT in STEM (oSTEM).

The Community OUTreach Coordinators (CORE) serve as the peer educators for the LGBTQ Resource Center. Agustin, Vicente, and Gregorio are members of CORE and all shared how CORE empowered them. Agustin, a fourth year psychology major and self-described introvert, shared how CORE helped him “become more extroverted” and also emphasized how he learned to “be more comfortable with public speaking” through participating in panels on LGBTQ students for faculty, staff, and other students. Comparably, Vicente, a third year business administration major and commuter student, expressed how being a part of CORE helped him overcome the loneliness he felt when he went home:

“When I go home there’s no queer people in my family or at least I don’t know of any queer people in my family. So, I feel a little alone at home. Here [at the LGBTQ

Resource Center and with CORE] I don't feel as alone because I know that there's people like me that know what I've been through and know what I'm going through."

Vicente also captured how relating to others in CORE at the LGBTQ Resource Center helped him feel a sense of belonging and acceptance. He expressed how speaking on panels with others who shared similar experiences "really just strengthens the bond" among CORE panelists.

Correspondingly, Gregorio, a third year English major, explained how being a part of CORE helped him "become a better role model and also grow as a person." Gregorio also emphasized which identities he stressed when speaking on panels for CORE: "My sexual orientation and my ethnicity are both things that are a big part of who I am." Gregorio's ability to speak about his intersectional identities is an important message to share with those who attend CORE's panels. As peer educators for the LGBTQ Resource Center, Agustin, Vicente, and Gregorio represent a voice for the Latinx gay/queer population that is important for others to hear.

The Queer Alliance is a campus organization that plans and organizes campus wide LGBTQ events like a drag show and Pride Prom. Jose and Abel talked about how their involvement in the Queer Alliance empowered them to support other Latino gay/queer students. Abel, a third year psychology major, expressed how being a part of the Queer Alliance helped him "be a more well-rounded person." Event planning is one of the main responsibilities of being in the Queer Alliance, so it was no surprise that Abel improved his communication skills and learned to be more outgoing as a member of the Queer Alliance. Another member of the Queer Alliance, Jose, a fourth year microbiology major, shared how "it was really nice to bring a lot of queers together to have their own prom." Both Abel and Jose shared their satisfaction and pride in being able to organize events and activities for the LGBTQ population. The support provided by the Queer Alliance to plan large-scale LGBTQ themed events taught these two

students some fundamental skills in communication and time management. The Queer Alliance also offered Abel and Jose the opportunity to help represent the LGBTQ community through providing events explicitly catered for them.

OUT in STEM (oSTEM) focuses on connecting LGBTQ students with professionals in the STEM fields. Daniel, Arturo, Jose, and Enrique reported finding mentorship and networking opportunities in oSTEM. Daniel, a first year mathematics major, explained, “It really helps people, queer people and motivate queer people to find STEM jobs, STEM careers, STEM studies.” Daniel shared how oSTEM helped him find support “with writing proposals and approaching professors” in his major. Arturo, a third year neuroscience major, added, “In oSTEM, you learn more about labs...or getting involved with faculty who are LGBT friendly.” Knowing which faculty members are LGBTQ friendly can make the classroom feel safer for Latinx gay/queer students. As Arturo pointed out, when selecting a lab, “The members [of oSTEM] can relate to the struggles...if the PI [lab professor] is gay-friendly, or how their identity affects their research.” Everardo, a fifth year statistics major, expressed how his involvement in oSTEM led him to find “some camaraderie with that team.” For Everardo, oSTEM provided not only networking opportunities, but also a community. Having faced marginalization for their intersectional identities in the past, the support that oSTEM provided these four students in navigating their STEM field eased any apprehension they felt around their identities.

Overall, the LGBTQ Resource Center and all of the co-curricular experiences under it empowered the participants to be confident in their intersectional identities. This confidence grew out of feeling safe, being accepted, and overcoming loneliness through the support provided by the co-curricular experiences at the LGBTQ Resource Center.

**Chicano Student Programs.** The Chicano Student Programs office and its Chicano Link Peer Mentor program were other co-curricular experiences participants identified as empowering and supporting Latino gay/queer students. Rafael, a first year music composition major, explained how he felt accepted at Chicano Student Programs: “Just being Latino, being queer. Those things make me unique in my own way, and it’s great that I can showcase that here [Chicano Student Programs].” Finding support for his intersectional identities and being able to be himself at Chicano Student Programs validates the importance of having this co-curricular space. Valentino, a third year philosophy and gender and sexualities major, shared how he made Chicano Student Programs his “home away from home” and how he worked to “create a friendly environment” at Chicano Student Programs because “this is their place, this is their space.” Jacobo, a third year ethnic studies and education major, added to this point by stating,

When I started coming to college, I went into this Chicano Student Programs space...there was this post [on Facebook] from before I went to college when I took a picture of the space and I was like, “This is going to be my home for the next four years.”

The students conveyed feelings of finally being acknowledged as a result of finding a place on campus that felt like home and that accepted both of their intersectional identities because they often felt the need to hide their sexual orientation.

**La Familia (LaFa).** La Familia is an organization that focuses on the intersectionality of race and sexuality for the Queer Trans Latinx community. It is housed under both Chicano Student Programs and the LGBTQ Resource Center. La Familia provides support and education on issues of religious bigotry, heterosexism, and ignorance in the Latinx communities and racism and ignorance in the larger Queer communities. Eight of the 15 participants were empowered to be themselves by learning to be activists and creating counter-spaces that both empowered and

supported others with the same intersecting identities. For example, Antonio, a second year sustainability major, talked about how much La Familia provided for him when he shared, “Before, I really did not like myself, I did not like my appearance. I hated myself for how awkward I was around people, but now I don’t care.” He also shared about the type of environment that La Familia provided for him and other Latinx Queer students,

We have a space to talk. We do important things. We talk about organizing and stuff like that, but we always maintain, like, this is also a space just to be, because, you know, the world is stressful enough sometimes.

Another participant, Vicente, a third year business administration major, made a similar comment by saying that after attending a La Familia meeting, he felt that, “Maybe it is okay to be queer and Latino, they can intermix, they can be experienced at the same time. You don’t have to choose one or the other.” Correspondingly, when asked about his intersectional identities, Daniel, a first year mathematics major, shared how he found support in navigating his intersectional identities, stating, “There’s not really a lot of people that you’re able to connect to in that sense [being Latinx and gay/queer], but luckily I found a group with La Familia, but with them you’re really able to share experiences.”

Every year, La Familia hosts an annual conference focused on Queer Transgender Latinx people called ¡Presente! A majority of the participants attended, and five of them helped plan the conference this past year. Jacobo, a third year ethnic studies and education major, described how the conference opened “doors to a great community of people who are also fighting or also struggling with their identity, with their sexualities.” This conference provided a space for Latinx gay/queer students to exist fully in their intersectionality. Arturo, a third year neuroscience major, initially was not going to attend ¡Presente!, but when he arrived, he

described the people at the conference as “welcoming and warm.” Jose, a fourth year microbiology major, added to this point by describing a workshop for mothers of LGBTQ students, stating, “I wanted to feel like that was my mom in their shoes telling them that it is okay to be gay. They were really accepting.” Again, most of the participants came from traditional Latinx homes where they were not accepted for being gay/queer, so it was important to provide a place where they witnessed acceptance first hand—especially from parents. Valentino, a third year philosophy and gender and sexuality studies major, summed up ¡Presente!: “It really changed my life, because not only was I able to be around other queer, trans Latinx folks. Not that I hadn’t before, but not in a space that was intentionally, like, this is for us.” Not only did ¡Presente! provide a safe space for the participants, but it also made them aware that the fight for acceptance was not over, offering examples of acceptance from the Latinx community. ¡Presente! fueled their desire to organize and continue to fight against the dominant narrative.

**Residence Life.** Three participants asserted that the office of Residence Life provided them with experiences of empowerment. Agustin, a fourth year psychology major, felt that being a part of Residence Life made him “more proud [of]...and confident” in his sexuality. Agustin no longer felt the need to hide his sexuality, and as a result of being in Residence Life, he felt more comfortable with his identity. Correspondingly, Gregorio, a third year English major, stated, “I’ve definitely become a lot more comfortable in terms of explaining myself and kind of, like, going through the intersectionality of my identity, as a whole.” Abel, a third year psychology major, shared that being involved in Residence Life helped him come out of his shell and “be a more well-rounded person.” Similarly, Agustin explained how being a part of the Residence Life staff made him “very comfortable speaking to people and residents,” and that it

helped him grow both as a leader and as a person. Gregorio also shared how being a part of Residence Life provided him with experiences to interact with others, stating, “There’s been things that I’ve learned because I’ve interacted with people different from myself. I’m definitely more culturally aware.” Abel also talked about learning from Residence Life, referring to regular trainings he received as a member of the Residence Life staff with topics like mental health, stress management, and teambuilding. Other experiences described by Agustin, Gregorio, and Abel revolved around how Residence Life increased their awareness of their privileges, taught them about using gender-neutral terms, and helped them create an inclusive community. Residence Life provided these three students with experiences that improved their public speaking skills, increased their self-confidence, enhanced their leadership skills, and helped them find a new sense of purpose to empower others. Residence Life was a safe place for these three participants to learn, grow, and be confident in who they are as Latino gay/queer students.

**Teatro Quinto Sol (TQS).** TQS is an organization that focuses on creating cultural awareness through performance. One third of the participants are involved in this organization and shared how membership in this organization empowered them to get involved in activism. Daniel, a first year mathematics major, acknowledged how TQS helped him “dispel a lot of myths, and a lot of prejudice” by helping to make him aware of his language and his actions through activism. Relatedly, Jacobo, a third year ethnic studies and education major, stated:

I think every time we have Poesia Peligrosa, which is the quarterly event that Teatro Quinto Sol puts on... We do art. We do activism. It all comes together here through Teatro Quinto Sol. It’s been really, really great to see this as our space that we’re creating in the university. This is something that doesn’t typically happen in university

settings, and it's really building community and relationships. It really empowered me to know that it's just...these are spaces where I feel accepted. I feel empowered and I feel that we can take on the world together.

Jacobo's description of TQS painted a picture of a space they created that built community through activism, art, and performance. The ability to create a space where Latino gay/queer students felt that it was possible to take over the world validates its impact on how well TQS is supporting Latinx gay/queer students. Valentino, a third year philosophy and gender and sexuality studies major, elaborated on what took place in TQS's events:

We do spoken words. Everybody can go out there and perform. They can go dance, they can sing, they can go up and do standup. I think that's important...I love that, creating community, showing visibility of what we can do, the space that we can create ourselves. That goes back to the majority of people in TQS are queer, and then also people are part of La Familia.

Valentino pointed out how this co-curricular experience allowed Latinx gay/queer students to be seen, to be visible, and to be themselves. He also highlighted that most members of TQS are part of the LGBTQ community as well as part of La Familia. TQS provided Latino gay/queer students space where they did not feel marginalized and where they came together to combat various forms of oppression through activism.

**Summary.** My participants shared counter stories of examples of being supported by specific co-curricular experiences. All 15 participants maintained involvement in at least one co-curricular activity that provided a sense of empowerment. Each student was supported in different ways that included a feeling a sense of belonging, increased pride in identifying as Latino and gay/queer, and increased self-confidence.



## **Identity and Intersectionality**

Another key finding was the participants' level of awareness of their marginalized identities and their intersectionality. Identifying as Latinx and gay/queer proved difficult for most participants before attending college. Coming from homes where they had to hide their sexual orientation to arriving at a college that is not adequately equipped to support their Latinx identity was no easy journey. The following section captures and tells stories of this challenging journey in navigating the intersectional identities of race and sexual orientation for Latino gay/queer students. This section shows the participants' identity development, starting with demonstrating their awareness of their intersectionality, continuing by exploring their understanding the impact of co-curricular experiences on the salience of their identities, and finally discussing how they reconstituted their intersectional identities through disidentification.

**Intersectionality.** Many participants demonstrated an understanding of intersectionality's central principle: that forms of oppression can increase when combined (Anderson & McCormack, 2010; Crenshaw, 1991). Abel, a third year psychology major, is well aware of his intersectionality. When it comes to how he self-identifies, he said, "I feel like, I'm first queer, second Latino Mexican." Abel is not alone in prioritizing his sexual orientation over his race/ethnicity. Agustin, a fourth year psychology major, added to this point by stating, "I feel like my sexual identity has prevailed over my ethnic identity." This comment by Agustin showcases a common theme among Latino gay/queer students around their struggle with their intersectionality where they are forced to pick one identity over the other. Daniel, a first year mathematics major, described this difficulty of being Latino and gay/queer as being "a lot harder to understand...because not only do you face discrimination for one, but you'll face discrimination for another, especially if you'll face discrimination in one marginalized

community because of your other one.” Similarly, David, a first year biology major, stated, “I feel like it’s not okay to be gay in the Latino community.” Daniel and David are describing the homophobia they, as well as other participants, have experienced within the Latinx community. For example, Jose, a fourth year microbiology major, stated “I am just struggling with identifying as Latino because my parents, they’re really Catholic, and there’s a lot of homophobia involved. It’s hard to identify as Latino because I’m trying to identify as gay.” When talking about being raised Catholic in his Latinx family, Antonio, a second year sustainability major, added, “Being brown, being gay is not family-friendly…it goes against everything that our families think.” Furthermore, Vicente, a third year business administration major, shared that “most Catholic people aren’t too fond of the LGBT community, there’s a lot of conflict between the two communities [Latinx and LGBT], and that stems greatly into the culture [Latinx]…there’s a lot of homophobia in the Latin culture.” Here, Jose, Antonio, and Vicente acknowledged another constant struggle that accompanies the intersectionality that Latino gay/queer students faced around homophobia and Catholicism. As a result, many of the participants struggled with coming out to their families and instead hid their sexual orientation for fear of being rejected. Vicente, a third year business administration major, shared that initially he believed that his Latinx and gay/queer identities have “always been separate” and that “finally being able to experience the intersectionality between the two [Latinx and gay/queer] has been really eye-opening” because his experiences in co-curricular activities made him realize that “they’re very much connected.” Valentino, a third year psychology and gender and sexuality studies major, succinctly captured the difficulty of Latino gay/queer students’ intersectionality:

I feel like that's really one of the oppressions of being queer and Latinx. Being a queer person of color, you really have to show a lot of love and respect for people who don't give it back to you, and try to maintain it, like try to maintain family. Trying to not let it fall apart. White gays and people of color, we get rejected at the same rates. However, queer and trans Latinx, other queer, trans people of color, we're put into situations where sometimes we have to choose between our sexuality and our culture. We have to fight to keep them both together, because they're intrinsically together; they've inherently been together.

Valentino demonstrated a deeper understanding of his intersectionality when he talked about his struggle to keep his identities together and eventually accepting that, fundamentally, they belong together. Similarly, Jacobo, a third year ethnic studies and education major, shared that "there's a lot of power in knowing who you are," and stated, "I enjoy and live in it [his intersectionality], I have to. This is who I am. There's no other way." Similar to Valentino, Jacobo accepted his intersectionality and talked about not only living in it but also how he embraced both his "*Latinidad*" and his queerness.

**Reconceptualized model of multiple dimensions of identity.** All participants filled out the RMMDI as part of their interview. They were asked to place their identities as close to or as far from their core when thinking about being in one co-curricular experience. Participants selected a diverse array of co-curricular experiences to use for the RMMDI. Most participants placed sexual orientation and race closest to their core, whereas religion was the farthest away (or not used at all) in all participants' RMMDI diagrams. The RMMDI allowed me to see how the meaning attached to participants' co-curricular experiences impacted the salience of their identities. Rafael, a first year music composition major, revealed that he placed race closest to

his core as a result of his interactions at Chicano Student Programs. He shared how some of the conversations that took place in Chicano Student Programs made him realize that he had “pushed away from traditional Latino values” and no longer held them close due to their going against his identity as a gay/queer man. However, Antonio, a second year sustainability major, had a different experience in La Familia. Antonio placed sexual orientation and race closest to his core as a result of being a part of this co-curricular experience. Antonio’s experience in Chicano Student Programs differed from Rafael’s; he stated, “within like, the Mexican community, sometimes it’s hard because our families are toxic and homophobic, but it also is important to like, stay true to our communities and not like, forget where we come from.” Both Rafael and Antonio acknowledged coming from traditional Latinx cultures that go against their gay/queer identities. However, while Rafael rejected the conventional Latinx values, Antonio shared his belief that he needed to remember his roots to stay true to his Latinx community.

Findings showed that the majority of participants’ placed sexual orientation closest to the core of their RMMDI diagrams. Arturo, a fourth year psychology major, shared that in his co-curricular experience in Residence Life, his sexual orientation was close to his core due to the lack of Latino gay/queer students involved in Residence Life. Agustin stated, “I feel like my representation really matters, and I have the opportunities to bring educational information to residents and have conversations.” Another participant, Rafael, a first year music composition major, explained the salience of his sexual orientation at Chicano Student Programs, he stated, “Sexual orientation is close because of the fact that when I was greeted, it was queer people and Latino.” For Rafael, the sexual orientation of the first people he met in Chicano Student Programs left an impression where he felt welcomed to the point that it influenced the placement of identities on his RMMDI diagram.

Other participants shared that the nature of their co-curricular experience revolved around their sexual orientation. For example, when discussing his involvement in La Familia, Valentino a third year philosophy and gender and sexualities major, explained that his “sexual orientation is close because that’s actually what we work with and what we focus on.” He also stated how, in La Familia, his “race, culture, and sexuality intersect.” For Daniel, a first year mathematics major, his involvement with TQS influenced the salience of his sexual orientation because “everyone in there is queer,” and as a result, placed his sexual orientation close to his core on his RMMDI diagram. Jose, a fourth year microbiology major, explained the salience of his sexual orientation thusly:

La Familia just brought my race and culture and my sexual orientation together. Just being able to merge the two with La Familia and bring them together and be able to say I’m a gay Latino.

For participants involved in La Familia and TQS, sexual orientation was an emphasis of those co-curricular experiences. As a result, participants’ sexual orientation was placed close to their core when they filled out their RMMDI diagrams.

**Disidentification.** The goal of disidentification is to reconstruct a new identification that simultaneously accepts and rejects the dominant narrative. Most participants reported redefining what it means to be Latinx and gay/queer both separately and at the intersection of the two constructs. They confidently defy and accept dominant narratives common in the Latinx culture like Catholicism and *machismo* to create an identity that they accept. Jacobo, a third year ethnic studies and education major, revealed how being in Chicano Student Programs and the LGBTQ Resource Center has taught him to continue “redefining what it means to be excellent, redefining what knowledge is and redefining what knowledge is in general.” Gaining new perspectives

from being in these two co-curricular spaces introduced him to new information that initiated his disidentification about knowledge. Valentino, a third year philosophy and gender and sexuality Studies major exhibited his disidentification when he talked about the gender-inclusive term Latinx:

I feel like Latinx, as a term specifically, is already naturally queer. I feel like because putting the X at the end of Spanish as a patriarchal language, not only are we defying the machismo that's in our culture, which is a major thing that needs a deep cleansing of Latinx culture, the machismo, and the anti-blackness, and the colonialism. Also, we're recognizing folks who don't identify with neither female nor male. I don't think queer and Latinx are mutually exclusive. Of course, we can add the queer to Latinx just to make it more specific, but I already think Latinx itself is a word derived from queerness. I know that I had queer family members in the past, my queer ancestors, whoever my queer and trans ancestors were. I'm going to bring that back, and I'm going to create this new way of thinking, like we end this legacy of oppression, and this internalized hatred because of this.

Valentino expressed his disidentification when he explained how adding the X to Latino created a form of resistance and inclusiveness within the Latinx community. Valentino also talked about creating a new way of thinking from ending a history of oppression. Part of disidentification involves both accepting and rejecting the dominant narrative and create an identity that includes both.

## **Conclusion**

The 15 participants shared their intimate life experiences related to navigating their intersectionality as Latino gay/queer college students. They discussed ways in which they

overcame loneliness, family rejection, and shame through finding family in their co-curricular experiences. Participants also shared ways in which race, sexuality, culture, gender, and socioeconomic status intersect. They expressed a sense of relief in finding others who were also navigating the same multiple marginalized identities as they were. This study created an opportunity to hear the stories of those on the margins: Latino gay/queer students finding support in navigating their intersectional identities through co-curricular experiences.

The distinctive manner by which counter stories revealed how co-curricular experiences contributed to feelings of both empowerment *and* marginalization was surprising. Additionally, some of the same co-curricular experiences that focused on supporting participants' identities also undermined their racial and sexual orientation identities. Participants displayed a profound understanding of their intersectionality and were able to share where they received support as well as point out how the university lacked resources to support them fully in their intersectionality.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION**

This study was motivated by my personal experience as a Latino gay/queer professional working in higher education. For Latino gay/queer students, finding support for their intersectional identities is complex. This group of students faces unique challenges as a result of their intersectionality. I sought to learn how co-curricular experiences affected Latino gay/queer college students' ability to navigate their intersectionality on campus. In understanding the complex challenges faced by Latino gay/queer students, I believe higher education institutions can learn more about how to support this dual marginalized student population. Additionally, this study can inform higher education administrators, faculty, and staff about ways to connect Latino gay/queer students with resources they need most. It is my belief that the counter stories told by participants can provide insight into accessing support for this unique population of marginalized college students.

With the preceding in mind, this chapter seeks first to provide an analytical summary of my key findings. Accordingly, I summarize those findings by linking to key research literature, most of which was introduced in chapter two. I then move on to discuss the implications of my study, in terms of implications for both practice and educational leadership, including those leaders working in the field of student affairs and who deal specifically with co-curricular activities. I then note the limitations of my study while also pointing to possible future studies that could potentially fill in the missing gaps in the research. Finally, I conclude the chapter and the overall dissertation by offering some closing thoughts.

### **Obstacles and Challenges in Co-Curricular Activities**

**Homophobia and heteronormativity.** One of the challenges highlighted by my research concerned Latino gay/queer students' perceptions of co-curricular spaces to be avoided due to



higher levels of homophobia and heteronormativity. One such space identified was fraternities. This is not too surprising when one considers research such as that conducted by Rhoads (1995), whose ethnographic case study of fraternity culture uncovered high levels of homophobia and numerous anti-gay actions on the part of the fraternity members studied. Rhoads theorized that fraternity brothers may seek to enact hyper-masculine forms of gender identity (machismo) as a means of addressing their own insecurities about their gender identity and sexual orientation. As a consequence, this form of hyper-masculine behavior results in various behaviors and actions hostile to both women and gay men, as fraternity men seek to convince others of their own masculinity. Described in some texts as the “gender inversion,” wherein gay men are equated with femininity, fraternity brothers, in essence, seek to reinforce heteronormativity through hyper-masculine acts wherein gay men, such as the men in my study, become the victims of their actions. When one combines the heteronormative quality of fraternities with the fact that they tend to be dominated by White students and often seek to preserve forms of Whiteness, one can easily see how fraternities are a space to be avoided by students with the intersectional identities of gay Latinx students.

**“Too White.”** Saenz and Ponjuan (2009) explored the low attendance rates of Latino males attending college in America. In their study, they found that because Latino and Black men viewed academic success as “acting White,” they did not attempt to obtain any form of education so that they could maintain their racial identity. However, in their study, Spencer, Noll, Stoltzfuz, and Harpalani (2001) challenged Saenz and Ponjuan’s explanation of the achievement gap between White and African American students. Spencer et al. conducted a study with 562 African American youth and found that African American students had high self-esteem and placed value on academic success while attempting to avoid poor academic

performance. The participants in this study rejected various co-curricular activities as a result of them being “too White.” Recall that Rafael, one of the research participants, felt more closely aligned with Chicano Student Programs because he felt the LGBTQ Resource Center was too *whitewashed*. However, Saenz and Ponjuan’s study did not include a Latinx gay/queer male demographic. Given the substantial importance placed on racial identity by participants in this study, it is significant to note the need for research that is more inclusive of LGBTQ students of color. This study also highlights the importance of collecting and telling the counter stories of LGBTQ students of color.

Correspondingly, Villicana et al. (2016) conducted a study that compared how coming out affected subjective well-being among 83 Latinx and 42 White gay men. The study found that an environment that excludes LGBTQ people of color may develop as a result of White gay individuals seeking community through their marginalized identity as LGBTQ. Villicana et al. stated that this might be why Latinos look for support from their Latino community versus the LGBTQ community. In my study, Latino gay/queer students also found a discriminative environment toward LGBTQ people of color in a co-curricular activity. Recall that Enrique noted that the LGBTQ Resource Center, a space designated to support all LGBTQ students, was mainly populated by White LGBTQ students who were not aware of problems linked to being gay/queer and Latinx. Findings of this study also showed that most participants felt the LGBTQ Resource Center was not equipped to support them as LGBTQ students of color. Similar to Villicana et al.’s study, the participants found support from the Latinx community at the Chicano Student Programs center. This study emphasizes the need for co-curricular activities to find ways to support students with multiple marginalized identities.

## Support in Co-Curricular Activities

**Finding *comunidad* and self-policing.** For the participants in this study, co-curricular experiences provided *comunidad* as a means of support in navigating their intersectional identities. They found others who identified like them and who had similar experiences around being Latinx and gay/queer and self-policed to be in these co-curricular spaces. Finding *comunidad* and self-policing allowed the participants to engage more with the campus and develop stronger relationships with those involved in the co-curricular activities. Their experience in finding this support from co-curricular experiences illustrates the findings of Contreras (2009). Based on navigating and accessing on-campus resources, Contreras's study found that as Latinx students became more connected with their campus, they developed more relationships and friendships, similar to how the participants in this study found *comunidad*. Co-curricular activities, such as Latinx organizations and community service groups, served as support for Latinx students in both Contreras's and my study.

Most participants in my study kept their sexual orientation a secret from family members at home, and others avoided going home as a result of having a negative coming out experience with their family. The support and *comunidad* that co-curricular activities provided for the participants offered acceptance. Along these lines, Peña-Talamantes' (2013) studied how six self-identified Latinx lesbian and gay college students navigated between their hometown and their college environment (a predominantly White public institution in Texas). Half of the participants felt they were living in conflict at the intersection of their home and college lives. Most participants kept their sexual identity a secret out of fear that they would lose or be rejected by their families. Peña-Talamantes found that the college environment provided an atmosphere for participants to be themselves without having to hide their sexual identity. In this study, co-

curricular experiences played a significant role in welcoming Latino gay/queer students and helping them feel accepted. For some, it was the first time in their lives they had experienced this type of acceptance. Being around other Latino gay/queer students in these co-curricular activities created a sense of belonging that most participants did not experience at home.

One of the co-curricular activities to which most participants belonged and about which most participants talked was La Familia, a campus organization that focuses on the intersectional identities of race and sexuality for the Queer Transgender Latinx community on campus. La Familia is housed under both Chicano Student Programs and the LGBTQ Resource Center. Interestingly, meetings are held at the LGBTQ Resource Center, but the members all socialize at Chicano Student Programs. The participants who are members of La Familia shared that they felt more comfortable socializing in a Latinx space due to their familiarity with the Latinx culture they found at Chicano Student Programs. Research by Morgan Consoli et al. (2015) found that Latinx students with a stronger sense of pride in their racial identity had a stronger sense of belonging on campus as a result of identifying with the Latinx culture. Comparably, the participants in my study also had a strong sense of pride for their Latinx identity and, despite being rejected by or keeping their sexuality a secret from their Latinx family, identifying with the Latinx culture was what connected them to each other and the campus; it made La Familia feel like a family. In addition, Morgan Consoli et al. indicated that the Latinx students' strong sense of Latinx pride helped shield them from the discrimination they faced by having instilled a positive self-concept of their racial identity by their parents. An example of how the participants in my study shielded themselves from discrimination is in their involvement in planning La Familia's ¡Presente!, an annual conference focused on queer and transgender Latinx people. This unique conference provided a space for queer and transgender Latinx students from all over

southern California to connect around their intersectional identities. The participants who planned and attended ¡Presente! felt incredibly supported, experienced a sense of belonging, and had no feelings of rejection. This powerful conference provided an environment where Latino gay/queer students can show up, be *presente* as themselves, and no longer feel ashamed for being Latino and gay/queer.

**Creating counter-spaces and activism.** A highlight of my research emphasized Latino gay/queer students' creation of counter-spaces within co-curricular activities as a means to navigate experiences around marginalization. Solórzano et al. (2000) and Solórzano and Villalpando (1998) discussed the formation of counter-spaces as a significant tactic for minority students. The researchers found that minority students created academic and social counter-spaces as a response to racial microaggressions. Similar to my study, the students in the aforementioned studies created counter-spaces within co-curricular activities that supported their marginalized identity, such as identity-based organizations, offices that provide support and services for marginalized students, and peer groups. Solórzano and Villalpando emphasized that counter-spaces made it possible for African American students to cultivate a supportive atmosphere where their experiences were validated. Furthermore, the researchers stressed how counter-spaces allowed African American students to come together with others who shared similar experiences around marginalization. Comparably, findings from my study also featured how counter-spaces provided a comfortable environment for Latino gay/queer students to come together and build community around similar experiences. Numerous comments from the students in my study support the work of Solórzano et al. and Solórzano and Villalpando around counter-spaces created within co-curricular activities and the support they provide for minority students. The creation of counter-spaces within co-curricular activities by minority students is a

reaction to the lack of resources made available to them by higher education institutions. Students are becoming more aware of their marginalized identities and are seeking more support for their intersectionality; higher education institutions need to be prepared to provide that support.

Bilodeau and Renn (2005) found that co-curricular involvement and activism supported leadership identity development for LGBT students. Similarly, the students in my study developed their leadership identity from being involved in co-curricular activities and activism. Most of my participants' were involved in La Familia, an organization for queer transgender Latinx students that provided a space to dismantle and combat forms of oppression. For example, Valentino called to mind the importance of student agency when he shared how members of La Familia came together to find ways to destabilize various forms of oppression. Another student, Enrique, shared how his leadership skills developed as a result of being a part of La Familia. Bilodeau and Renn emphasized how the meaning their participants made of events and activities around activism helped cultivate their leadership skills. Additionally, most of my participants' intersectional identities influenced their involvement in co-curricular activities that promoted activism in dismantling various forms of oppression.

### **Latino Gay/Queer Students Became More Self-Aware of Their Intersectional Identities Through Involvement in Co-Curricular Activities**

**Intersectionality.** Crenshaw (1991) used the metaphor of an intersection to demonstrate how forms of oppression can increase when marginalized identities are combined. The participants in my study confirmed that navigating their multiple marginalized identities of race and sexual orientation was difficult. One of the findings highlighted in my research was how Latino gay/queer students came to understand and accept their intersectionality through their

involvement in co-curricular activities. Different participants prioritized their race or sexual orientation as a result of feeling like they had to choose one over the other. Getting involved in co-curricular activities provided them with support and resources that allowed Latino gay/queer students to explore this intersectionality further. Co-curricular activities like La Familia, TQS, Chicano Student Programs, Residence Life, and the LGBTQ Resource Center gave Latino gay/queer students opportunities to develop their sense of self, build their confidence, and validate their experience as Latino gay/queer students. Specifically, La Familia emphasized supporting the intersectional identities of queer transgender Latinx students, but La Familia also offers education on issues of religious bigotry, heterosexism, and ignorance in the Latinx communities, as well as racism and ignorance in the larger Queer communities.

Correspondingly, Means (2017) identified an intersectional framework as one that highlights the urgency of understanding identity intersections as they relate to dismantling the influence of dominant culture and endorsing social justice. Participants involved in La Familia demonstrated this understanding of their intersectionality as it related to student agency by organizing and enacting forms of resistance on campus. Also, Means utilized a framework parallel to Crenshaw's intersectionality called Quare theory, which, like intersectionality, contradicts the notion that one's identities can be understood individually, instead asserting that they intersect to form one's authentic self. The participants in this study all demonstrated this emphasis on how the intersection of one's identities forms one's authentic self. Recall how one student, Jacobo, relished his intersectionality and saw no way of separating two key aspects of his sense of self; his Latinx self and his gay/queer self were one. This type of comment was reflected in comments made by most of the students in this study.

**Reconceptualized model of multiple dimensions of identity (RMMDI).** The RMMDI served as an instrument to assess how the participants navigated their identities in their co-curricular activities and the influences the co-curricular activity had on the individual. The participants interviewed presented how they navigated their multiple identities in the specific co-curricular activity they selected. Abes et al. (2007) developed the RMMDI, which focuses on embracing the complexity of intersecting domains of development. Abes et al included meaning-making capacity into the MMDI (the prior incarnation of the RMMDI) to provide a better representation of the connection between context and salience of identity dimensions as well as the connection between social identities and their core. Incorporating meaning-making capacity to the MMDI also provides a more in-depth depiction “of not only *what* relationships students perceive among their personal and social identities, but also *how* they come to perceive them as they do” (p. 13).

The participants completed their RMMDI diagram in which they were asked questions regarding their multiple identities in the context of their co-curricular activity. The various co-curricular activities that the participants selected as their context included Residence Life, La Familia, and Chicano Student Programs to name a few. In the RMMDI diagrams, the majority of participants placed sexual orientation closest to their core. The second closest to their core was race, whereas religion was the farthest away (or not used at all). A reason for most participants placing their sexual orientation closest to their core could be that being Latinx is not as contested as being gay/queer. It is not okay to be a racist, but it is still acceptable by some to be homophobic, so being gay/queer may become more psychologically salient because of the oppression and rejection they experienced from their Latinx families. This finding could also be the result of the fact that gay/queer Latinx students may find it easier to have their racialized



needs addressed than those needs relating to sexual orientation. Due to the fact that racial/ethnic student groups are so strong in southern California, it is not difficult for Latinx students to find groups who meet their needs in this area; but, as my findings point out, because of their intersectionality and the fact that LGBTQ groups are dominated by White students and whiteness, finding spaces to have their sexual orientation needs (and homophobia) addressed is not so easy. Consequently, because those needs are less likely to be met, they may be more psychologically salient and hence closer to their core on their RMMDI diagrams.

Participants mentioned their Latinx families raising them as Catholic and that they always felt guilty or ashamed for being gay/queer as a result of being raised in this way. Participants shared how religion was not at the forefront of their identity in their co-curricular activities. If religion ever came up, it was in a discussion of how the Catholic religion imposed feelings of guilt or shame as they grew up. Most participants either had negative coming out experiences or have yet to disclose their sexual orientation with their families. It was no surprise that most participants got involved in co-curricular activities like La Familia, which included others who identified like them because they also experienced the same form of rejection from their families as a result of their sexual orientation. As a result of this rejection from family for their sexual orientation, participants still placed sexual orientation closest to their core in their RMMDI diagram, despite La Familia's emphasis on both race and sexual orientation.

Similarly, Misawa (2005) conducted a study using the multidimensional identity model to study how the race and sexuality of seven gay men of color developed while in college. The majority of participants talked about the impact of their sexual orientation before discussing their racial identity. A few reasons for this could be that: (a) participants thought their sexual orientation impacted their lives more than their race; (b) participants became self-aware of their

race earlier than their sexual orientation, so their sexual orientation was more present in their minds; and (c) at first, participants were more comfortable talking about their sexual orientation than talking about their race. These reasons Misawa presented as explanations for his participants prioritizing discussing their sexual orientation before race can apply to the participants of this study. Recall that Abel, one of the research participants, shared the common theme among participants of prioritizing sexual orientation before race. Most participants felt more comfortable talking about being gay/queer in this study because they hid that identity for most of their lives before coming to college. They felt embraced for being Latinx, but most felt like they could not disclose their sexual orientation. Recall that Antonio emphasized the difficulty of being gay/queer in a Latinx household due to Latinx families being toxic and homophobic. As mentioned earlier, most participants were not out at home, or if they were, they were not accepted for being gay/queer.

Not a single participant had a positive family experience regarding his sexual orientation before coming to college. When talking about how they placed sexual orientation and race closest to their core in the context of their co-curricular experiences, these participants revealed how joining these co-curricular activities made them feel accepted for being both gay/queer and Latinx. This impact of co-curricular activities validates the importance of having co-curricular experiences that support students with intersectional identities. The fact that almost every participant expressed how he navigated his sexual orientation and race close to his core in his co-curricular experiences shows how these co-curricular experiences made participants more aware of their intersectionality.

**Disidentification.** Muñoz's (1999) work with disidentification is intended to help queer people of color identify with their "ethnos and queerness" (p. 11) regardless of the

marginalization that comes with being a part of both identities. According to Medina (2003), Muñoz utilizes disidentification by studying how gay Latinos disidentify with traditional Hispanic images of *machismo* and recreate them as a form of activism to change the dominant narrative of Hispanic culture. Similarly, participants in this study demonstrated disidentification in the way they reconstructed their intersectionality in their co-curricular activities. According to Denton (2016), to disidentify is “neither to identify with available cultural discourses of identity nor to counteridentify, or oppose them” (p. 65). The idea of disidentification is to recreate a new identification that accepts and rejects the dominant discourse at the same time (Denton, 2016; Medina, 2003; Muñoz, 1999). Participants in this study assertively accepted and rejected the dominant narratives of identifying as both Latinx and gay/queer. Similar to how Muñoz described disidentification, the participants revealed how what they learned in their co-curricular activities helped them disidentify with their intersectional identities. Muñoz also shared that with disidentification comes resistance:

Instead of buckling under the pressures of dominant ideology (identifications, assimilation) or attempting to break its inescapable sphere (counteridentification, utopianism), this ‘working on and against’ is a strategy that tries to transform a cultural logic from within, always laboring to enact permanent structural change while at the same time valuing the importance of local or everyday struggles of resistance. (pp. 11-12)

One participant, Valentino, conveyed his disidentification when he described how the addition of the letter X to Latino generated a form of resistance and inclusiveness he desired within the Latinx community. The student agency that takes place within co-curricular activities like La Familia and TQS emphasized this disidentification. Participants in this study went through disidentification due to finding acceptance and a sense of belonging in their co-curricular

activities. They no longer had to feel guilty or ashamed for being rejected by the dominant narrative. Instead, they embraced it, accepted it, and rejected it, to disidentify in their intersectionality as Latino gay/queer students.

**Summary.** The findings analyzed here point to common themes highlighted in my research and in the extant research literature, such as Latino gay/queer students facing challenges and obstacles on campus around heteronormativity, homophobia, and spaces they perceive to be heavily rooted in Whiteness. The support and community that co-curricular activities provide for Latino gay/queer students was another common theme highlighted in my research. Lastly, another common theme was the role that co-curricular activities play in facilitating the identity development of Latino gay/queer students around their intersectionality.

### **Implications of Educational Practice**

The participants in this study found *comunidad* and safe spaces from within co-curricular activities from which they could identify as both Latinx and gay/queer. The implications of educational practice are to increase awareness of the challenges that Latino gay/queer students face in navigating their intersectionality and provide more resources and support for co-curricular activities that are successfully providing support and *comunidad* to students with multiple marginalized identities. Increasing knowledge of the Latino gay/queer student experience to other co-curricular offices and activities that do not focus on their intersectional identities can help validate Latino gay/queer students' intersectional identities.

#### **Higher education and student affairs.**

***Identity-based centers.*** Identity-based centers like Chicano Student Programs and the LGBTQ Resource Center need to focus on planning programs and events based on including all students. Additionally, identity-based centers need to document the needs of queer students of

color and focus on how to provide support for their intersectionality. The study provided background regarding the success of co-curricular activities like La Familia, housed under both Chicano Student Programs and the LGBTQ Resource Center. Having co-curricular activities focused on the intersectionality of students' marginalized identities provides a unique type of support needed in identity-based centers. Moreover, a designated staff member who meets with these types of organizations would increase the communication of needs and support between the students and staff. Identity-based centers should also provide workshops and presentations that focus on how to navigate being out in college while still not being out at home (or to family). Embracing and supporting students to be out and proud of identifying as Latinx and gay/queer can help validate their intersectional identities for the first time.

***Residence Life.*** Residence Life staff are one of the first groups of students that incoming students meet, so hiring a diverse staff is important in supporting students with multiple marginalized identities. For example, at a Hispanic serving institution, having a Residence Life staff that is representative of the institution's population can provide visual support in that Latino gay/queer students will see students who look like them in these positions. The training that Residence Life staff receive before the academic year begins should include topics on how to support students with multiple marginalized identities as well as provide knowledge of resources and staff who can provide support to these students. The programming and events that Residence Life plans and executes should include educating residents about intersectionality and identity. Latino gay/queer students connect with others who share their experiences so having events and programs about their experience will help them connect with others.

***First-year experience programs and orientation.*** Ensuring that new incoming Latinx gay/queer students are aware of the resources available to them on campus is imperative to

helping them navigate their intersectionality on campus. Providing them with sessions on how to navigate their intersectionality, how to find support at both Chicano Student Programs and the LGBTQ Resource Center and introducing them to upperclassmen who also identify as Latino gay/queer students at orientation can set them up for success in finding support.

***Fraternities and athletics.*** Educating fraternity members and athletes on how to combat stereotypes and stigmas related to homophobia can help provide a more inclusive environment for Latino gay/queer students. Also, making fraternities and sororities aware of heteronormative behaviors, traditions, and practices regarding membership, programs, and events can also make these co-curricular experiences more welcoming for Latino gay/queer students. Collaborating with Chicano Student Programs or the LGBTQ Resource Center on events or bringing these offices in to conduct panels addressing homophobia and heteronormativity will create a safer and more inclusive campus for Latino gay/queer students.

***Career center and alumni relations.*** The career center on campus can provide Latino gay/queer students with LGBTQ friendly places to work as well as advice on how to navigate their intersectionality at a job after graduation. Alumni relations can support Latino gay/queer students by connecting them with alumni and helping them network with alumni in their desired career field.

**High school.** Providing workshops and presentations for queer students of color on how to find *comunidad*, support, and resources when they get to college will help future college students find support as soon as they get to college. Another implication is to have co-curricular offices or campus organizations facilitate student panels and outreach programs to introduce resources to high school students in nearby schools. Getting Latino gay/queer high school

students to start thinking about college and where they can find support and *comunidad* can provide them with the tools necessary to succeed in college.

### **Implications for Educational Leadership**

Leaders in education need to be made aware of how co-curricular activities provided support and an accepting environment for Latino gay/queer students. To continue to support Latino gay/queer students, more resources should be provided for co-curricular activities in order for them to continue to do great work.

**University presidents.** University presidents need to develop and provide more resources to co-curricular activities that support students in their intersectionality. Many cultural centers, LGBTQ resource centers, and other student affairs offices are understaffed, having only one or two full-time professional staff members. To fully support queer students of color in their intersectionality, university presidents need to approve more staff at those centers. Also, addressing intersectionality issues publicly with the entire campus can have a significant impact on creating an inclusive campus environment for queer students of color.

**Vice presidents of student affairs.** The chief student affairs officers need to make an effort to address issues with student affairs staff around intersectionality and find ways to best support queer students of color. Vice presidents of student affairs need to support queer students of color by training student affairs staff to understand their intersecting identities as well as to advocate for them. Also, vice presidents of student affairs must direct their student affairs staff, as a division, to collect data on how to best support queer students of color and create programs to help address those needs.

**Vice president of academic affairs.** The vice presidents of academic affairs must ensure that faculty members are trained and made aware of classroom management and teaching

methods that support queer students of color. Additionally, vice presidents of academic affairs should make sure that faculty is inclusive of queer students of color in their classrooms. Vice presidents of academic affairs should incorporate questions on course evaluations that include capturing the needs of students based on identity.

**Directors of athletics.** Given a history of homophobia in some sports teams and high race demographics in some team sports, it is essential for directors of athletics at college campuses to train and educate their staff and athletes about the experiences of queer students of color around intersectionality. Directors of athletics should also promote and ensure the presence of an inclusive environment in their sports teams through continuous training sessions and dialogues around homophobia and heteronormativity.

**NASPA/ACPA higher education student affairs organizations.** National organizations of student affairs should research best practices to support queer students of color at their intersectionality and promote it to their members at national and regional conferences. Also, national organizations should highlight the importance of addressing issues around intersectionality for queer students of color.

**Principals/superintendents.** Educational leaders in high schools need to start working with Latino gay/queer students on managing issues they face due to their intersectionality. Principals and superintendents should partner with local colleges to offer queer students of color the necessary information and resources to help them succeed in college. Having conversations with queer students of color in high school can also help them start making sense of their intersecting identities before they get to college.



## **Limitations and Future Research**

**Limitations.** There are a few limitations to this study regarding the sample. First, since the sample population is difficult to identify, it made the sample population small in size. Second, a majority of the sample was a part of one campus organization. Finally, the majority of participants identified as first-generation college students.

The first limitation of this study is that the sample size is small, with 15 participants. The unique experiences of the 15 participants might not represent all experiences of Latino gay/queer students at the site and may impact the findings' transferability to the general Latino gay/queer student population. Finding participants who identified as Latino gay/queer proved to be more difficult than expected.

Second, with the noted limited population and the small number of participants, over 50% of participants were affiliated with one campus organization. As a result of targeting the queer transgender Latinx organization on campus, the majority of participants in this study were members of this organization. The experiences shared by the participants in this organization may not represent those of other Latino gay/queer students who do not associate with this organization, who did not know about it, or who decided not to participate in it.

Finally, the findings of this study may not be entirely generalizable because over 85% of the study's sample identified as first-generation college students. As a result, the experiences of second or third generation Latino gay/queer students are not well represented in this study. In general, it is difficult to find second or third generation Latinx students, let alone those who also identify as gay/queer.

**Future research.** The findings of this study suggest that co-curricular activities support Latino gay/queer college students in navigating their intersectionality. There are a variety of

opportunities for further research due to the lack of research studies focused on Latino gay/queer students. Literature studying the intersectionality of race and sexual orientation for Latino gay/queer students in higher education institutions is severely lacking. More research focused on the experiences of Latino gay/queer students is necessary to fully understand how to best help this population navigate their intersecting identities.

Moreover, more research needs to be done on how well equipped higher education institutions are supporting Latino gay/queer students. The findings of this study demonstrate the positive impact and support that co-curricular activities provide for Latino gay/queer students, but more research is needed on this topic. Building on the idea of similar future studies, the impact of co-curricular activities on Latino gay/queer students should be studied on multiple campuses.

Also, this study concentrated on the experiences of Latino gay/queer male students. This research can be expanded to include a broader population that comprises the entire spectrum of LGBTQ students of color and their experiences with co-curricular activities. Additionally, future research should examine differences in how LGBTQ students of color experience their non-disclosed life at home versus their experience in co-curricular campus activities that empower them to disclose their sexual orientation.

Finally, research on the experiences of Latino gay/queer students in fraternities will help combat the negative stigma Latino gay/queer students expressed in this study. Examining why some Latino gay/queer students joined fraternities and why others avoided them can help fraternities in overcoming the perceived issues of homophobia and heteronormativity.

## Concluding Remarks

The idea to study the impact of co-curricular activities on Latino gay/queer students came from reflecting on my own experience as an undergraduate at a large public institution. This study demonstrates the powerful impact that co-curricular activities can have on students who are navigating intersecting marginalized identities—especially those of Latinx and gay/queer. Studies have shown that co-curricular activities help foster students' identity and leadership development, but very few, if any, have studied their impact on Latino gay/queer students. This study brings to light the voices of students who have not been studied thoroughly, their voices that have yet to be heard, and their experiences that have yet to be validated. Understanding the experience of how Latino gay/queer students came from a background that rejects a part of their identity to find a place of wholehearted acceptance in co-curricular activities adds validity to their existence and power to the critical impact of co-curricular activities. This study provides knowledge of how co-curricular activities support Latino gay/queer students in their intersectionality by providing a space where Latino gay/queer students found *comunidad*.

Hearing the stories of my participants was both heartbreaking and empowering. It was challenging to hear participants' stories of being rejected by family or fearing rejection. Their experience was all too familiar to me, which made me realize that not a lot has changed since I was in college. Latino gay/queer students are still afraid to come out to their families and fear the consequences, should they decide to disclose their sexual orientation. This study is important to me because, despite hearing stories of fear and rejection, I also heard stories of acceptance and validation that came from their involvement in co-curricular activities. The support received from co-curricular activities was familiar to me in that I also found acceptance in co-curricular activities in college. The first time I disclosed my sexual orientation to someone was a result of

being involved in a co-curricular activity. I was so proud of the participants in this study because each and every one of them has been out since their first year in college. I was unable to be out when I was a college student, so I felt empowered by how brave they were to come out their first year. They thrived on campus, were unafraid to be themselves, and found *comunidad* in co-curricular activities. This impact that co-curricular activities had on the participants in my study is important and something that should not be overlooked. It is difficult to navigate college, and my participants' intersectionality makes it even harder. I was happy to hear that co-curricular activities provided a sense of belonging, acceptance, and *comunidad* for Latino gay/queer students.

This study relates to my professional life in that I work in co-curricular activities as a Latino gay/queer student affairs professional. I am open about my sexual orientation with my students and colleagues because, as one of my participants stated, "There's a lot of power in knowing who you are." Working and being out as a queer man of color at a predominantly White institution is not easy, but it is powerful when students of color, especially queer students of color, express their appreciation in seeing someone who looks and identifies like them at such an institution. The intersectional identities of that my participants and I share are validated in this study. We have become aware of the necessary support that co-curricular activities can foster for Latino gay/queer students. This type of research needs to continue to increase the number of students who find *comunidad* the way my participants have done.

Self-acceptance has not been easy for me, and it was an arduous journey to find confidence in identifying as a Latino gay/queer man. The stories shared by my participants in this study empower me to continue my work in higher education student affairs. I will continue to share my participants' experiences to provide a voice for Latino gay/queer students. This

study gives me hope that, one day, all Latino gay/queer students will find the *comunidad* that my participants found in their co-curricular experiences.

## APPENDIX A: Interview Protocol

### Interview Protocol

#### Potential Interview Questions

**1) Opening:** Please tell me about yourself. Who are you? Where is your family from? What year are you/ are you a transfer? What is your major/area of study? Are you a first generation student? What is you or your family's socioeconomic status? Is English your first language?

**2) Introduction:** One of the criteria for participating in this study was to self-identify as a Latino gay college student. Are you able/comfortable with talking about how your racial and sexual identities impacted your life? If so, how has your racial identity shaped who you are?

**Follow-Up:** How about your sexual identity?

**3.) Key:** Kimberlé Crenshaw defines intersectionality as intersecting forms of marginality based on membership in multiple identity groups. For example, you identify as Latino and gay, which are two distinct identity groups. How has your intersectionality impacted your college experience outside of the classroom?

**4.) Key:** Please tell me what an average day on campus looks like for you. What do you do? Where do you go on campus when you're not in class?

**Follow-Up:** How has your identity as both Latino and gay influenced where you go on campus?

**5.) Key:** In your time as a college student, how have you chosen what co-curricular experiences to get involved in? Why were you attracted to them?

**Follow-Up:** Has your identity as a gay man influenced those choices? How?

**Follow-Up:** Has your identity as a Latino man influenced those choices? How?

**Follow-Up:** How has you intersectionality helped you to make those choices?

**Follow-Up:** What type(s) of co-curricular experiences do you avoid? Why?

**7.) Key:** In thinking about your co-curricular experiences, how have they impacted you positively? Negatively?

**Follow-Up:** Have any of your co-curricular experiences ever made you feel accepted?  
Tell me about an experience where you felt this.

**Follow-Up:** Now, have any of your co-curricular experiences ever made you feel like you don't belong?

Tell me

about an experience where you felt accepted.

**8.) Ending:** I am trying to figure out how co-curricular experiences impact Latino gay college students' feelings of marginality or empowerment. What would you say has been the biggest impact that co-curricular activities have had on you during your college experience?

**9.) Final Question:** Is there anything else that we should have talked about but didn't? Is there anything else you can tell me about the role co-curricular activities have played in your college experience as a Latino gay student?

## APPENDIX B: IRB Approval



University of California Los Angeles  
10889 Wilshire Blvd, Suite 830  
Los Angeles, CA 90095-1406  
<http://ora.research.ucla.edu/ohrpp>  
General Campus IRB: (310) 825-7122  
Medical IRB: (310) 825-5344

### APPROVAL NOTICE New Study

DATE:	12/15/2017
TO:	MARCO VALENZUELA, EDUCATIONAL DOCTORATE EDUCATION
FROM:	TODD FRANKE, PhD Chair, NGIRB
RE:	IRB#17-001776 LATINO GAY STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES OF MARGINALITY AND EMPOWERMENT AT A PUBLIC UNIVERSITY

The UCLA Institutional Review Board (UCLA IRB) has approved the above-referenced study. UCLA's Federalwide Assurance (FWA) with Department of Health and Human Services is FWA00004642.

#### Submission and Review Information

Type of Review	Expedited Review
Approval Date	12/15/2017
Expiration Date of the Study	12/14/2020

#### Specific Conditions for Approval

– The IRB has determined that this study meets the criteria for a 3 year extended approval. (For reference, please see the OHRPP guidance document "Extended Approval for Minimal Risk Research Not Subject to Federal Oversight" at [http://ora.research.ucla.edu/OHRPP/Documents/Policy/4/Extended\\_Approval.pdf](http://ora.research.ucla.edu/OHRPP/Documents/Policy/4/Extended_Approval.pdf)).

#### Regulatory Determinations

– **Expedited Review Categories** - The UCLA IRB determined that the research meets the requirements for expedited review per 45 CFR 46.110 categories 6 and 7.  
– **Waiver of Signed Informed Consent** - The UCLA IRB waived the requirement for signed informed consent for the research under 45 CFR 46.117(c)(2). However, subjects should be provided with an information sheet describing the study.

#### Documents Reviewed included, but were not limited to:

Document Name	Document Version #
<a href="#">17-001776_Copy of Study Information Sheet and Consent Form.pdf.pdf</a>	0.01
<a href="#">17-001776_Recruitment Email for Study.pdf.pdf</a>	0.01
<a href="#">17-001776_Recruitment Flyer for Study.pdf.pdf</a>	0.01
<a href="#">17-001776_Recruitment Script.pdf.pdf</a>	0.01

**Important Note:** Approval by the Institutional Review Board does not, in and of itself, constitute approval for the implementation of this research. Other UCLA clearances and approvals or other external agency or collaborating institutional approvals may be required before study activities are initiated. Research undertaken in conjunction with outside entities, such as drug or device companies, are typically contractual in nature and require an agreement between the University and the entity.

#### General Conditions of Approval

As indicated in the PI Assurances as part of the IRB requirements for approval, the PI has ultimate responsibility for the conduct of the study, the ethical performance of the project, the protection of the rights and welfare of human subjects, and strict adherence to any stipulations imposed by the IRB.

The PI and study team will comply with all UCLA policies and procedures, as well as with all applicable Federal, State, and local laws regarding the protection of human subjects in research, including, but not limited to, the following:

- Ensuring that the personnel performing the project are qualified, appropriately trained, and will adhere to the provisions of the approved protocol,
- Implementing no changes in the approved protocol or consent process or documents without prior IRB approval (except in an emergency, if necessary to safeguard the well-being of human subjects and then notifying the IRB as soon as possible afterwards),
- Obtaining the legally effective informed consent from human subjects of their legally responsible representative, and using only the currently approved consent process and stamped consent documents, as appropriate, with human subjects,
- Reporting serious or unexpected adverse events as well as protocol violations or other incidents related to the protocol to the IRB according to the OHRPP reporting requirements.
- Assuring that adequate resources to protect research participants (i.e., personnel, funding, time, equipment and space) are in place before implementing the research project, and that the research will stop if adequate resources become unavailable.
- Arranging for a co-investigator to assume direct responsibility of the study if the PI will be unavailable to direct this research personally, for example, when on sabbatical leave or vacation or other absences. Either this person is named as co-investigator in this application, or advising IRB via webIRB in advance of such arrangements.



## APPENDIX C: Study Information Sheet and Consent Form

### UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA LOS ANGELES STUDY INFORMATION SHEET AND CONSENT FORM

#### *Finding Comunidad: Latino Gay/Queer Students' Co-Curricular Experiences of Empowerment and Marginality at a Public University*

*Marco Antonio Valenzuela, an administrator at Pomona College and a graduate student researcher in the UCLA Educational Leadership Program, from the Education department at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) is conducting a research study.*

You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you self-identify as a Latino gay/queer student who is involved in co-curricular activities. Your participation in this research study is voluntary.

#### **Why is this study being done?**

*The purpose of this study is to capture the stories of how co-curricular activities impact Latino gay/queer students' college experience, specifically around issues of empowerment and/or marginalization. The intersection of race and sexuality for Latino gay/queer students presents a unique experience that is lacking in research. Less than 50% of Latino male students graduate from 4-year universities within 6 years and LGBTQ students face higher rates of adverse social stressors, including rejection from family, sexual violence and bullying. This study will help institutions of higher education find ways to better serve this population through creating and developing resources that help Latino gay/queer students navigate through their college experience in hopes of helping them persist to graduation.*

#### **What will happen if I take part in this research study?**

If you volunteer to participate in this study, the researcher will ask you to do the following:

- *Participate in a 60-90 minute interview around your college experiences and fill out a model of the Reconceptualized Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity.*
  - *Participate in follow-up questions regarding the completed model.*
- *The interview questions center around how your co-curricular experiences impact how you navigate college through the lens of a Latino gay/queer student.*
- *The interview will take place at the California Public University.*

#### **How long will I be in the research study?**

Participation will take a total of 60-90 minutes.

### **Are there any potential risks or discomforts that I can expect from this study?**

- *Revealing personal information may cause some to feel emotionally unsafe, as a result the interview would pause and the participant will be able to step out if necessary.*
  - *In order to prepare students for this, I will notify them at the start of the interview of the types of questions they will be asked in the interview.*

### **Are there any potential benefits if I participate?**

*You will not directly benefit from your participation in the research.*

The results of the research may help improve support services for those at the intersection of their LGBTQ and Latinx identity. This study is significant to Latino gay/queer college students as they navigate the intersection of their marginalized identities. The importance and power of hearing their own story told through counter stories can help them relate and persist in obtaining their college degree. Improving support services for these two marginalized communities on college campuses will help them navigate their college experience.

The findings from the proposed study may also be significant to student affairs professionals and higher education institutions working directly with this population, given their responsibility for developing programs that support Latino gay/queer college students. National student affairs organizations like NASPA- Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education and the American College Personnel Association (ACPA), benefit from this study by having my findings presented at either organization's annual conference. Also, ACPA is already working on various dialogue groups, presentations, and online professional development workshops around the topic of intersectionality among its Latinx and LGBTQ knowledge communities within the organization. Hence, my research may inform that trend as well.

### **What other choices do I have if I choose not to participate?**

Participation is voluntary.

### **Will I be paid for participating?**

- You will receive a \$20 Visa gift card to thank you for your time.

### **Will information about my participation and me be kept confidential?**

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can identify you will remain confidential. It will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of coding. A key will code each student as LG1, LG2, etc. Interview transcripts will be coded accordingly. A document with the key will be saved electronically in a secure digital folder accessible only to the PI. Documents with identifying information will be coded and the PI will promptly destroy the originals.

Hard copies of any handwritten field notes will be stored in a secure file box, accessible only to the PI. Electronic transcripts and related coding and analysis documents will be stored securely. Hard copies and digital files will be stored in accordance with UCLA OHRPP's Guidance and Procedure: Data Security in Research.

**What are my rights if I take part in this study?**

- You can choose whether or not you want to be in this study, and you may withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time.
- Whatever decision you make, there will be no penalty to you, and no loss of benefits to which you were otherwise entitled.
- You may refuse to answer any questions that you do not want to answer and still remain in the study.

**Who can I contact if I have questions about this study?**

- **The research team:**

If you have any questions, comments or concerns about the research, you can talk to the one of the researchers. Please contact:

*Marco Antonio Valenzuela*



- **UCLA Office of the Human Research Protection Program (OHRPP):**

If you have questions about your rights as a research subject, or you have concerns or suggestions and you want to talk to someone other than the researchers, you may contact the UCLA OHRPP by phone: (310) 206-2040; by email: [participants@research.ucla.edu](mailto:participants@research.ucla.edu) or by mail: Box 951406, Los Angeles, CA 90095-1406.

***You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.***

**SIGNATURE OF STUDY PARTICIPANT**

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

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

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**SIGNATURE OF PERSON OBTAINING CONSENT**

---

Name of Person Obtaining Consent

---

Contact Number

---

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

---

Date

## APPENDIX D: Updated Interview Protocol

### Interview Protocol

**1) Opening:** Please tell me about yourself. Who are you? Where is your family from? What year are you/ are you a transfer? What is your major/area of study? Are you a first-generation student? What is you or your family's socioeconomic status? Is English your first language?

**2) Introduction:** One of the criteria for participating in this study was to self-identify as a Latino gay college student. Are you able/comfortable with talking about how your racial and sexual identities impacted your life? If so, how has your racial identity shaped who you are?

**Follow-Up:** How about your sexual identity?

**3.) Key:** You identify as Latino and gay, which are two distinct marginalized identities. How has this combination of being Latino and gay impacted your college experience outside the classroom?

**4.) Key:** Please tell me what an average day on campus looks like for you. What do you do? Where do you go on campus when you're not in class?

**Follow-Up:** How has your identity as both Latino and gay influenced where you go on campus?

**5.) Key:** In your time as a college student, how have you chosen what co-curricular experiences to get involved in? Why were you attracted to them?

**Follow-Up:** Has your identity as a gay man influenced those choices? How?

**Follow-Up:** Has your identity as a Latino man influenced those choices? How?

**Follow-Up:** How has your intersectionality helped you to make those choices?

**Follow-Up:** What type(s) of co-curricular experiences do you avoid? Why?

**7.) Key:** In thinking about your co-curricular experiences, how have they impacted you positively? Negatively?

**Follow-Up:** Have any of your co-curricular experiences ever made you feel accepted? Tell me about an experience where you felt this.

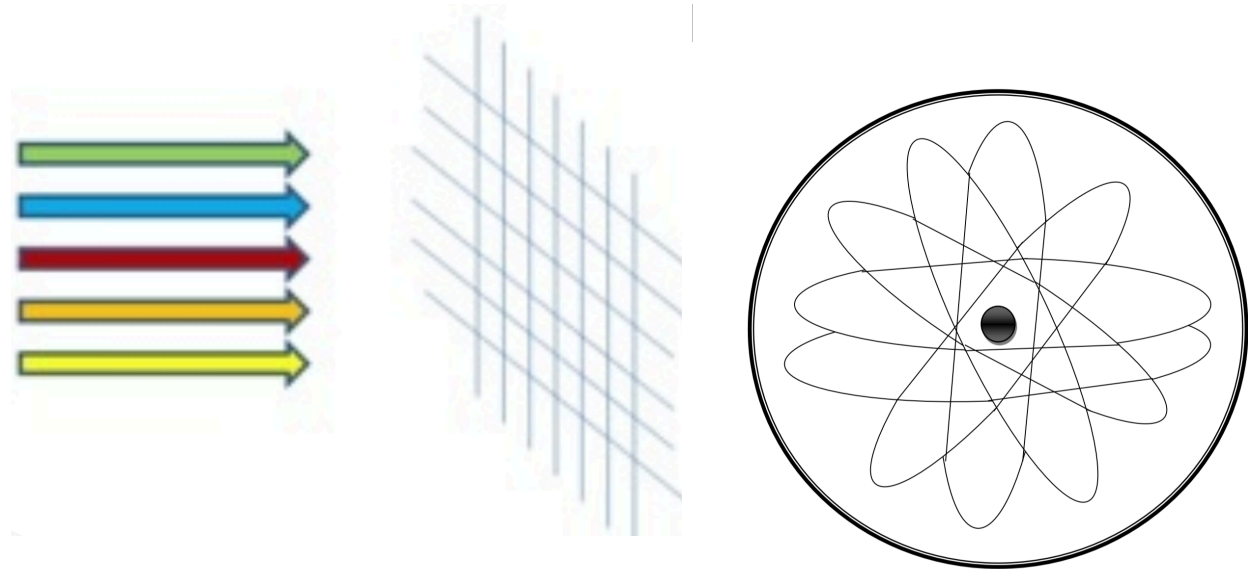
**Follow-Up:** Now, have any of your co-curricular experiences ever made you feel like you don't belong? Tell me about an experience where you felt like you didn't belong.

**8.)** I am trying to figure out how co-curricular experiences impact Latino gay college students' feelings of marginality or empowerment. What would you say has been the biggest impact that co-curricular activities have had on you during your college experience as a Latino gay student?

**9.)** Where beyond these co-curricular activities have you felt accepted? Or like you don't belong?

**10.) Final Question:** Is there anything else that we should have talked about but didn't? Is there anything else you can tell me about the role co-curricular activities have played in your college experience as a Latino gay student?

Explain the Reconceptualized Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity and then ask participants to fill in the model as it best exemplifies them currently.



1. Tell me about how you filled out the model.
  - a. Can you identify what aspects of identity made up your core?
  - b. How did you decide where to put each aspect of your identity?
  - c. Can you indicate what aspects of context (your co-curricular experience) were most relevant to how you perceived the salience of your social identities?
2. Can you give me an example or tell me a story about how you made meaning of your contextual influence (co-curricular experience) and how it influenced the position of your identities?
3. Is the way in which you filtered your contextual influence (co-curricular experience) in this model constant, or are there times when you would have filtered its meaning and impact on your identities in a different way?

4. Can you give me an example or tell me a story about a time when the meaning of this contextual influence (co-curricular experience) would have been filtered differently?

ATTENTION UC RIVERSIDE STUDENTS: Want to share your experience?

# LATINO, GAY/QUEER, & INVOLVED ON CAMPUS ?

You can help other young people like yourself by participating in a study designed to learn more about how co-curricular activities impact Latino gay/queer students' experiences around marginalization and empowerment.

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**INTERVIEWS WILL BE  
CONFIDENTIAL | A \$20 VISA GIFT  
CARD WILL BE GIVEN TO EACH  
PARTICIPANT**

If you meet these criteria and are interested in being interviewed please email me at  
[valenzuela11@g.ucla.edu](mailto:valenzuela11@g.ucla.edu)



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