UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

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Viviendo en la Intersección:

Queer Femme Latinx Men, Trans, and Gender Variant Individuals Experience Living at the Intersection of Identities

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy in Social Welfare

by

Javier Garcia-Perez

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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Doctor of Philosophy in Social Welfare

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Professor Laura S. Abrams, Chair

Background and Aims: Queer femme Latinx men, trans, and gender variant individuals live in a complex fabric of intersecting structures of oppression including, but not limited to, racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, poverty, citizenship status, internalized homophobia, internalized racism and linguistic hierarchy. Consequently, queer femme Latinx individuals navigate complex identities that are often not understood or adequately researched. While empirical research highlights how minoritized identities may negatively impact psychosocial functioning, mental health, and well-being, we still do not have a clear understanding of how individual queer femme Latinx navigate their identities in relation to these structures of oppression. This project seeks to understand how queer femme Latinx individuals subjectively understand their lived experiences.

Methods: This phenomenological study is theoretically grounded in intersectionality. Individual semi-structured in-depth interviews with open-ended questions were conducted via Zoom with participants who reside in the state of California, were 18 to 30, self-identify as queer femme men, trans, or gender variant and as Latinx. Recruitment was conducted via a purposive sampling method initiated with a recruitment email sent to LGBTQ+ and Latinx resource centers and university-level academic departments across California.

Results: 10 interviews were conducted. The analysis revealed four major themes: (1) "there is no particular way of existing; (2) "safety isn't guaranteed;" (3) "the different personas you create"; and (4) "reminding myself I'm worth it." Participants shared a common understanding of feeling a sense of limitlessness and freedom in their identities. They understood safety isn't guaranteed and discussed the need to create different personas as an adaptive behavior, while, being able to remind themselves they are worth it and practice selflove. Finally, participants were able to use community resources, knowledge building, and peer/family support to strengthen their own identity understanding.

Conclusion and Implications: This study provides an inclusive and intersectional understanding of the queer femme Latinx individual experience. Implications for social work practice include developing culturally-based and contextually situated interventions that support well-being and identity management. Particularly, this study shows queer femme Latinx individuals have a strong awareness of their own worth and are able to practice selflove. Social work practitioners could assist queer femme Latinx individuals understand the role of their adaptive behaviors while promoting selflove. Additionally, enhancing relationships with service-providing agencies to building a cohesive community of support to help normalize queer femme Latinx individuals' experiences could support queer femme Latinx individual's well-being and identity management.

The dissertation of Javier Garcia-Perez is approved.

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DEDICATION PAGE

To the fierce queer femme Latinx individuals who came before me—and to those that will come after me—that continue to fight for justice and our ability to exist authentically in a world that seeks to erase us, this project is dedicated to you.

Para mis padres, su apoyo incondicional y sus sacrificios me han brindado tantas oportunidades. Y es por ustedes que yo sé que puedo hacer cualquier cosa en esta vida.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Queer femme Latinx men, trans, and gender variant individuals live in a complex fabric of intersecting structures of oppression including, but not limited to, racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, poverty, citizenship status, internalized homophobia, internalized racism and linguistic hierarchy. This complex fabric is often filtered and experienced through an equally complex understanding of personal and group identity. Consequently, queer femme Latinx individuals navigate complex identities that are often not understood or adequately researched. Current scholarship on queer femme Latinx individuals emphasizes identity-based victimization—often thought of as acts of overt antagonism (e.g., assault, bullying, threats)—are not limited solely to explicit physical acts but may include psychological and emotional hostility. Therefore, subtle forms of discrimination—such as perceived discrimination, verbal assault, visual assaults, and exclusion —can also influence mental health conditions such as suicidal ideation, anxiety, and depression (Sue et al., 2007). Despite this research, existing scholarship lacks a clear understanding of the meaning that these unique and diverse experiences hold for those with multiple minoritized identities. Furthermore, while empirical research highlights how minoritized identities may impact psychosocial functioning and mental health, we do not have a clear understanding of how individual queer femme Latinx navigate their identities in relation to these structures of oppression, how they seek support, or gain support from within and/or outside of their chosen communities. Further research is required to develop a deep and rich understanding of the meaning queer femme Latinx individuals associate with their lived experience as holding multiple minoritized identities within complex structures of oppression.

How do they make meaning, navigate their realities, traverse various contexts, and ultimately cope with their unique experiences?

Background

The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer/Questioning+ (LGBTQ+) community represents a diverse array of identities and expressions. LGBTQ+ is a term used by community members, research, and academic literatures to describe people who identify with a variety of sexual and/or gender identities. The term queer has also been used to include all LGBTQ+ community members. Therefore, queer is an umbrella term for non-straight people and gender variant people. Queer is often used to adequately encompass a diverse and unique community that does not always fit into the categorized terms of LGBTQ+ and to represent a wider and growing community.

Traditional LGBTQ+ history is often conceptualized as originating in the 1970s with the gay liberation movement. However, one of the first gay rights groups in the United States was the Mattachine Society which activist Harry Hay formed in 1950 (Gosse, 2005). The society focused on social acceptance and other support for "homosexuals" (historically used term). Ultimately, the goal of the society was to push LGBTQ+ visibility forward in U.S. society with the objective to support the LGBTQ+ community and provide resources. However, a sudden shift occurred in April of 1952 when the American Psychiatric Association included homosexuality as a sociopathic personality disturbance in the diagnostic manual (Mendelson, 2003) Consequently, the American Psychiatric Association established and ultimately perpetuated a negative perception of the LGBTQ+ community in the United States.

The culminating event for LGBTQ+ community visibility and civil rights occurred in June 1969 when New York City police raided the Stonewall Inn—located in the Greenwich

Village neighborhood in NYC—resulting in overwhelming protests and demonstrations (Varga et al., 2019). This moment was later identified as the beginning of the gay liberation movement in the United States (Varga et al., 2019). Continuing the momentum, in December 1973 the American Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality from the list of mental disorders in the diagnostic manual (Mendelson, 2003).

Despite small and continued progress for the LGBTQ+ community, just eight years later in July 1981, the *New York Times* printed the first story of a rare pneumonia and skin cancer found in 41 gay men in New York and California. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) initially referred to the disease as the Gay Related Immune Deficiency Disorder (GRID) (Shilts, 1988). When symptoms were found outside of the gay community, the National Gay Task Force successfully lobbied to change the name of the disease to Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS) (Shilts, 1988). Unsurprisingly, the government provided little support, recognition, and resources to those suffering from the growing AIDS crisis. In response to the lack of support, in March 1987, the AIDS advocacy group ACT UP (The AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power) was formed. ACT UP was specifically organized to address the devastating affects the disease had on the gay and lesbian community in New York. The group held demonstrations against pharmaceutical companies profiteering from AIDS-related drugs as well as the lack of AIDS policies protecting patients from outrageous prescription prices (Gould, 2002). Lack of AIDS visibility and fear of homosexuality particularly gay men, proved to be detrimental to the LGBTQ+ community and the progress that had been made toward liberation and acceptance.

Generally, the experience was worse for queer people of color. For LGBTQ+ people of color and queer people of color their experiences were often erased or not incorporated into the

larger “traditional” historical narrative of LGBTQ+ history. Instead, queer people of color are required to negotiate their identities and navigate unique lived realities that integrate various cultural and social context often missing from the “traditional” historical accounts or cultural LGBTQ+ considerations. As a queer Latinx trans identified individual residing in California stated: “sometimes I would deny it, just to keep myself safe, but it wasn't really in the closet really because everybody knew” (Interview, November 28, 2020). Queer people of color often have to deny or conceal their identities for their own safety. Unsurprisingly, mainstream LGBTQ+ activism and history in the United States has excluded the voices of multiple minoritized communities, particularly queer people of color (Schmitz et al., 2020). Thus, queer people of color have been marginalized through whitewashing within mainstream queer rights movements, which has diminished the historical account of their contributions (Schmitz et al., 2020). Therefore, very few queer people of color are known for their contributions to the wider LGBTQ+ movement. Specifically, little is known about the contributions made by queer Latinx activist and community members.

The queer Latinx community became a focal point of attention in 2016 when a hate crime was committed at a popular nightclub. On June 12, 2016, an armed gunman walked into Pulse, a well-known queer nightclub in Orlando, Florida, on its popular Latin night and killed 49 people while wounding 58 others in what would be the deadliest mass shooting in U.S. history at the time. Absent from most major news reporting, however, was the fact that the majority of the victims were queer and Latinx. Even for the queer Latinx individuals who vicariously experienced the tragedy through the news, the emotional impact is immeasurable. As Bamby Salcedo, President and CEO of the TransLatin@ Coalition, recounted: “Trauma has a ripple effect, people will remember Pulse” (Jenson, 2016).

For queer Latinx people in the United States, the constant threat of violence and hatred frames tragedies like Pulse as far from abnormal. The day-to-day reality of violence is ever-present. The National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs (2016) reported in 2015, among a survey of 981 queer survivors of violence in the United States, Latinx respondents were 4.5 times more likely to experience online and mobile harassment, 2.3 times more likely to experience robbery, and 2.6 times more likely to experience violence by an employer compared to non-Latinx respondents. Stemming from this historical erasure of queer people of color, and queer Latinx people specifically, further work is needed to advance our understandings of queer Latinx-focused historical contributions and social activism (Schmitz et al., 2020).

Despite the day-to-day reality of violence for queer Latinx individuals, the queer Latinx community continues to employ resilience and create their own space by highlighting the intersection of their identities. The queer Latinx community in East Los Angeles developed the Queer Mercado. The Queer Mercado is a community-driven street market specifically for the queer Latinx community of East Los Angeles to connect, support local LGBTQ+ businesses and create a safe and inclusive space for the diverse community (LAIST, 2021). Therefore, the Queer Mercado is an environment that highlight community and cultivates a safe space for identity expression. Mercados—or markets—are a vital part of immigrant communities in Los Angeles. Informal street markets provide a means for survival, emotional support, and economic resiliency when dealing with mistreatment, discrimination, housing insecurity, economic instability, and other social factors (Munoz, 2017). As the popularity of the Queer Mercado has grown with the community in East Los Angeles, it has become a safe space for LGBTQ+ Latinx to feel free in their own neighborhood. Ultimately, the Queer Mercado seeks to remain authentic to both its predominately Latinx East Los Angeles and queer communities. The highlight of the Queer

Mercado is the ability to celebrate and create pride in queer Latinx identity regardless of whether it is Pride month or Latinx Heritage Month; the Queer Mercado allows for identity celebration year-round.

Problem Statement

In modern historical accounts, the year 2015 was a monumental moment for LGBTQ+ rights in the U.S. when the Supreme Court legalized same-sex marriage. Despite this advancement, heterosexism and transphobia has continued to permeate on systemic levels (Nadal, 2019). Examples include state sponsored transphobic legislation regarding the use of bathroom and public facilities and "religious freedom laws" that allow anti-LGBTQ+ discrimination when behaviors do not align with an individual's religion (Nadal, 2019). The current political landscape in the US—which has slowly and more recently been dominated by racist, heterosexist, and sexist rhetoric—continues to plague the LGBTQ+ community despite legislative and cultural advance (Noyola et al., 2020). Thus, creating a dual narrative within American society of pride and shame. In one instance there is a rhetoric or language of pride that is targeted to emphasize an inclusive movement publicized by celebrities, corporations, and public figures and simultaneously an overwhelming legislative backlash. Therefore, minoritized communities are subject to special stressors and competing understandings of their queer identity. Furthermore, minoritized communities are likely to experience discrimination in employment or antigay violence (Cyrus, 2017). These unique stressors are likely to lead to hypervigilance and negative self-perceptions like internalized homophobia, heightened stress, anxiety, and avoidance (Cyrus, 2017). Interpersonally, anti-LGBTQ+ discrimination has continued to persist (Nadal, 2019). Due to continued social and legal discrimination against the

LGBTQ+ community, embracing a queer identity is surrounded by concerns about safety and personal agency (Balsam et al., 2011).

Of particular importance is the understanding of femininity and a femme identity within the queer community. Schwartz (2020) defines femme as a queer identity marked by a critical engagement with femininity that manifests in one's style and values. Thus, using Schwartz's understanding of femme, femme has developed to include multiple identities over a broad spectrum of sexual and gender differences (Blair & Hoskin, 2016). Therefore, when queer is introduced to femininity we shift focus from a particular type of body towards a nuanced understanding of femininity. We shift focus towards trans women, bisexual individuals, effeminate gay men, gender-variant and queer subjects that question normative understandings of femininity and the continuum of sex, gender, and sexuality to produce femme (Hale & Ojeda, 2018).

There is limited research about queer individuals from racial/ethnic backgrounds and the unique challenges faced due to the intersection of gender, sexual orientation, and their race/ethnicity. Living as a member of multiple marginalized groups within a society may create a challenging dynamic and is likely a stressful emotional experience, fueled by the systemic interaction of oppression, domination, and discrimination within a society (Cyrus, 2017). The existing theory and research on queer people of color suggests these individuals may experience unique stressors associated with their dual minority status, including simultaneously being subjected to multiple forms of microaggressions (Balsam et al., 2011). Minority stress research has tended to focus on one dimension of identity (i.e., sexual diverse identity) and inequality (i.e., heterosexism), while failing to account explicitly for how heterosexism intersects with racism and sexism (Bowleg, 2008). Thus, more research is needed to understand how minority

stress is differentially experienced by sexual diverse people of color, including queer Latinx (Noyola et al., 2020). The intersection between gender, sexual identity, and racial/ethnic identity is especially complex given that gender and sexual identity are mutually constitutive and these identities are understood, expressed, and experienced differently based on race and ethnicity (Eaton & Rios, 2017).

Continuing our understanding of this particularly diverse community, racial/ethnic minority individuals have often reported exclusion from the mainstream queer community (Balsam et al., 2011). Additionally, beliefs concerning racial/ethnic differences in sexual behavior of queer people of color can lead to sexual objectification or rejection by other queer people (Balsam et al., 2011). In addition to racism within queer communities, queer people of color may also experience heterosexism and transphobia within racial/ethnic minority communities and specifically within their own cultural communities (Balsam et al., 2011). In Balsam et al.'s (2011) study of 112 LGBT-POC identified participants residing in Washington State, found participants noted racism in the queer community, heterosexism in racial/ethnic communities, problems with relationships and dating, concerns about immigration status, and rejection by their communities as being salient. Individuals who experience prejudice are more likely to report physical health symptoms and these minority stressors may affect health through chronic biological stress (Ghabrial, 2017).

The Latinx community comprises the highest proportion of sexually diverse individuals residing in the United States, with 21% of the total population identifying within the LGBTQ+ community (Noyola et al., 2020). Queer Latinx men have reported experiencing more instances of homophobia in their communities than non-Latinx White men, which potentially leads to isolation and subsequently compromises the support they would otherwise receive from their

families (Ghabrial, 2017). Research on queer Latinx people has often credited traditional religious beliefs, low educational attainment, language barriers, and support for traditional gender roles as mechanisms through which queer identity and expression is made difficult (Balsam et al., 2011). Consistent with the general research on sexual diverse individuals, researchers have also documented higher prevalence of mental disorders among queer Latinx when compared to heterosexual Latinx (Noyola et al., 2020). For example, a study conducted with gay Latinx men found that almost 60% of participants reported experiences of racism in an interpersonal gay context (Noyola et al., 2020). Similarly, a qualitative study with queer Latinx individuals found that all participants reported stress within their Latinx communities stemming from their queer identities (Noyola et al., 2020). These experiences are consequential for the mental health of queer Latinx individuals. A study of gay and bisexual Latinx individuals from three major U.S. cities found that racist and homophobic discrimination was associated with psychological distress, symptoms of depression, anxiety, and suicidality through its negative effects on social support and self-esteem (Noyola et al., 2020)

Queer femme Latinx men, trans, and gender variant individuals live in complex social contexts. Their individual experiences are understood through a white-centered LGBTQ+ history that lacks adequate queer people of color representations. When queer people of color are represented in larger LGBTQ+ history it is often whitewashed or devalued. This, ultimately, renders the intersection of their racial and queer identities illegible and without representation, and can lead to the misconception that their identities operate individually and one identity may be more privileged than the other. Furthermore, the duality of pride and shame their identities encompass in broader U.S. society may leave queer femme Latinx individuals in a state of

unrests and confusion. Further research is necessary to better understand queer femme Latinx individuals.

Pilot Study

I conducted a pilot study between November 2020 and February 2021 with a diverse sample of self-identified queer Latinx individuals residing in California. The study consisted of virtual in-depth interviews with a purposive sample. The aim of this research was to build knowledge on multiple minoritized identities and their experiences to inform further research and potential interventions. The sample inclusion criteria encompassed individuals who were 18 and older, self-identify as a member of both a sexual minority group (i.e. queer, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) and identify as Latinx or a variation of the Latinx identity (i.e. Latina/o, Chicana/o, Hispanic). The final sample was 9 participants with an age range of 22 to 46 and represented various gender, sexuality, queer identities and expressions. Recruitment was conducted via targeted emails to California State Universities, Universities of California, and California Community College campuses LGBTQ+ student resource centers, Latinx student resource centers, Chicana/o academic departments, and LGBT academic departments.

The analysis identified four major themes; (1) identity policing; (2) single identity; (3) cisgender lens; and (4) navigating multiple contexts. Participants shared a common experience of their behavior, thoughts, presentation, and desires being policed. These instances were often emphasized and mixed with cultural and societal norms. In turn, participants were often viewed and forced into a single-identity often not chosen by them. This was usually produced through a cisgender lens. Lastly, participants expressed the difficulty of navigating multiple contexts. These findings allow for initial insight into the queer Latinx individual experience of holding multiple minoritized identities. Furthermore, continuing to emphasize intersectionality and the

nuances of identity could support queer Latinx individuals fully experience their multiple identities.

The pilot study findings informed the framing for this dissertation. Particularly, this dissertation draws upon the consideration that intersectionality is key to understanding the experience of queer femme Latinx individuals. Results uncovered the policing of queer identity within the Latinx community often produced a single identity primarily focused through a cisgender heteronormative lens. This reality offered insight to focus on non-normative identities. Additionally, femmephobia was present in the findings. Rigoberto, a pilot study participant, shared, *"because we just hate femininity so much as humans and as people um so being challenged to always have more so of that masculine demeanor."* Additionally, Jorge, a pilot study participant, shared a story of femmephobia when coming out to their parents. They stated: *"I am still a man or a masculine person and I wasn't now going to transition into being a woman because I think that was a thought or a fear that my folks had was, oh you're gay you want to be a woman."* These examples offer insight into the perceived fear of femininity and a femme presentation. Further inquiry is required to better understand the nuance self-identification with a femme identity.

Purpose of this Study

Informed by the pilot study, this dissertation seeks to understand how queer femme Latinx men, trans, and gender variant individuals ages 18 to 30 subjectively describe the meaning(s) they hold and how they understand their lived experiences while living with multiple minorized identities within complex and often oppressive systems. Specifically, three main research questions guide this study:

(1) What meanings do queer femme Latinx men, trans, and gender variant persons ages 18 to 30 assign to their lived experiences of holding multiple minoritized identities?

(2) How do culture, family, community, and social climate inform, support, or frame their lived experience?

(3) How do queer femme Latinx men, trans, and gender variant persons navigate their complex and changing contexts?

In this dissertation, I first provide a comprehensive review of the literature illuminating the conceptual framing of queer, femme, and Latinx identities and their relationship to well-being. I then introduce my theoretical framework guided by—and combining—intersectionality, the minority stress model, and structural stigma. I describe the use of a phenomenological qualitative methodology that informs this dissertation and I provide a description of the participants in this study. Next, I outline the following findings: (1) there is no particular way of existing; (2) safety isn't guaranteed; (3) the different personas you create; and (4) reminding myself I'm worth it and introduce the composite description. I conclude by contextualizing the study findings, offering implications for social work practice, and directions for future research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The present study seeks to understand the meaning(s) associated with holding multiple minoritized identities for queer femme Latinx men, trans, and gender variant individuals. As such, the literature review summarizes how existing research conceptualizes multiple minoritized identities related to queer femme Latinx individuals. This review organizes the current academic scholarship in a unidimensional manner with the understanding that few studies exist focusing on the complete experiences of queer femme Latinx individuals. Therefore, the review is specifically organized into six subsections to best understand the current research around this population: (1) identity/identity formation; (2) Latinx queer identity; (3) femme (4) multiple identity & mental health/health; (5) Trans mental health/health; and (6) Queer Latinx mental health/ health.

Identity/ Identity Formation

Much of the research and theory on identity tends to view identity in linear, developmental stages. However, when considering individuals with multiple minoritized identities, understanding identity becomes more complex. The research on minoritized identity supports the idea that identity is not fixed and is constantly evolving and changing within given social contexts. Specifically, social constructionism considers identity to be socially, historically, politically, and culturally constructed at both the institutional and individual levels (Omi & Winant, 1994; Weber, 1998). Therefore, to fully embrace individual experiences, it is necessary to explore differences within each aspect of identity as each is influenced by the simultaneous experience of the other dimensions of identity (C. R. McCann & Kim, 2017).

Third wave feminist literature introduced a framework of intersectionality that recognized how socially constructed identities are experienced simultaneously, not hierarchically (C. R. McCann & Kim, 2017). Collins (1991) termed this framework a "matrix of domination" and explained that viewing relationships from an intersecting perspective "expands the focus of analysis from merely describing the similarities and differences distinguishing these systems of oppression and focuses greater attention on how they interconnect" (p. 222). Within the Latinx context, Gloria Anzaldua discusses her experiences as a Mexican American lesbian and her theory of mestiza consciousness. Anzaldua (1999) describes her ability to bring together multiple identities into a new and integrated identity, where "the self has added a third element which is greater than the sum of its severed parts…that element is a new consciousness" (p. 2).

Principles of queer theory disrupt traditional identity categories based on the suppositions that identity is performed and therefore unstable (Butler, 1991). Identity is comprised of fluid differences rather than a unified essence (Fuss, 1989). Fuss explained that the failure to study identity as difference implies a unity in identity that overlooks variations within identity, such as race and class. Furthermore, categories are insufficient because differences within those categories cause them to have "multiple and contradictory meanings" (Fuss, 1989, p. 98). Therefore, identity is more performative than static. As performative, participants' actions are not representative of identity. Instead, actions create identity (Butler, 1991). Decisions regarding their manner of dress, choice of partners, religious practices, and political involvement became the meaning of their identity dimensions. Individuals have more awareness and often utilize meaning and meaning making to deploy and better understand their identities. Individuals who utilized more complex meaning making may demonstrated an awareness of the performative nature of their identity rather than a reliance on fixed and externally defined meanings (Abes &

Jones, 2004). Those utilizing less developed meaning making may not always be aware of the performative nature of their identity (Abes & Jones, 2004).

Lastly, self-authorship brings in socially constructed perspectives along with the performative aspect of identity. Self-authorship occurs through "an ability to construct knowledge in a contextual world, an ability to construct an internal identity separate from external influences, and an ability to engage in relationships without losing one's internal identity" (Baxter, 1999, p. 2). Limited research has explored self-authorship in the context of how individuals make meaning of their socially constructed identities, such as race and sexuality (Abes et al., 2007). Furthermore, limited published research has explored a relationship between self-authorship and intersectionality of social identities. The results of Abes and Jones's (2004) study suggested that meaning-making capacity served as a filter through which contextual factors are interpreted prior to influencing self-perceptions of sexual orientation identity and its relationship with other identity dimensions. As such, little identity-based research has focused on how multiple minoritized identities are understood and navigated across various spaces and contexts.

Latinx Queer Identity - Jotería

"People, listen to what your Jotería is saying" (Gloria Anzaldúa, 1999). *Joto or Jota* has historically been used in a negative way to describe, categorize, or hurt those who identify as Mexican and who do not fit heteronormative standards. However, many queer Latinx individuals are part of an emerging political project that is transforming the meaning of such negative terms while decolonizing and challenging many aspects of Western hegemony (Bañales, 2014) .

Little has been written about the history of queer people within the Chicano movement, or about Latinx in the gay rights movement. Instead, a majority of the Chicano movement

literature and research has revolved around heterosexually identified Chicano men, while queer studies is dominated by a white queer experiences and political agenda (Tijerina Revilla & Santillana, 2014). In contrast, research on the queer Latinx community typically focuses on HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment (Tijerina Revilla & Santillana, 2014). Consequently, homophobia, patriarchy, and white supremacy are deeply embedded in queer Latinx communities and there is a lack of literature that examines or illustrates the multiple dimensions of the queer Latinx experience (Tijerina Revilla & Santillana, 2014). On one hand, homophobia and sexism have been problems in the Chicano community, preventing the Chicano movement from progressing (Tijerina Revilla & Santillana, 2014). On the other hand, the gay and lesbian rights movement has perpetuated white supremacy, which has prevented this movement from fully including queer people of color (Tijerina Revilla & Santillana, 2014).

Within Chicana/o and Latin American cultures queerness is often conceptualized though sex. However, discussions on sex remains a largely hidden concept and when considered based solely on a machista-gendered framework (Cervantes, 2014). Subsequently, the question of sexual orientation and the affirmation of queer experiences is shunned in ordinary conversation within a Latinx context (Cervantes, 2014). Unsurprising, queer people of color are aware that mainstream queer theory and queer research remains dominated by white male voices. However, it is important to acknowledge how people of color are challenging these areas of study (Cervantes, 2014).

Jotería as a concept builds on a long history of oppressed minoritized groups coming together to challenge institutions and ideologies that have silenced those who are deemed different (Cervantes, 2014). Jotería focuses on the heterogeneous lives and lived experiences of Jotería but also on the erasures and omissions of queer bodies of color (Alvarez, 2014).

Cervantes (2014) identifies Jotería to mean, "claiming sexual experiences as part of our identity. It challenges the continuing invisibility of homosexuality in Latin American and Chicana/o cultural contexts" (p. 203). Jotería allows and encourages queer Latinx to speak up and have a voice, not to assimilate or blend into normative society but rather to radically change it through critical reflection on brown sexuality (Cervantes, 2014).

The term Jotería directly speaks to the broader perspective about the intersectional issues and concerns of queer Latinx individuals (Hernandez, 2016). Moreover, the term Jotería differs from queer, because it centralizes queer Chicana/o, Latina/o and Indigenous experiences (Hernandez, 2016). Thus, reconfiguring Jotería means working through the pain and suffering of its imperialistic, Eurocentric, capitalist, heteronormativity (Bañales, 2014). In other words, the project of Jotería insists upon the inseparability of the many forms of colonizing oppression and violence that shape the realities for those who identify with the term (Bañales, 2014). This is especially important since Jotería often experience several displacements across multiple fronts, including home, community, school, and other social institutions. These dislocations have dire consequences, evident in the increasing accounts of suicides, bullying, and murders of queer youth of color (Bañales, 2014). Jotería is a term of empowerment and it is intentionally radical (Pérez, 2014). Lastly, Jotería is not gender-specific, nor is it limited to a single ethnic group or form of sexual identity (Pérez, 2014). Therefore, Jotería as a concept allows for a nuanced understanding of a queer Latinx identity and the ability for queer Latinx individuals to create their own reality and expressions they choose.

Femme

In popular literature, media, and even specific academic writing, femininity has consistently been demonized. Since the 1970s social science researchers have documented the

cultural devaluation of femininity and its impact on experiences of discrimination among sexual and gender minorities (Hale & Ojeda, 2018). In the early days of psychotherapy, the fear of the feminine through "penis envy" and assumptions of female biological or embodied inferiority was a pressing topic of interest (Hoskin, 2019). In these discourses, femininity is often positioned as subpar to masculinity. This positionality allows feminine traits to be looked at as weak and inferior to male characteristics (Hale & Ojeda, 2018). Therefore, the assertion of distinct difference between males and females reinforces the idea that they are worthy of different treatment (Hale & Ojeda, 2018). In a study with sexual and gender minorities, Hoskin (2020) found participants described femininity inherently being less than, and characteristics of femininity interpreted as a sign of inferiority. Lastly, Dhal (2017), recounting a speech given by award-winning U.S. writer Dorothy Allison which continues to identify the positionality of femininity as subordinate by proposing "to be femme is to be willing to be genuinely miserable, humiliated and full of feelings of inadequacy" (p. 39).

To further the understanding of femininity one must understand queer femininities. Queer femininity as a concept is something not necessarily inhabited by or attached to specific bodies (e.g. cisgender women) and identity markers (e.g. heterosexuality) but thought of differently (Hale & Ojeda, 2018). Queer femininities are commonly viewed as ironic and theatrical, therefore superficial or invisible (Hale & Ojeda, 2018). Thus, queer femininity is often described as "queer femme" rather than femininity. Schwartz (2020) defines 'femme' as a queer identity marked by a critical engagement with femininity that manifests in one's style and values. With this understanding, femme has developed to include multiple identities over a broad spectrum of sexual and gender differences (Blair & Hoskin, 2016). Blair and Hoskin (2016) define femme as "an identity that encapsulates femininity that is dislocated from, and not necessitating, a female

body/identity, as well as femininity that is embodied by those whose femininity is deemed culturally unsanctioned" (p. 101). Therefore, femme might include queer cisgender men, trans men, trans women and cisgender queer women (Blair & Hoskin, 2016). Lastly, the femme attachment to feminine aesthetics has complicated the relationship to LGBTQ+ communities and to the politics of queer identity (H. McCann & Killen, 2019).

Femininity, or a femme presentation, is not only looked down by heteronormative patriarchal societies, it is also devalued by mainstream or dominant aspects of the LGBTQ+ community. Many LGBTQ+ spaces are primarily aimed at white gay males. This means that the performance of queer femininity is located in already gender and racially specific spaces (Hale & Ojeda, 2018). Richardson (2009) suggests that femme presenting men are "a considerable source of anxiety for society and are punished for moving down the gender ladder and renouncing masculine privilege by doing femininity" (p. 529). In-group discrimination and prejudice are also demonstrated within gay male cultures against those perceived as feminine. Feminine gay men are considered undesirable and are on the receiving end of hostility and contempt from the gay community (Hoskin, 2020). Some queer scholars suggest that current discussions around modern gay male cultures seem to avoid links with femininity (Hale & Ojeda, 2018).

The devaluation of femininity is often conceptualized or position in contrast to masculinity. In a study conducted by Hoskin (2020) with a diverse LGBTQ+ sample, both gay men and lesbians consider masculinity to be more attractive and place more value on masculinity. Furthermore, this masculine privileging within LGBTQ+ communities is shown to contribute to feelings of inauthenticity among femme-identified persons, particularly lesbians and gay men (Hoskin, 2020). Within the LGBTQ+ community, gay men who conform to the heteronormative masculine image are called "straight-acting" (Eguchi, 2011). Straight-acting gay

masculinity parallels the cultural norm of strong, tough, and outdoors-type working-class men (Eguchi, 2011). Unsurprisingly, a common attitude among gay men is the idea of "no fems." The no fems attitudes among gay men is well documented by scholars and is displayed across many mediums like the contemporary hookup apps Grindr (Hale & Ojeda, 2018). This dual desire in popular gay male discourse to be masculine and to have masculine credentials has the effect of reproducing a widespread attack of femininity in other gay men, queer and trans women, whose femininity is called into question because their gender expression can be read as masculine (Hale & Ojeda, 2018). Thus, the discourse of straight-acting produces and reproduces anti-femininity and homophobia (Eguchi, 2011). Consequently, transwomen are the most vulnerable in their femme presentation. Queer femininities are manifested by lesbians, queer and transwomen, and feminine-expressing bodies are held accountable to standards of heteronormative femininity (Hale & Ojeda, 2018). The experiences of violence faced by gender-variant individuals on the trans feminine/ female spectrum is perpetuated by the assumption that femaleness and femininity are inferior to, and exist primarily for the benefit of maleness and masculinity (Hale & Ojeda, 2018).

Existing scholarship on queer femme identity has moved the field towards identifying the impact of femme presentation. An emergent branch of critical femininities scholarship explores femme individuals experiences of oppression on the basis of femininity. This scholarship developed the concept of femmephobia. Femmephobia, "refers to the systemic devaluation of femininity as well as the regulation of patriarchal femininity" (Hoskin, 2019, p. 687). Beyond the intersection of homophobia and misogyny, femmephobia is a type of gender policing that targets feminine transgressions against patriarchal norms of femininity (across genders, sexual orientations, and sex) in addition to the general cultural and systemic devaluation of all things

feminine (Hoskin, 2020). Femmephobia informs oppressive understandings of queer femmes as inauthentic and invisible. Such assumptions marginalize femmes in both queer and mainstream spaces (Taylor, 2020). Consequently, femme is often perceived as an undesirable and politically invalid or inferior identity within queer communities (Taylor, 2020). Femmephobia targets people, objects, emotions, and qualities perceived as embodying or expressing femininity, with the effect of devaluing femininity and policing deviations from normative feminine ideals (Hoskin, 2019). Research on femme-identified queer women and gender nonconforming individuals finds that femmephobia is a salient aspect of their experiences in queer communities (Blair & Hoskin, 2015, 2016; Taylor, 2020). Femmephobia is a regulatory power within LGBTQ+ communities and society at large (Hoskin, 2019). Violence against women, men, transgender people, and racial minorities is often exacerbated when elements of femmephobia are present (Hoskin, 2020).

Multiple Identities and Mental Health/Health

Research emphasizes that holding multiple minoritized identities may lead to negative outcomes. Stigmatization may influence identity development for multiple minoritized individuals, especially if they experience discrimination within their own social networks. For example, heterosexism within racial/ethnic minority communities may account for some of the differences in timing and process of coming out between White LGBTQ+ people and queer people of color (Pérez, 2014). Minority stress theory states that because sexual and racial minorities are regularly exposed to prejudice and stigma, they are at greater risk for mental and physical health problems, through the increase of psychological distress (Ghabrial, 2017).

In addition to being a sexual or gender minority, having a minority racial/ethnic background may lead to risk of poor health outcomes, as the stress of being a minority in

multiple identity groups can accumulate. Queer people of color face additional social stigma because of racism within the LGBTQ+ community and homophobia within their racial/ethnic communities (Whitfield et al., 2014). These additional stresses are associated with increased depressive symptoms in queer people of color compared to White LGBTQ+ individuals (Whitfield et al., 2014). Queer people of color are challenged by social and psychological issues unlike those that affect White LGBTQ+ or heterosexual racial/ethnic minority individuals (Ghabrial, 2017). Lastly, in addition to everyday racism and heterosexism, this population experiences racism within LGBTQ+ communities and relationships, heterosexism within their ethnic community, and varying forms of oppression that interact in different contexts (Ghabrial, 2017). Thus, racial and ethnic minority individuals have reported experiencing different forms of discrimination in their LGBTQ+ communities (Balsam et al., 2011; Ghabrial, 2017; Nadal et al., 2011).

Within multiple minoritized queer communities, social sexual racism is a prevalent concern. Sexual racism is a specific form of racial prejudice enacted in the context of sex or romance and is an issue among gay and bisexual men (Callander et al., 2015). This is particularly a contentious and complicated issue among the queer community because of the perceived values of diversity and inclusivity often attributed to the queer community (Holt, 2011). Nevertheless, past research demonstrates that social sexual racism in white majority cultures is prevalent. This area of research has revealed hierarchies of attraction that influence the sexual—and non-sexual—lives of gay and bisexual men (Han, 2008). Recent research, however, has focused on the extent and effects of sexual stereotyping and "personal preference" discourse to highlight how sexual racism is reproduced (Robinson, 2015). Research notes that racism places White men at the top of the hierarchy of desirability (Stacey & Forbes, 2022). In their study with

a diverse sample of queer identified gay and bi men, Stacey & Forbes (2022) found participants described feeling objectified and reduced to a stereotype because of fetishization. The most common feeling arising from their participants when confronted with fetishization was feeling objectified (Stacey & Forbes, 2022) Participants also described that being racially fetishized made them feel like they were reduced to a stereotype. Therefore, Stacey & Forbes (2022) argues fetishization operates to produce feelings of a unidimensional identity and erasing their intersectional identities.

Research underlines health and mental health disparities among sexual minority groups are well documented. Minority stress may contribute to these inequities by generating adverse psychological responses to stress such as hypervigilance, concealment of identity, and internalization of homophobia, which in turn increase risk for mental health disorders (Noyola et al., 2020). Minority stress refers to sexuality-based stigma/prejudice and discrimination that sexual diverse individuals experience as a result of their stigmatized minority social position (Meyer, 2003; Noyola et al., 2020). Numerous studies have demonstrated heightened prevalence of depressive and anxiety disorders among lesbian, gay, bisexual, and trans groups compared to heterosexuals. Some authors posit that these disparities are the result of the stress that prejudice and perceived discrimination can cause (Bostwick et al., 2014). For example, a recent national study found that lesbian, gay and bisexual persons were one and a half to two times more likely than heterosexuals persons to report lifetime mood and anxiety disorders (Bostwick et al., 2014). Numerous scholars have pointed to the institutional and interpersonal discrimination that sexual minorities face as a potential explanation for such disparities (Bostwick et al., 2014; Meyer, 2003).

The LGBTQ+ community consistently reports elevated rates of mental health problems and challenges compared to their heterosexual and cisgender counterparts (Meyer, 2003; Noyola et al., 2020). LGBTQ+ people, in general, have a higher prevalence of suicidal thoughts, attempts, and completions; depression and anxiety, and substance use and abuse (Nadal, 2016). In addition, multiple research studies have revealed that LGBTQ+ people overall report more frequent exposure to traumatic life experiences that trigger symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other trauma-related disorders compared to heterosexual or cisgender people (Nadal, 2016). However, limited research has measured the health and well-being of queer people of color more specifically (Ghabrial, 2017). Furthermore, there is mounting evidence that living as a queer person of color within society leads to complicated ways of socializing with the world. What is unclear, however, is the extent to which the membership in multiple minoritized groups leads to worse physical or mental health outcomes (Cyrus, 2017).

Experiences of homophobia and transphobia have an adverse effect in health for LGBTQ+ individuals (Whitfield et al., 2014). LGBTQ+ individuals are at a higher risk for depression, anxiety, and suicide than their heterosexual counterparts and those who are targeted for harassment and discriminatory behavior show some of the highest rates of suicide and suicidal ideation (Whitfield et al., 2014). LGBTQ+ individuals are approximately twice as likely to report suicidal ideation and have higher rates of attempted suicide compared to their heterosexual and cisgender counterparts (Sutter & Perrin, 2016). Moreover, LGBTQ+ individuals have a higher prevalence of anxiety, mood, and substance use disorders than heterosexual individuals (Sutter & Perrin, 2016). Likewise, racial/ethnic discrimination toward people of color is another pervasive psychosocial stressor (Sutter & Perrin, 2016). Taken together, the research suggests that queer people of color may be at particular risk for mental

health issues and suicidality rooted in the stress of multiple minority statuses (Sutter & Perrin, 2016).

The intersectional identities of sexual/gender minority and minority race/ethnicity are linked to greater susceptibility to psychological consequences of discrimination (Sutter & Perrin, 2016). Furthermore, LGBTQ+ mental health disparities and risks are associated with minority stressors such as depression, posttraumatic stress disorder, suicidal ideation, and substance abuse (Kevin L. Nadal, 2016). Recent research has found that psychiatric symptoms were associated with both racist and heterosexist stressors for African American and Latino bisexual and gay men (Balsam et al., 2011). Bostwick et al. (2014) examined the relationship between multiple types of discrimination and mental health disorders in a large national probability sample of lesbian, gay and bisexual respondents. Experiences of discrimination were common, with nearly two-thirds of the sample reporting at least one experience of sexual orientation, racial/ethnic or gender discrimination in the past year (Bostwick et al., 2014).

Perceived racism has been shown to be predictive of a number of medical conditions such as smoking and alcohol dependency (Ghabrial, 2017). Discrimination against sexual minorities is also linked to poor mental and physical health (Ghabrial, 2017). Studies have shown an increased likelihood among these groups to experience heart disease, liver disease, migraines, asthma, disability, posttraumatic stress disorder, depression, suicidality, lifetime mood and anxiety disorders, and alcohol and drug dependence, when compared to their heterosexual counterparts (Ghabrial, 2017). However, the academic literature does not consistently support a higher prevalence of negative mental health outcomes for multiple minoritized individuals. Scholars have used the Minority Stress Model to hypothesize that intersectionality decreases risk of negative mental health outcomes because experiencing discrimination for one identity may help

build resilience against discrimination in another identity (Meyer, 2010a). Therefore, this contradiction of findings suggests that there are other factors at play, or more interestingly, the existence of a protective mechanisms from psychological stress as a member of multiple marginalized minority groups (Cyrus, 2017).

Meyer's model (2003) suggests that health disparities among minority groups are best understood as arising from multiple contextual factors. That is, mental health differences are not determined solely by individual factors, such as personality, but are socially patterned and determined by circumstances in the environment and the complex interplay between individual factors and the sociocultural context within which individuals reside. For those who occupy a marginalized minority status in the United States (e.g., non-White, non-male, non-heterosexual), this context too often includes institutional and interpersonal discrimination, prejudice and stigma (Bostwick et al., 2014).

Maintaining multiple minoritized identities can add burden. To contend with and avoid potential discrimination, some choose to conceal their sexual orientation and nonconforming gender identity, or manage and regulate how it is made visible to others in different contexts. Although stigma concealment may provide necessary comfort or safety, it can lead to fear of discovery, stress, and cognitive burden (Ghabrial, 2017). Concealing one's sexual orientation leads to low self-esteem and social isolation, which is linked to increased risk of mental health problems, substance use, suicide and self-harm, and other high-risk behaviors (Ghabrial, 2017; Meyer, 2003). Psychological research in the last few decades has acknowledged the need for careful examination of how multiple social identities intersect to produce social phenomena, rather than assuming identities have simple or additive effects on people's experiences (Eaton & Rios, 2017).

Trans Mental Health/Health

Trans people of color represent one of the most marginalized groups in society and this population is relatively invisible in research, and often neglected in healthcare and health policy (Ghabrial, 2017). Researchers have linked experiences of transphobia and combined discrimination to increased depression symptoms among trans people of color, and trans people also appear to be at increased risk of low self-esteem and suicidality (Ghabrial, 2017). The severity of these emotional and physiological responses to stress and trauma among minorities and the apparent compounding effects of different types of discrimination against the multiply marginalized further emphasizes the need for research that tends to the unique lived experience of individuals in this population (Ghabrial, 2017). Trans people are multiply oppressed and many are in a perpetual state of negotiation between conflicting identities and values, which leads to stress, mental health problems, substance abuse, suicide, and high-risk behaviors (Ghabrial, 2017; McCabe et al., 2013; Meyer, 2003). Studies emphasize that prejudice towards transwomen occurs because they are perceived to transgress societal gender norms. Prejudice is enacted in numerous forms of discrimination resulting in everything from discrimination in education, employment and health care to unpunished violence and murder of transwomen, especially transwomen of color. Discrimination and rejection due to gender nonconformity often starts at an early age and puts trans female youth at risk of isolation, school dropout and academic performance issues.

From a systems perspective, discrimination based on transgender identity leads to unequal access to education, employment, and other economic resources, which can then create economic insecurity impacting safe housing and income (Wilson et al., 2016). Furthermore, discrimination causes poor mental health outcomes among adult transgender people. The

estimated prevalence of suicide attempts in the transgender population range from 18 to 41 percent, which is 15–38 percentage points higher than the overall U.S. population (Wilson et al., 2016). Compared with cisgender females, transwomen have reported lower overall mental health and quality of life (Wilson et al., 2016). Stress related to transgender-based discrimination may similarly affect mental health outcomes in this population (Wilson et al., 2016). Racial discrimination on top of gender-based stigma may exert a profound effect on mental health (Wilson et al., 2016). While trans research is growing, additional research is paramount to best understand the needs and concerns multiple minoritized trans individuals face.

Queer Latinx Mental Health/Health

Limited research is available focusing specifically on the queer Latinx experience. However, in their qualitative study with a sexually diverse Latinx sample, Noyola et al. (2020) found three major themes in participants' personal experiences of multiple minority stress. The first theme was ambivalence from families. This theme captures contradictory attitudes and behaviors toward participants' sexual identities by their families, as well as the dedication and commitment to family ties expressed by participants (Noyola et al., 2020). The second theme was traditional Latinx gender role expectations. Over half of the participants discussed the influence of traditional Latinx gender role expectations, particularly as they experienced them within their families of origin. Participants spoke about expectations for men to be dominant and to provide for their families, as well as expectations for women to be virginal, deferential, and devoted to child rearing, suggesting that machismo and marianismo play important roles in shaping familial and community contexts in which they experienced minority stress (Noyola et al., 2020). Lastly, marginalization from the LGBTQ+ community was the final theme. Several participants described feeling marginalized in the LGBTQ+ community (Noyola et al., 2020).

There is an importance of strong interdependent family relationships in Latinx culture, known as *familismo,* which may have some bearing on how queer Latinx men experience their life (Eaton & Rios, 2017).

Less is known about how racism, heterosexism, and sexism work together to shape minority stress among queer Latinx (Noyola et al., 2020). Many researchers contend that there is much more to investigate and even more that is unknown about the everyday lives of queer Latinx people in particular and about queer people of color more broadly (Balsam et al., 2011).

Key Gaps

Research on queer femme Latinx men, trans, and gender variant individuals is limited. Identity is often viewed from a theoretically linear perspective ignoring identity creation or self-authorship. Limited research has explored self-authorship in the context of how individuals make meaning of their socially constructed identities, such as race and sexuality (Abes et al., 2007). Furthermore, no published research has explored a relationship between self-authorship and intersectionality of social identities. Second, queer Latinx identity is often erased and there is a lack of literature that examines the extent and complexity of the queer Latinx experience. Little had been written about the history of queer people within the Chicano movement, or about Latinx in the gay rights movement. Exploring Jotería moves the understanding of identity toward the participant and allows for a nuanced understanding from a personal perspective.

There are two primary reasons to continue research with femme presentation and a femme identity. The first is a narrow view and conceptualization of femme. The majority of research on femme identity has examined femme identity specifically as it relates to butch and/or androgynous identities (Blair & Hoskin, 2015). Blair & Hoskin's (2016) study of femme identities that exist beyond the realm of cisgender lesbian women indicates there is a great deal

of diversity among individuals self-identifying as femme in their sample. This indicates that future research may need to be more inclusive when conducting research on femme experiences to allows participants to self-select and self-identify. The second is the attachment to femininity. While the issue of femme invisibility has been widely discussed before, femmes continue with feminine gender presentation in spite of the unpleasant feelings of exclusion perpetuated by their aesthetics is a testament to the strength of their attachment to femininity experienced, which warrants greater attention (H. McCann & Killen, 2019). Furthermore, the attachment to feminine presentation by femmes, regardless of experiences of exclusion, offers a critical point of interest and signals that for many femmes, there is clearly more than visibility at stake (H. McCann & Killen, 2019). Lastly, little research to date has examined the treatment of queer femininities and femme identities within the larger LGBTQ community (Blair & Hoskin, 2016).

Holding multiple minoritized identities may lead to risk of poor health outcomes, as the stress of being a minority in multiple identity groups could accumulate. Queer people of color face additional social stigma because of racism within the LGBTQ+ community and homophobia within their racial communities (Whitfield et al., 2014). However, little is known about how racism, heterosexism, and sexism work together to shape minority stress among queer Latinx individuals (Noyola et al., 2020). Many researchers contend that there is much more to investigate and even more that is unknown about the everyday lives of queer Latinx people in particular and about queer people of color more broadly (Balsam et al., 2011).

Finally, trans people of color represent one of the most marginalized groups in society and this population is relatively invisible in research and neglected in healthcare and policy (Ghabrial, 2017). Racialized sexual and gender minority individuals are among the most under-researched and underserved populations in health and psychology. They are multiply oppressed

and many are in a perpetual state of negotiation between conflicting identities and values, which may lead to stress, mental health problems, substance abuse, suicide, and high-risk behaviors (Ghabrial, 2017; McCabe et al., 2013; Meyer, 2003). Further research is necessary to address the unique challenges faced by the trans population.

CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is guided by an intersectional framework. Cho, Crenshaw and McCall (2013) define intersectionality as "a way of thinking about and conducting analyses… [W]hat makes an analysis intersectional… is its adoption of an intersectional way of thinking about the problem of sameness and difference and its relation to power" (p. 795). Therefore, they define intersectionality as a meta-theory; they emphasize that the purpose of intersectionality is not to serve as a "grand theory" or standardized methodology. Rather, intersectionality is a "gathering place for open-ended investigations of the overlapping and conflicting dynamics of race, gender, class, sexuality, nation, and other inequalities" (Cho et al., 2013, p. 788).

At the heart of an intersectional analysis is an acknowledgment of power and its ability to shape identity in both place and time; in this way, intersectionality is less about individual identity and more about power. Effective intersectionality studies, according to Cho et al. (2013), "reveal how power works in diffuse and differentiated ways through the creation and deployment of overlapping identity categories" (p. 797). Thus, intersectionality uses identity as a lens through which to understand how structures of power (e.g., policy, discrimination, interpersonal relationships) operate to our collective and individual disadvantage.

Intersectionality assumes that discrimination is the product of the social dynamics of power and that there is a value in identifying both (1) how these dynamics manifest differently for different social identity categories; and (2) what similarities exist between how power shapes these seemingly disparate identities. Researchers using an intersectionality lens have attempted to explore how forms of discrimination manifest differently for different combinations of historically-disempowered identity groups (Cho et al., 2013; Frost, 2017). While an

intersectional framework has provided an influential critique of existing research on race, gender, and sexuality-based discrimination, its most commonly cited weakness is its lack of empirically testable principles. There is a perception that intersectionality raises more questions than it answers (Frost, 2017). Nonetheless, several empirical studies have highlighted how groups facing multiple forms of discrimination are more at-risk of negative mental health outcomes than those who face just a singular form of discrimination (Grzanka & Miles, 2016; Wynn, 2010).

Frost (2017) notes that intersectionality is sometimes incompatible with models that operate within a disparities framework. Disparity frameworks, often found in the public health literature, tend to quantify group differences in order to assess the interactions between multiple identity categories. However, intersectional analysis would contend that this is a "fallacy of analytic isolation" since the analysis attempts to isolate a given identity status and health outcome from other identity statuses that are, in reality, inseparable in a person's lived experience (Frost, 2017, p. 468). Meyer's (2003) Minority Stress Model serves as a guiding framework for many contemporary studies analyzing dual or triple minority stress (i.e., stress caused by multiple forms of discrimination). The model posits that belonging to a minority group and structural discrimination make an individual more susceptible or sensitive to experiencing stressors related to feeling abnormal or undesired. These experiences can be felt personally or vicariously, especially if an individual internally identifies with a minority group but "passes" as a member of a majority group (Frost, 2017). This exposure to "minority stressors" then impacts cognitive processes (e.g., self-esteem, paranoia, self-efficacy) that then leads to symptoms of psychological distress (e.g., depression, anxiety, or hypervigilance). This psychological distress can then, in turn, lead to negative behavioral health outcomes (e.g., substance abuse, suicide attempts, or social isolation) (Frost, 2017; Meyer, 2010b).

The logical paradox of Minority Stress Model studies (Baams et al., 2015; Balsam et al., 2011; Hayes et al., 2011; Mereish et al., 2017; Muñoz-Laboy et al., 2017) is that while minority stressors are considered *unique* to the population of study (i.e. Latinx discrimination is different from other forms of racial/ethnic discrimination), experiences of discrimination are often measured using a combination of assessments that were developed to measure each aspect of identity in isolation, typically in populations that experienced only one main type of identity-based discrimination. In other words, these studies conceptualize multiple minority status as a "double jeopardy" or "additive burden," wherein race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and gender combine to influence mental health (Frost, 2017). Additionally, these studies isolate identity categories without interrogating the structures of power that might actually commonly shape these identities. Intersectionality examines subjective experiences of these stressors and their relationship to larger structures. From an intersectional perspective, the objective frequency of minority stressors in a person's life is less important than how minority stressors are perceived, internalized, and responded to.

Intersectional theory contends that people often experience multiple sources of systematic oppression and discrimination based upon: their race, class, sexual orientation, and other identity markers (Cho et al., 2013; Veenstra, 2011). Intersectionality is concerned with the interconnections and interdependencies between social categories and systems (Atewologun, 2018). These systems are often deployed through stigma. Consequently, stigma is defined as the co-occurrence of labeling, stereotyping, separation, status loss, and discrimination in a context in which power is exercised (Hatzenbuehler & Link, 2014). Structural stigma is defined as "societal-level conditions, cultural norms, and institutional policies that constrain the opportunities, resources, and well-being of the stigmatized" (Hatzenbuehler & Link, 2014, p. 2).

Link and Phelan (2014) introduced the concept of "stigma power" to identify macro-level structural factors that exploit, control, or exclude stigmatized individuals. In doing so, they highlight the structural conditions that produce stigma power and oppressive environments. Link and Phelan (2014) developed a typology of three functions of stigma and prejudice: exploitation and domination (keeping people down); norm enforcement (keeping people in); and disease avoidance (keeping people away). They theorize that stigma power refers to instances in which stigma processes achieve the aims of those who stigmatize others with respect to exploitation, control, or exclusion.

Intersectionality, the minority stress model, and stigma theory individually offer a narrow view of queer femme Latinx individuals. However, combining these theoretical approaches to further inform and deepen the understanding this unique community faces is promising. The understanding that queer femme Latinx individuals are complex and hold multiple realties simultaneously through an intersectional understanding, experience additive minority stressors, and operate within a culture that tends to stigmatize their identities is key. The connecting factor between these distinct theoretical approaches is the understanding and importance of how power is deployed and used in various ways. The combined theoretical framework, ultimately, allows for a deeper understanding of the meaning's queer femme Latinx individuals assign to their lived experiences of holding multiple minoritized identities along with the implication culture, family, community, and social climate has on their lived experiences. Lastly, the theoretical framework that I propose in this study will illuminate how queer femme Latinx individuals navigate their unique experiences of traversing the complex and changing contexts surrounding various axes of their own identities.

CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research broadly aims to uncover human experiences from subjective, lived perspectives (Bailey & Tilley, 2002). Furthermore, qualitative research operates on the premise that reality as meaning is not only subjective in nature, but that individuals construct multiple "realities" as they interact with and traverse various contexts and social environments (Bailey & Tilley, 2002). Using these foundational assumptions, this dissertation seeks to understand how queer femme Latinx men, trans, and gender variant individuals ages 18 to 30 subjectively describe their personal lived experiences as multiple minoritized individuals.

Qualitative Approach: Phenomenology

Qualitative research provides a richness and detail about the contents of people's thoughts and behaviors (Wortmann & Park, 2009). Currently, the majority of research and conceptualization on the lived experiences and realities of queer femme Latinx individuals are rooted in "single-axis" identity studies (e.g., studies that focus on only one identity category) rather than multiple identities or multiple contexts that surround identity. As a result, the experiences of intersectional minority groups—such as queer femme Latinx individuals—are not fully developed. The result is that existing research does not reflect the richness and complexity with which queer femme Latinx individuals navigate their intersectional identities in various social contexts. Therefore, qualitative methods provide a means through which these experiences can be included in the conversation, while ensuring rigor in the methods used to interpret, analyze and communicate these experiences and to acknowledge and minimize researcher biases (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

A phenomenological design guided this study. Phenomenological methodology generally aims to capture the universal essence of a phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 75). Phenomenology is an intellectual engagement in interpretations and meaning making that is used to understand the lived world of human beings at a conscious level (Qutoshi, 2018). The methodology is discovery oriented rather than verification oriented. Therefore, I did not propose a hypothesis to be supported by evidence, but rather described the structure of the phenomenon so that it can be understood in a deeper, holistic and more comprehensive way (Broome, 2011). Finally, I selected a phenomenology to give greater voice to the population of study. As an approach that is participant oriented, phenomenology allows the research participants to express themselves and their lived experience the way they see fit without any distortion and/or prosecution (Alase, 2017).

Research Questions

Informed by a pilot study conducted between November 2020 and February 2021 with a diverse sample of self-identified queer Latinx individuals residing in California, this dissertation seeks to understand how queer femme Latinx men, trans, and gender variant individuals ages 18 to 30 subjectively describe the meaning they hold and how they understand their lived experiences while living with multiple minorized identities within complex and often oppressive systems. Specifically, three main research questions guide this study.

(1) What meanings do queer femme Latinx men, trans, and gender variant persons ages 18 to 30 assign to their lived experiences of holding multiple minoritized identities?

(2) How do culture, family, community, and social climate inform, support, or frame their lived experience?

(3) How do queer femme Latinx men, trans, and gender variant persons navigate their complex and changing contexts?

Statement of Reflexivity: Bracketing

Bracketing, or acknowledging the researcher's experiences with the phenomenon of interest is a key component of qualitative research and is often used with phenomenological methodologies (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As a tradition that encourages researchers to bracket themselves away from the lived experiences of the research participants, Creswell & Poth (2018) advised researchers to "first describe [their own] personal experience with the phenomenon under study…[beginning] with a full description of his or her own experience of the phenomenon" (p. 193). In this way, the researcher should avoid interjecting their personal experiences into the research participants lived experience (Alase, 2017).

The goal of bracketing is to discuss my own experiences with the phenomenon of study. Smith et al. (2009) argued "the approach to data collection is committed to a degree of open-mindedness, so you will have to try to suspend (or bracket off) your preconceptions when it comes to designing and conducting interviews or other data collection events" (p. 42). Finally, the reason for bracketing one's individual understanding during interviews is to enable participants to express their concerns and make their claims in their own terms (Alase, 2017).

Personal Bracketing

I identify as 33-year-old queer Latinx and neither masculine or feminine. However, I am often read or coded as feminine given my demeanor, presentation, mannerism, and fashion choices. I have thus experienced living and making meaning of multiple minoritized identities in varying contexts. I publicly disclosed my sexual identity at the age of 23 while in a committed queer relationship. I chose to disclose later in life out of fear of rejection, persecution, and the

fear of distress. My Latinx parents did their best to support and understand me but ultimately relied on traditional cultural norms to inform their reactions. My mothers' first reaction to my queer identity was focused on presentation rather than actual identity. She made it a point to ask if I desired to be a woman or wear women's clothing and emphasize that my queer identity was okay as long as I did not "become" a woman. The understanding around my identity was to limit the visibility and essentially develop a separate life.

Within my ethic identity, I specifically identify as Mexican and grew up in a majority Mexican neighborhood located in Southern California. Growing up, I was exposed to the biases within the Mexican community regarding queerness and queer Latinx expressions. During my undergraduate (in Northern California) and graduate studies (in the Northeastern U.S.) I was exposed to various expressions of queerness and expressions of Latinx cultures and communities of different nationalities and consciously worked to undo these biases.

I personally have never experienced a violent act of overt discrimination related to my ethnicity or queerness. However, holding multiple minoritized identities I have experienced overwhelming stress and increased anxiety. I have previously written about my personal experiences with imposter syndrome, a psychological phenomenon in which objectively qualified minorities feel as if they are imposters when working in institutions where minorities have traditionally been excluded (Garcia-Perez, 2016). In this piece, I reflected on the fear of writing I had developed throughout my years as a student. In particular, I recounted an incident at Columbia University with a gay White male professor who had told me that my writing was not "up to par" for the program and that I had "slipped through the educational cracks." Reflecting on the incident and the avoidance of writing I developed as a result, I can now interpret my behavior as connected to my experience as a multiple minoritized individual.

My personal experiences and identities allow me to approach the research with a level of care and understanding that may be missed by other researchers. Having a connection and related identities with the participants could allow participants to feel comfortable and may allow participants to go deeper with the understanding that some cultural context may be understood. Ultimately, the burden is on me to understand my own identity in relation to the participants and identify my own limitations, bias, and projections.

Data Collection

A qualitative research interview is often described as "a conversation with a purpose" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 57). This purpose is informed by a research question or questions (Alase, 2017). Therefore, interviews are meant to open up and develop a relationship with the participants so that their lived experiences can be explored and analyzed. For this dissertation, a one-time interview that was semi-structured with open-ended questions focused on stories to gather more detail was used. This is because qualitative research emphasizes, "we know or discover ourselves, and reveal ourselves to others, by the stories we tell" (Lieblich et al., 1998, p. 7). The underlying premise of qualitative inquiry—and research interviews—is the belief that individuals make sense of their world most effectively by telling stories (Bailey & Tilley, 2002). Each interview lasted approximately one to two-hours. Interviews were conducted via Zoom to account for participant burden and comfort given the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The interviews were digitally voice recorded for transcription and analysis. The interview protocol can be found in Appendix B.

Sample

The sampling approach was purposive and sought to include divers trans and queer representation. The sample inclusion criteria incorporated participants who reside in the state of

California, were 18 to 30, self-identify as queer femme men, trans, or gender variant and as Latinx or a variation of the Latinx identity (i.e. Latina/o, Chicana/o, Hispanic). Smith et al. (2009) stated that in phenomenological studies "samples are selected purposively (rather than through probability methods) because they can offer a research project insight into a particular experience" (p. 48). Recruitment was conducted between May 2022 to October 2022 via targeted emails to California State Universities, Universities of California, and California Community College campus LGBTQ+ student resource centers, Latinx student resource centers, Chicana/o academic departments, and LGBTQ+ academic departments. Additionally, recruitment flyers were posted to various social media accounts and shared widely by community members. Word-of-mouth and targeted recruitment were also used, specifically, at the Los Angeles Pride event in June 2022. The final study sample included 10 participants. Table 1 includes participant pseudonyms and demographic information.

Table 1: Participant Pseudonyms and Demographics

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Sexual Orientation	Race/Ethnicity	Geographic location in California
Osvaldo	28	Cisgender Male Femme Identified/Presenting	Queer, Gay, Pansexual	Chicana/o	Southern
Guillermo	27	Cisgender Male Femme Identified/Presenting	Queer, Gay	Mexican American	Southern
Cesar	27	Cisgender Male Femme Identified/Presenting	Queer, Gay	Latinx	Southern
Kristian	30	Cisgender Male Femme Identified/Presenting	Queer	Latinx	Southern
Hiro	18	Non-binary, femme presenting	Queer	Chicana/o	Northern

Leon	18	Transgender Man (FTM) Femme Identifies/Presenting	Queer, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, Non-binary	Latine	Southern
Brisa	18	Non-binary, femme presenting Transgender Man	Queer	Latina/o	Northern
Salvador	21	(FTM) Femme Identifies/Presenting	Transgender	Chicana/o	Northern
Maya	19	AFAB, Agender, and attached to Femme presentation	Queer	Latine	Southern
Xavier	26	Cisgender Male Femme Identified/Presenting	Transgender, Transfem, nonbinary	Latinx	Central

Analysis

The data analysis plan is derived from Creswell & Poth (2018). Creswell & Poth (2018) put forth a five-step process to analyzing phenomenological data. The steps are: (1) personal bracketing; (2) significant statements; (3) textual description; (4) structural description; and (5) composite description.

Preliminary work

Interview audio files were transcribed and entered into ATLAS.ti, a qualitative software program that enables the efficient storing, retrieving, analyzing, and sharing of data. Prior to engaging with the analysis, it is important to adopt the phenomenological attitude. The phenomenological attitude brackets the researcher's "everyday" knowledge to encourage a fresh look at the data (Broome, 2011). In other words, the researcher acknowledges their assumptions,

theoretical positioning, cultural background, and personal experiences. Furthermore, the concept of bracketing allows the researcher to be present with the data without speculating its validity or existence. Thus, simply being present means that the researcher allows themselves to "see" the data as it appears in its own context without doubt or belief (Broome, 2011). In addition to bracketing prior to data analysis, Broome (2011) suggest the researcher read the entire "naive description" in its entirety to "get a sense of the whole experience" and approach the data and subsequent analysis from the participants experience and voice. As such, the entire data set was read without coding or analysis.

Personal Bracketing

Bracketing and reflecting on personal positionality and the existence of prior knowledge allows the researcher to see and better identify the data from the participant's first person perspective (Broome, 2011). According to Creswell & Poth (2018), the researcher begins with a full description of their own experience with the phenomenon under study. This technique is an attempt to set aside the researcher's personal experiences so that the focus can be directed to the participants in the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Therefore, I first reflected on my own experiences with the phenomena under study (located in Statement of Reflexivity: Bracketing). This process allowed me to put my personal experiences aside so that I may freshly consider the participants' experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Significant Statements, Textural Description, and Structural Description

The data were manually open-coded and initial data-driven coding was conducted. Descriptive codes, codes that summarize the primary topic of the excerpt, and In Vivo codes, codes taken directly from what the participant states and place it in quotation marks, were used (Saldaña, 2016). From this step, coded data were extracted into codebook matrices, which

allowed for identification of themes and comparison across study participants. The data were re-coded with the codebook in mind to assure accuracy of the initial codebook and to safeguard data fidelity.

This process produced a list of initial significant statements. Participants' meaning of their experiences were thereafter formulated from these significant statements and reduced into meaningful segments. These segments were assigned names by combining codes into broader categories that were common across all the participants' narratives. After a list of exhaustive, non-repetitive significant statements were compiled and each statement was understood to having equal worth, the initial significant statements were moved into themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Brief memos were written for each theme to synthesize the commonality and nuances of statements within each theme. The larger identified themes were used to produce a description of "what" the participants in the study experienced with the phenomenon. This is called a "textural description" of the experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Themes were then used to write a description of the context or setting—structural description—that influenced how the participants experienced the phenomenon (Creswell et al., 2007). Finally, themes were reviewed and further grouped into categorical families leading to subthemes. Subthemes were then grouped under larger themes to condense the essence of participants' experiences (Table 2).

Composite Description

From the structural and textural descriptions, a composite description was written that presented the "essence" of the phenomenon. This passage is the "essence" of the experience and represents the culminating aspect of a phenomenological study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). It is typically a long paragraph that tells the reader "what" the participants experienced with the phenomenon and "how" they experienced it (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The analysis uncovered

four major themes: (1) there is no particular way of existing; (2) safety isn't guaranteed; (3) the different personas you create; and (4) reminding myself I'm worth it.

Strategies for Rigor

To enhance methodological and study rigor and to ensure data fidelity and analytic precision I utilized bracketing. Bracketing provides transparency through the disclosure of biases that may have shaped the researcher's interpretation and approach to the particular topic. Ensuring constant and adequate bracketing will allow readers to validate the interpretation of selected quotes through a more objective stance (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Alase (2017) argues self-reflection should be more than just a one-time exercise that researchers casually report in a manuscript, but should be approached as more of a step-by-step detailed and descriptive journey happening consistently. Furthermore, the bracketing should offer an insight into what the research and analysis process was and how the researcher arrived to the results (Alase, 2017). To achieve bracketing I produced memos prior to each interaction with either participants, data, analysis, or writing. Creating a memo prior to each interaction ensured I remained aware of my intentions and my own thoughts and feelings at any given point. Moreover, to enhance my own ability for bracketing, I included a code for personal bracketing so I may document thoughts about my personal experiences as they arise during the coding and analytic process (Creswell et al., 2007).

CHAPTER 5

RESULTS

Guided by phenomenology, this study sought to understand the complex fabric of queer femme Latinx identities and how members of the queer femme Latinx community navigate these complex and shifting identities. The analysis uncovered four major themes: (1) there is no particular way of existing; (2) safety isn't guaranteed; (3) the different personas you create; and (4) reminding myself I'm worth it. Table 2 illustrates the major themes and associated subthemes. In this chapter, I will present a composite description of the results followed by a detailed account of each major theme and subtheme.

Table 2. Results

Themes	Subthemes
"There is no particular way of existing"	"There's endless possibilities"
	"It's kind of like a super power"
	"Connectedness…even if I don't fit in"
"Safety isn't guaranteed"	"The narrative is god awful"
	"Same trauma just different font"
"The different personas you create"	"Coming out but it not going in"
	"Imitation of heterosexuality"
"Reminding myself I'm worth it"	"If you can't love yourself how in the hell are you going to love somebody else"
	"Yes, I'm finally free"
	"Being around people I feel validated and seen by"

The first research question asked, *what meanings do queer femme Latinx men, trans, and gender variant persons ages 18 to 30 assign to their lived experiences of holding multiple minoritized identities?* This question is primarily answered throughout the theme "there is no particular way of existing." Second, the study asked *how do culture, family, community, and social climate inform, support, or frame their lived experiences?* This question is addressed with the themes "safety isn't guaranteed" and "the different personas you create." Finally, the fourth theme, "reminding myself I'm worth it," answered research question three, how *do queer femme Latinx men, trans, and gender variant persons navigate their complex and changing contexts?* The essence of the phenomenon experienced by queer femme Latinx individuals is understood through the identified themes and is explained in the composite description.

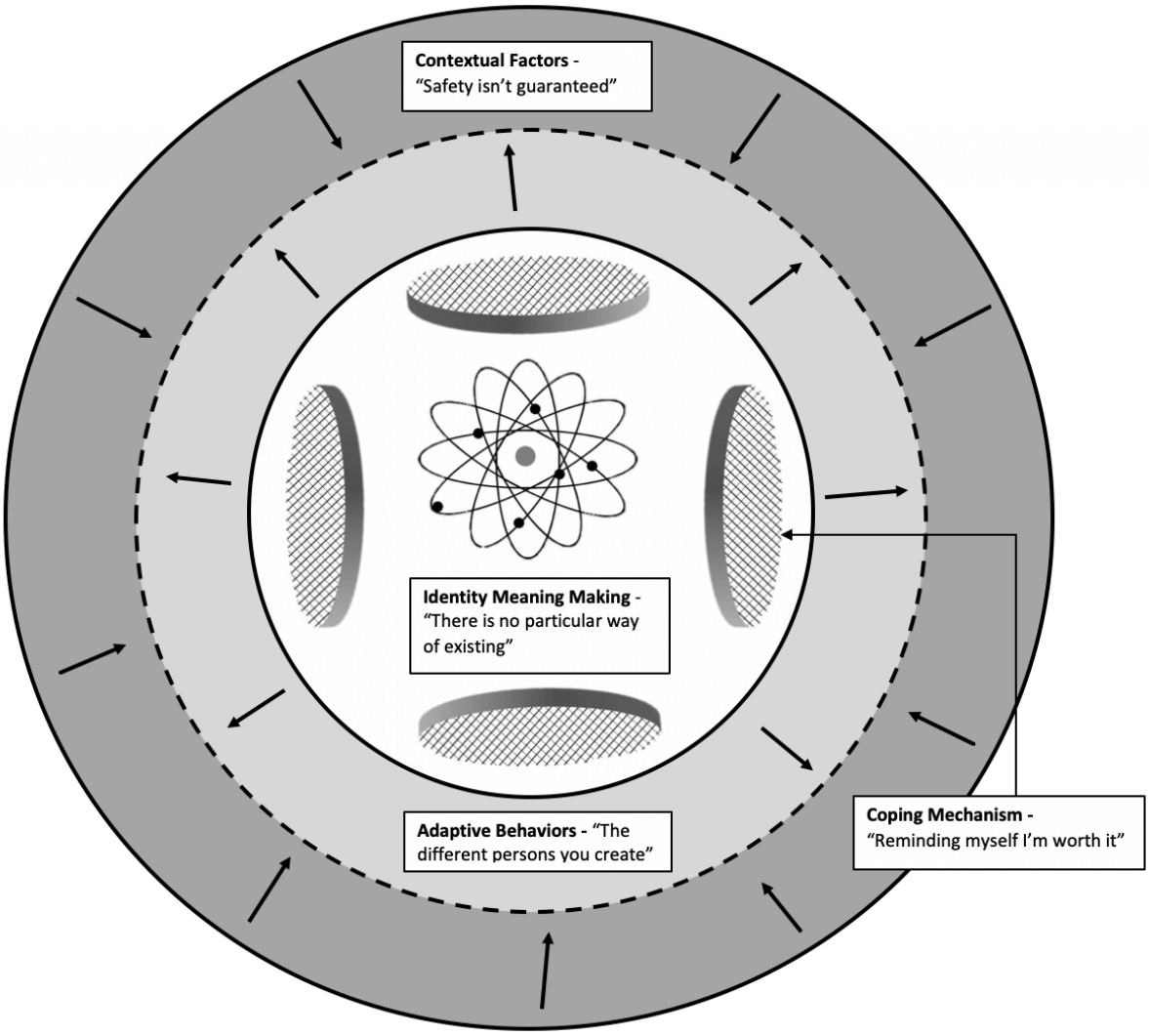
Composite Description

As my analysis will show throughout this chapter, queer femme Latinx men, trans, and gender variant individuals live in a complex fabric of intersecting structures of oppression including, but not limited to, racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, poverty, citizenship status, internalized homophobia, internalized racism and linguistic hierarchy. While juggling and sensing these complex realities, queer femme Latinx individuals are able to experience and make meaning of their multifaceted identities. This experience is the core of the phenomenon. Figure 1 illustrates the essence of the phenomenon and the composite description of the results.

At the center of the model is the identity meaning making that queer femme Latinx individuals in this study experience. They experience a complex understanding of identity that is non-linier and non-fixed, as captured in the first theme, "there is no particular way of existing." Queer femme Latinx individuals make meaning of their identity by encompassing a limitless space and understanding that their identity is fluid and constantly in flux. Therefore, participants

perceive their intersectional identity is adaptable and evolving in both place and time and is not fixed.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework



The outer ring delineates the impact of contextual factors that include culture, family, community, and social climate. In accordance with intersectionality's undertraining of the role power plays in shaping identity along with structural stigma queer femme Latinx individuals experience their contextual factors with the acute awareness that, as illustrated by the second theme, "safety isn't guaranteed." The model highlights these contextual factors negatively

impact queer femme Latinx individuals signified by arrows points inwards toward individual queer femme Latinx. However, the model underlines how queer femme Latinx individuals examine their discrete subjective experiences and use adaptive behaviors in opposition to contextual factors. In order to withstand the negative impact of the contextual factors, illustrated by the inner ring, the model emphasizes adaptive behaviors shown by the third theme "the different personas you create." This relationship is shown through arrows pointing outward towards contextual factors. Particularly, queer femme Latinx individuals utilized adaptive behaviors, like imitating heterosexuality, to counter contextual factors and establish physical and emotional safety.

Last, the model highlights queer femme Latinx individuals coping mechanism(s) as illustrated by filters in the center of the model. Despite contextual factors and the associated adaptive behaviors, queer femme Latinx individuals perceive and internalize their own self-worth and selflove emphasized by the fourth theme "reminding myself I'm worth it." Moreover, queer femme Latinx individuals are able to filter and make meaning of their experiences to remind themselves of their worth. Queer femme Latinx individuals are able to find meaning in their identity by practicing selflove, gaining knowledge through various resources, and identifying and finding support from family and community.

Theme 1 – "There is no particular way of existing"

Queer femme Latinx individuals make meaning of their identity and existence through creativity, fluidity, and pushing boundaries. For example, Salvador, a 21-year-old FTM (Female to Male) Trans Femme Identified Chicano, reported they "live by [their] own rules [and] tend not to engage in sort of discourse that limits [them]." Salvador specified they choose to engage in their identity without boundaries. Similarly, Osvaldo, a 28-year-old Cisgender Male Femme

Identified Chicano, described that identity can be multiple things at multiple times, stating "but at the same time, it's like you know you can be soft and hard and I think that's something I'm learning." In this case Osvaldo described they can be both soft and hard simultaneously regardless of presentation or identification and as they grow into their intersectional identity they are learning to embrace the fluid nature of their expression and own identity understanding.

Moreover, participants reported their queerness is primarily produced through creation, transgression of norms, and enforces the idea they have no boundaries or is limitless. The fluid nature is enhanced and personified by their femme identity. Queer femme Latinx individuals exhibit their femme identity by being unapologetically themselves and not following traditional, cisgender/heteronormative prescribed gender and sexuality roles. Participants described their Latinx identity in terms of connection to something bigger, ancestral lineage, and comfort. Ultimately, the queer femme Latinx participants in this study experience pride in who they are regardless of their individual experiences because they inhabit and embody fluidity. They choose to center their authenticity, create their boundaries, and highlight their humanity. As Leon, an 18-year-old FTM (Female to Male) Trans Femme Identified Latine explained, they transgress societal norms and reclaim them as their own. Leon recalled, "everything you tried to force me into its mine now and I'll make it a part of me…everything you complain about it's mine now." Queer femme Latinx participants in this study were able to encompass all of their identity regardless of perception and ultimately make it their own.

"There's endless possibilities"

Participants described the ability to create queerness without boundaries and to establish their identity as fluid with the key understanding that there are no limits. Osvaldo shared, "queerness is limitless there's endless possibilities." Furthermore, participants continued to echo

this sentiment by highlighting the multiplicity of queerness. Leon explained “queer is fluid, in the sense that it can occupy multiple things at multiple times and at the same time.” Here, Leon underlines the ability for queerness to occupy many things simultaneously. This aspect highlights a unique feature of the limitless nature within queerness ultimately understanding that queerness is transgression. Moreover, Osvaldo shared queerness is inherently linked to transgression and progress. Osvaldo shared, “paradigm that's all about progress and how can we transgress our bodies and how can we, you know find something else.” Unsurprisingly, participants identified their queerness is unique and adaptable. This was highlighted by Leon; “queer is unique to the individual…queer it's adaptable.” Leon emphasized queerness is unique and adaptable to both the individual but also to the larger community and thus underlines the fluid nature of queerness as well as the detachment from time and physical space. Thus, queerness can transgress context, time, and physical space to meet the needs of the individual. Last, participants reported queerness is shaped by creativity. Brisa, an 18-year-old Non-binary Transgender Man Femme Identified Latino, underscores the transgressing nature of queerness by highlighting community is often reacting to suppression and is able to transform suppression into creativity. Brisa shared, “when people are suppressed that's when they come up with the most beautiful things and so being different makes people more creative…queerness is creativity.” Overwhelmingly, participants reported the creative creation of queerness as a result of negative perceptions around their queer identity. Participants were able to utilize the stigma they received from others to create their own understandings of identity.

“It's kind of like a super power”

Participants described and introduced their femme identity as a form of power. Xavier, a 26-year-old Cisgender Male Femme Identified Latinx, described femme identity as a super

power: “it's kind of like a super power…it gives you this identity.” Xavier emphasized femme identity is a “super power” that allows you to embody internally and externally your true self. Participants specifically described femme identity as power because it allowed for true freedom of creativity and transgression. Participants were able to transgress both gender and sexuality norms to reach and present their authentic selves. Moreover, femme identity allowed for a freedom of expression and ultimately expression without boundaries. Cesar, a 27-year-old Cisgender Male Femme Identified Latinx, describes the ability to embody femme by deliberately countering gender norms and instead be your authentic self regardless of societal standards, thus, reach their power. Cesar shared, “just being yourself and kind of saying fuck you or just saying no to gender norms and saying no to society's norms and just really expressing what you want to do, who you want to be.” Beyond transgression, Salvador highlights that femme identity is “more of a way of existing versus simply just a way of appearing.” Therefore, the femme identity moves beyond simply a feminine presentation, but a true embodiment of a limitless, authentic, fierce attitude.

“Connectedness…even if I don’t fit in”

Queer femme Latinx individuals described their Latinx identity in terms of comfort, familiarity, and to some extent safety. Leon described their “Latinx identity is comfort its safety its home it's strength it's lineage it's pride.” Brisa continued to illuminate the connection to something bigger mentioning that “it gives me a connectedness.” Across the sample of diverse ages and identities, participants shared a similar sentiment that despite the heteronormative cultural aspects of the Latinx identity, they found a connection that went beyond the stereotypical understanding of Latinx culture and allowed them to ground themselves in their ancestral lineage. As Maya, a 19-year-old AFAB (Assigned Female at Birth) Agender Femme

Identified Latine, described, “it feels like something bigger that I can be a part of.” Therefore, in this sample, queer femme Latinx make meaning of their Latinx identity as a grounding force and something larger they are a part of regardless of their individual or personal attachment to the identity.

Theme 2 – “Safety isn’t guaranteed”

Queer femme Latinx individuals expressed their reality that physical safety is not always guaranteed and they often have to be hyper aware at all times. Guillermo, a 27-year-old Cisgender Male Femme Identified Latinx, emphasized you must always be aware of your surroundings and presentation deciding whether your presentation is too “evident.” Guillermo recalled, “at all times safety isn't granted, so you do have to kind of take things a little bit back you know or not be as evident I guess.” Participants echoed Guillermo’s sentiment that physical safety is not always a given as they are unable to express themselves freely in most settings. Participants emphasized the need to alter their appearance, behaviors, or presentation because of constant fear or panic. This, at times, produced residual trauma and feelings of being alone. They often had to learn what was acceptable behavior, presentation, or speech and what was not. The lack of physical safety extended beyond general policing of societal norms. Emotional and physical safety was not always guaranteed in the LGBTQ+ community. Participants recalled experiencing exclusion, judgment, racism, and being fetishized. Overwhelmingly, participants noted the reality of having to perform and alter that performance for a given space and context.

“The narrative is god awful”

Queer femme Latinx individuals have a clear understanding the narrative around their intersectional identities is not positive. Salvador highlights the reality that “current narratives about queer people are not good at all…I feel so afraid to go to almost anything queer related in

public.” Hiro, an 18-year-old Non-binary Femme Identified Chicana/o, believed “older people are going to go away and die with all the homophobia and transphobia but then they're passing on that message to the younger kids.” Hiro dispels the idea that generationally there would be a shift in terms of values and ideals noting that the negative perceptions are being instilled in younger generations. Furthermore, Hiro shares the rise of social media, although community building, has led to negative messaging being highlighted and amplified. Hiro shared, “you see a lot more hate there's always been homophobia transphobia what I feel like now with social media you just see what's going on, people recording horrific events or just crimes or just videos of incidences and stuff.” The harsh reality is, as Maya explained, despite substantial gains, their queer femme identities are still contested: “the fact that queer identities are even still a contested topic.” Subsequently, Leon noted that violence against queer femme Latinx individuals is often minimized or even overlooked. Leon shared, “I don't trust you guys outside…because oftentimes violence against us is overlooked.” More specifically, Salvador discusses how the trans community is particularly under attack:

> The narrative regarding trans people right now is so God awful because again I’m dictated by fear and the current perception of trans people is so negative like people think that trans people are like fucking pedophiles and groomers and so right now I’m very restrictive in terms of like who I decided to let in as friends.

Maya noted current legislation makes it harder to exist and exist authentically; “there's definitely a wave of like you know anti queer and trans and such legislation it's making it harder for people to exist.” Furthermore, Osvaldo describes the reality that “when queer people are targeted it's always the most obviously queer people who get targeted first which can often mean femme people, especially you know, like assigned male at birth fem people.” Osvaldo echoes the reality

that queer femme Latinx individuals, in particular, experience a level of distress cause by the current social and legislative context.

"Same trauma just different font"

Brisa shared that despite progress in acceptance of LGBTQ+ folks, it's the "same trauma just different font." Brisa emphasized the reality that despite social progress, much of the concerns around presentation and identity are still present. This concern of reexperiencing trauma manifested in both internal stressor as well as external concerns.

Internally, participants mentioned feeling unable to express themselves publicly and often referenced safety concerns. Osvaldo described the "weird feeling of not being safe anywhere." Osvaldo further elaborated the feeling of being unable to show PDA due to fear; "a really interesting wave for me to have to experience of having to not show PDA not hold his hand in public out of queer fear out of gay panic." Moreover, Guillermo lamented not being able to show affection to their partner. Guillermo shared, "I can't be like you know this lovey dovey like gay person like kissing my partner, because I'm afraid of like having a hose turned on me." Despite the progress made socially Osvaldo stressed there is still real fear around authentic presentation. Osvaldo recalled, "I can't even shake it oftentimes because, again, like the panic sets and you're like I don't want to die and if it means me like walking like this." The physical safety concern is also emphasized in how participants choose to present themselves. Hiro recalled often questioning their choices in outfit as a trauma response: "there's a lot of moments where that like trauma that's imprinted in me POPs out…should I wear that is that too short are people looking at me." Despite the current reality, Guillermo is aware that systemic change is necessary. Specifically, Guillermo shared, "unless something else or some kind of systemic change…I think it leads me to be like hyper aware of like just everything."

Participants expressed the unconscious need to hide who they are as a trauma response. Xavier stressed they learned what was acceptable and what was not and began to hide those parts of their identity or presentation as a response. They stated:

> The things that I've gotten in trouble for, been called out on I've done it because I didn't see an issue with that until someone said something, you know after so many years of that, it's so automatic, and you do it you know subconsciously that sometimes you don't even realize what you're doing.

Furthermore, Hiro reclass an overwhelming feeling of wanting to disappear in response to their identity. Specifically, Hiro shared,

> I don't think I was gonna self-harming or anything but I think for a moment I thought about it, and I was like I never thought of like suicide, but I just thought like wow like I just wish I could just disappear. I wish I could just close my eyes and just be gone, because it was so hard.

Additionally, participants noted growing up with the need to hide their identity expression and presentation left them unable to fully express themselves. Thus, in later life they had to adjust and learn who they are and how to best be authentic. Hiro shared:

> It was really difficult and it took me years…up until my like early mid to mid 20s to really like express myself and really be like what do I want, what do I want to share with the world what do I want to share with myself because I've been like hiding away for so long even to this day, like being 27 like I'm still learning about myself.

Externally, participants shared their perception the LGBTQ+ community has not progressed. Kristian, a 30-year-old Cisgender Male Femme Identified Latinx, described experiences of racism within the LGBTQ community. Kristian explained, "definitely like racism

in the gay community…going to bars and people talking about me in front of me as if I couldn't hear them say derogatory things about me." Hiro echoed Kristian's sentiment and described the judgmental nature of the community. Hiro recalled, "people put each other down for what they're wearing or how they look, their appearance or their background and there's a lot of that in the LGBT+ community, you know it's the whole saying no fats no fems no Asians is so big and it's ugly." Overwhelmingly, participants described the reality of being sexualized and fetishized as queer Latinx presenting folks. Kristian shared, "part of the queer Latinx experiences is going places where you're not always welcome or like going places where people suddenly come up to you because they want to like gang bang you." Guillermo echoed a similar sentiment; "wanting to have sex with me because they want to colonize my body." Participants reported the prevalence with which they were sexualized and how they were often only welcomed into queer space because of that sexualization.

As participants noted, despite social progress, queer femme Latinx individuals still experiences the trauma of marginalization, both internally and externally.

Theme 3 – "The different personas you create"

Queer femme Latinx individuals expressed the need to create and highlight different personas that were often a heteronormative masculine presentation. This was not done by choice and was encouraged by specific situation or other external factors. Kristian recalled a time they were asked to present more masculine because of the situation. Kristian shared, "depending on the situation and depending on where I was, what was going on, I do feel like I was asked by my mom to sort of dress more traditional and that was really, really painful." More specifically, participants felt their identities were being censored. Kristian described feeling "like I was definitely pushed into and felt like I had to almost censor myself into situations." Self-censoring

was often accomplished by changing their behaviors or presentation. For example, Osvaldo shared, “sometimes I feel like I have to change my voice or changed my demeanor.”

The participants’ expressed the need to alter their presentation was nothing new and could often be traced to childhood and adolescence, as they shared stories from their childhood recalling being forced to hide or adjust their presentation. Hiro recalled “I would be playing barbies with my cousin and we'd have to lock the door and if someone knocks we'd have to hide the barbies right under the bed and be like oh we're just playing another game.” Furthermore, Guillermo shared their family prohibited them from watching specific television programing, recalling their family members telling them “stop watching those novelas you shouldn’t be watching this because they’re for the women demographic female demographic.” Participants reported they were often able to trace the request or feeling the need to alter their presentation and behaviors to childhood and adolescence, which continued into adulthood.

Participants shared the need to alter their presentation while physically present among family. Osvaldo described their attempts to create different personas after moving back to their family home. Osvaldo recalled, “moving back home in a way, going back to that square one of regression and suppressing.” Hiro shared a similar story:

> I was miserable I was depressed because here, I was in college so out and expressive and then I got home and my mom my homophobic mom was where are you going why are you wearing that. She would hide my cloths if they look too feminine, and so I was very depressed and so I realized, I was like you need to get out, you need to leave in order for you to have a better relationship with your mom.

Ultimately, participants expressed feeling the need to create personas to "fit in" and cater to other's needs. Xavier describes their reality of always feeling like an outsider within their own family;

> It's a tough process…feeling like you're just wrong…sometimes I just feel like I'm not part of this fucking dimension or a part of this a planet. Um, I just feel very much like an outsider…it's definitely been a very long and very lonely process for me.

Queer femme Latinx individuals were encouraged, and often required, to present different personas. These presentations were often a reproduction of masculinity and/or heterosexuality. These personas were usually enforced and required regardless of their own chosen presentation or identity.

"Coming out but it not going in"

Queer femme Latinx individuals shared their fears and reservations with coming out. Specifically, participants described identity denial and passive acceptance from family and LGBTQ+ community members, sexualization of their identity, and specific negative experiences with the LGBTQ+ community.

Hiro recalled, "it took a lot of time for me to really come out because I just didn't feel comfortable I didn't feel safe, and so I always thought I'll come out when I'm financially secure when I can you know go out and create my own little nest." Despite reservations, some participants shared stories of acceptance, although the acceptance was conditional or performative. Guillermo recalled "I was able to say my parents and my family were never against it, but they weren't like super in the know… they didn't know like queer cultural or don't know queer culture." Similarly, Hiro shared a feeling that they were conditionally accepted: "I think it was like passively celebrated." However, despite participants coming out, they were

often forced to conceal their identity or not acknowledge their queerness. Leon emphasized this point; “I think I have come out it just hasn't really gone in.” Their presentation and identity were often policed and they were not allowed to explore their own identity.

When coming out, participants shared their family members’ inability to cope and come to terms with their identities; which resulted in sometimes reducing them to sexual acts. For example, Osvaldo recalled: “I find it very disheartening where it's like why can't you like recognize these things like I’m more than just a cock sucker.” Salvador shared their mom remained in denial and did not accept their identity. Salvador recalled, “primarily my mom is in this continuous stage of denial.” Over-sexualization and identity denial often-made participants create different personas or ways of expressing. Xavier recalled, “I don't really share much just because of those negative experiences you know, just um being yourself, and then finding out that yourself is wrong according to your parents.” Furthermore, participants expressed the need to hide their identities rather than conceal or perform. Xavier shared that they choose to hide their identity and presentation: “I just tend to hide all that...it makes me a very secretive person.” The exclusion, or identity management, was not solely related to a family context.

Often, exclusion was also experienced from within the LGBTQ+ community. Osvaldo described, “I've experienced a lot of like exclusion from the queer community where it's like sometimes it's like damn I I’d rather just hang out with like straight people because they're more open.” Xavier noted that within the queer community there are expectations for appropriate presentation and behaviors, explaining: “you have to look a certain way, or you have to act a certain way in order for you to fit in this box and be able to be seen as fem as a woman…you know um as queer.” Ultimately, participants echoed the feeling of being allowed to “open the closet” but not come out.

"Imitation of heterosexuality"

Queer femme Latinx individuals had to reproduce or imitate heterosexuality for physical safety, identity management, and for acceptance. Guillermo described their preferred form of masculinity: "the imitation of heterosexuality was always wearing something like skater clothes as like masculine clothing or as my preferred choice of masculinity." Kristian recalls in different occasions needing to imitate heterosexuality. Kristian shared, "there were different situations in life that kind of I do feel like did push me into dressing more hetero or the opposite of fem presenting." Kristian shared an example would be a work environment: "I definitely worked in a couple of environments and jobs where I felt maybe it wasn't the best thing to like push certain boundaries." The common sentiment across participants was presenting masculine would make everything much easier. Osvaldo emphasized this point, stating: "this would be easier if I was just more masculine, but it was just so hard for me." Furthermore, Hiro recalls "when I was a freshman I was like 14 and I had that moment of like this would be easier if I was just more masculine." Specifically, Hiro recalls the deliberate decision to imitate heterosexuality:

> You're going to watch more basketball because that's what your brothers do you're going to be more masculine you're going to you know hide you're going to delete all your music all your pop girls like Britney Spears you're going to delete all that music you're going to download Christian music because it's going to be easier that way.

Subsequently, both Hiro and Xavier note that imitating heterosexuality required specific clothing and behaviors. Hiro shared, "I always grew up with the need to act manlier and you need to walk a certain way you need to dress like this, you know wear Dickies and just blend in because it was survival." While Xavier described wearing loser fitting clothing as a marker of masculinity, "I try to wear like baggy clothes." Lastly, Osvaldo notes the reality that imitating heterosexuality is

in part for survival: “living in like the IE (Inland Empire) you know it's very masculine and you know they can really pick up on anyone who's not straightforward or whatever, and so I think part of that does feel like survival.”

Theme 4 – “Reminding myself I’m worth it”

Despite structural and contextual barriers, queer femme Latinx individuals exhibited a sense of selflove and self-worth. For example, Hiro recounts their continued effort to practice selflove; “continuing to love myself reminding myself that I’m worth it.” Participants noted community visibility and the ability to see examples of a fulfilling queer life as reminders of worth. They also noted intersectional events that brought together all of their identities allowed them to feel a sense of pride but also build community. Furthermore, they highlighted the ability to surround themselves with people that reinforced their own identities was important. Participants specifically shared receiving identity and presentation validation, learning community specific language, community history, and culture were key to building selflove and self-worth. Additionally, they stressed the importance of establishing depth, transparency, and vulnerability in a relationship. Last, participants emphasized the importance of offering support with purpose/intention, providing love and safety, being there no matter what and allowing for mistakes produced a sense of support for queer femme Latinx individuals.

“If you can’t love yourself how in the hell are you going to love somebody else”

Participants shared a sense of self-love and self-awareness that allowed them to embody their identities and experiences. Hiro echoed this sentiment, stating “it's also important like selflove and self-support supporting ourselves, you know it's that saying if you can’t love yourself how in the hell you going love somebody else.” Furthermore, Guillermo noted “working on yourself and just being there for yourself.” Additionally, participants understood the need to

be kind and understanding with themselves. Salvador described "learning to be more empathetic… learning that I make mistakes too." Hiro noted the need to have financial independence to prioritize their own needs and well-being, stating "I needed to make my money and work so then I could heal I could begin the process of selflove self-care." Selflove and independence empowered queer femme Latinx individuals to be able to set boundaries. Kristian shared, "I've been waiting for this moment…to set boundaries." Ultimately, queer femme Latinx participants in this study have a clear awareness of their own worth and continuously seek to strengthen their own selflove to continue to grow and support themselves.

"Yes, I'm finally free"

Queer femme Latinx individuals emphasized the ability to learn and gain knowledge around their multifaceted identities supported their growth and understanding. Leon recalled feeling overwhelmed and isolated not being able to name or understand their experience; "I think when I was younger and I didn't have a word for what this was I just was like okay that kind of sucks I'd be really depressed right because I was like okay I don't have a word for it, so I didn't even know that there were other people that felt this way." Similarly, Maya shared that their own ability to gain understanding allowed them to develop a connection to community and find individuals with similar experiences. Maya recalled, "education has been the main one, just having a community of people who have similar experiences and also have language to define themselves." Furthermore, Brisa described how knowledge provided empowerment: "they taught me so much and they taught me the words for me, to be able to describe my own identity, which obviously freed up a whole world, because it was like yes, I'm finally free." Similarly, Osvaldo credits community knowledge for developing into their identity:

> This person that I am now, I was not this person maybe 5 to 10 years ago I was way more passive I would just take it, I didn't know how to defend myself or speak up for myself advocate for myself and I would say that, coming from undergrad learning about all this queer theory and Latinx radicalism I think both of those have really helped my identity like speak up more and learn how to be more of a force really because now I don't give a fuck and I will speak up.

Overwhelmingly, participants noted the ability to gain knowledge—through online forums, cultural resource centers, community, and educational courses—allowed them to connect to a community but it also allowed them to feel free in their own identities.

With the support of knowledge and community, participants were able to find pride in their experience and their identities. However, visual representation also supported their identity development and understanding. Hiro recalled a community specific event that affirmed their identity:

> In California I'm seeing a lot more representation, a lot more visibility and it's really beautiful to see, especially in my brown communities like for example, I went to like East LA for the queer mercado and I went fem and you know I was like I'm going to be cute and shit and I saw like a lot of other like queer Brown people are just people that were fem me people like me expressing fem and stylish and it was just so cute to see…it's just so great to see you know it's like I just think of me as a kid and just me seeing myself walking down the street.

Similarly, Cesar described the importance of queer femme Latinx visibility:

> Just visibility like when I got to college, I really got to meet other brown queer people and brown queer men that had similar upbringings or just experiences that I had, and so,

> for so long, I felt so alone and I felt like no one's like me until college and I was like wow there's a lot of people that are like me.

Visibility was not only important in everyday life interactions. Guillermo recalled the importance of seeing the full range of queer life on television:

> Once I got to middle school we got cable and I was able to watch a lot of reality shows, the real world and true life and you know, at least those are the top two where I would see a life older queer folk and knowing that okay there are people like me, you know…understanding, the range of queer life at least here in America and having an idea of what my life could be when I would be able to be myself.

Ultimately, visual representation was important for queer femme Latinx individuals to gain a sense of their identity.

The understanding there is a larger community beyond their own physical space and immediate geographic location, along with the awareness of a collective community power supported participants identity. Hiro shared the realization that there is a larger community that holds collective power tied together by similar experiences and sharing these similar experiences leads to collective community power.

> Queer power in their voice and their experiences and their expression is so powerful it's really helped me it's really helped me become more confident it's really helped me see that, wow I'm not the only one there's so many people like me and I share my stories and I share my experiences with other people, and you know we just help each other out.

Leon noted the importance of seeing people living happily; "people are like me and they talk about it and it's not something evil or bad, and that was the best part I think of having a wider queer community was like I can see other people living happily I feel like queer Latinos don't get

enough coverage." Lastly, participants noted visibility allowed for queer femme Latinx individuals to gain their humanity. Hiro recalled the ability to share their humanity with their family:

> There were so many family members that came up to me or friends that are like wow you're the first queer person I know and…family was very homophobic growing up and some still are but I think them seeing me and being like wow like my cousin is gay my brother is gay my nephew is gay my uncle is gay, I think it's really just opening their eyes and it's making them see that's queer people aren't just like cartoon characters.

Visibility and community appeared to be key to developing identity and a sense of selflove and self-worth.

"Being around people I feel validated and seen by"

Participants identified key characteristic of caring individuals that allowed for them to feel supported. Kristian emphasized that validation is important for support, "just being around people that I feel validated and seen by." Furthermore, participants specifically identified safe spaces, mentorships, and direct acts of support.

Queer femme Latinx participants highlighted the importance of having and creating safe physical spaces. As an example, Hiro recalls the importance of resources centers while in college:

> Having safe spaces is really important. I remember coming out in college and I went to school and there was a resource Center an LGBT resource center that I went to often just to take naps get snacks and meet people I would go to events and I just felt really nice because, you met people from just different perspective different walks of life, but like you just felt very safe and comfortable.

Similarly, Osvaldo recalled the sense of safety and euphoria when they are able to be in a queer specific space:

> Nothing feels better than going into a queer space whether it's a coffee shop or a restaurant or a bar or a resource center it just feels good to know that you're okay, like you, feel good here and people get it, or they want to learn and it just feels nice because I feel like I never had that growing up.

Additionally, Hiro notes the importance of having your own individual physical space for self-development, in this case, describing their independence. Hiro recalled, "it feels good to know that I have my own space, I have my own car, I have my job I pay my bills, I do, what I want and that allows and that power allows me to like really express myself." Here, Hiro emphasizes the importance of an individual physical space to support identity development but also identity growth.

Participants highlighted the importance of community, visibility, and sharing knowledge to produce a collective power. Participants shared the desire to mentor and continue to support the LGBTQ+ community with the understanding that role models emphasize authenticity, which in turn, allows for authenticity. Osvaldo shared, "I hope that one day I can be a teacher or a professor at a college or something and I can really use my wisdom to help out other younger people who are gay or Latinx." Similarly, Hiro shared their desire to give back and continue community visibility: "I see myself giving back to younger LGBTQ+ people of color kids of color." Additionally, Kristian noted mentorship goes beyond individual support, but is also creating and sharing opportunities within the community to emphasize collective power. Kristian shared, "the queer community really looking out for each other and give each other, our own opportunities."

Last, participants articulated what support looks like for them from both family and community. Participants suggested that support can be many things and come from different sources, but ultimately support is unconditional. Leon described what support could look like.

> I think it different people different kinds of support, but I think, for me it kind of looks like having resources from people seeing role models of people like me that supports me to want to reach my own goals, because it's like they could reach their goals and they're like me so I feel supported in reaching my goals then affirmations I see as a big support that other people can give me it's like I love you even if you're not what people want or expect from you I love you.

Furthermore, Osvaldo notes that "support is emotional whether that is checking in on me, or asking how I'm doing." Brisa shared "support to me is people who are going to be there, no matter what…I can make mistakes and they're gonna support me and love me." Finally, Salvador emphasizes that support is "unabashedly believing in what a person is saying and are experiencing." Queer femme Latinx have a strong awareness of what support should look like and how family and community could offer support.

Conclusion

This study sought to understand the complex reality queer femme Latinx individuals embody and how they navigate their complex identities in a harsh social and legislative context. Through the use of a qualitative phenomenological methodology, the findings revealed queer femme Latinx individuals embody a limitless and fluid approach to their intersectional identities. Additionally, the analysis highlighted queer femme Latinx individuals have an understanding that safety isn't guaranteed and they have a clear awareness the current narrative is god awful specifically for the queer femme community. There is a consensus they are still unable to express

their thoughts, desires, chosen presentation, or present as their whole selves. Therefore, they are forced to create different personas and forms of expression. One example is that queer femme Latinx individuals often feel the need to imitate masculinity and by default heterosexuality. This pressure was enacted through clothing, behaviors, speech, language choices, and general interest. Despite the contextual reality queer femme Latinx individuals experience they are able to remind themselves they are worth it. Particularly, queer femme Latinx individuals practice selflove and have a strong awareness of their own worth and power. They are able to free themselves by gaining knowledge and language around their experiences. They gain a sense of pride through representation, visibility, and celebration of their community. Finally, queer femme Latinx individuals feel validated and seen by surrounding themselves with supportive individuals who offer emotional, financial and physical support with purpose and intention.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION

This phenomenological study sought to understand how queer femme Latinx men, trans, and gender variant individuals subjectively describe the meaning(s) they hold in relation to their intersectional identities and how they understand their lived experiences. Specifically, this study investigated how queer femme Latinx individuals contend with multiple minorized identities in complex and often oppressive systems, including from within their own communities. Analysis of in-depth interviews resulted in a conceptual framework (Figure 1) that depicts how queer femme Latinx individuals experience and make meaning of their lived realities within a complex and contextually driven social systems. Highlighted by Table 2, the conceptual framework is comprised of the four themes and their underlying subthemes. Findings highlight participants' self-authorship and pride in femme identity, the impact of contextual factors in suppressing or expressing identity, adaptive behaviors, and coping mechanisms.

Identity Meaning Making

The first research question asked, *what meanings do queer femme Latinx men, trans, and gender variant persons ages 18 to 30 assign to their lived experiences of holding multiple minoritized identities?* Analysis found that participants make meaning of their multiple minoritized intersectional identities with the understanding they are able to construct their own identities without boundaries and establish fluidity with the crucial awareness there are no limits to their creation. Furthermore, their femme identity allows them to express their creativity and fluidity.

Much of the minoritized identity research supports the idea that identity is not fixed and is constantly evolving given social context. Specifically, social constructionism considers

identity to be socially, historically, politically, and culturally constructed at both the institutional and individual levels (Omi & Winant, 1994; Weber, 1998). Similar to social constructionism, queer femme Latinx participants exhibited the ability to construct a fluid queer identity within a social, historical, cultural, and political context that allowed for progression. In particular, participants emphasized fluidity as a key concept.

Fuss (1989) explained that identity is comprised of fluid differences rather than a unified essence. The failure to examine identity as distinct categories implies a unity in identity that overlooks variations within identity categories. Fuss emphasizes the differences within those categories cause them to have "multiple and contradictory meanings" (1989, p. 98). Participants echoed this sentiment by emphasizing the multiplicity of their own identities. Therefore, Fuss furthers the understanding multiple and contradicting meanings can exist simultaneously. This concept was evident in this study and highlighted when participants addressed their Latinx identity. They described their Latinx identity in terms of comfort and familiarity regardless of traditional heteronormative dominant views often found within the culture (Cervantes, 2014). This seemingly contradictory attachment to Latinx identity aligned with the literature. Participants understood that despite the heteronormative cultural aspects of the Latinx identity, they found a connection that went beyond the stereotypical understanding of Latinx culture and allowed them to ground themselves in their ancestral connection.

A different view point within the literature but closely related is the idea identity is more performative than static. As performative, participants' actions are not representative of identity, instead, actions create identity (Butler, 1991). Particularly, participants' decisions regarding their manner of dress, choice of partners, and behavioral presentation became the meaning of their identity dimensions. Participants exhibited more awareness and often utilize meaning and

meaning making to deploy and better understand their own identities. This was emphasized by their femme identity. Participants utilized more complex meaning making around their femme identity and presentation and understood their femme identity as a super power. This demonstrated an awareness of the performative nature of their identity rather than relying on fixed and externally defined meaning of femininity (Abes & Jones, 2004). Participants utilized the performative nature of identity, rather than rely on the fixed understanding, to produce their own unique understanding of their super power of a femme identity. As such, participants demonstrated the complex and diverse understanding of what femme could be. This understanding pushes the literature around femme identity forward. Blair & Hoskin (2016) understand femme might include queer cisgender men, trans men, trans women and cisgender queer women. This study centers non-normative femme identities and presentations and offers a unique understanding of queer femme.

Although participants described their ability to utilize complex meaning making around their femme identity, they still reported experiencing femmephobia. Femmephobia is a type of gender policing that targets feminine transgressions against patriarchal norms of femininity (across genders, sexual orientations, and sex) in addition to the general cultural and systemic devaluation of all things feminine (Hoskin, 2020). Femmephobia informs oppressive understandings of queer femmes as "inauthentic" and invisible. Queer femme Latinx individuals in this study recalled their femme presentation being devalued and measures against "traditional" understanding of femininity by the larger LGBTQ+ community and their family. Aligned with the literature, such assumptions marginalize femmes in both queer and mainstream spaces (Taylor, 2020). Furthermore, femininity is often positioned as subpar to masculinity. This positionality allows feminine traits to be looked at as weak and inferior to male characteristics

(Hale & Ojeda, 2018). Participants shared experiences around their own need to present in a masculine demeanor for safety. Often, queer femme Latinx individuals in this study were encouraged to adopt heteronormative traits and were asked to conceal their queer femme presentation. The experiences of violence faced by gender-variant individuals on the trans feminine/ female spectrum is perpetuated by the assumption that femaleness and femininity are inferior to, and exist primarily for the benefit of, maleness and masculinity (Hale & Ojeda, 2018). Femmephobia informed participants' gender presentation and encouraged adaptive behaviors noted in the conceptual framework due to physical safety concerns.

Despite femmephobia, participants continue to create end exhibit their femme identity. Femme identity became multifaceted and multidimensional. As Butler (1991) notes, actions create identity. The identity moved beyond simply a feminine presentation, but a true embodiment of a limitless, authentic, fierce attitude. This understanding of femme aligns with the literature. Schwartz (2020) defines 'femme' as a queer identity marked by a critical engagement with femininity that manifests in one's style and values. Participants moved beyond simply presenting femme and establishing femme as a super power.

The academic literature emphasizes the use of self-authorship can encourage identity meaning making and creation. Self-authorship occurs through "an ability to construct knowledge in a contextual world and the ability to construct an internal identity separate from external influences, and an ability to engage in relationships without losing one's internal identity" (Baxter, 1999, p. 2). Participants described the ability to create queerness without boundaries and to establish their identity as fluid with the key understanding that there are no limits. Participants developed their understanding, while simultaneously creating different presentations, often heteronormativity, for safety. Aligned with the literature, participants were able to engage in

relationships with family and community members while still maintain their internal identity. Queer femme Latinx individuals were able to create identity in a contextual world that is often violent but still remain true to their own internal identity creation.

While not explicitly mentioned or used by participants in this study, the use of Jotería as a concept could supports queer femme Latinx individua's construct their identity. Jotería is a term of empowerment and it is intentionally radical (Pérez, 2014). Jotería as a concept allows for a nuanced understanding of a queer Latinx identity and the ability for queer Latinx individuals to create their own reality and expressions they choose. Gloria Anzaldua (1999) discusses her experiences as a Mexican American lesbian and her ability to bring together multiple identities into a new and integrated identity as key to her own identity development. Jotería has the potential to serve as the new integrated identity for queer femme Latinx individuals.

Contextual Factors & Adaptive Behaviors

The second research question asked, *how do culture, family, community, and social climate inform, support, or frame their lived experiences?* Participants identified contextual factors, including culture, family, community, and current social climate, as overwhelmingly unsafe. This framed their lived experiences and required them to create adaptive behaviors. These behaviors included creating different personas or presentations, often more masculine and heteronormative presentations.

Contextual Factors

Meyer's minority stress model (2003) suggests that health disparities among minority groups are best understood as arising from multiple contextual factors. Mental health differences are not determined solely by individual factors, such as personality, but are socially constructed and determined by circumstances in the environment and the complex interplay between

individual factors and the sociocultural context. Queer femme Latinx individuals shared fears around anti-LGBTQ+ and anti-trans legislation creating a hostile environment and recalled traumatic stress and trauma symptoms being a common occurrence. Specifically, because they occupy a marginalized minority status in the United States (e.g., non-White, non-male, non-heterosexual), their context includes institutional and interpersonal discrimination, prejudice and stigma (Bostwick et al., 2014). Therefore, Bostwick et al. highlight the reality queer femme Latinx individuals experienced in this sample. Queer femme Latinx individuals recounted experiences of prejudice and stigma around their chosen identities and presentations, specifically their queer femme identities. This was due in part to the current social and legislative climate, or institutional discrimination. Queer femme Latinx individuals in this sample experiences elevated distress that they attributed to contextual factors. While the current legislative climate affects the entire LGBTQ+ community, queer femme individuals are particularly targeted as noted by this study. Additionally, anti-immigrant legislation has a direct impact on the Latinx community. A such, queer femme Latinx individuals are uniquely challenged by the current legislative and social climate.

Within the academic literature, numerous studies have demonstrated heightened prevalence of depressive and anxiety disorders among lesbian, gay, bisexual, and trans groups compared to heterosexuals (Bostwick et al., 2014; Ghabrial, 2017). Some authors posit that these disparities are the result of the stress that prejudice and perceived discrimination can cause (Bostwick et al., 2014). Aligned with the literature, participants in this study recalled modifying their public behaviors and presentation due to fear of prejudice and the perceived discrimination they felt because of homophobia and femmephobia. Queer femme Latinx individuals in this sample expressed their reality that physical safety is not always guaranteed and they often have

to be hyper aware at all times. Ghabrial (2017) noted that queer people of color are challenged by social and psychological issues unlike those that affect White LGBTQ+ or heterosexual racial/ethnic minority individuals. Queer femme Latinx individuals in this study recalled daily subtle acts of homophobia and femmephobia making it difficult to exist authentically.

Within this sample, queer femme Latinx individuals shared their lived experience that emotional and physical safety was not always guaranteed within the LGBTQ+ community. Tijerina Revilla and Santillana (2014) stress the gay and lesbian rights movement has perpetuated white supremacy, which has prevented the movement from fully including queer people of color. The lack of adequate representation within the LGBTQ+ community was noted by participants in this study. Furthermore, participants shared their view that the LGBTQ+ community has not progressed to equally include and validate queer people of color, particularly queer femme Latinx individuals. Because of this queer people of color face additional social stigma because of racism within the LGBTQ+ community (Whitfield et al., 2014) as noted by the findings in this study.

Overwhelmingly, participants described sexual racism within the LGBTQ+ community. Particularly, queer femme Latinx individuals in this study shared the frequency of being sexualized and fetishized as queer Latinx presenting folks within queer spaces. Within the academic literature, sexual racism is a specific form of racial prejudice enacted in the context of sex or romance and is an issue among gay and bisexual men (Callander et al., 2015). Furthermore, research emphasizes racism places White men at the top of the hierarchy of desirability (Stacey & Forbes, 2022). Participants in this study felt their presence in queer spaces was only as a sexual object. This finding aligns with the academic literature. Stacey and Forbes' (2022) study found a prevalence of multi minoritized individuals feeling objectified and reduced

to stereotypes in LGBTQ+ spaces. Moreover, participants in this study recalled experiencing exclusion, judgment, and broader forms of racism from the LGBTQ+ community. The implication of this finding highlights the importance of complex and intersectional identities. Stacey & Forbes (2022) argued fetishization operates to produce feelings of a unidimensional identity and therefore erases queer intersectional identities.

Multiple research studies have revealed that LGBTQ people overall report more frequent exposure to traumatic life experiences that trigger symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other trauma-related disorders compared to heterosexual or cisgender people (Kevin L. Nadal, 2016). Queer femme Latinx individuals in this study shared numerous accounts of traumatic life experiences. Participants shared their behaviors and presentation being policed as young as childhood and adolescence. Participants recalled the need to conceal their identities and presentation from a young age often developing distress around their identity and presentation. Queer femme Latinx individuals shared numerous stories around their queer identity and the negative feelings associated. Minority stress may contribute to these inequities by generating adverse psychological responses to stress such as hypervigilance, concealment of identity, and internalization of homophobia (Noyola et al., 2020). Overwhelmingly, participants noted the reality of having to perform and alter that performance for a given space. Queer femme Latinx individuals in this sample specifically recalled the need to be hyperaware at all times.

Queer femme Latinx individuals occupy a unique space that is often not addressed in the academic literature. Noyola et al. (2020) in their study with sexually diverse Latinx highlighted four themes that encapsulate the queer Latinx experience present in this study. The first theme they presented was ambivalence from families. This theme captures contradictory attitudes and behaviors toward participants' sexual identities by their families (Noyola et al., 2020). Queer

femme Latinx individua's in this study recalled ambivalence towards their queer identity from their family and shared their family passively accepted them. The second theme they presented was traditional Latinx gender role expectations. The common sentiment across participants in this study was presenting masculine would make everything much easier. This aligned with the findings in Noyola et al.'s (2020) study that "traditional" gender roles and expectations were applied and often expected of queer femme Latinx individuals. Finally, Noyola et al. (2020) presented marginalization from the LGBTQ+ community and sexual objectification as separate themes in their study. While Noyola et al. separated marginalization from the LGBTQ+ community and sexual objectification, participants in this study could not separate the two. Queer femme Latinx individuals primarily recalled experiencing marginalization from the LGBTQ+ community through sexual objectification. Specifically, participants recalled feeling sexualized, objectified, and fetishized by the larger LGBTQ+ community.

Adaptive Behaviors

There is mounting evidence that living as a queer person of color within society leads to complicated ways of socializing with the world (Cyrus, 2017). Particularly, maintaining multiple minoritized identities can add burden. While participants in this study did not address their identity management as a burden, they did share the need to adapt their behaviors and presentation in various contextual settings. The adaptive behaviors present in this study align with the literature. Specifically, to contend with and avoid potential discrimination, some queer individuals choose to conceal their sexual orientation and nonconforming gender identity, or manage and regulate how it is made visible to others in different contexts (Ghabrial, 2017). Although stigma concealment may provide necessary comfort or safety, it can lead to fear of discovery, stress, and cognitive burden (Ghabrial, 2017). While queer femme Latinx individuals

in this study shared numerous stories of identity management and the need to alter their presentation they did not frame this practice as a stressful or a cognitive burden.

The academic literature argues that stigma may influence identity development for multiple minoritized individuals, especially if they experience discrimination within their own social networks. For example, heterosexism within racial/ethnic minority communities may account for some of the differences in timing and process of coming out between White LGBTQ people and queer people of color (Pérez, 2014). Queer femme Latinx individuals in this study recalled delaying their coming out process due to fear and safety concerns. Noyola et al. (2020) in their sample of sexually diverse Latinx also found that participants coped with minority stress by strategically managing their racial/ethnic and sexual identities depending on social context, particularly with their families. In both studies, Queer femme Latinx individuals developed adaptive behaviors to cope with their contextual world to feel a sense of physical safety. These adaptive behaviors were often used within a family context.

Queer femme Latinx individuals in this study often utilized masculine and heteronormative presentation as adaptive behaviors. The discourse of straight-acting produces and reproduces anti-femininity and homophobia (Eguchi, 2011). While participants in this study self-identify as femme for physical safety they often chose to conceal their femme presentation in specific context. Therefore, queer femme Latinx individuals in this study developed a complex and nuanced understanding of femme presenting and therefore were able to conceal their identity while simultaneously moving the femme identity forward.

Coping Mechanism(s)

The third research question asked, *how do queer femme Latinx men, trans, and gender variant persons navigate their complex and changing contexts?* Participants navigated their

identity by creating a strong sense of selflove and self-worth. They identified gaining knowledge through resource centers, community, academic courses, and online forums as important. Lastly, participants identify protective factors that support their identity.

Noyola et al.'s (2020) study found developing critical consciousness supported their identity management. They found that developing awareness of privilege and oppression and how that shaped participants daily experiences led them to contest oppressive systems. Furthermore, their study demonstrated that sexually diverse Latinx individuals understood their social positions as intersectional and that they develop an understanding of their experiences of minority stress as part of an oppressive sociocultural context. Similarly, queer femme Latinx individuals in this study utilized knowledge building and awareness as a coping mechanism. Particularly, participants shared gaining critical knowledge around queer Latinx history, larger identity positionality, and engagement with power and privilege supported their identity management. While participants did not explicitly identify their social positioning, queer femme Latinx individuals used self-authorship and their nuanced understanding of their intersectional identities as a coping strategy and developed their own understanding of their lived experiences. Similar to developing critical consciousness is the importance of speaking up. Within the academic literature, the concept of Jotería encourages queer Latinx individuals to speak up and have a voice, not to assimilate or blend into normative society but rather to radically change it through critical reflection on brown sexuality (Cervantes, 2014). The ability to speak up and have a voice was present in this study. Particularly, participants credit community knowledge and community resource centers with the ability to "speak up."

Although limited, the academic literature suggests there are protective mechanisms from psychological stress for members of multiple marginalized minority groups (Cyrus, 2017).

Protective mechanisms were present in this study. Participants in this study identified key characteristic of caring individuals, namely family and community, that allowed them to feel supported. While participants suggested that support can be many things and come from different sources, ultimately support is unconditional. Participants specifically valued having physical resources, seeing role models that look like them, unconditional love regardless of expectations, emotional support, and believing and validating their identity. These aspects of support operated as protective factors for queer femme Latinx individuals.

Additionally, participants identified safe physical spaces and direct peer-to-peer mentorships as important. Noyola et al. (2020) found that seeking and creating social support from others who identify similarly to oneself in terms of racial/ethnic and sexual identities served as a coping strategy for their sample. Specifically, participants in their study described the unique benefits of social support from LGBTQ+ and communities of color. Noyola et al. (2020) emphasized LGBTQ+ and communities of color provided a sense of belonging, the opportunity to learn how to manage specific identity stressors, and the realization that they are not alone in experiencing minority stress. These concepts aligned with the findings in this study. Queer femme Latinx individuals shared the importance of visibility, particularly of individuals that look and present like them, as an important coping strategy. Participants emphasized the role of peer mentorship and the ability the larger LGBTQ+ community plays in understanding their own identity. Furthermore, queer femme Latinx individuals in this study found comfort in realizing they are not alone.

Contribution

This research study offers several contributions. In particular, the research study focused on intersectionality, deepened the understanding of queer femme identity, included trans

participants, and moves beyond research focused on disease prevention in the LGBTQ+ community.

Racialized sexual and gender minority individuals are among the most under-researched and underserved populations in health and psychology. They are multiply oppressed and many are in a perpetual state of negotiation between conflicting identities and values (Ghabrial, 2017; McCabe et al., 2013; Meyer, 2003). This study specifically sought to understand the complex identities and offer insight into seemingly conflicting identities and values. Additionally, identity is often viewed from a theoretically linear perspective ignoring identity creation or self-authorship in the context of how individuals make meaning of their socially constructed identities, such as race and sexuality (Abes et al., 2007). This research study utilized intersectionality and positioned self-authorship at the forefront centering queer femme Latinx individual identity meaning making.

Blair & Hoskin's (2016) study of femme identities that exist beyond the realm of cisgender lesbian women indicates there is a great deal of diversity among individuals self-identifying as femme in their sample. This study specifically sought to expand the understanding of queer femme and included a diverse representation of self-identified femme. Second, the issue of femme invisibility has been widely discussed, however, femmes continue with feminine gender presentation in spite of the unpleasant feelings of exclusion perpetuated by their aesthetics that warrants greater attention (H. McCann & Killen, 2019). The attachment to feminine presentation by femmes, regardless of experiences of exclusion, offers a critical point of interest and signals that for many femmes, there is clearly more than visibility at stake (H. McCann & Killen, 2019). This study contributes to an understanding of femme attachment and the reality that queer femme acts as a form of power for femme-identified individuals.

Trans people of color represent one of the most marginalized groups in society and this population is relatively invisible in research and neglected in healthcare and policy (Ghabrial, 2017). This research study sought to include divers trans representation. This study contributes to the unique understanding queer Trans femmes hold around identity and meaning making. Particularly, the understanding that a specific intersectional approach is important to best understand and support trans people of color. Intersectionality assumes that discrimination is the product of the social dynamics of power and that there is a value in identifying both (1) how these dynamics manifest differently for different social identity categories and also (2) what similarities exist between how power shapes these seemingly disparate identities (Cho et al., 2013). While intersectionality may account for diversity in experiences, it is important to recognize little is known about the trans queer experience within a U.S. context. Therefore, by centering trans specific experiences this study moves our understanding forward and encourages further research to develop an awareness of a trans specific intersectional approach.

Finally, this study moved beyond a focus on disease prevention. Research on queer Latinx typically focuses HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment (Tijerina Revilla & Santillana, 2014). Furthermore, there is a lack of literature that examines or illustrates the breadth and depth of the queer Latinx experience (Tijerina Revilla & Santillana, 2014). Researchers contend that there is much more to investigate and even more that is unknown about the everyday lives of queer Latinx people in particular and about queer people of color more broadly (Balsam et al., 2011). This study, which focused specifically on queer Latinx, moved research forward by focusing on everyday experiences. Additionally, utilizing the conceptual understanding of Jotería contributes to the literature on well-being. Further exploring Jotería could progress our

understanding of a queer femme Latinx identity toward a nuanced understanding from a personal individual perspective.

Strengths

This study has several strengths. First, sampling queer communities and Latinx communities respectively is challenging. Individually, queer and Latinx populations are extremely vulnerable and are often not represented in research. Currently, there are major challenges in conducting research with queer populations. The difficulties include finding a large sample and representation of diverse stages of coming out (Elze, 2003). Additionally, there is complexity and diversity within the queer umbrella that makes adequate sampling difficult. These barriers are systemic and are noticed in the limited research with predominately queer samples (Elze, 2003; Tufford et al., 2012). However, this research study centered the queer experience and sought a diverse representation within the queer umbrella. Similarly, the Latinx population is often difficult to recruit and is not always represented in research. Often the diverse demographic characteristics of Latinx, such as linguistic socioeconomic, and geographic diversity, are not considered (Umaña-Taylor, 2009). Consequently, research with Latinx is greatly limited. This study accounted for the diversity within the Latinx community and centered their experiences.

Second, research around multiple minoritized identity is limited, specifically intersectional queer femme Latinx identities. Research is often organized in a unidimensional manner with the understanding that few studies exist focusing on the complete experiences of queer femme Latinx individuals as a whole. Consequently, this study is one of the first qualitative projects that captures the lived experiences of queer femme Latinx and puts forward the understanding of how individual queer femme Latinx navigate their identities in relation to

structures of oppression, and how they seek support. Moreover, this study provided a more inclusive understanding of the femme experience. This study is framed from a strengths-based perspective and specifically asks how participants make meaning of their identity and navigate their identity. Contrary to much of the research with queer and Latinx communities that tend to focus or operate from a deficit model.

Lastly, multiple steps were taken to ensure rigor and trustworthiness of the study findings. Memos and notes were used during each interview and during the analytic process. Furthermore, theoretical triangulation was used by employing three theoretical perspectives (intersectionality, minority stress model, and structural stigma) to inform the analysis and the interpretation of the findings. Thus, this study provides a nuance theoretical approach by incorporating intersectionality, minority stress, and stigma theory.

Limitations

While the research topic and design employed by this study will move the field forward, data collection and sampling presented limitations.

In-depth interviews are an effective way to collect qualitative data. However, some participants may have disguised their true feelings about their experience around their queer, femme, or Latinx identities. Additionally, participants may have withheld sensitive or traumatic experiences due to fear of judgment, concern, or embarrassment. Other participants may have excessively tried to cooperate by offering the researcher responses that they perceived to be helpful, resulting in social desirability bias. For example, participants may have exaggerated positive familial reactions to their identities, while, other participants may have minimized negative experiences. Additionally, the interview was a one-time interview, which, limited the ability to gather data at various points in time.

A purposive sample often has multiple biases. Participants were primarily recruited through university academic departments, university resource centers, social media, and community resource centers across the state of California. It is possible, given the educational level of participants and recruitment through university campuses, that participants who chose to respond and take part in the research study were comparatively more comfortable with their identities and possibly had a more developed understanding of those identities than those who did not respond to the recruitment materials. Additionally, the liberal nature of the state of California and the high concentration of queer Latinx individuals across the state could produce more awareness of their own identities. This limits the transferability of the findings to other states or internationally as the experience of queer femme Latinx individuals across different contexts may vary greatly.

The socio-political and public health context may have also played a role in aspects of sampling. During the time in which participants were recruited and this study was conducted, the queer community experienced heightened fears driven by anti-LGBTQ+ and anti-Trans legislation across the United States, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, and a developing public health crisis with Mpox (monkeypox). Additionally, acts of violence on a national scale with an anti-queer driven mass shooting in Colorado made national news. These factors may have exacerbated fear of queer identification and participation in a research study. It is possible that the social and legislative climate influenced the characteristics of the sample. Participants willing to participate in the study possibly felt more comfortable with their queer femme Latinx identity and perceived their risk was low. While participant health and safety were a priority, the public health crisis—COVID-19 and Mpox—experienced during the research study may have affected study sample.

Implications for Social Work Practice

The study findings contribute to several implications for social work practice as they highlight and emphasize the lived experiences of queer femme Latinx individuals. Particularly with community-based social service delivery and individual-level service delivery.

Community-Based Social Service Delivery

There are three main implications for community-based social work practice. The first is directly supporting the queer femme Latinx community during the harsh social and legislative climate. The second is using technology to develop community connection. The third is to develop and foster community driven physical and online spaces.

Queer femme Latinx individuals in this study were intensely aware of the current harsh social and legislative climate. Specifically, the rise of anti-LGBTQ+ and anti-Trans legislation along with repeated acts of violence against the queer femme community. As such, community-based social service agencies and community settings are poised to support queer femme Latinx individuals. As was present in this study, queer femme Latinx individuals navigated their identities through gaining knowledge and community support. Therefore, community-based agencies could utilize their resources to develop accurate information and disseminate to the queer femme Latinx community. They could also offer information-based resources to address mounting concerns. State and local level community-based agencies should make a considerable effort to engage and support queer femme Latinx individuals and communities by providing up-to-date accurate information around recent legislation. Additionally, agencies can develop resource tool kits to support queer femme Latinx individuals navigate the changing legislative landscape. Moreover, social worker practitioners can develop and share in knowledge building

campaigns. Examples include a presentation on a specific legislation directly impacting the queer femme Latinx community and safe space training for community members and allies.

Emerging technologies and social media platforms create opportunities for far reaching campaigns and knowledge dissemination that allow for service delivery to geographically removed community members and community members who must conceal their identity. The advantage of online spaces and the internet in general has open possibilities for the queer femme Latinx community to connect, discover, and explore their identities. In our current digitally driven society the online world is an important spaces for both the identity construction and wellbeing of LGBTQ+ people (Llewellyn, 2021). Therefore, community-based service provides ought to capitalize on the use of online technologies. Furthermore, the accessibility of online spaces is particularly important for LGBTQ+ people in rural or remote areas but also for those that might feel excluded from more traditional, geographically specific queer communities (H. McCann & Killen, 2019). Online spaces support more flexibility and fluidity in self-presentation than offline spaces (H. McCann & Killen, 2019). Community-based agencies can better use technology to support identity and shared meaning making for queer femme Latinx individuals.

Finally, community-based social service agencies can foster community specific spaces for queer Latinx individuals to connect with other members. While the current social climate may limit physical spaces, community-based agencies could create digital spaces. For years LGBTQ+ individuals have used online media to create unique spaces in which they can thrive and connect (Llewellyn, 2021). Specifically, LGBTQ+ communities use online media and social media networks to aid in identity development, interact in safer, sometimes anonymous, validating spaces, teach others about LGBTQ+ topics, become engaged in an LGBTQ+ community, and develop friendships or romantic relationships with other LGBTQ+ people who

may not be readily available to them offline (Woznicki et al., 2021). Participants in this study shared the importance of peer-to-peer support and mentorship. Community-based agencies could foster digital spaces to encourage peer-to-peer support. Additionally, the online space has the potential to become a relative safe space—ranging from societies where LGBTQ+ identity is illegal, to where LGBTQ+ is accepted but non-normative (Llewellyn, 2021). While community-based agencies could offer physical spaces for queer femme Latinx individuals, online spaces provide a level of safety that may not be reached with physical spaces.

There are many implications for social work practice. However, to fully utilize resources community-based agencies should engage in interdisciplinary collaboration and interagency partnership to best support queer femme Latinx community well-being. Particularly, agencies should understand the interconnectedness of queer femme Latinx identities and should incorporate other areas, such as health, mental health, housing, and nutrition, to best support queer femme Latinx individuals.

Individual-level Service Delivery

At the individual-level service delivery, social worker practitioners could support and provide individualized services to queer femme Latinx people. Of particular importance is utilizing practitioners that mirror their clients. Cabral and Smith (2011) in their meta-analysis of racial/ethnic matching of clients and therapists found a strong preference for a therapist of one's own racial/ethnic identity. Moreover, by identifying with their client's practitioners are able to better understand the psychosocial needs of queer femme Latinx individuals. This therapeutic connection could allow social service providers to better support queer femme Latinx individuals unique needs.

In order to assist queer femme Latinx individuals in coping with complex contextual factors, practitioners must be aware of the range of queer femme Latinx individual's adaptive behaviors and associated coping mechanisms. Frequently, queer femme Latinx individuals are viewed as "resistant to treatment." Furthermore, support is rarely offered and if support is offered it is usually deficit-based or inadequate interventions are used. Particularly, in this study, queer femme Latinx individuals utilized imitating heterosexuality as a form of identity management to adapt to negative contextual factors. Often, imitating heterosexuality is perceived negatively and practitioners tend to view queer femme Latinx through the lens of internalized homophobia. This enforces the understanding of queer femme Latinx individuals through a deficit model. However, the idea of self-authorship puts forth the idea that queer femme Latinx individuals have the ability to engage in relationships and adaptive behaviors without losing one's internal identity" (Baxter, 1999, p. 2).

This study found that queer femme Latinx individuals have a strong awareness of their own worth and are able to practice selflove. It would be helpful for social work practitioners to assist queer femme Latinx individuals in understanding the role of their adaptive behaviors and encouraging selflove and self-worth. Specifically, practitioners can support queer femme Latinx individuals by fostering, validating, and encouraging their selflove and self-worth. Therefore, practitioners can support queer femme Latinx develop a clear understanding of their identity from a strengths-based approach. Finally, social worker practitioners should help normalize queer femme Latinx's experience as much as possible.

Directions for Future Research

Limited research has focused on queer femme Latinx individuals and how they make meaning of their multiple minoritized identities in a harsh and often oppressive contexts. This

study contributes to the literature by centering the queer femme Latinx experience and offering insight into how they make meaning of and navigate their identities. Overall, this study found that queer femme Latinx individuals make meaning of their identity through a limitless understanding that gives them the freedom to create identity as necessary. They experience a world that is not safe often having to adapt for safety and security. However, they are able to navigate harsh contextual factors through adaptive behaviors and the awareness of selflove and self-worth. Despite rich findings, numerous questions on this topic remain. Particularly: How does queer femme identity and perception impact parents and family members? How do contextual factors impact well-being and mental health? What are community-informed social service needs for queer femme Latinx individuals? What is the role of religion, spiritualty, and culture in identity meaning making for queer femme Latinx individuals? How does language use and language translation impact identity meaning making and family support? How could the use of technology and online spaces support queer femme Latinx individuals?

Despite the advantages of an online LGBTQ+ community, the internet is not always the best space for community. The possibility of discrimination and targeted hate is a reality LGBTQ+ individuals face. More specifically, multiple minoritized individuals often face the possibility of online harassment based on varying identities. In particular is online ethnic discrimination (Keum & Miller, 2018). Online ethnic discrimination has been operationalized as "victimization that threatens, excludes, or targets an individual based on race and ethnicity through the use of symbols, voice, video, images, text, and graphic representations online" (Stewart et al., 2019, p. 502). Online ethnic discrimination can take place in various mediums such as social media platforms, chat rooms, discussion boards, web pages, and online games/

videos (Cano et al., 2021). Given the complex nature the online space provides, further research is required to best understand the role online spaces play for queer femme Latinx individuals.

While this research study was conducted solely in California, a multi-state study is needed to provide a comprehensive understanding of how anti-LGBTQ+ and anti-Trans legislation impact queer femme Latinx individuals over time and across varying contexts. Future studies should examine the residual effects of traumatic experiences due to queer femme Latinx identity and presentation. Additional research should employ mixed-methods to gain an understanding of the nuance and complex reality queer femme Latinx individuals experience from various methodological perspectives. In particular, a survey could account for the multitude of contextual factors experienced by the queer Latinx community not captured by phenomenology. Contextual factors could include: generational considerations, social class, geographic location, and access to resources via social capital. Finally, in order to improve service delivery to the most vulnerable populations—like queer femme Latinx individuals—and uphold social work's code of ethics and values, research must focus on intersectional community-driven knowledge to enrich the understanding of this phenomenon in varying contexts.

TABLES AND FIGURES

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

University of California, Los Angeles
RESEARCH INFORMATION SHEET

Research Study: Viviendo en la Intersección

Javier Garcia-Perez, with faculty sponsorship from Dr. Laura S. Abrams, 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 were referred by an existing participant of the research study. Your participation in this research study is voluntary. Along with a copy of this research information sheet to keep for you records, you will receive a resource list.

WHAT SHOULD I KNOW ABOUT A RESEARCH STUDY?

- Someone will explain this research study to you.
- Whether or not you take part is up to you.
- You can choose not to take part.
- You can agree to take part and later change your mind.
- Your decision will not be held against you.
- You can ask all the questions you want before you decide.

WHY IS THIS RESEARCH BEING DONE?

- Queer femme Latinx men, trans, and gender variant individuals live in a complex fabric of intersecting structures of oppression including, but not limited to, racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, poverty, citizenship status, internalized homophobia, internalized racism and linguistic hierarchy. This complex fabric is often filtered and experienced through an equally complex understanding of personal and group identity. Consequently, queer femme Latinx men, trans, and gender variant individuals navigate complex identities that are often not understood or adequately researched. This dissertation seeks to understand how queer femme Latinx men, trans, and gender variant individuals ages 18 to 30 subjectively describe the meaning(s) they hold and how they understand their lived experiences while living with multiple minorized identities within complex and often oppressive systems.

HOW LONG WILL THE RESEARCH LAST AND WHAT WILL I NEED TO DO?

- Participation will take a total of one-two hours and will be completed in one session.
- If you volunteer to participate in this study, the researcher will ask you to do the following:
    - Respond to basic demographic questions.
    - Spend approximately one-two hours with the researcher for an interview.
    - The interview will be conducted via zoom and will be recorded.
- You will have the oportunity to review, edit, and erase the tapes/recordings as you see fit.

ARE THERE ANY RISKS IF I PARTICIPATE?

- There is a potential for discomfort given the topics of study. A resource list is provided should you need it.

ARE THERE ANY BENEFITS IF I PARTICIPATE?

- You will not directly benefit from your participation in this research.

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

- Participation is completely voluntary and you may stop participation at any point during the interview.

HOW WILL INFORMATION ABOUT ME AND MY PARTICIPATION BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL?

- The researchers will do their best to make sure that your private information is kept confidential. Information about you will be handled as confidentially as possible, but participating in research may involve a loss of privacy and the potential for a breach in confidentiality. Study data will be physically and electronically secured. As with any use of electronic means to store data, there is a risk of breach of data security.

Use of personal information that can identify you:

- 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 storing de-identified data, including your interview responses. Demographical data will be collected but it will be aggregated.

How information about you will be stored:

- Your information will be stored in a secure password protected server. Only the PI will have access to participant information.

People and agencies that will have access to your information:

- The research team, authorized UCLA personnel, and the study sponsor, may have access to study data and records to monitor the study. Research records provided to authorized, non-UCLA personnel will not contain identifiable information about you. Publications and/or presentations that result from this study will not identify you by name.
- Employees of the University may have access to identifiable information as part of routine processing of your information, such as lab work or processing payment. However, University employees are bound by strict rules of confidentiality.

USE OF DATA FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

- Your data, including de-identified data may be kept for use in future research.

WILL I BE PAID FOR MY PARTICIPATION?

- Yes, you will receive a $20 gift card upon completing the one-time interview.

WHO CAN I CONTACT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS ABOUT THIS STUDY?

- If you have any questions, comments or concerns about the research, you can talk to the one of the researchers. Please contact: the PI (Javier) or the faculty sponsor (Dr. Abrams) Please contact:
    - **Javier Garcia-Perez (PI)**
        - *PhD Candidate in Social Welfare*
        - (951) 850-1443
        - jgarciaperez@ucla.edu
    - **Dr. Laura S. Abrams (Faculty Sponsor)**
        - *Social Welfare Department Chair*
        - (310) 206-0693
        - abrams@luskin.ucla.edu

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 or by mail: Box 951406, Los Angeles, CA 90095-1406.

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.

You will be given a copy of this sheet along with a resource list to keep for your records.

APPENDIX B

Interview Protocol - Participant

Introduction:

- Thank you again for agreeing to chat with me today.
- My name is Javier and I am a PhD candidate at UCLA in the department of Social Welfare.
- I want to go over what today is going to look like.
    - We should be chatting for about an hour and a half to about two-hours
    - Before the interview I'm going to briefly go over some basic consent, feel free to interrupt if you have any questions, and then we'll get the interview started.
    - When answering questions think about stories or moments.
- I wanted to ask if it is okay if I record our conversation?
    - The recording is simply for note-taking purposes and analysis.
    - I want to emphasize that the recording will not be shared with anyone besides the research team.

Brief Consent Review:

1. **Why is this study being done?**
    a. This dissertation seeks to understand how queer femme Latinx men, trans, and gender variant individuals ages 18 to 30 subjectively describe their personal lived experiences as multiple minoritized individuals. Some of the questions I am going to ask you might be difficult to talk about. I want you to know that you are in charge of your story and you have the power to stop this interview, skip questions, or not talk about things you don't want to talk about.
2. **What will happen if I take part in this research study?**
    a. If you volunteer to participate in this study, the researcher will ask you to do the following:
        i. Respond to basic demographic questions.
        ii. Spend approximately 90 minutes with the researcher for an interview.
        iii. The interview will be conducted via zoom and will be recorded.
        iv. Participants will be invited to voluntarily submit any of the following additional data sources: (1) creative output, like journals, essays, poetry, music, photos, or artwork accompanied with the interviewee's explanation of the work; (2) social media posts; and (3) any additional data they may wish to share.
3. **What other choices do I have if I choose not to participate?**
    a. Participation is completely voluntary and you may stop participation at any point during the interview.
4. **What are my rights if I take part in this study?**
    a. 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.
    b. Whatever decision you make, there will be no penalty to you, and no loss of benefits to which you were otherwise entitled.

c. You may refuse to answer any questions that you do not want to answer and still remain in the study.

5. **Confidentiality**
    a. 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 storing de-identified data, including your interview responses. Demographical data will be collected but it will be aggregated.

Transition:

- Do you have any questions for me before we get started?

Interview Guide:

<u>Demographic:</u>

1. Where in California do you live?
2. What is your age?
3. What generation Latinx are you?
4. What is your/family country of origin?
5. What is/was the primary language at home?
6. What are your personal gender pronouns?
7. What is current occupation (if any)?

<u>Identity Perception:</u>

1. What does it mean to you to be?
    a. Queer
        i. Why…
    b. Femme/femme presenting
        i. Why…
    c. Latinx
        i. Why…
2. How would you say you experience (understand) your identities?
    a. Any specific memories come to mind?
3. How would you describe your presentation (expression)?
4. How would you say your identities mix or exist together?
5. Can you tell me about a time you felt like you had to change because of your identities?
    a. (maybe work harder, hide certain identities)
6. Can you recall a time you felt your identities were celebrated and you felt complete/seen (authentic)?

7. Can you tell me about a time you felt your identities were looked down on?
    a. What was going on?

Contextual Factors:

1. What was your coming out process like?
    a. Can you tell me your story?
2. Tell me about your family? How do you define family?
    a. What has your family been like during your process?
    b. Can you recall a time they supported you?
    c. Maybe a time they didn't support you?

3. How do you define community?
    a. What has your community been like during your process?
    b. Can you recall a time they supported you?
    c. Maybe a time they didn't support you?
4. Can you describe the current situation in California and maybe the US around Queer Femme Latinx?
    a. Has it impacted you at all?
5. How has culture played a role in your identity journey?
    a. Any cultural norms come to mind?
6. How has the larger LGBTQ+ community played a role in your identity journey?

Support/Navigating Their World:

1. What does support mean to you?
    a. What does support look like?
    b. Do you seek support?
    c. What supports do you use?

Outcomes:

1. How would you say you've managed your various identities?
2. What do you think your future looks like?

General:

1. Anything you would like to share that maybe I didn't ask about?

APPENDIX C

University of California, Los Angeles
Resource List

Research Study: Viviendo en la Intersección
PI: Javier Garcia-Perez, MSW

A list of resources for the LGBTQ+ and Latinx community in California. When possible, each resource is hyperlinked to the organization website.

Hotline	
LGBT National Hotline 888-843-4564	Crisis Text Line Text: START to 741741
National Trans Lifeline 877-565-8860	National Domestic Violence Hotline 800-799-SAFE (7233) 800-787-3224 (TTY) 800-942-6908 (Spanish)
National Suicide Hotline 1-800-273-8255	Peace over Violence Los Angeles County Rape & Battering Hotlines (English and Spanish) 310-392-8381 213-626-3393 626-793-3385
Intimate Partner Violence	
Los Angeles LGBT Center Intimate Partner Violence 323-993-7400	Los Angeles County Domestic Violence Hotline (Only accessible from Los Angeles County area codes) 800-978-3600

Mental Health & Health	
BIENSTAR *Location:* 5326 East Beverly Blvd Los Angeles, CA 90022 *Email:* info@bienestar.org *Phone:* 323.727.7896 *Serves:* The Latino community affected by HIV and AIDS in the Los Angeles area	San Gabriel Valley Gay and Lesbian Center *Location:* Prince Erik Hall 2607 S. Santa Anita Ave. Arcadia, CA 91006 *Phone:* 626.578.5772 *Serves:* The LGBT community in the San Gabriel Valley area
LGBTQ Center Long Beach *Location:* 2017 E. 4th Street Long Beach, CA 90814 *Email:* info@centerlb.org *Phone:* 562.434.4455 *Serves:* The LGBTQ community in the Long Beach area	Latino Equality Alliance *Location:* 553 S Clarence St. Los Angeles, California *Email:* info@latinoequalityalliance.com *Phone:* 323.286.7224 *Serves:* The Latino/a LGBTQ community in the Los Angeles area
Children's Hospital Los Angeles *Location:* 5000 Sunset 4th floor Los Angeles, CA 90027 *Email:* ctyhd@chla.usc.edu *Phone:* 323-361-5372 *Serves:* Trans youth and gender diverse community (3-25) with medical, mental health, case management, STI testing, and support groups.	Los Angeles County Lesbian and Bisexual Women's Health Collaborative *Location:* Iris-Cantor-UCLA Women's Health Education & Research Center 911 Broxton Ave, 1st floor Los Angeles, CA 90024 *Email:* ktsingh@mednet.ucla.edu *Phone:* 310.794.8063 *Serves:* Lesbian and bisexual women in the Los Angeles area
Los Angeles LGBT Center *Location:* 1625 Schrader Blvd. LA, CA 90028 *Phone:* (323) 993-7400 *Services:* The LGBTQ community in the Los Angeles area	National Queer and Trans Therapists of Color Network A healing justice organization that provides national directory of mental health providers.

Community Center	
Member Centers (California) Member Centers in the United States Listed alphabetically by State/Province, then by City, then by Location name	TransLatin@ Coalition The TransLatin@ Coalition 3055 Wilshire Blvd., Ste 350 Los Angeles, CA 90010
Pacific Center for Human Growth Founded in 1973, Pacific Center for Human Growth is the oldest LGBTQIA+ center in the Bay Area, the third oldest in the nation, and operates the only sliding scale mental health clinic for LGBTQIA+ and QTBIPOC people and their families in Alameda County.	Rainbow Community Center of Contra Costa County Clinical Services for LGBTQ Youth & Their families
Oakland LGBTQ Center Community resource center with a variety of programs.	Fresno LGBTQ+ Resource Center Community resource center with a variety of programs.
LGBTQ Center Orange County Community resource center with a variety of programs.	Somos Familia Somos Familia's mission is to create support and acceptance for Latina(o) lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning youth and their families. They envision a world where youth of all sexual orientations, gender expressions and identities are accepted and celebrated by their families and communities. Phone Number: 510-725-7764 Email: somosfamiliabay@hotmail.com

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