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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA,  
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Authentically Gay, Authentically Latino: Contesting Sexual and Ethnic Identity Boundaries

DISSERTATION

submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements  
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in Sociology

by

Archibaldo Silva

Dissertation Prospectus Committee:

Professor David J. Frank, Chair

Professor Francesca Polletta

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2021



# DEDICATION

To

Celina and Hector

*The true vocation calls us out beyond ourselves*

*Breaks our heart in the process*

*And then humbles, simplifies, and enlightens us about the hidden core nature that enticed us  
in the first place*

David Whyte

Words of wisdom from a friend

*Sobretudo guarda tu corazón porque este determina el rumbo de tu vida.*

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## **ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION**

Authentically Gay, Authentically Latino: Contesting Sexual and Ethnic Identity Boundaries

by

Archibaldo Silva

Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology

University of California, Irvine, 2021

Professor David J. Frank, Chair

Gay sexuality has been racialized as White and Latino ethnicity opposes a homosexual identity. Adopting a gay sexual identity thus seemingly requires the shedding of an expressive and instrumental ethnic identity, something that is challenging if not impossible for Latino men. I argue, however, that it is possible to be both gay and Latino and I show how that happens for my Latino gay men respondents. The focus of my dissertation is on gay men who are out to their family members and invested in a romantic, committed relationship. I analyzed Latino gay men's lives in order to shed light on how LGBTQ people of color reconcile historically unreconcilable aspects of their lives: sexual identity and ethnic identity. I find that my respondents contest ethnosexual boundaries in their everyday interactions with family members. The Latino gay men in my study, predominantly of Mexican origin, become gay within the family context as they engage family in processes that are shaped by broader shifts in the cultural, social, economic, and political contexts in which they and their families are embedded.

## INTRODUCTION

*In a North American context in which individualism is on the increase, among U.S. Hispanics there exists a countervailing impulse in “comunidad,” community. This concept of “comunidad” is best expressed as “familia,” family, perhaps the most important social institution in Latino/a cultures. —Miguel de la Torre (Religion and Religiosity, 2008)*

After questioning me about my sexuality, my father calmly offered some advice when I revealed to him that in fact I am gay. “Beware of AIDS and mayates<sup>1</sup>, and just don’t ever dress as a woman and don’t tell anyone else,” he said. His reaction surprised me; I was moved to tears as I processed what I perceived at the time as unconditional acceptance. Having experienced homophobia in my hometown in Mexico and within my own family, I expected him to be angry and disappointed. Instead, he assured me that he loved me. And while I did not read his reaction as such at the time, he also nonetheless suggested that keeping my place in the family was contingent upon my protection of the family’s honor and my dignity as a man—by not paying for sex or affection or crossdressing and thus keeping my sexuality invisible and private (don’t tell anyone else).

Beyond my personal experience, my father’s response to my disclosure of a gay identity challenges notions that homophobia is inherent to Mexican culture. His reaction in fact reflects the stereotypes and stigma attached to AIDS and homosexuality, which are

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<sup>1</sup> Mayate is a derogatory term Mexicans use to refer to a man who has sex with men (often for money, housing, or other material gain), but considers himself straight because he takes on an active sexual role.

neither unique to Mexicans in particular nor Latinos/as (Latinx<sup>2</sup> henceforth) in general. But most importantly, his reaction reveals the complex relationship between cultural understandings of gender, sexuality, and family—within my family and in the larger Latinx community in the United States.

The focus of my dissertation is on gay Latino men who are out to their family members. I analyze this demographic as a way to better understand how LGBTQ people of color reconcile historically irreconcilable aspects of their lives: sexual identity and ethnic identity. That is, how LGBTQ people construct a sexual identity while keeping their membership within their family and ethnic community; how they structure their romantic relationships alongside family relationships. My overarching research questions ask how Latino gay couples navigate family of origin in a context in which their relationships are legitimized by the state, but contested by cultural understandings of family. How do they nurture and sustain family ties while living an openly gay life after explicitly disclosing a gay identity? To answer my research questions, I focus on how my respondents draw from culture and institutional arrangements to reconstitute their sexual identity in ways that cohere with their ethnic identity. I argue that family history and the political and legal contexts serve as the basis on which Latino gay men forge identities and maintain family ties. I further argue that the Latino gay men in my study contest ethnosexual boundaries drawing on various cultural repertoires they have adopted from a variety of sources.

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<sup>2</sup> I use the term Latinx as gender inclusive version the category. The term has gained support in the scientific community, but it is not widely accepted among Latinos/as. I use Latinos when referring to men only and Latinas when referring to women. I also refer to my respondents as Latino gay men because they self-identified as such.

Swidler (2001) discusses a new way of thinking about culture. From her perspective, culture bestows individuals with agency. In opposition to the argument that individuals do not use culture, Swidler maintains that culture is like a “tool kit” in which a repertoire of symbols, rules, and rituals is kept handy for people to use in various ways in various situations and even within the same situations. In her work, she shows that the use of these cultural tools can sometimes produce contradictory arguments as different frames are used within a single situation. Her analysis shows that people maintain a diverse cultural repertoire with frameworks and/or vivid scenarios that are called into action to make sense of “different scenes or situations” (page 34). In Swidler’s view, culture is an unorganized, unintegrated accumulation of worldviews that “constitute multiple selves, worlds, and modes of action” (page 24). Swidler suggests that there is a certain consistency to culture that is facilitated by institutional constraints and prescribed behavior. For example, because most people have specific ideas about what marriage is or should be, when discussing marriage people return to the same themes consistently, regardless of whether the arguments advanced contain contradictions. [Swidler argues that marriage as an institution confronts different people with similar challenges. They draw on culture in patterned ways to deal with those challenges.]

Jimenez (2008) discussed ethnic boundary surveillance within Mexican origin categories. Claims of ethnic inauthenticity are advanced by Mexican immigrants and second-generation Mexican Americans against later generation Mexican-Americans who do not possess key indicators of ethnic authenticity, such as Spanish language. Immigrant replenishment, Jimenez argued, “informs ideas about authentic expressions of Mexican ethnicity.” Rigid intragroup boundaries originating from strong notions of ethnic

authenticity result in rigorous standards for performing ethnic identity. Jimenez did not discuss sexuality, but drawing from Nagel's (2000) work I suggest sexual identity is a key indicator used by co-ethnics for gauging ethnic authenticity. Nagel (2000) defined "ethnosexual frontiers" as surveilled borderlands at the intersections of ethnic boundaries: "erotic intersections where people make connections across ethnic, racial, and national borders" (page 113). Nagel adds that ethnic communities contain multiple sexual boundaries organized and regulated by "appropriate enactments of heterosexuality." The nearly universal depiction of self and other through heteronormative "ethnosexual expectations for behavior," according to Nagel, marks homosexuality too. Ethnic others and co-ethnics surveil and enforce culturally approved gender and sexual behavior in order to maintain the "honor and respectability" of the ethnic community. Similarly, Almaguer (1993) argued that Latino men have historically been required to show "allegiance to patriarchal gender relations and to a sexual system meaning that directly militate against the emergence" of a gay identity. Nagel's (2000) and Almaguer's (1993) analyses suggest that my respondents must contend with existing ethnosexual boundaries to maintain ethnic authenticity as traditionally constructed—Spanish-speaking, heterosexual, family oriented—when they adopt a gay sexuality among family and co-ethnics.

I discuss my respondents' experiences drawing on Swidler. I suggest that my respondents draw from different cultural contexts to structure their romantic and family relationships. I trace the source of their multiple repertoires. Emerging rhetorics, social practices, and cultural shifts surrounding the visibility and social support of LGBTQ issues are salient sources. Drawing on culture and family history, my respondents reimagine their collective and individual sense of self as members of their ethnic community and gay

individuals. As they draw on family history and prescribed social practices within the family, they advance contradictory arguments about self and belonging contesting ethnic boundaries, which are also “sexual boundaries—erotic intersections” (Nagel, 2000). Respondents also draw on language emerging from LGBTQ circles, such as marriage equality and gay rights rhetoric, to reimagine the possibilities for their relationships. My respondents imagine their romantic lives as belonging in the realm of family and thus merge both in ways that the boundaries between sexual and ethnic identities blur (Alba, 2005). Finally, my respondents also draw from ideologies and formal articulations of legal rights emerging from political bodies, making them part of their cultural repertoires about self, love, life, family, and belonging.

## CHAPTER ONE

### **Ethnic Attachment and Acculturation**

Similarities across generations in the United States suggest ethnic attachment. Traces of ethnic attachment can be found into the fifth generation and it is reflected in language, religion, and family values (Telles and Ortiz, 2008). At the same time, immigrants and children of immigrants who have been exposed to the U.S context assimilate into American culture, having access to a dual frame of reference (Portes and Rumbaut, 2014). For example, research shows that a majority of second generation Latinx continues to speak Spanish at home, rather than just English (Tellez and Ortiz, 2008; Vasquez, 2011; Portes and Rumbaut, 2014). In addition, “acculturation gap” analyses show that, as compared to their African-American, European, and third-generation Latinxs counterparts, first- and second-generation Latinxs experience greater levels of acculturation conflict at home (Deniss et. at., 2010). Ethnic attachment attests to how prominent of a role parental culture plays in the socialization of US-born or US raised immigrants and children of immigrants. Similarly, the acculturation gap research findings supports the dual frame of reference immigrants and US-born individuals develop as they come of age in the United States.

Religion and religiosity shape ethnic identity. Research shows that religious affiliation may be a sort of badge for ethnic identification (Calvillo and Bailey, 2015). With a focus on religious affiliation and language use as a marker of ethnic identity attachment, Calvillo and Bailey (2015) show that Catholics are more likely to use Spanish at home compared to their Protestant counterparts. In addition, the authors suggest that religious artifacts at home might function as a source of ethnic replenishment for Catholics thus leading to stronger ethnic attachment compared to Protestant Latinx. Similarly, religious



affiliation can also result in ethnic detachment or ethnic identity malleability (Marti 2012; Calvillo and Bailey, 2015). Marti (2012) shows that religious affiliation can result in an “ethnic transcendent Latino identity.” While ethnic identity is not shed, Marti (2012) argues that ethnic identity is “stretched” in ways that transcend the boundaries between “us” and “them” and connect with “other Hispanic or non-Hispanic” people within the same religious group.

The generational acculturation gap shapes family dynamics. Second-generation Mexican-Americans continue to identify as Catholic, albeit symbolically in some cases (Telles and Ortiz, 2008; Smith, 2005; Vasquez, 2011). Regardless of religiosity or religious identity, religious dogma historically promotes traditional family values, heterosexuality and traditional gender roles, all of which shape family dynamics (Telles and Ortiz; 2008; Portes and Rumbaut, 2014). However, compared to first-generation, second-generation Latinx are more likely to disagree with traditional gender ideologies and expectations, and more often than not agree that it is ok to disagree with a parent (Tellez and Ortiz, 2008; Dennis et. al., 2010). Unlike their parents, second-generation immigrants disagree that men should have the last say or that girls should live at home until they get married (Telles and Ortiz, 2008 p205). Telles and Ortiz (2008) also found that second-generation Latinx are more likely to exercise their freedom of expression and individuality in a variety of ways, which is characteristic of US individualism (see also Marti, 2012). In addition, they show that age and cohort play important roles in shaping attitudes about gender expression, ethnic attachment, and collectivism. The ways in which ethnic attachment and acculturation to the US context shape family life are thus well documented.

Ethnic attachment widens immigrants' chances to participate in family life, in the United States and abroad. At the same time, ethnic attachments also pose challenges to efforts to reconcile traditional and modern attitudes and identities (Almaguer, 1993; Manalansan V, 2003; Smith, 2005). For example, Mexican American boys may grapple with Latino masculinity ideologies on the one hand and hegemonic notions of American masculinity on the other (Smith, 2005). Similarly, the boundary between religious beliefs and sexual identity options may pose challenges in negotiations of sexual identity at the individual level (Wedow et. al., 2017). In addition, ethnoreligious beliefs have the power to demarcate the limits of acceptable partners that parents can envision for their adult children (Clycq, 2012). For gay Latino men, ethnic, cultural, religious, and family values challenge, and are simultaneously challenged by, a homosexual identity in the US context. On the one hand, a homosexual identity has been historically rejected on the basis of religious and cultural definitions of family (Powell et. al., 2010) and social constructions of "normal" sexuality (Seidman, 2003; Snorton, 2014; Ward 2015). On the other hand, American culture provide individuals a platform on which to build arguments of freedom and equality (Hochschild, 1995). Unlike White middle-class gay men, however, gay immigrants are positioned in a unique location from which they must simultaneously negotiate class, race and ethnicity within a society that views them through a racialized lens (Almaguer, 1993; Manalansan V, 2003; Collins, 2005; Cantú, 2009 and 2011) and gender and sexuality expectations in society and within the family of origin (Chen, 1999; Collins, 2005; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005; Cantú, 2011; Ocampo, 2012 and 2013; Delucio et. al. 2020; Reczek and Bosley-Smith, 2021), as well as ethnic boundaries and belonging in their community, (Dubé and Savin-Williams, 1999; Jimenez, 2008; Frank et. al., 2010).

Latinx gays and lesbians must also negotiate personal beliefs and social expectations about gender expression and sexuality. Although they may self-identify as gay among other gay friends, they may not feel they have the freedom or the desire to adopt a gay identity among family (Almaguer, 1993; Dubé and Savin-Williams, 1999; Ocampo 2013; Delucio et. al., 2020; Schmitz et. al., 2020). Thus, family is one of the arenas where conflicts between tradition and modernity, ethnic solidarity and sexual identity emerge. Gay men may negotiate sexual identity through the performance of ethnic authenticity as understood in their ethnic/racial community and family (Nagel, 2000; Decena, 2008; Ocampo, 2012 and 2013; Lee 2018). At the same time, multiple identities' negotiation presents varying dilemmas and different negotiation needs. Whereas gay identity may be salient among friends, sexual identity does not trump ethnic identity, or vice-versa within the family context.

### **Family Matters and Latinx Familism**

Family exists in the “interactions of its members” rather than only in state sanctioned legal ties (Burgess, 1926; Weston 1991). From a functionalist perspective, family is a group characterized by economic cooperation, a co-residence, and has reproduction as one of its core functions (Gittins, 1982). However, an increasingly globalized society requires us to move away from functionalist definitions of the family. Recent scholarship shows that economic globalization, legal barriers, and post-industrialization among other factors require that family members put distance between themselves (Parreñas, 2001; Abrego and Menjivar, 2011; Madianou and Miller, 2011; Dreby 2012; Enriquez, 2015; Abrego, 2016). Similarly, in the national context, economic and structural issues including divorce, single parenthood, longevity, and step-family have

increasingly diversified family, its organization, and the interactions among its members (Bengtson, 2001; Cherlin, 2010; Johnson and Young Jr, 2016). Families have for decades existed across borders and across households, separated by emotional and physical distance.

Despite family separation, blood and chosen family continue to be a meaningful source of support for its members. The nuclear family has been thought of as the primary site of socialization and support for family members. The newest members of society have been documented as acquiring cultural knowledge primarily within the family (Thomson, McLanahan, & Curtin 1992; Janoski & Wilson, 1995; McLoyd, Cauce, Takeuchi, & Wilson, 2000). However, as a system of social support that provides material and nonmaterial resources, family networks and relationships across generations are increasingly important. For example, the longevity of family members has allowed for a greater overlap between children, parents, and grandparents, and changes in kin's familial roles and interactions (Lopez, 1999; Bengtson, 2001; Perlesz, Brown, Lindsay, McNair, De Vaus, & Pitts, 2006; Cherlin, 2010). Family scholars have documented the ways in which families extend across households, but also the socialization and childrearing roles of extended family and non-kin networks (Weston, 1991; Jones et. al., 2007; Conn et. al., 2013). Keeping in mind that families are not exactly what people often times imagine a family looks like (i.e., a nuclear family with common residence) is important for understanding that my respondents' family life exist across the distance, but family continues to be a meaningful concept in the daily lives of my respondents.

Scholars have accumulated a rich body of knowledge about the family life of gays and lesbians. The research foci range from gays' and lesbians' interactions with their

communities, their romantic relationships, family structuring, and relationships with family of origin (Peplau and Cochran, 1990; Peplau et al., 1996; Oswald, 2002; Peplau and Fingerhut, 2007; Moore, 2011; Acosta, 2013; Ocampo, 2013; Delucio et. al., 2020; Reczek and Bosley-Smith, 2021). Gays' and lesbians' parenting styles, child outcomes, and relationship dynamics in particular have received the most attention from researchers historically (e.g., see Patterson, 2000; Thornton and Young-DeMarco 2001; Moore & Stambnolis-Ruhstorfer, 2013; Costa et. al., 2021). Adult and older adult gays and lesbians have received scant attention, except in matters of public health, for example HIV/AIDS and drugs and alcohol abuse. Gays and lesbians of color receive even less attentions in all lines of social science research, but scholars have begun to fill the gap (Collins, 2005; Cantú, 2003 & 2009; Moore, 2011; Acosta, 2013).

Chosen families are important for LGBT people. In her work about chosen kin, Weston (1991) argued that gays and lesbians create family of choice networks because blood relatives and society have historically excluded them from cultural definitions of family (see also Powerll et. al., 2010). Over a decade after Weston's work, research still shows that gay men and women continue to rely more heavily on chosen kin than on blood relatives for social support and material resources (Oswald, 2002a; Dewaele Cox, Van den Berghe, and Vincke, 2011; Brennan-Ing, Seidel, Larson, and Karpiak, 2014). The well documented, long history of stigma against a homosexual identity and the exclusion of LGBTQ people from full participation in civic and family life (Cohen & Savin-William, 1996; D'Augelli, Hershber, and Pikjington, 1998; Mays and Cochran, 2001; Cantú, 2003; Moore, 2011; Acosta, 2013; Kimport, 2013) are in large part responsible for such outcomes.

Chosen families may be less salient among Latinx, however, as suggested by familism research.

Familism has been closely associated with Latinx. For decades, researchers have attributed familism, high levels of familial solidarity, loyalty, and support among family members, to Latinx as a core characteristic (Sabogal, Marin, & Otero-Sabogal, 1987; Diaz, 1998; Costante et. al., 2019; Salcido et. al., 2021). The conceptualization of familism as unique to Latinx families has been criticized as a problematic stereotype that pathologizes Latinx culture (Cantú, 2009). And familism actually operates in similar ways in diverse ethnoracial groups (Schwartz, 2007; Leong, 2014). But the idea of familism among Latinx people in the United States is well documented and it is thought to be in part shaped by the negative context of reception in the host country as well as class dimensions. And familism applies to the family life of LGBTQ people. Diaz (1998) argued that within Latinx families, acceptance of a gay identity is only achieved through silenced sexuality. Sexual behavior and a gay sexual identity are not linked in the case of his respondents because the Latinos he observed chose family over their own individual sexual desires, which is reminiscent of familism. In fact, Diaz attributed such behavior to a profound “respect, affiliation and loyalty to family of origin” (92). Similarly, Acosta (2013) emphasized the importance of family to her respondents by linking her respondents’ narrative to her own experience as tacit subjects within the family. Cantú (2009), arguing for a queer political economy of migration, recognized the importance of the family for his respondents’ experiences, asserting that the family is “where normative constructions of gender and sexuality are reproduced” (128).

#### **SEXUALITY AND ETHNICITY AT THE INTERSECTION OF FAMILY**

Today LGBTQ individuals enjoy of greater legal protections and social acceptance much of the world. This is particularly true for lesbian and gay individuals in the U.S. for whom public support more than doubled between the late 1970s and the turn of the twentieth century, according to the Williams Institute (see Flores, 2014). More people of all ages have since the mid 1990s contributed to a broad cultural shift in attitudes toward lesbian and gay sexuality. Survey data shows that more people of all ages have expressed positive attitudes toward LGBTQ people. Similarly, marriage equality's public support increased rapidly during the three decades prior to the 2013 SCOTUS's ruling on the unconstitutionality of section 3 of the Defense of Marriage Act, which defined marriage as the union between one man and one woman at the federal level (Flores, 2014; Hull 2014). LGBTQ visibility has increased in television and in society at large and more LGBTQ people are "out" (Flores 2014; Villicana, Delucio, and Biernat, 2016).

In spite of the new legal protections, same-sex couples face unique challenges. As Americans transitioned into a context in which gay marriage would become a constitutional reality, gay and lesbian couples scrambled to devise strategies to gain cultural legitimation (Koppelman, 2015; Williams, 2018). Gaining cultural legitimation proved difficult in some contexts more than in others, such as gaining support from religious organizations (Wood and Conley, 2014; Winder, 2015; Powell et. al., 2016; Williams, 2018), securing services from private businesses (Koppelman, 2015; *Masterpiece Cakeshop, Ltd. v. Colorado Civil Rights Comm'n*, 138 S. Ct. 1719, 2018), securing family participation in same-sex wedding ceremonies (Ocobock, 2013), and gaining support from family of origin while openly gay (Tan, 2011; Ocampo 2012; Acosta, 2013; Delucio et. al., 2020).

Within the family context, LGBTQ individuals approach challenges, such as disclosing sexual and gender identity, with care. Attempts to gain familial legitimization may result in negative consequences. Opening up about an LGBTQ identity—or even establishing the nature of a same-sex relationship regardless of verbal disclosure of sexuality—has been shown to leave LGBTQ vulnerable to exclusion and rejection (Ocobock, 2013; Robinson, 2018). Marriage may lead same-sex couples to perceived positive family experiences, but explicit disclosure of homosexuality also creates opportunities for LGBTQ people to experience rejection from family members they believed supported them (Ocobock 2013). Similarly, Robinson (2018) documents that disclosure of LGBTQ sexuality results in verbal, psychological and physical abuse, alienation, and may lead to homelessness.

The experiences of LGBTQ racial/ethnic minorities in the United States are unique as compared to their White counterparts (Gil, 2018; Schmitz et. al., 2020). For this reason, continuing to belong to their ethnic community and family of origin may be particularly important for LGBTQ people of color (POC). Beyond the issues in the family context, xenophobia and racism are two prominent situations that LGBTQ POC face, in addition to homophobia. On one hand, the law and cultural understandings of family have historically been oppressive toward LGBTQ people (Williams, 2018). On the other hand, anti-immigration laws and anti-immigrant sentiment fuels the so-called “immigrant threat” effectively marginalizing US-born citizens and documented immigrants by making them suspects of illegality (Chavez, 2013; Rodriguez, 2017). Thus, LGBTQ people of color face racial exclusion and victimization (Ocampo, 2012; Meyer, 2015; Coulter et al., 2017) and policing and alienation (Rosenberg, 2017) in addition to sexuality-based discrimination.



Family has been documented as one of the most important institutions for LGBTQ POC, Latinx people included (Almaguer, 1993; Diaz, 1998; de la Torre, 2008; Acosta, 2013; Han et. al., 2017; Patrón, 2021). The opening quote by de la Torre (2008) captures the complex ways in which ethnicity and family are entangled: community "is best expressed as family" among Latinx people. As I show in Chapter 2, family is in fact central to my respondents' self-identity as Latino gay men. However, multiple identities, that is being both LGBTQ and Latinx, represent multiple and varying sets of dilemmas that challenge ethnic identity and sense of belonging as a member of the family of origin. LGBTQ Latinx have thus long grappled with inventing strategies for navigating family of origin before, after, and without verbal disclosure (Acosta 2011; Decena, 2011; Ocampo 2012 & 2013; Delucio et. al., 2020). The fact that family is important for Latinx LGBTQ renders unsurprising that many gay and lesbian Latinx continue to avoid verbal disclosures of a homosexual identity among family. Existing in a sociocultural context in which homosexuality is perceived as a threat to family relationships, gays and lesbians Latinx are channeled into tacit subjectivity (Decena, 2011), complicity sexual silence (Acosta, 2010), hyperconscious gender management (Ocampo, 2013), and the use of various other nonverbal disclosure strategies in relation to family of origin (Delucio et. al., 2020; Schmitz et. al., 2020).

Cultural understandings of gay and lesbian people have assumed that family is incompatible with LGBTQ. Two factors fueling these beliefs according to Mezey (2015) were first the fact that gay and lesbian parents did not exist in the North American imagination. Gay and lesbian parents were absent from public view, from the media, culture or politics so historically people assumed that gays and lesbians do not parent. Second, it

was assumed that all families rejected any family member who adopted an LGBTQ identity. Prior to Mezey, scholars had grappled with the question of whether in fact LGBTQ and family are incompatible (Weston 1991; Baca Zinn, Eitzen, and Wells, 2015). Weston (1991) found that in the United States adopting a gay identity was equated to a rejection of “the family.” Diaz (1998) echoed a similar finding in relation to Latino men-who-have-sex-with-men. Diaz believed Latinos rejected a gay identity in favor of family because adopting a gay identity meant they rejected their families.

Nagel (2000) defined “ethnosexual frontiers” as surveilled borderlands at the intersections of ethnic boundaries—“erotic intersections where people make connections across ethnic, racial, and national borders” (page 113). Nagel adds that ethnic communities contain multiple sexual boundaries organized and regulated by “appropriate enactments of heterosexuality.” The nearly universal depiction of self and other through heteronormative “ethnosexual expectations for behavior,” according to Nagel, marks gay and lesbian sexualities too. Co-ethnic as well as ethnic others surveil and enforce culturally approved gender and sexual behavior in order to maintain the “honor and respectability” of the ethnic community. Latino men have historically been required to show “allegiance to patriarchal gender relations and to a sexual system meaning that directly militate against the emergence” of a gay identity (Almaguer, 1993). Nagel’s (2000) and Almaguer’s (1992) analyses suggest that my respondents must contest ethnosexual boundaries as they attempt to maintain their ethnic authenticity when they adopt a gay sexuality.

My respondents’ life stories show that they went through a process of identity defragmentation. Having experienced conflict in relation to suspected homosexuality and actual familial rejection due to homosexuality, my respondents had compartmentalized

their sexual and family lives. With the exception of occasional attempts to merge their sexual and family lives, my respondents initially would avoid mixing their lives as gay individuals with family, even after disclosing to their parents that they are gay. As one respondent put it, *“there is a time to be gay, and there is a time to be with family.”* This pattern of compartmentalization is consistent with existing literature about how gays and lesbians Latinx negotiate sexuality and family life. However, shifts in the sociopolitical and cultural contexts changed how my respondents thought of their identities in relation to family. Prior to the rise of LGBTQ issues as a focus of national debates, my respondents felt the need to balance personal/private and social/public aspects of their identity. By the time of data collection, my respondents had begun to successfully merged their romantic and family relationships in ways that blurred the lines between personal/private and social/public aspects of self identity. That is, they felt they could be openly gay in a long-term romantic relationship and continue to belong and participate in family life, in similar ways as heterosexual couples could.

### **Methodological Design**

An insider in both the Latinx and the gay communities, I was familiar with how silence about sexuality characterizes family relationships particularly in relation to gay and lesbian sexualities. Yet, I felt a disconnect between scientific discourses and my personal experiences in the community. I was particularly troubled by the implicit suggestion in public health, and social science research that gays and lesbians are exiles in their ethnic community, their family, and a public health concern. There was no denying the accuracy of the research, but I felt that an important aspects of the life of LGBTQ Latinx was missing in the conversation. The gay men I had met over the years felt deeply connected to their

communities and their families. I wanted to capture that connection through my research, to understand how the gay Latinx men and women I knew avoided becoming the homeless, disowned orphan, HIV+, drug addicted subject in the literature. Ultimately, my puzzle is one about the incompatibility of ethnic and sexual identities. To understand how a Latino ethnic identity coheres with a gay sexual identity, my research design relies on the life histories of self-identified gay Latino men and their family relationships. I draw additional insights from my participant observation as an insider in the Latino community and the Latino gay community.

### **Participants**

I primarily draw from interview data with self-identified Latino gay men who were in a romantic relationship. I also draw insights from interviews with lesbians, transgender, Black, Asian, and White participants, particularly in the concluding chapter. I am interested in the experience of gay men specifically because gay men have to overcome particular social and structural constraints as they navigate their social worlds (Ocobock, 2013). I am thinking, for example, about conceptualizations of sexual fluidity (Rupp and Taylo, 2010; Diamond, 2016). I do not mean to say that lesbian women face no challenges because women are viewed as more sexually fluid. Feminists argue that women might face greater obstacles because we live in a patriarchal society dominated by White men (e.g., Collins, 2005). In addition, research suggests that men can also be sexually fluid and get away with it in certain contexts (Anderson 2008 and 2012). However, racial privilege shapes how sexual fluidity is received and treated by the society (Snorton, 2014; Ward 2015). Latino men have historically been required to show “allegiance to patriarchal gender relations and to a sexual system meaning that directly militate against the emergence” of a gay identity

(Almaguer, 1993). Given Almaguer's analysis of Latino men's social location in relation to a sexual meaning, gender, and patriarchal systems, I thought focusing on men's experiences would better expose the ways in which ethnic and sexual boundaries are contested.

I focused on men that ascertained independence from family of origin. We know that familism, high levels of familial solidarity, loyalty, and support among family members, is a core characteristic of Latinos (Sabogal, Marin, & Otero-Sabogal, 1987; Diaz, 1998; Costante et. al., 2019; Salcido et. al., 2021). I figured that being financially dependent on family would heightened familism, thus making it more difficult to tease out familistic behavior from other processes. Research suggests that financial independence reduces the likelihood that a person will feel constrained and forced to adhere to familistic values in order to keep membership in the family (Gordon, 1994; Ramirez-Ortiz, 2020). While I wanted to keep familism in check (i.e., limit it or reduce it), I also needed participants that sought to keep a relationship with family—not because they “had to” but because they “wanted to.”

Another element I required for participation was a long-term committed relationship. I allowed participants to decide whether they in fact were in a “long-term committed relationship.” However, I required them to be in their romantic, committed relationship for a minimum of six month. I decided that six months was appropriate because I felt that gay/lesbian relationships move fast; they are often gauged in “gay years” in the community—similar to how people compare “dog years” to “human years,” but in this case the comparison is between “gay years” and “heterosexual years.” There is research that partially supports this idea. According to Reczek et. al., (2009) long-term same-sex couples' trajectories “can transition more ambiguously to committed formations without marriage, public ceremony, clear-cut act, or decision.” Gay/lesbian relationships follow

unconventional trajectories toward commitment. My data shows that the average years in the relationship in my sample was seven years. Relationship length in years ranged from six months (only two couples had six months) to twenty-three years. I thought twenty-three years was impressive because research at the time suggested that immigrant Latino “MSM” had a tough time forming and keeping long-term committed relationships (Diaz, 1998; Bianchi et. al., 2007). The partners with twenty-three years were a Salvadoran and a Mexican immigrant. There was another couple who had 21 years in their relationships; two second-generation Latinos.

But why a long-term relationship? I believed that focusing on Latino gay men who sought to keep family relationships while also invested in a romantic relationship would better help me understand how Latinos contest ethnic authenticity as they structure their sexual lives as part of the family realm. Given that Latinos are not in a position or context in which they can easily shed their ethnic identity, how can they then continue to be authentically Latino and authentically gay without having to specialize/escape any one of the two identities? As I learned during the interviews, all my participants had disclosed their sexual identity to either siblings or parents, or both. The conversation about a gay identity was not ongoing, they talked about it once. However, the interview responses suggest that respondents shared aspects of their sexual lives (i.e., romantic relationships) with family members over the years. In sum, my respondents were no longer, if they previously had been, living a tacit subjectivity as defined by Decena (2011). Readers can learn more about my participants’ demographic information in the appendix.

## **Recruitment**

I used a snowball sampling method through three channels, including personal networks, social media networks, and community organizations in Los Angeles, California and in Dallas, Texas. I began recruiting in the summer of 2014 and stopped in 2017. Over the years that I had actively participated in LA's and San Fernando Valley's gay night life, dating sites, and other gay scenes prior to joining graduate school, I met multiple gay men and some lesbian women who fell outside the disowned homosexual narrative. Many of the gay men I called my friends for several years lived with their families, some of whom I met personally. I thought my status as an insider would facilitate access to gay participants as well as their families. I did not yet understand that their family relationships were more complex than dichotomous categories of acceptance or rejection would suggest. Complexities in how gays and lesbians negotiate family limited my access to family members to a handful of them, ten to be specific. Most of the gay respondents I recruited, however, assured me they would connect me to a family member for an interview. While that did not happen in all cases, it signals that the participants I recruited felt comfortable enough to commit to ask a family member to participate in a study about same-sex relationships.

I first began recruitment using my immediate connections to the gay community. I reached out to friends and acquaintances to tell them about my research. I did not ask them to participate, but I asked them to connect me with potential participants in their own networks. Second, I scouted my gay Facebook friends' pages to link to potential participants in their friends' lists. When I identified a potential participant, I sent a "friend request" so they could access to my private Facebook upon accepting my request. I proceeded to send a Facebook messenger invitation to participate in my study upon their friend request

approval. I have an active recruitment script that I did not use because it is absurdly long to be sent out as a text message, which I had not anticipated. However, I tried to follow the script as best as possible while also considering that my potential participant might become annoyed with a lengthily message and block me. I believe my approach was most appropriate for online and text message communication. The fact that I recruited a majority of my participants via Facebook, sixteen out of thirty-five, suggests that not using the script was a good move.

### **Data collection**

I used in-depth, semi-structured interviews as my main data collection method. I used a pre-interview survey and participant observation as a supplemental data collection methods. I audio recorded all my interviews and subsequently transferred them to storage encrypted with SecureAccessV3 software. I created an interview guide to capture the life histories of my respondents. The interview consists of a combination of open-ended questions and close-ended questions and prompts. The open-ended questions are organized in various sections designed to capture respondents' backgrounds, experiences in their romantic relationships, attitudes about and perceptions of their homosexual subjectivity in relation to family, cultural ideas about relationships, attitudes about marriage, political consciousness, community and work experiences, experiences within their ethnic community, and experiences within religious communities. I modified the interview guide as needed. For example, I rephrased questions for more clarity, dropped questions that participants could not answer or that generated no meaningful data from the beginning, and added questions based on previous participants' discussions of specific topics. The most recent version of the interview guide is included in the appendices.



With few exceptions, I interviewed participants individually. I decided to conduct separate interviews to avoid a sensation where one partner would dominate the conversation. I also wanted to avoid partners influencing each other, feeling their data was supplemental or that their stories should be complementary. In addition, I wanted each participant to openly and freely tell me their own opinions, thoughts and views without feeling the need to withhold information because the other partner was present.

I tried to follow the same pattern with all my interviews and interview procedures, but the interviews inevitably flowed in different ways with each participant. I used interviewed by comment strategies as discussed by Snow et. al. (1982). I relied on a combination of “puzzlement” and “the replay” often and to a lesser extent on “humorous comments.” I noticed I used humorous comments more often during my interviews with Spanish speakers. In general, for each participant I first provided a Study Information Sheet. I gave the participant a moment to read over the sheet. In some instances, I read the sheet for the participant. I answered any questions or offered clarification. Participants usually wanted to know what the study was for. I told them I was a student at UCI and I wanted to understand the relationship gays and lesbians have with their families. I asked for verbal informed consent. Upon consent, I asked the participants to fill out a short demographic survey, a copy of which is included in the appendices. The survey asks basic questions about identity, income, age, religiosity, and political views. I used the survey demographic data to create categories of race, class, gender, religious affiliation and religiosity. For example, I created socioeconomic status categories using the survey data. Specifically, SES is a compound category that includes level of education, occupation, and individual yearly income.

I used participant observation ethnography as a method to collect supplemental data. First, I participated in a Latino men's weekly meeting held at a non-profit organization that caters to gay Latinos and the Latino immigrant community. The organization is dedicated to providing healthcare information and some social services to the Latino community. The organization's name and location shall remain anonymous to protect the participants' identities. I consistently participated in the gay Latino men's weekly meetings from 2014 through the summer of 2015. I attended the weekly meetings with less frequency in 2015 because I was writing my second year paper. I used my second year paper as a valid reason to exit the field. I eventually stopped attending the meetings in 2016. The weekly meeting's topic changed each week. However, topics such as sex, sexuality, romantic relationships, HIV information, and living as an undocumented gay men were often revisited. The meetings allowed me to observe how first-generation gay immigrants and second-generation US-born Latinos articulate their sexuality and gender. I also observed how the men responded to performances of Latino gay masculinity with laughter as opposed to, for example, finger snapping as encouragement. I want to note that the men who attended the weekly men's meeting are not the participants in my interviews.

I collected notes during my interviews. I captured the respondent's appearance and their general disposition in my notes. I captured the interview setting including the type of neighborhood (e.g., urban, suburban, residential, business district, industrial park, types of businesses, etc) and the place where the interview took place (participant's living room or garden, coffee shop, park, etc). In some instances I noted the number of Grindr profiles within a two-mile radius from the interview location to gauge gay activity levels in the area. I ultimately discarded that data because I realized it was, if not problematic, then at least,

unreliable. I use my observations as supplemental data to better understand my respondents' interview answers.

### **Data analysis**

To analyze my data, I followed the guidelines suggested by Braun and Clarke (2008) in their discussion of thematic analysis, in addition to the aforementioned strategies. Braun and Clarke suggest to the researcher to familiarize himself with the data, generate codes, search for themes, review themes, define and name themes, and finally produce the report. It was a messy process; I went back and forth between defining themes and familiarizing myself with the data. For example, reading new research articles related to my dissertation stimulated a further reflection about a piece of data I had left alone already. After learning new information, I would go back to that same piece of data and analyze it from a different angle. This in turn generated further reflective and analytic memo writing.

In order to become familiar with my data, I transcribed my interviews before proceeding with my thematic analysis. I transcribed the first several interviews personally and I used a transcription service for subsequent interviews. I personally translated and transcribed all the interviews I conducted in Spanish—I am fluent in Spanish. When translating, I tried to capture the substance of the message in my respondents' answers. I further familiarized myself with the data, reading through my interviews several times. While reading and re-reading, I used a variety of coding methods including old school and high-tech. I used line-by-line, color-coding hard copies of my interview transcripts by hand. I also cut each respondent's answer to a question and pasted it in a single word processing document for further analysis and coding using software Atlas ti. And I used a spreadsheet to organize responses by codes and subsequently by themes.

I wrote analytic memos alongside coding my interviews. According to Saldaña (2013) an analytic memo is a commentary stimulated by the data and it can be reflective, descriptive, or follow focused coding strategies. I wrote “early” and “advanced” memos (Charmaz, 2006). Charmaz describes early memo-ing in a similar fashion as Saldaña. Both express that early memo-ing is useful for reflecting about what is happening in the data and can be used to describe what is the content of a code.

I used a variety of coding strategies as described by Charmaz (2006). During initial line-by-line coding, I explored my data more in-depth. For example, instead of thinking about my data from an insider’s perspective who already “understood” what was happening in my data, I used “open-ended” coding. I did this with the understanding that I held prior ideas and understandings about the data. This was a challenging state. I read “silence” and “tacit subjectivity” all over my interviews; I read “erasure” and “complicit avoidance of sexual disclosure” and I read “fear” and “hyperconscious gender management,” all of which have been discussed in relation to my target population. I was obviously influenced by existing literature and I could not see past the existing narratives. In-vivo coding, which I also used during the initial coding phase, helped me move away from my preconceptions about my data. Using in-vivo coding with small pieces of data (i.e., phrases, words) allowed me to keep the substance and meaning the respondent wanted to convey. This coding strategy generated codes that moved my analysis away from the silenced family navigation strategies previously documented in the literature.

After initial coding, I moved to a focused coding phase in which I was more selective about my codes. In this stage I identified the most salient codes and made connections between codes and participants to create themes. For example, I created a theme about

shared knowledge between family members that I called “You Know They Know.” This theme captures the meaning of a same-sex relationship within the heterosexual family as articulated by my respondents. I created another theme I called “Couple’s Identity” that captures how couples think about their relationship to family as a gay couple. I had initially thought of the couple and the family as separate entities, but the theme suggests respondents see themselves as part of “one big family” because they felt family is “a big part of [their] lives.” In a third example I collapsed two themes into one. I had originally created a “Past Family Reactions to the Gay Relationship” theme and a “Present Family Reactions to Gay Relationship.” I collapsed these two into a new theme I called “Evolution of Family Relationship.” Once I found these meaningful connections in the data, I organized participants in a Google Sheet and I transferred their responses using rows and columns to keep track of themes, where each column represents one theme.

### **Dissertation Overview**

In the following chapters I detail the stories of my respondents and their efforts to reconstitute their identities as gay Latinos men in relation to family. In chapter two I argue that the gay couples in my study secure social benefits and membership in the family by drawing on family history. My respondents draw primarily from culturally approved practices to construct and legitimate their romantic relationships within the family realm. Being both gay and Latino, the men in my study are presented with a predicament that challenges their identity and sense of self. In this chapter I also show that my study participants reimagine their collective and individual sense of self as they negotiate family life and navigate the line between two seemingly incompatible identities by using family practices they are accustomed to. In doing so, I also illustrate how family continues to be

central in the lives of my respondents. I illustrate how through the observation of customs, values, and conventions, my respondents lessen the stigma attached to homosexuality within the family, recasting the gay relationship in a respectable light thus making it less incompatible with family life.

In chapter three I ask what are the factors associated with the successful maintenance of ties between gay Latinos and their families of origin? I discuss how social position shapes family formation process and family dynamics among gay Latinos in the United States. In the first section I highlight how the intersection of class, citizenship, and masculinity shape the ways in which gay couples can structure family relations, what family formation processes they can access given their social locations. In the latter section of the chapter, I illustrate how shifts in social positions—from an invisible, silenced gay subjectivity to a visible and “loud” one—impacts the ability of individuals to shape family dynamics and participate in family processes. I suggest visibility is not an all or nothing condition and thus there is a limit to how visible and loud is acceptable for some family members. In addition, I suggest that transcending the limits of visibility can make family relationships difficult, but it is not a grounds for total exclusion of the homosexual subject.

In chapter four I argue that political and legal contexts serve as the basis on which Latino gay men forge family ties. My respondents draw from different cultural contexts in the construction and legitimation of relationships. For example, cultural tools emerging from LGBT circles become widely accepted and the basis of reality restructuring as they are framed through “formal, legal articulation” as rights and thus become part of public dialog through media coverage and legal action (Jacobs, 1993:724).

Finally in the conclusion I discuss the generalizability of my findings. Drawing from interview data with Latinx lesbians and non-Latino gay men, I discuss how my findings about family formation processes apply to individuals in different, multiply marginalized social locations as well as to individuals that are not particularly interested in sustaining family relationships. For example, a Black gay respondent was not particularly inclined to keep a close relationship with his mother or extended kin. However, he understood that the wider cultural structure creates opportunities for him to engage in family formation processes should he desire to do so.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Family Formation

Building a romantic relationship as part of the family realm has only recently become an option for sexual minorities with the advent of same-sex marriage legalization at the federal level. Notwithstanding laws, queer people of color and their family members still encounter multiple challenges as queer folks wish to enter into a romantic relationship and advance it as part of the family unit (Ocobock 2013; Gattamorta and Quidley-Rodriguez, 2017; Cisneros and Bracho 2019; Gerena 2021). In this chapter I argue that the gay couples in my study secure social benefits and membership in the family by drawing primarily from culturally approved family practices to construct and legitimate their romantic relationships within the family realm. Being both gay and Latino, the men in my study are presented with a predicament that challenges their identity or sense of self. I show that my study participants reimagine their collective and individual sense of self as they negotiate family life and navigate the line between two seemingly incompatible identities. I also show that family continues to be central in the lives of Latino gay men and illustrate how through the observation of customs, values, and conventions, my respondents lessen the stigma attached to homosexuality and cast the gay relationship in a respectable light making it less incompatible with family life.

Disclosure of homosexuality has historically been understood as a threat to family relationships. This is well documented in the literature about how LGBT people navigate sexuality and family (Tan, 2011; Decena, 2011; Ocampo, 2013; Acosta, 2013; Ocobock, 2013; Villicana, Delucio, and Biernat, 2016; Delucio et. al., 2020; Schmitz et. al., 2020; Reczek and Bosley-Smith, 2021). For gay and lesbian Latinx in particular, entering into a



long-term romantic relationship with a same-sex partner represents a threat to family relationships. This in turn also represents a threat to safety and security as these are linked to family relationships in complex ways for Latinx sexual minorities (Robinson, 2018). Not surprisingly, much of the literature documenting the ways in which Latinx sexual minorities navigate family life is characterized by secrecy, silence and tacit subjectivity (Acosta, 2013; Ocampo 2013). Latinx sexual minorities have historically favored good family relationships over a long-term romantic relationship as such.

Family and ethnic identity are intrinsically linked for Latinos in complex ways that include religious affiliation and ethnic attachment (Marti, 2012; Calvillo and Bailey, 2015; Costantine et. al., 2019; Salcido et. al., 2021). One core expression of Latino ethnic identity associated with familism is a sense of obligation to maintain family ties across generations that include extended family (Costantine et. al., 2019; Salcido et. al., 2021). Other expressions of ethnic identity among Latino people include a sense of entitlement to family resources and a sense of duty and respect toward family (Sabogal, Marin, & Otero-Sabogal, 1987; Silva and Campos, 2020). In sum, the contemporary scientific discourse about familism argues that familism is a central value among Latino families. And familism as a social system consequently suppresses expressions of individuality and favors expressions of a collective ethnic identity based on family rights and obligations.

Latinx ethnic identity has historically been incompatible with a gay or lesbian sexual identity (Almaguer, 1993). The structural arrangements of family life among family of origin, for example, have been shown to suppress expressions of homosexuality (Almaguer 1993; Diaz 198; Acosta, 2013). The development of a gay or lesbian identity has also been suppressed by the stigmatization of homosexuality at the hands of powerful religious and

political institutions. This does not mean that homosexuality has not existed in Latin-American communities. However, the precarity that has historically characterized the lives of homosexual subjects attests to the challenges Latino families face as they attempt to include an openly homosexual family member in the family unit.

A more accepting and inclusive sociopolitical climate for same-sex relationships means that gay couples today have access to historically cisgender, heteronormative social institutions. Two such institutions are marriage and family, both of which are legally backed by laws at the federal level in the United States. Legal access to such institutions, however limited, shapes the ways in which a society can reimagine same-sex relationships. This newly emerging collective imaginary shapes the context in which my study participants reimagine their familial relationships and reconstruct a sense of self as Latino gay men.

In the following sections I explain how the gay men in my study along with family members reconstruct family life based on a shared collective imaginary. First I discuss how observing norms of dating relevant to Latino/Hispanic cultural practices is part of the process of maintaining a cohesive sense of self. Then, I show how my respondents' approaches to navigating family life shift with the context in which their relationships exist. Finally, in the last section, I show how individual family members exert influence on the gay respondents and the tension that creates between conformity and individuality, and sameness and difference.

### **Norms of dating, self identity, and the centrality of family.**

The literature about familism among Mexican ethnics and other Latinos in the United States documents how normative familism shapes collective and individual identity. Of particular relevance is how the relationship to family of origin drives gay Latino men's

decisions about how they structure their lives. For example, the relationship to family is central in deciding whether or not to enter a long-term romantic relationship with a same-sex partner and adopt a gay identity. Regardless of age or family support, family ties have historically been known to profoundly shape Latino gay men's sexual lives, including sexual identity.

Given that family shapes gay Latinos' lives in profound ways, how do gay Latinos manage family relations while they live an openly gay life? In other words, how do they form a long-term romantic relationship with a same-sex partner and keep strong family bonds? In this section I show how Latinos use norms of dating to maintain good family relations while forming a long-term relationship with a same-sex partner. By following norms of dating, the respondents in my study fit the script prescribed by family expectations. By doing so, they foster respect for the family and themselves, both of which are important for self-identity.

The following interview excerpts from three respondents exemplify what a majority—twenty-seven of the thirty-five total—of my study participants expressed in their respective interviews about family. Similar patterns appeared during informal interviews with other gay men while we discussed family and gay relationships. I begin with Adan's story. Adan self-identified as gay and Latino in the pre-interview survey. At the time of the interview, Adan was working in a clerical position making close to thirty-five thousand USD per year. He reported his level of education as "trade or vocational education" in the pre-interview survey. Adan is a US-born, second generation Mexican-American. His parents were born in Mexico and permanently immigrated to the United States during their teenage years. He was thirty years old at the time of the interview.

Adan expressed the centrality of family in his life during the interview. While talking about his childhood Adan said “*Family is so important to me. My father unfortunately passed away when I was in eleventh grade... it was a really tough time for my family and so we had to stick together.*” Later in the interview, Adan talked about how important the support of his family was for the development of his romantic relationship with his partner Leo. He stated that he would not have pursued a relationship with Leo had his family not been supportive and accepting of his sexuality:

*I would have wanted them [my family] to love me, to accept me. And I think that if that was not the situation and I did bring him around, then I was making it so that they would push me away. You know what I mean? I would fracture our relationship. So I wouldn't have that happen. But thankfully that's not the situation. I was more careful about my actions and doing something like that.*

Adan explained that his family in fact were supportive and accepting of his sexuality. That encouraged him to pursue a relationship with Leo. The quote above is one of the most explicit examples of how family shapes respondents' sexual lives. Other respondents also expressed the same idea in more subtle ways.

Given the centrality of family to Adan's life choices, it makes sense that he was “*more careful about*” his actions “*and doing something that*” could fracture the relationship with his immediate family. Observing dating norms was part of that careful process. He said:

*We dated for three months before we became boyfriends. He [Leo] had an ex-boyfriend that he was still kind of trying to work things out with. During the dating process, there was an exchange through text messages with his ex-boyfriend. I thought it was inappropriate. Of course, we are two different people, we don't think the same. But in*

*my family we don't-. Once we date someone is because we are not interested in anyone else, we're not finishing any other relationship or starting a new one. It's just not who I am...*

Observation of norms conveys respect for family values. Respect for the family is a key element in normative familism. However, observing norms is not only about showing respect. It also conveys respect to Adan's and Leo's relationship. Furthermore, being "inappropriate" goes against Adan's own moral code of behavior, which is intricately linked to family values, as the quote above suggests. Adan's sense of self was also threatened by what he perceived as an impropriety. Hence, the affirmation that "it's just not who I am".

Adan felt compelled to take action in order to verify his own conception of who he is, to confirm his self-identity. He continued:

*... and so we got into a discussion about it. That's when we realized we were both serious about it, we want to move forward, continue what was happening, be boyfriends officially. And so once we became official, we were off limits. The dynamics changed where we were no longer going out and doing our own thing, we were doing things as a couple.*

The excerpt above narrates a series of events that seem ordinary and unrelated to family. However, Adan talked about family expectations during the interview. He mentioned that it was important for him to make sure Leo and he had "a thing" before taking Leo to his sister and his mother. "A thing" is a reference to a relationship that is "serious" and "official" and monogamous or "off limits". In addition, Adan made it a solemn event to take Leo to his father's tombstone. He did not initially take Leo to the cemetery with him even though Leo

offered to accompany him. It was not until he knew “*this is the guy*” that he “introduced” Leo to his deceased father and vice-versa.

Adan’s Catholic upbringing shaped his values. He explained that although his family did not go to church on Sundays, he went to church because he attended Catholic school. He added that family and honesty were salient in the Catholic school teachings. At that point, he elaborated on what he felt was inappropriate about the exchange between Leo and his ex-boyfriend. He felt it was not clear what the relationship status was between them. Therefore he asked Leo to be “*straightforward*” when they had the discussion about Leo’s ex-boyfriend. Both of the salient elements, family and honesty, were important for how Adan approached the development of his relationship with Leo.

Adan did not initially introduce Leo as his boyfriend. He said about Leo:

*He was not introduced as my boyfriend until several months later after we started dating, when they [family members] started to ask: who is this guy? We noticed he's been coming around a lot. I had gay friends that would come and hang out with me; we would go and hang out, have a party, barbecue at home. So there was always gay friends around. So in their eyes, I think they thought this is just one of his friends. But then when they started seeing that he was hanging out more often with me, that's when it started becoming apparent that this guy is not just a friend. He's a little more.*

The norms of dating that Adan adhered to for developing a romantic relationship and subsequently including that relationship in the family realm constitute part of family history. Retracing the same path he imagines his ancestors established helps reinforce hegemonic dating norms that have historically marginalized sexual minorities. Such marginalization stems from the way homosexuality has been socially constructed as always

already disrespectful, disreputable, and undesirable. That is the stigma gay Latinos grapple with as they endeavor to form a romantic relationship as such, without hiding it under the veil of friendships. However, that is only part of the struggle.

We know from past research that gay Latinos confide in someone they trust in their family with information about their sexual identity. My respondents' narratives similarly reflect how Latino gay men navigate family and sexuality through selective disclosure of sexual identity and general silence about their sexual lives. A key aspect about my respondents, however, is that they are now willing to label their relationships and use official titles such as boyfriend. For example, notwithstanding how careful Adan was about the strategies he employed to navigate family, he eventually labeled Leo as his boyfriend. He said:

*So I didn't tell my mom, oh, this is my boyfriend. I told my siblings. And I think they understood that it was a conversation to be had with my mom so I didn't have to go directly to her and say this is my boyfriend in Spanish: mi novio. 'Cause it was awkward. For me it was awkward. It took years for me to adjust. Yeah. To be able to say something like that to my mom. So yeah. So I think she knew, probably like six months in, I think. Then she realized this is the guy- I didn't say this is my boyfriend until after she already knew he was. But I said it. That was a huge step in my relationship with Leo. It took years.*

Through engagement in a particular social practice—in this case adhering to established norms of dating—Adan realized another end was possible for his relationship. Part of that is taking that huge step of labeling Leo as his boyfriend in conversation with his mother. Doing so sets the foundation for new conceptualizations of strategies to navigate

family that do not require silence, avoidance, erasure, or tacit subjectivity as the only viable options for building a gay romantic relationship and continuing to belong. The practice of bestowing on Leo the “boyfriend” title within the family invokes family history. A consequence of that, however, is the erasure of sexual difference and the reinforcement of hegemonic, heteronormative dating norms. So, while Adan reconciles two incompatible identities, gay and Latino, he inevitably obscures his own social experience as a self-identified gay Latino.

### **Shifting strategies.**

Notwithstanding the obscuring of social experience, the signification of sexual difference through labeling practices achieves a certain accumulation of personally relevant meanings. Labeling practices are constituted by openness and authenticity, which are two salient sources of meaning among my respondents. However, openness and authenticity alone are not sufficient for achieving the development of a romantic relationship as part of the realm of family. Where silence, avoidance, and erasure are inefficient, openness and authenticity functions as a strategy to navigate family relations successfully. Elsewhere, my respondents recoil into the safety of silence and privacy to protect family bonds. In other words, the strategies for navigating family change with the context in which family dynamics unravel, a phenomenon I illustrate using Omar’s narrative.

Omar was thirty-seven years of age at the time of the interview. He was born and raised in the state of Sonora, Mexico. He permanently immigrated to the United States at the age of 27 without documents. Despite having been in a relationship with his “*novio*” [boyfriend] Sandro for close to seven months, he self-identified as bisexual in the preinterview survey. He also referred to himself as a “*macho puto*” during the interview,



which shows that Omar's conceptualization of his sexual identity does not neatly fall into the available categories in my survey. Omar was making under fifteen thousand USD per year doing manual labor at the time of the interview. Also at the time of the interview, he continued to live and work as an undocumented immigrant.

Talking about family relations, Omar expressed the importance of being genuine and open. He said about authenticity:

*I have always believed that openness is the best policy. One must be genuine. I have this attitude with my family 'or take me or leave me' [o tomame o dejame]; either we are family or we are not family. It has led to conflict with some family members. I had a conflict with two cousins because they were always against my sexuality so I don't have a relationship with them. I'd rather be authentic and lose that bond. I'm not going to hide who I am for them. It would be to deny myself. For what? So I can be unhappy and they can still dislike me. Not me.*

Being open and genuine is clearly an important aspect of Omar's identity. In fact, it seems Omar gave greater importance to keeping a cohesive sense of self than to maintaining healthy family relationships. His "take me or leave me" attitude suggests that family is secondary, though not irrelevant, in the process of making choices about how to structure his sexual life. However, further evidence suggests that family continued to be central in Omar's choices about self identity, sexual identity, and romantic relationship.

Omar was willing to fracture family relationships in order to maintain a sense of authentic self, but family is still a central element for how Omar developed his relationship with Sandro. Specifically, Omar had to make important choices about living arrangements, presentation of self, and about how to introduce Sandro to family members. The following

excerpts show family is a primary point of departure in the making of such decisions.

Talking about family relationships he explained:

*Most of my family are in Mexico, but I have some family members in Fontana. I have taken Sandro with me to their house. We visit them often. We have a good relationship. Before moving out of my cousin's apartment we had a better relationship with my aunt too. We used to take her out. Sandro used to drive from Lynwood to Covina and we would all go out together. We took her out to eat and shopping, but when I moved out of my cousin's apartment she went and told everyone in Mexico that I moved in with a man. I tell Sandro, see how she repaid you? And since I moved out of my cousin's place she is not coming [to the USA] anymore because I won't be there to take her out. She was nice, but she is like a double edge sword.*

Omar's decision to move out of his cousin's apartment is linked to family in complex ways. First, moving to Lynwood increased the physical distance between Omar, his cousin and the rest of his family living in Fontana, CA. Second, as the excerpt suggests, moving out created emotional distance between Omar and his cousin and Omar and his cousin's mother, his aunt. Omar's decision to move out alienated his aunt to the point that she considered not visiting from Mexico anymore. She also worried that her son's alcoholism would worsen with Omar's absence because Omar looked after his cousin and regulated his alcohol consumption. Furthermore, she worried that her son, Omar's cousin, would struggle to cover the apartment rent and expenses without Omar's financial contribution. All of this created conflict between Omar and his aunt, according to Omar's perspective.

Omar's initial commentary about his approach to family life seems to contradict my original suggestion that family continues to be central for how Latino gay men structure

their lives, including their sexual lives. Although Omar's strategy seems to go against all sorts of expectations, it in fact confirms the centrality of family. Specifically, Omar continued to consider family relations when making decisions about his sexual life. Continuing with the theme of openness and authenticity and navigating family life, Omar said:

*Yes, I have taken him [Sandro] to my family in Fontana. The first time I just showed up with him, no warning. They sort of wanted to ask me the first time I brought him with me so I told them this is my boyfriend [les presento a mi novio]. And they looked at me in disbelief like they thought that I might be joking. I'm like yeah that's my boyfriend [sí, es mi vato]. They thought it wasn't real, but then they kept on seeing him every weekend so they realized I wasn't joking. And then we moved in together so any doubt in their minds dissipated [laughs triumphantly in Spanish].*

Omar understood why for his family it was somewhat of a shock to hear him articulate the nature of his relationship with Sandro. He explained that he had never talked about his sexual identity to any of his family members before introducing Sandro. He had other relationships with men in the past, but he had only taken two boyfriends to his family, Sandro being the second one. His reasons for keeping past relationships away from family involved privacy, respect, but mostly doubts about whether he was going pursue something serious with previous boyfriends. That changed when he met Sandro.

Omar dated for a relatively short amount of time, but the same dating pattern was salient as with other respondents' dating experiences. Like a majority of respondents, Omar brought Sandro to his family as a friend, then introduced him as a boyfriend, and eventually made the decision to move in with Sandro. As he explained, he initially only took Sandro to meet his cousin. Then, when his aunt was visiting from Mexico, he took Sandro to meet her

and they all went out together. Finally, Omar took Sandro to his family in Fontana where he first introduced him as his boyfriend a few weeks before moving to Lynwood with Sandro. It was only after the official introduction of Sandro as his boyfriend that Omar decided to move out of his cousin's apartment.

My respondents' approaches to navigating family life while forming a long-term romantic relationship are unexpectedly different from what has been documented in the literature about queer people of color (Almaguer, 1993; Diaz, 1998; Acosta 2013; Ocampo, 2013; Delucio et. al., 2020). Scholars have argued that for queer people of color the ultimate liberatory goal does not necessarily involve verbal expression of sexuality or "coming out" to family (Rust, 1996; Decena, 2011; Roque-Ramirez, 2011). Despite being characterized by openness and authenticity, my respondents' approach is similarly not particularly about achieving a liberatory goal as gay men. Instead, as Omar's narrative illustrates, it is about respect, a recurring theme in literature Latinx people in relation to family and community (Halgunseth et. al. 2006; Acosta, 2010; Asencio, 2011; Streit, 2020). He said:

*And you know how a lot of gay men claim their partner is their friend. "It's my friend, it's my friend" [derisively in a childish, feminine voice]. And you won't get them to put a name to it [the relationship] even if everyone else knows otherwise. No, he is my friend. Not me! I tell them because I know they will respect my honesty. If I say this is my friend and it's obvious he's not just a friend, they will laugh. They will laugh. They will laugh at me and my relationship and they will never respect that. But when I am open about it they know I'm not joking and they know they have to be respectful to me and Sandro. Even if they don't like it they have to respect [tienen que respetar].*

Omar's approach at first sight appears to be characterized by defiance and disrespect to family values as they have been documented in the literature about queer people of color. His approach also appears to decenter the family as he makes important decisions about how to structure his sexual life. I argue however that family continues to be central in every decision Omar makes about his relationship, about his authenticity, and about his openness because family is the site where the struggles for openness and authenticity take place.

Omar's policy of openness and authenticity to navigating family has limits and that is what makes the struggle for openness and authenticity evident. On the one hand, Omar claims that he always labels his boyfriends as such. He said, "*I always say that about my boyfriends.*" That is, that they are in fact boyfriends, not just friends. He continued:

*And when I'm on the phone with a guy, they are like you talking to a man? I'm like, yes I'm talking to a man, so what? They are like you fucking faggot! So what, I tell them [Me dicen ay pinche puto! Y que tiene, les digo]. I show up and I'm like it's my boyfriend, my partner. Like it's nothing. Like no big deal. Like everybody knows me already.*

Such authenticity gives meaning to Omar's life. As Omar explained, being forthcoming with his family solidifies his sense of self as a respectable and respectful individual. In addition, it creates a context in which his relationship with Sandro will be recognized and respected by his family members, "*even if they don't like it*" as he affirmed.

Omar seemed unwilling to deny or hide his relationship with Sandro, and thus his sexuality, in order to maintain intact the bonds with his cousins, uncles, and aunts from Fontana. Yet, not everyone in Omar's family recognized his relationship with Sandro. In such cases, Omar approached family life through silence and tacitness. Specifically, Omar's

parents and other family members in Mexico did not talk about Omar's and Sandro's relationship in the same way as his family from Fontana do. When I asked about his family in Mexico he said:

*My aunt told everyone I married. I didn't know until my sister told me: your aunt Maria made a scandal. At first they were happy that I married, but then my aunt told them: but he married a faggot. So my dad locked himself in the room and didn't come out until the following day. The following day they were talking with my aunt and the whole family. My dad told them that they were going to continue life as always, that they were going to pretend my partner is just a friend and that everything was fine. My dad said: he is old enough to know what he does, but for us it will be like he has a friend and that's it.*

Unlike with his Fontana family, Omar reasoned that since his Mexican family already knows, he does not need to talk about it with them. He was not yet married to Sandro, but that did not seem to matter since he was in fact in a relationship and living together by the time his family in Mexico learned about his gay sexuality. Omar told me he did not plan on telling his parents, but he felt his aunt did him a favor when she told them about his relationship with Sandro. He also felt that his Mexican family's reaction signals acceptance because "*there was no scandal*" and "*they took it well*" and "*they didn't worry about what the family might say*" or "*about what the neighbors and friends of the family might say.*"

The fact that Omar's approach for structuring family life varies with the context is further evidence that family continues to be central in how Omar structures his sexual life. While he is utterly open with his family in California, he is silent about his relationship when it comes to his family in Mexico. On the one hand, he is willing to face and challenge

his family members' criticism about his sexuality. For example, when his cousins called him a "*fucking faggot [pinche puto]*" he casually replied "*so what [y que tiene]*." On the other hand, he resists his cousins' encouragement to talk to his parents and family in Mexico about his sexuality or his relationship with Sandro:

*My cousins tell me: tell them. I'm like, for what? Why should I tell them? Why should I have to tell the world hey I'm this. All my cousins are a lot more worried than I am about me not telling my parents [that I am with a man]. They are all like you gotta tell them, it's your responsibility! I'm like no, if they ever ask me I'll tell them, but otherwise there is no reason for me to tell them. No reason at all. Imagine I tell them and they are like whatever, why are you telling me this? Or they might just say to me that it is okay. So I rather not talk about it. If they ask me I will tell them but if they don't bring up the topic I won't talk about it. For what?*

Like Omar, other respondents understood that in certain contexts openness and authenticity may fracture family relations. Most respondents' approaches to structuring their gay romantic relationships as part of family life was characterized by the openness and authenticity illustrated in Omar's narrative. However, the conversation shifted to privacy and respect toward family members in discussion about family living in Mexico or when the parents were involved. For example, Nestor expressed he wanted to talk to his mother about his plans to marry a man, but then claimed "*I never told my mom because I don't feel like I have to.*" And Piero told me about his Durango family "*I don't tell them because they are the kind of people that never ask*". And JC told me he wished he had told his parents about his sexuality before they passed away, but he never mentioned it.

Omar explained, without me directly discussing the topic of shifting strategies, that he would expect his family in Mexico to be genuinely shocked to learn about his sexuality or his relationship with a man. However, he added that he would not expect or tolerate shock from family members who had been living in the United States and had sufficient knowledge about the sociopolitical context in which his gay relationship existed. In addition, Omar suggested that religious differences within his family members also influenced how they perceived his relationship and sexuality. He explained that his family in Mexico are Catholic and therefore less likely to understand his relationship with Sandro. Like Omar, my other respondents felt that the context in which their relationships existed allowed for greater visibility and extended protections they did not have outside their local communities in Los Angeles.

### **Family influence, conformity, and individuality.**

The social benefits gay respondents secure through the deployment of respect constitute membership in the family. Being part of the family involves observing the customs and conventions that characterize the collectivity of family. This creates a context in which individual family members may influence the choices gay respondents make about how to structure their romantic relationships. I already showed the centrality of family for how my respondents structure their sexual lives, how they maintain a cohesive sense of self, and how they secure social benefits by adhering to family customs, values, and conventions. In this last section I draw on Nestor's narrative to illustrate how individual family members exert pressure on the gay individual thus influencing the gay relationship and I show that such pressure causes gay respondents to experience tension between individuality and conformity in that situational context.



Nestor and Fabian had been together for three years at the time of the interview. Like my other respondents, they dated for a few months before moving in together. Nestor and Fabian are one of the few couples that had gotten married before the interview. They had been married for six months when I interviewed them. A naturalized US citizen, Nestor had been living in the United States for fifteen years. He self-identified as gay in the preinterview survey. He reported his level of education as “trade or vocational” and his occupation as pharmacist. He was forty-two at the time, sixteen years older than Fabian.

Nestor felt he had struggled for recognition and respect of his relationship within his family for a long time. Before Fabian, Nestor had a ten-year relationship with another man. However, his brothers and sisters did not give legitimacy to that relationship because at that time the law repudiated same-sex marriage. Despite his siblings’ negative attitudes toward homosexuality and gay relationships, Nestor was open about his sexuality and his relationships previous to Fabian. He explained that he struggled the most with his older brother. He told me:

*I had two partners before Fabian. One I dated for ten years. I would say to my brother: tu cuñado [your brother-in-law] when talking about my ex-. He always said: fuck no, he's not my cuñado. And you guys are not even married, it's not even legal. We're talking about [the year] 2000. Ninety-something. Ninety-nine. And he would never accept that I was with somebody. Even though he did accept it, he never called him mi cuñado [my brother-in-law] or things like that.*

Nestor struggled to articulate his siblings lack of support and recognition of his relationship with his partner of ten years. For example, he stated that his brother “would never accept” Nestor was with “somebody,” but then he contradicted himself saying “he did accept it” [his

relationship with a man]. He felt his brother supported him, but did not accept his relationship.

Nestor felt that his siblings never rejected him as a person, but he realized that they had difficulties understanding his relationship with a man as a legitimate relationship. He explained to me that his siblings were against gay relationships in part because the gay marriage debate in California during the nineties questioned gay relationships' validity and place in society<sup>3</sup> and in part because they viewed gay relationships as unstable. Nestor continued:

*[My bother] said: you guys change partners; today you have a boyfriend, tomorrow don't. He was like when you marry, then I'll say he's my brother-in-law. But he was never mean in a different way. He said gay people change, today you get mad, you get up and leave. He told me: you guys don't know how to talk or work out a relationship, even though I was with that person for a long time. Even in the end, he brought it up to me. I thought he forgot about it, but when we broke up he was like you see. When a real person loves someone, you don't walk out. I told you. He [ex-boyfriend] just left. That kind of got me mad. Not with him, with myself. I was like when I'm in a relationship, I'll be very committed.*

Nestor lived independently in his own home away from his parents and eleven siblings, but he wanted to construct his relationship as part of the family. This was important for him because, as he explained, despite “*the fights and argument*” he was taught that his family “*will always be there*” and family was “*so important*” for him.

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<sup>3</sup> Domestic partnership passed California Legislature in the late nineties, but was vetoed by former Governor Pete Wilson and former Governor Gray Davis. See AB 627 AB 1059 and Domestic partnership Act of 1999.

By the time he began his relationship with Fabian in 2010, Nestor introduced him to his family as a friend. When they began dating a year later he shared with his siblings he had a “boyfriend.” He said, “*when we became boyfriends, I went to say to my brothers and sisters that's my boyfriend. And it felt good.*” I asked Nestor what made him want to share his relationship with his family. Nestor explained that he wanted to prove them wrong about gay relationships. He said:

*I wanted to prove to them that they were wrong. You know. But at the same time, I don't know. You don't have to prove nothing to nobody. As long as you're happy, you know where you're at, who you are, and you know what you want I think everything will be fine. I've always been a person for long-term relationships because it's how my family is. You can see my brothers, my sisters. They've been married with one person. And they stay married for thirty, forty years.*

Like Nestor, other respondents used family as a referent for how to structure their own romantic relationship. Without exception, respondents referred back to family for examples of “good” relationships. They often illustrated good relationships using parents and siblings as examples. In doing so, respondents emphasized the importance of lasting marriages as illustrated above.

Nestor explained that marriage has always been important in his family. He believed that because same-sex marriage continued to gain support in the United States, his brothers and sisters encouraged him to marry Fabian once same-sex marriage was legalized. For example, recalling when Nestor told his siblings about his relationship with Fabian, he said:

*My brother Juan was here on vacation. He lives in Mexico. And he was like, you know he's [Fabian] not leaving! I was like, I'm going to take him home right now when we leave and take you to the bus. I'm going to drive him home. And he was like no he's going to get married to you. And I said why would you say that? I just talked to the guy [my brother] about my relationship a couple days ago. My brother was like believe me, he's going to. He is going to get married to you. And I said, you're crazy. He said I can see him in this house. The way he displays himself in the house it's like he already lived here. Plus you can marry now. It is legal so why not do it? If you are going to do it this is the one. And it's funny, you know. This is my brother telling me this and he's like, plus you look so happy with him. I liked the idea [of getting married to Fabian].*

Nestor's conversation with Juan was only one of several he had with his siblings about his relationship with Fabian. He continued:

*And I was talking to my brother Martin. He was like, how is everything going with Fabian? So my family was really supportive in this situation [relationship with Fabian]. My brother was like "robacunas carbon" [cradle snatcher]. And I was like no, they look for me, I don't look for them. But it was funny. And I told Martin, he's going to be your brother-in-law. And he was like well it looks like you guys are going to get married. And I was like no. He's like yeah and when you guys get married, I can call him "cuñado" [brother-in-law].*

Months after Nestor had that exchange with his brother Martin, Fabian proposed and they got engaged. Nestor recalled:

*I don't know why but I wanted to call my sisters right away. I didn't, but when we came back I told them we got engaged. And then my sister Yalila said oh! are you guys going*

*to have a party to announce it? I was like no, now it's on Facebook. You just want a party. She was like no, pendejo, that's the way you do it. I was like everybody knows already. But you know what? she insisted and for a while it was an argument, but it would be so weird to do that, to announce it like straight couples. It was funny.*

Nestor's siblings changed their views about gay relationship as time progressed from the late nineties to 2011 when he got engaged to Fabian. On the one hand Juan and Martin sort of pressured Nestor to pursue marriage with Fabian. For example, Juan said "*It is legal so why not do it?*" and Martin was willing to refer to Fabian as his brother-in-law, but only after they were officially married. On the other hand, his sister Samanta also pressured Nestor to adhere to family customs, for example, by announcing his engagement. However, Nestor resisted their suggestions, for example, saying "*you are crazy*" to his brother Juan when he suggested marriage and by refusing to hold an engagement announcement party. I view such resistance as the result of a long history of marginalization within his own family. For example, Nestor's comment "*it would be so weird to do that ... like straight couples*" emphasizes the sexual difference between his siblings and his own sexuality, which was the source of marginalization in the first place.

Nestor's older sister Samanta, like the rest of the siblings, also emphasized the importance of a long-lasting marriage. Nestor recalled:

*So after I told them [we got engaged] my sister Samanta had a serious talk with me. She was like, okay, you guys got engaged, I'm really happy, congratulations. But she's like, I just want you to know and I want you to be clear in your mind so that way you know what you want. You know marriage is forever right? I was like yeah. She said,*

*and I want you to tell me, how do you feel that he's younger than you? Because you're going to get older, like twenty years, and he's still going to be looking young.*

I asked Nestor what he felt his sister was most worried about when she decided to have that conversation with him. He felt that Samanta wanted to make sure that Fabian and Nestor were not going to “*hacer el ridiculo*” [ridicule themselves/look ridiculous] getting married only to separate soon after that. And she worried that the marriage might dissolve after a few years because Fabian is sixteen years younger than Nestor. Nestor explained that Samanta was like a second mother to him, more than a sister, so she wanted to protect him.

The phrase “*hacer el ridiculo*” is packed with meaning. *Hacer el ridiculo* means to do something laughable at best and something stigmatizing at worst. *Hacer el ridiculo* involves spectators, in this case the families of Nestor and Fabian during the wedding they were planning. In addition, it involves spectators on social media such as Facebook, where Nestor and Fabian posted their engagement. As such, *hacer el ridiculo* involves Nestor’s entire family because beyond spectators they are active participants in the celebration of a same-sex marriage and they are directly linked to one of the gay partners contracting marriage. So, beyond her worries about divorce soon after marriage becoming a source of shame for Nestor, Samanta was worried about how the spectacle or marriage followed by separation might become a source of shame for the entire family. Hence, her decision to have a “*serious talk*” with Nestor.

### **Conclusion.**

In this chapter I have shown the centrality of family for how Latino gay men develop their romantic relationships and for how they structure their sexual lives. I argued that the gay men secure social benefits and membership in the family through the deployment

culture. The social benefits they secure include respect for their relationships and membership in the family. Such deployments of culture partially represent an aspect of family history that my respondents tap into in order to reimagine their identities as Latino gay, assert authentic, and continue to belong. My respondents simultaneously reimagine new ways to structure their sexual lives as part of the family unit and pursue new possibilities such as forming lasting romantic relationships. Tapping into particular aspects of family history, my respondents reenact social practices that have long been important rituals in the process of family formation.

Decena (2011) wrote that his Dominican immigrant respondents were unable to depart “definitively from the worlds and attachments that made it possible for them” to leave their home country. My respondents, though thirteen of them were second-generation immigrants, similarly found it impossible to detach themselves definitively. They sought to detach themselves from the cultural baggage that for them represents the social construction of homosexuality among Mexican-origin communities. However, they all expressed in one form or another a continued discomfort with embracing their gay identity and expressing it in blunt ways among family members. Specifically, they all agreed that “*joterias*” were inappropriate among family members. Joteria refers to Mexican gay subculture and, as a verb, “*jotear*” is the action(s) of gesturing, speaking, and or posing in a gender nonconforming ways as well as referring to other gay men as *muyers* (a variant of *mujer* = woman), *ella* (her), or by any other feminine pronoun.

Lastly, my data suggest that the gay men in my study balance conformity and resistance as they navigate family life. For example, they adopt historically approved family practices/rituals while simultaneously reshaping said practices to meet their needs as gay

Latino men in long-term relationships. In addition to being critical about the cultural context in which they were brought up, my respondents sought not only to show respect for the family (conform), but also to earn the same kind of respect from family members (resist), as was the case with Nestor (Silva 2015, unpublished manuscript). Adopting historically approved familial and social practices, then, function as a strategy for gay men to secure respect and recognition for their relationships and for accomplishing family status simultaneously.

As is well documented, the social position of Latino gay men has historically been a fragile one. As such, the result of adopting and disclosing a gay identity has historically been encountered with hostility and social ostracism. However, the story is much more complicated. In the next chapter I will show how the intersection of SES, citizenship, and gender shape unique opportunities for my respondents to structure their sexual lives and family lives in ways previously not afforded to openly gay individuals.



## CHAPTER THREE

### Social Locations and Family Formations

*Theoretically, legal-status distinctions should work differently than race and class: obtaining a legal status should be an administrative process similar to applying for a library card. The difference between those who have a library card and those who do not certainly shapes one's daily routines, access to books, DVD collections, computers, and—in the case of some libraries—day passes to regional museums. Access to a library card alters one's resources. However, we hardly think of this as the source of deep social status distinction. —Joanna Dreby, *Everyday Illegal**

In the previous chapter I shed some light on the overarching question guiding this project: how do Latino gay couples navigate family of origin after the legalization of same-sex marriage? I showed that family of origin continues to be central for how Latino gay men develop their romantic relationships and for how they structure their sexual lives. I argued that gay couples secure social acceptance and membership by drawing from family history and the sociopolitical context to reconstitute their identity in ways that sexual and ethnic identities cohere. In this chapter I ask what are the factors associated with the successful maintenance of ties between gay Latinos and their families of origin? In the sections that follow, I discuss how social position shapes family formation process and family dynamics among gay Latinos in the United States. In the first section I highlight how the intersection of class, citizenship, and masculinity shape the ways in which gay couples can structure family relations. In the second section, I illustrate how shifts in social positions—from tacit subject to gay rights activist for example—impacts the ability of individuals to shape family dynamics and participate in family processes.

According to intersectionality scholars, multiple forms of inequality simultaneously affect individuals' experiences and shape their perceptions based on their particular social locations (Crenshaw 1991; Collin 1990; Choo & Ferree, 2010). Choo and Ferree (2010, p131) articulate the complexity that can be added to already rich empirical findings by problematizing the "relationship of power for unmarked categories." In my case, I aim to problematize the relationship between class, citizenship, masculinity, and sexuality in analyzing my respondents' experiences in the family context. While my research is primarily focused on the experiences of gay Latino men within the family context, two facts soon became evident about my respondents' life histories and survey data. The first fact is that the patterns I identified can be broadly generalized beyond gay Latino men and the second is that such experiences are shaped by the particular social locations occupied by individuals. Hence, it became necessary to take into account my respondents' multiply constituted social locations to better understand the family formation processes available to them.

The relationship between social constraints and resistance, power, spatiality, and social relations is also of importance. Cantú (2003) wrote in "A Place Called Home" that spatiality is, in addition to a physical location, "the site where social relations are formed and power is exercised." Other scholars have referred to such a "site" as "heterotopia," "borderland," and "thirdspace" (Soja 1996). What links the different terms is that scholars conceptualize them—in addition to physical locations—as sites in which the social, the historical, and the spatial exist in a simultaneous and complex interdependence; as sites where the gendered and sexualized dimensions of space can be studied (Cantú 2003 p120). According to Ingram (1997) "space [also] has erotic dimensions linked to identities and

their commodification” (in Cantú 2003). Ingram (1998) termed this space “queerscape” and imagined it as an erotic landscape “comprised of networks of social negotiations based on erotic desire.” While I do not theorize space or use such framework(s) to analyze my respondents' relationships, it is important to keep such “sites” and their nature in mind to better understand some of the experiences I describe in the lives of my respondents in relation to family of origin. Drawing on this conceptualization of space as having erotic dimensions, I suggest that the gay couple’s home is eroticized and as such it represents a different set of constraints and opportunities for those who occupy it.

Although family history such as relationship quality between family members seems important, the broader context in which my respondents’ experiences take place demands attention be given to their social locations. While socioeconomic status is salient in this discussion, I do not mean to suggest that citizenship and gender (and race and sexuality for that matter) are less relevant. However, the nature of my data shapes the claims I can make about the social locations of my respondents as they structure their family and sexual lives as mutually constitutive. Some of those processes involve the ability to, and the ways in which respondents structure their romantic relationships as part of their family life or vice-versa: that is, their family life as part of their romantic relationships. Intersectionality thus offers an analytic lens to look into my respondents lives and draw conclusions about how a multiply-marginalized social location shapes the family formation processes my respondents can engage in and which processes are beyond their reach.

Socioeconomic status is particularly important for how individuals structure family life. For my respondents, socioeconomic status can support or obstruct opportunities for brining family members into their space and personal environment. Specifically,

respondents with a higher socioeconomic status count sufficient resources to engage in family formation processes that pull family members into their own, arguably gay-oriented, immediate space and environment. In some cases, this put heterosexual family members in a context in which they felt uneasy or felt the need to monitor their own language and behavior. In contrast, respondents with a lower socioeconomic status were pulled into the environment of their family of origin and therefore into a largely heteronormative and cisgender context in which the gay individuals self-monitor and may feel the need to perform more of a heterosexual masculinity (Ocampo 2012; Silva 2015 unpublished manuscript) in spite of others' awareness about their sexuality and romantic relationship.

The opening excerpt suggests that legal-status shapes the everyday life routine of individuals and alters access to resources. In *The Pecking Order* Conley (2004) argues that social issues such as gender and sexual orientation, among others, "weigh in heavily on the pecking order between siblings" (p 8). Dreby extends Conley's argument showing that "legal uncertainty [too] becomes the source of family-based status inequality (Dreby 2015 pp. 103), but we seldom see it as a source of "deep social status distinctions." That was certainly the case for my undocumented respondents: they felt that lack of documents did not shape their family relationships in any meaningful way. However, my data shows that citizenship contributes to how respondents engage family formation processes in different ways, depending on their social position. Citizenship as I use it here refers to the Western social, historical construction of the category which determines the formal relationship between individuals and a political community (Cantú 2009). It also includes substantive conceptualizations and the implications of legal or "illegal" citizenship (Lem 2013). That is, the implications of having a documented or an undocumented status: feelings and

ideologies of membership and belonging, rights and privileges, civil participation and responsibilities, and wages and labor market participation opportunities.

Anti-immigrant, xenophobic legislation illustrates existing beliefs in the United States about who can claim membership, belonging, and the rights and privileges of being “American.” Examples of such legislation include Proposition 187 in California, SB1070 in Arizona, and SB4 in Texas. The narratives that drive such kinds of legislation are in part characterized by white injury, the “Latino threat” and the “Mexican threat” (Rodriguez 2017); such ideologies fuel racist sentiments and transform citizens and immigrants alike into suspected “illegals.” Scholars have documented some of the most devastating consequences of anti-immigration policies (Villalobos 2011; Stail & Vasi 2014; Dreby 2015) as well as more subtle effects (Park 2011; Feliciano, Lee, Robnett 2011; Brown, Jones, Becker 2018) that conceptualizations of legal-illegal and citizen-foreigner have on Latinos and other ethnic minorities. With that in mind, one of the salient ways in which citizenship mattered for how my respondents structured family was whether they had access to stable wages, wealth accumulation opportunities, reliable transportation and driving privileges. These are all important for whether gay individuals could pull family into their own spaces and under what condition.

Finally, gender is also important in family formation processes. I use R. W. Connell’s (2005, p71) definition of gender as an historical process that involves bodily practices. In Schippers’s (2007) words when citing Connell, “gender is the way in which the reproductive arena organizes practices at all levels of social organization from identity, to symbolic rituals, to large scale institutions.” And about masculinity Connell (2005) states that masculinity “is a place in gender relations, the practices throughout which men and

women engage that place in gender, and the effects of these practices in bodily experience, personality, and culture.” According to Connell, the body is an object and an agent of body-reflexive practices that are always social. Interestingly, Connell points out that masculinity is constituted through “bodily performance” and that means that “gender is vulnerable when the performance cannot be sustained.” Performances of masculinity include work ethic, financial success and stability, occupation and occupational prestige in addition to gender display and performance, all of which are salient elements in determining an individual’s position within the gender hierarchy.

In this chapter I profile the experiences of four respondents whose social locations differ. Specifically, I draw from the experiences of Thomas and Saul, and Junior and Sergio. While at first sight it appeared that the various definitions of difference that legitimate exclusion, inequality, and violence did not impact the family dynamics of my respondents, it became evident that my respondents’ experiences and perceptions in relation to their family were shaped by definitions of difference along class, citizenship, and gender. In addition to interview data I also include ethnographic observation data to illustrate my respondents’ gender display and performance through their bodily practices.

**Invisible openly gay men: privacy, citizenship and masculinity.**

*Oh my god, that was the coolest Halloween in years. He [Saul] is a Halloween freak. Loves Halloween. And every year Halloween is a big deal. Last year though, it was so special because both of our families were there and you could see my niece and his nephew talking and his little nephews playing with my nephews and my brother and his wife talking to [Saul's] sister. It was amazing because for me ... my family is my*

*backbone. My partner is my backbone as well. Both of them being together makes our life a lot easier —Thomas.*

I interviewed Thomas and Saul at a coffee and tea house in El Sereno, an Eastside Los Angeles neighborhood. They had purchased a house in the area around the time of the interview and were planning a “Halloween spook” wedding in their house for Halloween day 2015. Thomas and Saul were both born and raised in the Central Valley of California. Saul’s grandfather was part of the Bracero Program—a US-sponsored temporary program active from 1942 to 1964 (Jimenez, 2008). As Saul recounts it, his grandfather started in southern California, migrated north and established roots in the Central Valley. His family followed after. Similarly, Thomas’ father emigrated from the state of Guanajuato Mexico, met his mother in the Central Valley and established roots there.

Thomas and Saul were both deeply influenced by their respective immigrant families and the immigrant community in which they grew up. They were both raised Catholic, grew up speaking Spanish, were “*inculcated strong Mexican family values*” as Saul affirmed, and understood that homosexuality was wrong and femininity embodied in a male body was undesirable. Both grew up hearing about the dangers of “*la migra*” (Immigration and Customs Enforcement). However, as they grew older Thomas and Saul understood that unlike their undocumented neighbors, friends and family members, they were not at risk of deportation. They knew they enjoyed the social benefits and privileges of citizenship because as US-born citizens each of them holds a “*legitimate social security number*” in Saul’s words, and is entitled to the rights and privileges of “legal” citizenship.

Thomas and Saul experienced cultural violence (Galtung, 1990) and homophobia within their respective families and in their community. Thomas recalled that before

“coming out” as gay he would “*take homosexual friends*” to his parents’ house during his late high school years. As he recalled, “*you could tell they are homosexual because, again, they are a little different*” in how they express their gender and sexual identity through dress, occupation, and language. He recounted an instance in which he took a gay friend who was a hairstylist: “*that’s where my family were all like okay he’s a hairstylist. Our family hairstylist is homosexual so that’s how they’re like okay, he’s gay.*” Thomas continued, “*my parents would tell me, please don’t tell me you’re gonna be a joto like your friends.*” Thomas and Saul had been together for close to four years when I met them. They each had disclosed their sexuality as gay to their respective family members by the time they started dating each other. Thomas and Saul told me there were multiple instances in which they had to face homophobia and cultural violence before and after disclosing their sexuality despite the fact that they did not consider themselves feminine or obviously gay.

Thomas apologized, before and after, using the word “joto.” Joto is only one of various derogatory terms used among Mexican origin Spanish-speakers to regulate appropriate gender roles, sexual behavior (Nagel, 2000) and ethnic authenticity (Jimenez, 2008) through intimidation and stigmatization of men who identify as gay or are suspected of homosexuality. Such terms are used often by heterosexually identified men as part of performances of heterosexual masculinity in a similar fashion as the River High teenagers deploy the specter of the faggot (Pascoe, 2005). Such terms (joto, puto, and maricon) fit conceptualizations of cultural violence (Galtung 1990) and can be used to legitimize the use of direct or structural violence against gay men. According to Galtung (1990) “cultural violence makes direct and structural violence look, even feel, right—or at least not wrong.” Such use of cultural violence is not unique to Latinos. For example, in the United States, the



Federal Bureau of Investigation (2015; 2019) hate crime statistics show that there is a greater incidence of aggravated assault, simple assault, and intimidation among LGBT populations. While Thomas did not explain why he felt the need to apologize when using the word “joto,” his apology shows that he associates the term with negative or bad consequences.

Thomas and Saul were both stereotypically masculine in demeanor and gender display. That is, gender display and performance aligned with social and cultural expectations. In addition, their occupation and financial stability further legitimize their manhood and masculinity (Anderson, 2005; Connell, 2005). In addition to culturally appropriate performances of gender, both were a “big wheel” relative to other family members. Thomas and Saul, both in their mid thirties, held stable jobs when I met them. Thomas was working as an accountant at the time of the interview while Saul was a television director for a major video streaming service. Their combined income exceeded one-hundred sixty-thousand dollars per year. They had recently moved away from the Central Valley to Los Angeles. Saul recalled *“I got a job out here and we were like okay, he [Thomas] had recently lost his job out there so he was like okay, it’s a new opportunity.”* When I interviewed them, Thomas and Saul had both arguably approached hegemonic masculinity ideals as described by Connell (2005) since they achieved occupational prestige, financial success, and homeownership.

Thomas and Saul wanted to keep strong family relationships. They visited their families in the Central Valley every time they had time off from work. Thomas explained their family would also visit them in Los Angeles more often ever since they moved out of their apartment in Hollywood and into their new house in the Eastside of Los Angeles.

Scholars have argued that family members in different cultures negotiate independence and interdependence (Gordon 2008) and symbolically maintain interdependence and obligations (Sheng & Settles 2006) whether family members live together or move away. Similarly, despite being financially independent and having their own home miles away from their home town, Thomas and Saul sought to keep family ties and obligations.

The excerpt at the beginning of this section captured the joy and excitement Thomas felt when both families came together in the same space. It illustrates why it was important for Thomas and Saul to structure their relationship and family life as mutually constitutive. As the excerpt suggests, Thomas and Saul had accomplished not only acceptance as a gay couple within both of their families, but they successfully brought both families together into their own, personal space: their home in Los Angeles. According to Saul and Thomas, that was the latest “*family get together*” they had before the interview, but that was only one of many instances in which they managed to bring their parents and siblings together in their house.

Saul similarly expressed that it was important for him to actively pursue merging both of their families. When I asked why that was important, he replied: “*because I think it’s important to be able to marry both families together, his side and my side, into a space in which everyone is comfortable.*” I wanted to understand what Saul meant by “a space in which everyone is comfortable” so I asked him to elaborate specifically on that part of his comment. He explained that while his family had always been supportive and welcoming, there were “*moments*” in which he “*felt the need to adjust to [the family] environment*” because everyone else was heterosexual, with children. Saul felt that by bringing both of their families together into their own space where family members could see they “*share*

*things together; share a bed together, and that you know is a couple just us living together,”* his parents and siblings would be more aware about the differences and similarities.

Saul envisioned creating a family tradition that was unlike what his parents had experienced in their youth. Part of that tradition involved being “*able to marry both families together*” in a way that stronger family ties may flourish. In addition, Saul wished to influence younger generations to help them expand already established family values by making them more inclusive of same-sex relationships. Saul explained:

*For me it's like a reflection of the type of people that are in our family and how loving and generous and warm they are. So it's just a way of creating tradition. A way of showing our nieces and nephews on both sides that nothing is weird. Because our relationship is different it is not that different from my brother and his wife or his [Thomas] sister and her husband. That is just a group and it should all be based on that, and they should learn to embrace that as part of the values they have been inculcated growing up, and yeah having a good time.*

I chose to profile the family life experiences of Thomas and Saul because both of their narratives illustrate a pattern I identified among other participants who share a similar social position. Respondents in the citizen and middle-class categories seemed to have a specific advantage for how to engage family formation processes that were beyond the reach of respondents outside such categories. Sergio, for example, had limited and temporary access to similar family formation processes while he occupied a more stable social position relative to his two sisters. Sergio is undocumented and working-class. Like Thomas and Saul, though, Leo and Adan, for example, talked about their efforts to bring both of their families together in a similar fashion. Adan recalled the “*awkwardness*” in the

atmosphere at family gatherings they held in their home in northern Los Angeles. Adan identified such awkwardness particularly in his sisters' husbands: two "very old school cowboys" that "wear tejanas [cowboy style hats] for parties and stuff like that." Recalling his experience during family gatherings at his and Leo's home, Adan affirmed: "You can feel when someone's not one hundred percent there, in the moment. You feel that there's a little bit of awkwardness. And that's okay. I don't care. That's their problem."

The awkwardness Adan identified among male family members illustrates how family dynamics and power relations shift depending on the space and context in which family processes take place. I asked Adan: "what do you mean they're not there a hundred percent? Adan replied:

*Like you can tell that they're a little bit out of their element. When they're in my house, we're all having a good time, it's great. But when they are in one of my cousins' houses or one of my tíos' [uncles'] houses, their demeanor is a little different. They'll be having different types of conversations, without having to filter themselves. I think old school Latinos, especially when drinking and talking, they can say stuff, they can be very vulgar. Even if you don't mean to offend someone, you can. And I'm very conscious of that because growing up gay, I can remember; all those words stick out in my mind. Like puto, joto, or like, no seas puñal [don't be a faggot]. Even though they're not literally using it in a derogatory way, they'll tell each other ay no seas puto [don't be a faggot] when one says something funny that the others don't find funny. To me, the word is offensive. So I feel like they can't have that type of camaraderie and conversation at my house because they know that that's probably not appropriate in my house. So in that way, I can feel the tension.*

I asked Adan “*At your house?*” And he replied:

*Yeah. When they're at my house. And when they're out drinking. And even if they said those things, it wouldn't be a big deal because I understand and we don't care. Like, we grew up with it. But I think it's more them that are like careful about not being offensive to us. They don't say anything like that.*

Adan's experience suggests that being in the gay couples' presence does not deter uncles, cousins, or brothers-in-law from using offensive, homophobic language. In contrast, being in the gay couple's home seemed to heighten their awareness leading them to monitor their language and behavior. I suggest that the tension and awkwardness Adan identified in his two brothers-in-law stems from them being “a little bit out of their element” when the situational context limits their ability to perform heterosexual masculinity in an erotically marked gay space (Ingram, 1998; Cantú, 2003).

Saul and Thomas, Leo and Adan, Fabian and Nestor are among the respondents who reported stories about successfully “marrying” or “meshing” both of their families together. Leo and Adan reported that their respective families would seek to commingle with one another. Adan explained that their “*families began to kind of mesh*” to the extent that immediate and extended family members from both sides began to share resources like phone lines and car insurance. Adan added that things changed to the point that his and Leo's families often plan surprise birthday parties for each other's family members. Fabian and Nestor reported a similar experience. And Thomas told me: “*Without us being present, they still hang out*” referring to his parents. Saul added: “*My parents will go take his parents fruit or whatever they have. Or his parents would visit mine without us being present.*”

The processes I discuss above are the result of the gay couples' social position as well as agency. They made a concerted effort to create new family dynamics specifically by bringing together both families of origin. However, while I present a sort of straight forward narrative about the relationship between social position, agency, and family life, the reality is much more complex. For example, Fabian and Adan fell within the working-class category. Fabian was undocumented at the time of the interview. Yet, they each benefited from their respective partners' social positions such that their narratives resembled those of Thomas, Saul, and Leo. As I will discuss in the next section, a concerted effort to bring families together does not always yield the desired results.

**Traversing the limits of acceptable visibility: From tacit subject to gay rights activist.**

In the previous sections I argued that having a house enables the creation and maintenance of family ties. However, having a house is not enough. Surely, my respondents' family members played an important role in how family processes develop. There were instances in which family members were unable or unwilling to participate in the lives of gay couples. In some cases it was sheer distance that prevented family members from being part of gay couples' lives and vice-versa. In addition to distance, borders and immigration laws also made it difficult, if not impossible, to engage family in processes like Thomas and Saul did with their own family. Other cases, however, were complicated by shifting social positions, changes in family interdependence, and family members' beliefs about homosexuality. So, beyond having a house, other statuses matter too. One of those statuses is the level of visibility of the gay individual or gay couple. Too much visibility may become a source of conflict between gay and heterosexual family members. Taking what family members might perceive as private matters (e.g. the nature of the relationship between gay

partners, views about marriage equality, personal experiences and family history growing up gay) into the public sphere—traversing the limit of acceptable visibility—may indicate a fundamental change in priorities for everyone. Swidler (2001) wrote that context is important for how impactful culture can be asserting that the effects of culture “are strongest where the context demands and enforces public cultural coherence.” Short of a revolution, traversing the limits of acceptable visibly represents a threatening move against family values and the family. For the family members it might turn out that visible gays are okay in a private settings, publicly visible gays not so much. Shifts in social location shape the ability of gay individuals to engage family of origin in meaningful ways as part of their lives. Shifts in social location effect shifts in situational contexts impact the effects cultural practices have (Swidler, 2001) and the way in which ethnicity is understood (Jimenez, 2000). In the context of an immigrant family, visible performances of homosexuality threaten its honor and respectability of the family as I show in the this section

In this section I profile the experiences of Junior and Sergio in relation to Sergio’s family. Junior and Sergio are a mixed citizenship status couple: Sergio was undocumented at the time of the interview, Junior was a permanent resident. I supplement their narratives with data from my interviews with Sergio’s sisters Montserrat and Ana. In my discussion I illustrate how shifts in social position impact the ability gay individuals have to shape family dynamics and participate in family life. I also show that, contrary to Thomas and Saul, Sergio’s and Junior’s locations within the family of origin shifted from the periphery, to the center, to the periphery once more as social positions (theirs and their family members’) shifted over the years, from the time they were in Mexico and after migration. Specifically, Sergio and Junior lived at the margins of society and family life in Mexico as

they were suspected of homosexuality since childhood. Four years after immigrating to the United States and obtaining greater financial stability and cultural competence relative to Sergio's sisters, Junior and Sergio became central in the lives of Ana, Montserrat and their children. However, they were again pushed to the margins of family life years later, in part because they engaged in gay rights activism and also because Ana and Montserrat had achieved financial stability and cultural competence in the United States. At that point, Sergio' and Junior's social location shifted from tacit subjectivity to openly gay, gay rights activists. Keeping sight of the ways in which social location shapes gay individuals' opportunities to navigate family, I also call attention to the ways in which gay respondents' efforts can be undermined or enhanced by family members.

Sergio and Junior lived at the margins of society and family life in Mexico from childhood through young adulthood. Both grew up in a rural town in Guanajuato, Mexico. The town, as they described in their respective, separate interviews, was predominantly Catholic, patriarchal, and homophobic. Sergio recalled: "*I just wanted to get away from the family because there was oppression, persecution. I was sexually abused [by a family member]. I had no one's support.*" Similarly Junior told me: "*Harassment against gay people was entrenched there*" referring to his hometown. He continued, "*even professors used to say that if you were like that—if you were homosexual—you deserved it*" referring to the attacks and harassment he experienced. Both, Sergio and Junior are the youngest in their families. Sergio grew up in a multigenerational family that included nine siblings, grandparents, uncles, aunts, and cousins. In contrast, Junior, the only boy in his family, was raised by his two sisters from the moment his parents immigrated to the United States; he was in elementary school. Both, Sergio and Junior, experienced poverty, sexual harassment, and



physical and cultural violence in their hometown, at school and within the family because they were suspected of homosexuality.

Junior's gender display and performance transgressed social and cultural normative expectations. He explained during the interview that being feminine made him an easy target for harassment. He told me that as a child he "*preferred to play games that were [reserved] for girls,*" adding that during his youth he used language that was perceived as feminine by others, and as a young adult he would swing his arms and hips when walking in a way "*similar to how women walk.*" Junior recalled others' attempts at regulating his behavior through social sanctions including shame, ridicule, discrimination and intimidation. He confessed that for many years he tried to regulate his behavior to more closely resemble normative masculinity. He added that doing so negatively impacted his mental health. Ultimately, Junior embraced his femininity and made it part of his political activism.

In contrast, Sergio's gender display and performance aligned more closely with normative gender expectations. He confessed, however, that he had accomplished normative gender expectations through practice because he "*was a feminine child.*" When I met him, Sergio was sporting long hair. His hair was black and wavy, and pulled back in a pony tail that reached down the middle of his back. Sergio spoke in a calm, quiet voice as if he did not want others to hear our conversation. And unlike Junior, Sergio rarely made any hand gestures or facial expressions as he answered my interview questions. To some extent, Sergio seemed to embody the type of Mexican masculinity Octavio Paz described in his essay *Mascaras mexicanas*, "hermetic, closed up in himself." Yet, at the same time Sergio

was forthcoming and even became emotional when recalling his childhood during the interview.

Nagel (2000) explains that “gender regimes lie at the core of ethnic cultures.” Appropriate performances of gender are also appropriate performances of authentic ethnicity as constructed and asserted by co-ethnics. Just like the regulation of key elements that keep boundaries between “authentic” and “inauthentic” ethnicity (Jimenez, 2008), so do performances of gender have the power to reinforce ethnic boundaries. As Jimenez (2008) contended, the options individuals have for asserting self-identity are dictated not by the self alone, but by the way those around who witness a performance regard such assertions. In trying keep membership in the family, Sergio and his partner Junior were expected to adhere to normative performances of gender and ethnicity. Making themselves visibly gay within the family and beyond, left the couple vulnerable to reprimands, rejection, and exclusion from family life.

Sergio and Junior immigrated to California to escape the violence they regularly faced in Mexico, but they encountered similar experiences in the United States. They encountered symbolic violence, harassment, and exclusion at the workplace and within Sergio’s family. Once in California, they lived with Sergio’s brother Ivan in an apartment along with Ivan’s wife and four sisters-in-law. Ivan also helped them get a job in the factory where he worked. Soon after they arrived, it became evident to Sergio and Junior that the homophobia they had lived in Mexico was also present in California. Sergio told me: “*we began to experience the same issues. Except that here they [coworkers] targeted my partner because they could see that he is very effeminate.*” Junior similarly recalled: “*some of his*

*family members wanted to intimidate us in the beginning because we treated each other like spouses”* referring to the dynamics between Sergio and himself.

In spite of the homophobia they faced, they also encountered opportunities to achieve independence from the family. Junior explained that they both enrolled in English classes soon after they immigrated. They saved money to rent an apartment away from the family; they moved out of Ivan’s apartment months after they arrived. After two years of working at the same factory, Junior, a US-born citizen, was promoted to an administrative position and was given a pay raise. He purchased his first vehicle soon after. Sergio, an undocumented immigrant, continued to earn minimum wage, but their overall income as a couple increased and so too their ability to help family in Mexico and in Santa Ana with cash contributions. Sergio recalled: *“they [siblings] feel I need to cooperate with more money to send to our family in Mexico because we don’t have children.”* And Junior similarly expressed: *“they felt it was my obligation to help financially because I’m better off than they are”* referring to his sisters and parents. Although Sergio and Junior achieved financial stability and independence from family, they continued to feel it was their obligation to continue to help family financially and otherwise.

Experiencing anti-gay social attitudes continually ultimately drove Sergio and Junior to join gay rights activism. For them, part of being an activist involved being open about their sexuality and their relationship. Sergio explained that after getting married in 2008, he and Junior volunteered to publish their photograph and an article about their life as a gay couple in a local magazine in Santa Ana, CA. In the article, written by Junior, the couple discussed their sexuality, their relationship, and the violence they had endured because of

their sexual orientation in and outside of the family. From what Sergio could gather, his cousin's wife picked up the magazine while waiting at the barber shop. Sergio explained:

*They took two magazines and made a scandal at my sister's house. They threw one of the magazines at my sister [Montserrat], on the table. They told her look at what your brother is doing with the family name; look where he is putting the family name. But that was not enough for them. They took the second magazine all the way to Guanajuato to go show the family over there.*

Erasure and silencing are two strategies that have been documented in the literature about homosexuality particularly in relation to a lesbian identity (Rich, 1980; Moraga, 1981; Acosta, 2010), but similar themes are also implied in literature about gay identity (Decena 2010; Ocampo, 2013; Delucio et. al., 2020). These strategies require the complicit participation of the homosexual subject in interactions with family members in order for the strategies to meet their purpose. In the example above, Sergio recalled his mother calling him when she learned about the magazine. She wanted to express her disapproval and shame. Sergio recalled telling her *"I'm married whether you like it or not."* His mother replied *"No. For me he is only your friend and if anybody asks I will say you are friends and nothing more."* Sergio's refusal to become an accomplice in the erasure and silencing of his sexuality and the making of his relationship with Junior into a friendship resulted in ostracism.

Sergio told me about other instances in which his family excluded or rejected him for too visibly openly gay. For example, when he married Junior, he invited his family. He lamented that of the forty-seven family members who lived in the same neighborhood at the time, no one attended his wedding ceremony. In another instance, he recalled picking

up food and calling his sisters because he wanted to visit and share a meal with them.

However, his sister Montserrat told him on the phone that they were out. He explained: “*we were almost there so we drove by their house; I saw her welcoming family members that were visiting from Mexico.*” He felt his sister was ashamed of him and Junior so she decided to keep them away. Sergio confessed he was deeply affected by the family’s various acts of exclusion and rejection, particularly because they had a closer relationship in the past.

According to Sergio, the relationship with his family became strained when he began to talk about his sexuality more openly. Sergio recalled talking to his sisters about why people should vote against Proposition 8 of California. During that conversation he recalls his sister Montserrat saying “*If I could vote, I would vote against [same-sex marriage] because I don’t want my son to turn gay.*” Sergio explained that after that event he began to distance himself from his sisters and other family: “*that’s the reason why I distanced myself from the family. We used to have a relationship.*” Sergio added “*we used to visit them [family] often; we were in their house often. We used to take all my nephews out to the movies.*” Sergio explained that his family continued to be polite to them, but he realized they did not want him to speak about his relationship or his sexuality openly. He also learned through one niece that his two sisters and their families were against his relationship with Junior.

During my interview with Ana and Montserrat, they told me about the various ways Sergio and Junior helped them adjust to life in the United States. When they first immigrated to California, four years after Sergio, Sergio and Junior already had some financial stability and they knew how to navigate life as immigrants. Montserrat explained that Sergio and Junior helped them navigate the city, helped them find a house her husband

could rent at a low cost, and helped them get a job in the same factory they worked. They also told me that Junior often took the children and them out to eat and to the movies.

I also asked Ana and Montserrat to share their thoughts about Sergio's relationship with Junior. In general, they responded to my questions about their brother's gay identity with long periods of silence and vague or contradictory comments. Ana told me "*I don't like...*" and "*as long as Sergio is happy...*" and shrugged. She added "*I never got involved in that part of his life.*" Montserrat gave me similar answers, but made it clear that she was against homosexuality. For example, she said "*I wouldn't want to have a son like that [gay].*" However, they generally avoided discussing their feelings about gay sexuality and relationship by discussing instead what others thought or family conflicts unrelated to the issue of homosexuality or same-sex relationships.

Montserrat suggested that her husband and her did not want other gay people in their home. She told me that she always welcomed Sergio and Junior to family reunions because they are family. She also felt they were always respectful: "*they never held each other or acted in inappropriate ways when they visited.*" However, things changed when Sergio and Junior invited other gay friends to family functions. Montserrat explained: "*One time we invited them to a party. They brought a friend [Richi]. That day my husband told me that he did not want me to invite them ever again.*" Montserrat explained that Richi was noticeably gay: "*You can tell [se le nota]*". She added that her older son also did not like to be around Richi because he was clearly gay and feminine.

Montserrat recalled a second time when Sergio and Junior attended a family function accompanied by their gay friends:

*Another time when Rita [her sister] got married they brought like five guys. And Richi was here with them and he said hi to me like that [in a flamboyant loud and stereotypically feminine way]. He hugged me and kissed me. So the next time they were going to join us I told Junior please don't get mad, but I need to ask you as a favor please tell Richi not to say hi to me and don't bring your friends anymore. They didn't like that, but I had to tell them.*

Montserrat felt that from that point forward, the relationship with Sergio became tense. She recalled that around that time she had also told Sergio she would vote against same-sex marriage if she could vote, which further damaged their bond. She told me that while her brother was noticeably gay from childhood—*“he liked ballet, he was bullied about it”*—they loved him regardless. However, she was unwilling to allow him to bring other gay men around her family. She added that her children used to respect Sergio when they were younger, but their attitudes changed as they grew older and developed a clear understanding about the relationship between Sergio and Junior. She suggested that it all contributed to Sergio's decision to distance himself from them. Unlike Sergio, Junior continued to seek opportunities to be part of Sergio's family and vice-versa. However, their interactions after that were sporadic and superficial.

The shifts in social position of various family members impacted Sergio's and Junior's ability to shape family dynamics and participate in family processes. My data suggests that two important shifts influenced how the relationship between the gay couple and the rest of the family evolved. The first is a shift in the social positions of Sergio's sisters over the eight years after their permanent immigration. Sergio and Junior had more stability than Ana and Montserrat when the sisters first immigrated to the United States.

The two sisters relied on Sergio and Junior as they learned to navigate routine life in Santa Ana. Sergio and Junior helped them to become familiar with the city and the culture, aided them in enrolling children in school, helped them find a job and housing. Before the sisters and their family moved into their first rental house, the couple hosted them in their apartment for dinners and other family gatherings. When the sisters moved into their first rental house, however, the family gatherings were moved to their place. By the time I interviewed the family, three of Sergio's sisters lived in the same house with their respective families. Together, they could afford a higher standard of living and greater loyalty and interdependence developed between them (see Landale and Oropes, 2007), at which point Sergio and Junior were no longer central in their lives. For example, Montserrat learned to drive and had her own vehicle. She was in charge of dropping and picking up the children from school and feeding them while her two sisters were at work. In return, her sisters compensated her with a monthly cash contribution.

The second factor is a shift in Sergio's social position from a tacit gay subject to an openly gay subject and a gay rights activist. According to Sergio, the realization that he had the power to raise awareness about the damage anti-gay policies caused to LGBTQ people drove him to engage in gay rights activism. His approach, as he explained, was to "*engage in difficult conversations*" about same-sex marriage and gay rights with family, friends, and strangers. He believed it was necessary to educate his family about how anti-gay policy negatively affected lives of gay, lesbian, and transgender people. He also wanted to expose his family to gay people other than himself and Junior in an effort to show them that "*being gay is normal*" as Sergio put it. Sergio thus became a sort of spokesperson for the gay



community disclosing quite publicly his sexuality and the nature of his relationship with Junior. However, his approach had a counterproductive effect.

On one hand, Jimenez (2008) suggests that in a context where there is “heavy immigrant replenishment, ancestry, nativity, and even legal status become highly racialized.” On the other hand Nagel (2000) explains drawing on Butler’s notion of performativity that performative acts have the power to constitute the social order through discourse and actions. Unlike Jimenez’s and Nagel’s analyses, my analysis takes place within the privacy of the family. However, this instance, Rita’s wedding celebration, represents a semi-public context—an event to which the forty-seven family members who lived in the same neighborhood at the time will potentially attended. Thus, I suggest that in this context that is heavily influenced by Mexican immigrants and second-generation Mexican Americans, sexuality too becomes racialized and ethnosexual boundaries policed. I further suggest that Sergio’s introduction of visibly gay subjects into a familial heteronormative ritual is an attempt to establish a new social order within family constraints. The resulting ostracism is an attempt on the part of Sergio’s co-ethnics to regulate deviant performances of sexuality and ethnicity. It represents an attempt at regulation of ethnosexual boundaries.

Instead of gaining support and acceptance from family Sergio encountered increased resistance. Specifically, Sergio faced straightforward rejection from Montserrat, her husband and their 19 year old son. Montserrat said she would vote against same-sex marriage if she could vote, her husband asked for Junior and Sergio to not be included in family events when they showed up with other gay friends, and Montserrat’s son told Junior “*you are not my uncle*” and “*gay marriage is not legal*” as Montserrat and Junior recalled. In addition, by Ana’s, Montserrat’s, and Sergio’s accounts, Sergio’s mother also

made her position clear. She told Sergio: *“it’s not right [no está bien]”* referring to Sergio’s sexuality, *“I will say he [Junior] is your friend and that’s it”* so to delegitimize the gay couple’s relationship, and *“I have a son, not a daughter”* suggesting that being gay jeopardized Sergio’s manhood. Furthermore Sergio’s cousins expressed the shame and indignation they felt about the family name being associated with the gay couple in a local magazine. And Montserrat denied that she was home hosting family that were visiting from Mexico because, by Sergio’s account, she did not want the gay couple present out of shame. Based on my interview data, the aforementioned events occurred soon after Sergio and Junior engaged in gay rights activism and disclosed their sexuality so openly around 2008. When I interviewed Sergio and his family in 2017 the gay couple interacted with family superficially only.

## **Conclusion**

Nagel (2000) explains that “ethnosexual frontiers” are supervised, regulated and restricted by co-ethnics because “proper gender role and sexual behavior” is important “to ethnic community honor and respectability.” Almaguer (1993) similarly suggested that [Latino] “family requires allegiance to” sexual meaning and patriarchal systems that militate against homosexuality. What Sergio and Junior experienced within the family is evidence of such militancy against the emergence of a gay identity, an attempt to protect the honor and respectability of the family and the community, and a contestation of ethnosexual boundaries by Sergio and Junior against traditional understandings of gender, sexuality, and ethnic belonging. Sergio and Junior openly adopted the cultural values of sexual liberation through performances that emphasize their gay identity. They believed in need to make the personal public in order to normalize same-sex relationships. In doing so

they violated co-ethnic expectations of appropriate performances of sexuality and ethnic authenticity as understood by their family members.

The family relationships of LGBTQ people are complex. In this chapter I have shown that beyond dichotomous understanding of rejection and acceptance, my respondents' family life—their interactions, family structure, family configuration, and the roles each play in relations specific family members—is organized in meaningful ways by the social locations they and/or their family members occupy not only within the family, but also in their communities and society at large. For example, Sergio and Junior had historically occupied a marginal position within their families. However, the dynamics of their family relationships shifted along with shifts in the social locations they occupied over time. There may be certain kinds of interactions between particular family members which follow a particular pattern. However, shifts in social location may temporarily or permanently shape the patterns of such interactions. So, family history and quality of family relationships notwithstanding, the evidence suggest that the intersection of multiple social locations deeply shape how family formation processes unravel.

Thinking about the experiences of Thomas and Saul, Leo and Adan, and Fabian and Nestor, the shift in their respective social location as individuals and as gay couples modified family dynamics in meaningful ways. In the case of Thomas and Saul, once they established their own “landing-pad” (i.e., their home in the Eastside of Los Angeles), new family traditions began to develop. The new family traditions unraveled in a physical location that required family members to travel beyond their usual locations for family gatherings in the central valley. In addition to physical location, the couples “landing-pad”—as a site where social relations are formed and power exercised—was also marked by a

kind of erotic desire different from the dominant erotic desire in spaces where routine family dynamics evolved; that is homoerotic desire as the landing-pad belonged to the gay couple Thomas and Saul.

Previous scholars have discussed “landing pad” as a place such as a household, ethnic enclaves, and social networks that link immigrants, in particular, to resources—social cultural, familial, and economic (Chavez 1992; Cantú 2003). These landing-pads are vital, for the “survival and adaptation” of immigrants. Cantú asserts that “in the case of gay Latino/a immigrants one must ask where these ‘landing pads’ for survival and adaptation might be.” I take this as a point of departure to suggest that in the case of second- and third-generation gay Latino “immigrants” such as the aforementioned respondents, their homes become their landing-pads as they create resources for survival and adaptation as a gay couple. One particularly important resource is the physical space that is their property and bestows on the gay couple prestige and other social benefits. It is in that space where family and power dynamics shift in the context of the social, historical and spatial simultaneity of family life.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Gay Rights, Gay Subjectivities

*If the answer to the question, is life possible, is yes, that is surely something significant. It cannot, however, be taken for granted as the answer. For many who can and do answer the question in the affirmative, that answer is hard won, if won at all, an accomplishment that is fundamentally conditioned by reality being structured or restructured in such a way that the affirmation becomes possible. — Judith Butler, Undoing Gender*

I asked Lalo about his expectations and hopes for his relationship with his partner. He said, *"I want to be seen as the norm, as equal because we are; we are two humans in a relationship, we should be given the same treatment as any other couple. We have the right to live life regardless."* Lalo stands six-feet tall, muscular, bearded, and tatted-up from neck to ankles. He embraces femininity in general, but his own femininity in particular. At the time of this writing, he expressed his femininity through language, bodily movements, and fashion in a sort of avant-garde style. He identified his gender identity as "male" in the pre-interview survey in 2014, but today "genderfuck" captures his gender display most accurately. Such transformation occurred over the months after our interview in 2014. In an informal interview follow-up Lalo told me that his adoption of a gender non-conforming fashion was inspired by Latina fashion. He drew inspiration in particular from his older sister. Lalo continued: *"For a fact, as a couple I don't want to be ridiculed. I don't want to be seen as 'oh you're this but we're going to accept you.' No! I don't want to be seen as something different or outside the norm. I have rights too."*

Why, if the family continues to play such a central role in the lives of my respondents as we learned in chapter two, do they traverse the limits of acceptable visibility as we learned in chapter three? How can we explain Lalo's transition from a conventionally masculine gender display to genderfuck? Why do my respondents neither keep a tacit subjectivity nor complicity participate in the erasure of their own sexuality? How can the gay men in my study affirm that it is possible to be a gay Latino, to have a committed relationship with another man, and to continue to belong in the family and ethnic community? The kind of thinking and behavior exhibited by my respondents depends largely on the availability of cultural scripts and the contexts in which they deploy their sexuality. Queer people did not automatically acquire the knowledge that they are equal and should be treated with the same dignity and respect as heterosexual citizens. Those beliefs and cultural claims are institutionalized in laws and policies, proclamation of LGBT human rights, and organizations that support LGBT rights.

The overarching research question guiding my dissertation is how do Latino gay couples navigate family of origin after the legalization of same-sex marriage. In chapter two, I argued that family history has played a fundamental part in how gay Latino men structure their identities and relationships. In chapter three I showed that socioeconomic status, gender, and visibility shape how my respondents can engage family and shape family dynamics. In this chapter I further argue that my respondents draw from on political and legal discourse that legitimate their sexual identity and same-sex relationships. They do so in order to make choices about how to advance their relationships within the family. For example, cultural tools emerging from LGBT circles become widely accepted and the basis of reality restructuring as they are framed through "formal, legal articulation" as rights and

thus become part of public dialog through media coverage and legal action (Jacobs, 1993:724).

Historical, political, economic and cultural developments over the past three decades have restructured the social reality in which my respondents deploy their sexuality. Such developments have been institutionalized through the establishment of principles, laws, and organizations that advance the rights of LGBTQ people. My respondents draw from the values and norms articulated through such principles, laws, and organization to structure how they think about their sexual identities and romantic relationships. The way respondents think about and use cultural scripts is informed by family history, class consciousness, and involvement in LGBTQ organizations.

Institutionalized cultural claims serve as scripts for claims-making about sexuality, relationships, and family life. In the following sections I outline some of the milestones in the advancement of LGBT Rights that exemplify the institutionalization of values and beliefs about equality and the rights to equal legal and political protections and privileges. Next, I discuss how a first group of respondents use cultural scripts about LGBT rights as a tool for resistance against hetero-patriarchal norms, to restructure their subjectivities and social existence. In the last section, I discuss how a second group of respondents resist emerging cultural scripts, in particular marriage equality as having the power to redefine their sexual and family lives.

### **The Institutionalization of Beliefs and Restructuring of Reality**

Beliefs about the human and civil rights of LGBT people have been in the process of becoming institutionalized for decades. I will describe a few salient examples in this section. I favor a local-national-global organization of information against a chronological

set up because my aim is not to provide a timeline. Instead, I want to illustrate how beliefs and cultural scripts about equality, civil rights, and human rights become institutionalized through codes, laws, and the adoption of principles in official documents. Thus, I begin with examples of law and policy modifications at the local level, followed by LGBT rights advances at the national level, and I end with a brief discussion of declarations of global LGBT Human Rights principles.

Much of the groundwork leading to pro-LGBT legislation in California was laid in Los Angeles and San Francisco. These cities have been particularly supportive environments for LGBT people in the state “long before the start of a gay movement” (Library of Congress a & b; Faderman and Timmons, 2006:106; Podmore and Tremblay, 2016). Nonetheless, the place of the homosexual subject within American society was raucously contested, and arguably continues to be contested, at the local and national levels since the emergence of the gay movement pre and post Stonewall riots. In Los Angeles in particular, cultural claims making about the pleasure to be and the right to life as the member of a sexual minority became institutionalized in the form of organized religion (ONE Archives at USC Library, 1968b; Faderman and Timmons, 2006), gay bars and bathhouses (ONE Archives at USC Library, 1966; 1968a; 1973; 1989), media and live performances (ONE Archives at USC Library, 1988; Faderman and Timmons, 2006), and sexual communities (Library of Congress a & b; Faderman and Timmons, 2006). The cultural scripts emerging from the gay and lesbian liberation movements eventually became codified through legislation.

California State Legislature initiated the optimum legal environment for same-sex couples in the late 1990s. Drawing from popular schemas about the nature and meaning of romantic relationships, legislation constructed same-sex relationships as based on personal



choice, commitment, interdependence, and reciprocity (see Domestic Partnership Act of 1999). Further legislation attempted to legitimize same-sex partnerships by constructing same-sex couples as families that must be protected from potential economic and social hardships that often result from the dissolution of conjugal relationships (see Domestic Partnership Act of 2003). The goal was to create a legal environment in which gay and lesbians in committed partnerships could enjoy legal protections, benefits and responsibilities similar to those of married different-sex couples. These and similar laws contributed to the construction of same-sex conjugal relationships as a legitimate and thus an objective category. I quote AB-25 and AB-205 extensively in the next two paragraphs to illustrate the codified institutionalization of beliefs and cultural scripts in relations to same-sex relationships.

The Domestic Partnership Act of 1999, also known as Domestic Partnership Assembly Bill No. 26 or AB-26, amended the Family, Government, and Health and Safety Codes of California. The text reads “An act to add Division 2.5 (commencing with Section 297) to the Family Code, to add Article 9 (commencing with Section 22867) to Chapter 1 of Part 5 of Division 5 of Title 2 of the Government Code, and to add Section 1261 to the Health and Safety Code, relating to domestic partners.” AB-26 “would provide that a domestic partnership shall be established between 2 adults of the same sex” thus recognizing same-sex relationship in California in any legal capacity. AB-26 defines domestic partners as “two adults who have chosen to share one another’s lives in an intimate and committed relationship of mutual caring.” AB-26 instructs the “Secretary of State to prepare forms for the registration and termination of domestic partnerships, distribute these forms to each county clerk,” making the forms available to the public.

AB-26 preempts local ordinances or laws from creating obstacles for the creating of a domestic partnership except when offering rights to domestic partners. The bill requires “a health facility to allow a patient’s domestic partner and other specified persons to visit a patient” and authorizes “the state and local employers to offer health care coverage and other benefits to domestic partners.”

The California Domestic Partner Rights and Responsibilities Act of 2003 (AB-205 Domestic Partnership) furthered to institutionalized beliefs about equality and legitimacy. AB-205 “intended to help California move closer to fulfilling the promises of inalienable rights, liberty, and equality.” The bill provided “all caring and committed couples, regardless of their gender or sexual orientation, the opportunity to obtain essential rights, protections, and benefits and to assume corresponding responsibilities, obligations, and duties.” In addition, AB-205 aimed to “further the state’s interests in promoting stable and lasting family relationships, and protecting Californians from the economic and social consequences of abandonment, separation, the death of loved ones, and other life crises.” One way AB-205 accomplished such a task was by recognizing unions of “two persons of the same sex, other than a marriage, validly formed in another jurisdiction” as valid domestic partnerships in California under section 299.2 of the California Family Code. In addition, AB-205 Domestic Partnership “Expanding the rights and creating responsibilities of registered domestic partners would further California’s interests in promoting family relationships and protecting family members during life crises.”

Historically, LGBTQ people have grappled with institutionalized homophobia and heterosexism. A shifting social context shaped over decades of activism created new possibilities for homosexuality and same-sex love to become institutionalized. AB-26 and

AB-205 are two examples of the codified institutionalization of beliefs and claims about equality and the right to life. Such beliefs and claims emerged from within LGBTQ communities and feminist circles. These ideas compete in political, religious, cultural, and medical arenas against hereto-patriarchal claims about the perverse, immoral, and abnormal nature of same-sex desire and love. Such hetero-patriarchal claims are rooted in European colonialist constructions of gender and sexuality imposed on colonized and racialized peoples and women (Podmore and Tremblay, 2016; Upadhyay, 2021).

Same-sex marriage was a hot topic for more than a decade. It became a topic of national conversation in the United States particularly between 2006 to 2015. A search in NewsBank database for the phrase “gay marriage” for the years 2006 to 2015 returned 52,455 “Newspaper” articles and 10,194 “Web-Only Source” articles in addition to blogs, transcripts, college newspaper articles, and audio files in the United States alone. According to Hunter (2017) following a number of state bans on same-sex marriage in 2004, LGBT rights organizations met to rethink the same-sex marriage strategy. The new strategy was articulated in a document titled *Winning Marriage: What We Need to Do*, which eventually was modified and retitled *Winning Marriage: The Path Forward*.

Part of the strategy articulated in *What We Need to Do* involved approaching the marriage equality movement more like a “national candidate campaign” in order to win the public. In addition, the crafters move beyond the human/civil rights discourse to also include messages of “love, commitment, fairness and freedom” (Freedomtomarry.org) in order to appeal to voters who were in doubt about their position on the issue. The human/civil rights discourse, however, continued to be part of the campaign as it resonated with liberal voters who already supported marriage equality (The Atlantic). In addition, the

campaign crafters made strategic use of key concepts like “fair/fairness,” “separate but equal,” and “freedom” in claims-making for same-sex marriage support. The Human Right Campaign summarizes the strategy stating: “people needed to hear the stories of couples and families across the country impacted by laws that failed to grant them the recognition they deserved.”

Several battles were fought and won over the decades prior to 2010, but meaningful advances on LGBT rights at the federal level occurred during Barack Obama’s presidency. On June 2009, Barack Obama proclaimed “June 2009 as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Pride Month” (Administration of Barack H. Obama, 2009). Obama’s Administration partnered with the LGBT community to “advance a wide range of initiatives” meant to correct years of discrimination against LGBT peoples at the international and national levels. The next year, the Congress repealed Section 654 of Title 10, U.S.C., “Policy concerning homosexuality in the Armed Forces” popularly known as the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” (U.S. 111th Congress, 2010). According to an article published in *The Advocate*, without the repeal of DADT “none of the equality advances that followed could have come nearly as quickly” (*The Advocate*, 2016). Indeed, Obama’s administration oversaw a number of advances in LGBT rights.

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender legal protections and visibility increased in important ways after the repeal of “don’t ask, don’t tell.” For example, in the year 2011 Obama directed his Administration to stop defending the Defense of Marriage Act in the courts of law. And in 2012 Tammy Baldwin became the first openly gay person elected to the United States Senate. However, three key Supreme Court decisions made the most impact on the visibility, acceptability, and institutionalization of homosexuality at the

national level. These cases were *Hollingsworth v. Perry* 570 U.S. 693 (2013), *Obergefell v. Hodges*, 576 U.S. 644 (2015), and *United States v. Windsor*, 570 U.S. 744 (2013). Together, these cases solidified the institutionalization of homosexuality, same-sex marriage in particular, and affirmed that the lives of LGBT people should also be protected by the constitution of the United States.

Major developments in global LGBT human rights emerged in the decade from 2000 to 2010. Figure 4.1 shows LGBT Rights regained support in the United States after Barack Obama's administration joined the UN's efforts to decriminalize homosexuality around the world in 2009 (Administration of Barack H. Obama, 2009; Hull, 2014). In 2011, The UN adopted the "United Nations Gay Rights Protection Resolution, a significant first step in the inclusion of LGBT people in the international human rights framework" (Associated Press in Geneva, 2011; Ibhawoh, 2014). By 2012 tech giants like Facebook and Google openly expressed support for the LGBT community. Facebook launched a same-sex marriage icon and Google launched a "Legalize Love" campaign that was perceived to offer support for same-sex marriage. Two seminal documents that affirmed global LGBT human rights emerged in 2006. These are the "Declaration of Montreal on LGBT Human Rights" and the "Yogyakarta Principles on the Application of International Human Rights Law in Relation to Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity." In the rest of this section I focus on the Declaration of Montreal and the Yogyakarta Principles in order to make sense of the cultural claims my respondents advanced as they talked about their sexuality and their relationships with family, community, and the state.

*The Declaration of Montreal on LGBT Human Rights*

The Declaration of Montreal on LGBT Human Rights's main goal was to include LGBT people in the international human rights framework. The Declaration was adopted by the International Conference on LGBT Human Rights, held in Montreal, Canada preceding immediately the first global Outgames in 2006 (Swiebel, 2008). The organizers wanted to address the UN's shortcomings in its application of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in the lives of LGBT individuals. The International Conference on LGBT Human Rights and its adoption of The Declaration of Montreal were supported by the United Nations, the European Nation, and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. Louise Arbour, the UN's High Commissioner for Human Rights and the European Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs, and Equal Opportunities Vladimir Spidla were the keynote speakers at the conference (Swiebel, 2008).

In the preamble, the document opens with the assertion that "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights," an assertion taken directly from the UDHR. The authors of the preamble assert that this famous first sentence of the UDHR "still contains in a nutshell our political agenda, as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, transitioned and intersexual persons" (The Declaration of Montreal on LGBT Human Rights, 2015). The Declaration then proceeds to emphasize that such an assertion is not yet a reality for LGBT people in most countries: "But most countries still do not accept that people have different sexual orientations and different gender identities; that two women or two men can fall in love with each other." And "Refusal to accept and respect these differences means that oppression of LGBT people is still a daily reality." The preamble highlights that LGBT groups and individuals continue to grow impatient "to achieve freedom and equality."

The five main sections following the preamble of the Declaration of Montreal are 1) Essential Rights, 2) Global Issues, 3) The Diverse LGBT Community, 4) Participation in Society, and 5) Creating Social Change. In the fourth section, the right to life, public and private and the importance of relationships and family are all emphasized. In contrasting same-sex and different-sex couples, the Declaration of Montreal states: “As a matter of simple equality, same-sex couples are entitled to the full range of relationship options available to different-sex couples, including marriage for those who choose it.” The rest of the sections likewise articulate the demands set forth by the Declaration, understandably using the phrase “human rights” fifty-seven times and the words equal or equality twenty-four times. In sum, The Declaration of Montreal “outlines a number of rights and freedoms pertaining to LGBT and intersex people” proposing these be “universally guaranteed...from the guarantee of fundamental freedoms to the prevention of discrimination against LGBT people in healthcare, education and immigration” (Anon., 2021a).

*The Yogyakarta Principles on the Application of Human Rights Law in relation to Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity*

United Nations’s special rapporteurs on human rights from all over the world convened in Yogyakarta, Indonesia on November of 2006. They brought together their expertise on human rights jurisprudence and international treaties to craft a set of human rights principles in relation to sexual orientation and gender identity (Dittrich, 2008). The resulting document was titled The Yogyakarta Principles after the Indonesian city. The original document contained twenty-nine principles (The Yogyakarta Principles, 2016a). In November 2017 “additional principles and state obligations on...Gender Expression and

Sex Characteristics” were added to “complement the Yogyakarta Principles” (The Yogyakarta Principles, 2016b; Anon. 2021b).

The twenty-nine principles articulated in the Yogyakarta Principles document were adopted by the “International Panel of Experts in International Human Rights Law and on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity,” reads the preamble of the original document (The Yogyakarta Principles, 2016a). In the preamble, the experts recognize “that there is significant value in articulating in a systematic manner international human rights law as applicable to the lives and experiences of persons of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities.” They observe “that international human rights law affirms that all persons, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity, are entitled to the full enjoyment of all human rights” (The Yogyakarta Principles, 2016a). In short, the panel of experts on international human rights law “intended to apply the standards of international human rights law to address the abuse of human rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people” through the Yogyakarta Principles and its supplemental YP+10 (The Yogyakarta Principles, 2016b; Anon. 2021b).

The Yogyakarta Principles stipulates a set of international human rights standards meant to promote the equality. The first principle asserts “The Right to the Universal Enjoyment of Human Rights” promoting freedom, equality, dignity, and rights for human beings of “all sexual orientations and gender identities” (The Yogyakarta Principles, 2016a). Principles two through nine promote the right to equality and non-discrimination, recognition before the law, the right to life, security, privacy, a fair trial, as well as the right to “treatment with humanity while in detention” and “freedom from arbitrary deprivation of liberty,” (The Yogyakarta Principles, 2016a). Principles ten through twenty-three



promote the rights to be free from abuse, exploitation, and the rights to education, health, work, housing as well as the rights to think, speak, and move freely. Principle twenty-four asserts the right of people of all sexual orientations and gender identities to found a family. And the remaining five principles assert the right to visibility through participation in public, cultural, and civic life free from oppression. Finally, the additional principles and state obligations articulate in YP+10 reiterate some of the same principles while holding the state accountable and responsible for making it possible for LGBTIQ people to attain the highest standard of living available in their area (The Yogyakarta Principles, 2016b).

### **Restructuring family and sexual lives**

In the opening excerpt, Butler discussed how non-normative categories such as drag, butch, and femme drive political questions about “what counts as reality and what counts as human life” (Buttler 2004:30). Butler emphasizes how the possibility of life as a member of a non-normative category is not a given, but an accomplishment. In the case of my respondents, life as gay men in long-term, same-sex committed relationships accepted, recognized, and legitimized not only by the states, but also by the family is similarly not a given. Instead, it is an accomplishment. Butler suggests that it is “an accomplishment that is fundamentally conditioned by reality being structured or restructured in such a way that the affirmation becomes possible.”

In the following two sections, I profile two groups of respondents to illustrate how their attitudes about same-sex marriage legalization may inform how they structure their social reality. It is difficult to untangle the factors that shape the different way respondents were impacted by similar social, historical and political contexts. However, I identified key between group differences that provide clues as to why their views about the same issues

vary. Specifically, these are differences in socioeconomic status, links to LGBT communities, and experiences with homophobia within the family of origin. I briefly discuss these and then proceed with my respondents' experiences.

**Socioeconomic status differences:** Socioeconomic status is a composite variable that I created using my respondents' self-reported level of education, occupation and yearly income at the time of the interview. I also considered the family history of my respondents when I created the category and as I made decisions about where to place each respondent. For the first group, two of the respondents were working-class (Lalo and Isidro) and the other (Vicente) was lower-middle class. Vicente had a military background, which suggests that while he achieved some upward mobility he had a working-class consciousness (see Lutz 2008). Lalo and Isidro had a direct link to immigrant roots, in fact Isidro was an immigrant himself. Immigrant background and family history both suggest that Lalo and Isidro also had a working-class consciousness. In contrast, all respondents in the second group were middle-class or upper middle-class. Two were immigrants (Ed and Mel), however their family history suggests they came from a middle-class background. Specifically, Ed's father was an established plastic artist while Mel's family were part of the political elite in El Salvador; they fled their country when the Salvadoran Civil War broke in 1980. Mel followed years later.

**Links to LGBT Organizations:** The first group of respondents did not report any political activism or any other links to organizations that are invested in fomenting the acceptance, visibility, or normalization of the LGBT community. In contrast, the second group of respondents all had direct links to LGBT organizations or organizations that aid in the efforts to advance the sexual diversity. Don was involved in political campaigns; he

viewed his involvements as a way to increase sexual diversity in politics. Ed was involved in performance arts; he often sought to challenge heteronormativity, patriarchy, and heterosexism through his work. And Mel and Evan were heavily involved in the activities at their respective LGBT rooted or LGBT affirming church.

Experience with homophobia and rejection: The first group of respondents reported experiences of homophobia within their family. Two of them reported negative reactions and rejections from family members at the time they disclosed their homosexuality. Vicente witnessed intrafamily violence stemming from misogyny and homophobia and Isidro was told by his mother several times that he would go to hell for being gay. In contrast, the second group of respondents reported they received messages of acceptance from family members when they came out. Evan experienced rejections from his parents when he came out to them while he was in high school at which time he ran away from home. His partner's family took him in and allowed them to live in the family home as a couple. They had been together for twenty years at the time of the interview. Since Evan was welcomed in his partner's family as another member of the family since the day he came out and ran away from home, he based much of his interview responses on the experiences within his adoptive family.

Place of residence and social context: The first group of respondents lived in working-class communities. Cantú (2009) wrote that the gay Latino immigrants in his study were more likely to live in working-class communities where their sexuality was invisible because they were more easily identified as a Latino working men than Latino gay men. Such communities not only erase non-heterosexuality, but may also be perceived as unsafe or unwelcoming for LGBT identified individuals. As a result, the gay men in my study

felt they could not openly and safely express their sexuality in their communities, as in the example with Vicente (*“it has to be WeHo”*). In contrast, the second group of respondents lived in middle-class communities that were perceived by my respondents as gay friendly, though they were not identified as gay communities. For example, Don told me before we began our interview that there were many gay couples in his neighborhood in Highland Park. Evan mentioned after our interview that most residents in the gated community where he lived were gay or Indian families. He added that the Indian people were very accepting. And Mel told me that there was a large gay community in Glendale, the city where he lived at the time of the interview. Whether the communities were gay friendly or not is questionable. However, these respondents perception was that they lived in a gay friendly community.

In contrast to the first group, the second group of respondents were more immersed in gay social groups as a result of their involvement with LGBT organizations and likely place of residence. Their interview data suggest that their lives were characterized by a sense of normalcy in relation to gay identity, same-sex love and families headed by same-sex couples (*“We have friends, a couple, they have triplets”*), prior to the rise of LGBT Human Rights and Civil Rights discourse to the national stage. My sense is that all of the above listed factors as well as the fact that the second group of respondents lived in a sort of protective bubble contributed to their understanding of LGBT Human Rights and Civil Rights from a more rational perspective (a process; a transaction; a legality). In contrast, the first group who took a more emotional approach (a call to take action; a teaching opportunity; a liberatory event). Now to my respondents’ experiences in their own words.

**“We have the right to life regardless”**

Lalo, 28 years old at the time of the interview, was raised in an immigrant town near Merced California. He explained that in his hometown *“everything was primarily Mexican so the stigma of being gay was kind of worse.”* He recalled that the *“only one gay guy in that town was the pit of everybody's jokes.”* Lalo refused to identify as gay up until after his 18th birthday. He told me referring to the only gay man he knew growing up, *“that's the only thing I knew what a gay man was, growing up. So I was like no, I'm not like that.”* Lalo proceeded to explain that he suppressed everything feminine in his being in favor of masculinity. He lifted weights to build a masculine physique, he let his facial hair grow, and he *“got into tattoos”* even after he had come out to his family. By the time I met Lalo in 2014, however, he told me he had begun to embrace his feminine side and wanted to explore it more since he felt there was more freedom and he believed gay men *“have the right to live life regardless.”*

Lalo is one of the seven respondents that talked about his relationship and his sexuality in a way that resonated strongly with the LGBT human rights and marriage equality campaign language. For example, I asked Lalo whether he and his partner had talked about marriage. He said:

*“This conversation came up recently: what were to happen if myself or yourself got in a car accident and there's no one around to sign for anything, I don't have any legal rights, I can't even be in your hospital room. You know? What would happen? Now that legalization came through, now that the job that I'm at I can offer him medical and dental, we think about marriage as an option and we just talked about it with our family.”*

Lalo was born in the United States, so when he asserted “*I don’t have any legal rights*” he referred to legal rights over his partner, as a spouse would, to make decisions if that were necessary in case of an emergency. Lalo’s answer is what eventually led me to look at my data through the frame of LGBT human rights and civil rights. His reply is reminiscent of the Janice Langbehn case published in the *New York Times* in 2009 under the headline “Kept from a Dying Partner’s Bedside.” The case caught national attention and eventually led President Obama to issue a presidential memorandum to allow hospital visitations for gay and lesbian couples.

As a follow-up question, I asked Lalo to tell me more about what the conversation about marriage was like with the family. He told me that both their families were supportive and understanding. However, recalling the day he brought up the conversation with his partner Patrick’s family, he explained “*I saw he [Patrick] got nervous so I stopped. I had to talk with him in private.*” He continued:

*Our plan in the future is to open our own business. And so I tell him, imagine in the future, we finally establish our own business. One of us passes away and we have family that don't really care for us and come in and take our money or take our assets, take something, and leave the other person high and dry. So we've talked about it. We've talked about it.*

Lalo eventually persuaded Patrick to discuss their decision to marry with their respective families because he felt it necessary for both families to be informed about the rights they would have over each other’s assets. So, the couple talked with Patrick’s family about their plans and emphasized that they wanted to get married to make sure they had all the same “*rights and responsibilities as heterosexual married couples*” but also because “*you know; you*

*love that person, you want to partner up with someone for support, for love, for guidance.”*

And *“Today we’re nobody different. We’re just a couple nowadays.”*

I interviewed Lalo in the summer of 2014, about one year after the Supreme Court of the United States (SCOTUS) deemed Section 3 of the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) unconstitutional and cleared the way for same-sex unions to be legalized in California. The SCOTUS’s ruling in relation to Proposition 8 of California and DOMA in 2013 was the culmination of years of strategic campaigning in favor of marriage equality and LGBT Human Rights. Thus, it is understandable that Lalo felt he and Patrick were *“just a couple”* that could have the same *“rights and responsibilities as heterosexual married couples.”*

My data shows, however, that not all respondents perceived they had the freedom or the *“right to live life regardless”* as Lalo felt. For example, Lalo told me that Patrick’s *“stigma as to the whole notion of being gay was bad, he didn’t like to show it at all.”* Lalo continued: *“He keeps introducing me as his amigo [friend]”* at family gatherings. *“I had to talk to him!”* Lalo exclaimed:

*I had to talk to him. I’m like Patrick, they know I’m not your fucking friend, dude. You gotta stop pretending or this is never going to be the norm. Do you always want to be different like oh there is the gays. So we don’t have the same perspective as to the notion of being gay. He doesn’t believe we have rights; he believes we have rights, but he’s not...you know. Sometimes we get to his family and he’s all quiet. So I got used to having to talk all the time about our plans and the news about gay marriage.*

Patrick did not want to participate in this research. However, from Lalo’s perspective, Patrick was worried about expressing his sexuality through bodily practices *“because he has a big ass family; so many cousins and tías and a lot of them are cholos [gang members].”* Lalo

continued: *“he worries that they are not going to respect his legal right to live his day to day life as a gay man, but they know [he is gay], you know.”*

Lalo distanced himself from gay rights activism. However, in the family conversations he recalled, Lalo returned to the themes of rights and equality multiple times. For example, in discussing his expectations about his relationship with Patrick he expressed *“I don't want to be seen as ‘oh you're this [gay] but we're going to accept you”* to express he expected equality as an individual. He expected his sexuality and his relationship to be normalized: *“No! I don't want to be seen as something different or outside the norm.”* And he cited legal protections to hint at equality between same- and different-sex couples: *“I have rights too.”* Lalo also used emotional messages when talking to family members about potentially marrying Patrick: *“you love that person, you want to partner up with someone for support, for love.”* And he believed that increased visibility was necessary to accomplish such normalization: *“You gotta stop pretending or this [being gay/a gay couple] is never going to be the norm.”*

Vicente, a 38 year old former marine from East Los Angeles, is another of my respondents that used the LGBT human rights and civil rights discourses as a tool for cultural resistance. In particular, he used such discourses as a tool against the homophobic culture in which he was raised and continued to identify as an adult. Vicente stands about five-feet-eight, with a muscular built. Although he appears stereotypically masculine at first sight, he is far from a “sturdy oak” or “give ‘em hell” kind of guy. Growing up in East LA, Vicente experienced homophobia in and outside of his family circle. For example, his father was physically violent against Vicente’s aunt because she was openly lesbian and suffered from alcoholism. And at school, Vicente recalled his friends making fun of him after he lost



weight: *"they were saying that I had lost all this weight and wanted to be in shape because gay men were about a nice body. They were being bullies."*

During our interview, Vicente told me he had been out since age twenty-one, but did not feel free before: *"I came out when I was twenty-one but I like never felt I was really out because people look at you sideways."* In reference to being out in public as a couple, Vicente told me: *"I always tell him [Isidro], it has to be WeHo [West Hollywood] so I can kiss him if I feel like it, holding his hand or whatever."* Contrary to East LA, West Hollywood is known as a gay neighborhood. It is home to the LA Gay Pride festival. City streets are adorned with rainbow flags and there are several gay bars and restaurants. Vicente continued to explain that he did not feel comfortable expressing his sexuality in public or being identified as a gay man: *"One time we went with this other gay couple. It's four of us having dinner. And one of them is very feminine and one is kind of feminine. You can tell they're gay. And we're just sitting there. And honestly, it made me look around and see who's looking at us, stuff like that."* And about being gay at work he told me: *"I'm openly gay at work now but I wasn't before. I work for [a tech giant] now, so it's a more accepting company."*

By the time of our interview, Vicente had actively worked to overcome his own internalized homophobia and the prejudice he felt against feminine gay men like his friends. I asked him to explain what had changed for him that he decided to go public with his sexuality and his relationship: *"I always had these things. If you are girly you are a bottom and weak; and gay is evil and you're going to hell, but that's wrong."* Vicente added: *"But we are human and we love each other. We've been treated really bad but that is changing."* In relation to opening up about his relationship with Isidro to his family, Vicente told me: *"I want to be recognized, I want to be treated like my brothers are with their families"*

*and getting married does that. I want to be seen and I want to be seen the same way [as my brothers with their wives], you know what I mean?"* And about his father's side of the family he explained: *"My dad's side is more religious. So even though they accept the gay stuff now, we have to be married so we don't live in sin. But let's see what happens at the reception when we kiss in front of everybody."* And about visibility he added: *"We want them to see that we can do it too."*

Like Vicente, Isidro, also drew on the human rights and marriage equality discourses to explain his choice to open up to his family about his relationship with Vicente. Isidro was an undocumented immigrant. He was 36 at the time of the interview and while he was openly gay, he had never talked about his relationship with his family. I asked Isidro "why did you decide to tell them now [about your relationship with Vicente]?: *"I didn't know how my mom would react. Because of fear of how she would react."* I followed up "what about now?": *"I wanted her to come visit us and stay with us and spend time with my partner and have open communication."* I insisted "so you are not worried about her reaction anymore" and Isidro replied:

*Yes, but more than anything I think that she can see that it is not how she imagines it. I want her to be more open about these things. Everyone knows gay men can get married and it's legal. I want her to understand that. I want her to know that there can be a relationship between a man and a woman, a woman and a woman, and a man and a man and no one is going to hurt me because there are laws. I want her to be less closed minded as they say. And I also want her to also be happy like I am.*

Isidro referred to common knowledge about the legalization of same-sex marriage "everyone knows...and it's legal." He also affirmed the fact that *"there can be a relationship*

*between*” same-sex partners and *“there are laws”* to uphold the rights of same-sex couples and protect them from physical harm. And he associated support for same-sex relationships and laws to protect the LGBT community with being *“less closed minded”* as well as something that can bring happiness to individuals and same-sex couples: *“I also want her to be happy like I am.”* In sum, Isidro had internalized the values expressed in the LGBT Human Rights and marriage equality language. In turn, Isidro drew from such values and a new, more open minded understanding of his now sexuality and relationship. With that under his belt, he built up the courage to disclose the nature of his sexuality with Vicente to his mother and to make plans to invite her to visit them and stay with them.

#### **“If anything, it binds us legally”**

Talking about marriage, Don told me during our interview: *“Not having an option was a problem so we were very supportive of gay marriage. But that didn’t mean we have to get married or we want to get married.”* Referring to his domestic partnership with Ed, his partner of twelve years, Don added, *“This is real. And we are very strong together, as a partnership.”* Don refused to let the state dictate the meaning of his relationship with Ed: *“If anything, it binds us legally. It doesn’t necessarily strengthen our relationship.”* Instead, he emphasized the quality of their partnership and highlighted the intrinsic value of their relationship: *“Because I don’t think any piece of paper or process would do that other than our own process—process in terms of growing together.”* He continued: *“Back then, marriage didn’t exist. Maybe we would’ve married. But it was more like a business transaction as opposed to a romantic transaction. You know.”*

In the previous sections I illustrated how the human rights and marriage equality discourses structure the sexual lives and family relations of gay Latinos in my study. In

particular I have shown how they talked about their relationships in ways that suggest such discourses help them restructure their reality and made possible the affirmation of belongingness as a gay Latino. However, not all respondents were equally influenced by the marriage equality campaign or the human rights discourses that dominated national debates about same-sex marriage roughly from 2004 to 2014. In this section I show how gay Latinos contested the power of the state to define the essence or meaning of their relationships while at the same time structuring their sexual lives as prescribed by cultural hegemony. The respondents I profile in the following paragraphs denied that their relationships were more meaningful as a result of the legalization of same-sex marriage. In addition, they were critical about whether same-sex marriage was in fact what LGBT people needed to achieve equality.

I interviewed Don and Ed in their Highland Park family home. The couple had raised Don's biological daughter, a teenager at the time of the interview, from a previous relationship. They also occasionally hosted Ed's biological son, also from a previous relationship. My conversation with Don suggests that his experience in his local community as well as his experience in the gayborhood where he worked at the time of our interview shaped his subjectivity and social existence as a gay individual. Both Don and Ed had lived their lives as openly gay among family and friends. And Don felt they were treated with equality in his local community: "*We're very equal in everything.*" Because Don already experienced his life as a gay man as on equal grounds with heterosexual couples, the legalization of same-sex marriage was symbolic: "*And that's part of why I think marriage is symbolic.*" In addition, Don felt gay couples were already normalized in his community: "*We*

*have a lot of [gay] couple friends that have children or adopted children. We have friends, a couple, they have triplets."*

Don felt marriage was a performance for others rather than something that added meaning to his sexuality or his relationship with Ed. He recognized how the legalization of same-sex marriage would impact gay couples in society at large: *"Part of it would be part of our process to normalize [gay couples]."* However, he suggested marriage was a sort of performance for others: *"I guess it would just mean more for someone else—our family. I don't know if it would do much for us."* Although Don recognized it was part of the normalizing process, he simultaneously minimized its importance: *"I guess it would just symbolize the normalness, if you will, of being a gay couple and equal. But that's, I think, an indirect result."* For Don, marriage was significant only in terms of what it represented as it would *"just symbolize normalness"* for others, but not for him or those in his local community. In contrast, he talked about his relationship with his domestic partner Ed in a way that emphasized its intrinsic value, regardless of state laws or societal views: *"This is real. And we are very strong together."* And *"I don't think any piece of paper [is necessary to] strengthen our relationship."* And *"it's equal to the relationships that they have—their heterosexual relationships. And in some cases, can be stronger."*

Although Don generally viewed marriage as a contract and a performance for others, he understood why *"not having an option was a problem."* He particularly brought up the rights and privileges that come with being legally bound with his partner through the law. In discussing the reasons why he and Ed agreed to enter into a domestic partnership before the legalization of same-sex marriage Don told me: *"I always want to feel equal. I don't want any one person, entity, or process to ever treat me any different."* And like Lalo, he drew on

the theme in the Janice Langbehn story: *“What if I get in an accident, I’m in the hospital? Who’s going to answer for me? My daughter is a teenager. Who’s making those decisions? Ed legally can’t. If the hospital had enforced their policy, he would not be accepted by my bedside.”* Don continued: *“So from a legal standpoint, the answer to that was to be legally bound to each other.”* At the same time, Don was skeptical of whether marriage would add meaning to his relationship with Ed: *“It would show my family like my cousin and his wife, they got married; and my other cousin got married. Ed and Don got married, you know. But again it was a business transaction.”*

Like Don, Ed also was critical of marriage. In particular, he was critical of how individuals are conditioned by society to understand relationships and family: *“I feel when we start talking about this, there’s already a layer of what is and what isn’t a relationship. Right? Because of how I was raised and how I saw my family structured.”* Yet, Ed rejected the idea that his relationship with Don should be defined by already existing ideas about relationship: *“Our idea was we cannot define our relationship by other people, including other male-male relationships that we’ve come across.”* And while he felt he had some autonomy in shaping and defining his relationship, he also felt he could not completely escape cultural hegemony: *“But autonomy is contingent, you know. It depends on our relationships with others. I want a relationship. I feel like that is the nature of my personality.”* Ed added: *“Whether it’s normative or how people perceive it, is not an issue for me. It’s how we evolve together. That is a relationship, not when it’s defined by marriage, not when it’s defined by heteronormative values.”*

A third respondent, Mel, was less critical of marriage, but like Don and Ed felt marriage was *“more for legalities”* than *“just for love.”* During our interview at Founders

Metropolitan Community Church in Los Angeles, Mel shared with me that he and Irvin, his partner, were planning to marry each other *“because of the legal benefits of getting married.”* Mel elaborated on his statement drawing from the same theme as previous respondents; namely, the theme in the Janice Langbehn case: *“I was in the hospital and he couldn't be with me. So you know what, screw this. I want him to be with me if I get sick or if he gets sick. It was like a legal decision for me.”* In reply to my questions about how marriage might change his relationship with family Mel told me: *“Because in the straight world being married is like, oh my god, so legal, so important. I guess my family sees it from that perspective and is very excited.* Mel added: *“But we have a stable relationship already. We have grown a lot together; we can be as prosperous as any other couple. We can be as happy as any couple without getting married.* At the same time, Mel felt his relationship was dominated by already established ideas he could not escape: *“But the books were written by straight people so it's how we have to think about it. There are no books about gay society. They're being written.”* And we can *“set a precedent for the coming generations.”*

A final respondent, Evan, echoed a similar sentiment about the legalization of same-sex marriage. He explained that during the twenty years of his relationship, they had never had the need for a document that showed he and his partner were bound. Instead, he believed that the pronouncement of love for each other to God was more important. He said: *“I am all about marriage equality. The only thing is that we have been together for 20 plus years and we have not needed documentation that says you guys are bound. To me the paper is governmental. But the fact that you pronounced your love to God is different.”* It may be that respondents who had been in their relationships for several years without the possibility of marriage felt they were not missing out on anything. Only after marriage

became a possibility can they then consider whether they might want it for themselves. In this sense, the political context becomes the basis on which these respondents may restructure their lives through a marriage ceremony and an official pronouncement of their mutual love as husband and husband. However, Evan, like the previous respondents, viewed marriage as a business transaction that involves governmental affairs: *“We are trying to find out what are the pros and cons. It might hurt for example income-wise or whatever. Also like previous respondents, he did not think of marriage as a ritual that would add meaning to his relationship or as something marking an exciting milestone: “Is this something that we are like whoa! Oh! really! Not really. We’ve been together for such a long time that we just don’t feel that there is a need for a documentation to say that we are legally bound, if that makes sense.”*

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I identified historical, political and legal contexts, including human rights and marriage rights, as social forces that influence how the individuals in my study restructure their subjectivities and social existence. I argued that gay Latinos forge and maintain family ties in part on the basis of these wider contexts. I show how different respondents were impacted in different ways by the social, historical, political, and economic forces. Specifically, one group of respondents used the available cultural scripts as a tool for resistance against homophobic culture while the second group used cultural scripts as a tool to resist the power of the state to define their sexual and family lives as well as how they operate within their communities.

Respondents draw from different cultural repertoires. The first group of respondents used the human rights and civil rights political discourses as a way to contest



the homophobia and anti-gay sentiment they experienced from childhood through adulthood. They used the values expressed in the human rights and civil rights discourses to make choices about their gender expression, their level of “outness” in public, and choices about whether or not to engage family members in more open ways. In contrast, the second group talked about the same discourses, marriage in particular, with a certain level of disdain—as if they felt it was an act of condescension against their relationships and their lives as open, respectable members of society. They viewed same-sex marriage in particular as part of the process to normalize gay couples, a legality, a performance for heterosexual people, a business transaction restrictive to a heteronormative map for how to structure their romantic relationships. They rejected the idea that marriage equality could or would define or add meaning to their relationships or their lives as gay men.

My data also shows that the men in my sample draw from different cultural repertoires linked to their social location in the construction of family. For example, those who have economic options don't rely as much on the political options to structure and make sense of their sexual and family lives. Their socioeconomic status, family history, and class consciousness functions as a source of supplies that is useful in their structuring of subjectivities. As the wider political landscape changed in relation to LGBT rights in the United States, they grapple with a social reality they may have been aware of but familiar with it only from a distance. This is possible because of the context in which they experience everyday life as homosexual subjects. That is, in a sort of protective bubble in which they enjoyed of freedom from homophobia and discrimination in part because of their social standing and in part because of their gender display.

In contrast, the first group of respondents under the section “We Have the Right to Life Regardless” lack economic resources and feel more exposed to social sanctions based sexual orientation and gender display. As such, they may tend to relay more heavily political options and the socio-historical context of the moment. Their socioeconomic status, family history, and class consciousness supplies them with a different set of tools to structure their subjectivities and family life. Having experienced homophobia in their families and in their communities, these individuals experience everyday life as a homosexual subjects that are exposed to discrimination, violence, and oppression. As the wider socio-historical context restructures their reality, they seize the opportunity to affirm the right to life as gay Latino men.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Summary and Conclusions

Research on the assimilation of immigrants has paid little attention to how expressions of gender and sexuality shape ideas about ethnic authenticity and belonging. Research about the assimilation of immigrants and subsequent generations shows there is a strong ethnic attachment among later generation-since-immigration co-ethnics (Portes and Rumbaut, 2014). The evidence is solid particularly in relation to Mexican immigrants and second-generation Mexican Americans (Tellez and Ortiz, 2008; Vasquez, 2011; Portes and Rumbaut, 2014) and research suggests that religion influences ethnic expressions (Marti, 2012; Calvillo and Bailey, 2015). While there are strong indicators of structural assimilation, cultural assimilation patterns are more complex (Jimenez, 2008; Vasquez, 2011). For example, cultural assimilation patterns indicate that first- and second-generation immigrants are picking up cultural practices associated with an American identity such as English language while simultaneously keeping a strong ethnic attachment.

Ethnic boundaries are heavily policed and regulated in a context characterized by a firm presence of ethnic symbols (Jimenez, 2010). Immigrants and second-generation US-born Latinos, for example, speak Spanish, are more likely to celebrate ethnic holidays, express their ethnic authenticity through dress choices, and their celebrations of American holidays are more likely to feature ethnic symbols including foods, music, and items that suggest a strong ethnic attachment. Readily accessible ethnic raw materials create expectations for what it means to be authentically ethnic. Such expectations are imposed on later generation Mexican Americans and policed by immigrants and the young second-generation according to Jimenez (2010). What is less clear is whether expressions of a

homosexual identity reinforces intragroup boundaries. Given the evidence of a strong ethnic attachment among immigrants and second-generation Latinos, I suggest that expressions of authentic ethnicity are shaped by heteronormative understandings of ethnic identity. As such, a gay identity and a Latino identity conflict with one on various dimensions.

Symbols, or the lack thereof, are important for communicating appropriate sexuality. Nagel (2000) explains that “ethnosexual frontiers” are supervised, regulated and restricted by co-ethnics because “proper gender role and sexual behavior” is important “to ethnic community honor and respectability.” Nagel (1998) similarly shows that the politics of dress and demeanor as powerful symbolism for nation building or resistance. Nation, Nagel explains, is likened to family. Similarly community is fundamentally expressed as family (de la Torre, 2008). It follows that performances of gender and sexuality that violate culturally approved standards will draw criticism and lead to marginalization by co-ethnics and family members. For example, Almaguer (1993) suggested that [Latino] “family requires allegiance to” sexual meaning and patriarchal systems that militate against homosexuality. My respondents’ experiences within the family illustrate such militancy against the emergence of a gay identity—family members’ attempts to protect the honor and respectability of the family—but also the contestation of ethnosexual boundaries by my respondents against traditional understandings of gender, sexuality, and ethnic belonging.

Through this dissertation I have examined how race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and the wider context influence how Latino gay men make sense of their sexual identities as they engage in family formation processes. They are invested in keeping family ties while also staying invested in a committed romantic relationship with a same-sex partner. My

respondents' lives present new information that nuanced our understanding of Latino gay men's experiences. My dissertation links literature about sexuality, ethnicity, and family relationships in an effort to find alternative perspectives to explain the lives of Latino men who self-identify as gay without shedding their Latino ethnic identity. In doing so, I show how Latino gay men contest the boundaries between ethnic and sexual identities within the family context.

*Authentically Gay, Authentically Latino* shows that immigrant and US-born Latino gay men alike contest the boundaries between ethnic and sexual identities by drawing from ethnocultural understandings of gender and their social location in the social context in which they are immersed. Informed by mainstream gay culture in the United States, they negotiate ethnic boundaries that reject homosexuality as an option for primary group identification. Latin-American sexual meaning systems that operate on the basis of honor and shame (Almaguer, 1993; Lancaster, 1988) are contested in the face of claims about equality, pride, and LGBTQ rights that shape respondents' sexualities. Similarly, allegiance to patriarchal gender relations and normative familistic values as the basis of family life are challenged by a context in which families exist across multiple households and are shaped by local socioeconomic forces and North American understandings of gender and sexuality. Simultaneously, drawing from family history and cultural practices, my respondents negotiate the meaning of a gay identity that developed in a context in which ethnic identity has a symbolic meaning at best. Without seeking to adopt a gay identity as the primary means of identification, they bestow ethnic meanings onto sexual identity through practices they fundamentally understand as Latino ethnic identity performance. Aided by the political, cultural, and legal contexts the men I interview reconstitute their sexual and

ethnic identities in coherent ways. Structuring their sexual and ethnic identities as mutually constitutive creates opportunities for them to merge their sexual and family lives. Private and semi-public enactments of homosexuality mediated through ethnic identity foster positive interactions with family of origin. In this way, my respondents embody a gay identity that departs from the meanings associated with mainstream performances of gay sexuality.

My data shows that socioeconomic status has the power to shape what access my respondents have to what family formation processes. Middle-class men had the material resources necessary to draw family into their personal spaces. In doing so, they created opportunities for the development of family traditions in which the gay couple were central. Family formation processes initiated by the gay couple were not different from any of the family formation process they were accustomed to. The key difference is that these new traditions to which gay couples were central took place within their own homoerotically marked spaces. The homoeroticization of the gay men's personal spaces was conducive to heterosexual men's hyperconscious awareness of their own performances of heterosexual masculinity, which rely on the homosexual other-ed for validation. Heterosexual family member felt the need to regulate their language so not to disrespect the gay hosts. This suggests that while shaped by Latino ethnicity, heterosexual and homosexual masculinities are ultimately informed by different sets of values. While the former is constructed against the background of femininity and homosexuality, the latter seems to depart, if not utterly reject, ideologies that marginalize women and LGBTQ. More research is necessary to identify the ways in which heterosexual and homosexual masculinities are informed by similar or different value systems.

Gay sexuality was not a recurring conversation within the Latinx families in my study, but it was conspicuously present. Latino gay identity seems to require neither verbal disclosures to nor expressions of acceptance from family member for healthy development in the way that White gay identity models suggest necessary (Rust, 1996; Roque-Ramirez, 2011). The majority of my respondents had verbally disclosed their sexuality prior to the interview, but they were not invested in obtaining verbal affirmations of their sexuality from family members (with one notable exception, the activist couple). The presence and visibility of the gay couple in the family, however, is what ultimately makes a gay sexuality conspicuous. While my respondents did not shy away from conversations about their romantic relationships, the same-sex relationship is the living materialization of a gay identity that coexists with Latino identity as embodied by my respondents.

Family is the arena where respondents face questions of visibility, self-representation, and authenticity. In particular, respondents who had family both in the United States and in Mexico contended with decisions about whether to disclose a homosexual identity through formal introductions of their partners as such. Although openly gay in the United States, respondents felt it was necessary to shift strategies to accommodate their Mexican family members' understandings of gay men's sexuality. Whether during interactions over long-distance communication, in-person communication particularly in the Mexican context, or communication through a third party, the respondents ultimately recoiled into the comfort of silenced sexuality. They understood that Mexico was dominated by different sexual and gender systems. However, they did not understand such shift in strategies as a threat to their authentic identity because from their perspective family the already knew the nature of the "friendship" between the gay

partners. Interestingly, Gonzalez-Lopez (2004) has argued that immigrant men reconstruct their ideologies about gender and sexuality after migration to the United States, once they “unpack their ‘sexuality luggage.’” This suggests that while the men in my study reconstruct their sexual identities in way that coheres with ethnic identity, they maintain the ability to operate from a dual frame of reference in their interaction with family of origin.

### **Family formation**

The family formation processes my respondents engaged in are not unique to them. Considering that the social context in synergy with social structures and institutional arrangements shape available choices for how people engage family, my findings are generalizable to people beyond the Latino gay category. Institutional (re)arrangements, on one hand, create a particular set of circumstances that grant or deny marginalized categories access to resources previously reserved for a privileged groups. A simultaneous shift in attitudes about the nature and morality of the marginalized category alleviates or exacerbates existing constraints that bar the marginalized category from access to said resources for engaging family in ways previously unavailable. Institutional rearrangements paired with a shift in attitudes thus produce a favorable environment in which the marginalized category can engage in family formation processes within previously exclusive institutions. This is by no means a novel idea. Intersectionality scholars have already articulated the ways in which domains of power, intersecting identities, and intersecting systems of inequality shape the social worlds and experiences of groups and individuals.

Data from interviews with six Black and one Asian gay men, one Latinx trans-woman, and four Latinx lesbians suggests my findings are generalizable to categories



beyond Latino gay men. Their life histories follow similar patterns as that of the Latino gay respondents. In particular, the social locations shape the family formation processes they have access to. Their material resources shape whether they can effect family traditions placing themselves at the center of family life. For example, Leon, a 55 year-old successful surgeon, had been open to his family for “over ten years now” at the time of the interview. Leon explained that he felt he and Aleman were not part of their respective families. I asked Leon, “Do you feel that you two are part of your family, as a couple?” His answer was a definite “No.” He explained he had a relationship with his family, but they lived too far to consider them part of their family circle. Leon and Aleman lived in Dallas, Texas at the time of the interview. Aleman’s family lived in Nogales, Sonora Mexico and Leon’s family lived in Miami. When I asked Aleman the same question about his family, though, both Leon and Aleman explained that they were “trying to make it happen.” Aleman talked about his two daughters from a previous marriage in particular:

*They wanted to come [to Dallas]. There was a concert by a group of Korean youth and they wanted to come to the concert and they stay here in the house. That’s why they came, but they were here a few days. In fact, my oldest daughter wanted to come live here for a time, with us, because she wanted to go to college here in Dallas. She is 21. The youngest one is 15 years old.*

Leon explained that he would be happy to have Aleman’s daughter stay with them and that he was willing to financially support her education. He further explained that in their interactions he was not “trying to have her call me dad or mister;” he asked her to call him by his first name to try to build trust with her. Aleman’s aunt, who was like a second mother to Aleman, and his cousin who was like a sister, had visited Aleman and Leon multiple times

in their Dallas home. They did not refer to their multiple visits as tradition, but the fact that they had visited around the same time on consecutive years in a row signals tradition.

Leon's and Aleman interviews took place in their home. I had attended a pool party at their house a week prior to the interview. I recruited Leon, Aleman and another couple that day. Leon's home was located in a pricey neighborhood in the northern area of Dallas. He reported a yearly individual income above \$90,000. Leon's material resources allow both Aleman and Leon to engage family in family formation processes in ways they may not have at their disposal otherwise. Having a multi-bedroom home allowed them to host Aleman's daughters, cousin, and aunt. Similarly, having the ability to support the education of Aleman's daughter would have shaped their everyday lives in a meaningful way.

The Asian gay man, Latinx lesbians, and the transgender woman reported similar experiences in their interviews as the Black gay men in relation to family formation processes. Socioeconomic status was salient in how respondents could engage family formation processes. However, socioeconomic status was not the only factor shaping family formation. In the case of the three Black gay men, religion was a salient factor, for example. Mark, Karl, and Claude reported that their respective families' religious affiliations and religiosity led them to put physical distance between themselves and the rest of the family. They did so as a way to practice self-care, but also as a way to protect their families from the potential negative consequences associated with having a gay child. In addition, two Black respondents reported not having disclosed their sexuality as gay to family. Karl, a 32 year-old Associate Manager making over \$75,000 at the time of the interview, was one of two Black respondent who reported not having disclosed his sexual identity as gay to his parents because his father was "the pastor of his church." John, a 33 year-old Kenyan

immigrant nurse, in contrast reported not having disclosed his gay identity to his family because they were all in Kenya where a gay identity could get John killed and his family ostracized, as he explained during the interview.

The Latino gay identity is fraught with meaning. My respondents' understandings of their identities as Latino and as gay are shaped by the historical contexts in which they and their families first formed and their transition into American culture where they further developed. Similarly, their identities are also shaped by the contemporary context in which they make sense of their everyday experiences as gay men. Their understandings of ethnic identity and belonging developed within the Latino culture and are closely linked to family loyalty. Because they were Latino before understanding themselves as gay, they contend with ways to keep their ethnic authenticity while developing a gay self aided by their everyday experiences in the United States' cultural context. The process by which my respondents ultimately come to understand themselves as gay Latino is thus linked in complex ways to their enactments of family in relations, as much as it is to their enactment of romantic associations and the wider context.

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## APPENDIX A: Participants' Demographic Information

Name	AGE	GENDER ID	RACE/ETHNIC ID	NATIONALITY BACKGROUND	SEXUAL ID	LEGAL STATUS
Diego	25	male	Latinx	Mexican	Heterosexual	Citizen
Doña Isabel	58	female	Latinx	Mexican	Heterosexual	Resident
Barry	38	male	Asian	Asian	Gay	Resident
Jeff	35	male	Asian	Asian	Heterosexual	Citizen
Sandro	43	male	Latinx	Guatemalan	Gay	Undocumented
Omar	37	male	Latinx	Mexican	Bisexual	Undocumented
Irving	34	male	Latinx	Mexican	Gay	Undocumented
Mel	36	male	Latinx	Salvadoran-American	Gay	Resident
James	36	male	Latinx	Mexican-American	Gay	Citizen
Lalo	28	male	Latinx	Mexican-American	Gay	Citizen
Magdalena	44	female	Latinx	Mexican	Heterosexual	Undocumented

Name	AGE	GENDER ID	RACE/ ETHNIC ID	NATIONALITY BACKGROUND	SEXUAL ID	LEGAL STATUS
Fabian	26	male	Latinx	Mexican	Gay	Undocu mented
Nestor	42	male	Latinx	Mexican	Gay	Citizen
Ortzi	25	male	Latinx	Mexican	Gay	Undocu mented
Isaac	28	male	Latinx	Mexican	Gay	Citizen
Mark	28	male	Black	African- American	Gay	Citizen
Leo	31	male	Latinx	Mexican- American	Gay	Citizen
Adan	30	male	Latinx	Mexican- American	Gay	Citizen
Ricky	41	male	Latinx	Salvadoran- American	Gay	Citizen
Joe	44	male	White	Polish- American	Gay	Citizen
Ed	35	male	Latinx	Mexican	Queer	Citizen
Don	38	male	Latinx	Mexican- American	Gay	Citizen
Vicente	38	male	Latinx	Mexican	Gay	Citizen

Name	AGE	GENDER ID	RACE/ ETHNIC ID	NATIONALITY BACKGROUND	SEXUAL ID	LEGAL STATUS
Isidro	36	male	Latinx	Mexican	Gay	Undocu mented
Mario	33	male	Latinx	Mexican- American	Gay	Citizen
Said	40	male	Latinx	Mexican	Gay	Citizen
Thomas	34	male	Latinx	Mexican- American	Gay	Citizen
Saul	35	male	Latinx	Mexican- American	Gay	Citizen
Alejandro	30	male	Latinx	Mexican	Gay	Unstate d
Betina	23	female	Latinx	Mexican	Hetero sexual	Undocu mented
Alex	47	female	Latinx	Mexican	Hetero sexual	Resident
Vanessa	52	trans	Latinx	Mexican	Gay	Undocu mented
Viktor	40	male	Latinx	Mexican	Gay	Undocu mented
Junior	42	male	Latinx	Mexican- American	Gay	Citizen
Sergio	41	male	Latinx	Mexican	Gay	Undocu mented



Name	AGE	GENDER ID	RACE/ ETHNIC ID	NATIONALITY BACKGROUND	SEXUAL ID	LEGAL STATUS
Ana	44	female	Latinx	Mexican	Heterosexual	Undocumented
Montserrat	52	female	Latinx	Mexican	Heterosexual	Undocumented
Anabella	46	female	Latinx	Mexican-American	Heterosexual	Citizen
Jameson	46	male	White	Anglo-American	Gay	Citizen
Karl	32	male	Black	African-American	Gay	Citizen
Mark	29	male	Black	African-American	Gay	Citizen
Kc	26	male	White	Anglo-American	Gay	Citizen
Jean	32	male	White	Anglo-American	Gay	Citizen
Max	45	male	Latinx	Mexican	Gay	Undocumented
Jc	47	male	Latinx	Mexican-American	Gay	Citizen
Pichojitos	52	female	Latinx	Mexican	Lesbian	Undocumented
Tina	53	female	Latinx	Mexican	Lesbian	Undocumented

Name	AGE	GENDER ID	RACE/ ETHNIC ID	NATIONALITY BACKGROUND	SEXUAL ID	LEGAL STATUS
Angelo	36	male	Latinx	Mexican	Gay	Undocu mented
Chava	37	male	Latinx	Mexican	Gay	Undocu mented
Aleman	46	male	Latinx	Mexican	Gay	Undocu mented
Leon	55	male	Black	African- American	Gay	Citizen
Edith	30	female	Latinx	Mexican- American	Lesbian	Citizen
Zuleica	29	female	Latinx	Mexican- American	Lesbian	Citizen
Evan	39	male	Latinx	Mexican	Gay	Resident
Piero	40	male	Latinx	Mexican	Gay	Resident
Scott	39	male	White	Anglo- American	Gay	Citizen
Memo	30	male	Latinx	Mexican- American	Gay	Citizen
Epifanio	28	male	Latinx	Mexican	Gay	Resident
Conrado	31	male	Latinx	Mexican	Gay	Resident

Name	AGE	GENDER ID	RACE/ ETHNIC ID	NATIONALITY BACKGROUND	SEXUAL ID	LEGAL STATUS
Claude	32	male	Black	African-American	Gay	Citizen
John	33	male	Black	African-American	Gay	Resident
Armando	36	male	Latinx	Mexican	Bi sexual	Undocu mented
Mary	46	Transwo man	Latinx	Mexican	Hetero sexual	Undocu mented

## **APPENDIX B: Gay Couples Interview Schedule (latest version)**

**Interview #:** \_\_\_\_\_ (Example: 1DL Interviewee one, Dallas, Latino)

**Pseudonym:** \_\_\_\_\_ (Chosen by the interviewee)

**Date/Time:** \_\_\_\_\_ (Format: MM/DD/YY, 1300hrs)

### **I. Background and current relationship with family**

A. Tell me about your childhood.

- a. What were you like as a child?
- b. What was your relationship like with your parents?
- c. What did they do for a living?
- d. What was your relationship like with your siblings?

*I would like to know about your relationship with your family now that you are an adult.*

B. Tell me about your present relationship with your family.

- a. How is your relationship with your siblings and parents?
- b. Do they know you are gay?
- c. How did they find out?
- d. How far do you live from your family?

C. How often do you see your parents and siblings and other family?

- a. Tell me more about that

*Most people have tensions within their families.*

D. Have you had tensions with your parents or siblings?

- a. What have been the main ones?

E. Do your parents or siblings know about your relationship with your partner/boyfriend?

- a. How was their reaction to your relationship?
- b. How do you feel your family treats your partner and you?
- c. Why do you think that is? (Story/Example)

F. Have you had any conflicts with your family in relation to your sexuality?

- a. How did that play out?

G. Overall, how would you describe your personal relationship with your family?

## **II. Relationship with partner**

*I'm going to shift topics a little. I'd like to know more about your relationships with your partner/boyfriend.*

- A. Tell me about how your relationship began
  - a. How did you meet your partner?
  - b. What happened after that?
  - c. How/when did you know you wanted to get serious?
- B. Has being in this relationship affected your relationship with any members of your family?
  - a. How did/do your siblings feel about gay people? And your parents?
  - b. How do you know this is how they felt? (Story or Example)

## **III. Perceptions and subjective experience**

*We talked briefly about this, but I'd like to know more about when your family met your partner.*

- A. Tell me about the first time someone in your family met your partner.
  - a. Did they know about your relationship at this point?
  - b. Did they know you are gay at this point?
  - c. How do you know? (Story/Example)
  - d. What was their reaction? (Story or Example)
  - e. Overall, how do you feel it went? (Cold/Warm)
  - f. How do you know? (Story or Example)
- B. Tell me the story of why you decided to introduce your partner to your family when you did.
  - a. Did you think they were ready to meet him?
  - b. Was it important for you that they met him?
  - c. Why not just maintain your relationship as "private"? [e.g., without telling your family](Story).
- C. How did you feel about that experience?
  - a. How did you feel about the way family reacted? (Story/Example)
  - b. Would you have done things differently, if you could? How?

- D. How do you think your family felt about your relationship at that point, when they first found out?
- How do you know? (Story/Example)
  - What were their views on your relationship? How do you know? (Story/Example)
  - Did you feel your family understood you and your partner's relationship?
  - How do you know? (Story/Example)
  - Did you ever get any questions about your relationship from family members?
- E. Tell me about how your partner responded to the situation. (Story)
- Was he talkative and friendly or..? [e.g., close and warm or cold and detached]
  - Who did he talk to?
  - How do you think he felt?
  - How do you know? (Story/Example)
- F. How did you feel about your relationship with your partner after all that happened?
- How did your partner feel?
  - How do you know? (Story/Example)
  - What happened?
- G. Do you think your family would treat you and your partner differently if he were a woman?
- Tell me more about that
- H. Do you feel your family counted you two as part of the family at this point, when they first found out?
- How do you know? (Story/Example)
- I. Tell me what about sharing this part of your life with your family was important to you?
- What about having your family be part of your relationship was the most important?
  - What did you want your family to know about you and your partner? Why?
  - Did you try to tell them about this? How? (Story/Example)
  - Did you have other conversations about it before or after? (Story/example)
  - How did you want your family to think of you and your partner at this point? Why?
- J. Did your partner want to be introduced to your family?
- Did he want to meet your family?

- b. How do you know? (Story/Example)
  - c. How did he feel about the idea of meeting your parents/siblings?
  - d. How do you know? (Story/Example)
- K. What were your expectations introducing him to your family?
- a. What did you think would happen?
  - b. Did you think things would be easier or more difficult after that?
  - c. Why did you feel that way? (Story/example)
  - d. Was their reaction different from what you thought it would be?
- L. *[If living together]* Tell me about when you two moved in together with your partner?
- f. Did you get any help from any family members to move or something like that?
  - g. Did anyone tell you not to do so? Why?
  - h. Were you living with family at the time? Did you leave in good terms?
- M. Did moving in together affect your relationship with your family?
- a. In what ways? (Story/Example)
- N. Overall, how do you think your family feels about your relationship with your partner now?
- a. How do you know? (Story/Example)
  - b. Does this have anything to do with you being a gay couple?
  - c. How do you know? (Example/Story)

#### **IV: Cultural ideas about relationships**

*I'd like us to talk about different ideas about romantic relationships.*

- A. What is the ideal relationship?
- a. What are the most important qualities of an ideal relationship?
  - b. Do you have any examples of an ideal relationship in your family?
- B. What do you think your family feels an ideal relationship should be?
- a. Why do you think that? (Story/Example)
- C. What do you think about alternative forms of relationships such as polyamorous, open, or non-monogamous relationships?
- D. Do you know men who are uncomfortable with these types of relationships?

- a. Tell me more about that.
  - b. Why do you think they are uncomfortable? (Story/Example)
  - c. What about bisexuality and relationship?
- E. Do you think you and your partner contribute to a change in how people think of relationships?
- a. How? How do you know? (Story/Example)
- F. Do you think the way people feel about same-sex relationships has changed?
- a. How do you think it has changed?
  - b. Can you tell me any story that makes you think that

## V. Perspectives on marriage

*Now I would like us to talk about marriage.*

- A. In general, how do you feel about marriage?
- a. What does it mean to you?
  - b. Can you tell me a story of why you think that way?
- B. How do you feel about the availability of marriage for same-sex couples?
- a. Tell me more about that
- C. Do you think the availability of gay marriage changes straight people's perspectives of gays?
- a. How do you think it does that?
  - b. Can you tell me a story or example of why you think this?
- D. In general, do you think the availability of gay marriage affected your relationship with your partner?
- a. How do you think it did that (Story/Example)
- E. *[If married]*  
Why was getting married important?
- a. Would domestic partnership, as opposed to marriage, have been good enough?
  - b. Why not continue your relationship as it was, without getting married?
- F. *[If married]*



Tell me what happened when you broke the news to your family that you were getting married.

- a. Who did you tell first? (Story)
- b. What did you expect?
- c. Reactions and counter reactions
- d. Celebrations

G. [*If married*]

Do you feel your family sees your relationship different now that you are married?  
How?

- a. Tell me more about that
- b. Do you think this is because of marriage?
- c. How do you know? (Story/Example)
- d. Does it matter to your family that you are happy?
- e. How do you know? (Story/Example)

H. [*If married*]

Do you think your family counts your relationship as part of the family now that you are married?

- a. Can you tell me a story or example of why you think this?

I. [*If married*]

Do you feel your marriage changed the relationship you have with your siblings and parents?

- a. How so?
- b. Tell me more about that (Story/Example)

J. [*If married*]

What do you think your marriage means to your family?

- a. How do you know?
- b. Do you talk with them about your relationship plans for the future?
- c. How would you like them to think of your marriage?

K. [*If married*]

Tell me about the ceremony?

- a. Who was there?
- b. Did everyone you invited come?

L. Do you think your family counts your relationship as part of the family now?

- a. How so?
- b. Can you tell me a story or example why you think this?

M. What does it mean to be part of the family as a couple?

- a. Can you tell me story of why you feel this way?

N. How is that different from being part of a family of choice that is not biologically linked?

- a. Can you tell me a story or example of this?

## **VI. Political context**

*We've talked extensively about family and relationships. Now I would like us to talk about being gay and politics. Would you be up for that?*

A. Are you involved in any political activism?

- a. Tell me more about that.

B. What do you think of what has been happening in national politics in relations to LGBTQ?

- a. Can you tell me a story of what makes you think this way?

C. Do you feel that has any influence on what happens in the political environment in your state?

- a. Tell me an example of how you think that matters.

*I would like to know how you feel this matter for your city in general and for your neighborhood and community in particular*

D. How do you think or feel this political rhetoric affects:

- a. Your city?
- b. The gay community in your city?
- c. Your neighborhood? (Tell me a story of why you think this way)
- d. Your Black/Latino community? (Story)
- e. Your religious institution?
- f. Your family members? (Story/Example)
- g. Your friends?
- h. Your relationship? (Story)
- i. You personally? (Story)

E. Do you think gay men have sufficient legal anti-discrimination protections in this City?

- a. Tell me more about that.
- F. Have you heard or know about any anti-gay movements, protests, or other anti-LGBTQ efforts by anyone in your city?
- a. Tell me more about that.
  - b. How do you feel about that?
  - c. How do you think that makes your family feel?
  - d. How do you know? (Stories/Examples)
- G. How is like to be gay in your city?
- a. Is it cool to be gay in your city?
  - b. Does that affect your relationship?
  - c. Are the citizens of your city pro- or anit-gay in any way?
  - d. Are there any places where you can be yourself (gay) and feel worry free?
- H. Do you feel there are any divisions within the LGBTQ community in your city?
- a. Tell me more about that
  - b. Does that matter for your relationship?
  - c. Can you tell me a story or example of why you think this?
  - d. How do you think race matters? How do you know? (Story/Examples)

## **VII. Sociocultural context**

- A. Tell me about your neighborhood.
- a. What is it like to live there?
  - b. Is it affordable compared to other neighborhoods in the area?
  - c. Do you feel you can stay more or less anonymous in your neighborhood?
  - d. Are most people there other Black/Latinos?
  - e. Are there any other gay couples in the area? How do you know? (Story/Example)
  - f. Are people religious in your neighborhood? How do you know? (Story/Example)
- B. Tell me about your neighbors.
- a. Do you know them?
  - b. Do you get along with them?
  - c. Do they know you are a couple? (Story/Example of why)
  - d. How do you think they see your relationship? How do you know (Story/example)
  - e. Does that matter to you?
  - f. Do you know what they might think about gays and gay relationships?
  - g. How do you know? (Story/Example)

- C. Tell me about what is like to be gay in your neighborhood?
- Do you feel it is safe for gay men? How?
  - Do you feel that matters for your relationship? How?
  - Can you tell me a story or example why you think that way?
  - Would you feel comfortable throwing a gay party at home?
  - I guess I want to know if you would be comfortable being laud as a gay men there.
- D. Have you witnessed any incidents of violence or aggression against LGBTQ people in your city?
- Where did this happen?
  - Was your partner/boyfriends with you?
  - Tell me more about that (Story/Example)
  - Is this usual?
  - How do you feel about that?
- E. Have you personally been victim of aggression or violence?
- Tell me more about that (Story/Example)
  - Where did it happen?
  - Was you partner/boyfriend with you?
  - Do you think this had anything to do with you being gay? How do you know? (Story/Example)
  - Do you think being Black/Latino had anything to do with it? (Story/Example)
  - How did you react to the incident?
  - What happened after all that?
- F. Do you feel you can pass as heterosexual?
- Can you tell me an example or story of why you think this way?
  - Can your partner pass as heterosexual? How do you know? (Story/Example)

*That last set of questions was tough. I'd like to check in with you before moving forward. How are you feeling about the interview? Shall we continue?*

- G. Do you have substantial LGBTQ resources in your neighborhood?
- What are they?
  - How much do you and your partner use them? How?
  - How do you feel about these places/organizations/people?
- H. Are there any religious institutions or organizations that support the gay community?

- a. Do you consider yourself a member of any of those?
  - b. How do you think they support the gay community? (Story/Example)
  - c. How do you think they support gay relationships?
  - d. Do you think that influences straight people's minds about LGBTQ folks?
- I. Are there any other organizations or institutions that support LGBTQ but are NOT LGBTQ?
- a. Tell me more about that.
  - b. Can you tell me a story or example of why you feel/think that?
- J. How do you feel about LGBTQ Pride celebrations in your city?
- a. Do these happen far from your neighborhood?
  - b. Are there any other celebrations of LGBTQ life that you know of?
  - c. Tell me more about that

### **VIII. Workplace**

- A. Are you openly gay at work?
- a. Tell me more about that
- B. How is the environment at your job in relation to being gay?
- a. How do you know? (Story/Example)
- C. How are your relationships with your coworkers?
- a. Can you tell me a story of example of why you feel that way?
- D. How is your relationship with your boss?
- a. Can you tell me a story or example of why you think this?
- E. Do you talk at all about your relationship at work at all?
- a. Tell me more about that (Story/Examples)
- F. What is the racial composition of your workplace?
- a. How do you feel about that?
  - b. Can you tell me a story or example of what makes you feel this way?

### **IX. Ethnic/Racial Community**

- A. What does it mean to be Black/Latino for you?
  - a. Tell me more about that
- B. How does that matter for being gay?
  - a. Tell me a story/example of why you feel that way.
  - b. Does that affect your relationship? How? (Story/Example)
- C. Do you think you can be more gay than Black/Latino sometimes or more Black/Latino than gay?
  - a. Can you tell me a story or example of why you think that?
  - b. Tell me more about that
- D. What do you think the Black/Latino heterosexuals feel about gay Black/Latinos?
  - a. Can you tell me a story/example of why you think that?
  - b. Tell me more about that

## **XI. Religious Community**

- A. Are you a member of any religious community?
  - a. Tell me more about that.
- B. How does your membership in this community matter for you as a gay man?
  - a. Tell me more about that? (Story/Example)
- C. How do you think it matter for your relationship?
  - a. Tell me a story/example about why you think this.
- D. Do you think it matters for how your family sees your relationship?
  - a. Tell me a story/example of why you think this.

*We have reached the end. Is there anything else you would like to add before I stop the recording?*

## **APPENDIX C: Family Interview Schedule (Latest version)**

*I will ask you some direct question. Take your time if you feel uncomfortable or stuck.*

Tell me about [gay respondent's name]

Childhood

Family relationship

Relationship between respondent and gay participant

Tell me about when you learned that he is different [use gay if they use gay]

How did you learn about it?

What was your reaction?

Who else was present?

What was their reaction?

How does everyone take it nowadays?

Tell me about when you met [gay respondent's partner by name]

How long ago was this?

How did you meet?

Did you know they were together?

Tell me what kind of relationship you have had with [gay respondent]

Relationship before

Relationship after

How has it changed if at all

Tell me about what kind of relationship you have with [gay respondent's partner by name]

How do you get along? (Ask for examples/stories)

Ask for elaboration

Tell me about how other family members think about [the gay couple by names]

Are there conversation in the family about them?

What kinds of things do others say?

What about the parents?

What about the children?

What about others (friends of family and extended family)?

Tell me about when you have family reunions and [gay couple by names] join the family

Describe the kinds of reunions to which they are invited

How do they behave in the gathering

Tell me about the last time you all got together

Tell me about what you think their future will be like together.





