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Los Angeles

Promotoras en Acción: The Discursive and Pedagogical Practices
of Latina Immigrants Doing Queer Advocacy Work

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

by

Rigoberto Marquez Jr.

2015

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Promotoras en Acción: The Discursive and Pedagogical Practices
of Latina Immigrants Doing Queer Advocacy Work

by

Rigoberto Marquez Jr.

Doctor of Philosophy in Education

University of California, Los Angeles

Professor Thomas M. Philip, Chair

This qualitative study examine the discursive and pedagogical practices of a group of immigrant Latina mothers in Los Angeles who teach a workshop series that engages Latina/o parents and community members in conversations about queer Latina/o issues. The LGBT Acceptance Project is an LGBT curriculum designed and taught by the *Promotoras* of Planned Parenthood Los Angeles. For the dissertation study, I was interested in how the *Promotoras* engaged parents and community members in conversations about gender, race and sexuality within a Latina/o context. I was also interested in the identities of the *Promotoras* as women who work for Planned Parenthood and their roles as advocates and allies for queer communities. Two research questions guided this study: 1) What are the pedagogical and discursive practices that inform the *Promotoras* teaching of the LGBT Acceptance Project? 2) How do the *Promotoras* understand their ally identity and how does this inform their teaching and daily lives as

heterosexual Latina allies engaged in queer activism? Interviews and observations were the two sources of data collection used in the study. I conducted three interviews with each of the *Promotoras* who teach the LGBT Acceptance Project. The interviews focused on their life histories, their pedagogical approaches to their teaching of the LGBT Acceptance Project and their identities as advocates and allies for queer communities. I also collected observation data from seven workshop series. Adapting the work of Kumashiro (2000) on anti-oppressive teaching strategies, I documented four types of exchanges within the workshop series I argue lead to new understandings about power and oppression, within a Latina/o context.

The first chapter in the dissertation that describes my findings addresses the *Promotoras* identities as allies and advocates for queer youth. I begin the chapter with introductory portraits of each of the *Promotoras*. The portraits are followed by narratives of three *Promotoras* that offered distinct experiences of how they understand their identities as allies and advocates for queer communities.

The second chapter describes my findings where I discuss the different ways Maria Felix engaged parents in conversations about queer communities. Within the workshop space, several tools and techniques are used by Maria Felix that create different opportunities for parents to engage in conversations about queer communities. Three themes within the teaching emerged from my observations. The first is the LGBTQ Experience and Becoming Allies, which addressed how parents came to understand the experiences of queer youth and how they saw their roles as advocates and allies. The second theme is Relational and Intersectional Understanding of the Queer Latina/o Experience, focused on how Maria Felix gets parents to understand the intersectional forms of oppression queer Latina/o youth experience. The final

theme, *Humanizing Queer Latina/o Youth*, demonstrates the different ways Maria Felix tries to evoke feelings of empathy and compassion from parents for queer communities.

In the final chapter of the dissertation, I discuss several of the challenges and tensions in doing queer Latina/o advocacy work and offer some approaches the *Promotoras* can take to create more critical spaces when engaging in conversations about race, gender and sexuality. I conclude the dissertation with conversation on what I am calling a “community-based model for queer of color praxis work in education” and how I believe the *Promotoras* work and teaching of the LGBT Acceptance Project provides one example of how we approach a community-based model to queer of color praxis work in education.

The dissertation of Rigoberto Marquez Jr. is approved

Marjorie Faulstich Orellana

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Thomas M. Philip, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2015

DEDICATION PAGE

To those who have come before me, those currently in the struggle for justice and equality for queer youth of color and to future generations that will continue this fight.

Seguimos en la lucha

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VITA

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Marquez, R. & Brockenbrough, E. (2014) *Queer Youth V. the State of California: Interrogating Legal Discourses on the Rights of Queer Students of Color*. Paper presented at Whose Beloved Community?: Black Civil and LGBT Rights Movements An International Conference At Emory University, March 2014

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Martinez-Wenzl, M. & Marquez, R. (2010) *Fractured Institutions of Hope: Community College Opportunity in California*. Paper presented at annual Association for the Study of Higher Education Conference, Indianapolis, IN, November 2010

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

How I Came To This Work

In order to discuss how I became immersed in the work of *Promotoras*, (also known as community health educators) with Planned Parenthood Los Angeles (PPLA), I must first share my *testimonio* of why this work is important to me and how I came *to do* “queer”¹ or more specifically “queer of color” research in education. I follow in the tradition of (Queer) Chicana feminist scholars who have used *testimonios* in education as an important methodological tool to privilege and center the subjectivities of bodies marginalized by the mainstream (Delgado-Bernal et. al., 2012). I begin this dissertation with a *testimonio* that situates my body and its lived experiences in order to inform how I approach, interpret and think about my work. As Cruz (2006) states, “...the inclusion of the body holds the beginnings of charting new territories in epistemic approaches, where we can begin to develop strategies to rethink our work in education to reflect the multiplicities of language and history in less partial and less distorted ways” (p. 664). Thus I share my story of coming to queer of color theory in education and how I apply it in my collaborative work with the *Promotoras* of PPLA in hopes that it will inspire others to think about their histories, stories and positionalities.

Promoting a Queer of Color Body

How I understand, use and theorize queer theory in education stems from my own experiences as a young queer Chicano of Catholic Mexican immigrant parents, raised in an African-American and Latina/o working-class neighborhood of Los Angeles. From an early age,

¹ In the dissertation I mostly use “queer” to speak about the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Community. However when I do use “LGBT” it is usually when speaking in the context of laws and policies which mostly use the term “LGBT.” I also use the term “LGBT” in the context of the *Promotoras* work and how they use this term.

I was aware of my race, gender and sexuality as markers of difference which kept me from participating fully in my schooling. Hearing homophobic and derogatory remarks, directed towards me and other students perceived to be queer, was a common occurrence in my education. However, experiences of “otherness” were not limited to my gender expression or sexuality; my working-class racial identity also marked me as different. As part of the Los Angeles Unified School District’s effort to integrate San Fernando Valley schools, students from the “inner city” took hour-long bus rides into white, middle-class neighborhoods to attend school. On the promise of a better education, I went from my African-American and Latina/o working-class environment to a school in a predominantly white and wealthy neighborhood. Like the majority of the students of color who lived with desegregated busing, I was tracked (Oakes, 1995) into remedial courses filled with students from other working-class communities of color. Resisting the school district’s push to integrate, the school became two schools in one: one school for the students from the neighborhood and another for the bussed students of color.

Eventually I crossed the school’s manifested color line (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2006) and made it into a college-track program where I was one of a handful of students of color. During these early years of racial border crossing (Anzaldúa, 1987) I began to understand the multidimensionality (Hutchinson, 2000) of my identities. The bullying, harassment and microaggressions (Kohli & Solórzano, 2012) I experienced in school looked and felt different depending the group of students and teachers I was with at that moment. How people saw my body and reacted to its presence was motivated, in part, by their own experiences with and knowledge of queer brown bodies. Cruz (2006) states the brown body, “...even in a space created for lesbian and gay youth, is still contained within the parameters of its (future) use, whether as worker, citizen, or its complicity with a racially gendered social order” (p. 665). In a

similar fashion, the bullying and harassment my queer brown body experienced was linked to the perpetrator's self-interest in maintaining their own position of power. The queer brown body is thus subjugated, in order to maintain a regulated and hegemonic order of race, gender and sexual identity that marginalizes and maintains queer of color bodies as the "other."

Like other queer persons of color, I felt at times isolated from communities of color for my queerness and from queer communities for my racial identity. I turned to Bienestar², a community service and advocacy organization focused on serving lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) members of the Los Angeles' Latino community, for guidance and direction. As a community college student in the late nineties, I entered these spaces and found a great support system—a community that understood and discussed the struggles and intersecting identities of queer young men of color while simultaneously empowering its members through leadership development. This early engagement with community groups allowed me to recognize the power community organizations have to transform lives.

My involvement within Bienestar led me to focus on theories of race, gender and sexuality. As an undergraduate, I discovered the work of queer of color theorists (Ferguson, 2004; Holland & Cohen, 2005; Munoz, 1999; Rodriguez, 2003; Somerville, 2000) and tried to put some of these ideas into practice through my involvement with queer people of color groups working to combat homophobia and racism in schools. With a focus on praxis, I created and led outreach projects that cultivated our identities as young (queer) people of color within the college and high school experience. I soon found myself training and school practitioners who worked with students of color on how to be inclusive of queer issues in their education initiatives.

² BIENESTAR is a non-profit social service organization dedicated to positively impacting the health and well-being of the Latino community and other underserved communities in Southern California. Founded in 1989, the organization uses an innovative and compassionate peer-to-peer model that is 100% culturally relevant to its constituents. It primarily targets the Latino gay, lesbian, bi-sexual and transgender segments of the community.

Unfortunately, what I encountered while working within these spaces was a hesitation to discuss how these programs, which perpetuated heteronormative ideas of success and family, further marginalized queer youth of color. This lack of a critical engagement by educators and community activists on the intersectional identities of their student participants, particularly from Latina/o communities, instilled in me a passion to find ways to promote awareness of and increase support for the needs of queer youth of color.

As a community organizer for Bienestar, I had the opportunity to advance new strategies on how to educate Latina/o communities on queer Latina/o youth issues. With the goal of building a strong base of grassroots support within these Los Angeles communities, our organizing team utilized a community strength model to cultivate support for queer Latina/o youth. During my tenure at Bienestar, the same-sex marriage debate in California also gained momentum, and conversations about queer rights were becoming more prevalent across the state. What my experiences have taught me is that if educators and researchers are going to transform school culture for queer Latina/o youth, reform efforts must begin from the ground up. I knew that the only the way to build broad-based support for same-sex marriage was to go into Latina/o communities and facilitate frank conversations among neighbors about queer issues. Community educators and activists need to develop strategies to engage local school communities in ways that educate stakeholders about queer Latina/o youth experiences in order to build support for queer Latina/o youth.

From my first interaction with the *Promotoras* of PPLA at the “LGBTQ Forum” in Boyle Heights in April of 2013, I knew they embodied many of the attributes needed to build a strong base of support for queer youth in Latina/o communities. For the last three years, the *Promotoras* have been engaging Latina/o parents through a workshop series that seeks to humanize the queer

experience by having direct and heartfelt conversations about the multiple forms of oppression faced by queer youth and how as Latina/o parents they can support queer communities. The work the *Promotoras* are advancing has the potential to transform hundreds of Latina/o parents across Los Angeles into allies on queer issues and, I would argue, promote empathy for queer Latina/o youth in these communities.

This dissertation was a case study of my collaboration with the *Promotoras* of PPLA who engaged Latina/o parents on queer Latina/o issues. In the dissertation, I documented the *Promotoras*' pedagogical and discursive practices, and how these shaped the queer workshop series. I also discussed how their work can be used as a model to create other similarly structured programs to support queer Latina/o youth and why I believe their work is one example of a community-based approach to queer of color praxes in education.

Promotoras of Planned Parenthood Los Angeles

The *Promotoras* of PPLA teach a workshop series called the LGBT Acceptance Project. This series educates Latina/o immigrant parents on queer issues while providing them resources and strategies they can use to serve as queer allies and advocates in their communities. The Spanish-language workshop series focuses on activities and exercises that introduce parents to the lives of queer people. The LGBT Acceptance Project engages parents in activities and conversations where they become aware of how the types of oppressions queer people experience are interconnected with their own uniquely Latina/o experiences of oppression and those of other marginalized communities. For example, in one of the sessions a *Promotora* compared the experiences and stigmas of being undocumented in the United States to that of queer individuals who chose to not disclose their sexual orientation. These remarks led to a conversation about the amount of scrutiny those who are undocumented and queer must face on

a daily basis. By raising parents' consciousness about multiple forms of oppression, the *Promotoras*, I argue, have the ability to deepen participants' recognition of power and difference. The development and implementation of the curriculum provided a glimpse into how the *Promotoras* approach these conversations within the workshop series.

PPLA created the workshop curriculum over the course of a year by collaborating with different Latina/o and queer advocacy organizations, including Lambda Legal and the Human Rights Campaign Foundation; both teach their own workshops on issues related to gender and sexuality. The *Promotoras* adopted some of the strategies these organizations have used in the past to teach about queer issues and developed a curriculum they felt would be effective and could resonate with their constituents—primarily Latina immigrant mothers. The transformation and adaptation of existing methods used to engage communities in discussions about gender and sexuality and the pedagogical and discursive practices used in the curriculum made the *Promotoras'* work unique.

For example, during the workshop series, in order to explain the concept of heteronormativity, instead of providing parents with the literal Spanish translation, which is *heteronormatividad*, they framed the discussion around *los privilegios de los heterosexuales* or privileges of heterosexuality. How they used the term “heteronormativity” was different from existing LGBT outreach efforts in English; I argue that the ways they engaged in these conversations were much more effective in their ability to evoke a direct connection to parents' own lives. Therefore, I studied the *Promotora's* language use and (re)interpretation of queer discourses while also examining parents' mutual exchanges on related topics.

The California Context

California's state government, with its history of approving ground-breaking legislation and educational policies to support queer youth in schools, is an influential player in efforts to support queer youth in schools. In 1984, Dr. Uribe founded Project 10 at Fairfax High School in LAUSD. It was one of the first programs in the country to support queer public school youth and a precursor to national organizations such as the Gay-Straight Alliance Network (Uribe & Harbeck, 1992). Organizations such as the Gay-Straight Alliance Network and the California Safe Schools Coalition have provided almost two decades of support and resources for queer youth—from trainings and workshops for schools and districts to directly influencing statewide policy reform.

For example, the California Student Safety and Violence Prevention Act of 2000, the Safe Place to Learn Act (2008) and the Civil Rights Act of 2008 provide queer students some of the most comprehensive protections under state law. In 2011, Governor Jerry Brown signed a landmark bill requiring all public schools in California to include the contributions of LGBT people in the social sciences curriculum (McGreevy, 2011). In August of 2013 Brown signed a law that extends protections for transgender students to access any schools facilities consistent with their gender identity (McGreevy, 2013). The laws to combat homophobia and support queer students make California an important site for the movement to protect queer youth in our nation's public schools, but it also provides us with examples of where these policies are falling short of protecting all queer youth in schools statewide.

Problem Statement

Efforts to protect the rights of queer students in California are now unfolding amidst significant demographic shifts across the state. Although students of color are projected to

comprise the majority of K-12 students nationally by the next decade, they already comprise the majority in California's schools, with Latinos alone accounting for 52% of the state's K-12 population (California Department of Education, 2015). Based on these percentages, queer students in California's schools will increasingly be students of color—and more specifically, Latino students—for whom queer identity, community and experience may be intimately mediated by racial, cultural and linguistic differences. With an increasing number of queer students of color in our public schools, current policies and initiatives must then account for these differences. However, some of my past research on the effectiveness of current California pro-LGBT youth policies has shown that queer youth of color disproportionately attend schools where these policies have not been implemented or enforced (Marquez & Brockenbrough, 2013).

A recent report by the Williams Institute, affiliated with the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) School of Law, underscores this point by uncovering where this disconnect happens between policy and action. Durso, Kastanis, Wilson and Meyer (2013) found queer people of color experience higher levels of discrimination due to a lack of institutional, organization and structural support systems that consider their identity as queer and as people of color. The disconnect between California's educational policies and the day-to-day reality for Latina/o queer students necessitates a thorough examination of what works to raise the visibility of queer Latina/o youth on these issues and increase their safety and acceptance in Latina/o communities. The apparent disconnect and limited understanding between pro-queer youth policies/initiatives in the state and the appropriate institutional, organization and structural support systems in place within Latina/o communities is a problem that needs to be better understood and fully examined. Therefore, we must look to the work being done by community

groups and organizations that are helping predominately Latina/o communities reach new levels of awareness of and understanding on queer youth issues.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this dissertation was threefold; first, I wanted to draw attention to the important work the *Promotoras* are doing in promoting a call to action for queer youth in Latina/o communities. As previously mentioned, there is disconnect between the promulgation of California laws which support queer youth and their implementation in predominantly Latina/o schools. The work of the *Promotoras* is one way to advance the implementation of pro-queer youth policies and initiatives in communities of color.

Second, I wanted to analyze the pedagogical and discursive practices the *Promotoras* use to discuss queer issues with Latino immigrant parents. My goal was to identify how parents came to new understandings of the oppression and marginalization of queer youth in general, and Latina/o queer youth specifically. The *Promotoras*' practices are grounded in critical pedagogical approaches to teaching and learning. They employ multiple ways of engaging the curriculum that invite parents to construct new understandings about issues of gender and sexuality rooted in a place of love and acceptance—humanizing queer people.

Third, my goal was to also demonstrate the *Promotoras*' identity development as Latina allies and advocates to queer communities. I contend two things happened simultaneously. On one hand the *Promotoras*' use of language informed how they built a common understanding with parents around gender and sexuality, and this shared lexicon then informed how the *Promotoras* and parents talked about Latina/o queer issues and identities. On the other hand, the *Promotoras*, as advocates and instructors, continuously built and adapted their language, which

not only defined them as mediators of language and identity, but inadvertently shaped their self-identification as a Latina allies to the queer community (Rodriguez, 2003).

This building and adapting of their teaching and language use further developed in the *Promotoras*' curriculum development meetings where they discussed ways of introducing new knowledge to the curriculum and finding creative ways of engaging their parents in the workshops. This mirrored the ways educators participate in collaborative spaces with other teachers, where their dialogue enhances their own teaching practices (Duncan-Andrade, 2005; Lyte & Cochran-Smith, 1989; Wienbaum, Allen, Blythe, Simon, Siedel & Rubin, 2004). The curriculum development meetings were a space where the *Promotoras* could collectively examine their own teaching, learn from each other and share helpful practices and strategies. To date, no research has documented the identity development process of heterosexual Latina/o immigrants becoming allies and advocates for queer rights. This study contributes to discourses surrounding family acceptance of queer community members by speaking against the dominant narrative that Latina/o's do not support queer youth.

Research Questions

Accordingly, two research questions guided my study:

- 1) What are the pedagogical and discursive practices that inform the *Promotoras* teaching of the LGBT Acceptance Project?
- 2) How do the *Promotoras* understand their ally identity and how does this inform their teaching and daily lives as heterosexual Latina allies engaged in queer activism?

Significance of Study

The significance of this dissertation is at a practical and theoretical level. First and foremost, the dissertation provides practitioners and community-based organizations with

examples of how to build grassroots support for issues related to gender and sexuality which is authentic to Latina/o immigrant communities. Secondly, from a theoretical perspective, the work the *Promotoras* engaged in demonstrates how concepts of intersectionality and multidimensionality are understood and constructed within a Latina/o context. In essence, the *Promotoras* and parents engaged in discursive practices that helped them explain and understand the experiences of queer Latina/os who live and exist in the intersections of race, gender and sexuality.

Organization of Dissertation

In Chapter 1, I outlined the imperative for this study, my research questions and the study's context. In Chapter 2, I review related literature contributing to my understanding of family and community support of queer individuals as well as the literature on the *Promotora* model. Chapter 3 discusses the methodological tools used for data collection and the ways in which I targeted my analysis. Chapter 4 findings address Question 2 of the dissertation. I describe the identity development of the *Promotoras* as queer allies by highlighting the process of how they came to understand their ally identities. In my Chapter 5 findings, which address Question 1, I examine the pedagogical and discursive practices used by the *Promotoras* that led to moments where parents came to a shared understanding and/or construction of the queer Latina/o experience. In Chapter 6 I discuss my findings, including the importance of the *Promotoras*' work, and conclude by offering new directions for future projects.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review focuses on three areas of research that speak to the work of the *Promotoras*. The first is literature on parents of queer children, followed by literature on heterosexual allies and last is research on *Promotoras*. Combined, the literature provides points of entry to make sense of the experiences of *Promotoras* and the parent participants of the LGBT Acceptance Project. This study will further build upon each of these areas.

Heterosexual Parents And Queer Children

Within a review the literature that examines how heterosexual parents become allies to the queer community are studies of how adults with school-age children become invested in queer advocacy work. The *Promotoras* are not parents of queer children, but their identities as mothers inform their pedagogical practice and their approach to the queer curriculum they teach. In some instances, attendees came to the workshop series specifically because a child has recently self-disclosed the sexual orientation or a gender identity other than their biological gender.

In a review of literature on parents and queer individuals, two major themes emerged. The first and largest body of work focuses on the negative experiences of sexuality disclosure. Much of this research discusses the psychological and emotional harms to queer individuals, caused by family and community rejection. The majority of this research is found within the fields of psychology, social welfare and public health, and utilizes a quantitative perspective. Consequently, the research does not adequately inform our understanding of the factors that influence parental and community rejection, making it more difficult to identify applicable solutions. Although this research is important, I concentrated on identifying literature that did not

focus on negative outcomes for individual self-disclosure of sexual orientation. Instead, I reviewed literature that focused on identifying the primary factors associated with family acceptance, thus avoiding deficit notions of queer identity.

In my search for literature that did not focus on deficit understandings of queer and family dynamics, I was surprised to find a relatively small body of work (Gonzalez, Rostosky, Odom, & Riggle, 2012; Hill & Menvielle, 2009; Lee & Lee, 2006; Oswald, 2002; Slesaransky-Poe, Ruzzi, Dimedio, & Stanley, 2013). These studies, conducted using qualitative methods, document the process of how parents come *to do* queer advocacy work.

Acceptance of Queer Children

One of the earliest studies by Saltzburg (2004), focused on the meaning-making process heterosexual parents of queer children went through in coming to terms with their child's sexual orientation and subsequently, their new identity as a parent of a queer child. In this study, five major themes emerged. The first was an early awareness their child was different. In fact many parents noted they knew from an early age their child was different from other boys and girls. A second theme was parental certainty of knowing their child was queer; several parents felt it was great to have that affirmation when their child disclosed their identity.

A third important theme was an emotional detachment for the majority of parents in the study; once their child “came out,” many parents isolated themselves from their child and other social spaces in order to avoid having to talk about them. A fourth theme was a fear of estrangement. Several of the parents felt an enormous fear of losing their child to queer subculture, a culture where they (as parents) felt they could not find a place of belonging. The last theme was adjustment and education. Several parents discussed wanting to find other parents

who going through similar experiences that they could identify with and learn from. As a result several parents sought out community resources to find support.

A study by Gonzalez et al., (2012) which studied the benefits heterosexual parents reported gaining by having a queer child, identified five major themes. The first was personal growth; several parents felt they had increased their open mindedness, which they defined as gaining a heightened sense of awareness of discrimination and an elevated level of compassion for those who were different. A second was positive emotions—parents expressed a strong sense of pride in their child and reported a better understanding of what it meant to practice unconditional love. A third theme was the development of closer relationships with the larger family structure, where several of the parents discussed having closer bonds to their children and their family as a whole after learning they had a queer child. The last theme was activism and social change—several parents felt a strong desire to get involved in activist work related to queer issues. Both of these studies offer examples of how parents process their acceptance of a queer child. However as Fields (2001) notes, their acceptance is not necessarily a revolutionary act.

Fields (2001) offers a more theory-based study on parents and the progression of accepting their queer child. The purpose of the study was to understand the process parents undertook to de-stigmatize their gay and lesbian children and themselves in order to restore the view of themselves as successful parents. Utilizing Goffman's (1963) notion of "normalize" and "normify," Fields suggests that "group participants were able and compelled to normalize and to normify because they were simultaneously normal—straight, married, middle-class, and middle aged women and men—and deviant—the mothers and fathers of lesbian and gay adults" (p. 166). Throughout the article, Fields provides examples of how parents normalized their children in order to normalize themselves (such as talking about their children getting married, going to

prom or how happy they were that their children maintained feminine and masculine traits). Fields draws a connection between the demonstrations of these parents and their active reification of heteronormative constructs of gender, sexuality and family.

Becoming Queer Advocates

The studies in this section outline the types of advocacy parents engage in and how they make sense of this work. The evidence indicates that current advocacy work done by heterosexual parents of queer children is heteronormative and racially homogenous.

Johnson & Best (2012) discuss the process of how straight parents (or what they term “traditional parents”) become advocates of gay rights. Through observations of and interviews with active members of a Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG)³ chapter, the authors analyze the process these traditional parents went through: from forming a general acceptance of their queer child to becoming public advocates for queer rights. Utilizing a conceptual identity model known as “moral career,” they analyze the mechanisms that propelled these parents to moral careers of advocacy, or what they call, the life of “radical normal parents.”

In a similar vein, Broad, Crawley, & Foley (2004) explore how PFLAG contends with the traditional family values discourse of the religious right—specifically through an analysis of how they frame political issues in their advocacy and in the ways they make meaning of their identities as parents of queer children. Utilizing Gubrium and Holstein’s (1997) definition of interpretive practice which is “the constellation of procedures, conditions, and resources through which reality is apprehended, understood, organized and presented in the course of everyday life” (p. 114). Broad et al. (2004) analyze the meaning making processes of PFLAG members,

³ Founded in 1972 with the simple act of a mother publicly supporting her gay son, PFLAG is the original ally organization. Made up of parents, families, friends, and straight allies uniting with lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people (<http://community.pflag.org>).

tracing how the dominant discourses on traditional family values(i.e. Right Wing) becomes the part of their identities as parents. As Broad et al. assert, “we show that PFLAG’s interpretive practices engage and appropriate the meanings of family and religious values employed in the family politics of the Religious Right.” (p. 513).

What this article demonstrates are the ways that PFLAG members reify dominant norms of family. Instead of speaking against the normative discourse on families (i.e. white, middle-class, Christian and heterosexual), they find ways to appropriate many of the norms they ironically seek to destabilize. One of the more interesting points Broad et al. (2004) point out is that these stabilizing notions of families are also dependent on the silence surrounding issues of race, class, gender and sexuality.

A case study on the *Promotoras* work with the LGBT Acceptance Project will contribute to our understanding of Latina/o parents who become advocates. This research has the potential to explain why Latina/o parents, regardless of their degree of acceptance of their queer children, have not gravitated to the advocacy work of PFLAG. This study offers new insights into the discursive practices that bring meaning to the identity of heterosexual Latina/o parents who support queer youth.

Broad, Alden, Berkowitz, & Ryan (2008) focus on emerging themes in research on queer-related parenting, central to what they call activist parenting. Borrowing from the work of Naples (1992) and McDonald (1997) on activist mothering, Broad et al. (2008) contend that much like the mothers of color profiled in Naples’ and McDonald's work, queer-related parenting has blurred the boundaries between parenting and politics. They suggest these blurred boundaries between traditional notions of parenting and engagement in queer political work have

blurred in ways where much of the political/activist work surrounding LGBT issues has taken a rather parental figure slant.

As an important caveat, Broad et al. (2008) acknowledge that the concentration of white, middle-class participants present a significant limitation to their conceptual framework.. However, if we were to apply this working framework of activist parenting to the work of the *Promotoras*, in what ways would activist parenting look similar and different for parents of color? Or, in what ways could Naples' and McDonald's work contribute to the conversation of heterosexual parents of color who support queer youth?

Heterosexuals As Allies

Although attitudes and beliefs towards queer communities are steadily changing, there is still relatively little that is known about the motivating factors that lead heterosexuals to ally activities. However, within the last two decades there has been a growing body of literature that documents the development and experiences of heterosexual allies, identifying some motivating factors that lead straight individuals to become queer advocates and agents of social change. Within the literature, most studies have centered on institutions of higher education or community-based organizations.

Student Development and Student Personnel

The earliest research on ally development at the university level, focused on the role of academic counselors in creating an inclusive environment for queer college students (Chojnacki & Gelberg, 1995), and then branched into on the experiences of students and the impact of ally faculty (Croteau, Lark, Lidderdale, & Chung, 2004; Sanlo, 2000). These early studies narrowly documented the nature of stigma and heterosexual privilege on college campuses. Later research included the emergence of queer allies among heterosexual college students. For example, a

study conducted by Stotzer (2009) focused on how college students came to develop their identity as queer allies. Stotzer interviewed 50 college students from a Midwest university, with the goal of identifying key factors that contributed to their ally identity. Three major themes emerged: experiences that normalized nonheterosexual orientations, personal relationships with queer students and educators, and empathetic reactions to the struggles of queer peers.

Community-Based Organizations

More recent research documents heterosexual allies' advocacy work on queer issues through community-based organizations. For example, Duhigg, Rostosky, Gray, & Wimsatt (2010) documents the experiences of heterosexual allies who are not parents of queer children. The authors identify six domains that led to the participant's development as queer allies. My study contributes to this growing area of research by documenting the factors that motivate the *Promotoras* to engage in queer advocacy work.

Russell's (2011) study suggests two primary motives of heterosexual allies: 1) a belief that queer individuals have a fundamental right to be treated as equals; and, 2) the discrimination that family members or friend have experienced. Russell concludes by offering a refined conceptualization; heterosexual allies view their participation in queer advocacy as an issue of fundamental human rights.

Promotoras

Existing literature analyzes the effectiveness of *Promotoras* in promoting health education and advocacy. This includes an examination of the role of *Promotoras* as effective researchers and studies of how the principles of the *Promotora* model are used in other forms of advocacy. This study advances the study of the principles and methodologies employed by *Promotoras* as powerful tools for direct action and social justice advocacy work.

Who Are Promotoras?

Community health educators, or *Promotoras*, have been effective agents for social change in Latina/o communities for nearly six decades, particularly within Latin American countries. Their roots can be traced to the political activism and social movements of the 1960s in Latin America. Utilizing Freirian methodologies, community health workers promote literacy and health education as fundamental human rights, while also advocating for self-reliance and awareness of community strengths (Torres & Cernada, 2003). *Promotoras* have become a particularly powerful force in health advocacy for Latin American populations who live in rural communities disconnected from health care infrastructure and resources found in larger metropolitan areas. Their ability to bring health care and health education to rural, isolated populations—in a manner that relies on creating mutual and collaborative relationships between community members—is what makes *Promotoras* a powerful and influential community resource.

Aware of the effectiveness of *Promotoras* in Latin America, health practitioners in the United States in the 1980s began to implement similar approaches within densely populated Latina/o communities in rural and urban areas that lacked access to basic forms of health care. California became a leader in this approach to health care and education (Love, Gardner, & Legion, 1997), given its growing population of Latina/os and Latina/o immigrants. Love et al. (1997) studied the efforts of San Francisco Bay Area health care providers who turned to a *Promotora* model in their efforts to reach larger Latina/o populations. Similarly, Cardoza-Clayson (2000) as cited by Torres and Cernada (2002-2003), discusses the growing number of health providers in California using *Promotoras* to increase Latina/o health outcomes, and states “California based *Promotoras*, like their counterparts in Latin American countries, work in

communities to make health services accessible to those unreachable by system structures because of cultural and class differences” (p. 123).

Research on Promotora Effectiveness

Several studies have assessed the effectiveness of *Promotoras* to deliver quality health care. For example, Swider (2002) conducted a meta-analysis of literature that documented the work of *Promotoras* across a span of geographical regions, different types of health providers and types of interventions used in order to assess the effectiveness of *Promotoras* in mediating health disparities. Swider identified six themes in his review: outcomes, access, knowledge, health status, behavior change and cost. Among these measures, Swider (2002) concluded that *Promotoras* were most effective in increasing access to care. Although Swider (2002) asserts that he is unclear as to how *Promotoras* create and sustain this type of access, it is possible that this is due to the principles of self-efficacy and rights to health care that comprise the *Promotoras* outreach and promotion.

A study by Lujan, Ostwald, & Ortiz (2007) provides an example of how *Promotoras* create and sustain access to health care for a group of Mexican Americans living with type 2 diabetes. The purpose of the study was to determine how effective the *Promotoras* were in an intervention created to change the beliefs about and knowledge of diabetes and glycemic control among the study participants. The intervention took place over six months, through eight weekly two-hour sessions—activities designed to educate participants on proactive steps to longer, healthier lives. As described by the authors, “[t]he *Promotoras* presented diabetes knowledge in the classes as a critical lifestyle-changing mediating factor that can be taught, learned and modified to empower Mexican Americans to improve their health” (Lujan et al., 2007. p. 666).

The authors concluded that the *Promotoras*'s personalized attention and their common experiences empowered participants to take control of their diabetes and their health.

Promotoras as Researchers

In more recent years, there has been a growing trend among public health researchers to integrate some of the principles of the *Promotoras* into new study designs and to include *Promotoras* as part of the research team (Delgado, Zapata, Martínez, & Manzanares, 2011; Lucio, Zuniga, Seol, Garza, Mier & Trevino, 2012; Otiniano, Carroll-Scott, Toy, & Wallace, 2012). For example, Otiniano et al. (2012) studied the effectiveness of *Promotoras* in reducing the high rates of body fat, systemic and fat tissue inflammation and postpartum depression symptoms among a group of Latinas. The purpose was to demonstrate how essential the *Promotoras* were to the integrative and treatment validity of the study. Keller, Records, Coe, Ainsworth, Lopez, Nagle-Williams & Permana (2012) conclude their article by stating that “developing interventions that have the potential for sustainability and positive differences in the lives of participants necessitates involving *Promotoras* in research teams as respected collaborators with integral roles that go far beyond data collection” (p. 128).

An important study by Nelson (2011) titled “Promotores as researchers: Expanding the promotor role in community-based research” makes a strong case for this type of approach. The goal of the study was to develop an intervention specific to migrant farmworker populations in order to reduce the incidence of sexual violence and intimate partner violence within migrant communities (Nelson, 2011). In this study, the *Promotores* played an integral role in the design and application of interventions and the subsequent data analysis. Nelson (2011) contends the *Promotores* served a key role in not only accessing the population, but also in creating an intervention with relevance to farmworkers' lives.

Promotoras Participating in Social Justice Work

More recently we have seen the *Promotora* model used to empower communities to act on issues of social justice. In recent years, the *Promotora* model has expanded its focus from only health prevention and dissemination of health information, to direct advocacy in building a movement to address broader human rights issues that affect Latina/o communities. Access to good schools for their children, safe and affordable housing and a living wage are some of the social issues *Promotores* engage on with local communities.

The process of how *Promotores* build support for different social and political issues is described as a three-stage process: 1) the development of personal relationships over time based on mutual respect, empathy and understanding; 2) the distribution of vital information and resources; 3) the creation of opportunities for community members to participate in individual and collective actions (The California Endowment, 2011). Working and collaborating with *Promotores* to build programs and projects that educate community members on a particular social justice issue becomes a powerful way to build support and a movement from the ground up.

For instance, a study by Ramos, May, & Ramos (2001) documented an initiative designed to implement culturally relevant activities for Latina/o residents in a Texas border town in order to better understand the community's environmental health risks, with the aim of creating greater awareness and a call to action. The training of the *Promotoras* consisted of four phases: 1) a pre-intervention assessment to learn about the health concerns of the population, 2) environmental health education and training for *Promotoras*, 3) community outreach and educational sessions led by the *Promotoras* 4) post-education and outreach assessment to evaluate effectiveness of the intervention. This study is one of the few examples of a community

organization using the principles and methodologies of the *Promotoras* to move beyond health-related issues and into broader social justice advocacy. In many ways, the model of this intervention is similar to that of the LGBT Acceptance Project.

CHAPTER 3:

METHODS AND RESEARCH DESIGN

This qualitative case study was designed to provide a richness of description to better understand how the *Promotoras* teach and engage parents in conversations about queer-related issues; I employed several strategies which targeted their pedagogical and discursive practices. The strength of the case study lies in its ability to examine, in-depth, a “case” within a natural setting (Yin, 2006). A case study inquiry explores a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, and is especially salient when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident (Yin, 2006). In this study, the phenomenon is Latina parents teaching on queer-related issues, and the case is the *Promotoras* of Planned Parenthood who teach the LGBT Acceptance Project. My research design used a heuristic case study approach (Mitchell, 2006). Mitchell (2006) contends a heuristic case study allows an opportunity to develop theory around the phenomenon of study. Citing Eckstein (1975), Mitchell (2006) adds that a heuristic case study:

...is deliberately used to stimulate the imagination towards discerning important general problems and possible theoretical solutions...Such studies...tie directly into theory building and therefore are less concerned with overall concrete configurations than with potentially generalizable relations between aspects of them; they also tie into theory building less passively and fortuitously...because the potentially generalizable relations do not just turn up but are deliberately sought out (p. 30).

This perspective accommodated my desire to explore possible theories about the methods, strategies and language the *Promotoras* and parents used as they grappled with creating new and different ways of understanding and discussing to the intersectionality of gender, race and

sexuality. Since a significant part of this study entailed capturing the interactions between *Promotoras* and parents as they come to understand and make sense of the lives and experiences of queer Latina/os, a heuristic approach also recognizes that the researcher's understanding of the phenomenon and case at hand can actually strengthen the analysis (Mitchell, 2006).

Positionality of Researcher

My positionality as a queer Latino, who grew up in a Catholic home in Los Angeles, who has worked with nonprofit organizations throughout the city and who does “queer of color research,” places me in a unique position to approach this study. My position builds on Harper's (2005) work on queers of color and “speculative knowledge” which attest to the power of relying on our own “felt intuition” to pose questions and make sense of experiences. Delgado-Bernal's (1998) notion of *cultural intuition* also informs my positionality; Delgado-Bernal attests cultural intuition is a mixture of preexisting and emerging knowledge that comes from (a) the combination of personal experience, collective experience and community memory; (b) existing literature; (c) cumulative professional experience; and (d) the analytical research process itself.

Promotoras of Planned Parenthood Los Angeles

I collaborated with the *Promotoras Comunitarias* of PPLA. The *Promotoras* program has been serving Latina/o communities in the Los Angeles area for twenty-five years; this highly successful program was created to address the lack of access to reproductive health care and sexuality information in Latina/o communities. As mentioned on their website, “since its launch in 1990, more than 650 women from different parts of Los Angeles have been trained to act as

Promotoras. To date, the program has reached more than 150,000 residents of Los Angeles County.”⁴

The process of becoming a *Promotora* is a case worth studying on its own. Once the women have been selected as *Promotoras*, they must undergo a rigorous training program to learn about multiple public health topics, including women’s reproductive health, family communication, child abuse, substance abuse, teen pregnancy prevention and domestic violence. When the *Promotoras* complete the training, they attend another series of workshops where they learn to be effective teachers and leaders in the community.

The LGBT Acceptance Project

In 2011, PPLA and the *Promotoras* were approached by the nonprofit organization Honor Fund⁵ to support a project to increase the awareness and acceptance of queer people within Latina/o communities. In 2012, Honor Fund supplied financial support to launch a program similar in structure to other Planned Parenthood workshops.

During the first year the *Promotora* leadership team and a number of *Promotoras* who expressed interest in the LGBT Acceptance Project undertook a rigorous year of curriculum development. With the generous support of local, state and national queer and queer Latina/o focused organizations, the *Promotoras* developed a four-part workshop series to engage Latina/o parents and community members in honest and heartfelt discussions about the pervasive homophobia and heterosexism within Latina/o communities and negative impact this has on queer youth. The workshops also provide parents with resources and strategies they could use to speak against homophobia to family, friends and community members. The curriculum was

⁴ <http://www.plannedparenthood.org/los-angeles/community-outreach-2222.htm>

⁵ Honor fund is a non-profit organization in Los Angeles dedicated to advancing the rights and freedoms of the Latino LGBT community through leadership development, advocacy and public education.

piloted fourteen times over the course of eight months in 2012; in 2013 PPLA expanded the program to offer 40 series of workshops sessions. The number of workshops series increased by 50 percent in 2014 to nearly 60.

The Curriculum

The LGBT Acceptance Project is broken into a two-hour session once a week for four weeks (eight hours total for the series). Each weekly session builds on the previous week's activities, with the end goal of having the participants' leave with a strong understanding of the lives and experiences of queer people, and how they can be a source of support to this population. Table 1 is an excerpt from the curriculum to illustrate the theme of the sessions and learning objectives.

Table 1: LGBT Acceptance Project Themes and Learning Objectives

<p><u>Session 1:</u> Basic Concepts & Addressing Misconceptions about LGBT People</p> <p>Learning Objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To increase empathy with LGBT people’s experiences of isolation derived from societal rejection. • To examine personal values and perceptions about LGBT people. • To dispel myths and increase knowledge related to LGBT concepts.
<p><u>Session 2:</u> Theme: Family Acceptance of LGBT Youth</p> <p>Learning Objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To increase knowledge about the impact that family rejection has on the health and lives of LGBT youth. • To discuss the family sphere as having a unique potential and being a privileged space for safety and acceptance. • To increase willingness to support family and extended LGBT family members.
<p><u>Session 3:</u> Faith and Acceptance</p> <p>Learning Objectives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss our concepts of family and faith, how they are founded on the basis of unconditional love • Analyze how the support and acceptance of our LGBT family members come up against the parameters of faith within Latina/o communities. • Discuss the importance of using scripture and spirituality to address ideas of faith and integrity instead of exclusion and oppression.
<p><u>Session 4:</u> Social Discrimination and Being an Ally</p> <p>Learning Objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To increase participants’ understanding of their attitudes towards LGBT people and how that impacts the support that they can provide to this population. • To increase participant’s knowledge (awareness) of the scope of LGBT discrimination in schools and the workplace. • To increase participant’s empathy with LGBT people’s experience of discrimination. • To increase participant’s self-efficacy to engage in ally behavior.

The Promotoras and Program Coordinator

Five *Promotoras* taught the LGBT Acceptance workshop series and one program coordinator oversaw its implementation. All six of the women identify as immigrant Latina mothers. Some were *Promotoras* in Mexico and immediately wanted to reconnect with this

community of women in the United States. All the *Promotoras* in this study taught previous workshops for Planned Parenthood before deciding to work on the LGBT Acceptance Project.

Parent Participants

Some parents who attended the LGBT Acceptance Project workshop series heard about the program through word of mouth, often directly from *Promotoras* during the course of participating in other workshops offered by Planned Parenthood. Other parents were recruited from schools, churches and community organizations the *Promotoras* are affiliated with. A majority of parents who participated in the LGBT Acceptance workshop series live in South Los Angeles and identify as immigrants from either Mexico or Central America. In any given class there were 10 to 35 parent participants.

Research Sites

Although the workshop series is taught across Los Angeles, the workshops I observed took place in schools in predominantly Latina/o neighborhoods in South Los Angeles. Some happened in the mornings and others in the afternoon.

Design

I collected data through observations and interviews. I conducted the observations and gathered field notes at the research sites. I recorded audio of the sessions between *Promotoras* and parents for later analysis. Following the observations, I recorded my general thoughts on the particular workshop session. My field notes, audio-recorded data and my later reflections on the sessions provided multiple methods for analyzing both the process and content of workshops. In total, I collected data for seven workshop series, or 28 discrete sessions, with at least one series observed from each the five *Promotoras*.

I also conducted semi-structured interviews with each of the *Promotoras*. As Schensul et. al. (1999) note, semi-structured interviews use a predetermined interview protocol to address salient individual topics. Specifically, I used in-depth phenomenological interviewing techniques to uncover the lived experiences of the *Promotoras*. Patton (2002) argues phenomenological approaches to interviews allow the researcher to ascertain "how people experience some phenomenon-how they perceive it, describe it, feel about it, judge it, remember it, make sense of it, and talk about it with others" (p. 104). I conducted three 60-minute interviews with each *Promotora* and two 90-minute interviews with the Program Coordinator at different points in the study. The rationale in conducting three interviews is to allow for different accounts and to capture any changes in how the *Promotora*'s understand their experiences as teachers of the LGBT Acceptance Project and allies to the queer community over the course of their work. Thus, multiple interviews provided a method to document potential growth and reflection on their encounters in the workshop sessions.

Procedure for Observations

The purpose of this study was to understand the pedagogical and discursive practices of the *Promotoras* and parents while embarking discussions of gender, race and sexuality. More specifically, I was interested in capturing and making sense of exchanges between *Promotoras* and parents as they came to new shared meanings and understandings about the lives of queer Latina/o's. Building on Kumashiro's (2000) research on how educators can participate and teach about anti-oppressive education, I was interested in identifying discussions and activities that facilitated different types of awareness and understanding about oppression and marginalization. Kumashiro's (2000) work offers four primary approaches educators use to teach about multiple forms of oppression: education **for** the Other, education **about** the Other, education that is

critical of privileging and othering, and education that changes students and society. Kumashiro (2000) argues these approaches to anti-oppressive education lead to new levels of understanding about oppression and difference that individuals can then build upon.

Utilizing Kumashiro's four approaches to teaching and learning about oppression, I documented four different types of exchanges within the workshop series which may lead to a new understanding about power and oppression that is specific to Latina/o communities and Latino queer identities:

- 1) Discussions about what it means to be queer and types of oppression associated with a queer identity;
- 2) Comparisons participants make from their own life experiences as Latina/o immigrants to discuss similarities in oppression;
- 3) Discussions of the intersectionality of oppression;
- 4) Self-identification of ways to serve as allies and advocates for social change.

The intention of capturing these four types of exchanges was to identify how parents and *Promotoras* grappled with an understanding of oppression in the lives of queer Latina/os mediated by the parents' backgrounds, language and experiences. The *Promotoras* work expands the scope of Kumashiro's (2000) model to include what it can mean for Latina/o immigrant parents to engage in anti-oppressive education where conversations about oppression and marginalization are mediated by participants' own language, immigration status, gender and race.

For example, in the first session of the series, *Promotoras* introduce vocabulary and labels associated with different queer identities. Terms like "gay", "bisexual" and "transgendered" are defined. The goal of the activity is two-fold. At one level the *Promotora*

want parents to understand the meanings of these terminologies, but she also wants them to recognize the different types of oppression. A shared understanding of these identities and types of associated oppression develops over the course of multiple discussions and activities. During this process the *Promotoras* are inundated with parent perspectives of what it means to be queer. Parents share how they came to understand queer terminologies. Terms like, “*de ambiente*”, “*marimacha*”, “*lesbica*” and “*transvesti*” are described and discussed. The *Promotora* and parents then engage with these terms and have conversations about them; for instance, one exchange discussed how these terms have different meanings and types of behaviors associated with them in various regions of Mexico.

In summary, I used methods consistent with developing a heuristic case study to examine the process by which parents and *Promotoras* arrive at a shared language and understanding of what it means to be queer as mediated by their backgrounds, experiences and language use. Within the data collection process, I focused on how the *Promotoras* applied their training and perspectives to make sense of parents’ experiences. Table 2 elaborates on the four types of engagements I specifically looked for.

Table 2: How I Am Identifying Parental Engagement about Latina/o Queer Issues

What I am looking for	Examples from Parent Comments	Measure	Significance
Parental engagement with queer concepts and how they make sense of these identities.	<i>“en mi pueblo, nosotros llamamos mujerers lesbianas, marimachas. Son mujeres que se visten como hombres” / “in my town, we call lesbian women, marimachas. They are women who dress like men”</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Use of queer concepts in English 2. Use of queer concepts in Spanish 3. Providing English example of queer 4. Providing Spanish example of queer 	Examples of nuanced understanding of what it means to be queer.
Parents discussing similarities in oppression.	<i>“Yo se que es lo sentir desriminacion cuando uno es joven. Yo no podia mirar cuando era nina, y gente en las escuelas pueden ser muy cruel” / “I know what it feels like to be discriminated against as a child. I could not see when I was young, people in schools can be so cruel”</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Parent shares experience with similar form of oppression 2. Parent provides example of a similar oppression. 3. Parent affirms another’s experience. 4. Parent disagrees with example of similar oppression 	Demonstrates how Latina/o parents make sense of their oppression(s) & equate them to homophobia
How parents engage and make sense of the intersections of oppression	<i>“por un lado, es discriminada por vestirse como hombre, por otro por ser lesbiana, y por otro por ser Latina” / “On one end she is discriminated against for dressing like a man, another for being a lesbian and another for being Latina”</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Parent connects two forms of oppression. 2. Parent uses personal example of intersecting oppression 3. Parent agrees with example of intersecting oppression 4. Parent disagrees with example of intersecting oppressions 	Parents are able to understand that discrimination can manifest in many ways for one person.
Parents as allies and advocates for social change.	<i>“no esta bien, que estos nino’s no se sientan bien en sus escuelas. Como padres tenemos que hablar con otros padres y maestros para cambiar las cosas” / “It’s no right, that these kids do not feel right in their schools. As parents we need to talk with other parents and teachers to change things around”</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Examples of talking to teachers. 2. Examples of talking to family. 3. Examples of talking to communit. 4. Self-identifying as ally. 	Parents are able to identify ways that they can be supportive of queer youth.

To review, in my analysis of workshop discussions I took an in-depth look into how parents and *Promotoras* made sense of ideas of gender, race and sexuality by applying four types of consciousness raising outlined above. The first objective was the introduction of a new concept related to sexual orientation and subsequent discussion for parents to better understand this aspect of the lives of queer youth. The second objective was the introduction of an analogous concept in order to draw a comparison but also make sense of the similarities in experiences. Third was the process for parents to understand how being both queer and Latina/o can lead to different and possibly harsher types of discrimination and oppression and, lastly, parent identification of ways they can serve as allies and advocates for queer people and Latina/o queer youth specifically.

I did not expect to find evidence of all four types of exchanges, nor did I anticipate finding these examples presented in a chronological fashion; in fact, I hypothesized these would be contested conversations. In some workshops, parents brought different perspectives to the subject matter at hand that were not covered, discussed or expected. I also documented evidence of shifting language use as parents gained proficiency over the month-long workshop. Indeed, the impromptu departures from the curriculum provided the greatest revelations during this case study, providing critical examples of how parents implicitly and explicitly discussed and came to understand the lives of queer Latina/os and the intersecting nature of their identities. I found nuances in the language use of Latina/o parents as they made sense of people's multiple and intersecting forms of oppression which suggest new ways to conceptualize the development of queer ally practices.

Procedure for Interviews

The purpose of the interviews was to gain a more thorough understanding of what informed the *Promotoras*' pedagogical practice and how their work, in turn, shaped their identities as allies and advocates for queer issues. The interview questions probed their motivations and teaching objectives, providing a space for the *Promotoras* to reflect on their practices and self-identities. I conducted three interviews with each *Promotora*. The first interview at the beginning of the study collected their life histories. I gained a sense of who the *Promotoras* were—even before they started working for Planned Parenthood. In the second interview I asked about their pedagogical approaches to teaching and their intentions within the LGBT workshop series. This interview took place during or at the conclusion of one of the month-long series they led; the proximity to the sessions provided an opportunity for the *Promotora* and I to reference significant moments associated with specific activities which occurred in the workshop space.

The final interview queried how the *Promotoras* integrated their role as advocates on queer issues with their identities as Latina immigrants. The audio-recorded interviews happened over the first six months of 2014. First interviews took place in January and February; second-stage interviews between February and May. I conducted final interviews in June. I wrote field notes after each interview with a *Promotora*, describing my initial reactions and reflecting on the information obtained. Once all the interviews were complete, they were transcribed from Spanish and passages used in the dissertation were translated into English.

Data Analysis

Interviews

To analyze interview data, I drew from techniques of portraiture (Lightfoot & Hoffman-Davis, 1997) and narrative (Reissman, 2001) to bring to life the *Promotora*'s experiences. An approach grounded in using the *Promotoras* own words can reveal how they construct their narratives and connect their work to how they think about and talk about the queer community. Following the advice of Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis (1997), I read each interview transcript four times in search of emergent generative themes. I identified the themes by identifying patterns of convergence and divergence across all interview responses.

I first read the interview transcripts through the lens of highlighting each *Promotora*'s background and noted additional questions and issues which emerged. Afterwards, I wrote an initial impressionistic record (Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997) for each *Promotora*. Next, I cross-referenced notes from my observation data to develop an analytical record which outlined broader themes such as identity development and understanding of the queer experience across the interviewees. Then I created a preliminary analytical category scheme that included both the overarching themes derived from previous reading of the transcripts as well as new guiding questions and ideas.

After completing the impressionistic record, the analytical record and preliminary analytical category scheme I reviewed the transcripts a second time, looking to see how well these initial categories would hold up, attending closely to the previous highlighted areas for pattern verification. Patterns were determined by their frequency within and across the interviews. From here, I began open coding, which allowed me to organize ideas into themes

such as “family,” “early awareness,” “stigma,” “community” and “ally identity.” I used Nvivo software to organize my data thematically as I engaged in deeper analysis.

Before I started the third reading of the transcripts, I began the process of constructing preliminary portraits of each *Promotora*. Using early themes, these preliminary portraits provided a preliminary understanding of how the *Promotoras* understood their role in shaping PPLA’s LGBT Acceptance Project. At this juncture in my analysis, I chose to narrow my focus to the narratives of three *Promotoras*. These three *Promotoras* offered divergent views on their roles as *Promotoras* and their self-identification as advocates and allies to the queer community.

In the final stage of analysis, I reread the transcripts, impressionist records, observation data and preliminary portraits in search for themes within each *Promotora*’s interviews. In this final analysis, I was interested in teasing out more thoroughly how the *Promotoras* made sense of the queer community and how they understood their approach, ally identity and advocacy work. At this point, I revised initial codes and grouped them into emergent themes.

Observations

I started the data analysis process by listening to the audio recordings of each workshop series and concurrently reviewing my field notes. After listening to each workshop session I wrote an impressionistic memo. After reviewing all four sessions in a workshop series, I compiled an extended memo with preliminary themes. I repeated this process for five of the seven workshop series that I observed, one from each of the *Promotoras*’ workshops I observed. I chose to not analyze observation data for the two repeated workshop series.⁶

⁶ My data collection began with an observation of *Promotora* Flor. However, data collected from this workshop series was not reliable for several reasons. First, participation was inconsistent because parents came late or left early from the session. In addition, two of the four workshop sessions were cancelled. Low parent turnout led to one cancellation, and a fire drill disrupted another workshop session already underway. The second workshop series omitted was with *Promotora* Alejandra Guzman. I had scheduled observations of another workshop series running

Once I listened to the audio of my observation data, my analysis narrowed to one of the five workshop series as an opportunity for an in-depth examination of the educational process the LGBT Acceptance Project advances, specifically how a *Promotora* engages parents in conversations and how the parents, in turn, discuss and make sense of the queer experience. Focusing on one workshop series allowed me to look more closely at conversational nuances in the conversations of parents and the *Promotora*.

I chose to observe and analyze transcripts from Maria Felix's workshop series for several reasons. First, out of the entire workshop series I observed, she was the only *Promotora* who did not know the community or the parents she was working with. Unlike the other *Promotoras* who knew the parents and/or community who participated in their LGBT Acceptance Project workshops, Maria Felix entered the space with no connection to the community or the parents. The bonds and connections the *Promotoras* have with the community are beneficial, facilitating how each *Promotora* engages parents in the workshop space. However, one of PPLA's goals for the LGBT Acceptance Project is to expand their work to new spaces and communities of parents.⁷ Thus, Maria Felix's workshop proved an important example of how a *Promotora* attempted to build a space for dialogue and a sense of community with parents she did not know.

Like Maria Felix, the parents did not know each other prior to the workshop; in most workshops I observed, parents had some number of established relationships with other participants because of their attendance of other Planned Parenthood workshops. Parents in Maria Felix's workshop had school-age children between years of ten and eighteen. This was one of the few workshops offered by the school where the workshop series was taught that was

contemporaneously and, as a result, I would not have been able to compare the audio recordings with observation data.

⁷ Elsewhere in the dissertation I expand on this point.

open to both groups of parents. The absence of preexisting relationships among participants meant I would have a better baseline from which I could measure the development of a common identity/group affiliation among them. Maria Felix also had the largest group of parents, averaging 20 or more attendees per session. The greater number of parent voices meant the inclusion of a wide range of perspectives. I believe this series could serve as a model workshop series for future projects—particularly if the *Promotoras* are interested in branching the curriculum to communities they are not familiar with.

After selecting Maria Felix’s workshop series, I listened to my observation data again to look for patterns and themes originally described in my impressionistic memo. Next, I transcribed the recordings and translated key passages which supported the themes identified into English. At this time, I started to develop different codes as different themes emerged within the data. Using Nvivo, I coded and time-stamped my transcribed data to allow for both thematic and chronological analysis. I then grouped the data codes into themes and subthemes.

After I identified my prominent themes, I went back to the audio-recorded data and analyzed it again, this time breaking the workshop sessions into five-minute intervals and translating and transcribing moments in the workshop series consistent with the themes. The new and pre-coded passages were imported into Nvivo, (re)coded and time-stamped. The final analysis of the data focused on finding patterns across the five-minute intervals as the workshop series progressed. The transcript conventions demonstrated in the selected passages in the dissertation were adapted from Gutierrez (2008).

Colon denotes sound stretch (“U::mm”)

Bold denotes emphatic stress (“**You see**”)

Equal signs indicate latched speech or ideas

Example: Promotora: We are talking about LGBT youth=
Parent: =youth

Queer of Color Critique

The theoretical perspective that informed my collection and interpretation of data and that framed the analysis of the interviews was a queer of color critique. A queer of color perspective offers a critique of the conversations and observations specific to issues of gender, immigration, race and sexuality.

This approach grows out of intersectional analyses of identity and power found in Black feminist scholarship (Collins, 1990; Hammonds, 1997; Higginbotham, 1992), which explores changes in systems of power and privilege. A queer of color critique acknowledges how sexuality, gender and other forms of difference variably intersect across social and historical contexts to produce shifting relationships between queers of color and the communities with which they identify. The result has been a rich body of work that destabilizes the heteronormativity and gender binary of racial discourse, and contributes to challenging the centrality of whiteness and class privilege in much of queer discourse. A critical theoretical approach is more suited to incorporating the specificities and complexities of how queer people of color embody their identities, navigate their social worlds, and define their own sense of freedom in the face of multiple oppressions.

A queer of color critique has been taken up across multiple academic disciplines to explore the lives of individuals and communities across racial, regional, gender, sexual, and socioeconomic positionalities (Ferguson, 2004; Gopinath, 2005; Hames-Garcia & Martinez, 2011; Hong & Ferguson, 2011; Johnson & Henderson, 2005; Manalansan, 2003; Munoz, 1999; Rodriguez, 2003; Somerville, 2000; Stoler, 1995), with an emergent body of scholarship analyzing the educational experiences of queers of color (Blackburn, 2005; Brockenbrough, 2011; Cruz, 2001, 2011; Garcia, 2009; Grady, Marquez & McLaren, 2012; Kumashiro, 2001;

McCready, 2001, 2004, 2010; Quinn, 2007; Valadez & Elsbree, 2005). All this work attests not only to the diversity of queer of color experiences, but also to the need for nuanced modes of analysis to understand the intersectionalities that constitute queer of color communities. Thus, a queer of color critique presents a robust blueprint for understanding the creation of alternative meanings and understandings of power. A queer of color critique looks to the differences between and within racialized, gendered and sexualized collectivities and what statuses or positions within these articulations of difference are valued and protected (Hong & Ferguson 2011).

I utilized a queer of color critique in my analysis of the interviews with the *Promotoras* as they describe their identities as Latina immigrants and advocates for queer issues and how this identity informs their everyday lives. This analysis showcased the interrelated nature of issues pertaining to race, gender, sexuality, class, immigrant status and religion. It was my goal to make sense of how they understood and discussed the intersections of oppression for themselves and how this informed their teaching.

As previously mentioned, few studies document the advocacy work of heterosexual Latina/o communities on queer issues or how someone who is a person of color comes to recognize the oppression of queer people. I argue the *Promotoras* are embarking on important work that operationalizes a queer of color critique or praxis. In other words, their pedagogical approach to teaching and learning functions within the intersections of race, gender and sexuality, directly informed by their own lived experiences with racism, sexism and racist nativism (Huber, 2011). This becomes very important to how I understand their identity, because it positions them against dominant research on queer ally identity development which only focuses on the experiences of white and middle-class individuals.

CHAPTER 4:

THE MAKINGS OF A LATINA QUEER ALLY IDENTITY

From the moment I first met the Planned Parenthood *Promotoras*, I knew there was something that united them. There was an unexplainable quality they shared that connected them, an embodiment of what it means to not only be a community health educator, but a *Promotora* for Planned Parenthood. Before I explore how these educators came to identify as allies to queer communities, it is important to first understand their personal journeys to becoming Planned Parenthood *Promotoras*—and how this informs their teaching of the LGBT Acceptance Project curriculum.

In this chapter, I begin with introductory portraits of the five *Promotoras* (Maria Felix, Alejandra Guzman, Yuri, Flor and Rocio Durcal) and the program coordinator (Judith) who were part of this study⁸. These portraits provide a sense of who they are, their motivation for doing this work as well as painting a humanizing picture of each of them. I also present extended narratives of three *Promotoras* whose responses directly inform question two of the dissertation:

2) How do the *Promotoras* understand their ally identity and how does this inform their teaching and daily lives as heterosexual Latina allies engaged in queer activism?

Promotora Portraits

Judith

I first met Judith at the LGBTQ Forum in Boyle Heights. After hearing Judith talk about the LGBT Acceptance Project and the work she and the *Promotoras* hoped to accomplish, I knew I wanted to be a part of it. I was struck by Judith's dedication to queer issues and sexual

⁸ The *Promotoras* chose their pseudonyms (English: pseudonyms) for this study, some of which happen to be of famous Mexican actors and singers.

and reproductive health education, as well as her knowledge of community development work. Judith is a warm and motivated person; she is critical, self-reflective and always looking at how to improve upon the work she is doing. Judith serves in several capacities at Planned Parenthood in addition to being the program coordinator of the LGBT Acceptance Project; her other educational initiatives also involve Latina/o families and youth.

Judith has worked for Planned Parenthood for the last ten years. Prior to that, she worked with other sexual and reproductive health nonprofit organizations in Los Angeles. She has over twenty years of experience working in sex education. Her first experiences as a sex educator started as a *Promotora* in Mexico City in the 1990s with a nongovernment organization (NGO) that raised awareness of the growing HIV/AIDS epidemic. After graduating from the *Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico* (UNAM), Judith knew she wanted to dedicate her life to sexual and reproductive health education. After years of working for different NGOs in Mexico, she moved to California to work for various Los Angeles organizations as a *Promotora*. She eventually went back to school and earned a Master's in Latin American Studies at UCLA. One of Judith's goals when coming to the United States was to work for Planned Parenthood. She believes the organization was the best place to work because of its progressive politics and direct work in underserved and under-resourced communities.

Judith spoke of the LGBT Acceptance Project with pride. When I asked Judith why she decided to work on this project, she shared her early experiences with an HIV/AIDS NGO in Mexico led by gay men. Judith has a gay brother. His disclosure of his sexual orientation and subsequent struggles in Oaxaca impacted her and motivated her to become involved.

Judith has built strong relationships between the LGBT Acceptance Project and various LGBT organizations in Los Angeles. As a result, the *Promotoras* consistently receive education

on new concepts and workshop ideas from different queer organizations. The curriculum's evolution since its inception is in large part due to her commitment to making sure the *Promotoras* are receiving the latest training and education on community engagement and advocacy work on queer issues from some of the leaders in the LGBT advocacy field.

Maria Felix

Maria Felix was the second of the *Promotoras* whose classes I observed. When I met Maria Felix, there was a strong connection between us—we got along immediately. Maria Felix is a consummate professional who works hard, and enjoys new challenges. All interviews with Maria Felix took place in her home; she lives in a small guest cottage with a large yard where she grows different fruits and vegetables. It is a simple home and reminded me of the homes of church friends we would visit when I was younger. Her home is adorned with trinkets given to her over the years by parents who attended her workshops. As we sat down at her dining table I could hear passing cars outside blaring *rancheras y corridos*, types of regional Mexican music. Maria Felix once said, “*Ojala que te doy lo que necesitas Rigo*”⁹ We laughed, and I said, “*Por su puesto que si*”¹⁰

Maria Felix grew up in a working-class *pueblo* just outside of Mexico City; she is the only daughter of five children. She has lived in the United States for the last 22 years, considers this her home, and never intends to move back. Maria Felix lives with her two teenage sons in a Latina/o neighborhood of South Los Angeles. She does not have a relationship with the children's father. Maria Felix lives for her children and wants both of them to grow up as two individuals with strong heads on their shoulders.

⁹ Translated to English: “I hope that I give you what you need, Rigo”

¹⁰ Translated to English: “But of course you will”

This mother of two has worked as a *Promotora* for Planned Parenthood for the last thirteen years. When she first joined PPLA, she described her involvement with HeadStart, a Los Angeles program for young children (ages 4-5) of working-class families. The HeadStart program was run by a group of *Promotoras* who also worked for Planned Parenthood. When she joined the HeadStart program, she was going through a divorce. She talks about this time in her life as the most tragic; she was depressed and unsure how to support her children and lift herself up. One of the *Promotoras* noticed her going through a hard time and offered some resources and support. She began volunteering with the HeadStart program and eventually became a HeadStart *Promotora*, teaching new parents entering the program. After a year, the HeadStart program was dissolved at her children's school. The *Promotoras* encouraged her to apply to PPLA program.

Currently, Maria Felix is not only a Planned Parenthood *Promotora*, but she is also *Promotora* for two other organizations in Los Angeles. However, when I asked which of the three agencies she considered her priority, she responded very adamantly it was Planned Parenthood, “[L]as otras organizaciones no tienen tanto entrenamiento como nosotras, siempre estamos aprendiendo algo nuevo.”¹¹ When I asked her why she decided to get involved with the LGBT Acceptance Project, she saw it as an opportunity to learn something new and gain more experience. Like many of the other *Promotoras* who teach the LGBT Acceptance Project, Maria Felix does not have a direct connection to queer communities. Her interest in taking part in these classes comes from a place of wanting to learn and grow as a *Promotora* and become a more effective agent of change in her community.

¹¹ Translated to English: “The other organizations don't have as much training as we do, we are always learning something new”

Alejandra Guzman

I met Alejandra Guzman at the first *Promotora* meeting I attended. When Alejandra enters a room, you notice her presence. She is strong, witty, passionate, sassy, hilarious and dedicated to her work. Alejandra also wanted to make sure I mentioned she is “*muy sexy y no me importa lo que piense le gente!*”¹² When talking to Alejandra about where we could meet to have our first interview, she immediately said in a loud voice, “*Tu vas a venir a mi casa, quiero que conozcas quien soy yo!*”¹³ Alejandra lives in Hollywood, and when she gave me directions to her home, I realized she lived near many of the places I frequented when I was younger, including bars and clubs popular with Latino gay immigrants. At the end of our first interview, I asked Alejandra if she knew about Tempo, a nightclub popular with Latino gay immigrants that features *norteno*¹⁴ music. She said yes, and this led to a conversation about perceived gender norms, stereotypes and references to current Mexican pop music and *telenovelas*¹⁵. Out of all the *Promotoras*, Alejandra was the most candid in our interviews.

Alejandra grew up in Mexico City as the oldest of six siblings. She talked about how her mother subscribed to very traditional gender roles as she was growing up. As the oldest and a woman, she was responsible for taking care of her younger siblings, particularly her three brothers. It was not until her parents separated that her life shifted. She then lived with her father and credits him for instilling in her the beliefs that men and women are equal and that women can do whatever they want in life. After attending a vocational college, Alejandra joined the

¹² Translated to English: “I’m sexy and do not care what people think about me”

¹³ Translated to English: “You are going to come to my house, I want you to know who I am”

¹⁴ *nortenas* are a regional genre of music in Mexico, that also has a specific subculture connected to it. Its sound closely resembles country or folks music. The typical attire worn by men in this subculture is tight blue jeans, a studded belt, cowboy boots and hat. This genre of music is also considered to be very masculine and *machista*.

¹⁵ Translated to English: Spanish Soap Operas

police force and considered that one of the best times in her life. However, a divorce from her husband led her to immigrate to the United States where most of her siblings were living.

Alejandra is a single mother, supporting her three daughters as well as her two grandchildren.

Alejandra has been a *Promotora* for Planned Parenthood for the last 12 years. She takes great pride in being a *Promotora* especially because of the impact the group has made in her personal life. Her journey to become a *Promotora* mirrors many others who work for Planned Parenthood. She attended *Promotora* classes as a student at first, became involved as a volunteer and eventually applied to become a *Promotora*. Alejandra credited much of her success in life to Planned Parenthood, first as a someone who accessed the different resources and support they offered, and now as a *Promotora* working for the organization to support other women and mothers just like her.

When Alejandra found out that Planned Parenthood would be starting a new initiative focused on queer issues, she was determined to be one of the *Promotoras* of the new program. When I asked Alejandra where this strong desire to work on this new project came from, she explained it was because of her past relationship with another woman. She described the relationship as beautiful and loving, cut short due to family members' homophobic attitudes towards their relationship. Both families physically assaulted Alejandra and her partner. The constant abuse they endured took a toll, and the relationship eventually ended. In describing her experience, Alejandra became very emotional. As a result of that relationship and the prejudice she experienced, she wanted to educate other young parents. She does not want other children to go through the same difficult times she faced.

Yuri

Before I started collecting my observation of the *Promotoras*, Judith suggested I join Yuri, who was starting a new series, so that I could get a sense of what the full four-part workshop series looked like. Judith noted that Yuri “ran a tight ship,” and when I attended her first class, I realized Yuri was indeed focused and driven, moving from activity to activity to make sure parents understood the concepts and ideas she presented. Yuri’s approach to teaching reflects her years of experience as a clinical nurse and her experience teaching on health issues.

Yuri grew up in Guadalajara, Mexico and is one of six siblings. One of the reasons Yuri decided to immigrate to the United States was to further her career as a health professional. After receiving her nursing degree, Yuri moved to Mexicali¹⁶ and started working as part of a nursing exchange program between Mexicali and San Diego. In this program, nurses from Mexicali would travel to San Diego and work with different communities, while the San Diego nurses would do the same in Mexicali. Yuri, inspired by this work, decided to continue her education and felt she could strengthen her skills by moving to the United States.

During this time, Yuri also fell in love with a fellow nurse, married and had a child. While Yuri is no longer with her child’s father, she still has a good relationship with him and they co-parent their son as much as possible. As a single mother, Yuri has limited access to childcare, so on many occasions her son (who is now ten years old) comes with her to the workshop sessions she teaches in the evenings. Yuri loves that her son attends these sessions with her. She says he likes coming, and it brings her an immense joy to know he is growing up with a strong understanding of the complexities of gender identity and expression.

Yuri considers the LGBT Acceptance Project curriculum her favorite workshop series to teach. In her twelve years as a *Promotora* for Planned Parenthood, no other curriculum has

¹⁶ Mexicali is a border city about 2 hours southeast of the US-Mexican border.

brought her so much satisfaction and challenged her views and opinions on issues of gender and sexuality. Yuri's only connection to queer communities prior to this point was her ex-husband's best friend who is gay. It was by getting to know him that her attitudes and understanding of queer communities shifted. Once she started teaching for the LGBT Acceptance Project, she further expanded her beliefs to a richer understanding of the complexities of queer experiences. Yuri's curiosity and inquisitiveness made her stand out from the other *Promotoras* who teach the curriculum. She consistently pushed herself to find new ways to communicate the material to her parents in a way that resonated. Yuri made the most of each two-hour session.

Rocio Durcal

Although Rocio has been a *Promotora* for Planned Parenthood of over twenty years, she still has the energy of a teenager. Rocio is one of the most well-regarded *Promotoras* at Planned Parenthood; her years of experience have allowed her to witness many of the high and lows of the program and as a result, much of the institutional memory resides with her. While Rocio may have the energy of someone forty years younger, she embodies the essence of a strong, incredibly passionate and loving, elderly matriarch. Rocio also does not take herself too seriously; she credits her "hippie past" and dedication to God for her longevity and success as a *Promotora*. When Rocio entered the school, she was received with hugs and kisses everywhere she went. The parents and school administrators she has built relationships with over the decades in east and northeast Los Angeles lovingly refer to her as *maestra*, or teacher, as they greet her walking down hallways or when they ask a question during a workshop session. Rocio was aware and appreciative of the respect and admiration people showed her, but she was quick to tell me she does not let it go to her head. She believes it is just part of the larger plan that God has put in front of her.

Rocio is from Mexicali, Baja California a desert city two hours east of Tijuana, south of the US-Mexican border. She grew up in the heart of the city and spoke of her time in Mexicali as a beautiful upbringing. She moved to the United States at the age of thirty and has lived here for over thirty years. Rocio is a mother of four children and has three grandchildren. She is married and has been with her husband for over twenty years. Rocio credited the support and love she receives from her husband and adult children as one of the reasons she has been a *Promotora* for so long.

Before joining Planned Parenthood, Rocio had been active in her children's school since they started attending. She was part of the parent leadership team at their schools and involved in community outreach. Her first contact with Planned Parenthood was at a Neighborhood Watch event where Planned Parenthood was recruiting parents to come to a *Promotora* information session. Rocio signed up, attended the workshop, and at that moment realized it was where she needed to be. Rocio spoke of her work with Planned Parenthood as the work God intended her to do. Her religion and faith are at the core of who Rocio is and this manifests itself in how she performs her work as a *Promotora*.

Before her work in the LGBT Acceptance Project, Rocio did not have a connection to queer communities. As the LGBT Acceptance Project was forming, she helped organize a PFLAG chapter in Bell, California; but other than working and supporting parents with queer children, she had no connection to queer communities. Rocio considered her LGBT work as one of the biggest blessings she has received in her professional life. She believes "there are no accidents in this world" and that she was "destined to work and educate others about queer communities."

Flor

Flor was the first *Promotora* I interviewed for this project. Our first interview took place in a small Chinese take-out restaurant a couple of blocks from where she had just taught a class in south east Los Angeles. She walked into the restaurant carrying scrolls of posters and dragging a crate of materials. I stood up and offered to help her, but she insisted I sit down as she placed her materials onto the table. Prior to the interview, I had only met Flor briefly. Both of us were nervous for our interview, as we both did not know what to expect.

Of the five *Promotoras* who teach the LGBT Acceptance Project, Flor has the least amount of experience teaching and working in the community—slightly less than seven years—and is very aware that she is still developing as a *Promotora*. Flor is quiet and pensive but once in a while will throw out a zinger that will make everyone laugh or chuckle at our meetings. One of Flor's strengths was her ability to adapt to challenging situations and new environments that push her to grow as a person and *Promotora*.

Flor grew up in a *pueblo* in Durango, which is a state in the northwest part of Mexico. She is the second youngest of 10 siblings and she described her childhood as difficult, but not one that she would have wished to change in any way. For several years, Flor went back and forth between the United States and Mexico visiting family and taking care of family members. Eventually Flor married and stayed in Los Angeles to form her own family. Her two teen daughters and her husband are her biggest support system. They encourage her to “shoot for the stars” and to do what she thinks is best for her. Like Rocio, Flor has the complete support of her family and credited them for her growth as a *Promotora*.

Flor became a *Promotora* on a whim; before becoming a *Promotora* she did not have much experience working in the community. Other than being involved in her children's school

parent association, she did not have much experience teaching. Yet someone encouraged her to apply at Planned Parenthood and when she was accepted, she was surprised but grateful, “*Pues alamejor miraron algo en mi?*”¹⁷ She applied to be a *Promotora* for the LGBT Acceptance Project as a challenge. Flor had no personal connections to queer communities, with the exception of a distant uncle, but saw this work as important way to build a new skill set in an area that she knew nothing about.

Over the course of my observations of the *Promotoras* I connected with Flor because of the many ups and downs we both went through during the first workshop series of hers I observed, described elsewhere in the dissertation. Before the first workshop session started, I also found out Flor rode the bus two hours to to the workshop location for a session that began at nine in the morning. This is one example of the type of dedication she and the other *Promotoras* have to educating the community. I offered to drive her home after the sessions, and this provided us another space to get to know each other. While Flor may not have been the most animated or commanding of the five *Promotoras* who teach the LGBT Acceptance Project, she was able to effectively get the message across and gain parent support.

Promotora Embodiment

The *Promotoras* had varied life experiences prior to joining to Planned Parenthood; they also had different reasons for wanting to educate community members on issues of sexual and reproductive health and eventually becoming part of the LGBT Acceptance Project. What I hope comes across in the above portraits is the depth of their care and their genial nature. They also have a maternal compassion and humility about them. I often expressed to them how amazing their ability to reach parents and make an impact in how they understand the LGBT experience

¹⁷ Translated to English: Perhaps they saw something in me?

was. Always self-effacing, they would just chuckle and reiterate they were only as good as their *comadres*¹⁸. This idea of *comadres* or *comadrisimo* (Scholz, 2015) is an important aspect and part of their embodiment as community activist working on women's issues.

The *Promotoras* who are part of the LGBT Acceptance Project already had years of experience going into Latina/o communities to engage with what many consider difficult and controversial topics. They were accustomed to being *señaladas* (marked) as “radical” or “extremist” in their communities because of their pro-choice position. In studying how the *Promotoras* understood their similar and different identities and roles as allies to queer communities, I first endeavored to understand how they saw their identities as Planned Parenthood *Promotoras*. In short, my interpretation of our conversations was/is mediated by their experiences as *Promotoras* who are already *señaladas*, or marked, as having progressive or liberal social justice views.

The *Promotoras* self-reflected on their identities and teaching practices with ease. For example, they were aware of both community needs as well as effective ways to convey information in a manner that is relevant and impactful. This consciously purposeful approach to their message was something all the *Promotoras* discussed with me. For instance, when I asked Maria Felix why she thought their approach resonated with the parents they taught, she stated:

We have a certain way about us, as in, a way to make the information get to the people on whatever it is, it's just a question of training us on the topic on what they want us to teach, have us learn the information and we manage it well.¹⁹

¹⁸ *Comadre* means godmother, however *comadre* is also commonly used for a friend who you see as family. But as Scholz explains it can also be used as a collective feminist perspective.

¹⁹ “nosotras tenemos como una manera, o sea una forma de poder hacer llegar la información a la gente y cualquier cosa, nada más es cuestión de enterarnos del tema de lo que quieran que enseñemos, que nos aprendamos la información y lo manejamos muy bien”

Maria Felix, like all the *Promotoras*, had an understanding of the role she played in the community and her ability to convey messages and information that resonated.

When speaking to Judith in one of our interviews, I mentioned to her I felt the *Promotoras* were able to build deep connections with women in their workshops, and I asked Judith her perspective:

I think open-mindedness is very important to being a *Promotora*. Because when you see women who have passion for their work, that are outspoken, they have leadership skills, they know about the community—that makes a wonderful *Promotora*. If you have passion for changing your community— that is a *Promotora* there. Someone who is not shy, who is self-assured—wonderful. But, if you are not open-minded about the topics we address at Planned Parenthood. You won't make it, I mean, I don't think you will be an effective *Promotora* or that you might even survive the training, because you might say, that this is not what you like or that it does not go along with their values. So if you are very conservative, in terms of values....maybe I shouldn't say that...but, but it won't work. Because sexual reproductive health is a very delicate issue and you need to respect, all sorts of you know...um...all sorts of diversity and respect it and honor it and that is what we are all about in Planned Parenthood. So that is a key element. So when I see a woman that is very open-minded, in our classes, deep in their opinions and that she is not judgmental, you know, and that she is very open. I say, well yes, this woman would be a great Planned Parenthood *Promotora*

The majority of the *Promotora* programs and curriculum focus on sexual and reproductive health education for women. In their curriculum they talked about safer sex

practices and taught women about exploring their bodies and sexuality. According to Judith, the goal of these sessions was to have women become comfortable talking about their bodies so they could feel confident in protecting themselves from sexually transmitted infections and unwanted pregnancy. In order to effectively engage women, the *Promotoras* had to build trust first. Thus, a *Promotora* had to be open-minded, self-aware and self-assured in order to lead the classes. One of the ways that the *Promotoras* were able to do this was by speaking from their collective experiences as Latina women; the life experiences of these *Promotoras* informed who they were and how they approached their work.

Since they were part of the LGBT Acceptance Project and identified as LGBT advocates, I was interested in how the *Promotoras* first understood and grappled with their connection to a pro-choice organization. In one of my interviews with Judith I asked her if she or the *Promotoras* experienced stigma or prejudice in the Latina/o communities because of the organization's pro-choice stance and classes on sexual and reproductive health. Judith let out a big sigh, looked at me and said, "We are from Planned Parenthood, Rigo, of course there is a stigma!" Judith indicated she struggles with it on a consistent basis and went on to share thoughts on her decade with Planned Parenthood and how she sees the *Promotoras* received by the Latina/o communities.

Every year we are accepted into the *Promotor* conference, and I mean they know what kinds of topics we talk about...sexuality pretty much. But I don't know of other people's perspective but I have had experiences in the San Fernando Valley or other events where...they...some hospitals that have a religious affiliation don't want us at the health fair for example, you know, or they don't want to invite us because of our pro-choice, our openly pro-choice position. So we are

Planned Parenthood and we encounter that, so that's, so that's why some *Promotor* programs consider us too progressive, too liberal...and that may be true. That's the nature of our *lucha, nuestra* struggle and that's fine, that's fine.....sometimes we are welcomed, sometimes we are not....sometimes we are accused of being baby killers and such at events—without having any idea of what we do and we don't need to be apologizing for the work that we do. You know, we provide a very important service and, yes, in some communities, the *Promotoras* are *señaladas*. *Les a sucedido a todas, son señaladas, acusadas de cosas que no*²⁰..etc. and we don't have to apologize for our services. That's the nature of our work

This notion of being *señaladas* or “marked” was something all of the *Promotoras* mentioned in our interviews. As a employees of a pro-choice organization, Planned Parenthood *Promotoras* are accustomed to attacks, assumptions and stereotypes people make of such individuals. However the *Promotoras* took this in stride, knowing the services and resources they provide to women and children in the community are effective, important and needed. When I asked the *Promotoras* if the stigmas associated with being a *Promotora* at Planned Parenthood had any negative affect on them, they quickly responded with a resounding “no.” While the *Promotoras* interviewed had varying degrees of awareness of the negative connotations associated with Planned Parenthood, they all recognized the work they do is needed in the community, and they took pride in their ability to empower other women to make choices about their lives. When I asked Rocio Durcal how she reacted to the stigma associated with being a *Promotora* for Planned Parenthood, she responded with:

²⁰ Translated to English: “...marked. It has happened to all of them. They are marked, acused of things that are not

If it is someone that I do not know, I get where they are coming from. If they are someone that does not know about the program, I also get where they are coming from. But, when someone knows me, my work speaks for itself and when someone has the opportunity to get to know Planned Parenthood, the organizations work speaks for itself. So instead of defending our work, I know there will always be two sides. Some will think it's fine and others will say this is not right. So, I just wait for someone to say something, I won't, I will only say something if things are not going well. Only then do I say something, that is when I ask for the opportunity for them to get to know my work, get to know the *Promotoras* and then they can talk.²¹

Rocio's response exemplified the approach *Promotoras* took to the types of attacks and stigmas associated with being a *Promotora* of Planned Parenthood. Instead of engaging with people in conversations that shed a negative light of the organization, they invited people to learn about Planned Parenthood and its services.

Over 50 women are *Promotoras* for Planned Parenthood, all of them with different histories and trajectories. Many of them are single mothers and at one point or another utilized the organization's resources. Many of the *Promotoras* at Planned Parenthood, according to Judith, came to work for Planned Parenthood because they wanted to give back to the community that helped and supported them in their times of need. In fact, in my interviews with the *Promotoras* some of them spoke of their love and commitment to Planned Parenthood

²¹ Si es alguien que no me conoce lo entiendo. Y si no conoce el programa también lo entiendo. Pero cuando alguien me conoce, mi trabajo ha hablado por mí y cuando alguien ha tenido la oportunidad de conocer a Planned Parenthood, la organización ha hablado por sí misma. Entonces más que defender, yo sé que siempre hay dos partes, alguien va a decir que sí y alguien dirá que no, entonces yo me pongo y espero a que alguien hable, no yo, solo si veo que algo no va muy bien entonces sí puedo intervenir un poco, ahí pido la oportunidad de que conozcan mi trabajo, conozcan los promotores y después hablamos

coming from a desire to not let other women experience the type of shame and humiliation they were made to feel for making difficult life choices.

The *Promotoras* were unapologetic in their support for a pro-choice organization. The *Promotoras* acknowledged many in the Latina/o communities saw them as radicals or extremists. The *Promotoras* knew they were *señaladas*, targeted and misunderstood because of the types of classes they bring into the community. However, they wholeheartedly believed the work they were doing made a difference in the community because they witnessed the change in the parents that took their workshops and have also seen a change within themselves and their families.

A Latina LGBT Ally Identity

Drawing from my interviews with the *Promotoras*, I share the narratives of three *Promotoras* (Yuri, Maria Felix and Alejandra Guzman) who explained how they came to do this work, how they understood their identities as allies to queer communities and how they put this new consciousness and/or awareness of queer issues into practice in their teaching and daily lives.

Yuri

Early Experiences

From an early age, Yuri was taught that everyone on this earth was a child of God, and in his eyes, were all equal. She credited her mother's strong religious values for teaching her people lived their lives in different ways but were all still the same and deserved respect. Yuri spoke of three pivotal moments that contributed to her early awareness and understanding of queer communities. Yuri's first experience with an queer person happened when she was ten or eleven years old, with one of her older sister's friends, Vero, who was a lesbian. Yuri recalls it was her first experience meeting an "out" lesbian woman. Vero would come over their house a lot when

she was growing up, and remembers her sister would tell their mother that Vero and her girlfriend were not safe in the *pueblo*, and their home was the only place they could be together and feel safe. At this time Yuri did not have the language to describe Vero's lesbian identity nor did she understand it was a romantic relationship; from the *pueblo's* responses to Vero, she did understand there was something about her that caused the *pueblo* to treat her as an outsider. Although in her home her mother accepted Vero and other LGBT people, Yuri did not learn about LGBT identities until she was an adult and in college. "Not even in my home did we talk about sexuality, I came to learn that at university, because not even in school, no, not even in school they taught us that, I came to learn that later on."²²

In one of our interviews, Yuri also reflected on a close male friend, Macias, from her childhood. When she moved to the United States, she reconnected with him and found out he was gay. Yuri recalled being very close to Macias. They would play dress up and act as if they were married. Yuri remembered he always wanted to be the bride and play the woman. Yuri reflected on those early experiences with Macias and recognized he was probably just figuring out his identity as a gay man. While she is no longer as close to Macias today, she continues to feel a strong connection to him and credits their early experiences in helping her makes sense of gay male identities. Macias' current reality as a gay Latino man from a very traditional and conservative Mexican family informed how Yuri understood the difficulties faced by many in queer Latina/o communities. According to Yuri, Macias currently lives a double life. He splits his time between the United States and Mexico. In the United States, he has a boyfriend he has been with for many years, and in Mexico, he has a girlfriend. Below is part of my exchange with Yuri on Macias:

²² "En mi casa ni siquiera se hablo de sexualidad yo lo vine a aprender en la universidad, porque ni en la escuela, no, ni en la escuela no los enseñaban, nada, yo lo vine a saber despues"

Yuri: his sister is here. We ran into each other one time and I asked her how was Macias, and she said he was happy with his boyfriend...and then

Rigoberto: then that's how you found out?

Y: That's how I found out

R: And do you have a relationship with him now?

Y: Not right now, because he left to live over there again (Mexico), when he goes to live over there, it is because his permit expires. Over there he is a man, that is, over there he has a girlfriend...so when he comes here, he is who he is, but over there he can't, because his father is...his family is...well more than anyone his father, and when he comes here, he is who he is, he has another brother that is gay, Agustin, he has never been back, and he doesn't want to

R: It's because he does not want to....

Y: No, not him, when Macias comes here he is him, but over there he is not, because he is the youngest so he has to keep going back...It is sad

R: difficult right...to have a double life, and he is an older man right?

Y: yes.²³

²³ **Yuri:** "aquí esta su hermana...nos encontramos una vez aquí y le pregunte, como esta Macias? Y me dijo—ahi esta bien, vive feliz con su novio—y entonces..."

Rigoberto: ¿Ahí se dio cuenta?

Y: Aquí me di cuenta.

R: ¿Y no tiene relación con el ahorita?

Y: Ahorita no porque él ya se fue de nuevo a vivir para allá, pero cuando se va a vivir para allá que se le vence su permiso de su beca, allá es un hombre, o sea allá tiene su novia.

R: wow

Yuri's friend Macias serves her as a reminder of the realities for many LGBT Latina/o's, particularly gay Latino men who have to straddle cultural expectations. When Yuri stated that in Mexico, "he is a man" and in the United States "he is himself" she is referring to the gendered norms and expectations of many men in Mexico. Because Macias is not out to his family, he cannot express himself as a gay man when he is in Mexico. Moreover, according to Yuri, he has to present himself in a stereotypical way where being a man equates to certain expressions of masculinity and heterosexuality. Yuri recognizes Macias made the choice to live this double life, since his older brother, Agustin, who is also gay, has chosen to not return to Mexico and act "heterosexual," having cut all ties to their family.

Yuri's third pivotal moment informing her early understanding of the LGBT community was her ex-husband's gay best friend. Her ex-husband had several gay and lesbian friends when they met; in many ways they challenged several stereotypes and assumptions Yuri had about queer communities, such as gay men being "husband stealers." Other misconceptions included "They will convert your children" and "They will purposely infect you with AIDS". Yuri

Y: Entonces cuando viene para acá él es lo que es, pero allá no puede porque su papá es muy... su familia es muy... más que todo su papá y él cuando viene, aquí él tiene otro hermano gay, pero su hermano gay, o sea el otro, Agustin, nunca ha ido para allá, él no quiere ir.

R: Es porque no quiere...

Y: No, él no y cuando Macias viene para acá él sí, pero él allá no porque es el hijo más chiquito y tiene que estar llendo.

R: Wow

Y: Eso es triste.

R: Difícil ¿verdad?

Y: Sí.

R: También tener dos vidas y ya es señor ¿verdad?

Y: Sí

recognized the beliefs she held were problematic, but stressed they were the same stereotypes and assumptions about queer communities many in the Latina/o communities continue to embrace. It was not until she started working as a *Promotora* and learned more positive terms associated with gender and sexuality that she could make sense of her early experiences. She states, “When I started the *Promotora* curriculum, when we saw different definitions and what is gender and all of that, that’s when I said, Ah! So that’s what how it was!”²⁴

Relational Understanding of Difference

Yuri’s early experiences with Vero, Macias and her ex-husbands gay friends directly shaped how she made sense of queer experiences and how she began to talk about the topic in her workshop. At the outset of the LGBT Acceptance Project, she also began to relate her own experiences and feelings of difference and isolation as a way to make sense of and speak about queer communities. Her training to lead the workshops transformed how she thought about the LGBT community. I asked her if there was a particular moment or realization working on the LGBT Acceptance Project that influenced or moved her in a profound way. Yuri responded:

In the feelings, that is where it changed me the most. Like with those people...my friend Macias who when he lives here he is happy, but as soon as his permit expires he has to leave because he also has that obligation with his parents. Since he is the youngest, he has that obligation—they gave it to him, not because he wanted it. In this aspect I changed, because these people have to appear as something they are not, and I started to reflect because many times you say, well I am not a person that is gay, but I still have to appear as something that I am not sometimes. Like when my relationship (with my husband) was not going well and

²⁴ “cuando entré a lo del currículo de Promotoras, cuando ya vimos definiciones y que son géneros y todo eso entonces ya dije ¡ah entonces esto era así!”

I was telling the world that it was fine. Why? Because they warned me a long time ago, “If you marry him it’s going to go sour!” And so when they would ask, how is it going? I would say, “It’s going great, we are super happy” and all that and so after sometime you get frustrated. So much that one day you say, “If they ask me the same thing I might start to get mad,” so I won’t go, or I feel sad, or I don’t want them to keep attacking me in that that manner and so instead you decide to just keep silent.”²⁵

Yuri emphasized that it was not until she made the connection to her own life and her own experiences in moments of “un-authenticity” she understood what her friend Macias might have felt or gone through. She was also able to universalize this feeling of inauthenticity or otherness to the others in the queer community.

I asked Yuri to speak more about how this realization of relating her own experiences to queer communities became important to her understanding and how she explained it to parents. She stated, “Because they get more to the humanity, they get to you more, they move you.”²⁶ This idea of seeing everyone with humanity, and having people be moved in an emotional way by their experiences was something Yuri and many of the other *Promotoras* felt was necessary in order to engage the community to feel a sense of connection to queer people. For Yuri, as Latina/o’s we have to take care of our own community, we have to recognize that one person’s

²⁵ En los sentimientos, esa fue la manera que más me cambió, como esas personas... como mi amigo Macias que él viene aquí y él es feliz, nada más termina su permiso y se tiene que ir porque tiene la obligación también allá con sus papás y como es el más chiquito el tiene la obligación, se la dieron no es porque la tenga. En eso me cambió más como estas personas tienen que aparentar lo que no son y me reflejé porque muchas veces tú dices, bueno yo no soy una persona gay pero también tengo que aparentar lo que no soy. Cuando mi relación no va bien y yo le digo a todo el mundo sí, sí va bien ¿por qué? porque desde antes me lo advirtieron, sí te casas con él te va a ir mal, entonces les digo ¿Cómo van? Súper bien, estamos bien felices y todo eso y cómo es que te vas frustrando tanto que llega un momento que dices, me van a preguntar de lo mismo o me enoja o mejor no voy, o me siento triste o no quiero que me estén atacando en esa forma y mejor decides quedarte callada”

²⁶ “porque estas lleguen como mas a la humanidad, te llegan y te mueven.”

experience of marginalization is connected to our own and we have to examine where these ideas of prejudice and discrimination come from. I asked Yuri what she felt was needed in order to bring about change for the queer Latina/o communities. Yuri declared:

Well we have to get rid of our prejudices, all those prejudices that we have within, that we carry from our home countries, I think that is what we need. Be more humane, not only look for the good in our families. That is what I think we need to do, first for people to start with the prejudices that we carry, then get rid of them and see the humanity in people. To say, if the *señora* at the front of the house is affected, then you are going to be affected because you live within that community and you are there, and so we need to explore those sides and areas.²⁷

Yuri went on to say the Latina/o communities, compared to white Americans and African-Americans, was not where it needed to be as a supportive community on queer issues. She described how in the relationships she has with non-Latina/o's, they tended to be more supportive and more open-minded about sexuality. "They are more open to everything, they see it as natural, but not our community, because many of us are not born here, we come with all of those ideas, we come here and then we translate those ideas onto our children"²⁸

For Yuri, the status of Latina/os as immigrants played a role in some of this disconnect, or a lack of openness about queer communities. One the ways this can be addressed, according to Yuri, is to have the broader Latina/o communities get rid of their prejudices, see the humanity in

²⁷ "Pues que se quiten todos los prejuicios, todos esos prejuicios que traemos ya desde nuestros países y yo pienso que eso se necesita y ser como más humanos, no nada más buscar el bienestar de mi familia. Eso es lo que pienso que se necesita, las personas empezar a trabajar primero por los prejuicios que traemos, después de quitar esos prejuicios ver el lado humano de las personas, de decir, si le afecta a la señora de la casa del frente te va a afectar a ti porque tú vives dentro de la comunidad y estás ahí, entonces empezar a explorar por ese lugar, por esos lado"

²⁸ "Son más abiertos a todo, lo ven más natural pero nuestra comunidad no, porque muchos de nosotros no somos nacidos aquí y entonces ya venimos con todas esas ideas venimos aquí y esas mismas ideas se las trasmitimos a nuestros hijos"

each individual and recognize how one person's struggle is all of everyone's struggle. In her personal life and in her teaching, Yuri's goal was to have parents understand how queer persons were part of the community which, as Latina/os, had to "take care of our own."

LGBT Ally Identity

For Yuri, the classroom is a space where she practiced being an ally. In many instances, it began before the classes even started, by letting school administrators and volunteers know she had an LGBT workshop series she could offer the parents at their school. Getting the "buy-in" from schools for the LGBT workshop series could sometimes be a challenge. The schools where the workshops took place were mostly sites where the *Promotoras* already had relationships or had taught before. Yuri recognized some school officials considered queer issues a sensitive topic. Yuri, like many of the other *Promotoras*, sometimes encountered resistance from school administrators. In many cases, Yuri shared that the parents wanted the workshop series, but school leadership thought the sessions could be too controversial for their community or that it was "not the right moment." One way Yuri pushed back on administrators or parent coordinators was by talking about the importance and need to have these conversations. Yuri stated:

When I offer these classes I tell them that the program is about lessening the cases of children being abandoned because they have another sexual orientation. I tell them, as a consequence of abandonment or of rejection these kids go to the streets, they find other people, and maybe they pressure them to do drugs, or they sell their bodies for food and shelter or even suicide. This is the point of these classes, that these kids won't be rejected by their families, so we are going to look

at lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender communities. This is how we are going to see the humane side of these families.²⁹

In Yuri's attempt to "sell" the LGBT workshop series to schools, she sometimes advocated for the lives and rights of queer youth. By citing statistics, the high levels of homelessness, and higher rates of school disengagement and suicide, Yuri demonstrated to administrators and parent coordinators the strong need in their communities to talk about these issues. What Yuri also did was make sure schools recognized queer youth were already present in their communities and they needed to address their realities. In Yuri's experience, only one school declined the LGBT workshop series. Yuri shared that the teacher liaison for the parent group was a very conservative woman who refused to budge.

Once in the classroom, there were new sets of challenges and opportunities. For Yuri, a *Promotora* who teaches the LGBT Acceptance project must come with her "*corazon y su mente abierta.*"³⁰ You must come ready and willing to hear all types of comments (including negative ones directed towards you) where you may be thrown off, but you must keep your composure or else you may miss an opportunity to educate someone in the class. Yuri was also careful in handling questions about her own sexuality from the parents in the space. I asked Yuri how she addressed personal inquiries and she replied:

I tell them, well I don't have to tell you my sexual orientation because it is mine, just like I do not ask yours, but some parents say—oh everyone now thinks that I

²⁹ "cuando yo ofrezco el programa les digo que el programa se trata de disminuir la tasa de niños que son abandonados porque tienen otra orientación sexual, ya les digo, como consecuencia de ese abandono o rechazo estos niños se van a la calle, encuentran otras amistades y tal vez los induzcan a que empiecen a consumir drogas, a tener que vender su cuerpo para alimentarse o hasta el suicidio. Esta es la finalidad de la clase, que estos niños no sean rechazados por sus familias y vamos a ver comunidades lesbianas, gay, bisexuales y transgéneros, entonces es así como les estoy diciendo vamos a ver el lado humano de las familias"

³⁰ Translated to English: an open heart and open mind

am a lesbian or that I am heterosexual or that I am something else—and so you have to be able to distinguish, be able to separate, come and give your class, hear their comments, if you can help, if not then find the appropriate resources for them, but you cannot let their comments get to you.³¹

Yuri was deliberate about not asserting a heterosexual identity in the class, but instead redirecting the question to parents and asking why it was significant for them to know her sexuality. For Yuri, she chose to not privilege her sexuality over others'. Some may argue that claiming a heterosexual identity could demonstrate strong ally behavior to the class. However, by not claiming a heterosexual identity, it made it more difficult for parents to “make sense” of Yuri’s sexual identity and her motivation for doing the work. Instead, her non-response opened up more possibilities for understanding different motivations that might lead people to engage in queer ally work.

I asked Yuri what her goal was for the workshop series, the one idea she wanted parents to leave with. She stated:

For me the objective is that there be acceptance and that there are no stereotypes.

Once there is acceptance in the family, we can change many things in our nuclear family, in our family model. In every sense, we can change because the objective is that these children are not rejected. Because I have a child, and I don’t know if he is going to be gay or heterosexual or bisexual. I do not want to have my child

³¹ “Les digo, bueno mi orientacion sexual no te la tengo que estar diciendo porque es mia, asi como yo no te la pregunto, pero algunas personas dicen—oh ya todas las personas estan creyendo que yo ya soy lesbian o yo soy heterosexual o yo soy esto—entonces tienes que distinguir, saber separar, venir dar tu clase, escuchar tus comentarios, si puedes ayudarlas que bien sino tartar de buscar los recursos pero que sus comentarios no te afecten”

outside my family. That is why my objective is that families face these issues and educate ourselves on how to treat these children.³²

For Yuri, the LGBT Acceptance Project provided her opportunities to educate her friends and family. When I asked Yuri what impact teaching the LGBT Acceptance Project had in the personal sense, she was happy to share, “I have grown as a mother, with my son and with my family I have also grown.”³³ This was most apparent in how she has chosen to parent her son and how she answered criticisms from family members. In our interviews Yuri talked at length about her son and how proud it made her feel to know she had instilled in him many of the values she learned as a *Promotora*, especially since the LGBT Acceptance Project started. She provided several examples of how her son acted as an ally in school, by defending other kids when they are bullied or befriending kids who are gay. As Yuri shared these stories, she laughed. “It was one of the challenges when I started as a LGBT *Promotora*, that they will all think I am ready to change Miguelito, and I say, it’s not that I am ready, it simply does not interest me.”³⁴

While her family members were happy she was part of this workshop series, they worried her son’s attendance of these workshops might turn him gay or open up the possibilities for him to experiment. Yuri admitted the main reason they were adamant that *Miguelito* not attend the classes with her was because they already feared he might be gay. Their point of reference for

³² Para mí el objetivo es que haya aceptación y que no haya estereotipos. Una vez que hay una aceptación en la familia nosotros podemos cambiar muchas cosas de nuestro núcleo familiar, de nuestro modelo familiar, podemos cambiar. En todos los sentidos puedes cambiar porque el objetivo es que estos niños no sean rechazados, porque yo tengo un niño y yo no sé si mi niño va a ser gay, va a ser heterosexual o va a ser bisexual, yo no quiero exponer a mi hijo fuera de mi familia. Por eso mi objetivo es que las familias nos eduquemos para afrontar y educarnos en cómo tratar a los niños.

³³ “He crecido como mama, con mi nino y con mi familia tambien he crecido”

³⁴ “fue unos de los retos cuando me meti a ser Promotora de LGBT que todos ellos creen que yo estoy preparada para cambiar Miguelito y yo digo, no es que este preparada es que simplemente no me interesa!”

this assumption, according to Yuri, was that he was the only boy on a synchronized swim team, which her family saw as a women's sport.

Yuri's conversations with her family and ex-husband about how her son was being raised or the types of after-school activities in which he was involved forced Yuri to feel she had to defend her parenting choices. These experiences also made Yuri reflect on how stringently gender roles and norms are for school-aged youth. Yuri admitted that if her son was not the only boy on the synchronized swim team, she might not have reflected so much on these issues otherwise. Nonetheless, she was grateful because it provided her an opportunity to challenge other parents' views and opinions about queer communities and gender norms.

Maria Felix

Early Experiences

Maria Felix's early awareness of queer people manifested in witnessing the policing of gender norms in her *pueblo*, particularly the policing of masculinity. She considered her town a very homophobic place where, if a man did not come across as *machista*,³⁵ they were taunted or made fun of. Maria Felix grew up hearing what could be considered typical homophobic slurs, such as "joto" or "maricón,"³⁶ said to boys and men that participated in activities associated with women. For instance, Maria Felix recalled one situation where her younger brother was outside cleaning the front stoop of their home with a broom and neighborhood kids started to call him several homophobic slurs. Upon reflection of her experiences, Maria Felix recalled one specific incident that informed how she understood the LGBT experience.

³⁵ *Machismo* is a form of masculinity and gender role identity that is specific to the Latina/o population. It is the embodiment of colonial patriarchy.

³⁶ "faggot" or "queer"

There used to be a guy who was gay, well transgender because he tried to look like a woman although his appearance was very masculine, but he tried, but he had to wear pants because he worked in the market. He would sell his potatoes, his sweet potatoes, tomatoes and everything. Anyways, he was treated badly by others in the market. My brother and I use to work in the market, in the *tianguis*, selling stuff and this guy, they would treat him bad, they would yell at him. You know I would feel horrible. But we were older when that happened and I would say to myself “Why do they treat him that way?” in reality it brought me a lot of sadness to see that they would treat him that way. Because the guy was already older and I did not know his deal, because we were still young, we were adolescents when we were doing that, but he was already older, I think he was twenty-four or twenty-five years old. I would feel really sad because of how they treated him and I would say “How can he shut all of those people up?” I could see that he would try to play along with their jokes or when they messed with him, he would play along. Like if they came with one more rude comment he would respond to them with another, like that to decrease the intensity of what they were saying. I don’t know, but it brought me a lot of sadness how they treated that guy.³⁷

³⁷ “ahí había un muchacho que era gay, bueno transgénero porque el trataba de verse como una mujer aunque su apariencia era muy masculina, pero él trataba, usaba pantalones porque tenía que trabajar en el mercado. Él vendía sus papas, sus boniatos, tomates y todo pero lo trataban muy mal en el mercado; mi hermano y yo trabajábamos en el mercado este, en el tianguis, vendiendo cosas y a este muchacho lo maltrataban, le gritaban muchas cosas, a mí me daba mucha tristeza fijate. Pero ya éramos más grandes cuando ocurrió eso y yo me decía ¿por qué lo tratan así?, de verdad me daba mucha tristeza que lo trataran de esa manera pues ya era un muchacho grande y yo no sabía lo que tendría, porque nosotros éramos chiquillos, éramos adolescentes cuando andábamos haciendo eso, pero él ya era grande, creo que de unos 24 o 25 años. Entonces me daba tristeza de ver como lo trataban y decía ¿cómo poder callar a toda esta gente? Yo veía que él trataba de seguirles las bromas y el maltrato para que ellos no lo molestaran más, es como que él les seguía la corriente. Como si le salían con una que otra grosería, él les contestaba con otra

Maria Felix expressed regret for not being able to do more to support that person. When I asked Maria Felix if she considered herself to be a compassionate person, she responded: “I think I have always felt compassion for other people, for any type of person I can feel compassion for, or I feel compassion when I see someone going through a difficult situation.”³⁸

I did not ask Maria Felix why she thought this person was transgender and not just an effeminate gay man. However, it raises questions about how Maria Felix made sense of this memory to understand the experiences of gay men and transgender people. In fact, Maria Felix volunteered that when she started taking the LGBT curriculum classes, past life experiences started to make more sense and she felt more comfortable to engage others in these conversations. She then began to share another experience she had with a former hairdresser of hers whom she said was transgender. “He was a transgender guy, who had a salon and he was also a dancer. He would do a lot of imitations of artists and I would love to go to his salon because he would share stuff with me.”³⁹ What is important to note is how Maria Felix used the term “transgender.” Although Maria Felix referred to a transgender man, she later clarified that she was referring to a transgender woman. In one of our conversations I asked Maria Felix to clarify what she meant by transgender and I explained to her the differences and appropriate pronouns and descriptions to use. Maria Felix was thankful I engaged her in that conversation. She did not think she had a perfect understanding of queer issues, and she recognized there was always room for growth and reflection.

cosa, así como para disminuir lo que le estaban diciendo, no sé, pero sí me daba mucha tristeza lo de este muchacho”

³⁸ “Yo creo que siempre he sentido compasión por cualquier persona, por cualquier tipo de persona creo que puedo sentir compasión, o siento compasión, cuando veo que está atravesando por una situación difícil.”

³⁹ “Era un muchacho transgénero que tenía ahí su salón y aparte el bailaba, hacía muchas imitaciones de artistas y me gustaba ir a su salón porque me platicaba las cosas.”

Intersectional Understanding of Difference

Before starting the LGBT Acceptance Project Maria Felix had little knowledge of the severity of sex or gender based discrimination.

When I started taking the training and with the information that they gave me, that's when a lot of things became clear to me about what I understood or I thought. Many myths were clarified for me too, I did not understand the severity of the discrimination that was happening, I thought it was just like any other thing, I mean like the discrimination, like the discrimination of Black people and others. So I understand now that it is much more difficult, now that we dedicate ourselves to this community, for Latina/os in this country. I think that since then I started to be more conscious.⁴⁰

Before starting with the LGBT Acceptance project, Maria Felix was aware of race-based discrimination African-Americans experience. As a dark-skinned women she related that discrimination in the United States to the treatment of dark-skinned people in Mexico. Notions of racism and *colorism* was something Maria Felix thought a lot about and touched on in her teaching. In several instances in the classroom, Maria Felix used *colorism* as an example to discuss how *Mexicanos* consciously or unconsciously discriminate against or marginalize other *Mexicanos* based on their skin tone (Hunter, 2007). She also took it a step further; she made connections to the stereotypes people have of those living in provincial towns, whom she argued

⁴⁰ "...cuando empecé a tomar el entrenamiento y con la información que me dieron, porque ahí como que se me aclararon muchas cosas que yo pensaba de lo que yo aprendí. Muchos mitos se me aclararon a mí también, yo no entendía lo grave que era la discriminación por la que estaban pasando, yo pensaba que era como cualquier otra cosa, o sea que así como los discriminan a ellos, pues discriminan a los morenos y a otros. Entonces entiendo pues que es más difícil ahora y aparte para los que nos dedicamos, pues para los latinos aquí en este país. Yo creo que desde entonces empecé a tomar más conciencia

tended to be indigenous Mexicans who were also discriminated against. Maria Felix discussed these connections.

Look I'm from Mexico City, I spent many years in Mexico City and in Mexico City they discriminate a lot against people who are from the provincial towns and see them of unimportance. Now if a gay provincial person comes to the city, well he goes through the same thing that a Latino will go through here. There is a lot of discrimination in the city for people outside the city.⁴¹

Maria Felix made sense of the types of discrimination queer Latina/o's in the United States go through by comparing it to types of discrimination queer *Mexicanos* from provincial towns may experience when they move to a large metropolitan area, like Mexico City. Maria Felix, as a dark-skinned woman who was raised in a provincial town and then moved to Mexico City, was keenly aware of the racial politics that exist in Mexico and the United States. Of all the *Promotoras*, Maria Felix most clearly articulated the connection between racial and other forms of oppression Latina/os can experience in Mexico and the United States.

Maria Felix related other forms of oppression and marginalization in the Latina/os experience in the United States and in Mexico to the discrimination faced by queer youth:

There are other things that someone goes through so they can relate it to that. For example, I do not have any LGBT family members but somehow I relate it to other forms

⁴¹“...mira, yo soy de la ciudad de México, pasé muchos años en la ciudad de México y en la ciudad de México discriminan mucho a la gente de provincia y no importando... si ahora viene un provinciano gay a la ciudad, pues pasa por lo mismo que pasa un latino aquí. Hay mucha discriminación en la ciudad para la gente de fuera de la ciudad

of discrimination and that way we can identify. I always try to tell people how we feel as immigrants in this country.”⁴²

Maria Felix believes that, parents can directly or indirectly relate to the immigrant experience, participants can understand some of the feelings of marginalization. “I believe that people who had the experience of leaving their country and came here are a people who are much more open-minded, people who are confronting change. So I believe that they receive the information pretty well.”⁴³ For Maria Felix, the decision to leave one’s home country and the new experiences one encounters in the United States compelled many immigrants to reflect on their attachment to community as part of their identity.

I asked Maria Felix if a particular moment challenged her to re-evaluate or reflect on her core beliefs. She immediately replied affirmatively.

Well, for me God is fundamental in my life and Jesus Christ is like an example for me. Well, when they made me reflect on “Well, if Jesus actually came to earth who did he reunite with? And if he came at this very moment to the city of Los Angeles, well, who would he reunite with?” Because he would not discriminate against no one, and so I say to myself as a Christian I have a lot of faith and I tell myself a whole lot of things and I think that it’s true. How am I going to demonstrate unconditional love if on one side I am discriminating against certain

⁴² “hay otras cosas por las que uno pasa que se puedan relacionar con eso. Por ejemplo, yo no tengo un familiar LGBT pero lo relaciono con otro tipo de discriminación de alguna manera y entonces nos podemos identificar; siempre trato de decirle a las personas sobre como nosotras nos sentimos como emigrantes en el País.”

⁴³ “yo creo que la gente que tuvo la experiencia de dejar su país y venirse es una gente de una mente mucho más abierta, gente que están enfrentándose al cambio. Entonces yo creo que reciben bien la información, muy bien”

people in society? And so that message, that part, really had a big influence on me.⁴⁴

For Maria Felix, faith and Catholic values play a strong role in how she lives her life. She credited these beliefs with why she has always treated everyone met meets with respect, dignity and compassion. However, it was not until the curriculum development was underway that she made connections between how her faith and values as a Christian did not align with many others in the Latin/o faith community. For that reason, the session entitled “Faith & Acceptance”—as much as she talked about it as the most personally difficult of the four sessions—was a favorite of Maria Felix. It allowed her to share her core values and demonstrate how she practiced her faith.

The class on faith and acceptance is the most difficult, because the people think that when we are going to talk about a specific religion and in reality that has nothing to do with it. I personally believe and I am still struggling how to get the vocabulary to take it to that place that is more emotional. The subject matter has nothing to do with religion and so that is a lot of work. I have encountered people, well, I do not want to place an adjective on them, but they fight till the end defending their beliefs when it pertains to LGBT people. “They should be excommunicated or taken off this earth,” It’s so hard, so hard to convince them. Well, they have profound ideologies, and they feel so secure in what they are

⁴⁴ “. . . pues para mí Dios es muy fundamental en mi vida y Jesús Cristo es como un ejemplo de vida. Bueno, cuando me hicieron reflexionar acerca de que ¿realmente cuando Jesús vino a la tierra con quiénes se reunió? y que si viniera en estos momentos aquí a la ciudad de Los Ángeles pues ¿con quién se reuniría?, pues no discriminaría a nadie. Entonces yo me digo cristiana, yo me digo que tengo mucha fe y yo me digo un montón de cosas que es cierto, ¿cómo voy a mostrar mi amor incondicional si por otro lado estoy discriminando a cierta parte de la sociedad?, entonces esa parte, ese mensaje, a mí me funciona.

saying with their Bible in their hand trying to demonstrate that one is wrong when we say to be sympathetic, accepting and show love for LGBT people.⁴⁵

Maria Felix was frequently saddened by how adamantly some parents held on to religious beliefs critical of the LGBT community. To her, they had a very narrow view about what it meant to be a good Christian and a person of faith. As much as she tried, she recognized she would not be able to change all parents' views. However, this did not stop Maria Felix from trying, "I like these types of workshops, you know controversial and all that, if only they would excite Maria Felix, right? And not the *Promotora*, but I cannot let Maria Felix come out."⁴⁶ I asked Maria Felix why only the *Promotora* could be shown and not Maria Felix. "No way, because then we will get into fistfights (she laughs)."⁴⁷ Maria Felix joked that as much as she wanted to let the parents know how she really felt about their religious views and beliefs, she kept it professional. As a *Promotora*, Maria Felix was there to provide parents with information and did not let her personal views and opinions interfere with the classroom dynamics.

Maria Felix enjoyed talking about faith in the Latina/o experience, which she felt is intertwined with culture and tradition. She noted that the video parents watch during the session was vital to making the connection and message even stronger⁴⁸:

⁴⁵ "...la clase de espiritualidad y aceptación es la más difícil, porque las personas creen que cuando vamos a hablar de ese tema es que vamos a hablar de cierta religión en específico y realmente no tiene nada que ver. Yo creo personalmente y todavía estoy en la lucha de cómo conseguir un buen vocabulario para llevarlo a esa parte más emocional, no es nada de religión ni nada de eso el tema, pero ese es el que ha costado mucho más trabajo. He encontrado gente, pues yo no quiero ponerles un adjetivo, pero pelean hasta lo último defendiendo sus creencias en cuanto a que esas personas (LGBT) deben ser descomulgadas o sacadas del planeta y es tan difícil, tan difícil convencerlos, pues ellos tienen una ideología tan profunda y se sienten tan seguros de lo que están diciendo que con la Biblia en la mano quieren demostrar que uno está equivocado en cuando a ser empáticos en cuanto a la aceptación y el amor para los del LGBT."

⁴⁶ "a mi me gustan ese tipo de charlas, así controversiales y todo eso, que quisieran que se alegre Maria Felix, verdad? Y no a la Promotora, pero no puedo dejar Maria Felix que salga?"

⁴⁷ "porque no, entonces nos agarramos a golpes (Risas)"

⁴⁸ This video had not been included yet when I observed Maria Felix workshop session.

I think it is more complete because there we are seeing the face of the guy, the girl, of the gay, the lesbian, the whole process they went through, I feel it more...and of different people, the Mexican, the Puerto Rican. Aside that we are all Latinos and that we all speak Spanish, but in one way or another I think culturally we are different and so this demonstrates that. I see it more complete, that part I see it more for us and the statistics, the numbers, the genderbread person that I love so much, that I see as general. But the Faith and Acceptance class, because look, I don't know any other cultures but at least I know mine and us Latinos I know that we cling to or are real fanatical about our religion and all that. So I believe that this class is more focused on us, I believe that a large part of the information is related to us, not all, because some parts are general for all cultures but some parts are specific to us.⁴⁹

While most of the curriculum spoke directly to the needs of LGBT Latinos, for Maria Felix, this was the session where she could influence changes in Latina/o views based on religion and cultural tradition.

LGBT Ally Identity

I asked Maria Felix if she felt a change within herself since she started the LGBT Acceptance Project and if she would consider herself an ally to queer communities. Below is part

⁴⁹ "...yo creo que ese está más completo porque ahí estamos viendo a la cara del muchacho, la muchacha, del gay, la lesbiana, la familia, todo el proceso por el que pasaron, lo siento más... y de diferentes personas, la mexicana, los puertorriqueños. A pesar de que somos latinos y que todos hablamos español, pero de alguna manera culturalmente yo creo que somos diferentes y entonces ahí se muestra. Yo lo veo más completo, esa parte la veo muy para nosotros y las estadísticas, los números, el monito aquel que me gusta tanto pues se me hace general, y la parte de la clase de Fe y Aceptación sí, porque fíjate, yo no conozco otras culturas pero por lo menos la cultura mía o nosotros los latinos yo sé que somos así bien aferrados o bien fanáticos de nuestras religiones y eso. Entonces yo creo que sí está enfocada más a nosotros, creo que gran parte de la información sí está relacionada, no toda, porque alguna la siento así general para todas las culturas y otras bien específicas para nosotros."

of our conversation where she described how she saw herself as an ally and how it manifested at home with her family.

Maria Felix: Yes, noticeably yes, now yes, because before I felt like...in fact, I never thought that I could do something, in fact, because not another opportunity had presented itself like that time in the market when I was an adolescent. But now that I have this information I do consider myself, I believe that by the simple fact that I take this information well I am already an ally. Perhaps a situation will not present itself where I need to defend someone in that moment, but I believe that if something like that happened I believe I would do something. And my family, my family has changed a lot with the information that I give them.

Rigoberto: In what ways?

MF: Well at least, possibly an example is that they abstain from saying things, we have reflected a lot to always put ourselves in the shoes of someone else and well that's when they watch themselves. I don't know, they watch themselves when we are in family, about the types of things we can do and I believe that yes, we are much more open. You know what, I believe what happens with my family is that they confined in me a lot, they see me as the elderly one in our tribe, anything thing that they need, they say "Call Aunt Maria Felix" since I am the oldest one who is here since we left Mexico, and so for any little thing—"Aunt Maria Felix, that this thing or that thing" There is Aunt Maria Felix, the guys, my nephews are very close to me. For anything little thing, I am one of the oldest in my family here, besides I do have the information and they are always asking for me "Aunt this or that or the medicine" and so that is how it is with any little question. So my

family, they confide in me a lot and so they believe that I am telling the pure truth.”⁵⁰

When Maria Felix first started in the LGBT Acceptance Project, she equated being an ally to someone who protected a queer person from being attacked or harassed. However, she has not had to confront a situation like that since the moment in the market as a child. After receiving this information and training, she realized going into the community and sharing this information with others was also what it meant to be an ally. What was powerful about Maria Felix’s description was how she has made her family cognizant about homophobic language. As the self-described “elder” in her family, Maria Felix receives a lot of respect and support from her family. She is able to talk to her children, brothers, and nephews and change their opinions about queer communities. She realizes that while they may not consider themselves allies, they do monitor what they say about queer people, at least in front of her.

However, Maria Felix acknowledged that her passion for queer issues and her zero-tolerance for homophobic remarks have raised some eyebrows with her brothers.

⁵⁰ **Maria Felix:** Sí, fíjate que sí, ahora sí, porque antes yo sentía que... es más, nunca había llegado a pensar que podía ser algo, es más, yo creo que como tampoco se me había presentado una situación así como la de aquella vez en el mercado cuando era adolescente. Pero recibiendo la información sí me considero, yo creo que no más por el hecho de llevar la información pues ya soy una aliada. Quizás no se me presenta la situación de defender a alguien en su momento pero yo creo que si llegara a ocurrir sí lo hacía, yo creo que sí lo haría. Y mi familia, mi familia está cambiando mucho con la información que yo les doy.

Rigoberto: ¿En cuáles maneras?

MF: Por lo menos... quizás por ejemplo se abstienen de decir cosas, hemos reflexionado mucho de que siempre hay que ponernos en los zapatos de los demás y pues se cuidan, no sé, ellos se cuidan cuando estamos en familia, sobre el tipo de cosas que podemos hacer, y yo creo que sí, que están más abiertos. Sabes que, lo que yo creo que pasa con mi familia es que ellos confían mucho en mí, ellos me ven así como la anciana de la tribu, cualquier cosa que se les ofrece, les dicen – Háblenle a la tía Maria Felix – como soy la más vieja que está acá desde que nos vinimos de México, entonces por cualquier cosa es – fíjate tía, que esto y que lo otro – ahí está la tía Maria Felix, los muchachos, mis sobrinos se acercan mucho a mí. Para cualquier cosa, yo soy de los más grandes de mi familia acá y aparte que tengo la información y siempre recurren a mí – Tía esto, que aquello y que la medicina – y así, cualquier cosa andan preguntándome, entonces mi familia confía mucho en mí y entonces creen que lo que yo les digo pues es la pura verdad

I can assure you that many think that I am going to be or that I already am a lesbian and that I am just in the closet. Because for instance, I am alone, all of my friends are women, we don't work with men and I have my best friend, Nelly, who is staying with me right now because of a certain situation, so I start laughing because I know that they must be thinking that she must be my partner, but that just makes me laugh. I know that, for example my brother the other day I went to his house to visit, I went with my friend and her daughter. I saw how he kept looking at me when I left his house, he kept looking at us into the distance and when I turned around to where he was leaning looking at us, probably saying "What could be going on in my sister's head?" But I know that if that were to happen, that nothing would happen because he has always said, "I want the whole world to be happy, in whatever way, how it needs to be" and I started thinking too, "What could my brother be thinking about at this moment."⁵¹

As Maria Felix shared this story with me, she was giddy, almost implying that being a lesbian was the least of her worries. Maria Felix was not concerned if people thought she was a lesbian, it was not something she thought about when she did this work. Maria Felix was very comfortable in who she is, and it made her happy to know her family, just like her, has grown in their understanding and acceptance of queer people.

⁵¹ Yo te aseguro que muchos piensan que me voy a ser o que ya soy lesbiana y que todavía estoy en el closet. Porque por ejemplo yo estoy sola, todas mis amigas son mujeres pues nosotras no trabajamos con hombres y tengo a mi mejor amiga Nelly que ahorita está conmigo por cierta situación, entonces me da risa porque yo sé que deben estar pensando hasta que es mi compañera, pero me da risa por eso. Yo sé que por ejemplo mi hermano, la otra vez fui a su casa a visitarlo, iba con mi amiga y su hija, lo miré como se me quedó viendo cuando yo salí de su casa, se quedó así viéndonos alejarnos a las dos y cuando me volteé a verlo todavía él estaba así recargado mirándonos como diciendo – ¿Qué estará pasando por la cabeza de mi hermana? – pero yo sé que si llegara a suceder eso él simplemente me diría – Ah, pues está bien – y que no pasaría nada, porque él siempre ha dicho – Yo quiero que todo el mundo sea bien feliz, de la manera en que fuera, como tenga que ser – y yo también me quedé así como pensando ¿qué estará pensando mi hermano en este momento?"

Now that Maria Felix has been teaching the LGBT Acceptance Project for close to three years, the challenge she has set for herself is to go into as many spaces and communities to teach this workshop series.

Now it's a challenge, just like before it was a challenge to get the 15 workshop series out, now to get these series is the new challenge, because I know that many in our community are informed about other subjects that we offer. So now coming and giving them these new sessions, it's a new experience, every time I go and give them it's something new because I know that the people know nothing about this. So now it's thrilling to come, give the classes, see where parents end up. I get enthusiastic and I get really happy, because I know that it is something new that people need, possibly they did not expect it. I believe the same thing happened with me of not knowing what was going to happen after but I was surprised and I loved it so much, I feel that people are going to see it that way too. Sometimes they say "But what is LGBT? ok, can you explain it to me? What is it about?" So when we take these sessions, sometimes they do ask, for example the coordinators who want the sessions ask like they also don't know "So what's going to happen? Can we change the name so more people in the community could understand?" I It is an experience, a new experience every time I am going to give the class and it is satisfying because it pleases me very much, I'm enthused to give the workshops.⁵²

⁵² "Ahora es un reto, así como antes era un reto conseguir una serie de los 15 temas, ahora poder dar estas ya se formó ese reto, porque yo sé que muchos de nuestra comunidad ya están muy informados de los otros temas que damos. Entonces venir y darles estos nuevos, es una experiencia nueva, cada vez que la voy a dar es algo nuevo porque yo sé que la gente no sabe nada de estos temas. Entonces es una emoción llegar, dar las clases y ver cómo termina la gente, me causa mucho entusiasmo y me siento bien contenta, porque sé que es algo nuevo que la gente está necesitando, quizás no esperando porque yo creo que lo mismo que me ocurrió a mí de no saber lo que iba a pasar después y me sorprendió y me gustó tanto, yo siento que también así va a ser para la gente porque ellos no

The challenge to get the workshop sessions to as many places as possible is something that keeps Maria Felix going. Similar to the “15 temas⁵³,” workshop series that began 10 years ago and was seen as controversial and difficult to get buy-in from the community, she sees the LGBT Acceptance Project as the next venture. Like all of the other *Promotoras*, she sees the LGBT Acceptance Project as transformative work. Maria Felix is excited about the possibilities for growth and change these workshop sessions can generate within people because she has experienced the change and growth within herself.

Maria Felix is also not only limiting her work here in the United States; she has started spreading the message with family in Mexico. Maria Felix mentioned a new initiative she is working on with one of her cousins in Mexico, who recently reached out to her wanting to learn more about the program.

I came here many years ago, and so I have cousins who were kids when I came. Now through Facebook some are noticing the things I’m connected with and someone from Mexico, a young cousin of mine, who has a lot of experience, but there are rumors that he is gay.

Well then, he calls me, we now got in contact with each other and he tells me he is very interested in what I am doing, “Like how do things over there function?” He is working at an organization in Mexico where they offer services to the community, like for example, providing glasses to the elderly or holding a health fair for mothers. Well, he is doing that type of work and he asks about the

saben. A veces es – ¿Pero qué cosa es el LGBT?, a ver, explíqueme más, ¿de qué se trata? – o entonces cuando las llevamos, como algunas veces que sí nos dicen que sí, por ejemplo las coordinadoras que quieren los talleres como que tampoco... – ¿Y qué va a pasar? ¿No le podemos cambiar el nombre para ver cómo lo entiende más la comunidad? – y es una experiencia, es una experiencia nueva cada vez que voy a dar unas clases, y satisfactoria porque me causa mucho placer y entusiasmo darlas”

⁵³ refers to the workshop series the Promotoras teach that focuses on women’s sexual and reproductive health

LGBT work, and so I am informing him, “Look, here are these fairs, here are these events, I participated in this and there are these organizations.” Well, I am hearing that he is receiving all of these funds from many organizations where he is working, but he is interested in this, because I think he wants to take this information to guys like him, who have not come out, because I know that he has not come out yet, but that is what I hear. Right there is the myth again, because they do not see him with a girlfriend they assume, right? But he is very interested in what is happening here with the laws, the resources. Well then, we are staying informed and I see that even with large distances we can still make an impact.”⁵⁴

Maria Felix takes great pride in knowing she is able to reach people in her hometown and that they know of the work she is doing. Through social media, her friends and family are becoming aware and this makes her happy. It also speaks to Maria Felix’s deep connection to this work and the amount of pride and joy it brings her to be able to share this message. In the above excerpt, she also talks about her cousin, who is rumored to be gay, and the happiness it brings her to know she can be a resource for him and possibly collaborate with him on potential projects.

What I also appreciate about the above excerpt is how Mari Felix discussed her cousin’s “questionable sexuality.” While she did believe the rumors were true, and that he in fact is gay,

⁵⁴ “Yo me vine hace muchos años para acá, entonces tengo primos que eran unos niñitos cuando yo me vine. Ahora por medio del Facebook alguien está viendo con las cosas que estoy yo relacionándome y alguien de México que sé que tiene mucha preparación, es un primo joven, pero por ahí se escuchan rumores de que él es gay.

Entonces él me habla, ya nos pusimos en contacto y me dice que está muy interesado en lo que yo estoy haciendo, que cómo están funcionando las cosas acá, que él está trabajando en una organización en México que está ofreciendo muchos servicios para la comunidad como por ejemplo, llevarles anteojos a todos los viejitos del pueblo o de llevar a una feria de salud a todas las mamás. Entonces él está haciendo ese tipo de cosas y me pregunta que cómo está por aquí lo del LGBT, entonces yo le estoy informando, mira, por aquí están estas ferias, están estos eventos, yo participé en esto y hay tales organizaciones. Entonces estoy escuchando que él está recibiendo muchos fondos de muchas organizaciones donde está trabajando, pero él está interesado, porque yo siento que él quiere llevar la información a muchachos como él, que no hayan salido, porque yo sé que él no ha salido abiertamente pero eso se comenta, y otra vez ahí está el mito, pues como no lo ven con una novia pues se asume ¿verdad? Pero él está bien interesado en ver lo que está pasando aquí con las leyes, con los recursos. Entonces estamos informándonos y veo como a veces hasta en largas distancias podemos impactar.”

she reflected on the assumptions that she made by saying that. It is a moment of reflection where Maria Felix thought about how her family may also have had these same thoughts about her (such as the interaction she described with her brother) and the how her assumptions were similar.

Lastly, I was interested in what Maria Felix thought needed to happen in the Latina/o communities to support queer youth. In addition to teaching parents in schools, did she feel there were other places in the community we needed to tap into for support. Maria Felix provided several examples including after-school programs, Latino HIV/AIDS organizations and other parent groups. But there was one place she felt the immediacy of this work could have an impact. Maria Felix was quite surprised to find out how little information teachers and school leaders had on LGBT issues and the rights and protections queer youth have in schools.

I want this information to get to the administrators in the schools, of the district because, where else are we going reach the most amount of parents? As a *Promotora*, I can talk to my neighbor over here, but where can we go to reach more people? In the schools, the bad thing is that we don't get along with the churches, but the churches would also be a place. All of these people need to be made aware of the rights and what is currently happening. And we have achieved it with this, people must be informed, we have to reach all forms of communication... Seven o'clock when the whole world is at home watching television, how many people are watching television a certain times in the day...I don't know, they need to get informed about what is happening. Not so much for the potential work that we could be doing, but to find out how the community is

being impacted, how the community is responding. What is it that they are thinking about⁵⁵

For Maria Felix there is urgency in this work. In the three years she has been a *Promotora* for the LGBT Acceptance Project she has not only seen the transformation in herself, but the other *Promotoras* and in her family. However, in the larger community where she takes this message, parents have been responding. She knows that their work is changing people's understanding of queer people and they are being recognized in the community for it. Maria Felix believes in this work and the capacity it has to change how Latina/o parents think about queer youth and as such wants to get the message across to as many people as possible.

Alejandra Guzman

Early Experiences

Several early encounters shaped how Alejandra Guzman thinks about the LGBT experience and how she currently talks to parents about queer issues. Alejandra brought a unique perspective to her work as a *Promotora*, demonstrated in how she self-identifies and how her past experiences informed her approach to the LGBT Acceptance Project.

Growing up, Alejandra remembered her mother had many gay and lesbian friends; they would come over to their house often, but as a family, their sexuality or gender expression was something never discussed. Instead, Alejandra remembered having to figure out why these men and women looked and acted so differently.

⁵⁵ “Yo quiero que esa información llegue a esas personas administradores de las escuelas, del distrito porque es que ¿dónde vamos a alcanzar a los papás más que en las escuelas?, bueno como *Promotora* puedo platicar con mi vecina acá, pero ¿a dónde vamos a poder alcanzar a más gente?, en las escuelas, lo malo que nosotros no nos llevamos bien con las iglesias pero en la iglesia también, que toda esta gente esté enterada de cuáles son los derechos y que es lo que está pasando, que se logró con esto, que se sacó, que esté la gente informada, que lleguemos a los medios de comunicación a las horas... 7 de la noche, cuando todo el mundo está metido en la televisión, que tanta gente está metida en la televisión a ciertas horas del día cuando... no sé, que se informe que es lo que está pasando. Y no tanto fíjate por el trabajo que pudiéramos estar haciendo nosotras pero sino como se impacta la comunidad, como la comunidad está respondiendo, que es lo que está pasando con sus pensamientos.”

Alejandra: Look, the only thing that I remember is that my mother always had those types of friends. My mother would call them *machorronas*, this one is...well, names, right? This one is *joto*, she never said *puto*, but she did say *joto*—this one is a *joto*, that fucker—she would say. I would talk to them, we would eat with them, and I would look and stare at them, and I thought it was interesting, because I remember that I would stare at them discretely, I mean, I was eating but I would see how they moved or how they did things, and sometimes I would say that that's not how it is. You understand me? I would come to my own conclusions, but we always had friends and we never said anything...all she would say is, this one is a *joto*, that one is a *machorróna* and that's it. Then I started to realize that they called her *machorróna* because she would act like a man and him *joto* because he would act like a woman, but from there to say...my mom to say "They are bad, dirty" no never

Rigoberto: Never?

A: Never, on the contrary she always had...I remember that later she had a guy stay with us whose mother had rejected him because he was gay and he came to live with us for two or three months. Well my mother never...I never saw her treat him badly, on the contrary I remember that she would talk to him, he would cry and she would hug him and to not worry while he was with us, all he had to do was look...but nothing. And I remember that he finally got a job and then I found out that his name was Paloma and yeah, but I never saw my mother...my mother, on my dad's side I never...I mean, my mother's side of the family it was

always about accepting everyone, on my dad's side they instead preferred to stay away from those people.⁵⁶

Alejandra vividly remembers the men and women who frequented her house during her adolescence. Talking about her mother and her gay and lesbian friends, Alejandra made it a point to discuss the language her mother used to describe these friends. Words like “*machorróna*” and “*joto*” today are homophobic slurs, but thirty years ago, these words were commonly used to describe gay men and lesbian women (although still in negative terms). Alejandra drove this point home by saying her mother never used the word “*puto*”⁵⁷ to talk about her gay friends, only *joto* (which can be considered less of an offensive term). In fact, Alejandra added her mother never said anything negative about gays and lesbians but instead opened up her home as a safe haven for young gay men rejected by their families.

Alejandra credited these early experiences for sparking her interest in understanding in what I understand as gender identity and performance. Thinking about her adolescence, Alejandra reflected on how rigid gender norms were and how strictly regulated they still are in

⁵⁶ **Alejandra:** Mira yo lo único que me acuerdo es de que mi mamá tenía siempre muchas amistades de ese tipo. Mi mamá les decía machorrónas, decía que este es... pues palabras ¿verdad?, este es joto, nunca dijo puto pero si decía joto – este es joto, el cabrón – decía así. Yo les hablaba, comíamos con ellos, yo los veía y se me hacía pues interesante, porque yo me acuerdo que los estaba viendo discretamente, o sea yo estaba comiendo pero los estaba viendo como se movían o como hacían las cosas, a veces yo decía, no, ese no es así ¿Sí me entiendes? Yo misma hacía mis propias conclusiones pero siempre tuvimos alrededor amistades y nunca dijimos... nada más decían es eso, este es joto, esta es machorróna y hasta ahí y ya empecé a darme cuenta que machorróna era porque se comportaba como hombre y joto porque se comportaba como mujer, pero de ahí que dijéramos... mi mamá dijera, ¡oh! son malos, son sucios, no nunca.

R: Nunca.?

A: Nunca, ella al contrario siempre tuvo... luego me acuerdo que llegó un muchacho a la casa que su mamá lo había rechazado por ser gay y ella lo tuvo en la casa como por unos 2 meses, 3 meses. Entonces mi mamá nunca... yo nunca vi que lo tratara mal, al contrario me acuerdo que platicaba con él y él lloraba y ella lo abrazaba y le decía que no se preocupara que mientras se pudiera ahí estuviera, no más tenía que buscar... pues nada. Y sí me acuerdo que ya después entró a trabajar y ya después supe que se llamaba Paloma y así, pero no, nunca vi que mi mamá lo... mi mamá, de parte de mi papá nunca vi... o sea, de parte de la familia de mi mamá siempre era como que a cualquier gente la aceptaban, de mi papá como que mejor se retiraban de esas personas.

⁵⁷ Puto can best be translated as a male whore/prostitute. It is considered a very derogatory and homophobic slur

Mexico. She discussed this point at length as she described her relationship with another woman in the police force. It was during this time she first understood and started to make sense of the multiple layers of sexuality, gender identity and performance.

Alejandra was 19 when she joined the police force and met Merino, and they soon fell in love. Alejandra had decided to join the force because it was one of the few jobs in Mexico City at that time which paid well and was respected. She also mentioned she always had a rough edge and strong character and thought those qualities could suit her in the force. When she joined, Merino introduced her to many of her friends on the force. At first, Alejandra was surprised to know and meet so many gay and lesbian police officers.

When I worked as a police officer there was a large LGBT community. Just as many men as women, but the men I remember would hide more, we would only find out if we saw each other out and about. One time there was a party we were invited to, so we went and there were male police officers that were men, but there they looked different, they acted different and so that's when I started to take notice.⁵⁸

Alejandra was very cognizant that male police officers had to present themselves in very masculine ways when they were on duty. She used this point to speak to the rigid forms of masculinity male police officers had to abide by, much more so than female police officers faced. Alejandra talked about the female police officers having much more flexibility in their gender performance and identity. For instance, Alejandra described Merino as very masculine in her dress and behavior. Merino dressed like a man and liked to be addressed by her badge

⁵⁸ “cuando trabajé de policía había mucha comunidad LGBT, tanto hombres como mujeres, pero en los hombres yo me acuerdo que se escondían, o sea nos dábamos cuenta porque los encontrábamos. Hubo una vez una fiesta que nos invitaron y nos dijeron para ver si podíamos ir y sí fuimos y había hombres policías que eran hombres y ya ahí se veían diferente, se comportaban diferentes y entonces ahí empecé a darme cuenta”

number instead of her name. Alejandra mentioned that many of her friends used their badge numbers because they were a gender nonspecific way of addressing each other.

For Alejandra, the police force was a space to explore her own gender identity and sexuality while having to push back against some of the bullying and harassment she, Merino and other gay and lesbian officers experienced.

Being there in the police force, is when everything changed, I started to see many things and feel even more things... I started being her friend and I did not care what people said, because soon they would say outside—“Now you are turning into a lesbian too because you are hanging out with her?”—by number right? We would get together with the other grenadiers and they would tell us—“Come on 26, you are too young to turn yourself into a *machorróna*, if you hang out with them”—and I would tell them, “Well yeah and what? Well now we are getting together, by force right? But I was like that... how can I say this... I never stayed shut, I would always say something, I mean I would do more... in many ways I was an ally, “What do they care, right?”⁵⁹

Alejandra went on to share in detail several instances when she defended Merino and some of the other police officers. Alejandra believed she was one of the few people not afraid to confront the homophobic police officers and made an effort to educate them on her friends’ identities. When they made comments or jokes, Alejandra challenged their comments and turned them into teachable moments:

⁵⁹ “estando ahí en la policía, fue cuando cambió todo porque empecé a ver muchas cosas y empecé a sentir más... ya empecé a ser su amiga y no me importaba lo que dijeran porque luego decían afuera – ya te estás volviendo lesbiana también porque ya te andas juntando con aquella – por número ¿verdad? Nos juntábamos con los muchachos granaderos y nos decía – ándale 26, estás muy chiquita para convertirte en machorróna, si te juntas con esas... – y yo les decía, bueno si es así ¿qué? pues ya nos estaremos poniendo a las fuercitas ¿verdad? Pero yo era así muy... cómo te diré... nunca me quedaba callada, siempre era... como que les contestaba, o sea me hacía más... pues en cierta forma aliada ¿qué les importa pues?, ¿no?”

They would ask me—“She used to be a woman and what happened, did she convert?”—and I would say “No güey that’s how she is,” but I would always tell them like that. Well, many of them would come nearby and they would ask me like “Why do they turn that way” and I would say that they don’t turn güey, that’s how they were born—“And how do you know they are born like that?”—and I would tell them “Because I asked them and they were born that way, that’s how they felt since they were girls, they just didn’t say anything because they were scared,” and yeah, that’s how it always was. I always put in my spoonful to make sure they were informed correctly.⁶⁰

According to Alejandra, she was never shy when it came to telling people how she felt. In the above excerpt which described her exchange with some of the homophobic police officers, Alejandra wanted to make sure I captured exactly how she responded to them. For instance, her use of the word “*güey*” translates to the slang word “jackass,” which is typical male banter in Mexican male culture, and Mexico City in particular. By using the word “*güey*,” Alejandra asserted herself so the men saw her as an equal; in doing so, Alejandra demonstrated that she wanted them to take her and her comments seriously.

Alejandra’s early experiences in the police force and her relationship with Merino had a profound impact in how she saw queer communities and how she made sense others people’s understanding of gender nonconformity. She said in reflection:

⁶⁰ “me preguntaban a mí – aquella era vieja y luego que ¿se convirtió? – y luego decía, no se convirtió Güey así es, pero yo siempre así les decía, así es. Entonces muchos se acercaban a mí para preguntarme así como de que ¿por qué se hacen?, y yo les decía, es que no se hacen, así nacen Güey, así nacen – ¿y como tú sabes que nacen? – y yo les decía, porque ya yo les pregunté y nacen, así nacen, así se sintieron desde niña, no más que no lo decían por miedo y así, entonces siempre era como que yo siempre estaba metiendo mi chuchara por tratar de informar bien”

I have changed in the respect that I have more information and that I like to defend people more...I wish all people would understand that people are born this way and that they do not turn this way, that it's not out of taste, that it's not because her husband left her. Easily and simply that's how they are and you might not like them, but respect them. I mean, this has become a larger issue for me...I can say possibly it is my affection or my love towards LGBT people. Yes, because really....for me they are...I don't care what they are, I'll say it again, I don't care if it's a man or a woman, I care about their emotions, that he is good, that she is good, not someone who is a hypocrite or false.⁶¹

“Soy Rara”

During one of our interviews, after Alejandra disclosed her relationship with Merino, I asked her if she identified as part of queer communities today. This led to an interesting exchange about how Alejandra came to recently understand her identity as something peculiar, different or a little *rara*:

Alejandra: When I joined the LGBT component and we went to Atlanta with Judith, they put the letter Q for “queer” and so I came back and told my daughters—“Now I know what I am, I am queer”—I told the oldest who is studying but still she says that no, that I am not queer, that I am heterosexual and that's all, that if I fell in love with a woman it was because she looked like a man. Well then, things kept going and I tell her, “No, daughter, it's not that I fell in

⁶¹ ha cambiado en el aspecto de que tengo más información y me gusta defender a los más... quisiera que todas las personas entendieran lo que realmente es esto, de que nacen no se hacen, de que no es por gusto, de que no es porque su marido la dejó, no simple y fácilmente así son y tal vez no los quieran pero que los respeten. O sea, ha ido haciéndose más grande mi... no sé si podría decirse mi afecto, mi cariño hacia esas personas del LGBT. Sí, porque yo realmente... para mí son... no me importa lo que es, vuelvo a decirlo así, no me importa si es hombre o mujer me importa su sentimiento, que sea bueno, que sea buena, no que sea una persona que sea hipócrita o falsa

love with the physical but with the person and then she tells me—“So what are you?”—and I repeat myself that “I am queer, but for your peace of mind I am heterosexual, I am a heterosexual queer—ok, *mami*” and she just stays there thinking. The other one tells me that yeah, I am weird, that even all of her friends say that I am weird, but I am weird because I am a person whether it be a child or an adult, I try to understand the person, their emotions, their needs or what they need.

Rigoberto: I also prefer like “queer,” because in Spanish there is no word

A: Yes, it’s *rara*, weird, I am a person that is very *rara*

R: Well *rara* or *raro* I believe is more...because the antiquated association to queer was someone that was weird, so *rara* for me seems to be more...

A: It is more common for Latinos to use the word “*rara*,” or weird, but I do consider myself, I myself have started thinking that yeah I am a weird person, because I can equally see a person that is a lesbian or gay and think, “Oh, they are gorgeous.” Do you understand me?

R: Yes.⁶²

⁶²**Alejandra:** cuando voy al componente de LGBT y fuimos a Atlanta con Judith, se pusieron la letra “q” de “queer” y regresé y les dije a mis hijas – ahora ya sé lo que soy, yo soy queer – y le dije a la mayor que está estudiando pero aunque todo ella dice que no, que yo no soy queer, que soy heterosexual nada más que si me enamoré de una mujer era porque parecía un hombre. Entonces ahí sigue y yo le dije, no hija, es que yo no me enamoro de lo físico sino de la persona y ella pues me dice – ¿Entonces qué es usted? – Yo le repito que soy queer, pero para tu tranquilidad soy una heterosexual, soy una heterosexual-queer – OK mami – y se queda así pensando. La otra pues me dice que sí, que sí soy extraña, que hasta todas sus amigas le dicen que soy extraña, pero soy extraña porque yo soy una persona que mismo que sea a un niño o un adulto, trato de entender a esa persona, sus sentimientos, sus necesidades o lo que quiere.

Rigoberto: Yo también preferiría así como “queer”, porque en español no hay una palabra.

A: Sí, es rara, extraña, soy una persona extraña.

R: Bueno sí, es lo mismo verdad, nunca lo pensé... yo siempre pensé que la palabra queer en español sería jotería.

In the above excerpt, Alejandra talked about attending a Creating Change Conference hosted by the National Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Task Force. The *Promotoras* were invited by the LGBT Latina/o coalition to attend and share some of the work from the LGBT Acceptance Project. At the conference, attendees were invited to place stickers on their badges to display their sexual identities and preferred gender pronouns. For Alejandra, seeing the word “queer” and being surrounded by so many people from queer communities made her come to a realization that she related with this community.

What followed was a revealing exchange with Alejandra about the meaning of “queer,” how the word’s origins were used to describe someone that was once considered weird or out of the ordinary, but over the decades has been (re)appropriated and (re)interpreted as an empowering queer identity in the United States. This led Alejandra to share that in Mexico, “*rara*” or “*raro*” is still much more commonly used to refer to people who may not necessarily identify as part of queer communities, but have a certain essence of them that places them outside of heteronormative constructs, but still different from United States constructs of queerness. In essence, *rara/raro/rareza* speaks more directly to Mexican forms of queer embodiment mediated by its own histories of gender and sexual identity regulation (Fiol-Matta, 2004).

For Alejandra her identity as someone that is *rara* has played a central role in how she sees herself now as a *Promotora* at Planned Parenthood. When the LGBT Acceptance Project

A: Por eso mi hija no quiere que diga queer, pero le digo que soy rara.

R: Pero rara o raro creo que es más... porque la palabra antigua que se asociaba a queer era de una persona rara, para mí entonces “rara” creo que se mira más. Alejandra: Es más común para los latinos usar la palabra “rara” o “extraña”, pero sí me considero así yo misma, yo misma me he puesto a pensar y digo que sí, soy una persona rara, porque igual yo puedo ver a una persona lesbiana o un gay y digo – oh, que guapos están – ¿me entiendes?

R: Sí

started and the selected *Promotoras* attended the first training, Alejandra knew she would have to share her past experience with the other *Promotoras* who were part of the curriculum development. This made Alejandra nervous and scared because she did not know how they would react to her past experiences.

I was going to say it and I would not be able to stay quiet, because I was really interested, I mean look, I had talked to with Judith and Manuela, I had already shared the experience I had with them and I told them that sometimes I would feel... Well, I don't know, uncomfortable and I would tell them that sometimes I feel like people notice and they would say—"No, why? That is something that is within you, you are special"—and like that, but I had talked with Judith and so when they said—"Are you staying for the LGBT curriculum?"—I was like damn! I was so scared, so scared that I didn't... I didn't like to talk, I was always quite, well then we were starting and they were talking and I would say "damn!" I was always like that... Marisol and the other women... what's her name?... I forgot... Ursula and it's like they knew—"Do you have something to say?"—"No"—"Alejandra, do you have something to say?"—so then I shared, and in that moment, I don't remember what class it was, in what class is where I could not stand it anymore and I talked and cried, right? Because whenever I touch that subject I want to cry, I don't know why. That is why I was scared, because I did not want to talk, I did not want to share because I did not hear anyone say that they felt this way or they felt that way, so it was like showing myself, but I did not care,

well I say that I did not care, but later I say to myself, those who know they must have told the rest.⁶³

Soon after sharing this information, Alejandra felt both a sense of relief and uneasiness. She did not know how the *Promotoras* in the curriculum development sessions would feel and how the other *Promotoras* would react once the word got out.

Alejandra presently feels there is a change in the dynamics between her and other *Promotoras* at PPLA. As accepting as some *Promotoras* are about queer issues, there are still many *Promotoras*, according to Alejandra, who have problems with it because it conflicts with their religious beliefs. Alejandra shared that on the surface they may seem supportive because as an organization they are supportive of queer issues, but in their personal lives, they still hold preconceived notions.

In the way that they talk is how I really know who is accepting, who is respectful and who is not, who is doing it only as a protocol of being a *Promotora*. In fact, when movements have happened in this respect, I know that the ones that go are the ones who are interested, and the ones that do not, are just following protocol.⁶⁴

⁶³ "...iba a decirlo no me iba a poder quedar callada, porque yo estaba muy interesada, mira de hecho ya yo había hablado con Judith y con Sandra y yo ya les había dicho mi experiencia que yo había tenido y yo les dije que yo me sentía a veces... pues no sé, incomoda y yo les decía, yo a veces siento como que la gente se da cuenta y me decían – no, ¿por qué? si hay algo en ti pero no sabemos que sea, es que tú eres especial – y así, pero yo ya había hablado con Judith entonces cuando a mi me dijeron – te quedaste para el currículo de LGBT – ¡híjole!, yo tenía mucho miedo, mucho miedo, de hecho yo casi no... no me gustaba hablar, siempre estaba callada, entonces estaban empezando y estaban hablando y hablando y yo decía ¡híjole! Y siempre estaba esta... Marisol y la otra señora... ¿cómo se llama?... se me olvidó, Michaela y ellas parece que sabían y – ¿tienes algo que decir? – No – ¿Alejandra tienes algo que decir? – no, luego yo comparto, entonces en un momento no me acuerdo en que clase, en que parte de la clase fue el momento que ya no pude más y hablé y yo llorando ¿verdad?, porque sí siempre que toco ese tema me da por llorar yo no sé por qué. Por eso es que tenía miedo porque yo no quería hablar, yo no quería decir, porque yo no oía a nadie que decía yo siento esto o sentí esto, entonces era como descubrirme, pero no me importó después, bueno digo que no me importa pero sí luego digo, aquellas que lo supieron ya lo deben de haber dicho para las demás.”

⁶⁴ ...En la forma en cómo ellas hablan me doy cuenta de quién realmente está aceptando o está respetando y quién no, quién nada más lo hace como un protocolo por ser *Promotora*. De hecho cuando se ha hecho movimientos en ese aspecto, yo se que las que van es porque realmente están interesadas, las que no es porque nada más se siguen el protocolo.”

Thus, Alejandra has directly experienced some of the stigma associated with her *rara* identity.

In our conversations, she shared that sometimes the *Promotoras* made jokes about her because of how she dressed or how she carried herself:

They see me *rara*, and why I said that is because it is always like, “Look at your red hair!” or “Hey, look at you all sexy!” or this thing or some other thing, there is always something they say to me, but I notice and think “Why don’t they say those things to others?” Am I making myself clear?⁶⁵

Alejandra wanted to make sure I understood there was subtext in the *Promotoras* comments. Because Alejandra dressed, acted and carried herself in ways that made her stand out from the other *Promotoras*, they saw her as different. Alejandra mentioned that some of the *Promotoras* were not surprised when they found out about her past experience, because of how she carried herself. According to Alejandra, this led to even more explicit comments about her sexuality such as, “*Se te esta volteando la tortilla?*”⁶⁶ Alejandra did feel that it was just lighthearted banter on their part (because she believes that knew she could take these type of comments). Still, these moments provided Alejandra a more honest sense of how many of the *Promotoras* at Planned Parenthood truly felt about queer communities.

Out of all the *Promotoras* in the LGBT Acceptance Project, Alejandra was the only one to speak of negative experiences with other *Promotoras* at PPLA about LGBT issues. While the other *Promotoras* recognized there were some *Promotoras* who could not reconcile their religious beliefs with the LGBT community, generally they felt their cohort was supportive.

⁶⁵ “me ven rara y por qué digo eso porque siempre es como ¡ay el cabello rojo! o ¡ay la sexi! o ¡ay! que esto o ¡ay! que lo otro, siempre hay algo que me dicen que yo veo que ¿por qué no le dicen a las demás eso?, ¿sí me explico?”

⁶⁶ Mexican saying that roughly translates to “your tortilla is switching sides”. This saying is a typical expression that used to describe lesbian womens sexual practices.

Alejandra, however, painted a different picture; this is possibly attributable to her *rara* identity and/or how she carries herself. Among the *Promotoras* Alejandra is “othered;” she destabilizes the gender norms and expectations of the space and as a result can feel the other *Promotoras* judgments of her more so than the other *Promotoras* from the LGBT Acceptance Project. Perhaps the larger *Promotora* group see Alejandra’s investment in the LGBT Acceptance Project differently than others who teach the curriculum because they see her as part of the queer community more than they see are as part of the Latina/o communities. Ultimately, like the concept of *machismo*, these women are functioning from a history of colonization. While the *Promotoras* work to push through social barriers, these women still must push through barriers of misogyny, patriarchy, homophobia and heteronormative culture that has been instilled into the Latina/o culture that impacts the way the think and react.

LGBT Ally Identity

Alejandra believed her experiences growing up in a house with gay and lesbian people, her relationship with Merino and her time in the police force provided her a perspective and approach to reaching parents and the community on queer issues in a way that could be profound and impactful. The first place where this work started for Alejandra was at home with her daughters, with whom she was very open regarding her past experiences as well as her current support for queer communities. While Alejandra’s daughters were supportive of the work she did as a *Promotora*, they did worry for her safety. Alejandra shared that her oldest was nervous she would be verbally or physically assaulted by someone because of how she dressed, how she talked, or how she expressed her views. Because Alejandra’s daughters knew their mother had a sharp tongue and would defend anyone who was being harassed on the street, they feared that could lead to something bad happening to her. However, Alejandra did not care; she felt strongly

that if she witnessed any type of injustice she would say something. For instance, while on the bus, she recalled that a couple of boys were harassing and taunting another boy whom Alejandra “could tell” was gay because he was very effeminate in his mannerisms.

He looked like he was scared of them, and so when he got off the bus, I got off the bus and followed him and I saw that the other guys got off the bus too, and they followed him, and so I yelled “Son, wait for me!” He turned around; the other guys crossed the street and I stayed with him until they left.⁶⁷

This was one example of many where Alejandra talked at length of about not letting anyone around her talk negatively or make queer youth feel bad for expressing themselves and being who they are—this includes her extended family.

I asked Alejandra how her brothers who live in the United States felt about her doing queer work; she immediately let out a deep sigh and said, “*Si supieras,*”⁶⁸ and then laughed.

My brothers told me that I was always *rara*...because I started saying to not say *puto*, for example my nephew, “Be quiet, *putito*” or “What are you going to say, *putito!*” and I told them not to call him that, “Shut up, *güey*”, more *puto* is you, like that right?—“Why do you call me that”—and I would say, “Well, yeah.” We would get into arguments and there were times what I would say, “It’s because you can’t call them that anymore, it’s a bad word, and even if he was. Let’s see, what if you had a son like that are you gonna call him that?—ay *cabrona!* Don’t jinx me—it’s not a jinx, it’s a blessing *güey*” and like that right? Because that’s

⁶⁷ “Se miraba como que les tenia miedo, entonces cuando se bajo del autobus yo tambien me baje y lo segui, y mire que los otros muchachos tambien se bajaron y lo siguieron, entonces yo grite—hijo esperame! Y voltio y despues los otros muchachos cruzaron la calle, y me quede con el hasta que se fueron”

⁶⁸ Translated to English: If you knew

how we talk and so when they found out—“Now I understand”—Well then, now they try not to touch the subject, in one or two of them I have noticed that they don’t use those words when I’m around. Because I have already told them, “Look brother, if you do not want me to say anything to you guys in front of anyone then don’t say those things in front of me because, it’s not that I am defending them or nothing, simply I don’t like it, stop to think, what good does it to you, you are old and you are still talking in that way, what kind of education are you going to give your kids, show them that you are a different person, well then, like the message is getting to them a little bit.”⁶⁹

Alejandra considers her brothers to be very *machista* and she fears they are setting a bad example for their kids, failing to understand one of them might be gay or lesbian, but too afraid to come out. According to Alejandra, her family knows that they can come to her for resources and support, but they also know that when they come to her house everyone is treated with respect and dignity.

Pedagogical Tensions

In a recent workshop sessions Alejandra was asked by a parent if she could fall in love with another women, and she responded with a “Yes, you never know if it could happen.” The context in which Alejandra answered the parent’s question was that an individual’s gender

⁶⁹“mis hermanos me dijeron que yo siempre he sido rara, así que... porque se empeze a decir que no dijeran puto, por ejemplo a mi sobrino, ¡cállate putito! O ¡qué tu vas a hablar putito! Y yo les decía ¡cállate Güey!, más puto eres tú, así ¿verdad? – ¿y por qué me dices así? – le digo pues sí, nos peleábamos o había veces que yo le decía, es que ya no le digan así es una mala palabra, además aunque fuera así, a ver que tú tuvieras un hijo así a poco le vas a decir así – ¡ay cabrona! no me eches la sal – esa no es la sal sino una bendición Güey y así ¿verdad?, porque así hablamos nosotros y entonces cuando supieron – ahora entiendo – entonces ya ellos tratan de no tocarme el tema una y dos ya he visto que ya casi no dicen esas palabras cuando yo estoy presente, porque ya les he dicho, miren carnales, sino quieren que yo les diga nada delante de la gente no digan así delante de mí porque no es que yo los esté defendiendo ni nada, simplemente no me gusta, ponte a pensar, de que sirve que tú ya estés viejo y sigas hablando de esa manera, que educación les vas a dar a tus hijos, demuestra que tú eres otra persona, entonces como que si les entra un poquitico

expression and sexuality can change over time, so you never knew if later on you could possibly fall in love with someone of the same gender. But the parents kept pushing and asking her more questions, and they eventually asked her if she had been in a relationship with another women, and Alejandra answered nervously with a yes. This led to a long conversation about her experience and how thankful the parents were for her honesty and frankness on the matter.

Alejandra shared this encounter with me, because according to her it was strictly prohibited for *Promotoras* to discuss personal matters that could possibly introduce a personal bias on a workshop topics. Below is an excerpt from a longer conversation I had with Alejandra as she reflected on this experience—why she thought it was important to share her experiences with parents during the workshop sessions and why, as a *Promotora*, she should have the opportunity to do so.

Well, I am going to be honest, I have questions I want to ask Judith, and I am going to tell you why. Because at Quintanilla [Elementary] School the mothers know me because I have been there for years, some of them took my class over three years ago, this time the ones that did not finish or did not graduate returned. So when they asked me that I said “yes,” and one of them who was in the back was impressed by that, but then we moved on, but when the class finished and I turned off the audio-recorder and one of them said—“ I don’t know, I felt that you had something more to say, because you talk about it with such emotion and with such passion”—and I start to laugh and the *señor* who was in the class, who was the only man said—“I don’t believe it, I could not see you”—Well, when I told them, I felt like I took a huge weight off but at the same time I added another one because...I started to feel bad, do you understand me? The reality is I felt sad,

what in reality I was saying to myself “Why can’t we be more honest and open on this topic? Why can’t I say that I was in love with a women and I left her because they would not let us be happy?” But as a *Promotora* we cannot say that; that is why I want to talk with Judith.⁷⁰

I shared with Alejandra I thought it would be a good idea to have this conversation with Judith. Alejandra understands why was its protocol for *Promotoras* to not bring in personal beliefs in the workshop space, but in the LGBT workshops, Alejandra argues they are trying to change the hearts and minds of parents so tapping into those emotions and seeing the humane side of this experience is important and valuable.

Alejandra’s past experiences present some new questions that Judith and the other *Promotoras* who teach the LGBT Acceptance Project will have to address. While the other *Promotoras* draw from their past experiences to help make the connections with their parents, they do so from an outside perspective. Alejandra complicates the pedagogical approach because she is speaking from the insider perspective, which then places queer experiences inside the space instead of outside it. This potentially could bring either positive or negative responses from parents, depending on the school and the context of the workshops sessions.

⁷⁰ Bueno te voy a ser honesta, esa pregunta yo se la quiero hacer a Judith y te voy a decir porqué, porque en Quintanilla School me conocen las madres de familia porque he estado ahí años atrás, unas cuantas tomaron las clases hace tres años, esta vez que volví a ir las tomaron las que no la pudieron tomar aquella vez y no se graduaron, fueron esta vez porque querían. Cuando me preguntaron eso yo les dije ¡Sí! y una que estaba por allá atrás se quedó impresionada pero ya pasó, pero cuando terminamos la clase y apagué la grabadora una de ellas me dijo – Yo no sé, pero presiento que usted ha tenido algo que ver, porque usted habla como con mucho sentimiento y con mucha pasión – ahí yo me empiezo a reír y el señor que estaba en la clase, que era el único hombre me dijo – Ah, yo no lo creo, no la vería a usted – entonces yo se los dije y cuando se los dije sentí que me quitó un peso de encima pero a la vez me eché otro y te voy a decir porqué...me empecé a sentir tan mal ¿no sé si me entiendes? La verdad sentí tristeza, porque la verdad yo me decía ¿Por qué no puede uno hablar de este tema abiertamente? ¿Por qué no puedo decir que sí me enamoré de una mujer y la dejé porque no me dejaron ser feliz con ella? Pero como *Promotoras* no podemos decir esos, por eso quiero hablar con Judith

Chapter Summary

When I first started my work with the *Promotoras* of Planned Parenthood and began attending meetings and gatherings, I immediately felt there was something about them that united them. I started Chapter 4 with introductory portraits of each of the *Promotoras* and their program coordinator, Judith, in order to get a sense of who each of these women are and how they came to do this work. I ended these portraits with a discussion on what I considered was a *Promotora Embodiment*.

However, it was how they understood their identities as *Promotoras* for Planned Parenthood and how this informed their work in the LGBT Acceptance Project that I found most interesting. As *Promotoras* for Planned Parenthood, they are aware of the stigma associated with their connection to a pro-choice organization. Judith and the *Promotoras* in our conversations talked at length about how they are *señaladas* (marked) in the community for doing this work. Their connection to what some may consider a radical and/or leftist organization positions them as the “other” or an outsider in society. However, it is from this place of **otherness** where the *Promotoras* are able to draw strength. The *Promotoras* experiences echo the work of Chicana/Latina feminist scholars that have discussed the different ways Latina women are oppressed in society for fighting against structures of oppression (Moraga, 1983; Anzaldúa, 1987; 2000; Latina Working Group, 2001; Torres, 2003). Yet, the *Promotoras*, like the Latina women discussed by the aforementioned scholars, empower each other and build from their collective experiences to fight for the rights of women and other marginalized groups.

For many of the *Promotoras*, their venture into the LGBT Acceptance Project was a natural transition given past experiences talking and teaching about sexual and reproductive

health to immigrant women. Their years of experience contributed greatly to their ability to engage parents in what many consider controversial and difficult topics.

Becoming Latina LGBT Allies and Advocates

The narratives with Yuri, Maria Felix and Alejandra Guzman demonstrate how the *Promotoras* came to understand their identities as allies and advocates for queer youth. The narratives begin with their early awareness of queer people and messages they received about queer communities. This is followed with pivotal moments in their life which shaped their early understandings about queer people. The last section(s) of the narratives demonstrate how the *Promotoras* currently make sense of queer communities as *Promotoras* of the LGBT Acceptance Project and how this informs their ally identities, teaching and advocacy work.

One of the first themes emerging from the narratives is this early understanding of difference and acceptance. Alejandra Guzman and Yuri's exposure to queer communities happened at a young age; their homes served as safe havens for queer youth. Both women talked at length about how their mothers instilled within the idea to treat everyone with respect and dignity. Not until our interviews, did Alejandra and Yuri reflect on the uniqueness of their early experiences in a home that welcomed and supported queer youth at a time when still considered taboo. These values and beliefs instilled in them by their parents informed how Maria Felix and Yuri approached their work as *Promotoras*.

My conversations with Maria Felix, Yuri and Alejandra Guzman on how they made sense of their work as *Promotoras* for the LGBT Acceptance Project provide different examples of how we can understand the roles and identities of Latina immigrants who are LGBT advocates and allies. For Yuri, she made sense of queer experiences by finding ways to relate it to moments when she has experienced some form of rejection and isolation, particularly in reference to her

ex-husband. How Yuri understands the experiences of queer people is echoed by researchers in counseling-related disciplines who have looked at how people make sense of other forms of oppression, by relating it to their own forms and feelings of oppression (Croteau et. al., 2002; Fukuyama & Ferguson, 2000, Ji, 2007; Jones et. al, 2012).

Maria Felix offers a different approach, her experiences as a brown woman from a provincial town outside of Mexico City inform how she makes sense of and speaks about queer communities. Unlike Yuri who relates it to her own moments and feelings of rejection and isolation, Maria Felix makes sense of queer experiences by focusing on the ways dark-skinned Latina/os are discriminated against in Mexico and the United States. Maria Felix's point of entry to understanding queer communities is not at the micro level, but more so the collective experiences of discrimination and racism. She focuses on the ways racism and homophobia are related, applying an intersectional lens to understand the multiple ways (queer) Latina/os can experience discrimination. Maria Felix's approach is more aligned with the work of queer of color scholars (Hames-Garcia & Martinez, 2011; Hong & Ferguson, 2011; Johnson & Henderson, 2005) who focus on the intersections of race, gender and sexuality.

Alejandra Guzman's narrative conveys her awareness of the complexity and interplay of gender and gender norms as reflected in her experiences with Merino's masculine gender performance and the hyper regulation of gender norms in the Mexican police force (Miller et. al., 2003). Over the course of being a *Promotora* for the LGBT Acceptance Project, she has begun to feel more comfortable disclosing her past relationship and is more open with people about her sexuality and identity as *rara*. However, Alejandra Guzman's *rara* identity, particularly within the Planned Parenthood *Promotora* space is still not well received. This raises larger questions about the roles of femininity that exist for women who are *Promotoras* for Planned Parenthood.

Alejandra Guzman's identity destabilizes the gender norms created in the space (i.e. heterosexual) and so is seen as an outsider (Rodriguez, 2003; Torres & Perpetusa, 2003). However, Alejandra Guzman uses her *rara* and outsider perspectives to engage parents and the community on the importance of supporting queer youth.

The narratives of the *Promotoras* taken together illustrate how some Latina/o immigrants come to understand queer communities and their roles as allies and advocates. Each of the *Promotoras* makes sense of queer communities and their experiences by relating to their own life experiences. This informs how they advocate, teach and understand their roles as allies. Their roles and identities as *Promotoras* for Planned Parenthood also play a central role in how they understand their identities and carry this message forward. Stigmatized for affiliation with a pro-choice organization and for talking about sexual and reproductive health in the community, these women are nonetheless able to draw strength from this place of otherness and use it to speak about the experiences of queer youth.

CHAPTER 5: TEACHING THE LGBT ACCEPTANCE PROJECT

Introduction

This chapter addressed Research Question 1: What are the pedagogical and discursive practices that inform the *Promotoras*' teaching of the LGBT Acceptance Project? I explored how parents came to understand queer communities and how they learned to become allies to queer youth in their families, schools and communities. This chapter contains four sections: Different Pedagogical Tools and Techniques; LGBTQ Experience and Becoming Allies; Relational and Intersectional Understanding of the Queer Latina/o Experience; and, Humanizing Queer Latina/o Youth. First, I discuss the different ways one *Promotora* engaged parents in conversations about queer communities. The subsequent sections address the three major thematic patterns evident from the data analysis. Each section provides a different glimpse of how the *Promotoras* engaged parents, created a space where they can empathize with queer youth and inspired a call to action. I limited my analysis to one *Promotora*'s workshop series in order to examine in granular detail the nuances in the conversations generated in the workshop space. Following the trajectory of a workshop series from beginning to end allowed me to record evidence of growth among parent attendees.

I focused my analysis on the workshop series taught by the *Promotora* Maria Felix. Several factors informed my decision⁷¹. First, she did not have a prior relationship with the group of parents she taught, unlike the other *Promotoras*, who were familiar with their respective groups of parents. This was an opportunity to see how Maria Felix interacted and built rapport with a group of parents from the outset. Of the seven workshop series I observed, Maria Felix

⁷¹ I elaborate in more detail on my decision to focus on Maria Felix in the methodology section

also had the largest number of participants. Thus, more parents in the workshop space meant hearing different and divergent perspectives that influenced the conversations.

The Setting

Prior to Maria Felix's workshop series—the second I attended during my data collection—I had already conducted one interview with her; during the month of the workshop series, I conducted the second and third interviews. This overlapping timeframe of data collection provided opportunities to reflect on some of the exchanges that occurred in the workshop space in more detail and further informed my ongoing observation data collection and subsequent analysis. The sessions took place in the evenings at a small charter high school southeast of the University of Southern California campus. Maria Felix was recruited to teach this series through word of mouth. A parent who had attended another of Maria Felix's Planned Parenthood workshops knew she also taught this material, and she contacted the parent enrichment coordinator at her children's school, who then asked if Maria Felix would be interested in teaching the LGBT Acceptance Project on her campus. In my first conversation with the parent enrichment coordinator, I learned the school had a Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) and zero-tolerance policies in place to create supportive environments for its queer students; however, she wanted to provide an opportunity for the school's parents to learn more about the queer communities and the experiences of queer youth.

The parents who participated were active in their children's schooling. Many spoke of their engagement in the school either as members of the parent group, volunteers in the classroom or attendees at various school-sponsored events. Their level of involvement at the school was also apparent by the types of questions asked and how they referenced their own children during sessions. For example, in the last session of the workshop series, a parent asked

Maria Felix how she thought the school's parent organization could help other parents become more informed on queer issues since not all parents knew about the GSA. Thus, many of the parents who participated in the workshop series were exposed to discussing school-related concerns with a group of parents.

Different Pedagogical Tools and Techniques

Maria Felix employed several pedagogical tools to keep parents interested in the conversation. The *Promotoras* use a range of activities and exercises that create multiple points of entry for parents to engage in class content. For example, the *Promotoras* incorporate videos which depict the struggles of queer youth and the process of acceptance parents of queer youth go through. In Maria Felix's sessions she used the film *Mi Familia*, a documentary of Latino/a families in San Diego that highlighted the experiences of parents coming to terms with their children's queer and gender nonconforming identities. The second video, *Bullied: The Jamie Nabozny Story*, was a documentary drama profiling a case of severe bullying and harassment of a high school student that led to waves of school policy reforms protecting queer youth in schools across the country.

The *Promotoras* also use several small-group activities, such as the "Heterosexual Questioner," "Early Understanding of LGBT People," "The Impact of Silence," "My Journey of Faith" and "Things We Can Do in Our Community."⁷² Each of these activities spoke to a different aspect of queer experiences and what parents could do to support queer youth. The parents participated in large-group activities where they read aloud different statements and scenarios about queer youth and their parents, with the *Promotora* soliciting their perspectives. The classroom visuals also played an important role in the classroom. Several posters, diagrams

⁷² See Appendix for explanation of each activity

and charts⁷³ used by the *Promotora* in activities were frequently left on the walls as a reminder of the class norms, or *acuerdos*.⁷⁴

Cosas que Dicimos

Maria Felix utilized a technique I call *Cosas que Dicimos*, or “Things we Say.” This involved Maria Felix paraphrasing stereotypical *dichos*, or sayings, people in Latina/o communities use to describe or talk about queer people (Ortiz, 2005). Maria Felix used these *dichos* in an exaggerated fashion and mostly in jest, trying to communicate to parents the absurdity of the saying. For example, in the second session, Maria Felix finished the “Heterosexual Questioner” with parents and began talking about the privileges heterosexuals have, their lack of awareness about queer communities and how damaging words can be to queer youth. Below is an excerpt from that conversation:

Maria Felix: How many times haven't we heard that “**I'm going to take him with 10 women** and this and that so he can...” (*parents laugh*) right? So that he can **cha::nge**, or we say “**it's a pha::se**, it's something in passing, it's going to go away if we take him with the psychologist. (*parents: yes, yes*)” (SR2-2, 11:20-11:28)

This passage exemplifies the types of conversational techniques employed regularly by Maria Felix to draw attention to the sayings parents have heard used to talk about queer people, and queer youth in particular. At different moments in the workshop, parents mirrored this technique.

⁷³ See Appendix for examples of diagrams and charts

⁷⁴ Class Agreements

For instance, in the same conversation a few minutes later Ana⁷⁵ (a parent) used it emphasize the different reactions a parent might have when their child tells them they are being bullied at school for being lesbian. Below is that excerpt:

Ana: She would probably not respond in the same way.

Maria Felix: She would not respond to her in the same way

A: She would probably say, “**se::e, I told you!** (*parents laugh*)

MF: You **dese::rve it!**

Jessica: You deserve it, **see I told you, find a man**

MF: **Those** are the responses that many times families give to LGBT youth.
(SR2-2, 18:56-19:07)

Note the parents’ laughter in this example. The laughter represented⁷⁶ parents’ acknowledgement of these sayings, particularly within the context of the class, as absurd comments; the inference was that parents reacted with “Can you believe that?” I argue that this served two important purposes. First, it brought to light these everyday sayings and scenarios many parents had already heard about queer youth. Second, by exaggerating and making a joke of these types of sayings, parents had an opportunity to distance themselves from it. If they had used these sayings in the past, parents possibly now knew they were not appropriate because they could have hurtful consequences for queer youth.

However, *Cosas que Dicimos* was also used by the *Promotora* to speak of positive practices parents could use to affirm queer lives and experiences. When used as a positive

⁷⁵ Within Maria Felix’s workshop series, a handful of parents particularly were vocal and engaged within the workshop space and I will be referring to them throughout this chapter. Thus, I have provided them with the pseudonyms: Miccaela, Sandra, Jazmin, Cruz, Juan, Cece and Ana. Other moments when parents only shared once or their voices were undistinguishable; I refer to them as “Parent” or “Parents.”

⁷⁶ McIntyre (1997) discusses when people engage in conversations about race and oppression; laughter is used to ease the anxiety and stress of the situation. I believe laughter in the context of the *Promotoras* work is also applicable given the difficulty of engaging in conversations about sexuality within the Latina/o community.

saying, it is still represented in exaggeration, but instead of being used in a form of jest, it was used as an opportunity for parents to jump on board and affirm the *Promotora*'s statement of queer acceptance. For example, in the second session of the workshop series after the parents have watched portion of *Mi Familia*, Maria Felix talked about affirming approaches parents can use to talk to queer youth:

Maria Felix: But we have to remember that for the youth, that for LGBT youth the treatment is still much worse...“and I don't care, what others **think**” **right?** “we are going to **accept** her, we are going to **protect** her,” they were going to love her in that way.

Parents: Yes, yes (SR2-2, 1:10:10-1:10:16)

Here Maria Felix emphasized how the parents in the film challenged some of the negative things people said about their transgender daughter. At the end of this exchange, we hear parents in the background say, “Yes, yes,” affirming Maria Felix's comments and the parents in the film. Using a *Cosas que Dicimos* technique demonstrates to the class not only “What people say” but also “What people **can** say.” In both cases, the technique prompted parents to challenge negative *dichos* and affirm positive *dichos* throughout the workshop series.

Lead-and-Response

Another technique used by Maria Felix and the other *Promotoras* I describe as “lead-and-response.” This technique created an opportunity for parents to become active participants, allowing the *Promotora* to check for understanding of the key idea she tried to get across. Unlike other conversations around oppression and marginalization based on class, immigration status, race or language, discussions of sexuality are still considered taboo in many Latina/o communities (Rodriguez, 2009). For many parents in the space, this workshop series was their

first experience with a range in queer terminology and their connotations or even publicly speaking about the lived experiences of queer people. For many of the parents, unlike the other Promotora's workshop series, Maria Felix's parents had also not participated in other PPLA workshops. Thus for many of the parents this might have been their first time vocalizing anything related to gender and sexuality. Affirming queer lives with collective responses instead of asking parents to speak individually helped create a safe space to express one's views. Below, Maria Felix applied this technique to reinforcing prior material:

Maria Felix: Now what is homophobia, we discussed it in the first class, does someone know what is homophobia?

Parents (choral response): fear and rejection=

MF: =**fear** and **rejection** (SR2-4, 54:30-54:36)

This approach also reinforced some of negative outcomes queer youth face from family rejection:

Maria Felix: Because if their family rejects, they are going to **e::nd u::p o::n...**

Parents (choral response): on the street=

MF: =**on the street** (SR2-3, 6:40-6:45)

In addition, Maria Felix checked for affirming responses parents could show their children:

Maria Felix: And how did they help her confront the situations that were happening outside?

Sandra: By supporting her=

MF: =**by supporting her**, giving her...**what?**

Miccaela: Confidence=

MF: =confidence. (SR2-2, 1:10:36-1:11:02)

Thus, Maria Felix used lead-and-response to actively engage parents in conversations about terminology, the negative effects of family rejection and ways parents can support queer youth. Since the number of session participants fluctuated throughout the four sessions, ranging from 12 to 35 parents, the technique allowed Maria Felix to both review prior learning with the previous session's attendees and (re)introduce key concepts for parents who might have missed the lesson the first time.

Setting the Stage

Each activity and exercise in the first session sought to build a common language to make sense of queer communities and what parents could do to support queer youth in their families, schools and community while also setting forth *acuerdos*, or norms, for the conversations. In the first class, parents took a pre-assessment, reviewed the *acuerdos* and learned to questions their preconceived ideas of queer people.

The Pre-assessment

The thirty questions on the pre-assessment that all the *Promotoras* use assessed parents' prior knowledge and understanding of queer experiences and their level of ally engagement. The *Promotora* read each question aloud and provided some context for the questions. The pre-assessment took about 20 minutes of the first class session. The questions exposed parents to terms the workshop will use and asked about different scenarios queer youth may experience at home, school, or in the community as well as the role parents and community members can play in creating supportive spaces for queer youth. The pre-assessment was well aligned to the workshop learning objectives; each section of the pre-assessment corresponded to content

discussed in each session⁷⁷. The pre-assessment acted as an overview of class content and framed how the *Promotora* would approach the topic. This was evidenced by Maria Felix's comment after parents finished the pre-assessment, "I know the pre-assessment gave you an idea about what this class is about, many of the things discussed in the pre-assessment will become clear as the class moves forward."

Introduction and *Acuerdos*

In the introduction and *acuerdos* (class agreements) Maria Felix expanded on the purpose of the workshop series, which is to: "learn about the impact of rejection and isolation of LGBT youth...how we can show empathy, to try to understand these youth...stop discrimination...and bring acceptance into our families." The *acuerdos* were the norms for the class. When talking about possibly contentious issues, *acuerdos* ensured conversations remained respectful of other viewpoints. More importantly, the *Promotoras* communicated that the spirit of the *acuerdos* encouraged parents to have an open heart and an open mind. As Maria Felix stated at the opening of this workshop series:

Maria Felix: What good is a closed parachute?

Parent: To crash (other parents chime in to...crash)

MF: It's not good for anything and so a closed mind also does not help any, we have to have an open mind. But more than anything else open our hearts.

(SR2-1, 21:10-21:16)

The *Promotoras* draw on parents' empathy and compassion when discussing the realities many queer youth face in their schools and homes. The *acuerdos* and introduction set the tone and purpose of the course. From the outset, the *Promotoras* modeled the types of conversations

⁷⁷ See Appendix for example of pre-assessment

parents should expect throughout the series and stressed why this form of engagement with the material was important.

The Genderbread Person and Debunking Myth Activity

The “Genderbread Person” and “Debunk Myths” were activities that provided parents with shared language and a common understanding about queer experiences. These foundational activities lasted close to fifty minutes. The genderbread person introduced concepts of gender and gender performance, sex, sexual identity and sexual orientation. Maria Felix defined each term—sharing individual details, eliciting questions from parents and providing examples. After the parents engaged in a conversation about each term, she then shared scenarios of the different ways they intersected to make the point of the complexities that surround not only queer identity development, but how all of us come to understand our identities in relation to the gendered roles in society. For many of the parents it was the first time they heard many of these terms, including heterosexual.

In the Debunk Myth activity, parents discussed in pairs and then collectively many of the myths and stereotypes they have heard about queer individuals. The *Promotora* wrote the myths and stereotypes volunteered by parents on the board and engaged in a brief discussion of each. Maria Felix left the words on the board and moved to the genderbread person. After a new understanding of gender and gender performance, sex, sexual identity and sexual orientation using the genderbread person cutout, Maria Felix and the parents discussed and debunked each myth. This activity encouraged parents to confront any stereotypes or prejudice they held coming into the workshop series. The activity also allowed the *Promotora* and parents to not get stuck on these types of questions when and if these types of questions or statement arise as the workshop

series moved on. Later in this chapter, I discuss how the group handled situations where new parents in the session brought up these types of questions.

Developing Common Ground for Understanding

This section outlined how the *Promotoras* applied pedagogical tools and techniques to facilitate conversations considered taboo or controversial for some parents. By setting out workshop norms, debunking myths and stereotypes and providing parents with affirming language to speak about queer communities, parents developed a knowledge base that permitted them to then move into a more complex and nuanced understanding of queer communities. When combined with the pre-assessment, videos, and genderbread person as a visual bookmarking tool, Maria Felix's pedagogical techniques created points of entry into conversations and new levels of awareness. Taken together, they comprised the critical foundational strategies which helped parents move from a simplistic understanding of queer communities to participating in discussions and activities that could lead parents to see within themselves the ability to enact change for queer youth in their families, schools and community.

LGBTQ Experience and Becoming Allies

The first finding addresses how the *Promotora* and parents come to understand the experiences of queer youth, the role of family, schools and community and as parents how they can serve as sources of support to queer youth. My goal here is to demonstrate what this type of conversation looked like and how constructs and notions of queerness and ally behavior were introduced and understood by the parents as the workshop series progresses. Maria Felix from the very beginning shared that the goal of the workshops series was have parents become “conscious and empathetic to the experiences of LGBT people and to learn ways they can

support and protect LGBT youth from bullying and harassment in families, schools and communities.”

The Downward Spiral

One of the recurring themes in the workshop was the idea of the “downward spiral.” Maria Felix listed a chain of events that could happen when queer youth experience family and community rejection. This narrative was described as follows: rejection from family and community leads queer youth to the streets. Once on the streets they meet people and in a desire to forget about their problems, use drugs and become sexually promiscuous. Once they become addicted to drugs they turn to stealing and prostitution; these types of risky practices then lead queer youth to having unprotected sex, which leads to higher risk of becoming infected with HIV, and eventually a deep depression and/or suicide. While many of the facts described by Maria Felix are true for some queer youth (Brooks et. al., 2005; Diaz et. al., 2001; Diaz et. al, 2006; Mizuno et. al., 2012), this downward-spiral narrative was woven throughout the workshop series and played a central role in how the parents came to understand part of queer experiences, or more specifically, the queer struggle.

This narrative was implicit in some questions on the pre-assessment. Statements included “In Los Angeles, 40 percent of homeless youth are LGBT;” “LGBT youth who are rejected by their families have a higher probability of acquiring a sexually transmitted infection or HIV;” and, “The rate of suicide for LGBT youth is higher compared to heterosexual youth.” Maria Felix first referred to the downward spiral halfway through the first workshop session:

Maria Felix: One of your questions in the pre-assessment asked if it was true or false that 40% of homeless youth are LGBT. Does someone remember that question on the pre-assessment ?

Parents (choral response): Yes

MF: Ok well let me tell you that it is real. 40% of people who are without a home and are on the streets of Los Angeles, we are not going to go to Mexico or any other place, here in Los Angeles. 40% of homeless youth are LGBT. (SR2-1, 58:40-59:20)

Throughout the four sessions, Maria Felix spoke to this statistic of queer youth homelessness and other statistics related to the negative effects rejection can have on self-esteem, sense of self, academic engagement, and one's ability to have a happy life. In the first and second workshop sessions Maria Felix went into detail, illustrating a correlation between levels of family and community acceptance and the possible contraction of HIV and/or risk of suicide with charts and diagrams. To assess if parents understood the downward-spiral message, Maria Felix asked several questions about what could happen when queer youth face family and community rejection:

Maria Felix: What does this family rejection lead them to?

Parents (choral response): To suicide=

MF: =**To suicide**, we know that many of the LGBT youth are taking their lives and more so if the family rejection is elevated. The risk of HIV infection, imagine if these youth go to the streets and they don't have who can help them, what can this **lead them to**?

P (choral response): Prostitution=

MF: =**Prostitution** right, so he can survive and this will lead him to higher risk of HIV or other sexually transmitted diseases. (SR2-1, 1:32:52-1:33:27)

By the second workshop session, parents moved from collective responses to answering questions individually about the downward spiral. In session two, Maria Felix reviewed key concepts and ideas taught in the previous session and asked parents what could happen if youth did not feel the support at home. Sandra immediately answers:

Sandra: They go to the street, that's when they start to go on the street=

MF: =uh huh, yes=

S:=and get into drugs and other stuff. Because they themselves throw them out, on the street. (SR2-2, 16:20-16:27)

Sandra's response exemplified many of these lead-and-response moments that happen around the downward-spiral narrative. By the end of the workshop series, different parents participated in a similar back-and-forth with Maria Felix about the negative effects of family and community rejection. However, the *Promotora* also asked parents what can happen when queer youth feel supported in their families and communities:

Maria Felix: How do they he::lp them? (*five seconds of silence*)

Ana: They help by... not committing suicide...or going to the streets so they don't turn to drugs

MF: Yes it makes it so their **self este::em** (*Maria Felix raises arm*)

Parents (choral response): Rises=

MF: =rises. Because if their family rejects them where are they going to **end up**?

P: On the street=

MF: =on the **stre::et** (SR2-3, 4:37-4:57)

Note the five seconds of silence after Maria Felix posed her question. Up to this point, parents have not had a conversation about how queer youth benefit from receiving acceptance and

support from family and the community. The conversations for the most part only focused on the downward-spiral narrative. This possibly explains why there was a silence and a hesitation to answer on the parents' part. What is also interesting is how Ana provided a counterargument. Ana's response attempted to make sense of the question by applying the downward-spiral narrative to visualize the possibilities for queer youth who do not face rejection. Maria Felix reinforced this contrast in outcomes by following Ana's comment with a prompt that parents answered with "the streets." This excerpt demonstrates the contrasting images created for parents grounded in the downward-spiral narrative.

Framing queer experiences in this manner created a sense of urgency but simultaneously maintained an image of queer youth as easily susceptible to deviant behavior. By the end of the workshop series, parents constructed an image of a queer youth who face a future potentially filled with promiscuity, substance abuse, HIV and depression. She did this in an attempt to evoke compassion and empathy for queer youth and to communicate the severity of the challenges queer youth face in their environment. Framing queer experiences in this manner created a sense of urgency but simultaneously maintained an image of queer youth as easily susceptible to deviant behavior.

The Role of *La Familia*

The ideas of family and home featured prominently in how Maria Felix talked about and made sense of the feelings of rejection and isolation queer youth experience. During the pre-assessment and activities in the first session, parents were made aware of the important role family plays in shaping the positive or negative experiences queer youth have at home, school and the community. Maria Felix stressed that homes are the first places where queer youth face rejection and discrimination:

Maria Felix: What are we going to learn at the end of **the class**? We are going to learn about the **i::mpact** of rejection and isolation. For LGBT youth, they are, in some places, in some areas and in some communities, by some people they somehow are being discriminated against right? And where can this discrimination **begi::n**?

Parents (choral response): At home=

Maria Felix: =At home (SR2-1, 19:15-19:32)

After Maria Felix made this point, she began the “Impact of Silence” activity where parents learned how difficult it could be for queer youth who could not share or voice certain parts of their identity at home. During the debrief to this activity, Maria Felix went back to the point made earlier about how rejection starts at home. Evoking the downward spiral narrative reiterated to parents what happens when queer youth face rejection from family.

Maria Felix: What do you think le::d them to the streets?

Parents (choral response): Not being accepted...not being accepted...

MF: Not being accepted **where**?

P: In their home=

MF: =**In their home**, this leads them to end up on the streets. (SR2-1, 59:36-59:57)

By making this link, Maria Felix communicated that families have the ability to create a home environment where queer youth can feel supported. This point was further reinforced and expanded upon in an activity where parents read statements aloud of what they can do to support queer youth:

Maria Felix: Believe that your son or daughter can have a happy life as an adult as LGBT.” If we believe that they can be happy, then they will believe it right? He will be able to be happy. But a lot of it depends on the kind of support that we give them **where?**

Parents (choral response): In the family=

MF: =in the family, right. (SR2-2, 39:56-40:18)

Maria Felix in the above exchange reinforced the idea support begins at home and parents’ attitudes and beliefs influence how queer youth feel about their identity. We saw this in her comment, “If we believe that he can be happy, then he will believe it, right?”

The above three excerpts illustrate how *Promotoras* emphasized the role family plays in shaping the experience of queer youth. Maria Felix recognized that parental acceptance of their child’s queer identity is often not easy; she reiterated and reinforced that acceptance and affirmation is a process.

During the second workshop session, parents watched clips from the documentary *Mi Familia*. The documentary showed how Latina/o parents of queer youth come to understand their queer children. During the film debrief, parents used some of the concepts discussed previously to make sense of the process of acceptance for parents of queer youth. One of the more interesting interactions happened after they watched a clip of parents who had a hard time coming to terms with their daughter Teresa’s lesbian identity.

Maria Felix: Ok, let’s, stop here. Was it the same process? How was it for this family? (*five seconds of silence*) Somebody want to comment?

Juan: Well, the father, well he didn’t accept=

MF: =He didn’t acce::pt. It was hard for the whole family right?

Miccaela: It's that they didn't, they didn't, didn't see any signals, well as they tell it there. It's like all of a **sudden** she told them one day and it was done, it was like there was **no** idea, no moment for them to **think**, to **think** that perhaps she was, or she wasn't. Because sometimes that happens, sometimes there are things that, that they do that will make someone notice

MF: Some signals?

Miccaela: uh huh

MF: That they would suspect.

Miccaela: Uh huh, but sometimes out of fear it is not asked, it is not asked to the person if they **are** or if they **aren't**. Instead, we always wait for that moment, for them to say it.

MF: Ok, ok do you all remember the process of coming to acceptance? For these parents was it something easy for them to get to this moment of acceptance?

Parents (choral response): No

MF: Like the mother said, she had to leave, Teresa had to leave the house. The father rejected her, the process for them was prolonged and the mother comes to say that if "I would have known how to respond from the beginning, how many things would we have avoided," right? (SR2-2, 58:53-1:00:32)

In this excerpt, there is an exchange between Maria Felix and Miccaela where some of the concepts and ideas discussed prior in the class are used to speak to the experiences of this family coming to terms with their queer daughter's identity. What first comes across are Miccaela's comment about the parents not having any idea their daughter was a lesbian. As Miccaela stated, "They didn't... see any signs." This referred to a prior conversation where parents reported that,

in many instances, queer children do not disclose and/or hide their identity around family members out of fear of rejection and so this could possibly explain why, according to Miccaela, they were blindsided by her disclosure. However, after Maria Felix affirmed Miccaela's comment, Miccaela went on to suggest what could also have happened was the parents chose to ignore the possibility their daughter was a lesbian out of fear. Maria Felix affirmed this statement by asking parents if the process of coming to acceptance for these parents was easy and they answered with a resounding "no."

Maria Felix attempted to help parents understand what the process of acceptance looks like. At the end of the above exchange, Maria Felix referred to a comment the mother in the film made by saying, "If they had this information earlier, how many things could have been different?" The connection I believe, Maria Felix wanted parents to stress is that if given education early on about queer experiences and the tools and language to engage in these conversations, maybe more parents would be accepting of their queer children from the beginning instead of rejecting them. At the end of this session, Maria Felix recapped key points from the previous two classes and built connections between the essential ideas presented. She asked parents to reflect on the process of acceptance the parents depicted in the film went through:

Maria Felix: At the end, what was it that helped Teresa's family accept her?

Miccaela: Well from what I could understand it was her family becoming informed, being present in those meetings, because everything that happened with the rejection of the mom and dad was that, not having that information. Instead, it was based on the education that it is given to us that some things are good and

some things are bad and that the line should not be crossed. (SR2-2, 1:04:01-1:04:56)

Miccaela's response was an important moment in the class. Two connections were made by Miccaela. First was her acknowledgement that many in the Latina/o community are not informed on this topic, and so it is important to seek out resources in order to find ways to understand queer communities. Miccaela mentioned that the parents rejected Teresa because they had no understanding of queer experiences. Miccaela then reinforced this statement by making the connection that it was due to the types of education given to "us" (meaning Latina/os) and societal views or opinions of queer communities that stop people from seeking out new information. Maria Felix built on Miccaela's point and solidified the connection for the rest of the parents.

Maria Felix: But it's because of everything we have learned in our culture. Did you notice all the difficulty the mother of Teresa had to go through? "What people said, that they said it was a **sin**, what was the family going to think?" All of those prejudices all of those things that we were raised with have such a weight that makes them suffer and have a harder time in their life And so the process of acceptance for every family was not easy, it was not easy, but the idea is that there be this and many times it's because we don't have the information, right? We don't have the information and that makes us feel like we are blind.(SR2-2, 1:11:28-1:11:53)

The message Maria Felix conveyed was parents need to change their preconceived notions of queer youth, because parents are at the center of the support system for queer youth. In Maria

Felix's exchanges she urged parents to understand it was not queer youth who needed to change, but rather parents' own preconceived notions of queer experiences.

Maria Felix also guided parents to recognize that although they may not have queer children, queer youth do exist in their communities and parents of queer youth may be struggling to make sense of their children's queer identity. Thus, the workshop supported those who struggling to understand their child's queer identity, who came to gain more information⁷⁸. It also affirmed a parent's process of acceptance, creating a place for parents without queer children to identify with this struggle and to learn how to be a source of support as others come to understand their children's queer identity. Combined, these approaches reinforced the idea queer youth are children from the community and as "our children," they need to be protected. This echoes the work of Collins (1991), particularly how she talks about African-America mothers as "othermothers" for Black youth in the community.

By the third workshop session, Maria Felix explicitly started to make this connection for parents:

Maria Felix: Take this information and share it, look, the importance of these workshops is that you take this information and not say "Well, I don't have anyone like that." But what if we have a nephew or what if we have a family member that has not received the support by their family but they need to know that they can count with us or how many times do we not have a neighbor that is going through a situation or many times our children come and say, "Well, my friend is going through this and their mother does not accept them." and well we

⁷⁸ Maria Felix shared that some parents in the space share with her some parents in the workshop space have queer children, but did not want to disclose. In other workshop series, parents did share with other Promotoras they were struggling with their children's queer identity.

can come and become conscious and realize that what we need to have for all people is respect. (SR2-3, 10:30-11:22)

Maria Felix stressed that queer Latina/o youth need to feel the support of their family and community, noting that the most radical change can happen within families.

Maria Felix: This is what we want to make the connection, the family is the most important because it provides youth security, but family can also change community and be the ones to support LGBT youth. Family can be the place of refuge. The family is the nucleus, if the family changes the way they treat LGBT people, so will the community. (SR2-3, 1:25:31-1:25:58)

By the end of the workshop series parents begin to understand the role they can play to change other people's minds about queer communities and the unique position they are in to be messengers. Below is an excerpt of Maria Felix talking to parents about their responsibility to go out and educate others:

Maria Felix: Thinking about the LGBT community, are there spaces that we can think of that support LGBT youth?

Sandra: For LGB...

MF: T

S: =T?...this is the first time I have seen a class like this for LGBT

MF: Look, information like this, it's the first time that we have seen this type of information, right?

Parents (choral response): Yes

MF: So really, all of you are being=

S: =privileged

MF: =privileged because you are the ones that are initiating this, this is why Rigo is here right, because this is being initiated within Latina/o's so they can become conscious because all of this affects us, ok? Because our LGBT youth don't have places, there are no places, for youth who are lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender.

S: In these areas? No. (SR2-3, 1:25:57-1:27:02)

Sandra responded to Maria Felix by using the word "privilege," an indicator that opportunities to learn and engage in issues of sexuality and identity are hardly ever talked about in her community. Other parents in the space shared Sandra's sentiment. On many occasions after the formal class time ended, parents shared with Maria Felix how happy they were to learn these new concepts.

Parents Becoming Allies

Throughout the workshop series parents were provided with different examples of how to be allies, however it was not until the last session when parents were given time and space to discuss concrete ways they to be allies. In the last session parents engaged in a dialogue about what it meant to be a bystander with the video *Bullied: The Jamie Nabozny Story*. Maria Felix taught that witnessing discrimination or bullying and not doing anything places the person in the role of someone who is complicit in the oppression. Below is an excerpt where parents engaged in a conversation about being a bystander.

Maria Felix: Many of the people did not have any courage, the principal didn't do anything to help Jimmy. Who also was there, but did not do anything?

Parents: Teachers...students

MF: It could have been other students right? That were observing what was going on and did not say anything or do anything to defend him right? And they stayed quiet. Who in reality could also be doing that?

P (choral response): Us

MF: Yes, we could also be doing something like that. But we know that there are events, marches that seek to gain support and yet many times we don't do anything. The question is for us to not move to the side, but to actually do something for these youth. (SR2-4, 1:22:43-1:23:07)

Having parents respond to the question “Who could else be doing that?” allowed Maria Felix to help parents recognize how easily they could step into the role of ally.

She encouraged them to not only reject the role of bystander but to also consider what they could do to create change in their community. Parents were asked what they can do to be allies to queer youth and wrote down examples on butcher paper to share with the class⁷⁹. Parent responses included “Not make homophobic jokes,” “Do not participate in homophobic banter,” “Share this information with our friends,” and “Ask the school to provide information for LGBT youth.” Through the course of these sessions, parents moved from hearing queer-affirming terminology to adopting the language and coming up with different ways to support queer youth in their homes, schools and communities.

At the end of this session, Maria Felix asked parents what kinds of actions create safe environments for queer youth in the community. Below is an excerpt with different parents sharing their thoughts:

Juan (J1): Well to support them emotionally

Maria Felix: The youth?

⁷⁹ See Appendix for examples

J1: The youth that present themselves in that manner. To support them.

Principally to listen to them, because sometimes we don't know how to listen to someone who tells us—so we have to listen, listen to them and that's how we can support them on their path and give them some advice, you understand me? Like for which way to go and, I think that there is nothing, there is no difference between one and another, we are all humans and we all want and=

MF: =we all deserve

Parents: Respect and dignity

Jazmin (J2): But what will need to happen to get to that point? Because I have someone really close that, that everyone says is gay is gay, but no one=

MF: =but no one has the nerve

J2: =no one has the nerve to say something, and I see him=

MF: While the person, her herself does not come and say I am homosexual. No one has the right to say something.

J2: But no, not say that he is a homosexual but to like you say, give them support, how to open him, how to make him feel ok, you understand me?

MF: Accept him the way he is

J1: Well, support him, support him where he is

J2: Respect this person being who he is?

MF: You love him and support him where he is and that is another part, and please all of you take that in mind. If it is a family member of mine who I know whose parents or siblings are going to reject him I want the family to know that I am here.

J2: His family is very *machista* and I think that is his concern, because I see him and my daughter tells me “*Mama*, he is” and I tell her “you be quite, why do you say that,” “because he is”. But he, he does not=

MF: =You do not have to go say are you or are you not, that is not what matters. What at that moment matters is that he knows you are there, you are family and “anything that you need I am here for you”=

J1: “I am here to support you, to support you” (SR2-4, 1:29:44-1:32:36)

This excerpt gets to the core of the knowledge the *Promotoras* are hoping parents leave with—a better understanding of queer communities and the ability to show compassion and empathy to this population. First was Juan’s statement that we are all human and deserve respect. He also shared that providing queer youth with support meant listening to them and providing them with advice. Jazmin jumped in and asked the class a question of how to get there, and shared the experience she was going through with her family member; both Maria Felix and Juan provided some suggestions and advice. What was not captured in the above excerpt was the nonverbal signs of support for Maria Felix’s and Juan’s statements. Several parents encouraged Jazmin to figure out how to approach this family situation by saying things like “Yes, yes” under their breath. In the next sentence by Maria Felix communicated that ally behavior—being someone others can turn to for support—is an ongoing practice. Maria Felix wanted parents to understand that by modeling ally behavior, they are creating opportunities for youth who need support to approach them when they are ready.

Relational and Intersectional Understanding of the Queer Latina/o Experience

The second finding examined how Maria Felix and the parents understood intersectional forms of oppression and marginalization queer Latina/o youth experience at

school and in the community. First, Maria Felix provided parents an opportunity to reflect on their own experiences, relating oppression and marginalization based on race, class and immigration status to experiences based on actual or perceived sexual orientation. Second, she drew parallels between these types of stigmatization to illustrate the connection, or intersectionality, of multiple forms of oppression and marginalization.

Relational Understanding of Oppression

Maria Felix began by eliciting examples of the stereotypes and misconceptions other communities have about Latina/os:

Maria Felix: And what do we know about stereotypes...(long pause) for example if people from another country see a *mariachi*, they think that all *Mexicanos* are what? (long pause)

Parents: *Mariachis*

MF: “Yeah isn’t it right that all Mexicans dress up as *charros*?” What they did was stereotype Mexicans, that is a stereotype that characterizes people in a certain type of way. (SR2-1, 1:21:49-1:23:09)

Two things are happening in the above excerpt. First, Maria Felix solicited a cultural stereotype. Some parents in the space had not heard the word “stereotype” before, as possibly indicated by the long pause which followed her use of the term. Maria Felix used this example of an assumption people might make of Mexicans to demonstrate the error of generalizing about an entire group of people as a result of one image.

What immediately followed the above exchange was a longer conversation about assumptions and stereotypes Latina/os make about queer communities. Setting up the conversation by first talking about assumptions other communities make about Mexicans, Maria

Felix was able to open up the space for parents to engage in a conversation about stereotypes and make a similar connections to the types of assumptions people might make about queer communities. Later in the workshop series, the discussion moved from stereotypes people have of Latina/os, to ways other communities discriminate against Latina/os.

Maria Felix: Sometimes why is it that people are discriminate against? Why are they discriminated? “Because we do or do not have papers? What color is your skin?”=

Sandra: =“you don’t talk English”=

MF: =you don’t talk English (SR2-2, 12:53-13:17)

Maria Felix throughout the workshop series engage parents in conversations about the different ways Latina/os are discriminated against in this country. The context for this type of conversation was usually followed by a connection to how those in queer communities are also discriminated against in the United States. This type of exchange became important, as it provided parents an opportunity to relay their own feelings and understanding of oppression and marginalization to how other groups might experience discrimination.

Maria Felix also spoke of how one person could experience discrimination on multiple fronts:

Maria Felix: Us as people who are immigrants we know a lot about what it means to be discriminated against and being rejected right, because we don’t have papers, because we don’t speak English, or because in the community in which I live we are not well accepted because it’s a community of all Black people or all white and so we know a little bit or we feel what discrimination and what rejection feels like. (SR2-4, 7:07-7:33)

These conversations tended to be some of the liveliest discussions in the class. Many of the parents were not accustomed to these types of conversations; asking parents to reflect on the different ways they or others they know were discriminated against due to their Latina/o identity was a new experience. The connection between their own oppression and the ways that many in queer communities also experience marginalization was an ongoing dialogue between Maria Felix and the parents.

Intersectional Forms of Oppression

Once Maria Felix engaged parents in conversations about the multiple ways Latina/os experience discrimination at the hands of **other** groups in society, she made the connection that queer Latina/o youth may face discrimination by their own Latina/o community:

Maria Felix: We know that for our LGBT Latino youth they go through **even more problems**, because homophobia exist in **be::half** from our **o::wn Latino community**. Now what is homophobia, we discussed it in the first class or does someone know what is homophobia?

Cece: Fear of and rejection=

MF: =**fear and rejection** of people who are homosexual if they have phobia, of feel phobia or rejection of people who are homosexual and so our LGBT Latino youth face discrimination because of that. Our very own community rejects them for being homosexual, they go through that, and they also go through racism, we mentioned that in the last class. (SR2-4, 54:20-55:46)

Maria Felix's use of the term "LGBT Latino" was purposeful, getting parents to make the connection to the particular struggles of queer Latina/os. For example, in other sections of this chapter where I describe interactions between Maria Felix and parents, Maria Felix used the term

“LGBT” and not “LGBT Latino.” For Maria Felix, it was important to build an understanding of the experiences of queer people and Latina/os separately first; doing so allowed for a larger impact and understanding when she asked parents to make sense of the intersectional struggles of queer Latina/os.

This narrative of “We Latina/os reject them for being queer, and other communities reject them for being Latina/o” was repeated throughout the workshop series. She again evoked the downward-spiral narrative:

Maria Felix: But it can also affect them by what Miccaela was saying that if that support does not happen at home, we are going to take them to those places. To the street, lead them to suffer more discrimination, because they discriminate them at home and they could suffer discrimination on the street. Because I am going to tell you something, it results that we have our youth at home and we are Latinos, and we have our daughter or son at home who is gay or a lesbian *chica*, we discriminate against them at home, and it results that they are going to want to do what, **where** would a young LGBT person want to go?

Cece: to the street=

MF: =**to the street** but to where their gay community is, yes or no? We know that in certain areas here in Los Angeles and in other places, there is an area where the youth meet, we know that right, and so these youth are going to seek refuge there but what happens? Well because they are **Latinos** and they arrive to that gay community where the majority are maybe white, **what** are they going to see?

Parents (choral response): discrimination=

MF: =**discrimination for being what?**=

P: =Latinos

MF: =**Latinos** and so imagine, because its double the amount of rejection that is happening there and we lead them to exactly what the *señor* was saying. They are going to have to find some way to live their lives, how to push forward, right?

And they suffer enough discrimination on the streets. (SR2-3, 6:15-8:46)

In the above excerpt, Maria Felix used the phrase “We are Latinos” to note that some in their collective community reject queer youth. She moved from accepting “the streets” as a response to specifically referring to the streets of West Hollywood, a small incorporated city surrounded by Los Angeles where an estimated 39 percent of residents are self-identified gay men. When she said, “We know that...in Los Angeles...there is an area where the youth meet,” and again used “We are Latinos,” she juxtaposed this identity with the gay community, which she described as mainly white. Maria Felix ended this exchange by emphasizing this was how queer Latina/o youth could face “double the amount of rejection.”

The above passage is an example of how Maria Felix echoed ideas about intersectionality and operationalized queer of color praxis work (Brockenbrough, 2011; Kumashiro, 2001; McCready, 2012). Maria Felix spoke of and made the connection to the multidimensionality of oppression queer Latina/o youth can experience from both Latina/o and queer communities. In the following passage, Maria Felix made the connection to institutional forms of discrimination that can exist for queer Latina/o youth such as schools and LGBT Youth Centers for parents in her workshop.

Maria Felix wanted parents to make the connection that queer Latina/o youth can experience more severe forms of discrimination, particularly in school, compared to white queer

youth. Below was a conversation where Maria Felix and parents are debriefing the video on the Jamie Nabozny case.

Maria Felix: These youth go and try to take refuge in the gay community, but right there they could go through racism for **being what?**=

Parents: =Latino=

MF: =Latino and so they go through a double discrimination and so where does the self-esteem go of these youth, their health and well-being, where does all of this go? It goes down right? For Jimmy this was not a big issue, but for our LGBT Latino youth the harassment and discrimination could be worse than what we are seeing here. (SR2-4, 55:00-55:36)

Maria Felix pointed to the different places where “Jimmy,” James Nabozny, was able to go for support, like the LGBT youth shelter. Maria Felix wanted parents to recognize although the violence Jimmy experienced was awful, queer Latina/o youth may have even less access to those resources.

Maria Felix referred to three sources of possible discrimination for queer Latina/o youth: from the Latina/o community; from queer communities; and third, from society as a whole.

Maria Felix: In one class a women shared with me, very upset, “But why are you talking about this topic if there are other groups that are also discriminated against.” Rigo mentioned to you all earlier, that this information for the Latina/o community is new, it is just coming out of the oven. In what place have you heard about this information for us Latinos?

Parents: Nowhere...nowhere...no where

MF: In no place, we are the first organization that is concerned, and there are organizations that are supporting LGBT youth, but there are no organizations that come into our communities to let us know what is going on...the purpose of the class is for us to become conscious of the type of rejection and discrimination experienced by the LGBT Latino community. (SR2-1, 41:39-43:04)

Maria Felix acknowledged there was support for queer communities, but few organizations were engaging parents in Latina/o communities with these types of conversations. She emphasized that the LGBT Acceptance Project focused on the experiences of queer Latina/o youth.

Humanizing Queer Latina/o Youth

Different class activities and directed conversations by Maria Felix sought to humanize queer Latina/o youth, to create opportunities for parents to demonstrate compassion and empathy. How I use the term “humanizing narrative” in the dissertation is the process of parents coming to understand queer experiences as different, but not abnormal, deserving respect and dignity. Blackburn (2014) describes this as the process of parents seeing the humanity within themselves and within queer people. In this section, I demonstrate several ways parents and Maria Felix engaged in such moments during the workshop series.

In Their Shoes

At various points, parents reflected on the difficult experiences queer Latina/o youth encounter as well as their own privilege as heterosexual individuals. One goal of select activities was to place parents “in the shoes” of queer people so they could imagine the emotions experienced when put in a situation hostile to queer identity. Maria Felix engaged parents in a conversation about the difficulties queer people might feel when they cannot share certain parts

of their identity. For example, in the following excerpt parents debrief after an “Impact of Silence” activity:

Maria Felix: What do you think this activity has to do with our class on LGBT?

Sandra: Because that is how maybe some LGBT people must feel when we prohibit them from talking about what they feel.

MF: About what they feel, do you all agree?

Parents (choral response): Yes

...

MF: It would be difficult. Imagine you had to think right now, "Well what would I talk to them about?" You had to think about that since I can't talk about my kids. Did somebody step back and think about what they were going to talk about?

Juan: We paused a lot

MF: You would pause a lot, because you did not know what to talk to them about. So it's difficult, now imagine if I told you, you have two hours to not talk about those things that are important to you, imagine two days, not being able to talk about **your kids**, of **your favorite food**, of **how you make your pozole**. Now can you imagine, two days, two weeks or how about two years not being to talk about that or a whole lifetime not being able to talk about these people who are so important in your life, of places that are so important in your life for you all.

Would it be **comfortable** or **uncomfortable**?

P: Uncomfortable

MF: So **what** does this activity have to do if we relate it with LGBT youth

P: It's difficult

MF: Difficult, because they can pass their whole lives...like how?

P: In silence=

MF: =in silence (SR2-1, 37:46-40:13)

After Maria Felix asked parents to affirm Sandra's statement, she asked parents to think about how hard it would be to do this activity for longer periods of time, while mentioning people, places and activities they could not talk about. Eventually Maria Felix asked them if this would be a comfortable or uncomfortable situation and once again made the connection to queer individuals. At the end parents responded with the type of answer Maria Felix was looking for, which was awareness that queer individuals would have to stay silent and not share large parts of who they are. This type of conversation between parents and Maria Felix was a typical strategy used to have parents participants relate to some of the experiences queer youth might go through.

At other moments in the workshop series, Maria Felix explicitly asked parents to reflect on the purpose of these types of activities. Below is an excerpt which exemplifies how Maria Felix framed these conversations. In it, three parents have just participated in the "Heterosexual Questioner."

Maria Felix: What are we trying to do with this class, what do we want to achieve with the questioning of these people? **What** message lies within there?

What do you see we are trying to do here? **What** do we want to demonstrate with the questions that we were asking them?

...

Cece: We are putting ourselves in the shoes of the person that, of the people that, of people that are gay, or whatever they are, that are feeling something when, people look at them in a certain way or when they are put into a situation where

they may look at them funny or even when they ask them why do you like this
or...make assumptions... (SR2-2, 15:00-16:26)

Here we see the parent, Cece, answer that the purpose of these activities is to put parents “in the shoes” of queer individuals in order to understand their life experiences. The above response spoke directly to the activity and also demonstrated parents were conscious of the purpose of many of the class activities: to empathize and show compassion for the struggles of queer communities.

Imagine If

One of the other ways Maria Felix cultivated empathy and compassion was by describing negative scenarios and situations queer youth might find themselves in; she then had parents reflect on what queer youth placed in these positions might feel. Maria Felix attempted to evoke this type of emotion by framing conversations and questions with the phrase “Imagine if.” In the excerpt below, Maria Felix wanted parents to imagine what it might be like for queer Latina/o youth who face discrimination from their families and queer communities.

Maria Felix: Imagine if a youth was born in a Latino family and he is gay.

Sometimes he faces discrimination from his own family because he is homosexual or lesbian, right? Gay or lesbian, and if he goes to the streets, what other types of discrimination is he going to face? If he arrives to the LGBT community, this Latino guy, what other type of discrimination can he face there?

For being=

Juan: =Latino=

Parents: =Latino=

MF: =Latino and so he has double discrimination, double rejection and so that affects him and where is this going to affect this guy more? Well in his self-esteem, it's going to affect his self-esteem and this is going to make him feel more isolated. (SR2-1, 1:30:37-1:31:45)

What Maria Felix does in the above excerpt by starting with “imagine if,” she has parents visualize the experience of this queer Latina/o boy. She then describes a scenario of what could happen to this individual due to the type of rejection they would face. This type of exchange is a typical way Maria Felix is able to get parents to think about and reflect on the experiences of queer youth.

At other moments in the workshop series, the “imagine if” phrase generates reactions from parents where they share their own experiences with queer youth.

Maria Felix: What is the family there for? **To support of course.** Now imagine a youth that comes to their family and says that they have been discriminated against and harassed for being gay or lesbian? What would, what would. If the daughter came and=

Miccaela: =I don't, I don't...well that I don't see it like that. I see cases like that, we have friends that are like that, but they, they don't see them like that. They **do not support them.**

MF: Okay, that is, that is where we want to get to=

M: =**on the street they go**

MF: And make some movement right? To bring out the emotions, right. The family is there to support. It is so important that family support, that is what we want you and all of us to learn.

M: But for those I know, **no no, no**

MF: No? Now imagine if these youth who know that in their family they are not going to have that support because the family does not tolerate, they are not okay with them. “That is not something you talk about,” but instead critique, we instead make lots of jokes. So then, a youth who is LGBT isn’t going to, are they going to come with that confidence to the family and tell them what is going on because they are this way?

Parents: No

M: No, no they won’t. **They will shut them up.** (SR2-2, 15:04-17:11)

Miccaela shared her own experience and engaged in a strongly worded back-and-forth with Maria Felix which ended with Miccaela confirming the rejection by family by saying “No, no they won’t. They will shut him up.” The “Imagine if” scenarios also created spaces and opportunities for parents to share their own stories about experiences with queer youth.

Todos Somos Humanos

One of the more powerful ways Maria Felix and parents showed empathy and compassion for queer youth was by using phrases like “We are all humans” and “We must see each other in humane ways.” This language of “humane” and “human” became particularly salient in conversations of faith and religion during the third session. The majority of conversations on faith focused on ideas of humanity and the growing acceptance of queer individuals in many faith communities. For example, a parent, Ana, talked about the Pope’s recent position about accepting queer people into the church.

Ana: The Pope right now, he said that we are no one to judge, that the only person that can judge us is God, and that not us, not no one should judge.

That...“if she has already accepted who she is, then why can’t we?” So why aren’t **we** going to accept all the people that are lesbian, gay, transsexual or bisexual=

Maria Felix: =He is revolutionizing all this about religion you know and don’t think that is just there, but in many places. (SR2-3, 54:57-55:38)

Ana’s statements are evidence that some parents are influenced by signals from faith leaders in their communities, interpreted here as movement on supporting queer individuals by leadership within the Catholic Church. Ana, in the above statement, also reinforced the Pope’s position by adding, “Why aren’t **we** going to accept” to illustrate the point that if the Pope accepted queer people then others should too.

At other moments in the workshop series, I saw Maria Felix and parents directly evoke God’s love and compassion for all human beings as support for queer communities.

Maria Felix: Who would he go with?...or is he going to say, not you because you are a lesbian, not you because you are gay. **Is he going to say that?**

Parents: No=

MF: =no. If we want to emulate the love of God, it’s because of that right. That we have to show that compassion and the love for all human beings, be whoever they are. Their color of skin, their religion, because sometimes we discriminate if we do not share the same faith...

Juan: That is an ignorance right? Because like we say, it is true, that God is one and only, for all humanity and for all people that problem is how they demonstrate it to you

MF: Yes, that is how we land on these questions (SR2-3, 1:20:00-1:21:06)

The context for the above excerpt was a conversation of “Who would Jesus spend time with?” if he came to Los Angeles. Maria Felix wanted parents to make the connection Jesus would show compassion and love for all human beings, particularly those who marginalized due to their race, religion or sexual identity. In this excerpt, we also had a parent (Juan) affirm Maria Felix’s statement that God is for all humanity and all people, but how people demonstrate his love is what might be the problem.

I end this section (and chapter) with a lengthy excerpt which exemplifies many of the themes discussed throughout the chapter. This excerpt was taken from a pivotal moment in the workshop series. It demonstrated parents enacting and modeling what I considered to be strong ally behavior, where they used much of the language and terminology discussed in the workshop series. This excerpt is from the third workshop session, where parents and Maria Felix engaged in a conversation about how the Latina/o community needs to see more acceptance of queer people within faith communities. A parent (Cruz) who did not attend the first or second workshop sessions shared some of her negative and opposing viewpoints about queer communities. This passage begins after Cruz and Maria Felix have engaged in a lengthy back-and-forth about some of the Cruz’s viewpoints; Maria Felix realized she was losing control of the class. As many of the parents started their own side conversations, Maria Felix tried to move forward:

Maria Felix: Ok, *señora*, this is now our third session. It would have brought me a lot of joy if you would have come to the first=

Cruz: =to the first one

MF: Yes, the first one or the second one. But unfortunately you were not able to attend. But we still respect your opinion and the opinion of everyone in the room

C: Ok, yeah, I'm not afraid

MF: And thank you for being here, because it is so important to have the aspects and opinions of other people

C: In the time that I grew up you didn't see that so much

MF: Yes the communication today is so much more open that, yes, we see it more. But really even in the Bible, that is if we are going to talk about one book in particular. Even in the Bible it talks about people that people, of a certain orientation....There are several things in the Bible....there are several things in the Bible that before would function, and were permitted, but today we no longer permit them. For example, in the Bible it says, it says that slaves were legal, they had slaves and it was ok.

C: Yes, in times of law

MF: But today that has **changed right? Are we fighting against that?**

Parents: Yes

MF: We are fighting for, we are fighting for change.

C: We are in a time of grace

MF: There are many things that were permitted then that are no longer permitted and so, some people, some of us know that. Does someone else have a comment?

Parent: the women over there (points to another parent)

MF: Yes? Tell me?

Ana: In the *pueblos* and towns of one, or in Mexico everyone was raised *machos* and it happened in my *pueblo* that. Now that they didn't worry about the mother or father, the man came out of the closet with his sons, now older. Why?

Cece: Because he started to feel

Ana: This man from when he was young was gay, but, you have to get married

MF: Exactly

Ana: Well now that he is older and was little drunk he came out of the closet

(parents laughs)

MF: The man with the alcohol felt free to share who he was

Ana: That is what happens in *pueblos* and towns that's how it happens

MF: Well, let's do something very simple. In the first class we talked about all the myths that are put upon youth, about how they are mistreated. Do you all think that a person would choose to by their own accord to be treated **that way?**

Parents: No

MF: Do you all think that if they hurt him, they don't let him in, that they, that they...you know they have killed a transgender youth very recently in Los Angeles. Ok? Now is someone going to prefer to be treated that way? **I won't, I won't.**

Sandra: And it's not because they didn't have the education. It's just simply the way they are, that's how they came

MF: It's their feeling

Miccaela: It's not the education of the parents

Sandra: But this class, this class is not about if it is right or wrong, this class is simply about being more understanding, for us to get a better understanding, for us to be conscious that they are human, like you and me and **to respect**

MF: That is all

Parents: Yes, yes

Miccaela: To respect for the fellow human he is.

MF: Exactly. If he is born on this earth then it is natural, **so you are saying that it is unnatural?** No, if it is from planet earth it is natural if it came from Mars or Jupiter or from the moon. Then, then, yes ok it is unnatural because it was not raised or born here...and thank you for your commentary.

Parent: I respect that person very much, but you know that God does not like that.

Cruz: Exactly

MF: Let's move, let's move on. We will listen to your opinion later, but for now I have to move on. (SR2-3, 59:38-1:04:25)

This passage contained one of the most heated moments in the workshop series. This workshop session was most well attended of the series—with over 30 parents present. For several of the parents in the session, this was their first time attending the workshop and, like Cruz, had no context for the class. There were several moments in the passage above that demonstrate how parents who attended the previous two workshop sessions have understood the purpose of the workshop series, while also exemplifying the most common types of ally behavior parents exhibited.

At the beginning of this passage, Maria Felix struggled with how to engage the parent known as Cruz. Maria Felix took several long pauses, seemingly trying to figure out how to approach the topic. She began with noting interpretations of the Bible have evolved over time and tried to get support from other parents and redirect the conversation. Eventually another parent, Ana, related a story of a man from her *pueblo* who “came out” as a gay man late in life

after his parents had died. Ana asserted that although he lived his life as a straight man, he was always gay, but could not share his true feelings because in small *pueblos*, *machismo* is prevalent. Ana's statement was affirmed by both Maria Felix and by another parent. Others echoed the statements with "Yes" and other nonverbal signals of approval.

Maria Felix was able to refer back to the Debunk Myth activity when asking the parents whether they believed a queer person would choose that life and she received a very loud and resounding "No" from participants. Another parent, Sandra, disputed Cruz's earlier comment that people "becoming queer" because they were misguided and did not receive the proper education or upbringing. Miccaela also affirmed Sandra's statement that parents could not educate their children to be straight, because sexual orientation is innate within everyone. Sandra then said that the class was for parents to become "conscious," that queer people were "Human, like you and me" and needed to be respected.

The passage also demonstrated that parents had begun to acquire new language to address these topics as a result of activities in previous sessions. The first was the distinction between sexuality and sexual orientation that Ana alludes at the beginning with her example of the gay man from her *pueblo*. Ana understood that because of societal pressures (in this case the pervasiveness of *machismo* in the *pueblo*), this man could not have lived the life he wanted, and so his sexual identity and sexual orientation were different. Sandra then addressed the idea of choice and debunked the myth that queer people choose to be queer; several other parents agreed with Sandra that that was something innate. Yet it was Sandra's last comment about the point of the class where we truly get a sense of how parents were thinking about the class content. Her use of words and phrases, like "more understanding," "conscious" and "human, like you and me" was language used by Maria Felix to talk about queer communities from the beginning.

However, the subtext in the comments made by the parents is what I found most interesting in the above passage. It was evident to me in the workshop space that Maria Felix was losing control of the class and the one parent was monopolizing the time. I believe the parents who had been there from the first workshop session picked up on Maria Felix's frustration and jumped into the conversation to help her redirect the message. While the comments and statements parents made affirming queer lives were made to the whole class, I could sense they were directed to one parent in particular—Cruz. It was as if the parents who were there from the first workshop session did not want one parent to derail from the progress the class as a whole had made from the first session. This is important for two reasons. First, it demonstrates possible growth in parents understanding from the first workshop session, but more importantly it demonstrated and modeled different types of ally behavior parents could participate in, if and when they found themselves in a similar situation in the future.

Challenges and Tensions of Doing Latina/o Queer Advocacy Work

The *Promotoras* of the LGBT Acceptance Project have developed a curriculum that resonates in the Latina/o community and provides parents with tools and resources that can be used to enact change in their communities for queer Latina/o youth. However, within the workshop space several challenges and tensions emerge that speak to the difficulty in engaging in this type of work.

The Construction of the Gay Latino Narrative

One of the first challenges is how the Spanish language favors masculine nouns and pronouns. The gendering of nouns becomes an issue within the workshop space, particularly since a large part of what Maria Felix is trying to do is break down rigid gender norms. Yet, she consistently rested on the gendered nouns and pronouns “o” or “os,” in order to talk about queer

communities. For example, when Maria Felix spoke about queer youth, she usually said something to the effect of “*los muchachos que son LGBT*”⁸⁰ in order to talk about particular experiences. By doing so, she evokes an image of a gay man and erases other images and possibilities of what it means to be queer. In moments where Maria Felix was trying to be more inclusive in her language, she said “*los muchachos gay y muchachas lesbianas*,”⁸¹ but this still erased images of transgender people in the process. The struggle to use language that is more inclusive remains a challenge for all of the *Promotoras*. In many instances, even when Maria Felix tried to be inclusive in her language, she usually consciously or unconsciously rested on the plural “*os*” to talk about queer communities. Parents also participated in this overriding construction of the gay Latino image. For instance, when parents shared stories of queer youth it was hard to tell if they were talking about gay, lesbian or even transgender youth, because they mostly used phrases like “*el niño*” or “*los niños*.”⁸² Consequently, the main image presented and constructed for parents about queer communities and experiences is one of gay Latino men.

In addition to the almost exclusive use of the plural “*os*” to talk about queer communities, the stories and examples Maria Felix used almost entirely focused on the experiences of gay Latino men. For example, in several instances, Maria Felix began a story and scenario with the phrase “*el muchacho gay*” to describe a particular experience queer youth may go through. The downward-spiral narrative Maria Felix used in the workshop space was another example where the image created for parents solely focused on the experiences of gay Latino youth. This image raised two issues. First, it reified this image of gay Latino men as hypersexual and susceptible to drug use and prostitution. Second, it created no space to discuss the

⁸⁰ Translated to English: “guys who are LGBT”

⁸¹ Translated to English: “gay guys and lesbian gals”

⁸² Translated to English: “the boy, the boys”

experiences of family rejection for lesbian women and transgender people or the types of places they go to for refuge and support.

A Heteronormative Construction of Queer Experiences

One of the other challenges within the workshop space was how heteronormative constructs of gender and sexuality were created and maintained by *Promotoras* and parents as they began to make sense of queer communities. The different activities and exercises parents engaged in provided examples of how Maria Felix and parents adhered to hegemonic forms of gender and sexuality. One such example was when parents engaged in a conversation about the myths and stereotypes they had heard about queer people. In the excerpt which follows, Maria Felix is in front of the class at the whiteboard and has her back to the class as she writes down myths parents have shared with her:

Maria Felix: Ok, now all of you tell me about some of the myths that you, that all of you were talking about. Tell me some of them.

P2: They cut hair

MF: That they are **good stylist?** (*parents laugh*)

P3: They are good decorators

P4: They are good homemakers

P5: They are good people

MF: They are **good people?** There are many things that are going to be positive, but there are also things that are going to be negative. **What else, what other things?**

P2: They are good imitators and artist.

MF: They are good imitators and artist

P3: Are make-up artist

Sandra: They are good at playing *futbol*.

MF: Really? That's a new one for me I haven't heard that one.

S: Yes many people have opinions that women who play “soccer,” is because they have, is because, is because they have tendencies to be lesbians

MF: Ah ok, that is, that is **a myth**—

S: A myth

P3: They know how to cook

MF: They know how to cook-I want to write the one that she said, that women who play *futbol*

S: Yes, people think that, some people think that the women who like sports that men like are, not necessarily, *futbol*, is because they are lesbians

MF: Ah ok, so if you participate in a sport that is considered masculine or what some may deem an extreme sport, is because you are a lesbian?

S: Uh huh. (SR2-1, 1:25:44 – 1:28:32)

The majority of the answers refer to effeminate gay men. Examples such as good hair stylist, home decorators, make-up artist, and performers were consistent and common answers given throughout all of the observations. In this excerpt, one parent (P5) shared they are good people. Surprised by her answer, Maria Felix noted that some stereotypes (of queer people) might be positive, but redirected parents to continue sharing more negative stereotypes. After parents shared a few more examples, another parent (Sandra) comments they are good at playing *futbol* (soccer). Maria Felix responded by saying, “really? That is a new one for me.” This moment shed light to the type of narrative or script Maria Felix was creating. Up to this point, every

example given by parents has been of effeminate gay men. In fact, Maria Felix does not realize Sandra is talking about lesbian women. Maria Felix assumed parents were going to primarily—or exclusively—reinforce the stereotypes of effeminate gay men. Sandra’s disruption highlights one of the challenges and tensions of the workshop space, where conversations (even when negative), only work to create, construct and re(imagine) ideas and notions of Latino gay male masculinity (Cantu, 2002; 2009), leaving lesbian women and transgender people out of the imaginary.

At other moments in the class, Maria Felix used examples of heterosexuality in order to make sense of queer experiences. In the discussion that occurred after watching *Mi Familia*, Maria Felix talked about how the coming out process for Teresa’s partner (who is also depicted in the film) was much easier.

Maria Felix: Ok, ok do you all remember the process of coming to acceptance? For these parents was it something easy for them to get to this moment of acceptance?

Parents: No

MF: Like the mother said, she **had to leave**, Teresa **had to leave** the house. The father rejected her, the process for them was prolonged and the mother comes to say that if “I would have known how to respond from the beginning, how many things would we have avoided,” right? Did you all notice the experience, on the side of the other women?

Miccaela: She was accepted=

MF: =uh huh=

M: =she was accepted=

MF: =uh huh.

M: That is something that I have noticed, because I have lived it like that within friends. That they are in relation, but the one, the one that looks more masculine, like that, like the family of her accepts her with more ease than they do the other women. Like it is with more ease that they accept her, that is what I noticed here. And I have also seen it.

MF: Oh wow, how great that you have made that observation.

M: Uh huh,

MF: Did you notice that for the mother of Teresa, there were many things that they talked about. For example, the family, what family said? They would say, “We do love her, but we do not accept her”

M: They didn’t accept her with her partner

MF: The mother even said that, that is a sin right? So it’s like the family, the family acceptance played such an important role. What would have happened all of you, if Teresa when she left with her partner that they didn’t have the means, in the video it sounds like they were ok when she left. But what if they didn’t have the means to go somewhere? Or what if Teresa’s partner was abusive? Because it happens, it happens many times in these and heterosexual couples, one of them, and many times it is the man who has all the control and says things like “well now that your family doesn’t accept me, or they don’t care for me, well now I am going to=

M: =to treat you bad

MF: “I am going to treat you bad” Where would it had taken Teresa in any of these situations.

After the parent (Miccaela) talked about having lesbian friends and the feminine lesbian woman’s lack of acceptance compared to her more masculine partner, Maria Felix engaged in a scenario of what would happen if Teresa’s partner (who presents herself in the film as more masculine) was abusive, because according to Maria Felix in “Heterosexual couples one of them, and many times it is the man who has all the control.” This moment is important as it exemplifies how Maria Felix makes sense of queer communities for the parents.

In order for Maria Felix to convey the possible dynamics in Teresa’s relationship, she first equated Teresa (who is visibly more feminine) with the role of the woman and her partner (who is visibly more masculine) with the role of the man. This example was one of several occasions where Maria Felix used heteronormative constructs of gender and sexuality to make sense of queer experiences (Dinshaw et. al., 2007; Yep, 2002).

Missed Opportunities

Within the workshop space, there were several moments I would define as “missed opportunities,” moments and exchanges where Maria Felix could have engaged parents in a conversation that would have led to a richer and more nuanced understanding about queer communities. For example, in the discussion of stereotypes, Maria Felix could have engaged Sandra and the rest of the parents in a broader conversation about the assumptions people make of women who participate in what are considered masculine sports (Mean & Kassing, 2008). This assumption made about lesbians could have led to discussion about parents’ ideas of femininity and masculinity (Krane, 2001). When Miccaela stated the masculine or “butch”

lesbian from the documentary was more easily accepted by families more “visibly lesbian,” Maria Felix could delved further into the assumptions people make about lesbians and their relationships (Taylor, 1983, Schippers, 2007). However, Maria Felix simply affirmed her statement by saying, “How great that you made that observation,” instead of exploring what it meant to be “marked” as queer due to gender expression (Gottshalck, 2003; Toomey et. al., 2010, Wyss, 2004)

These types of “missed opportunities” were common occurrences in all workshops. In one instance, when I debriefed with Maria Felix after sessions ended, I shared with her some of my thoughts on how the class went and potential areas of growth. She agreed that it would have been a great moment to elaborate on the conversation, but she did not think about that connection at the time. These missed opportunities speak to the power of heteronormativity, the belief that people fall into distinct and complementary genders with “natural” or preordained roles in life. Unlike Maria Felix, who identifies as heterosexual, my positionality as a queer Latino man who does “queer of color research” made me hyper aware of these types of moments and exchanges in the workshop (Harper, 2005). This is not to say Maria Felix is not capable of seeing these types of moments and pushing the conversation forward, however a hypothesis is that her privileged position as a gender-conforming heterosexual did play a role in how she presented and received messages from parents (Edwards, 2006; Goldstein, 2010).

Chapter Summary

Chapter 5 discussed the different ways Maria Felix engaged parents in conversations. Within the workshop space, several tools and techniques were used by Maria Felix that created opportunities for parents to engage in conversations about queer youth. Pedagogical techniques such as *Cosas que Dicimos* allowed parents to question the types of stereotypical sayings people

in the Latina/o community make about queer people. Lead-and-response also played a significant role in the workshop space as it created moments where parents could use queer terminology and speak to the experiences of queer communities in a way that allowed them to be part of a collective conversation.

The pre-assessment provided parents with an overview of the class content while the introduction and *acuerdos* set the tone and rules of engagement. The Genderbread Person and Debunk Myths activities sought to create a shared language and common understanding about queer experiences where preconceived notions and stereotypes about queer communities were debunked to allow parents to move forward with a more complex and nuanced understanding.

Taken together, the tools and techniques created opportunities for parents to engage in conversations still considered taboo and controversial for many in Latina/o communities. Each of the activities and pedagogical techniques provided entry points into the curriculum for parents. Whatever knowledge or understanding about queer communities parents arrived with, the activities expanded their knowledge and helped them identify ways they to enact change in their families, schools and communities to support queer youth.

The LGBTQ Experience and Becoming Allies

The first theme addressed how parents came to understand the experiences of queer youth and how they can see their roles as advocates and allies. Several subthemes emerged that illustrated the different ways Maria Felix engaged parents in these conversations. The first was the downward-spiral narrative. The purpose was to evoke feelings of compassion from parents, to demonstrate the severity of the problem and ultimately promote a call to action. While it created a sense of urgency among parents, it also remained rooted in negative stereotypes and assumptions.

By the end of the workshop series, parents learned how they could become agents of change for queer Latina/o youth in their communities. Several of the activities in the last workshop session created opportunities for parents demonstrate what they could do to support queer youth. Parents shared how much the workshop series affected them personally. While it remains to be determined how parents will enact ally behavior, by the end these sessions they had an awareness of what types of actions and behaviors can create environments that support queer Latina/o youth.

Relational and Intersectional Understanding of the Queer Latina/o Experience

The second theme focused on how Maria Felix communicated intersectional forms of oppression within the queer Latina/o youth experience. It was important for Maria Felix to approach the intersectionality of the queer Latina/o experience by first solidifying how Latina/os and queer people experience discrimination as two distinct groups. She believed that doing so led to a parents being able to apply an intersectional lens to their perspective.

Humanizing Queer Latina/o Youth

Finally, Maria Felix tried to evoke empathy and compassion from parents. Maria Felix led activities that helped parents place themselves in the position of queer people.

Maria Felix also used the “Imagine if” narrative as another way to promote empathy and compassion for queer youth. Similar to the downward-spiral narrative, Maria Felix described negative situations and/or narratives queer youth might find themselves and ask parents to think about and imagine what it must be like for these youth to be in those situations. During the “imagine if” narratives parents also shared their own experiences with queer friends or relatives.

These moments, when parents shared their personal experiences with queer youth, came across as the most authentic and intimate during the workshop space.

The final theme, the idea of “We are all humans,” manifested in conversations of faith and religion. This language was used to defend queer communities and speak to ideas of respect and dignity. There were several moments in the class where parents evoked empathy and compassion by describing those in queer communities as people who should be seen and treated like everyone else.

The four sections of this chapter discussed the different ways Maria Felix led parents to discover new levels of consciousness and understanding about queer communities. The films as well as the small and large group activities, contributed to an environment where parents felt comfortable enough to discuss what could be considered difficult or taboo topics.

Chapter 6: Discussion, Implications and Conclusion

The *Promotoras* of Planned Parenthood's LGBT Acceptance Project developed a curriculum that engaged Latina/o parents, helping them understand the lives of queer Latina/o youths. Using different activities and pedagogical techniques, the *Promotoras* created a space that allowed parents to take part in conversations about the realities queer Latina/o youth face in their homes, schools, and communities. My aim is to discuss the importance of the findings in Chapters 4 and 5, followed by a closer look at the challenges and tensions that arose in the workshop space. After an acknowledgement of the difficulties inherent in this type of work—as seen through an intersectional lens—I will argue that the *Promotoras* are effective at building support for queer Latina/o youth in their communities, and I outline the potential for future research on this topic.

Reflection on Findings

The findings in this study demonstrate how the *Promotoras* of Planned Parenthood Los Angeles facilitated conversations and activities that developed new levels of consciousness and understanding about queer communities and the complexities surrounding queer Latina/o youth experiences. The upbringing and past experiences of Rocio, Flor, Yuri, Maria Felix, and Alejandra Guzman informed how they presented the curriculum to parents. Their identities as *Promotoras* for PPLA also played a role in how effective they were at communicating the information in a way that resonated with participants.

My focus on the pedagogical practices of a single *Promotora*, Maria Felix, is one limitation of this study. In contrast to the past practice of *Promotoras* teaching within communities known to them, where they have built relationships over the years, the LGBT

Acceptance Project workshop series is now offered to parent groups and communities who have no prior relationship to the assigned *Promotora*. One goal of this study was to outline how the LGBT Acceptance Project and the *Promotoras'* approaches to the curriculum might serve as examples to other Latina/o community-based organizations seeking to develop similar programs. Thus, Maria Felix's workshop served as a prototype for what that model might look like. Maria Felix's ability to find commonalities and shared experiences with her Latina/o and immigrant participants was a critical reason that many parents became invested in the workshop series.

Even though other *Promotoras'* workshops were not discussed in detail in the dissertation, these observations did influence how I analyzed and made sense of Maria Felix's workshop series. For example, Rocio, Flor and Yuri conducted their workshops with groups of parents well known to them. That data provided the context in which I determined what features of Maria Felix's pedagogy were different. I will briefly elaborate on how the work of other *Promotoras* provided a range of examples and conversations with which I could draw contrast and comparisons with Maria Felix's approach. However, I also acknowledge that a study of the strength of relationships between and among the parents who participated was beyond the scope of this study.

Rocio Durcal

Rocio's workshop series was the third observed and took place at a school and with a community Rocio had known for years. The parents who participated had recently finished the entire "*15 temas*⁸³" workshop series (which takes about four months) and were very comfortable with each other and Rocio. This was apparent in their familiar greetings of each other and the

⁸³ This is the primary workshop series the Promotoras at PPLA offer. Conversations around women's sexual and reproductive health are the focus.

nature of their casual exchanges as they sipped coffee and ate *pan dulce* before the official class began.

Rocio assumed the role of matriarch within the workshop space; parents would refer to her as “*maestra*” and would use the formal “*usted*” instead of the informal “*tu*” when addressing her. There was a high level of respect for Rocio from all the parent participants. In terms of the LGBT Acceptance Project content, parents were comfortable asking questions and seeking clarification on terms and examples Rocio provided from the outset. This dynamic permitted me to see how parents were thinking about the curriculum and concepts as Rocio discussed them. However, unlike the parents who challenged Maria Felix with questions and pushback, Rocio’s participants fell into the role of “pleasing the teacher.” At no point did parents question what Rocio had to say.

For example, in the first workshop session after parents had discussed the genderbread figure, a parent shared that she believed her child could be transgender, given some of the behaviors exhibited. The parent appeared to seek clarity and advice on what she was going through and asked Rocio a series of questions. Whether Rocio did not understand what the parent was asking or did not grasp the immediate relevance, she remained nonresponsive and the parent did not persist, though she seemed unsatisfied with the discussion. After the session, I spoke with Rocio about the incident and provided examples and suggestions that could be shared the following week. This dynamic—of high regard for Rocio and familiarity with other participants—provided disincentive for parents to engage in ways that were more critical or would have pushed the conversation further. Thus, the rigor of reflections and conversations was secondary to preserving the sense of community created among workshop attendees and Rocio.

Flor

Flor appeared to know the parents in her sessions as well as Rocio knew hers. Flor's children attended the school where she held her workshop, and she had an established relationship with the parent center coordinator who organized the parent participants. As members of the school's parent association, with corresponding roles and responsibilities, parents multitasked several times during the workshop. Not only did some parents come in late or leave early, but they also engaged in activities for the parent coordinator while Flor's workshop was in session. These activities, like stapling booklets, cutting out paper designs and organizing attendance sheets created distractions that led Flor to repeat herself on several occasions. The combination of multitasking and minimal interaction with Flor as a presenter led me to conclude that parents may have participated in the workshop series as a favor to the parent coordinator. Although Flor became irritated at these distractions, she neither brought it to the participants' attention nor mentioned it to the parent coordinator. One possible explanation could be that she did not want to destabilize her own relationship with the coordinator.

Yuri

Like Rocio, Yuri presented the LGBT Acceptance Project material to parents who had recently completed the "*15 temas*" workshops. Yuri's group, like Flor's, was part of the school's parent association and involved in various related activities. Many participants were first-time parents with preschool-aged children, and the workshops were their first involvement at the school. Thus, while many were new to the school, Yuri herself had been part of the school community for many years and knew the surrounding community well. Her reputation at the school and the fact parents had already gone through the "*15 temas*" workshop series created an

environment where parents were comfortable with each other. Like in Rocio's series, parents in Yuri's series quickly jumped into class conversations.

More than any other *Promotora*, Yuri treated her workshop space like a traditional classroom. She allotted a certain amount of time for each activity and exercise before moving on to the next. For Yuri, it was important that she got through all the material, which unfortunately limited conversations on particular topics. While transitioning to another activity or exercise, Yuri would say that parents could "ask her more questions after the workshop ended." Yuri preferred activities meant to place parents "in the shoes" of queer youth. For example, one of Yuri's favorite activities was the "Star Activity."⁸⁴ Yuri believed this activity allowed parents to feel what it might be like to face rejection as a queer person; in the activity's debrief Yuri asked parents to think about moments in their lives where they faced rejection or stigma. After the star activity, one parent became very emotional from having recalled certain life events in her past. In response, Yuri had the class take a short break, organized a group hug with the participants to support the parent and expressed her thanks for sharing.

Among the *Promotoras* I observed, Yuri and Maria Felix succeeded in attaining the highest level of parent engagement in dialogue around the workshop topics. This made the degree of parent involvement in Maria Felix's sessions all the more remarkable, because she did not have the benefit of established relationships with parents like Yuri did.

⁸⁴ The Star Activity is one option the *Promotoras* have to use in the class. In this activity the parents are randomly given stars in four different colors, each point of the star ask the parents to answer a question of someone they consider as a source of support in different areas in their lives (family, friends, church, community, work). After the parents fill out every point of the star, she tells the parents that they are all LGBT people. For every point on the star the *Promotoras* then read a scenario connected to that support system and depending on the color of the star will dictate the level of support, the range in support goes from full to no support. The parents then depending on the level of support are asked to bend, split or tear off that point in the star. By the end some parents have their full star intact, while others are left with no star.

Alejandra Guzman

Alejandra was not afraid to be vulnerable in the space with parents; she modeled openness by sharing some of her experiences. This, in turn, created opportunities for parents to be vulnerable and share personal experiences they were going through. Similar to Maria Felix, Alejandra worked with parents she had not previously known and invested a considerable amount of time and effort in building a rapport. This was the first PPLA workshop offered at that particular middle school in the Pico Union area of Los Angeles, near which has near Alejandra's own neighborhood. her own community. In our initial debriefs, Alejandra shared her frustration at the lack of participation early in the series and noted this was unlike any of the other series she had taught before. She also appeared visibly nervous with an observer present, which compounded her anxiety that the class was not fully engaged.

While Alejandra believed this workshop series was not one of her strongest, there were several moments in the series that I found interesting. One of Alejandra's strengths was her ability to have parents open up either during or after the workshop session. For example, on one occasion during the second workshop session, a parent became very emotional during a conversation about Latina/o families and queer youth. The parent shared the negative experiences her gay best friend went through growing up and how guilty she felt for not doing more to support him. This was a pivotal moment in the class since it demonstrated a level of vulnerability. During the series, another parent asked several questions about bisexuality and about the experience of young lesbian women. Alejandra later confided in me that this parent had reached out because she was struggling with her daughter's lesbian identity and searching for support and resources.

Maria Felix

As a *Promotora* for over fourteen years Maria Felix demonstrated she knew how to command a class, despite being new to the curriculum. Maria Felix's years of experience gave her confidence and she was able to build rapport quickly with parents. As a result, parents felt connected and invested in the class, comfortable enough to share their thoughts and feelings on topics still considered taboo for many Latina/o parents. The different tools and techniques used by Maria Felix and the other *Promotoras* created opportunities for parents to become part of the space without feeling intimidated or uncomfortable. The findings in this study reveal effective strategies that resonate with Latina/o parents when women like the *Promotoras* of PPLA are engaging in conversations about gender, race and sexuality.

The theme of acceptance within one's family and community also shaped the conversations, helping parents acknowledge the role they could play in improving the experiences of queer Latina/o youth. This approach placed queer brown bodies within the workshop space instead of having parents think of queer people as outside of the Latina/o community.

Difficulties in Teaching about Queer Issues in the Latina/o Community

Although the curriculum contains various activities, exercises, films and surveys, the structure of the workshop session did not always permit parents to engage with the *Promotora* in more intimate or critical ways. Within the span of her two hours, the *Promotora* allotted time for each discussion before beginning the next activity or exercise. On several occasions this pacing left parents without enough opportunity to engage on a topic of interest to them.

The *Promotoras* focused on creating opportunities for parents to build their knowledge and learn from each other, thereby increasing the chances for participants to raise their

consciousness and understanding of queer communities. Yet it remained difficult to get a sense of how parents understood the material presented since not every participant engage in dialogue with the *Promotora* or other parents during each activity. Several possibilities could explain their limited engagement. First, the pacing of the curriculum did not allow much time in between activities. Second, some *Promotoras* dominated conversations or resorted to a lecture format instead of allowing a more democratic discussion. Lastly, the parents themselves were not the consistently active or vocal in the class, and so the *Promotora* struggled to get parents to participate.

The challenge and tensions found in the LGBT Acceptance Project speak to the difficulties of engaging Latina/o parents in conversations about queer communities. These types of discussions for the Latina/o community were new and—for many parents—still considered controversial. The different activities and exercises used in the LGBT Acceptance Project were designed to create opportunities for parents to learn about queer communities in way that was culturally relevant and specific, yet many parents still had a difficult time engaging in these conversations. The *Promotoras*' work demonstrated the difficulty of engaging in teaching and advocacy work that focuses on the intersections of race, gender and sexuality (Naples, 2009; Ferber & Herrera, 2013).

Changes and Growth in the LGBT Acceptance Project

Since its inception three years ago, the original curriculum of the LGBT Acceptance Project has changed significantly. As the *Promotoras* became more comfortable with the curriculum content and their teaching, they gradually adapted exercises and activities they felt did not resonate with parents. The professional development meetings also proved to be important places where the *Promotoras* discussed some of the struggles they faced with the

curriculum and together developed strategies to improve upon their teaching. The professional development meetings were also the time when LGBT community-based organizations came to Planned Parenthood and provided the *Promotoras* with new and different approaches they could use in their workshop space. Organizations such as the Los Angeles LGBT Center, Human Rights Campaign Foundation and Lambda Legal continue to support the PPLA's LGBT Acceptance Project with tools and resources they have found to be effective in their own outreach and education efforts. The organizational resources and support the *Promotoras* have received has significantly affected the curriculum's development and growth over the last three years.

PPLA has expanded the number of workshop series offered. In the first year, the *Promotoras* offered 18 workshop series, the following year 40 and this last year close to 60 workshop series were offered to Latina/o parents across Los Angeles. The geographical reach has grown from South Los Angeles to other parts of the city such as the San Fernando Valley, Central and North Los Angeles. The *Promotoras* have also started to offer the workshop series to a broader population of the community. For example, the *Promotoras* recently coordinated with the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services to host a workshop for 300 Latina/o foster parents. The popularity of the LGBT Acceptance Project is steadily increasing, and the *Promotoras* are adapting their curriculum to meet the needs of this growing population of parents.

Implications for LGBT Ally Development Programs

Planned Parenthood's LGBT Acceptance Project is one the first LGBT ally development programs in Los Angeles specifically focused on educating parents and community members on the lived experiences of queer Latina/o youth. The exercises, activities and conversations

Latina/o parents engaged in throughout the workshop series spoke directly to the intersectional nature of discrimination—based on race, gender and sexuality—for queer youth. The *Promotoras*' work has several implications for organizations engaged in LGBT ally development.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

The series is an effective model in large part due to the curriculum's culturally relevant content and teaching methods. Drawing on parents' encounters with racism, sexism and discrimination, the *Promotoras* build from these collective experiences in order to help parents make sense of queer experiences. The *Promotora*'s pedagogical approach also plays a significant role. As Latina immigrants, the *Promotora* can relate to the parents, a common ground on which to build a shared language and understanding about the queer Latina/o experience (Villenas & Deyhle, 1999). As previously discussed in the literature review, research on LGBT ally development workshops often do not speak directly to the needs and realities of queer communities of color. Thus the LGBT Acceptance Project makes an important contribution to this growing area of research and community development.

LGBT Acceptance Project is unique among LGBT ally development programs because the curriculum is designed and taught by non-native English speakers. Teaching the curriculum in Spanish meant that it resonated more with the community since certain words and phrases used to speak of queer communities in Spanish do not always translate (Rodriguez, 2003).

This project began when the Honor Fund, a LGBT advocacy organization in Los Angeles, sought support for LGBT initiatives in the Latina/o community. The nonprofit approached PPLA to pilot this project based on PPLA's track record of community engagement and outreach on sexual and reproductive health education. This is one of reasons the LGBT Acceptance Project

has been a successful and well-received program. By building on the strengths of an organization like Planned Parenthood Los Angeles, the LGBT Acceptance Project has been able to grow and expand more rapidly than if it was started with no institutional support (Dziengel, 2010).

Relational and Intersectional Conversations of Oppression

The LGBT Acceptance Project focuses on the multiple ways communities experience oppression and marginalization, unlike most LGBT ally development programs that address discrimination based solely on sexual orientation (Granka, 2015). This program situates queer experiences in relation to conversations of how other marginalized communities also experience oppression and marginalization (Hutchinson, 2000). By drawing on Latina/o parents' own experiences with racism, sexism and other forms of oppression, the *Promotoras* are able to build a shared understanding with parents about the multiple ways they and queer Latina/o youth experience discrimination. The multilayered approach the *Promotoras* use to get parents to understand the different ways queer Latina/o youth experience discrimination is the core strength of the LGBT Acceptance Project.

Modeling a Queer of Color Praxis in Community-Based Education.

My goal with the dissertation was to shed light on the important work the *Promotoras* have been doing over the last three years to educate Latina/o communities on the lives and experiences of queer Latina/o youth in our families, schools and communities. I was also interested in what we could learn from the *Promotoras* advocacy work that could contribute to the growing area of “queer of color” research in education. My aim is to expand upon my contributions to queer of color research (Grady, Marquez & McLaren, 2011; Marquez, in press; Marquez & Brockenbrough, 2012), by speaking to how the work of the *Promotoras* exemplifies what I call a community-based education model that centers around queer of color praxis.

This study also contributes to the fields of Critical Race Theory (CRT) in education and queer theory in education. In order to discuss how I am framing an educational model for queer of color praxis work within communities, I first discuss how these two extensive bodies of research informed my conceptual framework. After reviewing each field and its concomitant limitations, I turn to particular areas of inquiry within CRT and queer theory in education that informed my approach to this community-based model. I conclude this section with a queer of color praxis framework and how I think the *Promotoras* and the LGBT Acceptance Project exemplify this model.

Critical Race Theory

Since its debut in 1995 (Ladson-Billings & Tate 1995), CRT in education has addressed issues and disparities in our educational system which directly affect students of color. CRT in education can be defined as a framework that challenges the dominant discourses of race, gender, and class as it relates to education by examining how educational theory, policy and practice subordinate certain racial and ethnic groups (Delgado Bernal 2002). As a principle, critical race theorists in education reject deficiency models that rely on biological or culturally deterministic explanations which assume students of color lack the necessary traits for success in our educational system (Solorzano & Yosso, 2000). Critical race theorists in education also reject epistemologies based on white superiority—masked as so-called merit-based approaches in education—which inherently legitimize and mark the experiences of white students as the norm (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002).

In response to Eurocentric approaches to education research and practice, critical race theorists developed their own epistemologies, theoretical frameworks and methodologies that center the experiences of youth of color as sites of knowledge in order to demonstrate the

inherent racism and discrimination pervasive in our school systems (Delgado Bernal, 1998; 2002; Malagon, P. et al, 2009; Parker & Lynn, 2002; Perez-Huber & Malagon, 2007; Solorzano & Yosso, 2000). As Solorzano and Yosso (2000) suggest, “critical race methodology in education offers a way to understand the experiences of people of color along the educational pipeline. Such a methodology generates knowledge by looking to those who have been epistemologically marginalized, silenced and disempowered” (p. 36). Furthermore, critical race theorists also situate their research within the experiences of different racialized groups, noting their extensive histories and engagements with racism and discrimination. For instance, LatCrit (or Latina/o Critical Race Theory) places a focus on the experiences of Latina/os (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Fernandez, 2002; Solorzano, 2000) while AsianCrit (Asian Critical Race Theory) focuses on how different Asian communities have experienced their schooling (Saloom, 2005; Teranishi, 2002). In short, a CRT framework and methodology centralizes the lived experiences of people of color and uses that knowledge to inform future research and practices in education.

Critical race theorists in education also employ five elements, or tenets, central to their educational research: (1) the intercentricity of race and racism; (2) a challenge to dominant ideology; (3) a commitment to social justice; (4) a focus on experiential knowledge; and, (5) interdisciplinary approaches (Solorzano 2000; Yosso 2006). These tenets have informed much of the theory, research, practice, policy, curriculum and pedagogical practice found within CRT in education. However, in my review of CRT-grounded studies in education that acknowledged the experiences of queer and gender nonconforming youth of color within schools, I noticed when ideas of sexuality were presented they were regulated as an additional “-ism,” discussed only in generalities when students’ diverse identities were mentioned. Another limitation is that research which uses a CRT lens to speak to the experiences of queer and gender nonconforming youth of

color in our schools is scarce. My critique of CRT in education begins with how theorists in education have interpreted its central tenets, specifically the first and last tenets, since they focus on the types of engagements with theory and methodology I am interested in pursuing.

The first tenet of CRT addresses the intercentricity of race and racism with other forms of oppression (Solorzano, 1998; Yosso, 2006). This tenet contends that racialized oppressions are linked to other forms of oppression and subordination that are embodied by individuals such as gender (Delgado-Bernal, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 2009), immigration status (Benavides et al, 2008; Perez-Huber et al., 2009) and language (Pyon, 2009). The fifth tenet of CRT is the use of interdisciplinary approaches (Solorzano, 1998; Yosso, 2006). This tenet urges critical race theorists to analyze how other disciplines engage in conversations of race and racism in order to develop new and more robust understandings in education. For example, CRT in education draws from fields such as psychology (Solorzano, 1998; Smith & Solorzano, 2009), critical pedagogy (Lynn, 1999; Parker & Stovall, 2004), spatial analysis (Pacheco & Velez, 2009) and sociology (Solorzano & Villalpando, 1998) to provide new lenses and theoretical approaches to the field.

The most prominent disciplinary fields that inform CRT—ethnic studies and gender studies—help push the theoretical and epistemological perspectives that inform many of the contemporary critical race theorists in education (Delgado-Bernal, 1998; Ladson-Billings, 2009). However, within CRT scholarship that utilizes and foregrounds theoretical frameworks such as women of color and third world feminism (Delgado-Bernal, 1998; Ladson-Billings, 2009), a lack of critical engagement with sexuality endures. This is surprising given the documented history of women of color feminists' interrogations of racialized constructions of gender, race, and sexuality (Anzaldúa, 1999; Hammonds, 1997; Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1981).

Within CRT, the lack of engagement with sexuality as a lasting form of oppression—and its intersections with race and gender—need to be taking into consideration. Critical race theorists in education should consider what ideas and notions of gender and sexuality are embedded within their theories and methodologies that potentially silence or remove the voices of queer youth of color who may fall outside the sets of current disciplinary norms. My research with the PPLA *Promotoras* expands and contributes to the work of critical race theorists in education. Conversations about the multiple forms of oppression queer Latina/o youth experience is at the core of the *Promotoras* work. This dissertation analyzed to how conversations of race, racism, sexuality, homophobia and oppression are discussed among a group of Latina/o immigrant parents. This dissertation is also committed to advancing the last tenet of CRT by using interdisciplinary approach. Queer theory and queer of color theory also informed this dissertation, two fields of research that are still not present in CRT in Education. My goal was to demonstrate how theories of gender and sexuality manifest in a curriculum designed to cultivate allies for queer youth of color and how community educators and activists engaged in conversations around this material.

Queer Theory in Education

Queer theory examines the discursive production of social categories of gender and sexuality that organize our social life. It proposes a distinct way of thinking about how we create meaning at the intersections of gender, sexuality, desire and knowledge, and it encourages us to think of these social categorizations as malleable and unstable (Seidman 1996). Foundational texts that inform contemporary queer theory include Foucault's *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1* (1979), which offered a genealogy of the historical production and regulation of sexuality. Eve Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990) placed importance on the hetero/homo binary and

demonstrated how discourses of heteronormativity privilege normalize and deem associated practices and behaviors as superior. Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990) denaturalized and analyzed the social construction of binary gender and posited different ways that discourses of gender and sexuality become part of our daily discourse and practices.

Queer theory in education has been articulated within the theoretical contributions made by scholars in the social sciences and humanities who grounded their work within the framework of theorists like Foucault, Sedgwick and Butler (Britzman, 1995; Bryson & MacIntosh, 2012; Harris, 2010; Mayo, 2000, 2008; Linville & Carlson, 2010; Lugg 2006; Rodriguez, 2004). Situating their epistemological roots within these theoretical fields, queer theorists within education began to critique social processes, particularly inequalities and injustices within schooling institutions. They interrogated the discursive production(s) of gender and sexuality within structures of education, which name, mark and disenfranchise the queer subject (Britzman, 1995; Pinar, 1998; Dilley, 1999; Honeychurch, 1996; Leck, 2000; Ramussen et al, 2004; Sears, 1993; Talburt, 2004; Mayo, 2007; Pinar, 1998). Three tenets central to queer theory in education research are: (1) the examination of lives and experiences of those considered nonheterosexual; (2) a juxtapositioning of those lived experiences with lives and experiences that are considered "normal;" and (3) an examination of how or why those lives and experiences are considered outside of the norm (Dilley, 1999).

Research within this field has exposed the heteronormative context of schooling from multiple points of entry. For example, queer theorists in education have revealed how schooling structures and discourses engage in normalizing practices which render queer people in schools invisible (Blount & Anahita, 2004; Lugg 2003; Mayo, 2007). A significant body of scholarship has also shed light on schools' gender biases and the inflexibility of gender roles (Friend, 1995;

Nayak & Kehily, 1997; Sapon-Shevin & Goodman, 1992; Sears, 1992). Curriculum theorists involved in teacher education have theorized and implemented critical pedagogical practices that critically address gender and sexuality (Birden, 2005; Epstein et al., 2003; Kissen, 2002; Kumashiro, 2002; Lipkin, 2003; Rofes, 2005; Rodriguez & Pinar, 2007; Sanlo, 1999; Sapon-Shevin & Goodman, 1992; Sears, 1992). Queer theory has also provided new approaches to understanding the experiences of queer and gender nonconforming youth in schools, paving the way for educational policy reforms at the federal, state and district level. However, this literature has continued to ignore the educational experiences of queer youth of color who exist at the margins and intersections of gender, sexuality and race.

For the most part queer theorists in education have functioned within an inherent binary logic that discounts the multiple forms of oppression that can be constituted within a singular marginalized group identity (Kumashiro, 2001). That is, when a group functions to destabilize one social formation (i.e. heterosexuality) it usually reinforces the binaries of us/them, oppressed/oppressor, marginal/mainstream not allowing a space to name those who are simultaneously oppressed by these same social formations (Kumashiro 2001). Consequently, queer theorists in education have not engaged in significant ways with the forces which contribute to the different ways queer youth of color experience schooling.

Scholars who treat the experiences of queer youth of color as merely additive (Duncan, 2005; Leck, 2000; Snider, 1996; Wilson, 1996) fail to provide us with any information about how these experiences are different. More importantly we are left to figure out for ourselves how to best address the particular concerns of queer and gender nonconforming youth of color.

Queer theory does not account for all the different ways we understand formulations of sexuality and gender, and we must look to alternative archived discourses of gender and

sexuality in order to think more critically of how these categories are constituted and how they intersect with other social formations such as race. Other areas of scholarship precede queer studies engagement with gender and sexuality and have made important contributions to how we understand such discourses (Ferguson, 2006; Hames-Garcia, 2011). Queer theorists need new ways to understand the experiences of queer and gender nonconforming youth of color that speak to their unique positionality. Although it is easier to think about these groups as different and distinct, it is important for queer theorists in education to interrogate these difficult notions (Kumashiro 2001). By doing so, we may better understand how queer youth of color experience their schooling.

A Community Based Model to Queer of Color Praxis

As previously mentioned, a community-based model for queer of color praxis in education is guided by the work of critical race theorists and queer theorists in education. Within both areas of research, particular work was influential in helping me conceptualize this model. For example, the work of scholars who use a CRT framework to inform methodology and praxis became important to helping make sense of the *Promotoras* advocacy work (Aleman et. al., 2013; Celina, 2007; Covarrubias & Velez, 2013; Decuir-Gunby & Walker-Devose, 2013; Delgado-Bernal, 2001; Pacheco & Velez, 2009; Revilla, 2004; 2012; Stovall, 2006; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). In particular, Solórzano & Delgado-Bernal's (2001) notion of transformational resistance was foundational to how I envision a community-based model for queer of color praxis in education.

In addition, theories of resistance, as discussed by Solórzano & Delgado-Bernal (2001), draw on the relationship between schools and dominant society to demonstrate how students

enact agency and/or oppositional behavior in schools. They discuss four forms of behavior or resistance students participate in: Reactionary, Self-Defeating, Conformist and Transformative.

Solórzano & Delgado-Bernal (2001) argue students who enact transformational resistance illustrate both a critique of oppression and a desire for social justice, offering the greatest possibility for social change in schools and communities. For example, the 1968 walkouts in East Los Angeles is one example used to discuss what it looks like to engage in transformational work. However, transformational resistance does not need to be limited only to the experiences of students in school; instead, we can think of it as a theoretical framework that opens up the possibilities to engage in broader conversations about oppression, marginalization and action.

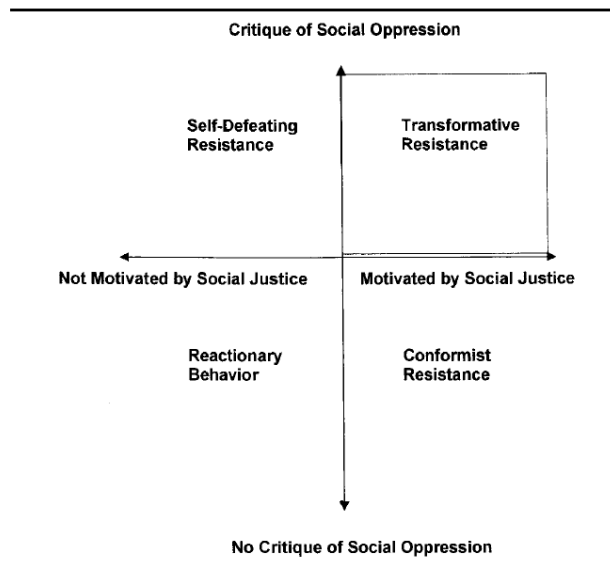


FIGURE 1 Defining the Concept of Resistance
 Table 3: Solórzano & Delgado-Bernal (2001): Transformational Resistance

Influenced by Solórzano & Delgado-Bernal’s (2002) model of transformational resistance, Covarrubias & Revilla (2003) adapted this work and developed a framework referred to as Agencies of Transformational Resistance, ATRs, to evaluate advocacy organizations engaged in social justice work in marginalized communities. Covarrubias & Revilla (2003) offer

four characteristics that inform what they believe is needed for an organization to function as a ATR. The first is raising a multidimensional consciousness by organizations that invest in understanding the multiple and intersecting forms of oppression. The second is nurturing a commitment to social justice by seeking to dismantle all relations of power that create inequality. Third is the development of skills and expansion of resources. This entails “ensuring that personal needs are met, that skills are developed and refined, that the relationship between their hardship and structures of domination are understood, and that the possibilities for transforming their world are made a reality” (Covarrubias & Revilla, p. 473). The last characteristic focuses on the creation and maintenance of an inclusive community where various forms of struggle that affect an organization’s participants are discussed and they are supported as a collective. Covarrubia & Revilla (2003) put forth these four characteristics as defining criteria for ATRs. Combined with Solórzano & Delgado-Bernal’s (2002) model of transformational resistance, these four characteristics of ATRs were a springboard to how I conceptualized a community-based approach for queer of color praxis work which placed conversations of Latina/o parents and community members supporting queer youth at its center.

Other influences on a community-based queer of color praxis model include queer theorists like Cohen (2005), who analyzed the evolution of queer youth programs. Using the notion of “sexual ideologies”—belief systems that influence how we construct and understand sex, sexuality, love, identities, femininity and masculinity (Mac and Ghail, 1998 as cited by Cohen, 2005)—Cohen (2005) contends that over time queer youth programs developed around these various organizing principles. Cohen (2005) identified four areas that demonstrate how queer youth programs sexual ideologies influenced the types of praxis work they engaged in.

TABLE 1. Classification of sexual ideologies.

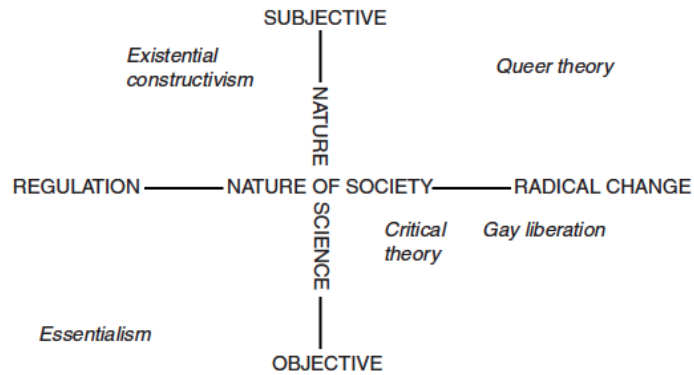


Table 4: Cohen's (2005) Classification of sexual ideologies

The first category is essentialism, the reduction of complexities within queer experiences which reinforce social prejudices and stereotypes. The second ideological category is existential constructivism where personal experience dictates identity, but does not challenge social order. Third, gay liberation/critical theory sought to emancipate the oppressed by raising a community's collective consciousness and understanding of gay oppression. Lastly, queer theory promotes radical change by looking to multiple interpretations and understandings of sex, gender, and sexuality while disputing normative and hegemonic constructions of identity. Cohen (2005) argues that queer youth programs enact one or more of these forms of sexual ideology and remain relevant today, serving the distinct needs of a diverse queer population whose members are at different stages in their understanding of sexual identity. One example of a queer theory group that would mirror Solórzano & Delgado-Bernal's (2002) model of transformational resistance would be the group ACT UP who through direct organizing was fighting to bring awareness of the AIDS epidemic and demanded funding for research during the Reagan administration.

A community-based model to queer of color praxis in education is informed by Cohen's (2005) analysis of queer youth programs sexual ideologies, Solórzano and Delgado-Bernal's (2001) notion of transformational resistance and Covarrubias & Revilla's (2003) Agencies of

Transformational Resistance. Taken together they demonstrate what I believe is needed to engage in and develop queer of color praxis work grounded in community activism.

Therefore, a community-based approach to queer of color praxis in education is guided by the work of the previously mentioned authors. It strives to exist in the upper right quadrant of both frameworks (transformational resistance/queer theory). Thus, the following principles are central to engaging in queer of color educational outreach: First the model acknowledges the interplay of race, gender and sexuality in schools and in the community as manifestations of power and oppression in the lives of queer youth of color. Second, the model embodies a commitment to social justice teaching and activism that centralizes queer youth of color experiences when seeking to create spaces and environments for youth in schools and the community. Third, this praxis includes a commitment to self-reflection in tandem with community dialogue around practices that teaching, activism and educational outreach. Fourth, the model works to create anti-oppressive spaces for all youth in schools and the community.

The *Promotoras*' teaching in the LGBT Acceptance Project provides one example of how we can think about a model for queer of activism in community-based education. I looked to how the *Promotoras* embodied their roles and identities as allies and advocates for queer youth of color in the community. The *Promotoras* were aware of their positionality as Latina immigrant women who teach and advocate for the rights of women and queer people. Working with the LGBT Acceptance Project over three years, they understand the multiple ways queer youth of color can experience oppression and marginalization in communities, and they draw upon their own experiences with racism and sexism. Secondly, the *Promotoras* use their understanding about queer Latina/o communities in order to educate other community members how they can serve as allies and advocates for queer Latina/o youth. Using the same process of

how they came to understand the intersectional and multiple forms of oppression queer Latina/o youth can experience, they teach parents and community members to look at how they themselves have experienced oppression, marginalization and difference.

Third, the *Promotoras* reflect on their teaching and advocacy work as they engage with different parents, community organizations and each other. Their understanding about queer Latina/o experiences changes and grows through conversations about the intersectional and multidimensional forms of oppression and marginalization. As a result of ongoing professional development meetings, the *Promotoras*' pedagogical approaches to teaching the curriculum evolve. Lastly, the *Promotoras* approach their teaching and community work with the intent to create spaces that are anti-oppressive and humanizing of all people. Faith and religion play a central role in the lives of many of the *Promotoras* and it is also a central conversation within the LGBT Acceptance Project curriculum. In their personal lives and in their teaching, the *Promotoras* strive to create spaces that are anti-oppressive.

Thus, their work is an example of what this type of model for queer of color praxis in community education looks like when conversations around race and oppression are discussed among immigrant Latina/o parents and specifically Latina mothers. The Latina/o community in Los Angeles has its own histories with oppression and marginalization mediated by stories of war, migration and segregation. These stories are the life experiences the *Promotoras* and parents evoke when they discuss ideas and notions of racism, sexism and homophobia. Thus, conversations about the queer Latina/o identities are informed and constructed through these life experiences. How parents make sense of queer experiences and the types of actions and forms of support they provide queer Latina/o youth originate from these spaces of knowing. Also the *Promotoras*' identities as *señaladas* inform their queer of color praxis because it acknowledges

the interplay of race, gender and sexuality as manifestations of power and oppression in their own lives, and it reflects their commitment to social justice teaching and activism.

A model of community-based education centered on queer of color praxis has the capacity to contribute to CRT, queer theory in education and queer of color theory in education. Within CRT, this approach can raise questions for field researchers who engage communities in conversations on the multiple ways people of color experience oppression and marginalization. This work helps push that conversation forward. For queer theorists in education, this work reinforces the important role of race and racism in the construction of gender and sexual identities. How a queer Latina/o person experiences and understands their gender identity and sexuality is in large part due to how their racial identity is understood in a particular space and/or context. The *Promotoras* construct images of queer Latina/o youth that build on the experiences of their participants, primarily Latina immigrant mothers. Therefore, constructions of queerness are created and at the intersections of race, gender and sexuality.

This work also contributes to queer of color theory in education. As discussed in Chapter 3, queer of color critique is still a relatively new field of study and only recently has made its way into the field of education. My goal with this dissertation is to continue to contribute to this growing field of research by demonstrating how the *Promotoras* work is queer of color praxis *in action*. By following along the path of critical race theorists in education who engaged in praxis work, it is my hope this dissertation demonstrates what it means to engage in queer of color praxis research that is community-focused and driven.

Future Directions

My collaboration with the *Promotoras* of the LGBT Acceptance Project over the last two and half years has led us to engage in several conversations about where we see this work going

in the future. One of the first projects we would like to focus on is getting the perspective of parents and community members who attend the LGBT Acceptance Project. A limitation of this dissertation study was that I did not speak directly to workshop participants. In the future, I would like to interview parents before and after they attended the workshop series to get a sense of how much their views and opinions about the queer Latina/o community changed as the workshop series progressed. I am also interested to know whether parents enacted or introduced any of the strategies they learned in the workshop series at home or in their communities.

I would also like to expand the LGBT Acceptance Project from only teaching parents and community members, to other Latina/o groups and organizations interested in building their own LGBT advocacy programs. The *Promotoras* and I plan to develop a “train-the-trainer” curriculum that could be used with other organizations. Documenting the process by which the *Promotoras* scale up of their curriculum for community educators interested in starting their own program to support LGBT Latina/o youth issues in schools and communities and evaluating how those organizations might adapt the LGBT Acceptance Project model to their own needs are areas for future exploration. My goal is to have the LGBT Acceptance Project serve as a model to other Latina/o community groups and organizations across the country seeking tools to bring a sense of awareness and advocacy on queer issues to their communities.

I am also interested in what we could learn from groups and organizations in Latina/o America engaged in LGBT advocacy work. For example, Mexico City has as long history of a strong presence of LGBT advocacy organizations (Encarnación, 2011). Could the indigenous programs or strategies practiced in Mexico’s urban areas enhance how the PPLA *Promotoras* engage in conversations about race, gender, sexuality and oppression? Would the discursive practices of these organizations translate to a population of Latina/o immigrants in the United

States? What could we learn about effective community education and outreach for queer youth from locations outside of the United States?

Another future direction is unpacking the theoretical contributions the LGBT Acceptance Project and the *Promotoras* make to the fields of public health and education. Within public health, there is a growing trend in the Promotor/a model to focus more on social justice and advocacy issues (The California Endowment, 2011). How could the LGBT Acceptance project contribute to expanding how those in the public health field think about the role of Promotor/as when it relates to issues and topics that can have a political impact? Within the field of education, I am interested in how the *Promotoras* 'pedagogical approaches can broaden how we think about critical pedagogy. In the case of the *Promotoras* work, what would a *Promotora* pedagogy look like within the context of schooling and education? How do the *Promotoras* embody a queer of color pedagogy and how does their praxis add nuance to queer of color field research in education?

Conclusion

In April of 2015, *This American Life* reported on a study conducted on a canvassing model that could change people's attitudes on same-sex marriage (Glass, 2015). The study (LaCour & Green, 2014), claimed that a short 20-minute conversation with a LGBT canvasser in favor of same sex-marriage could steer voters in California towards accepting and voting for same-sex marriage. Published in *Science* last year, this study quickly garnered national attention as an important model to gain support for LGBT policies and initiatives across the country. The study was conceived by now infamous UCLA Political Science graduate student, Michael LaCour, whose widely publicized study (and dissertation project) has since been retracted and discredited for allegedly fabricating all of the data (Singal, 2015).

LaCour's study struck a chord in me and many other researchers who have worked in communities and canvassed on different LGBT issues. Even after hearing his study was retracted and based on fabricated evidence, I still wanted to believe his results were true. I believed in his work because of the potential it had to revolutionize how we engage on LGBT political issues. For those of us who have been on the ground and working to build community support on queer issues, LaCour's study also would have validated what many of us already knew and felt—that one-on-one conversations humanize queer experiences and have the capacity to change the hearts and minds of people on queer issues.

My initial interests in working with the *Promotoras* of the LGBT Acceptance Project stemmed from my time as a community organizer in East Los Angeles working to build community support on queer issues in the Latina/o community. What I learned as a community organizer who went door-to-door talking about queer issues was that one-on-one conversations had the capacity to change Latina/os' preconceived notions of queer communities. The LGBT Acceptance Project applied the principles of this canvassing model to a four-part workshop series engaging Latina/o parents in heartfelt conversations about the different ways queer Latina/o youth experience discrimination and rejection in our homes, schools and communities and what as a Latina/o community we can do to support them.

The focus of this study was to first demonstrate how and in what ways the *Promotoras* facilitate conversations about the queer Latina/o community and experience. What I found are pedagogical and discursive practices interrogating issue of race, gender, sexuality and oppression. The *Promotoras* engage parents in conversations and activities that ask parents to reflect on intersectional forms of oppression by having parents draw on their own experiences of discrimination and marginalization as Latina/o immigrants and women. Several of the activities

the *Promotoras* used created moments where parents felt compassion and empathy for queer Latina/o youth. The *Promotoras* believe that contextualizing queer Latina/o youth as part of the community evokes compassion and compels parents to be supportive as allies and advocates for them in their families, schools and communities.

This study was also about understanding the identities of the *Promotoras* as allies and advocates. Little research looks at the identity development of Latina/os as LGBT allies and advocates; this study sought to shed light on how the *Promotoras* embodied those roles. Each *Promotora* grounded her queer ally identity in her own experiences with discrimination and/or rejection. The role of PPLA *Promotora* was a significant factor in developing the confidence to speak up for queer youth in the community. Although familiar with the repercussions that come with being associated with a pro-choice organization, the *Promotoras* drew strength from this identity to fight for queer youth issues.

The *Promotoras* of the LGBT Acceptance Project created a unique program that is turning Latina/o parents into allies for queer Latina/o youth in Los Angeles. Over 1,000 parents have taken part in the LGBT Acceptance Project workshop series since they started this program three years ago. This project offers one example what this work can look like. It is my hope that in this dissertation I have demonstrated the power in the work the *Promotoras* are doing in the Latina/o community. As acceptance of queer communities continues to rise, outreach in communities of color remains important. Current LGBT advocacy organizations have yet to fully account for the role that race, racism, and oppression play in the lives of queer youth. By engaging in heartfelt conversations about the queer Latina/o community, the *Promotoras* changed hearts and minds of Latina/o parents and ignited a sense of activism and compassion—one conversation at a time.

Appendix A

Sample of Exercises and Activities

Impact of Silence Activity⁸⁵

Instructions:

Distribute printed questions on cards, and ask participants to write their answers on the card. Also, ask each of the questions, allowing no more than a minute or so for participants to write down their answers.

- Clarify that nobody will have to discuss their answers with anyone else.
- Divide the group in pairs.
- Ask whoever is going first to introduce her/himself in 90 seconds without mentioning any of the topics on his/her card. Make a big deal about this! Say things like: “You can talk about whatever you want, but everything on your card is taboo. Don’t mess up.”
- At the end of the 90 seconds, ask the other partner to introduce themselves, again not mentioning anything written on their card, but this time they must talk for 2.5 minutes.
- Stop the activity after 2.5 minutes have elapsed.

⁸⁵ Activity from “Moving the Margins. Training Curriculum for Child Welfare Services with LGBTQ Youth in Out-of-Home Care.” NASW and Lambda Legal & Education Fund

Debunking Myths Activity

Objective: Reduce the belief in stereotypes and myths about sexual orientation and gender minorities.

- Once you have explained the terms, review the list of myths that was created in the previous activity and ask the group which ones are actually myths, and which ones are true. You will find many stereotypes in this list, both negative and positive. It may be useful to explain what a stereotype is, as it will help participants address the myths.

Stereotypes are generalizations that we make about groups or individuals. We use stereotypes when thinking about all members of a given group, without exception, and we attribute certain fixed characteristics to them. For example, “all teens are irresponsible,” “all women are weak,” etc.

These generalizations are false because every group of people comprises individuals who can all be different in various ways. It is not possible for all people in a given group (in this case, LGBT people) to behave in a certain way, have certain jobs, dress, act or feel in a particular way.

- With this definition in mind, ask participants to go over the list and identify the myths. The promotora can also use the “trash this myth” list as reference to respond to questions that may come up in the group. It is not necessary to review each of the myths on the list, only those that the group wishes to discuss. At the end you can distribute the list among all the participants.

We know a lot more about what doesn't influence sexual orientation, than we do about what does. Similarly, we know very little about how and why gender variance occurs. The one thing that all the myths have in common is that they are looking back at a person's life and trying to figure out what went wrong.

- Ask the group:

What do you think it is like for a young person to realize that they are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender in a society that has the myths, beliefs and stereotypes we have been discussing?

What impact do you think this environment might have on their self-esteem and emotional development?

Heterosexual Questioner

Objective: To increase awareness of the scrutiny that LGBT people are subjected to in their every day lives in a hetero-normative society.

Instructions: Ask three volunteers who identify as heterosexual or straight to come to the front of the room so that the facilitator can ask them questions from the heterosexual questionnaire. Ask the first volunteer a question, then the next one a different question and continue until you're done

Process questions for participants:

- How did you feel when you were asked these questions? If they respond that they didn't feel uncomfortable, ask them how they would have felt if they weren't in an education group like this one whose purpose is to talk about this topic.
- Was it easy to justify your sexual orientation to another person?
- Did you feel like you had to prove your heterosexuality?

Process questions for people who were observing:

- How did it feel to witness this process? / Was it comfortable / uncomfortable?
- How would you feel if you were asked these questions on a regular basis?
- What are some of the assumptions that underlie these questions (that heterosexuality is abnormal, a sickness and that the person should change their sexual orientation)?
- Why do you think we had you go through this process?

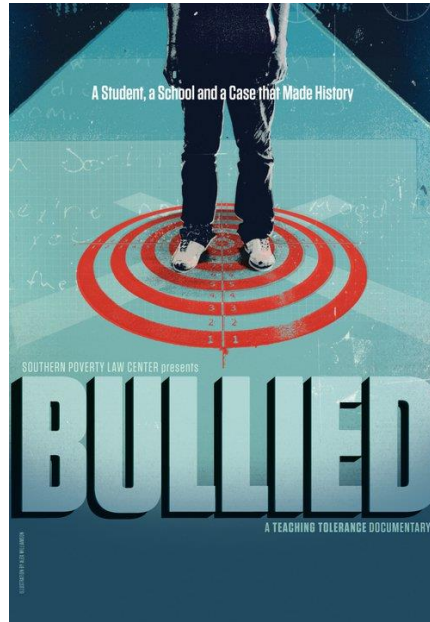
Video: Mi Familia



Objective: To analyze the journey, from struggle to support, of Latino families with LGBT children and the positive impact that family acceptance has on the overall health of the youth.

Explain that participants are going to watch a video showing real life stories of families who have LGBT children and their journey towards acceptance: "Let's pay attention to their stories, keeping in mind what we have just discussed: parental rejecting and accepting behaviors, and the different emotional and psychological stages that parents go through, as well as the impact of family acceptance on the children."

Video: Bullied: The Jamie Nabozny Story



Discussion

- After watching the video, ask the following questions:

- What do you think Jamie felt on a typical day?

Jamie experienced feelings of fear, self-loathing, helplessness, stress and depression, as well as the pain of physical violence that was inflicted upon him. He dreaded going to school and often felt the need to hide from classmates, to arrive at school early and stay late, and to avoid using the school bathroom for fear of being assaulted there

- How was this experience for his mom and dad? What did Jamie's face when they tried to defend Jimmy?

Bullying is a persistent problem for all LGBT students, yet Latinos/as face unique challenges (as other minority groups do), such as triple discrimination:

- Homophobia from within their racial and ethnic group,
- Racism from LGBT people of other races and ethnicities,
- A combination of the two from society at large.

Jamie found support from his family, yet imagine an LGBT Latino/a youth who faces the same bullying and discrimination at school, but does not receive any support from his own family! What would his life and future be like then?

Appendix B

Sample of Charts and Visuals

Acuerdos

ACUERDOS

1. Venca con el corazón y la mente abiertos.
2. Supenda todo juicio.
es decir trate de no juzgar
3. Respeto a las opiniones de los demas.
4. Mensajes desde el YO
5. Confidencialidad.
6. Derecho a Pasar
7. Escudna activa.
8. Celulares en vibración



ESP

1. B
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 3. Dis
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Definitions and Terms (1)

DEFINICION DE TERMINOS.

Identidad de género: El sentido interno de ser hombre, mujer, o una mezcla de ambos. Es cómo piensa la persona sobre sí misma y cómo se identifica. Esta es una cualidad psicológica, y, al contrario que el sexo biológico, no puede notarse a simple vista o medirse, sólo si la persona lo informa. Carecemos del término para nombrar la posición intermedia porque en nuestra cultura se supone que todas las personas se deben identificar con uno u otro extremo de las categorías (hombre---mujer)

Conducta sexual: Se refiere a los tipos de relaciones sexuales que deciden tener las personas. La conducta puede ser diferente de la orientación sexual.

Expresión de género: Es todo lo que las persona hacen para comunicar al mundo su identidad de género, su masculinidad, feminidad o ambas: ropa, estilo de cabello, manera de hablar, manierismo, roles o papeles cuando nos relacionamos con la gente, etc.

Por lo general, cuando la gente habla de la orientación sexual - que tiene que ver con la atracción - en realidad se refiere a la expresión de género. Es decir porque alguien se viste o lo vemos de cierta manera ("femenina" o "masculina" según nuestra opinión) asumimos que les gustan los hombres o las mujeres.

Definitions and Terms (2)

DEFINICION DE TERMINOS

Sexo biológico: Características físicas que nos definen como hombre o mujer basadas en los genitales, las hormonas, los genes, los cromosomas, los órganos internos y los genitales externos.

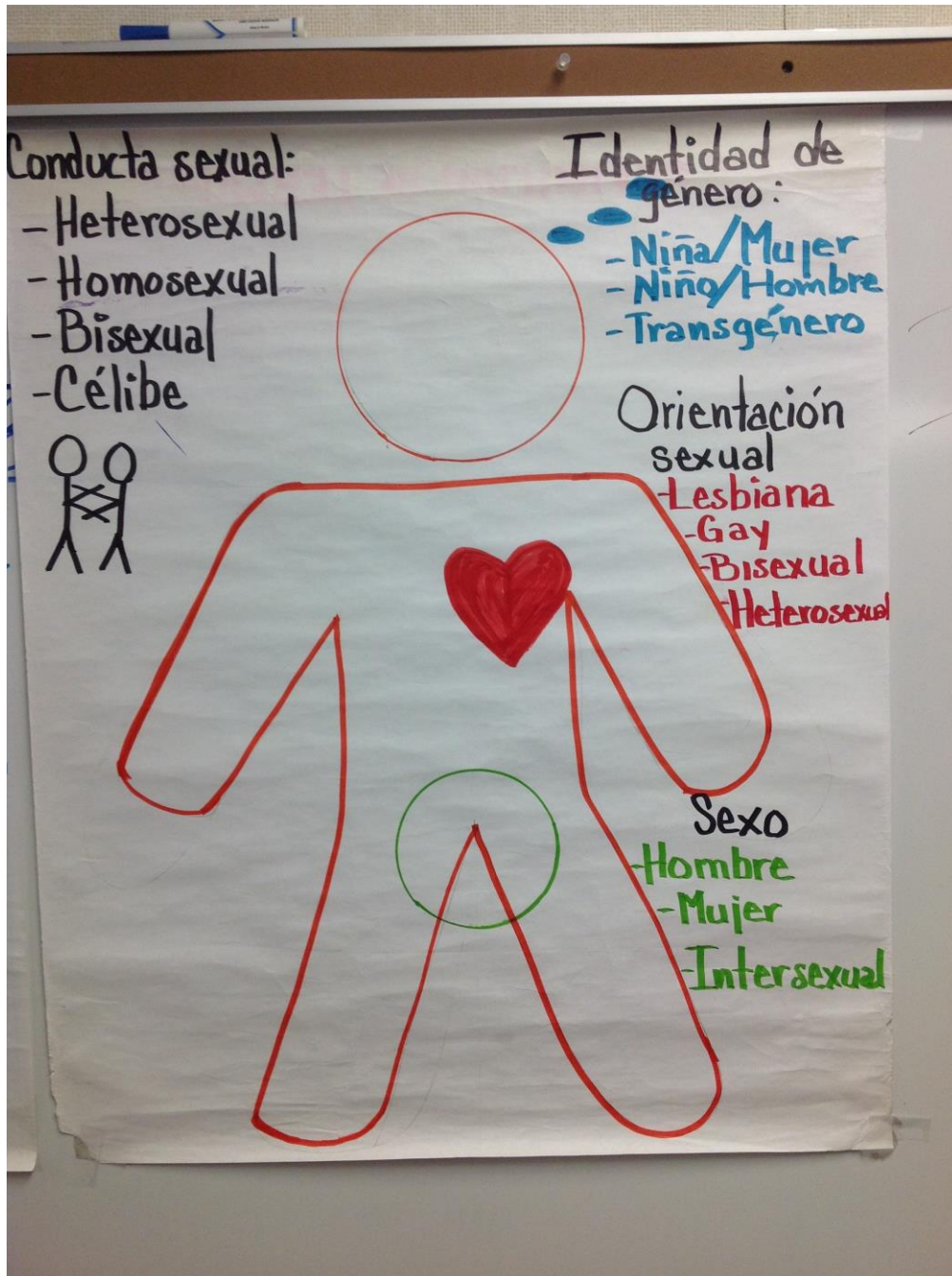
Orientación sexual: Combinación de las atracciones emocionales, románticas, y eróticas de una persona. Es decir: quién me gusta, quién me atrae sexualmente, y de quién me enamoro.

Hetero sexual: sentir atracción la mayor parte del tiempo o más intensamente por personas del otro género... atracción romántica, sexual, espiritual y emocional. No necesariamente quiere decir que la persona ha tenido relaciones sexuales con alguien de otro género.

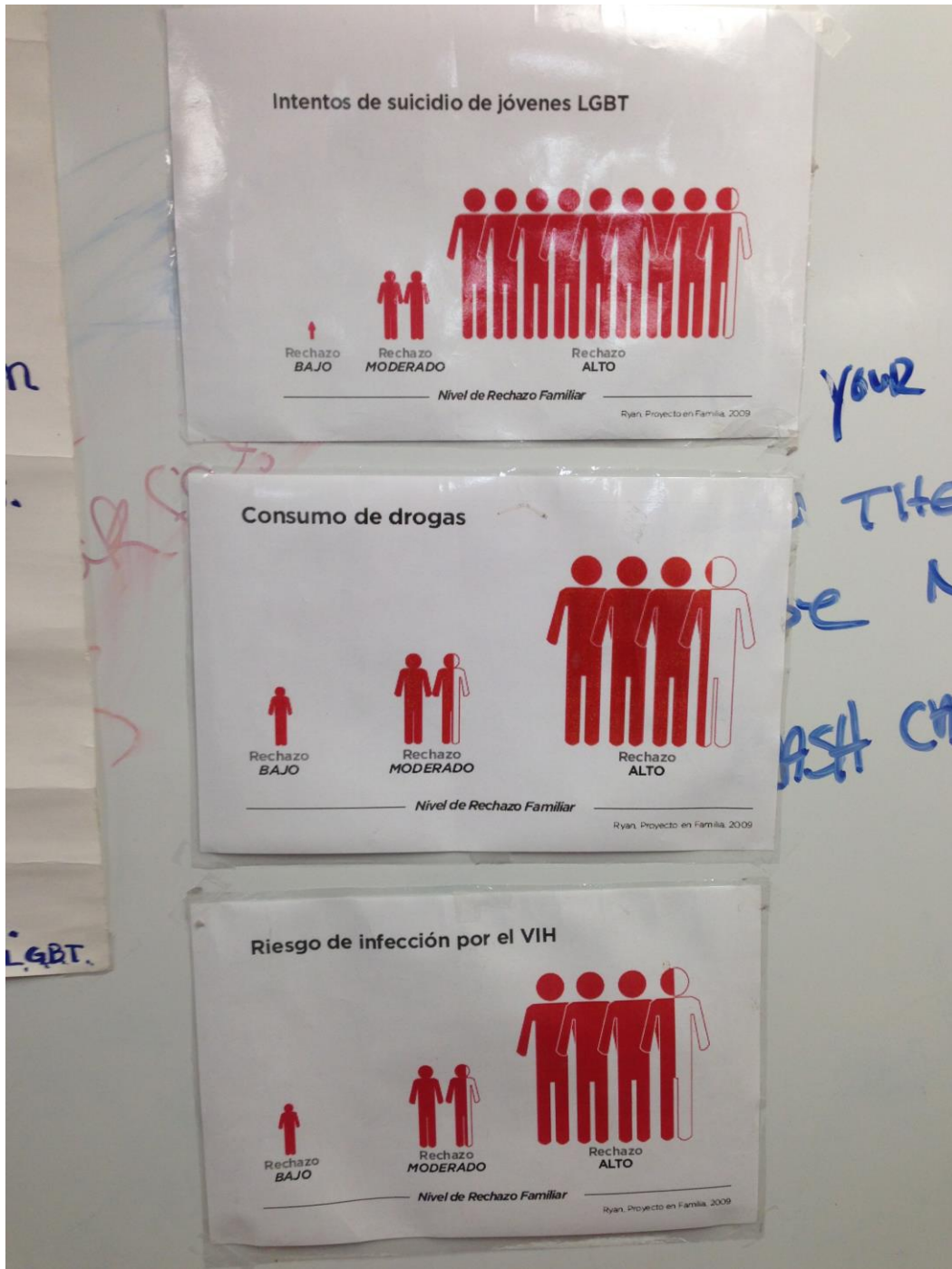
Homosexual: sentir atracción la mayor parte del tiempo o más intensamente por personas de nuestro mismo género...

Bi exual: sentir atracción tan intensamente tanto hacia hombres, como hacia mujeres... atracción romántica, sexual, espiritual y emocional. No necesariamente quiere decir que la persona a tenido relaciones sexuales con alguien de cualquier género.

Genderbread Person



LGBT Statistics



Queer Latina/o Youth Suffer Three Times the Discrimination

Para los jóvenes LGBT latinos, así como otros grupos minoritarios, enfrentan desafíos únicos tales como la discriminación triple:

- ☺ Homofobia por parte de la Población latina.
- ☺ Racismo por parte de las personas LGBT de otras razas o etnias.
- ☺ Y homofobia y racismo de parte de la sociedad en general.

ESPECTADOR: Persona que ve el comportamiento inaceptable pero no hace nada por detenerlo.

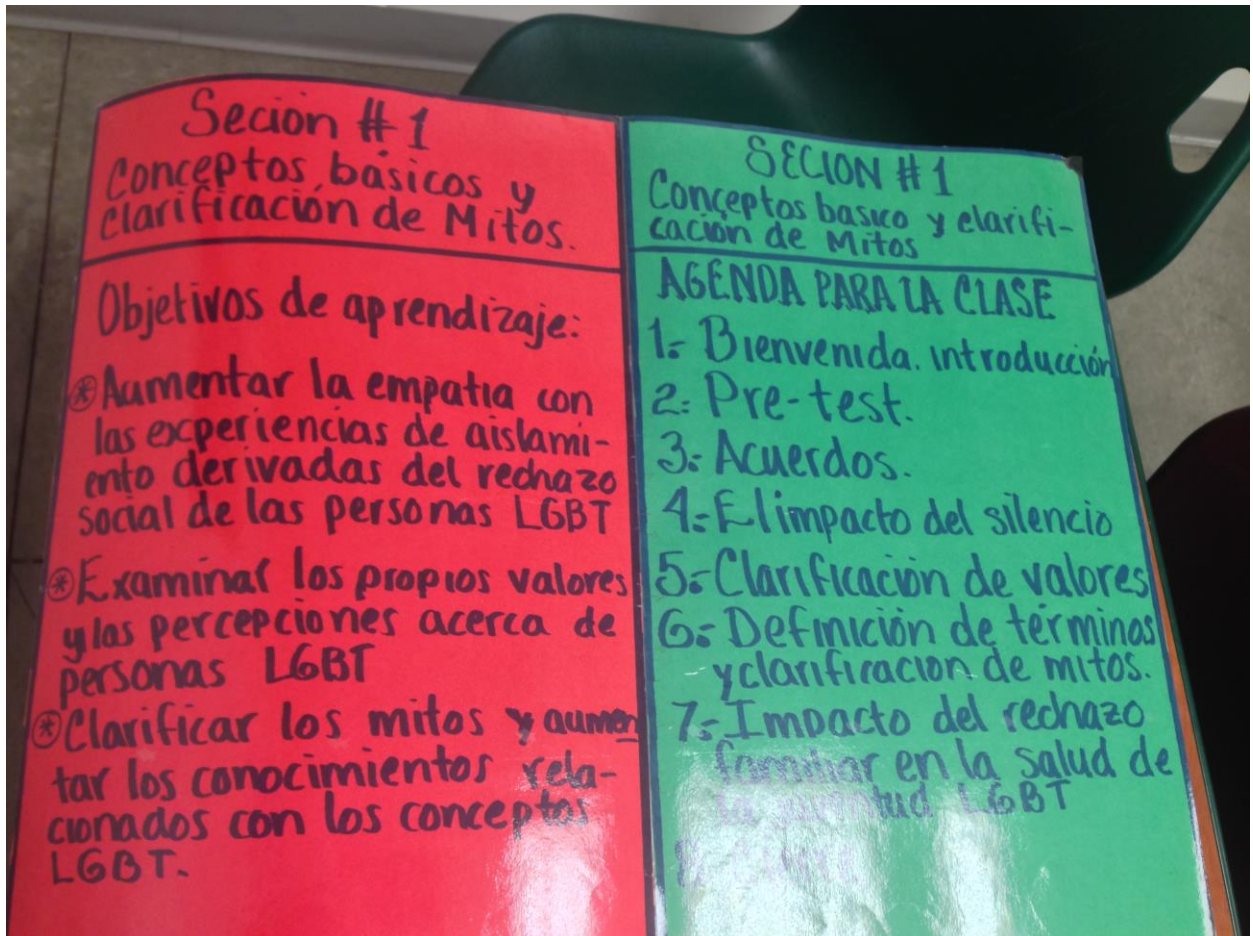
EXISTE MAS DISCRIMINACION EN:

- * Cuidado de la Salud.
- * Vivienda.
- * Empleos.

ALIADO: Alguien que apoya activamente a las personas LGBT.



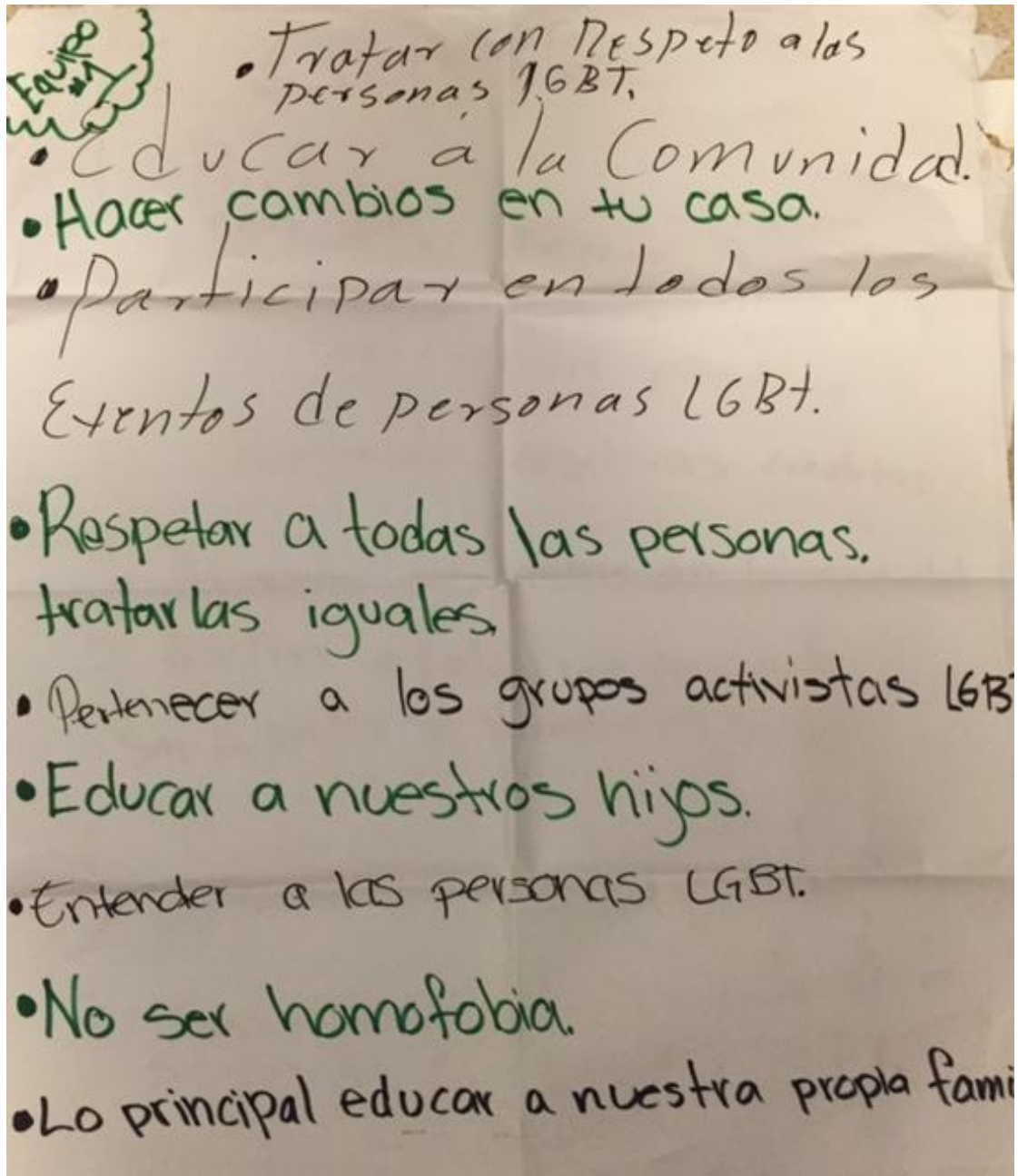
Session Objectives



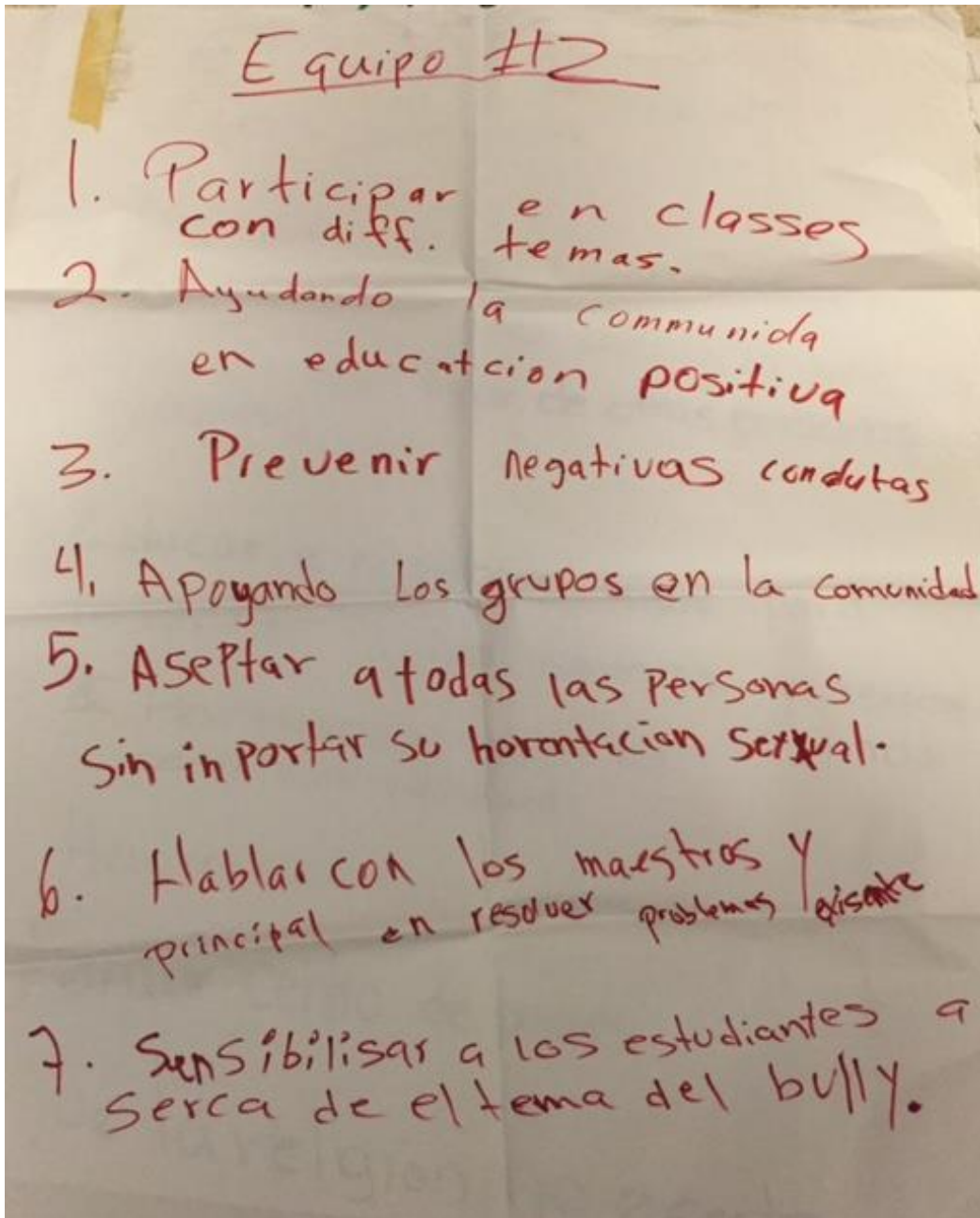
Appendix C

Sample of Parent Work

Becoming Ally Activity (1)

- 
- Tratar con Respeto a las personas LGBT.
 - Educar a la Comunidad.
 - Hacer cambios en tu casa.
 - Participar en todos los Eventos de personas LGBT.
 - Respetar a todas las personas, tratarlas iguales.
 - Pertenecer a los grupos activistas LGBT.
 - Educar a nuestros hijos.
 - Entender a las personas LGBT.
 - No ser homofobia.
 - Lo principal educar a nuestra propia familia.

Becoming Ally Activity (2)



Becoming Ally Activity (3)

- Equipo 3 Comunidad
1. Educando y asistiendo a clases educativas.
 2. No permitir comentarios negativos o denigrantes.
 3. Ponernos en el lugar de otras personas (empatía)
 4. Educar a nuestros hijos para respetar a los demás y asimilarnos
 5. Participar en la comunidad.
 6. Hacer cambios positivos
 7. Formar centro de padres
 8. Que la religión no afecte

Appendix D

Parent Pre-assessment (Spanish)

Día en que nació: _____

Planned Parenthood Los Angeles y Honor Fund

Programa de Aceptación Comunitaria de Personas Gay y Transgénero

Le haremos unas preguntas sobre las personas que son lesbianas, gay, bisexuales o transgénero. Lesbiana se refiere a mujeres que se sienten emocional y sexualmente atraídas a las mujeres, gay se refiere a hombres que se sienten emocional y sexualmente atraídos a los hombres (ésta palabra también se usa para referirse a las mujeres lesbianas), bisexual se refiere a las personas que se sienten emocional y sexualmente atraídas tanto a hombres como a mujeres, transgénero se refiere a gente que no se identifica con el género que les fue asignado al nacer (por ejemplo alguien que siente que es mujer pero que tiene cuerpo de hombre, o alguien que siente que es hombre pero tiene cuerpo de mujer). Usaremos las letras LGBT cuando nos refiramos a alguien que es lesbiana, gay, bisexual o transgénero.

Instrucciones: Por favor encierre en un círculo si usted piensa que la oración es Verdadera o Falsa.

1. Alguien que es LGBT puede cambiar con terapia. Verdadero Falso
2. Los hombres gay quieren ser mujeres y las lesbianas quieren ser hombres. Verdadero Falso
3. La mayoría de adultos que abusan sexualmente de niños/as son hombres heterosexuales. Verdadero Falso
4. La mayoría de gente LGBT son así porque fueron abusados sexualmente en su niñez. Verdadero Falso
5. La gente elige ser gay o lesbiana. Verdadero Falso
6. Las personas LGBT son tan buenas como madres o padres como las personas heterosexuales. Verdadero Falso

Instrucciones: Por favor lea cada oración y encierre en un círculo la respuesta que mejor refleja su opinión.

1. Una madre o un padre debe impedir que su hijo/a LGBT tenga amigos LGBT o vaya a eventos LGBT
De acuerdo En desacuerdo No sé
2. Un padre o una madre debe hacer todo lo posible para evitar que su hija o hijo sea LGBT.
De acuerdo En desacuerdo No sé
3. Un padre o una madre debe apoyar a su hijo/a LGBT aunque el padre o madre se sienta incómodo/a.
De acuerdo En desacuerdo No sé
4. Una madre o un padre debe pedirle a su hijo/a LGBT que no le diga a nadie que es LGBT.
De acuerdo En desacuerdo No sé

5. Un padre o una madre debe recibir en su casa a los amigos y novio o novia de su hijo/a LGBT.
De acuerdo En desacuerdo No sé

6. Un padre o la madre debe exigir que su hija LGBT sea más femenina.
De acuerdo En desacuerdo No sé

7. El papá o la mamá debe exigir que su hijo LGBT sea más masculino.
De acuerdo En desacuerdo No sé

8. Una madre o un padre debe llevar a su hija o hijo LGBT a organizaciones o eventos LGBT
De acuerdo En desacuerdo No sé

9. Un padre o una madre debe decirle a un hijo o hija LGBT cómo debe verse o actuar para que ese hijo/a no avergüence a la familia.
De acuerdo En desacuerdo No sé

Instrucciones: Por favor lea cada oración y encierre en un círculo la respuesta que mejor refleja su opinión.

1. Hacerle bromas a alguien porque es gay no es gran cosa.
De acuerdo En desacuerdo No sé

2. La gente LGBT se merece los mismos derechos y privilegios que las demás personas.
De acuerdo En desacuerdo No sé

3. Me molesta cuando la gente usa la palabra “maricón” o “Joto”.
De acuerdo En desacuerdo No sé

4. Les enseñé a mis hijas e hijos a no participar en las burlas hacia los niños y niñas gay.
De acuerdo En desacuerdo No sé

5. No pienso en la seguridad y el respeto hacia la gente LGBT porque no tengo hijos o hijas LGBT.
De acuerdo En desacuerdo No sé

6. La gente que es abiertamente gay provoca que se les hostigue.
De acuerdo En desacuerdo No sé

7. Yo puedo luchar en contra de la discriminación y el acoso hacia las personas LGBT
De acuerdo En desacuerdo No sé

8. Las personas LGBT están enfermas psicológicamente.
De acuerdo En desacuerdo No sé

9. Es importante para mí defender a las personas LGBT que son hostigadas.
De acuerdo En desacuerdo No sé

10. Cuando veo que una persona LGBT es hostigada, digo algo.
De acuerdo En desacuerdo No sé

11. Me siento totalmente cómoda/o cuando estoy entre gente LGBT
De acuerdo En desacuerdo No sé

Instrucciones: Por favor encierre en un círculo si usted piensa que la oración es Verdadera o Falsa.

1. La gente joven LGBT que es hostigada sufre mucho.

Verdadero Falso

2. En Los Angeles, los y las jóvenes LGBT representan hasta 40% de los adolescentes sin casa.

Verdadero Falso

3. 1 de cada 4 jóvenes LGBT son corridos/as de sus casas como resultado de decirle a sus padres que son LGBT.

Verdadero Falso

4. El suicidio entre jóvenes LGBT es más o menos el mismo que para los jóvenes heterosexuales.

Verdadero Falso

5. La mayoría de los jóvenes LGBT permanece en la escuela aunque sean muy hostigados .

Verdadero Falso

6. A muy pocos jóvenes LGBT los amenazan con violencia física.

Verdadero Falso

7. Los jóvenes LGBT que son rechazados por su familia tienen más probabilidad de estar a riesgo de adquirir el VIH y las infecciones de transmisión sexual.

Verdadero Falso

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