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Latinx Temporalities: The Queer Time of Spanglish, family, and Latinx futurity in Santa Ana, California, 2014-2017

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Latinx Temporalities: The Queer Time of Spanglish, Family, and Latinx Futurity

in Santa Ana, California, 2014-2017

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy  
in Chicana and Chicano Studies

by

Juan Sebastian Ferrada

Committee in charge:

Professor Dolores Inés Casillas, Chair

Professor Ellie D. Hernández

Professor Mary Bucholtz

Professor Carlos U. Decena, Rutgers University

March 2019

The dissertation of Juan Sebastian Ferrada is approved.

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Ellie D. Hernández

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Mary Bucholtz

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Carlos U. Decena

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Dolores Inés Casillas, Committee Chair

December 2018

Latinx Temporalities: The Queer Time of Spanglish, Family, and Latinx Futurity  
in Santa Ana, California, 2014-2017

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by

Juan Sebastian Ferrada

## DEDICATION

Para mis abuelitas Veronica Ulloa, Camerina De la Torre,  
y para mi abuelito Jesús De la Torre, QEPD.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am fortunate to have been trained and mentored by some of the boldest, most brilliant scholars and teachers who served as my committee. My committee chair and advisor—Inés Casillas, words are not enough to explain the gratitude I feel toward you. I hope to be such an integral part of my student’s intellectual (and personal) formation as you have been, and continue to be for me. Thank you for your patience with me running on queer—no, Latinx—time and for encouraging me to take this project as far as I could go. The rest of my committee members, Ellie Hernández, Mary Bucholtz, Carlos Decena—I learned so much from each of you and your work. Thank you for your feedback, commentary, and for agreeing to guide me on this journey. The dissertation is what it is because of the time you all gave me and my work. Mil gracias.

I had the privilege of being trained by some of the finest scholars, thinkers, and teachers of Chicana/o/x Studies during my time at UC Santa Barbara. I am especially thankful to Aída Hurtado, Gerardo Aldana, Chela Sandoval, Ralph Armbruster-Sandoval, and Denise Segura. Micaela Díaz-Sánchez, our pláticas during the last few years of this journey brought me much-needed ánimo when things got tough. Horacio Roque Ramírez (QEPD), I will never forget when I went to your office hours to “pitch” my dissertation idea and you said, “It’s an obvious project... that no one has done. Go for it!” Thank you for the encouragement. You are deeply missed. Part of what makes an academic department run smoothly is the dedication and support of the staff—and I was fortunate to have some wonderful people taking care of me during my graduate (and undergraduate) studies— Sonya Baker, Joann Irving, Shariq Hashmi, Mayra Villanueva, Katherine Morales, and the kick-ass undergraduates who worked as peer advisors over the years. I was fortunate to receive

funding for the completion of this dissertation and my degree: two Chicano Studies Institute Research Grants; Chicana/o Studies Departmental Merit-Grant; UCSB Graduate Research Mentorship Program Fellowship; and the 2013 Crossroads Research and Teaching Fellowship.

In graduate school, I created friendships with some of the most brilliant thinkers in Chicana/o/x Studies of this generation and also some of the best souls. I developed a deep love for my friends, who shared some of the best (and the difficult) moments of grad school with me. Janett Barragan Miranda, I am grateful to have completed this journey with you, side by side. We survived a lot together. Thank you for always reminding me why we love the work we do. Melissa Flores, my “person,” so much of this dissertation would not have developed like it did, if it had not been for your texts, phone calls, wine nights, staying up with me, talking through these ideas. Adanari Zarate, my academic sister, friend, fellow pop diva connoisseur—I am grateful for your friendship, cariño, and writing sessions talking about language and race. Thanks for your endless support. Sara V. Hinojos, I appreciate the friendship that blossomed from our paths crossing in graduate school. From starting one of the first Latinx (not “Hispanic” LOL) podcasts together to those wild quarters where we had our long, weekly drives to/from LA to SB—thanks for reminding me that chisme is not gossip if it is informative! Eddy Álvarez, my jotamadrina—I am grateful for your mentorship, guidance, and love over the years. Thank you for taking me under your wing when I was just a recently out jotito, trying to figure himself out, and for continuing to provide that apoyo. QUE VIVA LA JOTERÍA!

I am constantly in awe of being surrounded by some of the smartest, and coolest, colegas in my department. Learning how to navigate graduate school, especially in the first

few years, would have been so much more difficult without the consejos, dinners, chisme, and intellectual conversations con Marla Ramírez, William Calvo-Quirós, Amber Rose González, Jessica Lopez-Lyman, Nicholas Centino, Adrianna Santos, Michelle P. Baca, Tomas Carrasco, and Frankie Fuentes. And to the ones coming up—Paulina Ramirez-Niembro, vecina, thank you for the enthusiasm, the kindness, and the warmth. Aracely Garcia, I appreciate you so much—for holding my Pisces ass accountable but also for your unapologetic fierceness in academia. Alejandro Prado, thank you for amistad, and for demystifying the gym for me. Last, but certainly not least, Mariano Nava—thank you for the poetry, the cold brews, and for traveling time with me. Never lose your spark, remember what you told me—we are made of stars!

I am grateful to the many friends, roommates, and colleagues I met during my time at UC Santa Barbara. For the writing sessions, dinners, drinks, and collaborations in so many other ways—especially Maria José Aragon, Meghan Corella, Anna Bax, Magda Garcia, Katie Jan, Rachel Rhys, Natalia Villanueva, Eva Michelle Wheeler, Jessica Marter Kenyon, Taylor Smith, Carlos Torres, Raquel Wigginton, Heather McNair, and Jordan Tudisco. I am especially thankful for sharing space and establishing confidantes with Jane Choi, Hareem Khan, and Audrey Lopez. Cheers to all of us getting through it and for the lifelong friendship.

I have chosen a career path that will allow me to do what I love to do... teach. I was blessed to have met some of the brightest young minds in my classes throughout my years teaching and TA'ing at UCSB. So many of the students impacted me but I want to especially thank Maggie Murillo, Neftaley Arceo, Teresa Campa, Oscar Campos, Daniel Cortes, Alondra Garcia, Giancarlo Giron, Ana Guerrero, Yesica Lopez, Melba Martinez, Ricardo



Mata, Tristan Ordaz, Fabian Pacheco, Carolina Paz, Lexi Reichman, Danny Reyes, Vanessa Romo, Sarah Romero, and Marisol Vargas.

While Santa Barbara is not the most ideal place for a thriving social life as a queer person of color in their 20's—I was lucky to meet and live many beautiful adventures with Andres Alulema and Justin Reyes, who taught me that no matter the distance, queer boys of color friendship like ours never ends (#SBGR forever). Eric Campos—palomita, thank you for your friendship, and for the many adventures we shared—to many more! I am also thankful to Omar Rosales and Gabe Reyes, for the kiki's, the dancing, the laughs. Ariana Rodriguez Zertuche and Richard Moreno, I love you both to the moon and back. Cheers to us making a long-distance, queer, platonic relationship work despite the distance and time. To the Baddies (Danyeli, Ernesto, David, Agustin, Erick, Bash, Vanessa, Eric, and Kai)—thanks for providing laughter, dancing, and relief during the hardest, and final, moments of the dissertation writing. I love you all.

To the “Xisme Crew”, the heart, soul, and voices of this dissertation, thank you for allowing me into your lives and trusting me with sharing your stories. You all changed me in more ways than I will ever be able to express. I have found lifelong friends in each of you—gracias.

To all the members of DeColores Queer Orange County, y'all made history and created space for queer and trans Latinxs in Orange County. It was a privilege to organize, mobilize, and celebrate *jotería* alongside you. Thank you for lending your stories to this project. Para las mamás de La Familia—ustedes me han demostrado que el amor incondicional no solo pertenece a los familiares biológicos. Ustedes son poderosas. Gracias por todo su apoyo y por confiar en mi para compartir sus historias.

To all the people who I have loved and who loved me (even if only temporarily)—thanks for showing me that love and time are social constructs that sometimes have expiration dates...“I’m so fu\*\*in’ grateful for my ex... thank u, next.” Hercules, for being the light and breath of fresh air after the storm and for daring to bend space and time and love and affection away from the limits of normativity. Gracias, hermoso. “Dr. F”—Thank you for helping me lower the volume on the static that was keeping me from my true potential. You helped me save me from myself and taught me that I have the power to set boundaries.

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## JUAN SEBASTIAN FERRADA

juansferrada@gmail.com | (562) 309 - 5527 | 9805 Grovedale Drive, Whittier, CA 90603

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### EDUCATION

#### University of California, Santa Barbara

- 2019            Ph.D., Chicana and Chicano Studies  
Dissertation: *Latinx Temporalities: The queer time of Spanglish, familia, and Latinx futurity in Santa Ana, California, 2014-2017*  
Committee: D. Inés Casillas (chair), Mary Bucholtz, Ellie D. Hernández, and Carlos U. Decena (Rutgers University)
- 2013            M.A., Chicana and Chicano Studies
- 2010            B.A., Chicana and Chicano Studies, with distinction in the major  
B.A., Global Studies

### RESEARCH AND TEACHING INTERESTS

Gender & sexuality	Queer/Trans Chicana/Latinx studies	LGBTQ activism
Latinx language politics	Feminist methodologies	Race & ethnicity

### PUBLICATIONS

#### *Peer-Reviewed*

- 2019            **Ferrada, Juan Sebastian**, Mary Bucholtz, and Meghan Corella. “Respetar mi idioma’: Latinx youth enacting affective agency.” *Journal of Language, Identity, and Education*. (In press).
- 2018            Casillas, Dolores Inés, **Juan Sebastian Ferrada**, and Sara V. Hinojos. “The Accent on *Modern Family*: Listening to Representations of the Latina Vocal Body.” *Aztlán: A Journal of Chicano Studies* 43, no. 1 (Spring 2018): 59-85.
- 2011            Casillas, Dolores Inés, and **Juan Sebastian Ferrada**. “Listening to *Modern Family*’s Accent.” *Sounding Out!: The Sound Studies Blog*. Available at: <http://soundstudiesblog.com/2011/03/28/listening-to-modern-familys-accent>.

#### *Book Chapter*

- 2018            Bax, Anna, and **Juan Sebastian Ferrada**. “Sounding White and Boring: Race, Identity, and Youth Freedom in an After-School Program.” In *Feeling it: Language, Race, and Affect in Latinx Youth Learning*, edited by Mary Bucholtz, Dolores Inés Casillas, and Jin Sook Lee, (New York: Routledge, 2018).

#### *Book Reviews*

- 2016            **Ferrada, Juan Sebastian**. “Book Review: Eric Avila’s *The Folklore of the Freeway: Race and Revolt in the Modern City*.” *Aztlán: A Journal of Chicano Studies* 41, no. 1 (Spring 2016): 323-326.

- 2015 **Ferrada, Juan Sebastian.** "SO! Reads: Norma Mendoza-Denton's *Homegirls*." *Sounding Out!: The Sound Studies Blog*. Available at: <http://soundstudiesblog.com/2015/10/26/so-reads-norma-mendoza-dentons-homegirls/>  
*Encyclopedia Essays*
- 2011 Casillas, Dolores Inés, and **Juan Sebastian Ferrada.** "Farmingville, New York." *Anti-Immigration in the United States: A Historical Encyclopedia*. Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 198-200.
- 2011 Casillas, Dolores Inés, and **Juan Sebastian Ferrada.** "Hispanic." *Anti-Immigration in the United States: A Historical Encyclopedia*. Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 246-247.

## TEACHING EXPERIENCE

### Instructor of Record, University of California, Santa Barbara

- 2018, 2017 Chicana/o Studies – Honors Thesis Seminar  
 2017 Chicana/o Studies – Introduction to Chicana/o Studies: History  
 2017 Chicana/o Studies – Body, Culture, & Power  
 2016 Chicana/o Studies – Queer Communities, Identities, & Theories  
 2014 Chicana/o Studies – Chicana/o and Latina/o Media & Pop Culture

### Teaching Assistant, University of California, Santa Barbara

- 2017, 2013 Chicana/o Studies/Education/Linguistics – Language, Power, & Learning  
 2015 Chicana/o Studies – Queer Communities, Identities, & Theories  
 2014, 2012 Chicana/o Studies – Introduction to Chicana/o Studies: History  
 2013 Chicana/o Studies – Barrio Popular Culture  
 2013 Chicana/o Studies – Body, Culture, & Power  
 2013, 2012 Chicana/o Studies – Introduction to Chicana/o Studies: Gender  
 2012 Chicana/o Studies – Introduction to Chicana/o Studies: Culture

### Teaching Fellow, SKILLS Fellowship Program: High School Research Seminar

- 2014 Isla Vista Teen Center  
 2012 Santa Barbara High School

## INVITED LECTURE

- 2018 "On Latinx Time: Intentional Expressions." Latinx Heritage Month Keynote. Cañada College, Redwood City, CA. *September 5-6.*

## CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

### American Anthropological Association (AAA)

- 2014 "I Wasn't Afraid of No White Girl?: Queer Latina/o Undergrads Construct Race, Gender, and Sexuality in Fight Stories." Washington, D.C. *December 2-7.*
- 2013 "Respect My Language?: Latina/o Youth Agency, Affect, and Scholarly Accompaniment." Chicago, IL. *November 20-23.*

2012 “Sociolinguistic Justice in the Schools: Student Researchers as Linguistic Experts.” San Francisco, CA. *November 13-18.*

### **Association for Jotería Arts, Activism, & Scholarship (AJAAS)**

2017 “Lo que se ve si se pregunta: Finding sanctuary in queer pláticas con las mamás.” Minneapolis, MN. *October 6-8.*

2015 “Queering Spanglish: The Politics of Language in a Queer Latin@ Community-organizing Context.” Phoenix, AZ. *October 16-18.*

### **Latina/o Studies Association Conference (LSA)**

2016 “Speaking in Queer Spanglish: Disrupting ‘Coming Out’ Narratives among LGBTQ Latinxs.” Pasadena, CA. *July 7-9.*

### **National Association of Chicana & Chicano Studies (NACCS)**

2018 “Sounding Like a Jotx: Queer Language Politics and Jotería Methodologies in Chicana Studies.” Minneapolis, MN. *April 4-7.*

2018 “‘Mijito, que es binary?’: Articulating queerness in pláticas con las mamás in Santa Ana, California.” Minneapolis, MN. *April 4-7.*

2017 “Sharing the Mic: Queer Reciprocity in the Legacy of Horacio N. Roque Ramírez.” Irvine, CA. *March 22-25.*

2013 “Queer Latina/o Voices: Negotiating Queer Latina/o Youth Language Politics.” San Antonio, TX. *March 20-23.*

2012 “Listening to accent and ‘authenticity’ on *Modern Family*.” Chicago, IL. *March 14-17.*

### **AWARDS AND HONORS**

2017 Chicano Studies Institute Research Grant, \$1820  
2016 UCSB, Chicana/o Studies Departmental Merit-Grant, \$7000  
2016 Ford Fellowship Foundation, *Alternate*  
2015 UCSB, Graduate Research Mentorship Program Fellowship  
2015 Chicano Studies Institute Research Grant, \$2200  
2015 LGBTQ Mentor of the Year, UCSB Pride Awards  
2014 Chicano Studies Institute Research Grant, \$2000  
2014 Ford Fellowship Foundation, *Honorable Mention*  
2013 Crossroads Research and Teaching Fellowship

### **SERVICE**

2016 Search Committee Member, Assistant Director McNair Scholars Program, UC Santa Barbara  
2014 - 2016 Member, DeColores Queer Orange County  
2014 - 2015 Mentor, Emerging LGBT Leadership Institute, UCSB

2012 - 2015 Graduate Advisor, La Familia De Colores, UCSB  
2012 - 2013 Graduate Student Representative, Department of Chicana/o Studies

### **PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS**

American Anthropological Association (AAA)  
Association for Jotería Arts, Activism, and Scholarship (AJAAS)  
Latina/o Studies Association (LSA)  
National Association of Chicana and Chicano Studies (NACCS)

### **LANGUAGES**

High proficiency in English and Spanish.

### **PROFESSIONAL REFERENCES**

#### **Dolores Inés Casillas**

Associate Professor, Department of Chicana & Chicano Studies  
University of California, Santa Barbara  
e: casillas@ucsb.edu | p: (805) 893-3212

#### **Mary Bucholtz**

Professor, Department of Linguistics  
University of California, Santa Barbara  
e: bucholtz@ucsb.edu | p: (805) 893-7488

#### **Ellie D. Hernández**

Associate Professor, Department of Chicana & Chicano Studies  
University of California, Santa Barbara  
e: ehernandez@chicst.ucsb.edu | p: (805) 893-8880

## ABSTRACT

Latinx Temporalities: The Queer Time of Spanglish, Family, and Latinx Futurity

in Santa Ana, California, 2014-2017

by

Juan Sebastian Ferrada

This dissertation analyzes queer and trans Latinx language practices in a community-based organization in Orange County (OC), California. Through these innovative language practices, Latinxs in the OC craft their own ways of articulating queerness, bridging chosen families and families of origin, and mobilizing the local community. This dissertation encompasses the areas of queer of color critique, queer theory, raciolinguistics, and the developing field of Jotería Studies, which merges women of color feminist and Queer Chicana and Latinx Studies. Additionally, in examining queer language practices among Latinx communities, I consider how such practices open up new ways of thinking about family acceptance, sexuality, and Latinx time. I conducted a linguistic ethnography over the course of two years with this organization and conducted 20 in-depth interviews with members and their mothers. Based on my findings, I situate Spanglish as a Latinx practice that acts as a method to articulate racialized sexualities within Chicana/Latinx family, visual, and community-organizing spaces.

The first chapter sets the theoretical framework for the dissertation by tracing the evolution and advent of the “x” in Latinx. I discuss how this re-orientating is an example of a larger queering of time that begins to open up possibilities for Latinx community building,

empowerment, and crafting of a future (Muñoz 2009). Specifically, I explore how the politics of naming, the move to the “x”, Spanglish as a queer practice, and the re-claiming of historically derogatory terms offer us avenues to think more queerly about language in Latinx communities. Chapter Two explores more pointedly the queer politics of Spanglish as a queer language practice used to articulate affirming and empowering notions of queerness and othered genders and sexualities. I conduct a linguistic and visual analysis of the organization’s flyers and posters to demonstrate queer world-making through language. Chapter Three discusses queer and trans Latinxs childhood memories of queerness. This chapter explores how memory, embodiment, and affect impact the navigation of family structures in regard to non-normative gender identities and sexualities. The project concludes with Chapter Four, shifting the lens from queer Chicana participants to their parents who are members of the support group, La Familia. Through in-depth interviews with these Latina mothers, I explore how these parents navigate their own coming out process as parents of LGBTQ folks, as well as how they become politicized through the space in the advocacy work they do in the local Orange County community. This interdisciplinary project uses a feminist and queer of color approach to the analysis of Latina/o/x linguistic and cultural practices in the context of queer time.



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## I. Introduction

“Minoritarian performances—performances both theatrical and quotidian—transports us across symbolic space, inserting us in a coterminous time when we witness new formations within the present and the future.”<sup>1</sup>

-José Esteban Muñoz

As a child, I never understood why my parents insisted on scheduling family reunions or parties at our house two hours earlier than the actual time when most guests would arrive. The carne asada could be scheduled at 1:00 pm, and the first relatives would not arrive until at least 2:30 pm—like clockwork, this always worked. People of Color tend to run late, or at least that is the stereotype. Whether it is running late to a work meeting, not anticipating traffic before Sunday brunch, or just in general running late, a person of color might say or hear: “She’s running on CP time!” or “He’ll be here in 15 minutes, he’s on Chicano time.” “Colored people time” or CP time as it is often referred to, names the cultural perception of Black communities being habitually late.<sup>2</sup> At its worst, the phrase (especially if deployed by white folks) negatively stereotypes Black people as late but more pointedly in the context of tardiness—or being late with some type of institutional or bureaucratic repercussion. A recent and problematic use of CP time popped up in U.S. media during the 2016 presidential campaign when then-presidential candidate Hilary Clinton and New York Mayor Bill De Blasio referred to their own lateness as CP time in an awkward, yet cringeworthy, moment at campaign stop on *Hamilton* stage.<sup>3</sup> At its best, and when initiated within and amongst communities of color, the phrase may signal an understanding that communities of color are running at a different pace or tempo, marked by their lived experiences as people of color. Consider, for example, former President Barack Obama’s witty and fitting response to Clinton and De Blasio’s misuse of the term at the White House Correspondents’ annual

dinner, when he said, “I was running on CPT—which stands for jokes that white people should not make.”<sup>4</sup>

CP time more specifically speaks to the experiences of black communities in the United States, with other variations that are both racially and regionally marked—such as “southern time” or “delta time” which are understood to move a little slower than the fast-paced nature of larger, urban cities.<sup>5</sup> While CP time originates and hears its use amongst black communities, other racial and ethnic groups have adopted their “version” of the concept of CP time. For instance, one might hear Chicanxs and Latinxs in the United States refer to running late as “Chicano time” or “brown time”, or more generally as immigrant time. When viewed through a negative, stereotypical lens, CP time can paint people of color as incapable of adhering to punctuality which is often tied to larger ideas of labor, respectability, and reliability. However, thinking more openly about CP time, or Chicano time, allows us to understand it as a different rhythm in life, or perhaps as a less normative tempo in relation to time. This understanding of time echoes the minoritarian performances, José Esteban Muñoz describes in the quote in this chapter’s epigraph. CP time is not necessarily wrong or linked solely to disciplining tardiness—it “transports us across symbolic space,” where communities of color witness new formations in the present and future.<sup>6</sup> These different notions of time amongst communities of color also allow for a recalibration of sociality, where the “future” can be predicted, hence my immigrant parents’ precision in planning family parties.

While the following dissertation does not focus on CP time, it does provide a fitting entry way to the actual focus of this text, queer time, and more specifically Latinx time. A queer reading of CP time provides a useful link between temporalities not abiding by

normative standards of time. E. L. McCallum and Mikko Tuhkanen situate queer time as delayed due to the realities of living on the margins of society,

Queer time has long been colloquially understood to be about fifteen minutes later than the appointed time—“she’s not here yet because she’s running on queer time.” That local color signals a larger, more complex set of discrepancies and variances between queer modes of experience and the rational, clock-based existence of the social mainstream. Living on the margins of social intelligibility alters one’s pace; one’s tempo becomes at best contrapuntal, syncopated, and at worst, erratic, arrested.<sup>7</sup>

In a similar vein to how CP time might refer to a slower or different pace of time for communities of color in relation to normative and standardized understandings of time, which might be called “white people time”—theories of queer time and temporalities, implore us to think about time less about a linear trajectory rooted in heteronormative and biological reproduction. These different tempos point to the different rhythms that marginalized communities use to move through the world.

The following dissertation, *Latinx Temporalities: The queer time of Spanglish, familia, and Latinx futurity in Santa Ana, California, 2014-2017*, situates Latinx time, or Latinx temporalities, as queer modes of time that adhere to the nuances of Latinx communities experiences marked by race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, and language. I analyze queer and trans Latinx cultural and language practices in a community-based organization in Orange County, California, called DeColores Queer Orange County (DCQOC). In my discussion of these innovative cultural and linguistic practices, I demonstrate how LGBTQ Latinxs in the OC craft their own ways of articulating queerness, bridging chosen families and families of origin, and mobilizing the local community. Additionally, in examining queer language practices among Latinx communities, I consider how such practices open up new ways of thinking about family acceptance, sexuality, and Latinx time.

I refer to José Esteban Muñoz's theory of queer futurity to begin my discussion on how queering language queers our understanding of time, making queer futures possible, and present. Muñoz posits queer time as the antithesis of 'straight time' or normative time, rooted in futures being predicated on biological reproduction and the institution of the family.<sup>8</sup> The template of reproduction futurism, narrow in scope, creates no future for those not vested in heteronormativity. In this sense of time, the realities of being queer, working-class, and Latinx do not fit so neatly. I am concerned with how language, discursively and materially, allows for a different timeline to be imagined in relation to the future.

Thinking of time more queerly opens up how we perceive the present, and therefore the future. In this sense, time can be cyclical, sporadic, undetermined. For queer people of color, queering language is way of making room for themselves, for their stories, for their experiences, for their desires. Queering language can explicitly occur to make room for and to be intentional about gender non-binary identities. For Muñoz,

To call for this notion of the future in the present is to summon a refunctioned notion of utopia in the service of subaltern politics. Certain performances of queer citizenship contain what I call an anticipatory illumination of a queer world, a sign of an actually existing queer reality, a kernel of political possibility within a stultifying heterosexual present.<sup>9</sup>

The performances of queer citizenship that Muñoz writes about are meant to bring to light the formations of queer worlds—worlds that dismantle the heteronormativity of the present. Latinx time must be understood as a pull towards a thriving present and future. Latinx time is enacted through the embodied, discursive experiences of Latinx communities—visually, verbally. Latinx temporalities are enacted through the queering of language, the queering of family, and through engaging with desire.

## **Terminology**

Because this dissertation seeks to understand the parallels, intersections, and ruptures between language, gender, and sexuality, I use the term “Latinxs” to move toward a gender-neutral classification of this ethnoracial identity. Latinx, like Latina/o, encompasses a pan-ethnic identity, for those individuals whose ethnic identity is tied to a country in Latin America (including Mexico, Central America, South America, and parts of the Caribbean). I will use the gendered “Latina” and “Latino” when referring to a specific person’s gender identity or in examples.

Similarly, I use queer as an umbrella category to describe those whose gender and sexual identities fall outside the boundaries of heteronormative identities. In the place of queer, I also use the acronym LGBTQ+. When describing participants, I will refer to their specific expressions and identities. These moves to use language in this way throughout the dissertation is not meant to homogenize vastly different experiences in shorthand. However, since my focus here are queer communities of color, specifically Latinx communities—I use these terms (i.e. Latinx, queer) to think also more broadly about how gender and sexual difference manifests in these communities.

### **The site**

The following dissertation is based on a three-year, community-based ethnographic study I conducted with a local LGBTQ Latinx organization in Orange County, California called DeColores Queer Orange County. This grassroots organization formed in 2008 after a group of young queer and trans Latinx folks in Santa Ana organized a one-day conference addressing the needs of the undocuqueer community in Orange County. From 2008 to 2016, DeColores created spaces for queer and trans Latinxs to build community, organize around social justice issues, and create a queer Latinx culture in the heart of Santa Ana, California.

The organization came to be known throughout Orange County for hosting memorable drag shows, house party fundraisers, public demonstrations, and for their annual day-long community conferences. These spaces offered LGBTQ Latinxs in Orange County the opportunity to socialize with other folks who identified as they did. Because of DCQOC, the community was able to find ways to participate in activism, make friends, or find a date.

The annual conference was the biggest event DeColores hosted each year. The daylong event happened every summer and offered the community a variety of workshops addressing the needs of queer Latinxs in Orange County, such as HIV awareness and prevention, name and gender-marker change clinics, as well as workshops for parents conducted completely in Spanish. Each spring, DeColores would host their annual drag show to generate funds to host the conference free of cost and bring visibility to the LGBTQ folks the community. Besides the spaces they created, the organization was also instrumental as a training ground for young queer of color activists coming into their own politicization and queer identities. The spaces that DeColores created in Orange County became sites of community-building, political mobilization, spaces to express and celebrate queer love and desire, and a site of bridging chosen and of-origin families.

It is important to contextualize the political moment in Santa Ana, California to understand the significance of the work done by the members of this organization. Orange County is about an hour south of Los Angeles, nestled alongside the southern California coast, and known for its beach cities. Historically, Orange County has been a Republican county (with the exception of Clinton's win in the 1990's). However, the 2018 midterm election caused an unexpected "blue waves" with a majority of Democratic candidates winning. However, despite its association with suburban wealth and whiteness, Santa Ana is

unique city in the county, for it has the highest concentration of Latinx communities than all other cities in the County. 25% of all Latinos in Orange County live in Santa Ana. Over the last 10 years, the city has been subjected to the same displacements that gentrification is causing in so many other cities across the country. La Cuatro (which is how Latinos refer to 4<sup>th</sup> Street) has been renamed Downtown Santa Ana to match the string of café's, breweries, and gastropubs popping up on every corner. In addition to the changing make-up of the city, besides the LGBT Center and a small string of gay bars scattered throughout the county, there are not many queer public spaces.

Santa Ana's political climate is also significant because thanks to the city's partnership with US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (or ICE), the jail closed off part of their facilities to make room for a detention center within the city jail. In April 2012, the Detention Center (housed within the Santa Ana City Jail) opened the first Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender pod (or GBT pod) under the premise of protecting those detainees who identified as such. This of course caused an increase in the surveillance and detaining of undocumented queer and trans people in the community, specifically trans Latinas. In addition to the heightened surveillance of undocumented trans women in Santa Ana, the violence towards trans women of color hit home for DeColores when one of their members, Zoraida Reyes, was brutally murdered in June 2014. Zoraida, an undocumented trans activist, was instrumental in pressuring city officials to recognize the rights of undocumented queer and trans people in Orange County as well as aimed to abolish ICE, not just in the city but in the rest of the country as well. Zoraida's death, while devastating to the members of the organization and community, also served as a catalyst in the summer of 2014 where DeColores was at the forefront of mobilization for queer and trans rights.



It is in this context that I began attending the group's meetings and events. The organization had been at the center of queer and trans Latinx activism in Orange County since 2008. While it was the dynamic work of the members that attracted me to the space, what later grabbed my interest was the parent support group called La Familia. This group of Latinx parents began organizing in 2010, after one of DeColores' community conferences featured a parent track. La Familia is a space for parents, relatives, or friends of LGBTQ folks to share space and dialogue about LGBTQ Latinx issues. These monthly gatherings function as discursive and embodied sanctuaries where discussions surrounding queer sexualities are grappled with in meaningful and substantive ways. And while scholars have considered the ways in which queer sexualities exist in Latinx families, less of the scholarship has used dialogues with queer communities to explore this dynamic.

A focus on queer identities in Latinx communities can demonstrate the different ways that Latinxs navigate the world in relation to their queerness and ethnic identities. Latinxs are also the youngest demographic in the United States in comparison to all other ethnic groups. The University of Chicago released a study on millennials in the U.S. in 2018 which found that Latinx millennials identify across the LGBTQ+ spectrum more than any other ethnic group. 22% of Latinx millennials will claim an identity that is not heterosexual. This is important if we compare it to a PEW Research Study that indicated that Latinxs are also the youngest demographic of all other racial and ethnic groups in the U.S., with a median age of 28 in 2015, compared to a median age of 43 for white people, 36 for Asians, and 34 for Black communities.

I situate my work within the developing field of Jotería Studies, which merges, women of color feminist, and Queer Chicana and Latina Studies. I borrow Michael Hames-García's understanding of Jotería studies, when he writes,

As Jotería, our bodies and our *selves* are lived legacies of colonialism, racism, xenophobia, sexism, and heterosexism. By bringing Jotería studies into existence, we make the claim that these social and political processes cannot be adequately theorized without attending to our personal experiences.

The writing of this dissertation would not have been possible without paying close attention to how my personal experiences shaped how I read the participant's experiences, and how I began to queer my own understanding of time. Like Hames-García writes, our bodies and selves carry the legacies of racism and colonialism. Because this dissertation centers on queerness and language, it is important to note that part of the work of Jotería studies is to do the self-work in order to theorize from our bodies and lived experiences.

Theorizing from the body has a long genealogy in the field of queer, black, and Chicana Studies. For instance, Cherríe Moraga writes about 'theories of the flesh' to center the embodied realities as Chicanas. Similarly, E. Patrick Johnson is in conversation with Moraga by elaborating on the politics of resistance tied to theories of the flesh. Johnson writes,

Theories in the flesh emphasize the diversity within and among gays, bisexuals, lesbians, and transgendered people of color while simultaneously accounting for how racism and classism affect how we experience and theorize the world. Theories in the flesh also conjoin theory and practice through an embodied politic of resistance. This politics of resistance is manifest in vernacular traditions such as performance, folklore, literature, and verbal art.<sup>10</sup>

For Johnson, theories of the flesh merge theory and practice in an effort of marking the resistance deployed by queer and trans communities of color. These vernacular traditions that he mentions are useful for my discussions in this dissertation. By analyzing how Latina folks

in Santa Ana navigated the world—through their vernacular traditions and cultural practices—I was able to center how language, desire, and family enact a politics of resistance.

In her hallmark text, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Chicana feminist writer Gloria Anzaldúa weaves the contradictions that make up Chicana language politics by highlighting the intersections of language, race, gender, and sexuality. In her chapter, “How To Tame A Wild Tongue,” Anzaldúa treads the complex and often contentious terrain that language occupies in the mouths and everyday interactions of Chicanas in the US. Anzaldúa’s reflections on language and Chicana, one of the earliest critical discussions on the topic in the field of Chicana and Chicano Studies, expands on how colonized tongues navigate the harmonies and dissonances that Chicanas’ various and distinct voices occupy. In identifying each of her own voices---as a Chicana, as a lesbian, as a Tejana---Anzaldúa theorizes language by centering the body. That is, her ‘wild tongue’ is not only wild for its unruly physicality, but for its stubborn refusal to conform to one linguistic register, to one sexual identity, to one ethnic group. Such linkages among language, gender, and sexuality, make me consider the fluidity in which Anzaldúa names in her work. Her tongue, like her language, cannot be tamed. Similarly, Spanglish and all of its breaks, switching, jumps, pero likes, cannot be tamed. Successfully taming, or standardizing, Spanglish would no longer make it Spanglish. It would morph this linguistic variety into a co-opted, appropriated, version of something that was born out of a need for something better and bigger than the confines of strict monolingual English or Spanish practices. This approach to Spanglish challenges notions of code switching as language deterioration where its speakers linguistic and intellectual abilities are negatively evaluated.

The research questions guiding this dissertation are: 1) How do queer Chicanx/Latinx communities negotiate their family relationships, with both queer/chosen and of-origin?; 2) How does community-organizing and activism inform how immigrant families practice acceptance?; 3) How can queering the family structure offer glimpses into imagining a queer Latinx future in the present?; and 4) How does Spanglish offer an alternative to translating queer identities for Latinx communities?

### **Methodology**

To observe these narratives, I analyze interviews gathered over three years of organizing with DeColores Queer Orange County and its parent group La Familia. Based on my findings, I situate Spanglish as a Latinx practice that acts a method to articulate racialized sexualities within Chicanx/Latinx family, visual, and community-organizing spaces. When first began my fieldwork, I thought I would approach the data collection process with a linguistic ethnography as my method. I took several courses in the Linguistics department, including a linguistic ethnography course, to prepare myself for the research process I was going to embark on. However, as I began attending the organization's weekly meetings, I realized my role in the space was to be much more active in helping them organize in the community.

I would later learn that one of my strongest assets in conducting this research was not necessarily the time I devoted to the organization but that I understood the nuances, double messages, and challenges involved in just doing and being queer. The inside jokes, banter, the humor. Connecting with the participants—five of who eventually became my close friends—was based on our own likings as queer people of color. We bonded over music,

drag, pop culture, family, dating, break-ups—we all lived those things and witnessed each other’s experiences through that.

I share the stories of 14 participants. But many stories of those who impacted this project and me personally are not explicitly named in these pages—especially those no longer living or physically with us. The participant’s voices are the life breath of this project. They shared their childhoods with me. Some shared their first crushes, others their first sexual encounters. Some cried at painful memories of family rejection. Others laughed at their reckless behavior as teenagers.

### *Positionality*

My work falls in line with the emerging field of Jotería studies to understand the quotidian manifestations of queerness among Latinxs in the United States. I refer to a quote by Jotería studies scholars José Santillana and Anita Revilla as to how I navigated my roles as a researcher and activist. As I learned throughout my fieldwork, the research would not have been possible without centering the activism stemming from the needs of the community. They write,

Our research indicates that Jotería activists, students, and young scholars work to achieve social justice on two levels, externally and internally. Externally, they engage in a variety of collective actions that include protests, marches, rallies, cultural nights, meetings, conferences, and coalition building. In this way they maintain a much-needed visible presence both on and off campus. They challenge other organizations and community members, both Latina/os and others, on their heteronormative, racist, xenophobic, sexist, and homophobic attitudes. Internally, they go through a process of self-education, self-acceptance, self-empowerment, and healing. While some come to terms with their sexuality, others simultaneously explore their intersecting gender, working-class, and immigrant identities. They do so in a loving environment that helps guide them from feelings of marginalization and oppression to spaces of reclamation and transformation.<sup>11</sup>

I learned so much about myself throughout the research process. Many of the parts I had to still work through—coming out, family acceptance—were worked out because of the time I spent organizing with DeColores.

### **Chapter Overview**

Chapter 2 sets the theoretical framework for the dissertation by tracing the evolution and advent of the “x” in Latinx. I discuss how this re-orientating is an example of a larger queering of time that begins to open up possibilities for Latinx community building, empowerment, and crafting of a future (Muñoz 2009). Specifically, I explore how the politics of naming, the move to the “x”, Spanglish as a queer practice, and the re-claiming of historically derogatory terms offer us avenues to think more queerly about language in Latinx communities. Chapter 3 explores more pointedly the queer politics of Spanglish as a queer language practice used to articulate affirming and empowering notions of queerness and othered genders, sexualities. I conduct a linguistic and visual analysis of the organization’s flyers and posters to demonstrate queer world-making through language.

Chapter 4 discusses queer and trans Latinxs childhood memories of queerness. This chapter explores how memory, embodiment, and affect impact the navigation of family structures in regard to non-normative gender identities and sexualities. The project concludes with Chapter 5, shifting the lens from queer Chicax participants to their parents who are members of the support group, La Familia. Through in-depth interviews with these Latina mothers, I explore how these parents navigate their own coming out process as parents of LGBTQ folks, as well as how they become politicized through the space in the advocacy work they do in the local Orange County community. This interdisciplinary project uses a

feminist and queer of color approach to the analysis of Latina/o/x linguistic and cultural practices in the context of queer time.

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<sup>1</sup> José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia : The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, (New York: New York University Press, 2009): 56.

<sup>2</sup> For more discussions on colored people time, or “CP time”, see Robert Levine’s *A Geography of Time: The Temporal Misadventures of a Social Psychologist, or how every culture keeps time just a little bit differently*, (New York, NY, US: Basic Books, 1997) and Baratunde Thurston’s, “Black History Month: An Explanation of CP Time by Your Very Delayed Guest Book Editor,” *Huffington Post*, December 6, 2017, [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/baratunde-thurston/black-history-month-an-ex\\_b\\_472959.html?ec\\_carp=4857730199269097340](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/baratunde-thurston/black-history-month-an-ex_b_472959.html?ec_carp=4857730199269097340).

<sup>3</sup> For more on the Clinton and De Blasio CP time moment, see Tamara Keith’s “Clinton and De Blasio Land ‘CP Time’ with Unfortunate Timing,” *National Public Radio (NPR)*, April 12, 2016, <https://www.npr.org/2016/04/12/473953878/clinton-and-de-blasio-blasted-over-cp-time-joke>; and Karen Grigsby Bate’s “When It Comes to Terms Like ‘Colored People’s Time,’ Context Matters,” *National Public Radio (NPR)*, April 13, 2016, <https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2016/04/13/474069083/when-it-comes-to-terms-like-colored-peoples-time-context-matters>.

<sup>4</sup> See Phil Helsel and Jillian Sederholm’s article, “Obama Roasts Trump, Drops Mic at Last White House Correspondents’ Dinner,” *NBC News*, April 30, 2016, <https://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/white-house-correspondents-dinner/stars-arrive-obama-gets-one-more-chance-zing-correspondents-dinner-n565431>.

<sup>5</sup> Singer Valerie June makes reference to CP time and southern time in her interview with NPR, “Valerie June on Learning to Love ‘Perfectly Imperfect’ Voices,” *The Record: Music News from NPR. National Public Radio*, August 9, 2013, <https://www.npr.org/sections/therecord/2013/08/09/209857975/valerie-june-on-learning-to-love-perfectly-imperfect-voices>. In *A Geography of Time* (1997), Levine discusses other geographical locations having their own cultural sense of time, such as Africa time, or Island Standard Time.

<sup>6</sup> Muñoz, *Cruising*, 56.

<sup>7</sup> E. L. McCallum, and McCallum, Tuhkanen, Mikko, *Queer Times, Queer Becomings*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2011): 1.

<sup>8</sup> Lee Edelman, *No Future : Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004); and Muñoz, *Cruising*.

<sup>9</sup> Muñoz, *Cruising*, 49.

<sup>10</sup> E. Patrick Johnson, “Quare” Studies, or (Almost) Everything I Know about Queer Studies I Learned from My Grandmother,” in *Black Queer Studies: A Critical Anthology*, eds. E.P. Johnson and Mae Henderson, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 149-150; Cherríe Moraga “Theory in the Flesh,” in *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, eds. Cherríe Moraga and G. Anzaldúa, (New York: Kitchen Table, Women of Color Press, 1983).

<sup>11</sup> Anita Tijerina Revilla, and José Manuel Santillana, “Jotería Identity and Consciousness,” *Aztlán: A Journal of Chicano Studies* 39, no. 1 (2014): 167-179.

## II. Latinx Temporalities: Queering Language, Queering Time

“From shared critical dissatisfaction we arrive at collective potentiality.”  
—José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*

### **Introduction**

In the summer of 2015, DeColores Queer Orange County held one of their annual planning retreats in Big Bear Lake, California. The organization paid for their membership (at that time, a group of about 15 LGBTQ Latinxs, from across Orange County) to spend a weekend at a house in the mountains to plan their annual community conference and plan out their events for the rest of the calendar year. I joined the group that weekend to help them plan for their community conference whose theme that year centered on health and sustainability in queer and trans Latinx communities. As mentioned in the Introduction, part of the agreement with the organization for letting me conduct my doctoral research with them was to actively participate in the group’s meetings and activities with the members. On the first day of the retreat, I agreed to be the note-taker during the first part of the day’s agenda. The fourth item on the agenda that day was to revisit the organization’s mission statement, and more specifically, there was a vote to change the terminology in the mission statement from “Latin@” to “Latinx”.<sup>1</sup> The group debated the reasons for the switch, namely that it would be inclusive of gender non-binary and trans folks who did not feel represented by “Latino”, “Latina”, or “Latin@”. The organization ultimately voted to make the change and from then on the members began to intentionally use “Latinx” versus “Latin@”. I include this memory to mark a historical, sociopolitical moment of the shift to the x among Latinx communities as well as to mark an entry point to the following discussion on Latinx time, a temporality enacted through this queering of language, visually represented and indexed vocally through the x.



We are living in the time of the *x*, a Latinx era, and, I argue, a type of queer temporality. When I began writing this dissertation, I had not planned to write extensively about terminology. I was more interested in the linguistic, communicative practices used by queer communities. I was interested in the *doing*. When I began writing this dissertation (in the summer of 2015) the *x* was barely becoming more widely circulated in Latinx artist, activist, and academic spaces as well as on social media.<sup>2</sup> However, since 2015, the *x* has gained more momentum and become central to current dialogues around Latinx identity, culture, and representation. What I quickly realized was that the *x* needed to be a focal point of my discussion, focusing less on who the word referred to, but rather what the word, and that letter, evoked. And as I will discuss in this chapter, the *x* in Latinx and Chicanx does more than name a gender fluid Latinx identity or experience but initiates an intentionality to actively center those experiences. The *x* demands our attention and implores us to orient ourselves to a vision of Latinx communities where gender fluidity and queerness is intentionally included, considered, and represented.

The turn toward the *x* and its increased usage signals a unique queer Latinx language practice that happens through a queering of language. Throughout this dissertation, language practices refer to speech acts, written or verbal, that are culturally-situated as meaning-making processes.<sup>3</sup> In close readings of different queer Latinx language practices, I argue that queering language enacts a queering of time that opens up possibilities to envision another world for queer Latinxs.<sup>4</sup> This chapter foregrounds the theoretical framework for this dissertation situating Latinx language and cultural practices as those which articulate identities, desires, experiences, kinships, and other queer feelings to imagine other understandings of time and ultimately other ways of being in the world as queer people of

color. To map out the different ways that Latinxs queer language, I organize my discussion into three examples: 1) an overview of the lineage of Latinx terms and identifiers which leads to the advent of the x; 2) a discussion on Spanglish as a queer linguistic practice; and 3) a discussion on the re-claiming of historically pejorative terms in Spanish. I argue that these queer language practices offer Latinxs liberating possibilities through their crafting of innovative ways of talk about queer sexualities, desires, and identities.

Before my discussion on these different language practices, I provide a review of the literature on the racial politics of language among Latinxs. While few studies have centered language, sexuality, and Latinxs as their focal point of analysis, it is through the intersections from the growing body of scholarship from Chicanx Studies, queer studies, and sociolinguistics that allow me my point of entry to the concept of queer Latinx language practices.

The quote in the epigraph above borrows José Esteban Muñoz's concept of queer futurity to see potentiality as a crucial lens for this chapter, and the rest of the dissertation. Muñoz's concept of queer utopia and queer futurity deals with the blurring of temporality as a binary, meaning beyond the distinction of present and future. In many ways, as I will discuss here, the various ways that Latinxs queer language speaks to this shared dissatisfaction. Specifically, these queer language practices emerge from the lack of vocabulary in English and in Spanish for Latinxs to positively affirm their identities and experiences. The shared dissatisfaction demands for language that does more than it names.

Exploring the intersections of language, gender, and sexuality in Latinx communities calls for a queer reading of Spanglish that pushes the bounds of sociolinguistic theory and

prescriptivist-language advocates. This dissertation seeks to interrogate and theorize the uses, misuses, and political significance of Spanglish to understand these intersections.

### **Latinxs and Spanish**

Observing language practices provides a platform to analyze how Latinx communities negotiate their experiences in Spanish and Spanglish in the United States. With over 50 million Latinxs in the United States, I situate an overview of Latinxs' relationship to Spanish and Spanglish in the United States. The United States has become the second largest Spanish-speaking nation in the world.<sup>5</sup> There are 41 million Spanish speakers in the United States, of whom 11.6 million are bilingual.<sup>6</sup> These numbers demonstrate a significant demographic shift that speaks to the ethnoracial diversity and increasing presence of Latinxs in the United States. The United States Census Bureau predicts that by the year 2060, the Latinx population in the United States will reach 119 million.<sup>7</sup> As the youngest demographic of any other ethnic group in the United States, a focus on language offers an entryway to understand the social worlds of queer Latinx communities in the United States.

### **Language, race, and people of color**

Sociolinguists have explored the intersections of language and race in academic scholarship by breaking away from prescriptivist thinking toward an understanding of how these two social constructs manifest and create meaning in everyday interactions.<sup>8</sup> Research on language and race demonstrates how colonial ideologies form the roots of language politics, especially among communities of color.<sup>9</sup> The field of language and race has developed in linguistic and ethnic studies with varying approaches—the work of Ana Celia Zentella, H. Samy Alim, and Jonathan Rosa.<sup>10</sup> Studying the intersections of language and race, especially amongst communities of color, offers additional perspectives on race, in

addition to more common racialized markers such as phenotype. For this dissertation, understanding language as racialized is vital to interrogate how language practices among Latinx communities articulate different notions of time and racialized sexualities.

The relationship between language and race relies on the notion that language itself is racialized and that coded language often functions as a stand-in for racist rhetoric.<sup>11</sup>

Similarly, like race and gender, language acts as an unstable marker of identity. For example, linguistic anthropologist Bonnie Urciuoli conceptualizes discourses of race and ethnicity as part of a nationalist discourse where racialized communities are imagined and treated as not belonging to mainstream societies.<sup>12</sup> As part of this distancing, communities of color and those whose linguistic varieties do not subscribe to monolingual English practices deviate from the archetypal “generic American”.<sup>13</sup> The imagined “generic American” Urciuoli writes about falls into the categories of white, middle-class, and speaker of Standard American English.<sup>14</sup> Urciuoli distinguishes the differing effects of the ethnicization and racialization of language by aligning the former with a distant yet still hierarchical acceptance of difference and positions the latter as marking difference in language varieties as backward, disorderly, and a threat to the nation. Urciuoli highlights the conditional nature of language difference in the United States in the following excerpt:

Difference is safe when it cannot impede the “natural” progress of social mobility in the United States, but language difference is spoken and written about as an insurmountable barrier to such progress. People may safely retain their own language so long as it does not show in their English, which must display no more than a slight accent and occasional quaint expression.<sup>15</sup>

The passage above illustrates the contentious terrain communities with differing linguistic repertoires must navigate in the United States where only subtle markers of difference are acceptable. Urciuoli later notes that the racialization of language takes place when grammar,

and/or accents by people of color are evaluated as “bad” signaling a status of institutional illegitimacy.<sup>16</sup> Interpreting language as racialized implies recognizing racialization as a process, for as sociocultural linguist Mary Bucholtz states, it highlights “the fact that current ideas about race are the contingent and changeable result of specific historical, cultural, and political processes.”<sup>17</sup> The contributions by studies centered on the intersections of language and race offer insight into how language shapes and is shaped by real world racialized interactions.<sup>18</sup>

Studying the relationship between language and race grants insight into the use and distribution of racial terms and discourse, race as a subject of conversation, racialized ways of speaking, and also to historic associations of race and language.<sup>19</sup> It is within these intersections that I examine race and language in this dissertation. I have argued that only by examining the production of such forms in their discursive context that it is possible to see the workings of the linguistic mechanisms that support racial systems, and especially systems of racial inequity in which whiteness remains hegemonic.<sup>20</sup> Scholars have explored the systems of racial inequity and language, highlighted in relation to the experiences of Chicax and Latinx communities in the United States.<sup>21</sup>

As an interdisciplinary project, I refer to the work produced in Chicax studies, queer studies, as well as socio- and raciolinguistics to situate my analysis on queer Latinx language practices.<sup>22</sup> Working from a Chicax Studies lens, my work focuses on those identities, experiences, and bodies often left at the margins of society and academic inquiry. As many feminist and queer of color scholars have written, the field of queer studies and its compulsory whiteness has not developed the intersections of race and ethnicity in considering the experiences of people living with racialized sexualities in the United States.<sup>23</sup>

For instance, oral historian and performance studies scholar E. Patrick Johnson proposes quare studies “as an interventionist disciplinary project,” when queer studies, theory, and activism do not tend to the needs and experiences of black queer folks and other communities of color. For Johnson, quare studies explicitly takes racialized gender and sexual identities to the center as situated on the quotidian, everyday interactions people of color encounter. As Johnson states,

While attending to discursive fields of knowledge, quare studies is also committed to theorizing the practice of everyday life. Because we exist in discursive as well as material bodies, we need a theory that speaks to that reality. Indeed, quare studies may breathe new life into our “dead” (or deadly) stratagems of survival.<sup>24</sup>

In this sense, quare studies offers a route to research the experiences of queer communities of color, not in reference to white queer communities, but as the center and starting point. More specifically, Johnson discusses “theorizing the practice of everyday life” which builds on knowledge production from within the community. In a similar vein, Muñoz writes, “The stage and the street, like the shop floor, are venues for performances that allow the spectator access to minoritarian lifeworlds that exist, importantly and dialectically, within the future and the present.”<sup>25</sup> To understand the lifeworlds of queer communities of color, we must attend to those practices, sounds, and feelings that emerge in the everyday, offering us a method to maintaining the dialogue between the discursive and material. This is important considering that the literature on language and sexuality still is overwhelmingly white, gay, and middle-class.<sup>26</sup>

The focus on the intersections of language, gender, and sexuality has received attention from sociolinguists as demonstrated in the burgeoning field of queer linguistics.<sup>27</sup> The term “lavender linguistics” proposed by William Leap is sometimes used to name this subfield within linguistics.<sup>28</sup> In their anthology, *Speaking in Queer Tongues: Globalization*

*and Gay Language* (2003), anthropologists William Leap and Tom Boellstorff present a collection of essays exploring the different ways gay language and globalization are linked around the world. For Leap and Boellstorff, the need for research surrounding language and sexuality is not to create a definitive discourse for or by queer communities, but rather to observe them in context and purpose.<sup>29</sup> Leap and Boellstorff note that if sexual cultures exist, then so do sexual languages, which they see as “modes of describing, expressing, and interrogating the ideologies and practices relevant to the sexual culture(s) to which speakers of that language belong and modes of communication through which they constitute agreement and disagreement.”<sup>30</sup> Borrowing from Leap and Boellstorff, this chapter probes queer Latinx language practices and their modes of expression and affirmation. With this idea, I am less interested in simply looking at words or phrases but rather interaction and meaning making, since studying these acts “draws attention to the tensions between sexual politics (that is, the social contestation of sexual ideologies and practices) and sexual desires and to the effects these tensions have on a speaker’s understandings of his or her own sexual subjectivity.”<sup>31</sup> However, none of these studies have entertained the dimensions of language, race, and sexuality between Chicana/o and Latina/o communities given the 57 million Latinxs living in the United States, the second largest Spanish-speaking nation in the world.<sup>32</sup>

The discussion of how language functions for queer communities of color in the United States demonstrates how knowledge specific to one’s ethnoracial background is just as important as knowledge specific to one’s queer ways of speaking. In the anthology *Speaking in Queer Tongues*, Susana Peña’s chapter examines linguistic practices of Cuban American gay men, including their use of the term “gay” in English and Spanish, Cuban Spanish gay argot in club settings, and linguistic innovation, to illustrate gay

transculturation.<sup>33</sup> In her analysis, Peña cautions readers to not equate English and United States gay culture with liberation without analyzing its effects on non-English-speaking and non-white heterosexual men since “The struggles over language autonomy are reminders that English-language use, in the context of the United States, is imposed through a series of social, legal, and political methods complexly intertwined with racism and anti-immigrant attitudes.”<sup>34</sup> The prioritization of English in the United States also permeates LGBT spaces, where any language other than English might only be heard on specific “ethnic nights” at local gay clubs. However, as some scholars have written, queer of color spaces often function as sites to create their own sets of codes, languages, and identities.<sup>35</sup>

Studying the gay bar or gay club to understand queer of color spaces provides glimpses into the cultural, linguistic, and classed dynamics amongst queer and trans communities of color. For instance, Horacio Roque Ramírez situates the queer Latino dance club scene in 1980’s and 1990’s San Francisco as central to create a sense of belonging through cultural citizenship.<sup>36</sup> Roque Ramírez goes on to say that in addition to the music heard in these spaces, queer Latino cultural citizenships was informed by the, “surrounding community, musical cultures, languages, sexualities, and racial ethnic political struggles,” that shaped their worlds.<sup>37</sup> By focusing on queer of color cultural spaces, we understand the different functions language occupies in such spaces. In a similar vein, Deborah Vargas situates *suciedad* as an analytic for sensory dimensions of working-classed and racialized sensibilities. Vargas writes,

*Lo sucio* smells like underclass ghettos and barrios, Spanglish-speaking street corners, and racialized genders at the washeterias at midnight, those persistently targets of neoliberal gay capital and middle-class feminism’s queer cleansing.<sup>38</sup>



Here, Vargas alludes to the spaces, locations, and sensations that emerge in communities of color that may be considered excessive, or not contributing to capitalism. Roque Ramirez and Vargas' work both encourage to think more queerly about racialized cultural and language practices that are not framed in relation to white, queer and feminist, middle-class experiences.

Echoing the significance of deeper racial ideologies tied to language, E. Patrick Johnson's work posits the specific insider knowledges required to participate in black gay language, which is demarcated as a hybrid language that is "neither gay English nor black vernacular but draws from each and functions in relation to its users' specific contexts, needs, desires, and social and political purposes."<sup>39</sup> In this vein, Peña and Johnson's writings speak to the ways queer communities of color, while marginalized in multiple contexts, utilize language to respond to the communities' specific needs by crafting language that is inclusive, nuanced, and culturally-relevant. This chapter sees Spanglish as a strategy for negotiating different social worlds but also for crafting new worlds and queer meanings. For Latinx communities, a queer language practice, such as Spanglish, evokes a sensibility that speaks to cultural nostalgia as well as a space to express other types of genders and sexualities.

The interventions I make in this chapter are also building away from the idea of studying queer language practices as "gay men's English" which often is centered in scholarship focused on language and sexuality. For instance, in *Speaking in Queer Tongues*, Boellstorff and Leap consider gay men's English useful to study in comparison to queer women's linguistic worlds as well. Mindful of the challenges that gay English privileges predominantly cis, white, gay, middle-class men, they find it "ethnographically and linguistically justified" since all the global gay languages featured in their collection

borrowed some features of gay English.<sup>40</sup> My work takes a different approach, as it centers linguistic and cultural practices originating in working-class, immigrant, Spanish-speaking, and predominantly Mexican (and Latinx) queer and trans communities. Language practices such as the “x” and queering of Spanish and Spanglish terms call attention to how queer Latinxs forge new ways of articulating and translating their identities, desires, and experiences within and outside their communities. As Peña states,

We must be careful not to equate English (gay or otherwise) and United States gay cultures with liberation, egalitarianism, or freedom without also questioning how these languages and cultures are experienced by non-English-speaking, non-Anglo homosexual men.<sup>41</sup>

These new forms of articulating queer genders and sexualities do not take English as a given, nor as a necessary form of communication.

Latinxs in the United States experienced a polarizing effect when it comes to issues of language, whether in English, Spanish, or Spanglish. Chicana feminist Gloria Anzaldúa writes about the tensions within Chicana and Chicano communities surrounding language in her canonical text, *Borderlands/La Frontera*. In her chapter “How To Tame A Wild Tongue,” Anzaldúa elaborates on the ways Chicanas measure each other’s ethnic authenticity by whether or not they speak Spanish, one of the many forms of linguistic terrorism she names in that passage.<sup>42</sup> She proclaims her response to this linguistic policing by stating, “Ethnic identity is twin skin to my linguistic identity—I am my language. Until I can take pride in my language, I cannot take pride in myself,” signaling the impetus for research on language and race within Chicanx Studies.<sup>43</sup> Since the publication of *Borderlands/La Frontera*, many others have embarked on work on Chicano English, Chicano Spanish, Spanglish, and code-switching in Chicana/o communities demonstrating the insight provided in studies of language and race.<sup>44</sup>

While the scholars discussed above have begun important conversations about how to conduct research focused on the intersections of language, race, and sexuality, few scholars of color have explored what these intersections mean for queer and trans communities of color, especially Latinx communities. By taking language, sexuality, and race into account for how queer and trans Latinxs experience the world and make sense of it linguistically, this project aims to address the gaps in understanding Latinx language practices.

The few studies that have looked at language and sexuality in a Latinx context tend to entertain specific words and phrases (mostly pejorative and derogatory, but not always) that are used to label individuals with queer desires.<sup>45</sup> However, some studies have observed how queer communities use language in conjunction with their ethnic identities to navigate different spaces.<sup>46</sup>

One of the very few articles that highlight these specific intersections of queerness, Latinx communities, and language is a short article by Lawrence LaFountain-Stokes, who posits that language politics are intimately tied to nationalist rhetoric.<sup>47</sup> In this brief article, LaFountain-Stokes presents the question: “What does “queerness” (understood as a sign of sexual difference) have in common with non-monolingual linguistic practices such as bilingualism and code-switching?” and offers examples from Chicana feminist theory, literature, and film to understand mestizo languages and Puerto Rican linguistic queerness.<sup>48</sup> For LaFountain-Stokes the connection between queerness and non-monolingual linguistic practice correlates with ideas of purity and impurity: queerness in contrast to heteronormative sexuality and Spanglish in contrast to purist ideologies of English and Spanish. However, he notes that while neither language nor sexuality are inherently pure or impure, constructions of both result from the socio-cultural and historical moment.<sup>49</sup> The ideas introduced in this

work offer a unique perspective on the linkages between language and sexuality, discussions that have only been mentioned in brief within queer Latina/o scholarship.

Discussion of language, race, and sexuality within Latinx communities often elaborates on terminology and/or the use of language as a marker of culture, in a general sense. Juana María Rodríguez discusses some of the politics of language in relation to queerness in her book *Queer Latinidad: Identity Practices, Discursive Spaces* where she touches on how some queer Latina/o communities “queer” español.<sup>50</sup> Rodríguez explains that this queering happens through innovative wordplay, the inversion of gender pronouns, and what she calls ‘subversive appropriations,’ a process that requires insider knowledge establishing what should be considered as a speech community.<sup>51</sup> As part of her discussion, Rodríguez raises the point that gay identity can act as an object of context where identity functions as an act of storytelling through memory, naming, and shifting language practices. She credits the innovation of multilingual writing by Chicana feminist scholars in the 1980s.<sup>52</sup>

### **Queering language, queering time**

I embarked on this project wanting to understand how language and sexuality intersected for Latinx experiences. Unpacking what defines something as queer is an extensive task, but it is required here to situate my usage of the word and act of *queering*. To queer is to disrupt and to dismantle the invasiveness of heteronormative gender, sexual, and identity practices. I find Sandra K. Soto’s reading of Elizabeth Freeman’s discussion on queer especially useful for my discussion:

As Elizabeth Freeman eloquently describes it, “To ‘queer’ something is at once to make its most pleasurable aspects gorgeously excessive, even [or, we might press, *especially*] to the point of causing its institutional work to fail, and to operate it against its most oppressive political results.”<sup>53</sup> (original emphasis)

For Freeman, to queer something is to seek the sensational but also to dismantle the traces of heteronormativity. To queer language is to play with it. To queer language is to dance with it. Get into an argument with it. Ask more of it. In a similar sense, poet Brandon Wint sees queer as escaping the confines of rigid categorization. He writes, “Not queer like gay. Queer like, escaping definition. Queer like some sort of fluidity and limitlessness at once. Queer like a freedom too strange to be conquered. Queer like the fearlessness to imagine what love can look like...and pursue it.”<sup>54</sup> In many ways, queer language practices begin to open up the possibilities to imagine for queer, trans, and non-binary people to see themselves as thriving, as powerful, and as deserving of a future, and a present.

My discussion here serves as an invitation to continue to interrogate the often-deceptive performance of linguistic purity and other Latinx cultural practices that shape and move us to think more expansively about our racialized sexualities as queer people of color. *Latinx* queerly orients our perception of time, gender, and sexuality. Queerness is the movement towards a destination, not the endpoint. That movement, or orientation, is where possibilities of other worlds for the disenfranchised open up. Queerness is not a destination, nor a being, but a doing.<sup>55</sup> A Latinx temporality is a queer temporality, a movement stepping out of the linearity and rigidity of straight (and white) time.<sup>56</sup> What I am more interested in thinking about is how the shift to the X is actually a very clear and intentional expression of gender inclusivity and queerness. In other words, Latinx queers language in a very immediate and profound way.

### **Language and Queer Time**

In this queering of language, I find the shift toward the x as enacting a queer temporality, and more pointedly a queer future. I refer to José Esteban Muñoz’s theory of

queer futurity to begin my discussion on how queering language queers our understanding of time, making queer futures possible, and present. Muñoz posits queer time as the antithesis of ‘straight time’ or normative time, rooted in futures being predicated on biological reproduction and the institution of the family.<sup>57</sup> The template of reproduction futurism, narrow in scope, creates no future for those not vested in heteronormativity. In this sense of time, the realities of being queer, working-class, and Latinx do not fit so neatly. I am concerned with how language, discursively and materially, allows for a different timeline to be imagined in relation to the future. Queer language practices such as the shift toward the x, speaking Spanglish, and re-claiming derogatory terms align with a different, racialized timeline. For instance, as I discuss in Chapter 4, queer families also enable a Latinx temporality, not rooted in future biological reproduction.

Thinking of time more queerly opens up how we perceive time, and therefore the future. In this sense, time can be cyclical, sporadic, undetermined. For queer people of color, queering language is way of making room for themselves, for their stories, for their experiences, for their desires. The Latinx moment happens as a prime example of how queering language can explicitly occur to make room and to be intentional about gender fluid identities. For Muñoz,

To call for this notion of the future in the present is to summon a refunctioned notion of utopia in the service of subaltern politics. Certain performances of queer citizenship contain what I call an anticipatory illumination of a queer world, a sign of an actually existing queer reality, a kernel of political possibility within a stultifying heterosexual present.<sup>58</sup>

The x is a performance of queer citizenship that contains the “anticipatory illumination of a queer world,” in which the gender and sexual expressions amongst Latinxs are intentionally invoked. The disruption to the gendered binary ingrained in the Spanish language

demonstrates a pivotal ideological change. Our orientation is queered with the x. Latinx intentionally moves to ungender time, to queer language, to queer time.

### **Latinx is a verb**

To consider the queering of time through the queering of language, specifically in the context of the x, I consider the quote I cite from Freeman above to think about queerness as more of a doing, rather than a fixed being, identity. The ungendering that takes place with the x orients us to a queerer temporality. The move toward a queer perception of time clearly outlines the function of the x, to leave room for different iterations and motivations that can come from the shift to the x. The shift to the x serves as a reminder that non-binary, queer, and trans communities are never assumed or included in Latina/o, -@. Representation is important given the constant threat of violence queer and trans Latinx communities face for merely existed, particularly the undocumented communities. The x warrants more serious consideration also given the high murder rate for trans women of color, especially black and Latina trans women.<sup>59</sup> The x illuminates hope for queer, trans, and gender non-binary communities to demand representation, dignity, and respect.

I refer to an art exhibit I visited in the summer of 2018 in Los Angeles, California to better situate my analysis. The *Identity Exhibit* was hosted for a weekend in July by Bese, an art collective created by actress Zoe Saldaña to lift up marginalized voices and demonstrate the diversity that makes up the United States.<sup>60</sup> This particular exhibit featured the work of four different Latinx visual artists. The exhibit, which was displayed at Voila Creative Studios Gallery in Los Angeles, was set up in two separate rooms. In the back room, as I walked in, the first thing I noticed in big bold letters was the phrase “LATINX IS A VERB” painted above (Figure 1.1).



*Figure 1. Identity Exhibit, Bese. Los Angeles, CA. July 2018.*



The display in Figure 1 correlates with Soto and Freeman's readings of queer in the implicit doing of queerness. The x is important because it serves to shift and disrupt the normativity and gender binary of Latina/o or Latin@. The x informs change and re-orient ourselves, a type of paradigm shift, where gender non-binary Latinxs can see themselves within and as part of larger Latinx communities. Latinx is meant to be loud and unapologetic. Latinx as a verb, or doing Latinx, helps us move away from debating who the term refers to or owns it, but rather what the term invokes, or the potential it has to invoke.

### **Lineage of Latinx ethnic labels in the United States**

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Latinx people account for 17.8% of the total national population, which amounts to about 57.5 million people. The Census Bureau predicts that by 2060 that number will increase to 119 million, or 28.6% of the national population.<sup>61</sup> This continued demographic growth demands our attention if we are to take an intersectional approach to understanding the make-up of the Latinx population in the current sociopolitical climate. The Bureau's categorization includes Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, Salvadorans, and Cubans, among several other Latin American and Caribbean countries. Rather than think of Latinxs as a monolithic group, by centering the racial, ethnic, and linguistic diversity of the community we can paint a more complex picture of how these communities navigate identity politics.

For instance, it was not until 1975 that the U.S. Census Bureau created the Ad Hoc Committee for Racial and Ethnic Definitions who deemed "Hispanic" as the appropriate term to use on official government documents referring to a specific ethnic group with roots of Spanish ancestry, people who spoke the Spanish language, or those who migrated from Latin America to the U.S. Before 1975, the U.S. Census used the term "Spanish-surnamed" to refer

to those who would later be called Hispanic.<sup>62</sup> This presented some challenges, however, in identifying other ethnic groups, such as Filipinos, who share a legacy of Spain's colonial impact on their land and in their surnames.

Since then, the term Hispanic has become widely used and one still hears the term used in the media, as well as in the name of several national organizations and scholarship programs. Furthermore, the term has been historically and geographically accepted in the East Coast of the United States. Scholars of race and ethnicity, however, have critiqued the Eurocentric identifier noting that it does not account for other identities that did not originate in Europe. For example, because Hispanic implies a link to a European ancestry, it often erases the experiences and bodies of black, indigenous, Asian, and other ethnic and racial groups. This erasure of course arises because Latino or Latinx is not a race, it is an ethnic identity. Latinxs' racial identities are mixed, diverse, and not easily quantified in a government survey.<sup>63</sup>

The politics of naming oneself have been examined extensively in Black Feminist thought. For instance, black feminist writer Audre Lorde once wrote, "If I didn't define myself for myself, I would be crunched into other people's fantasies for me and eaten alive."<sup>64</sup> Chicana and Latina communities have a much larger connection to politicized identities and ethnic labels. Much like Chicano caused a disruption in the mobilization of the term and movement the 1960's, Latinx disrupts the gender binary today.

The Civil Rights era of the 1960's heralded a new wave in United States history of young people of color embracing their roots and seeking to intentionally re-define themselves on their own terms. Slogans and messages such as "Black is beautiful" and "Black Power" aimed to center the strengths and movements of the black community at the peak and

aftermath of the Civil Rights Movement. For Latinx communities, this held true for the introduction and expansion of the term “Chicano.”

I return to our topic on the politics of naming oneself, of intentional expressions. Politicized identities that emerge from a movement serve a purpose larger than naming a group or experience; these terms, like Chicana, and Latinx, command attention. They ignite a call for action. For Chicanas and Chicanos in the 1960’s and 70’s, embracing the term is born out of a movement rooted in the desire to re-claim an indigenous, pre-Columbian heritage, and aimed to reject the influence of Spanish colonization.<sup>65</sup> The term is a political identity that refers more broadly to people of Mexican descent living in the United States but has a pointed purpose of self-determination, as well as spiritual and organizational unity. Young Chicanas and Chicanos at the time, many of whom were second and third generation, were also rebelling against the hyphenated-American identity (such as Mexican-American) which was embedded with notions of assimilation, respectability, and a disavowal of their home country’s traditions.

From the re-claiming of “Chicano” during the Movement to the use of the letter “x” as a gender-neutral symbol, my discussion here maps the lineage of these terms as an example how communities of color fought to name themselves and how these terms carry with them political significance that is contextually denoted by region, class, and ethnicity. This lineage, however, is not chronological. After all language is always socially constructed and evolves with the times. When Chicana feminist writers began critiquing the Movement for its silencing of women and queer communities, many people started using “Chicana and Chicano” to refer the larger community. The move to mark Chicana, and in other cases Latina, was perceived by some men in the movement as a separatist and divisive act rather

than a claiming of space for Chicanas to voice the gendered differences of being women and femmes within the movement.<sup>66</sup>

These debates over naming and identity of course are always tied to language, as is the case with Latinx. Latinxs in the United States experience a polarizing effect when it comes to issues of language, whether it be in English, Spanish, Spanglish, or an accented variation of any and/or all of those. Anzaldúa treads the often-contentious terrain that language occupies in the mouths and everyday interactions of Chicanas in the United States. Her reflections on language expand on how colonized tongues navigate the harmonies and dissonances that Chicanas' various and distinct voices inhabit. In identifying each of her own voices—as a Chicana, as a lesbian, as a Tejana—Anzaldúa theorizes language by centering the body. That is, her 'wild tongue' is not only wild for its unruly physicality, but for its stubborn refusal to conform to one linguistic register, to one sexual identity, or to one ethnic group. Such linkages among language, gender, and sexuality make me consider the desire toward fluidity in language that resonates with the advent of the x. Her tongue, like her language, cannot be tamed. Similarly, other Latinx language practices, such as the inclusion of the x, cannot be tamed.

Now the x is not intended to be a one-size-fits-all identity category. Indeed, we need to honor the labor and push by Chicanas and Latinas for the inclusion of the A. The rationale to include the A before the O is a move to repair the gendered and patriarchal hold of the Spanish language. This move makes and marks space. Over the years, some communities started writing the term as Chicana/o, as well as Chican@, which was adopted by various organizations, Chicana/o Studies departments, and activist spaces. In her book *Reading Chican@ Like A Queer*, Chicana Studies scholar Sandra K. Soto's brilliant analysis of "@"

offers a queer reading of the symbol which guides my reading of “Latinx”. For Soto, the nonalphabetical symbol that is the “@” symbol marks a rupture in “our desire for intelligibility, our desire for a quick and certain visual register of a gendered body the split second we see or hear the term.”<sup>67</sup> The @ symbol destabilizes the desire for clearly demarcated terms used to envelop a pan-ethnic identity. She goes on to write that the @ symbol

...does something less sneaky but more impactful: it stays within purview but refuses the norms of legibility and the burdens of visibility, thereby effecting what Angie Chabram-Dernersesian would describe as *la ruptura* (“Chicana! Rican? No, Chicana Riqueña!”) or what José Esteban Muñoz might call a “disidentification”.<sup>68</sup>

Which brings me back to Latinx and thinking about our current political moment as Latinx time, or in other words, as a Latinx era. The proposal to use this term has stirred many controversial debates over the last few years about identity, naming, self-expression, and what inclusion looks like, and sounds like, within Latinx communities. The cultural significance and social meaning of words are always situated within the historical context and within systems of institutional, racial, and social power. Words and terms evolve, as do their meanings. Where Latino, or Latina, served as a pan-ethnic label for people from Latin America and the Caribbean, Latinx demands that we start thinking more queerly about the diverse experiences within this ethnic label. I want to be cautious with Latinx in that historically, the pan-ethnic umbrella term, Latino, and to some degree Latina, have been used to uphold whiteness and contribute to the erasure of black and indigenous communities.

Now many people have also argued that the x is simply not practical in that it creates a tongue twister to read and speak out loud. Some pronounce it in English as Latin-EX, while others prefer the Spanish pronunciation, Latín-equis. Some blend the two, La-tín-ex. Some folks on the internet have jokingly said they read Latinx as La-tinks. Lately, there has been

some discussion online about using the E instead of the X as it would make it much easier to read and speak as Latin-eh, rather than Latinx. With that in mind, how one pronounces Latinx does not really matter. Because like queer, the term invokes movement rather than being. And yes, identity labels are important, and they mark visibility and representation, but the move to the x should be a move that inspires other movidas. It should ignite and spark discussion and debate, and to dislodge any complacency we have with normativity. Latinx allows for the bridging of queer, trans, and gender non-binary communities which pushes toward a politicized re-naming and linguistic re-claiming of self, on our own terms. The linguistic queering and ungendering that Latinx enacts points to the multiple possibilities in world-making that represent the diversity of Latinx communities.

For Latinx, the shift mobilizes the embrace of different types of lived experiences within Latinx communities, rather than seeking the lowest common denominator in ethnic labels. Latinx *does*. It moves us to explore that which is not heteronormative, in terms of gender and in terms of sexuality. Latinx serves as an intentional queer expression and declaration, an ornamental move. Latinx is excessive, hard to pronounce, and extra.<sup>69</sup> Latinx is queering language. Spanglish is queering language. These linguistic practices make room for jotx/o and jotería identities. Such practices manifest in the mariconadas or jotísmos one sends their group chat or the memes one posts on social media. Linguistically, these practices serve as queer and trans testimonios.

And as usually happens with change, many cultural critics of varying generations, as well as identities, have come to challenge the shift to the x. For instance, many think pieces and blog articles circulated on the Internet, arguing that the X is not necessary because in Spanish, the O in Latino is already inclusive.<sup>70</sup> Others have sought to dismiss the X claiming

that the word is inaccessible to folks outside of academic spaces.<sup>71</sup> Others more pointedly caution the use of the X, saying that it might defeat its own purpose by grouping everyone under one term, yet again. An example of the transphobic and non-binary dismissal of the X came out in October 2017 when Chicano artist Lalo Alcaraz published a comic strip making the X the punchline of the joke (see Figure 1.2).

The comic strip demonstrates two people, speaking to each other in what looks like a metropolitan, urban setting. The person on the left (presumably Alcaraz) asks, “Why don’t you call Mexico City “D.F.” anymore?” to which the person on the right responds with, “Well, because “CDMX” is non-binary and gender-inclusive.” The person on the right has their finger point upward as if trying to make a point, in a preachy stance, with their eyes closed. Alcaraz received much criticism for the image by people claiming it was making fun of the representation of gender non-binary communities.

The increased use of the “x” has been most prominently incorporated into the social media practices of many LGBTQ Latinxs. Such practices speak to the liberatory aspect of crafting a new way of talking about these forms of identification. Social media’s anonymous and semi-anonymous choices also allows folks to speak for themselves or for larger communal sentiments. For example, similar to the re-claiming of the term “queer” as a more fluid and inclusive term for non-normative sexualities, some queer Latinxs have re-claimed the term “joto”, a historically derogatory term for gay men in many Spanish-speaking communities. The move to using these different spellings and pronunciations of terms are largely about in-group usage.



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Latinx serves as a reminder that making room for gender non-binary experiences, as well as queer and trans people, requires a deep unlearning. I find this to be the significance of the x, rather than about order. Latinx lacks a simple explanation or definition, which makes many people of different generations uncomfortable. Narrowly defining Latinx as a pan-ethnic term would not make it queer. Latinx should not confine us into rigid limitations of identity. It should push us to where we have not yet arrived and away from the fatalistic feeling of no future. The shift toward the x is proof that this is not true. Undocumented queer and trans Latinxs are at the forefront at liberation movements for queer immigrant rights.<sup>72</sup>

### **Spanglish as a queer language practice**

The second intentionally queer linguistic practice that also builds on my discussion here conceptualizes Spanglish, or the simultaneous switching of linguistic codes in English and Spanish, as a way Latinx communities queer language to create new ways of expressing racialized sexualities. Considering Spanglish as a queer linguistic practice allows for considering Spanglish a performance of “queer citizenship.”<sup>73</sup> The queering of language through Spanish illuminates other ways of doing or performing queer Latinidad. Because language does not always allow for full expression, there is an affective dimension of these language practices. The x, Spanglish, and *jotería vernacular* can also enact a feeling. Such practices represent queer ways of recognizing desire that speak to the cultural realities and nuance of marginalized communities.

Sociolinguist Ana Celia Zentella published one of the first studies on the functions and politics of code switching. Focusing on the practice of code switching amongst Puerto Rican communities in New York, Zentella’s work challenges deficiency models of code switching and demonstrates the cultural and linguistic skill set needed to engage in this

sophisticated speech act. Zentella's analysis illustrates the mechanics of code switching and the implications of speaking Spanglish for Puerto Rican communities where speakers acquire two sets of grammatical rules that allow them to know when to switch codes, in what context, and when to use both in a single utterance.<sup>74</sup> However, while Zentella's work highlights the ability to code switch and the use of Spanglish, in our social worlds such a practice is constantly met with suspicion, disregard, or in need of policing and perfecting. As Zentella explains in her work, speaking Spanglish is steeped with cultural significance that goes beyond a communicative function:

In the heads of the speakers is the shared knowledge of how to manage conversations, how to achieve intentions in verbal interaction, and how to show respect for the social values of the community, the status of the interactants, and the symbolic value of the languages.<sup>75</sup>

In this instance, code switching, and speaking Spanglish, provide glimpses of cultural work, conversational work, and symbolic meaning in speech acts.<sup>76</sup> I am interested in considering the possibility of envisioning a queer future through the use of Spanglish amongst queer Latinx communities.

I argue that the present nature and quotidian use of Spanglish allow for glimpses of a queer future where normativity of language and sexuality is disrupted. The function of Spanglish provides a linguistic and interactional platform to articulate tensions between theoretical implications and empirical practice. The speaking and usage of Spanglish taps into the affective realm of the present and the future. Spanglish allows glimpses and moments where colonial languages are mixed, standardization is disrupted, and possibility becomes present. The disruptiveness of Spanglish allows for cracks in the systems, innovative surplus, and affective excess. It is within this excess that we find a utopic feeling, as Muñoz states; "More distinctly, I point to a queer feeling of hope in the face of hopeless

heteronormative maps of the present where futurity is indeed the province of normative reproduction.”<sup>77</sup>

I propose considering the politics of Spanglish in an effort to think beyond ideas of one’s linguistic abilities or code switching as simply a communicative practice. This dissertation focuses on the relationship of Spanglish to queerness, and more specifically Latinx queerness and its multiple expressions and manifestations. Like queerness, Spanglish takes on many forms given the geographical location, ethnic background, as well as the social and political context of those speak it. Situating intersectionality as an analytical lens within this study, desire exceeds just sexual desire because it is always situated within queer Latinx bodies that are racialized, gendered, and classed in the social world. Understanding the queer Latinx body as medicalized and pathologized (as so often perceived in media and scholarship) as impure for its perversity (race, sexuality, gender) is deeply connected to the linguistic impurity and perversity of Spanglish. So, Spanglish becomes a strategy for our communities to share (linguistic and physical) space, multiple expressions.

The discussion in this chapter focuses largely on my theoretical framework to consider the political implications that Spanglish has in the daily lives of Latinx communities. By outlining this theoretical positioning, I hope to make sense of the uses of Spanglish in queer contexts, but I do so with the intention of situating Spanglish as it is used among Latinx communities. The significance of linguistic practices exists beyond the discursive and abstract. In that vein, I refer to Cherríe Moraga’s concept of “theory in the flesh.” According to Moraga,

A theory in the flesh means one where the physical realities of our lives—our skin color, the land or concrete we grew up on, our sexual longings—all fuse to create a politic born out of necessity... We do this bridging by naming our selves and by telling our stories in our words.<sup>78</sup>

To understand Spanglish as a queer practice first requires an interrogation of the meaning of queer in this context. To think queer is to think of disrupting that which we categorize as the normative. Queer means interrogating and challenging the imposed order of society.<sup>79</sup> It allows for movement, for evolution, for inclusivity, it is the future. As José Esteban Muñoz writes, “we are never fully queer” for queerness is a utopic future never fully within our grasp.<sup>80</sup> In many ways, a queer reading of Spanglish insinuates a Latinx future that navigates the messy terrain living on the border of our multitude of identities in the United States. Spanglish is a physically audible manifestation of the complex experiences within U.S. Latinx communities. Because I am writing about Spanglish as a queer practice, I want to also highlight the everyday dimension of Spanglish.<sup>81</sup> A queer practice signals an act that seeks to unhinge binary thinking and stir up traditional standardized notions of language. A queer practice serves to reimagine certain conventions that have rigidly defined the scope of possibility.

To hear Spanglish in public, being spoken amongst loved ones, or seeing Spanglish on a billboard sign in East LA is a common occurrence. Speaking Spanglish demonstrates a physical manifestation of the constant navigation that negotiating two colonial languages requires. Both languages, Spanish and English, carry within them an intricate web of ideologies and histories of oppression. When left to their own devices, Latinxs employ a hybrid tongue calling on both linguistic repertoires. Spanglish is not always intentionally political but reading the queer nature of Spanglish as such allows for a politicized understanding between linguistic practices and sexuality among Latinx communities. Spanglish is an embodied act in that it is a written and oral practice.

Despite the tireless institutional policing of Latinx speech (schools, the families of origin, workplace, the media), speaking Spanglish allows for temporary glimpses into a queer future in the present. When others cannot understand the ebbs and flows of Spanglish, speakers of Spanglish exercise and experience resistance, even if only momentarily. Speakers of Spanglish craft their own way of resisting linguistic imperialism of English in the United States by speaking truth to power on (and with) their own terms.

Muñoz writes:

For queer Latinxs, navigating the realities of racism, homophobia, xenophobia, transphobia, and classism, becomes an arduous and often daily occurrence. For those who speak Spanglish, communication, sharing, conviviality, love, fear, can be expressed in ways that are attuned to the cultural dynamics of Latinidad.<sup>82</sup>

The political work of Spanglish can be found in its alignment with queer sexualities where standard varieties of language are linked with heteronormativity and code switching with linguistic fluidity.

Muñoz writes cautiously about not categorizing queer future as simply naïve idealism. Queer futures rely on hope but as a critical idealism. I find a strong entry point is to consider the hopefulness of Spanglish, especially in the face of intensified racism, xenophobia, and homophobia. This linguistic variety is not yet fully realized because of the stigmatization and constant policing of it. However, the glimpses of possibility are found in the liberating moments in interaction whether it is to navigate or mask specific interactions. The speech act of Spanglish gives life to the possibility of expression, speech, and power, outside the realm of monolingual English and Spanish. Language is imbued with values and meaning, and in the case of Spanglish, in its audible and ornamental elements. The ornamental and excessive attributes of Spanglish allow us to be able to imagine an affective entry to futurity for as Muñoz writes, “This not-yet-conscious is knowable, to some extent, as

a utopian feeling.”<sup>83</sup> We can hear that utopian feeling in the spoken Spanglish. The cacophonous sounds of two languages blending together provide a frenetic and queer sound that allows for linguistic borderlands to be traversed.

Within discussion of queer representations in Chicana/o and Latina/o media, Daniel Enrique Pérez focuses his attention on the trope of the queer macho, positioned as existing outside of gender and sexual norms. He distinguishes the differences between the Anglo and Mexican macho and lends his attention to Jaime Manrique’s re-signification of the maricón, situating queerness as anti-colonial, a rebellion to colonial exchange.<sup>84</sup> In his discussion Pérez sees the queer macho as rejecting the “failed men” status; however, he sees Chicano queer men as abject men, where emasculation occurs in the form of lacking financial resources, and linguistically, through an inability to speak “polished English” or in the form of a vocal lisp.<sup>85</sup> Pérez’s work highlights an interesting point regarding linguistic capital as tied to sexuality with his discussion on emasculation, however still within a reading of cultural texts. As mentioned, the field of sociolinguistics has garnered a growing body of work on discussions of queerness and sexuality, tagged as “queer linguistics”.<sup>86</sup> The dissertation at hand will build off the following scholarship by tying in and nuancing the experiences of queer Latina/o communities.

### **The Sucio Sounds of Spanglish**

For the purpose of this study, I am interested in how and where Spanish and Spanglish exist amongst queer Latinx communities. Besides heavily populated Latinx cities, Spanglish has found a new home online on social media accounts. Many online-based Latinx media sites such as Remezcla, We Are Mitú, and *Latina* magazine all frequently use Spanglish in

their content. Besides using it in their everyday speech, Latinxs may find that many affective moments require Spanglish to express a certain feeling, or memory.

I find it imperative, however, to consider the attitudes toward Spanish and Spanglish. As some scholars have noted, racist rhetoric toward Latinxs is often coded in negative comments made about the Spanish language and its many variations.<sup>87</sup> Anzaldúa references how Chicanas who curse, disengage with respectability politics, or do not speak either Spanish or English are often pejoratively referred to as *deslenguadas* (or bad-mouthed women). Language purists see Spanglish as the bastardization of the mother language(s). While sometimes seamless and other times difficult, the switching of codes in Spanglish points to the fluidity of its nature. There is nothing static or pure about Spanglish. A standardized Spanglish contradicts its very nature. Ideas of linguistic purity speak to larger ideas of purity as they relate to nationhood, race, gender, and the body. Dominant language ideologies reinforce ideas of linguistic hierarchies that manifest in the policing of speech by communities of color. These ideologies fight against *pochismos* and what some language purists might comprehend as deficiencies in either or both languages. Language, like race, gender, and sexuality, is a social construct, which reinforces its unstable nature. Linguistic “deficiencies” are transposed and embodied in complex speech negotiations of race, place, and power.<sup>88</sup>

These intersections of language, race, gender, and sexuality are not foreign to Latinx communities. Unraveling the gendered and classed associations of *deslenguadas* points to other cultural and linguistic practices where Latinas are often monitored. In my household growing up two words often were heard with a negative connotation: *chusma* (gendered as a vulgar woman) and *chismosa* (gendered a woman who gossips).<sup>89</sup> Both practices tend to be

regarded as in need of disciplining or silencing. Como diría mi mamá, “en boca cerrada no entra mosca” (flies do not enter a closed mouth). In this sense, Deborah Vargas’ concept of lo sucio helps me articulate how the unruly nature of Spanglish allows for envisioning another possibility in relation to queerness and Latinidad. For Vargas, suciedad or lo sucio serves as a queer analytic to explore racialized discourses of difference through queer genders and sexualities:

first, lewd, obscene, offensive hypersexual undisciplined bodies; second, darkened, suspect citizens perpetually untrustworthy, impure, and nonloyal to the state; and third, diseased “cultures of poverty” subjects overdetermined to fail to arrive to normative womanhood and manhood.<sup>90</sup>

In many ways, Spanglish fulfills Vargas’ notion of suciedad in its inherent loudness and imperfection as it pertains to linguistic impurities.<sup>91</sup> Spanglish is undisciplined as it breaks from grammatical restrictions and rules. Spanglish is disloyal to the institutions of English and Spanish, whose standardizations are steeped in affinities toward nationhood. Lastly, Spanglish is understood as failure at both languages. That is, there is no mastery of the standardization of either language signaling a linguistic deficiency. The excessiveness of Spanglish can be heard in its undulating intonations, switches in mid utterance, and in its queer construction. Spanglish is a way of making culture accessible. The suciedad of Spanglish assists in navigating social worlds for queer Latinxs. The convivial dynamic of speaking Spanglish leads to other manifestations of linguistic suciedad in wordplay, banter, and other queer oral traditions such as chisme, reading, and throwing shade.

In keeping with this idea of lo sucio, Vargas also describes sucio time as wasted time, devoted to nonessential acts by queers that fail to fulfill capital reproduction.<sup>92</sup> As mentioned, Spanglish is often relegated as unnecessary and a failed attempt at being fluent in two



languages. Within this understanding of Spanglish as a *sucio* sound, new possibilities open up in imagining a queer future.

### **The re-claiming of *jotería***

The third type of Latinx language practice that queers language amongst Latinxs is the re-claiming of the historically-derogatory term “joto” (referring to an effeminate gay man).<sup>93</sup> Growing up in a Latinx household, when the word “joto,” or in other cases, “maricón,” while we may have not known those words as explicit insults toward a presumably gay man, we knew that it was to be met with caution. For some Latinx communities, the term *jotería* is embraced as an identity, experience, and as well as theory in some academic spaces.

For instance, one of the first *jotería*-specific organizations, the Association for *Jotería* Arts, Activism, and Scholarship (AJAAS), emerged in 2005 as a collective of artists, activists, and scholars whose mission is “To nurture queer Latina/o, Chicana/o, and Indigenous individuals and communities through practices that recognize the importance of linking art, activism, and scholarship.”<sup>94</sup> Additionally, AJAAS, which comes out of the Joto Caucus, a subgroup within the National Association of Chicana and Chicano Studies (NACCS), sees their mission to affirm *jotería* consciousness and envision a world that “celebrates multiple pathways for generating knowledge, sharing experiences, and becoming catalysts for social change.”<sup>95</sup> While the organization tends to still lean more toward an academic organization, it has become a site of intentional mobilization in the reclaiming of *joto*, *jota*, and *jotería*.

On their website, AJAAS provides a page in which they explain the meaning of the word, defining it as a noun and as an adjective. The definitions are stylized like a dictionary

entry on the page and have different connotations associated with the term. I include them here as an example of the many different kind of strategies *jotería* can occupy but also as a starting point for the working meanings of the term (I have included the entries as they are stylized on the website):

*noun*

1. **queer Latina/o, Chicana/o, and Indigenous people.** “People, listen to what your *Jotería* is saying.” - Gloria Anzaldúa
2. **a reclaimed term of empowerment**, derived from the derogatory terms “*Joto*” and “*Jota*” which have been used historically to describe people of Mexican descent who do not fit heteronormative standards.

*Adjective*

1. **relating to or supporting queer Latina/o, Chicana/o, and Indigenous people** “Did you see the *Jotería* art exhibit at the Museum of Modern Art?”
2. **a decolonial queer/feminist sensibility and politics, a mode of seeing, thinking, and feeling geared towards empowerment and social transformation.** “Our school district is developing a *Jotería* curriculum that connects issues of gender and sexuality with environmental racism in Latino communities.”<sup>96</sup>

These entries provide a different entry point to the use and meaning of *jotería*, demonstrating that the term does far more than serve as a rough translation for queer in a Chicana/Mexican context. I would add that *jotería* also exhibits more of a working-class sensibility in that *jotería* and/or *jotismos* defy social norms of respectability, political correctness, and rather, embrace a colloquial expression of non-normative sexualities. Furthermore, *jotería* studies scholars have pushed back against those quick to translate “*joto*” as a Spanish or Latinx equivalent of “queer”. Such insistence serves as a reminder that not everything can be directly translated and must be experienced and lived to be understood.

In 2014, *Aztlán: A Journal of Chicano Studies* published a special issue dedicated to the emerging field of *Jotería* Studies.<sup>97</sup> In his contribution to that issue, *Jotería* Studies scholar

Michael Hames-García emphasizes that the meaning of *jotería* should not be fixed, even though it is primarily used to refer to Chicaxs and Mexicanxs “whose lives include dissident practices of gender and sexuality.”<sup>98</sup> Hames-García writes for “*jotería*” to challenge the ‘logic of equivalency’:

While some authors draw close comparisons with terms like *lesbian*, *gay*, *bisexual*, *trans\**, and *queer*, others suggest that historical, geographic, and cultural contexts make *jotería* not equivalent to any of these North American terms. The extent to which *jotería* as an identity category, cultural practice, or social process remains distinct from other categories of sexual or gender dissent or nonconformity is an open question to be debated within *jotería* studies. What I hope takes center stage in such a debate is the utility of a term that is not simply a Mexican/Chicano Spanish equivalent of *queer*. Terms like *LGBT* or *queer*, as they are used in North America and Europe, tend to extract sexuality or gender from all the other ways a person exists in her or his society: as child, parent, neighbor, activist, friend, and worker. That extraction fits with a capitalist dismantling of social relations. We need more terms that can give expression to how people exist within a larger social fabric, and I hope that if we resist the logic of equivalency—that is, resist the temptation to simply use *jotería* the same way one would use *LGBTQ* or *queer*, but only when referring to people of Mexican or Chicana/o descent—*jotería* might become such a term.<sup>99</sup>

For Hames-García, by moving away from literal translations or equivalents, we can understand how the lived realities of Chicax communities are far more complex within the larger structure of Latinx cultural practices and identities. Terms like *jotería* encourage a critique of power and a shift toward deconstructing normative ideas of language, gender, and sexuality among Latinx communities. The move to use words like *jotería* as a self-identifier, or to queer words in English, Spanish, and Spanglish, generates an autonomous re-claiming of words, dichos, and ideologies that have for so long been used as violent weapons toward Latinx communities.

For many, terms like *joto* and *jotería* are still quite hurtful causing a complete rejection in the re-claiming of that language. These words often represent the stings of

growing up navigating homophobia. Juana Maria Rodríguez notes the caution with *joto* for some, while also highlighting its potential in having a counter meaning,

Yet these words [“jotos and machas”] bring with them the haunted histories of these names and the memories of their previous enunciation. The narrative shadows of *joto*, *macha*, and queer carry with them the traces of violence, familiar rejection, and cultural alienation even as they confer social existence and oppositional validation. As troubling as this discursive resignification is to some, for others it becomes a rallying point for a discursive autonomy, which while fictive, becomes a tool through which narratives of shame, violence, and alienation are verbalized and countered.<sup>100</sup>

I agree with Rodríguez in that the discursive resignification of *joto* can offer a starting point to combat narratives of shame and violence. However, I would argue that this discursive autonomy is hardly fictive, especially amongst communities identifying as *jotería*. As the examples above depict, *jotería*, much like the *x* in *Latinx*, is a both a discursive and material strategy of mobilization for queer Chicanxs and Mexicanxs. Rodríguez sees the re-claiming of *joto* and *jotería* as possibilities through which violence is countered. I would add to that statement that in owning and utilizing Spanglish in queer contexts, speakers are crafting ways to tell their counter stories, or what Anita Revilla Tijerina and José Santillana refer to as *jotohistorias*.<sup>101</sup> The reclaiming of historically-derogatory terms for queer folks in Spanish, the creation and queering of new words and phrases, and the intentionality in choosing these words set the stage for a new generation of queer Latinxs to articulate their identities and experiences.

The movement amongst artists, activists, and scholars, who identify as *jotería* to identify with the term has been predominantly amongst those with a Chicanx/Mexican background, and geographically it is more frequently used in the Southwest United States or in regions with large Mexican populations, such as Los Angeles or Chicago. However, *jotería* expressions are found all across regions of the continent, especially on social media. More

specifically, an increasing number of Chicana/Latina/Mexicana artists and t-shirt designers have sought to use many of these re-claimed words as screen tees and print art.<sup>102</sup>

Many of the popular *jotería* clothing designers gained popularity and notoriety for creating t-shirts and sweatshirts with bold Old English lettering spelling “Maricón”. For instance, many of the members of DeColores and myself often wore these t-shirts out in public, at events, and at the organization’s meetings. The shirts were always welcomed with a “yasss!” or “slay!” by other members of the organization. However, some of the parents of La Familia would often make remarks about being concerned how people would react to those shirts in public.

The shift to embrace *jotería* as an identity, sensibility, and in some cases, academic theory demonstrates how queering language for communities of color does more than provide representation but can offer new entryways to how Latinx communities make sense of their lived experiences as queer people of color in the United States. The apprehension that many of our families still hold in relation to the word is real. I do not mean to sideline the realities that older generations have very different relationships to the word. However, that discomfort, as with the x, can prove generative as an entry to dialogues aimed at unpacking queer identities in Latinx communities. I share an anecdote from my research journey to help elaborate.

## **Conclusion**

In June 2015, one year after Zoraida Reyes’ murder, the Department of Chicana and Chicano Studies in conjunction with the Chicana/Latina Graduation Committee at UC Santa Barbara awarded Zoraida an honorary degree posthumously. An empty seat with a cap, gown and Chicana/Latina Graduation stole was reserved to honor her memory and honorary

degree. The day of the graduation ceremony, my advisor, Inés Casillas, shared some moving words about Zoraida as she had been a student of hers a few years before, and introduced Camila (Zoraida’s best friend and a participant who we hear more from in Chapter 4) to accept the degree on Zoraida’s behalf. That day it was Zoraida’s chosen family who received the degree for her. Camila also expressed some personal words about Zoraida, exclaiming, “We did it, ‘mana!” (“We did it, sis!”). At the end of her speech, Camila loudly shouted “¡Que viva la jotería!” (“Long live la jotería!”) to which the crowd applauded after a brief pause. In that moment, I remember holding my breath in that brief pause that must have only lasted a few seconds. Sitting in the crowd surrounded by parents, tixs, abuelxs, and children—I could hear the confusion in some, the discomfort in others. Ultimately, the undergrads cheered and clapped as Camila walked off the stage.

I share this memory because it highlights the apprehension but ultimate celebration that jotería occupies in Chicana and Latina communities. Even for me, who has learned to embrace the identity and vernacular of jotería, the pause always instills a bit of anxiety while you wait for the reaction. Perhaps it is that tension, that pause, that breath—that temporary discomfort—that is the awkward and messy part of queering our ways of speaking and expression. In many ways, jotería also tests the boundaries of time, allowing us to envision a future that celebrate jots, blurring the lines between what Muñoz refers to as the here and now and a then and there.<sup>103</sup>

Queer language practices are central to the lived realities of queer, trans, and gender non-binary Latina communities in the United States. We find our own new ways of expressing the often difficult and contradictory as the different aspects of our queerness do not fit in one word, term, or category. Not white enough for “gay”, not normative enough for

“Latino”, Latinx communities create meanings that can handle the contradictions of navigating multiple identities. Horacio Roque Ramírez mentions such identity formation challenges that have been part of gay and lesbian Latina/o movements since at least the 1970’s. In his analysis of the Gay Latino Alliance (GALA) in San Francisco, he highlights the wordplay and deeper meaning of a question posed by one of his participants, “Chicano and gay?”.<sup>104</sup> Since then—as I have discussed in this chapter—gay, lesbian, trans, queer, Latinxs have found alternative ways of giving language to their experiences, desires, and identities.

Queering language allows for a queering of time, a shift in perception, understanding, and expression. This chapter has discussed three forms of queer Latinx expressions and language practices that explicitly and implicitly undo the gendered restrictions of a colonial language. The shift toward the x, Spanglish, and the re-claiming of *jotería* demonstrate that these communities are invested in painting their own futures and (literally) speaking them into existence.

The possibilities for imagining different worlds embedded in Latinx language practices lie in the creative crafting of imagining what is not yet here, or known, or what could be. To understand the queer nature of such practices carries implications for how queer Chicanxs and Latinxs imagine worlds outside the gendered and heteronormative limitations of what we have known. The excess of the x, of Spanglish, and of *jotería*, meaning the parts that are not easily translated, the words that Latinxs debate on how to pronounce (like Latinx), the code-switching rules which varies from speaker to speaker, are precisely what cements these practices as queer.

The language practices discussed in this chapter also point to the intentional execution of reclaiming language—owning it, utilizing it, and politicizing it. Such practices encourage us to think about how they function as empowering modes of being that align with our racialized, gendered, sexualized, and political subjectivities. The following chapter will demonstrate the manifestation of Spanglish as a queer language practice through an analysis of the flyers and other promotional material used by DeColores Queer Orange County to attract queer and trans Latinxs in their local community. If Latinx communities are making sense of their social worlds through specific language practices as a form of subverting dominant ideologies, then de-colonizing our bodies, minds, and tongues linguistically demonstrates such processes in motion.

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<sup>1</sup> DeColores Queer Orange County, Summer Retreat notes, July 11, 2015.

<sup>2</sup> For recent publications on the x, see Vilma Uribe, “#SomosMás: Reclaiming Latinx and Latina Identities on Social Media,” *Latino Rebels*, October 9, 2015, <http://www.latinorebels.com/2015/10/09/somosmas-reclaiming-our-latinx-and-latina-identity-on-social-media/>; Claudia Milian, “Extremely Latin, XOXO: Notes on LatinX,” *Cultural Dynamics* 29, no. 3 (2017): 121-140; Cristobal Salinas Jr. and Adele Lozano, “Mapping and recontextualizing the evolution of the term *Latinx*: An environmental scanning in higher education,” *Journal of Latinos and Education* (2017): 1-14; Catalina M. de Onís, “What’s in an ‘x’?: An Exchange about the Politics of ‘Latinx’,” *Chiricú Journal: Latina/o Literatures, Arts, and Cultures* 1, no. 2 (2017): 1-27; and Rigoberto Marquéz, “What’s in the ‘x’ of Latinx?” *Medium*, July 9, 2018, <https://medium.com/center-for-comparative-studies-in-race-and/whats-in-the-x-of-latinx-9266ed40766a>.

<sup>3</sup> See Ana Celia Zentella’s *Growing Up Bilingual*, (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1997); Norma Mendoza-Denton’s *Homegirls: Language and Cultural Practice Among Latina Youth Gangs*, (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008); and Mary Bucholtz’s *White Kids: Language, Race and Styles of Youth Identity*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

<sup>4</sup> I am using José Esteban Muñoz’s theory of queer time and futurity to situate my analysis. For more on queer futurity, see Muñoz’s *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009).

<sup>5</sup> For more demographic and language information on Latinxs, see Pilar Melendez, “United States has more Spanish speakers than Spain does, report says,” *CNN*, July 1, 2015, <http://www.cnn.com/2015/07/01/us/spanish-speakers-united-states-spain/>; and “Facts for Features: Hispanic Heritage Month 2017,” *United States Census Bureau*, August 31, 2017, <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/facts-for-features/2017/hispanic-heritage.html>.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> For more, see Jens Manuel Krogstad, “With fewer new arrivals, Census lowers Hispanic population projections,” *PEW Research Center*, December 16, 2014, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/12/16/with-fewer-new-arrivals-census-lowers-hispanic-population-projections-2/>.



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<sup>8</sup> See Ana Celia Zentella, “The ‘chiquita-fication’ of US Latinos and Their Languages, or Why We Need An Anthropological Linguistics,” *SALSA III: Proceedings of the Symposium about Language and Society at Austin* 1–18, Austin: Department of Linguistics; Zentella, *Growing Up Bilingual*; Django Paris, “‘They’re in My Culture, They Speak the Same Way’: African American Language in Multiethnic High Schools,” *Harvard Educational Review* 79, no. 3 (2009): 428-47; and H. Samy Alim, John R. Rickford, and Arnetta F. Ball’s (eds.) *Raciolinguistics: How Language Shapes Our Ideas about Race*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

<sup>9</sup> See Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands: The New Mestiza = La Frontera*, (San Francisco: Spinsters/Aunt Lute, 1987) and Alastair Pennycook’s *English and the Discourses of Colonialism. Politics of Language*, (London; New York: Routledge, 1998).

<sup>10</sup> Zentella, 1993; 1997; H. Samy Alim and Geneva Smitherman, *Articulate While Black: Barack Obama, Language, and Race in the U.S.* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Jonathan Rosa, “Racializing language, regimenting Latinas/os: Chronotope, social tense, and American raciolinguistic futures,” *Language & Communication* 46 (2016): 106-117; and Jonathan Rosa and Nelson Flores, “Unsettling race and language: Toward a raciolinguistic perspective,” *Language in Society* 46, no. 5 (2017): 621-647.

<sup>11</sup> Alim & Smitherman, *Articulate While Black*.

<sup>12</sup> Bonnie Urciuoli, *Exposing Prejudice: Puerto Rican Experiences of Language, Race, and Class*, (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996).

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 18.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 35.

<sup>17</sup> Bucholtz, *White Kids*, 5.

<sup>18</sup> Rosina Lippi-Green, *English With an Accent: Language, Ideology, and Discrimination in the United States*, (New York: Routledge, 1997).

<sup>19</sup> Ibid; and Alim & Smitherman, *Articulate While Black*.

<sup>20</sup> Bucholtz, *White Kids*.

<sup>21</sup> For more on racial inequities among Chicanx and Latinx communities, see Aída Hurtado and Raúl Rodríguez, “Language as a Social Problem: The Repression of Spanish in South Texas,” *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 10, no. 5 (1989): 401-419; Jennifer Stoeber, “The Noise of SB 1070: or Do I Sound Illegal to You?” *Sounding Out!* August 19, 2010, <https://soundstudiesblog.com/2010/08/19/the-noise-of-sb-1070/>; Patricia Lavon Hanna and Ann Allen, “Educator Assessment: Accent as a Measure of Fluency in Arizona,” *Educational Policy* 27, no. 4 (2013): 711–738; and Sara V. Hinojos and Dolores Inés Casillas, “Don’t Be Self-Conchas: Listening to Mexican Styled Phonetics in Popular Culture,” *Sounding Out! The Sound Studies Blog*, May 5, 2017, <https://soundstudiesblog.com/2017/05/05/dont-be-self-conchas-listening-to-mexican-styled-phonetics-in-popular-culture/>.

<sup>22</sup> For more on raciolinguistics, see Alim, et al. *Raciolinguistics*; and Rosa & Flores, “Unsettling race and language”.

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<sup>23</sup> For instance, see Horacio N. Roque Ramírez, *Communities of Desire: Queer Latina/Latino History and Memory, San Francisco Bay Area, 1960s-1990s*, (PhD dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 2001); Roque Ramirez, ““That’s My Place!”: Negotiating Racial, Sexual, and Gender Politics in San Francisco’s Gay Latino Alliance, 1975-1983,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 12, no. 2 (2003): 224-58; Roque Ramirez, ““Mira, yo soy Boricua y estoy aquí’: Rafa Negrón’s Pan Dulce and the queer Sonic latinaje of San Francisco.” *CENTRO Journal* 19, no.1 (2007): 274-313; Juana Maria Rodriguez, *Queer Latinidad: Identity Practices, Discursive Spaces*, (New York: New York University Press, 2003); E. Patrick Johnson, *Sweet Tea: Black Gay Men of the South*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008); Carlos Decena, *Tacit Subjects: Belonging and Same-Sex Desire Among Dominican Immigrant Men*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011); Katie Acosta, *Amigas Y Amantes: Sexually Nonconforming Latinas Negotiate Family*, (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2013); and Susana Peña, *Oye Loca: From the Mariel Boatlift to Gay Cuban Miami*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013).

<sup>24</sup> E. Patrick Johnson, “Quare” Studies, or (Almost) Everything I Know about Queer Studies I Learned from My Grandmother,” in *Black Queer Studies: A Critical Anthology*, eds. E.P. Johnson and Mae Henderson, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 149-150.

<sup>25</sup> Muñoz, *Cruising*, 56.

<sup>26</sup> For more on white gay men, see Kath Weston, *Families We Choose* (Columbia University Press, 1991); William Leap, *Word’s Out: Gay Men’s English*, (University of Minnesota Press, 1996); and Deborah Cameron, “Performing Gender Identity: young men’s talk and the construction of heterosexual masculinity” in *Language and Masculinity*, eds. Sally Johnson and Ulrike Hanna Meinhof, (Wiley-Blackwell, 1996): 328-335.

<sup>27</sup> See Mary Bucholtz and Kira Hall, “Theorizing identity in language and sexuality research,” *Language in Society* 33 (2004): 469-515; and Leap and Boellstorff, 2004.

<sup>28</sup> William Leap, *Beyond the Lavender Lexicon: Authenticity, Imagination, and Appropriation in Lesbian and Gay Languages*, (Australia: Gordon and Breach, 1995).

<sup>29</sup> William Leap and Tom Boellstorff, eds., *Speaking in Queer Tongues: Globalization and Gay Language* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004).

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, 13.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, 13.

<sup>32</sup> Krogstad, “With fewer new arrivals”.

<sup>33</sup> Susana Peña, “Pájaration and Transculturation: Language and Meaning in Miami’s Cuban American Gay Worlds,” In *Speaking in Queer Tongues: Globalization and Gay Languages*, eds. William Leap and Tom Boellstorff (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2004): 231-250.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, 246.

<sup>35</sup> Rodríguez, *Queer Latinidad*; Horacio Roque Ramírez, “Pan Dulce”; Johnson, “Mother Knows”; Ramón Rivera-Servera, *Performing Latinidad: Dance, Sexuality, Politics* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2012); and Deborah R. Vargas, “Ruminations on Lo Sucio as a Latino Queer Analytic,” *American Quarterly* 66, no. 3 (2014): 715-26.

<sup>36</sup> Roque Ramírez, “Mira.”

<sup>37</sup> Roque Ramírez, “Mira,” 277.

<sup>38</sup> Vargas, “Ruminations,” 723.

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<sup>39</sup> Johnson, “Mother Knows,” 253.

<sup>40</sup> Leap & Boellstorff, *Speaking*, 2.

<sup>41</sup> Peña, “Pájaration,” 246.

<sup>42</sup> Anzaldúa, *Borderlands*.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>44</sup> For more on this topic see Otto Santa Ana, “Chicano English and the Nature of the Chicano Language Setting,” *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences* 15, no. 1 (February 1993): 3–35; Rosaura Sanchez, *Chicano Discourse: Socio-Historic Perspectives*, (Rowley, MA: Newbury House Publishers, 1983); Ana Celia Zentella, *Growing Up Bilingual*, (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1997); Carmen Fought, *Chicano English in Context*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Otto Santa Ana, ed., *Tongue-tied: The Lives of Multilingual Children in Public Education*, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2004); and Arnaldo Cruz-Malavé, *Queer Latino Testimonio, Keith Haring, and Juanito Xtravaganza: Hard Tails*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

<sup>45</sup> Larry La Fountain-Stokes, “Queer ducks, Puerto Rican *patos*, and Jewish *feigelekh*: Birds and the cultural representation of homosexuality,” *CENTRO: Center for Puerto Rican Studies Journal*, 19 (2007): 192–229.

<sup>46</sup> Peña, “Pájaration”; and Decena, *Tacit*.

<sup>47</sup> Lawrence LaFountain-Stokes, “The Queer Politics of Spanglish,” *Critical Moment* 9 (2005): 5.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> Rodriguez, *Queer Latinidad*.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*; and Leap & Boellstorff, *Speaking*.

<sup>52</sup> Rodriguez, *Queer Latinidad*, 29.

<sup>53</sup> Elizabeth Freeman, *The Wedding Complex : Forms of Belonging in Modern American Culture*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002): xv; and Sandra K. Soto, *Reading Chican@ like a Queer : The De-mastery of Desire*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010): 5.

<sup>54</sup> Brandon Wint, *Love, Our Master* (In/Words Press, 2014).

<sup>55</sup> Maria P. Chaves Daza, “Enacting Queer Listening, or When Anzaldúa Laughs Listening,” *SoundOut! The Sound Studies Blog*, September 28, 2015, <https://soundstudiesblog.com/tag/queer-listening-to-queer-vocal-timbres/>.

<sup>56</sup> For more on queer time, see Jack Halberstam, “What’s that smell? Queer temporalities and subcultural lives,” *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 6, no. 3 (2003): 313-333; and *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*. Sexual Cultures. New York: New York University Press, 2005.

<sup>57</sup> Lee Edelman, *No Future : Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004); and Muñoz, *Cruising*.

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<sup>58</sup> Muñoz, *Cruising*, 49.

<sup>59</sup> The murder rates for trans women of color death rates have been staggering since 2014. There were 11 in 2014; 21 in 2015; 27 in 2016; 29 in 2017; and 24 in 2018. For more information, see Alex Schmider, “2016 was the deadliest year on record for transgender people,” *GLAAD*, November 9, 2016, <https://www.glaad.org/blog/2016-was-deadliest-year-record-transgender-people>; Lauren Holter, “The Murder Rate of Transgender Women in the U.S. Isn’t Declining,” *Refinery 29*, April 24, 2017, <https://www.refinery29.com/en-us/2017/04/151401/transgender-women-murder-rate-us-2017>; and “GLAAD calls for increased and accurate media coverage of transgender murder,” *GLAAD*, October 20, 2018, <https://www.glaad.org/blog/glaad-calls-increased-and-accurate-media-coverage-transgender-murders-0>.

<sup>60</sup> For more on *Bese*, see <https://www.bese.com/about>.

<sup>61</sup> U.S. Census Bureau statistics.

<sup>62</sup> Dolores Inés Casillas and Juan Sebastian Ferrada, “Hispanic,” *Anti-Immigration in the United States: A Historical Encyclopedia*, (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2011): 246-247.

<sup>63</sup> The U.S. Census has continued to struggle since then on how to accurately account for the multidimensional and diverse lived experiences of people with a multiracial and multiethnic background. More specifically, the Census has tried to tally race and ethnicity by awkwardly asking a separate question on ethnicity for Latinx folks. Example of how the Census has done this. On the last Census in 2010, this was how we were asked to mark our race and ethnicity. During the Obama administration, the Office of Management and Budget spent two years creating alternative methods to better capture the realities of a racially diverse community. The option on the right asked about a person’s race or origin, with different ethnicities listed as examples but ultimately would give the person being polled the freedom to list how they identified. However, earlier this year the Trump Administration released a statement saying that the proposals made during Obama’s Administration were not going to be approved and that the 2020 Census question about race and ethnicity will remain the same as the one used in 2010.

<sup>64</sup> Audre Lorde, “Learning from the 60’s,” *Sister Outsider*, (Berkeley, Crossing Press, 1984).

<sup>65</sup> For more on this topic, see Patricia Zavella, “Reflections on Diversity among Chicanas,” *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 12, no. 2 (1991): 73-85; Denise Segura, “Working at Motherhood: Chicana and Mexican Immigrant Mothers and Employment,” In *Mothering: Ideology, Experience, and Agency*, eds. Evelyn Nakano Glenn, Grace Chang, and Linda Rennie. (New York: Routledge, 1994); and Aída Hurtado, *Voicing Chicana Feminisms: Young Women Speak out on Sexuality and Identity*, (New York: New York University Press, 2003).

<sup>66</sup> Denise A. Segura, “Challenging the Chicano Text: Toward a More Inclusive Contemporary Causa.” *Signs* 26, no. 2 (2001): 541-50. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3175454>.

<sup>67</sup> Soto, *Reading Chican@*.

<sup>68</sup> Soto, *Reading Chican@*.

<sup>69</sup> Extra as a people of color expression highlighting and celebrating excess, flamboyance, aesthetically, behaviorally, or linguistically. For more on excess, see Tomas Ybarra-Frausto’s “Rasquachismo: A Chicano Sensibility,” in *Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation, 1965–1985*, ed. Richard Griswold Del Castillo, Teresa McKenna, Yvonne M. Yarbrow-Bejarano (Los Angeles: Wright Art Gallery, 1991); José Esteban Muñoz, “Feeling Brown: Ethnicity and Affect in Ricardo Bracho’s “The Sweetest Hangover (And Other STDs),” *Theatre Journal* 52, no. 1 (2000): 67-79; José Quiroga, *Tropics of Desire: Interventions from Queer Latino America*, (New York: New York University Press, 2000); and Vargas, “Ruminations.”

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<sup>70</sup> Uribe, “#SomosMás,”; Milian, “Extremely,”; Salinas, Jr. & Lozano, “Mapping,”; and de Onís, “What’s in an x.”

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Hinda Seif, “‘Coming out of the Shadows’ and ‘Undocuqueer’: Undocumented Immigrants Transforming Sexuality Discourse and Activism,” *Journal of Language and Sexuality* 3, no. 1 (2014): 87–120.

<sup>73</sup> Muñoz, *Cruising*.

<sup>74</sup> Zentella, *Growing Up*, 80.

<sup>75</sup> Zentella, *Growing Up*, 83.

<sup>76</sup> For more on Spanglish, see Zentella, *Growing*; Peter Sayer, “Demystifying Language Mixing: Spanglish in School,” *Journal of Latinos and Education* 7, no. 2 (2008): 94–112; Ramón Antonio Martínez, “‘Spanglish’ as Literacy Tool: Toward an Understanding of the Potential Role of Spanish-English Code-Switching in the Development of Academic Literacy.” *Research in the Teaching of English* 45, no. 2 (2010): 124-129; Dalia Rodríguez, “Silence as Speech: Meanings of Silence for Students of Color in Predominantly White Classrooms,” *International Review of Qualitative Research* 4, no. 1 (2011): 34; and Ana Sánchez-Muñoz, “Tempted by the language of another,” in *Spanish Perspectives on Chicano Literature: Literary and Cultural Essays*, Jesús Rosales and Vanessa Fonseca, eds., (Ohio State University Press, 2017).

<sup>77</sup> Muñoz, *Cruising*, 28.

<sup>78</sup> Cherríe Moraga and G. Anzaldúa, *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, (New York: Kitchen Table, Women of Color Press, 1983).

<sup>79</sup> Freeman, *The Wedding Complex*; Soto, *Reading Chican@*; Wint, *Love, Our Master*.

<sup>80</sup> Muñoz, *Cruising*.

<sup>81</sup> Michel De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

<sup>82</sup> Frances R. Aparicio, and Susana Chávez-Silverman, eds., *Tropicalizations : Transcultural Representations of Latinidad*. Reencounters with Colonialism--new Perspectives on the Americas, (Hanover, NH: Dartmouth College, University Press of New England, 1997).

<sup>83</sup> Muñoz, *Cruising*, 28.

<sup>84</sup> Daniel Enrique Pérez, *Re-thinking Chicana/o and Latina/o Popular Culture*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009): 12. Similarly, Ellie D. Hernández’s work on transvaluation deals with the need to deconstruct core categories that set limits to group identity. For example, she briefly explains the word “queer” as an example of transvaluation where the word is re-signified through political activism. See her book *Postnationalism in Chicana/o Literature and Culture*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009).

<sup>85</sup> Pérez, *Re-thinking*, 12.

<sup>86</sup> Leap and Boellstorff, *Speaking*.

<sup>87</sup> Jane Hill “Language, Race, and White Public Space,” *American Anthropologist* 100, no. 2 (1998): 680-689; Urciuoli, *Exposing Prejudice*; and Alim & Smitherman, *Articulate while Black*.

<sup>88</sup> Alicia Gaspar De Alba, *Velvet Barrios : Popular Culture & Chicana/o Sexualities*. 1st ed. New Directions in Latino American Cultures. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.

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<sup>89</sup> José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

<sup>90</sup> Vargas, "Ruminations," 716.

<sup>91</sup> Dolores Inés Casillas, "Listening (Loudly) to Spanish-language Radio," *Sounding Out! The Sound Studies Blog*, July 20, 2015, <https://soundstudiesblog.com/2015/07/20/listening-loudly-to-spanish-language-radio/>.

<sup>92</sup> Vargas, "Ruminations."

<sup>93</sup> The term "joto" is often translated to "faggot" in English.

<sup>94</sup> *Association for Jotería Arts, Activism, and Scholarship* website. For more see: [www.ajaas.com](http://www.ajaas.com).

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>97</sup> *Aztlán: A Journal of Chicano Studies* 39, no. 1 (2014).

<sup>98</sup> Michael Hames-García remarks that in addition to the meaning, there is even debate on whether to capitalize Jotería or not. For the full discussion, see Michael Hames-García, "Jotería Studies, or the Political Is Personal," *Aztlán: A Journal of Chicano Studies* 39, no. 1 (2014): 135-141.

<sup>99</sup> Hames-García, "Jotería Studies," 139.

<sup>100</sup> Rodríguez, *Queer Latinidad*, 53.

<sup>101</sup> Anita Tijerina Revilla, and José Manuel Santillana, "Jotería Identity and Consciousness," *Aztlán: A Journal of Chicano Studies* 39, no. 1 (2014): 167-179.

<sup>102</sup> Several queer, trans, and gender non-binary artists and fashion designers gained popularity during my time with DeColores Queer OC. Shirts donning words like "maricón" and "joto" were frequently seen worn by members of the organization. Artists and brands such as the Maricón Collective, Jotxwear, and Lambe Culo were the most prevalent. For more on them, see Adolfo Guzman-Lopez, "Jotear," *KCET*, April 26, 2011, <https://www.kcet.org/socal-focus/jotear>; Evan Moffitt, "Reclaiming the Slur: Meet the Maricón Collective," *Out Magazine*, May 31, 2015, <https://www.out.com/nightlife/2015/5/31/reclaiming-slur-meet-maricon-collective>; and Marco Aquino, "EMBRACING JOTERÍAS: QUEER SAN ANTONIO ARTIST LAUNCHES PLAYFUL PRIDE-INSPIRED MERCH," *Spectrum South*, January 26, 2018, <https://www.spectrumsouth.com/embracing-joteria/>.

<sup>103</sup> Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*.

<sup>104</sup> Roque Ramírez, *Communities of Desire*, 270-271.

### III. Que Pride, Ni Que Pride: Spanglish, Posters, and Latinx Spaces

Y me solté el cabello, me vestí de reina  
Me pusé tacones, me pinté y era bella  
Y caminé hacia la puerta te escuché gritarme  
Pero tus cadenas ya no pueden pararme.....  
Y miré la noche y ya no era oscura  
Era de lentejuelas.....  
-Gloria Trevi, “Todos Me Miran” (2006)

*And I let my hair down, and dressed like a queen  
I put on high heels, I painted my face and I was beautiful  
And I walked toward the door, I heard you yell at me  
But your chains can no longer stop me.....  
I looked at the night and it was no longer dark,  
It was made of sequins.....  
(author’s translation)*

#### **Introduction**

The crowd cheered loudly and emphatically as the members of DeColores Queer Orange County (DCQOC) performed the closing number to their drag show *Jotalicious! Dragraciad@s Sin Vergüenza* on a warm summer night in Costa Mesa, California. On this evening in July 2014, the lyrics to the song above resonated deeply in the audience as the performers lip synced Mexican pop diva Gloria Trevi’s gay anthem, “Todos Me Miran” (“Everyone Looks at Me”). The two-hour show, which was emceed by two of the organization’s members, Emilio and Mateo, included performances by drag queens and kings, all members of DCQOC—many of whom were first-time amateur drag performers—lip-syncing songs from artists like Bruno Mars and Lil’ Kim, to Ana Bárbara and Vicente Fernandez. The show closed with a group performance of “Todos Me Miran” to honor their friend, sister, and community activist, Zoraida “Ale” Reyes, who had been murdered only a month before in Anaheim, California. Emilio and Mateo shared with the audience that the

closing performance was a tribute to Zoraida, who had performed alongside many of them at their drag shows in years prior.

The audience was moved to tears, cheers, and claps, both of mourning and of celebration. The moment was powerful. “Todos Me Miran”—which according to many of the members was Zoraida’s favorite song—speaks of a presumably femme protagonist who has finally broken free from an abusive relationship and embraced being a queen.<sup>1</sup> Jotería Studies scholar Eddy F. Alvarez, Jr. writes about the sequin references in Trevi’s song and video as a framework to understand queer world making.<sup>2</sup> By noting the use of sequins, both lyrically and visually in the music video, Alvarez says,

...the narrator in the song “sees” a sequined night or world in the horizon. This sequined world is twofold: the ability to embody herself as she walks down the street and the queer world in front of her as she performs at the club. This sequined world is made of “anticipatory illumination,” potentiality, and hope... what queer scholars call “queer world making.”<sup>3</sup>

Alvarez’s use of sequins in queer world making helps make sense of my own memory in witnessing the performance of “Todos Me Miran” that summer night in July. That night we experienced a celebration of queer Latinidad, amongst the members of DeColores Queer Orange County, their mothers, and the local queer community in Orange County. A drag show may not be what comes to mind when you think of mourning the loss of a loved one but for the Latinx community in Orange County, it was the perfect way of honoring Zoraida’s life and legacy.

I attended the *Jotalicious* drag show (my first time at a DCQOC dragraiser) with my friend and colleague Adanari Zarate. We arrived promptly to the Shark Club, a venue known at the time for hosting WTF Friday’s, a weekly 18 and over LGBT party night in Orange County, one of the only spaces of its kind in the county. As we waited in line, Adanari and I



joked at how much younger everyone was (we were both 26 at the time) and remarked that the majority of those in line looked like they had just graduated high school. However, it was the fact that the majority of those in line with us that night were predominantly queer and trans people of color that really surprised us since Orange County had less than five gay bars, and they tended to be predominantly frequented by cis white gay men. The entire event felt like a celebration of Latinx queerness and I would soon learn that spaces such as *Jotalicious* were what DCQOC was known for in the Orange County area.

For DeColores Queer Orange County, drag shows were an annual occurrence after the first one they hosted in 2008. The drag show fundraiser, or “dragraiser” as they came to be called, functioned to generate funds for their yearly conference that was always free for the community to attend.<sup>4</sup> The word “dragraiser” plays with the words “drag show” and “fundraiser” to name drag shows used to raise funds usually for LGBT organizations. In another sense, the idea of raising drag elicits the idea that drag is lifted and revered. Dragraiser evokes ideas of a type of queer grassroots practice. As in the case of DCQOC, these different community events created spaces for queer and trans Latinxs to create community, find resources, and create a queer Latinx culture in the heart of Santa Ana, California. Besides their annual drag shows, DCQOC were also known for their house party fundraisers and annual day-long community conferences.

The annual conference is a daylong community event where different workshops are presented on a variety of themes addressing the needs of queer Latinxs in Orange County, such as HIV awareness and prevention as well as workshops for parents conducted completely in Spanish. The organization itself emerged from a conference that was organized by some of the first members in 2008. The drag show became a way for members to host a

social event that generated funds and incorporated different communities. As mentioned above, for many of the members, these dragraisers served as their first taste of performing in drag. The group emphasized the participation of drag queens and kings to ensure the inclusivity of folks of varying gender identities. The spaces that DCQOC created became sites of community-building, politicization, of queer love and desire, and as I discuss in Chapter 4, a site of bridging chosen and of-origin families. This chapter uses a visual and linguistic analysis of Spanglish on DCQOC's flyers, as well as participant interviews, to understand the links among language, sexuality, and space for queer and trans Latinxs in Santa Ana, California. In addition to situating the significance of the spaces that DCQOC created in Orange County, this chapter demonstrates how when paired alongside Latinx cultural signifiers, queering Spanish linguistically attracts and creates queer Latinx audiences and spaces.

### **Spanglish and Queer Spanish**

The political and queer possibilities of Spanglish push far beyond linguistic innovation and variety. Spanglish speakers understand that when it is spoken, Spanglish can exceed the communicative level. It's your favorite scene from *Selena*. Speaking Spanglish can evoke the first time you fell in love or told someone *que lo deseabas*. Spanglish can offer some a path to feel desire, hear queer voices, and make connections to build community. As the flyers in this chapter demonstrate, the affective sense of belonging lives in the inconsistent sounds of Spanglish.

Within Chicanx and Latinx communities, Spanglish has had a unique relationship amongst its speakers in terms of attitudes, practice, and linguistic policing.<sup>5</sup> Often dismissed as the product of linguistic incompetencies in both Spanish and English, Spanglish is

frequently surveilled by English-dominant, Spanish-dominant, and bilingual speakers.<sup>6</sup>

Sociolinguist Ana Celia Zentella contextualizes Spanglish as a cultural and communicative tool. She writes,

Whereas monolinguals adjust by switching phonological, grammatical, and discourse features within one linguistic code, bilinguals alternate between the language in their linguistic repertoire as well. Children in bilingual speech communities acquire two grammars and the rules for communicative competence, which prescribe not only when and where each language may be used, but also whether and how the two languages may be woven together in a single utterance.<sup>7</sup>

Zentella's work advanced our understanding of the role, impact, and function of Spanglish in Puerto Rican bilingual communities. I build on her work to combat notions that Spanglish somehow deteriorates the culture of Spanish and Spanish-speakers, specifically for Latinxs in the United States.

Thinking of Spanglish as a tool for cultural and sexual expression moves the focus away from essentialist (and arbitrary) measures of linguistic ability and fluency and towards the political potential of linguistic innovation. As I discuss in Chapter 2, Spanglish works as a queer language practice for queer and trans Latinxs to celebrate, make sense, and practice their own racialized sexualities, both individually and collectively. I argue that because Spanglish disrupts and destabilizes normative bounds of language rules and grammar, its queer nature allows for its potential for queer of color expressions. Spanglish acts as a tangible example of the 'anticipatory illumination' that Muñoz theorizes in relation to queer futurity. Rather than think of Spanglish as linguistically lacking in either language, it is precisely within the linguistic fluidity of Spanglish that new worlds and imaginations of queerness and Latinidad exist.

For such new worlds and queer imaginations to be possible, we must consider how such words, phrases, and feelings are translated to the viewer, reader, and listener. As I will

discuss in this chapter, the flyers that DCQOC used to promote their events served far greater purposes than advertising their fundraising and community events. The flyers use intentional linguistic and visual cultural markers that speak to a queer Latinx sensibility, feeling, and expression. These cultural texts needed to be recognizable by their target audience, which were LGBTQ Latinxs in the greater Orange County community in southern California.

In analyzing DCQOC's flyers alongside interview excerpts from the members, I argue that through the politics of translation, linguistic and physical spaces are created for queer Latinxs and queer Latinx cultural expressions. A translation made from an original text to a target language is often only considered successful if the meaning is translated verbatim. For the purposes of this dissertation, I borrow from Spanish studies scholar Héctor Domínguez Ruvalcaba's discussion on translation in relation to how the concept of queerness is disseminated throughout Latin America. He writes,

Translation is a form of mediation that, as in the cases of feminist or queer discourse, deals not only with the logic that would communicate the semantics of the translated text but also with rhetoric, that untranslatable part that according to Gayatri C. Spivak is not expressed in the logic of the language but in its disruption, the poetic fissure of language where the affect is performed. It is in this rhetoricity where we can find an alterity implied in the language, as a meaningful silence that demands an affective equivalence in the target language (Spivak 2012: 181).<sup>8</sup>

Domínguez Ruvalcaba cites Spivak in making the case that within processes of linguistic translation, we must adhere to the affective parts of translation that language cannot fully express or translate. These linguistic "disruptions" that both Domínguez Ruvalcaba and Spivak discuss serve as sites of meaning-making and cultural significance that cannot be fully realized or understood through language only. In many ways, this understanding of translation can be applied to consider Spanglish a type of linguistic disruption that creates a

path for expressing different feelings, experiences, identities, and cultural phenomena that cannot be fully explained in either Spanish or English.

Focusing on the linguistic ruptures and dissonances that Spanglish initiates, and how these ruptures create new modes of thought, encourages a move that goes against the basic tenets of translation. These basic tenets are that a linguistic translation should replicate the meaning of the original text into a target language. Domínguez Ruvalcaba frames this process within the concept of loyalty when he writes,

If we expect translation to reproduce the totality of the semantics and affective uses of the original text, then we believe that translation must be loyal to the seminal language system, rather than letting the discourse travel and undertake the adventure of discovering—or creating—a new set of meaning according to the politics of translation itself.<sup>9</sup>

In this sense, the use and function of Spanglish for queer Latinx communities lets the “discourse travel” and reveals more culturally-situated forms of mediating queerness, othered sexualities, and gender identities. For instance, as I discuss more at length in Chapter 1, the use of “jotería” by some queer and trans Latinxs does not aim to find the lowest common denominator as an umbrella term. On the contrary, *jotería* does not need to be literally translated to be understood as some racialized form of queerness. In tandem with Domínguez Ruvalcaba’s use of translation, the idea is to avert ourselves from the essentialist loyalty-logic of linguistic translations.

Outside the realms of rigid, prescriptivist language standardization, language has the potential to defy narrow bounds of heteronormative inclinations and rationale. I want to build from Domínguez Ruvalcaba’s interest in translations that aim to disavow loyalty in language, for he sees such practices as rooted in de-colonial discourse:

Rigid loyalty to the original in the translated version was, in effect, the intentionality of the translation of the doctrines and precepts that constituted the colonial discourse.

What is lost in translation is untranslatable (Lavinias and Viteri 2016: 4). The politics of translation that disavows loyalty is rather concerned with the need of the discourse to be a liberating impulse from the precepts of the colonial—that is, a decolonizing translation.<sup>10</sup>

I situate Spanglish and its use in queer Latinx communities as emanating from the “liberating impulse” Domínguez Ruvalcaba sees as part of a decolonizing translation. Following this logic, Spanglish acts as a meaning-making project for queerness, queer expressions, and queer communities, and it is precisely the act of creating such expressions that also marks this as a de-colonial process. Queering language is de-colonial. Queer language practices in English and the lack of affirming language in Spanish remind us that both are not enough to hold us. Language must disrupt if we are to craft queer ways of existing in the world. The flyers below demonstrate that queering words and phrases in Spanglish functioned to attract new people and build community around the tenets of ethnicity, sexuality, and language. As I will demonstrate, the intentional use of Spanglish served to attract those who did not need a linguistic translation. In many ways, queer language marks a refusal to be translated.

After all, as I discuss in the previous chapter, language, gender, and sexuality have many parallels and linkages because of their fluid nature. Queer Studies scholar Larry LaFountain-Stokes writes about the queer politics of Spanglish and encourages readers to consider the parallels between language and gender in a Latinx context.<sup>11</sup> Exploring the intersections of language, gender, and sexuality in Latinx communities calls for a queer reading of Spanglish that pushes the bounds of sociolinguistic theory and prescriptivist language advocates. This dissertation seeks to interrogate and theorize the uses, misuses, and political significance of Spanglish to understand these intersections.

To theorize about the queer implications of Spanglish and speaking Spanglish, I want to first contextualize these implications within practice. Spanglish speakers may quickly

recognize Spanglish in speech or in a linguistic exchange. Yet, because there is no standardized grammatical rule to Spanglish, it might not be as easily distinguishable in written form. Reading Spanglish requires an in-group lens before it is recognized as code switching. Because Spanglish does not exist as an abstract construction, I want to shift the focus to its usage by reviewing visual and linguistic representations of Spanglish. In the following chapter I turn to DCQOC's flyers and promotional materials to demonstrate how queer Spanglish is visually represented, specifically through language, cultural imagery, and iconography. These visual (and) linguistic texts are distributed digitally through social media sites on the Internet in addition to being printed and posted in local community centers, coffee shops, and health clinics. The presence of these queer Spanglish texts, both digitally and in the local community, offers entryways to understand the politics of space and the affective dynamic of Spanglish. Furthermore, these visual linguistic texts function aesthetically in creating space and imagining queer futures.

The promotional materials the group used to promote their events share two main features. First, they were predominantly in Spanglish which immediately engages a bilingual, and arguably, bicultural, audience. Second, the visuals on their flyers elicited very different emotional reactions depending on the context of each event. I have chosen to examine seven of DeColores Queer OC's flyers here to understand the use of queer Spanglish in crafting cultural and affective understandings in making a queer future present. These seven flyers are from events that the organization hosted from 2012 to 2016 and were selected for their innovative language use and imagery. The following chapters will look more in depth at the use of Spanglish as a strategy in interpersonal communication and interviews with the members. The focus here will be on the promotional materials as they provide material

examples of how Spanglish allows for glimpses into a queer future, specifically within queer Latinx communities, both visually and linguistically. This chapter positions the flyers and promotional materials as visual linguistic texts that function as archives of queer Latinx histories and aesthetics.

### **Political Aesthetics and Chicax Poster Art**

The preceding analysis situates the posters used by DeColores Queer Orange County as queer Spanglish texts that create a queer Chicax aesthetic with the use of Spanglish, queer iconography, and cultural signifiers. These images demonstrate how a local grassroots organization uses their flyers to attract other queer and trans Latinxs in the community to attend workshops, conferences, socials, and drag shows. These flyers function visually and linguistically to create an aesthetic accessible to other queer Latinxs that celebrates queer culture. Part of their significance, however, lies in how these flyers also function as queer Chicax art. Positioning these flyers as art that circulate in the community, they are also part of a larger genealogy of Chicana/o art and posters that emerged during and post Chicano Movement of the 1960s.

The Chicano Movement of the 1960s forged new pathways for Chicaxs in the United States that included political mobilization focused on self-determination with a commitment to educational access and civil rights for Chicaxs. In conjunction with the growing political fervor at the time, a Chicano art movement emerged that was rooted in communal art traditions and in sharing the experiences of Chicano communities.<sup>12</sup> Many Chicax artists used their art to document the experiences of living in the barrio as well as a form of political mobilization with a nod to indigeneity, representations of the nuclear family, and a celebration of Chicano culture.



One medium of Chicano art that came out of the movement was the political poster. Understanding the mechanisms of Chicano posters and print culture parallels my discussion on DeColores Queer OC's flyers and what they provide in terms of a queer Chicana/x cultural expression. Posters in the 1960s and after were often used for political campaigns in addition to promote meetings, demonstrations, and actions. In terms of community organizing, posters served multiple functions beyond conveying a message. They were visual representations of certain Chicana/o experiences yet also provided a method of informing the community of important political issues, events, and rallies. Chicano art historian Tomás Ybarra-Frausto writes about the impact of the Chicano art movement and how the reclaiming of vernacular traditions was intended to signal the social and political urgency of the moment.<sup>13</sup>

Aesthetically, the posters as well as other forms of cultural productions, carved out what is referred to as *rasquachismo*, a Chicano sensibility rooted in working-class notions of adaptability and tastes.<sup>14</sup> The necessity for resourcefulness highlights the elaborate craftiness that is part of *rasquachismo*. For instance, as Ybarra-Frausto frames it, "Pulling through and making do are not guarantors of security, so things that are *rasquache* possess an ephemeral quality, a sense of temporality and impermanence—here today and gone tomorrow."<sup>15</sup> It is in this vein that I situate how the flyers and posters used by DeColores exhibit *rasquache* sensibilities. Because they are expedient sources of visual information, inexpensive to reproduce, and portable, these flyers are the medium to illustrate these queer Chicana/x possibilities.

**Queer Latinx Spaces: Ain't no party like a DeColores Queer OC party**

The events and spaces DCQOC created in Orange County foreground the impact and need for cultural relevance for specifically queer of color spaces in a conservative, upper-middle-class, predominantly white, community. Their events were local, grassroots spaces for *jotería* to come together to socialize, organize, love, dance, flirt, and educate themselves on the issues impacting queer and trans communities in Orange County. For instance, DCQOC saw many of their members become partners and even celebrated a few marriages from relationships born from the space. The drag shows, in particular, became spaces where many of the members dressed and performed in drag for the very first time. Aside from the joyous and celebratory nature of one's first time in drag, these spaces were also significant for creating a sense of comfort and safety in exploring gender non-conforming identities and expressions.

Because the organization was grassroots-based, their only source of funding for the majority of their existence came strictly from donations and fundraisers. The drag shows, specifically, garnered a majority of the funds used to host their annual conference, which was known as the organization's main event every year. For that reason, the group dedicated a significant amount of time, planning, and energy to the drag show to make sure they gathered enough funds for the conference. And while the drag shows were important because of the funds they raised, the spaces created simultaneously offered glimpses into alternative worlds where gender, language, and sexuality blurred to create uniquely queer Latinx spaces within the local community.

Besides some of the drag performers doing familiar Spanish-language pop songs, the theme of each show was always culturally situated as being specifically queer, Latinx, and/or related to Orange County. DCQOC did not have set rules for what the members should

perform in the show but every year they were intentional in making it an intergenerational event by including some Spanish-language pop songs for the mothers of the performers to enjoy and sing-along to. In the interviews I conducted with the members of DCQOC, many of them shared the intentionality placed in making their events for and by queer and trans Latinx communities. Julieta shared, “We have some top three and we vote on which one we like the best. That’s usually how things get decided. You know, it’s incorporating a lot of cultural themes and queer Latino themes, right?” Their events and spaces were not the same as “Latin Night” at your local gay bar, which often times white patrons will frequent in search of a “Latin lover”.<sup>16</sup> For example, Julieta shared with me the usual protocol that took place in the planning of each event:

I really enjoy how we decide...like, with every event that’s part of the agenda. Like, “Okay! We need the date, we need the location, we need a theme”—and themes is like the big thing, right? We need to have a theme to make the flyer. Before the flyer we need to get inspiration for the artwork, which is based on the theme. So, it’s like, a really big deal. We really wanna make sure it catches people’s attention, and it relates to them, and they think it’s funny. A lot of the times, they’re, like, funny. Like, so...and then it might be “so my theme idea is what’s going on right now? What’s popular right now so we can change up the theme to make it more Latino and queer.

Julieta’s quote demonstrates how in planning their events theme, queer Latinx communities were the main audience they had in mind. I include this quote to note how the flyers’ strategic use of Spanglish and other cultural markers creates literal and affective invitations to build and create community. The following discussion provides a visual and linguistic analysis of DCQOC’s event flyers to situate the possibilities and power of Spanglish, of the spaces it manifested, and ultimately, how queer and trans Latinx communities flourished and thrived in Orange County.

The flyers and posters created by DCQOC appeared all over the local community in Santa Ana, California and the greater Orange County area. The organization posted flyers in

community spaces where the queer and trans community of the OC might see them. For instance, one could often find DCQOC's flyers at local coffee shops, taquerías, health clinics, HIV-testing centers, and other cultural centers. The organization also had a steady following on social media. Their colorful and creative flyers would appear on their Facebook, Instagram, Tumblr, and Twitter accounts to circulate the events more widely. DCQOC's online presence signals the age and "digital billboard" for such events, especially amongst young queer and trans people of color.

### **Hij@s de la Dragada**

In the spring of 2012, DeColores Queer OC hosted their third annual dragraiser "Hij@s de la Dragada" at the Ibiza Nightclub in Huntington Beach, California. The flyer's vibrant magenta background hooks the viewer to focus on the image of Mexican artist Frida Kahlo who looks to have been given a drag makeover (see Figure 1). Frida dons her iconic colorful dresses and her traditional rebozo. The graphic designer's rendering of this Frida includes splashes of bright colors and prints on her clothing. Frida's face immediately grabbed my attention for the excessive amount of makeup on her face. Now, this was not the "glammed" up make-up that many commercial iterations of Frida have used with thinner eyebrows, lipstick, and the omission of facial hair. This Frida's unibrow is intact, arched, and fiercely threaded. Her eye shadow reaches from her eyes to her brow in two shades of bright blues. The wing tip eyeliner has been laid on thick. Her cheeks are covered in pink blush, while her lips are fuller in a bright red. The mustache appears more defined in this image. This image evokes the sense of a drag queen performing as Frida although the image used is an actual image of Frida that has been made over in drag makeup. The makeup and its

aesthetic also signal a distinctly drag and Chicana aesthetic, particularly with the use of the wingtip eyeliner.<sup>17</sup>

The image of drag Frida is coupled with the name of the event “Hij@s de la Dragada” in a white font that seems to mimic barrio, tagging-stylized writing. The name of the event serves as a play on a Mexican-origin dicho: hijos de la chingada. The phrase references la chingada or the violated woman, who many scholars identify as Malintzín, the indigenous woman who is believed to have been Cortés’ slave and the mythical mother of the Mexican people.<sup>18</sup> Chicana scholar Norma Alarcón writes about Malintzin’s various iterations in Mexican folklore, specifically the epithet that has been used to refer to her as la chingada. La chingada carries the violent gendered and sexualized connotations of Malintzín that is commonly used to berate women, casting them as the “bad” woman. In her interview, Julieta discusses her fondness for this particular event and flyer:

I think one of my favorite ones is “Hijos de la Dragada”—“Hij@s de la Dragada” cuz it’s playing off of hijos de la chingada. It’s very, you know, a theme within our history of La Malinche—hijo de la chingada. So, like, every drag show, there’s always something drag in it. I actually was, I gotta say, I came up with that theme. So, I’m very proud of it. Cynthia, who was in the group at the time, does a lot of our flyers. She played it off really well with the Frida in drag. Or someone who is dressing up as Frida—she had a little moustache. So, it worked perfect.

The reimagined phrase on the flyer allows for a re-working of this derogatory phrase to open up queer possibilities. The use of Spanglish demonstrates such entryways.

To begin, the word “hij@s” includes the “@” symbol which creates a more inclusive invitation of men and women who participate in the drag show. The word “dragada” queers the word “chingada” to connote the children of a drag queen, or the children of the queen who is transforms to drag (to appease the Spanish purists). La dragada in the flyer

DeColores Queer Orange County presents...

hij@s de la  
dragada  
3rd Annual Dragraiser

**April 14, 2012**

**9PM | 21 +**

**@ Ibiza Bar & Nightclub | 18528 Beach Blvd. | Huntington Beach, CA 92646**



Figure 2, Hij@s de la Dragada, flyer, 2012.

presumably refers to Frida as drag mother. Oral historian and performance artist E. Patrick Johnson writes about the concepts of “home” and “family” in black gay vernacular as a method to subvert heteronormative assumptions that exclude or leave homeless many black gay men.<sup>19</sup> The idea of a “house” holds significance for drag/vogue ball performers since, as Johnson writes, “They are places where people “make do” with leftovers from a world that has disowned and abused them.”<sup>20</sup> Within houses, there are often house mothers, and fathers, who are the elders and heads of each house. As within heteronormative constructions of family, drag houses also refer to their children as sons or daughters despite not being biologically related. In a similar sense, the flyer depicts a queer Latinx house where Frida acts as House Mother to her drag children.<sup>21</sup> By using Spanglish to queer the derogatory phrase, the group’s dragraiser flyer opens up the possibility of creating a queer Latinx drag family to house those rejected from the constraints and abuses some queer folks experience within the heteronormative family structure.

The re-claiming and re-naming of the phrase “hijos de la chingada” to “hij@s de la dragada” signals the queer potentiality of Spanglish to imagine alternative expressions of queerness and Latinidad. The group consciously re-claims the phrase and queers its meaning and language to reach a bilingually queer audience. The word “dragada” itself does not simply denote this queering of the phrase, but in context with the word “hij@s” and the drag Frida, it envisions a drag experience outside the normative realms of Latinidad, heterosexuality, and even the hegemonic gay scene (read: cis, white, middle class). The aesthetic flyer also breaks away from the super glossy and glam flyers most gay bars in southern California use to promote their weekly drag shows. The contrast from DeColores

events and other more mainstream gay spaces offers a space to consider how queer practices look in working-class people of color communities.

### **Jotalicious! Dragaciad@s Sin Verguenza**

I turn my attention to another dragraiser flyer for a show the group hosted two years later called “Jotalicious: Dragaciad@s Sin Verguenza” which was hosted at the Shark Club in Costa Mesa, California in the summer of 2014 (see Figure 2). The show was incorporated into one of the nightclubs’ weekly events called WTF Fridays, an LGBTQ night for people 18 years old and over. This would be the first of many DeColores Queer OC events that I would attend during my time working with the organization. The group’s decision to host their fundraiser with this specific night was to make the event accessible to those who were under 21 years of age.

The image of the flyer has the title of the event across the top with the event details in the center of the frame. Along the bottom of the image are four of DCQOC’s members in drag (three drag queens, and a drag king on the right). The images were all taken from previous drag shows. The background and design of the image is white with rainbows radiating from the members and a rainbow running through the title. The rainbow, often associated with gay rights movements, takes a different significance for DCQOC as their name implies that they are made up of multiple colors. The first drag queen on the left seems to be belting out a song with her head tilted back. She has long dark hair and wears an embroidered blouse. The two queens in the middle wear strapless dresses with big dark hair. The drag king on the right is dressed in a mariachi outfit and hat and has a black mustache.





decoloresqueeroc



28 likes

decoloresqueeroc Are you ready for a taste of Jotalicious?!?!?!? Join the Dragaciado@s Sin Verguenzas for the @decoloresqueeroc Drag



Figure 3, Jotalicious, flyer, 2014.

Similar to the flyer previously discussed, the name of this event demonstrates the use of Spanglish and a queering of a commonly used phrase in Spanish to create the theme for their dragraiser. The first part of the title “jotalicious” uses the re-claimed word “jota” and “joto”, which as I discuss in Chapter 1, evokes a celebratory sense of queer Latinidad. While the word is still grating for some queer and non-queer Latinxs to hear and use, it has also provided a sense of pride for others who actively reclaim the word. As Jotería scholar Michael Hames-García reminds us, *jotería* is far more nuanced than trying to match it as an equivalent to queer.<sup>22</sup> For Hames-García, the term “*jotería*” goes beyond an identity category and should provide an entry point to the context in which the word gets used. Many of the members of DCQOC proudly identified themselves as *jotxs* at the time and thought that naming the event as such would be a celebration of those identities.

Like the *Hij@s de la Dragada* flyer, this dragraiser took a phrase from pop culture and queered it in Spanglish. The phrase re-imagined on the flyer comes from the word “bootylicious” which was made popular by the R&B group Destiny’s Child thanks to their 2001 hit single by the same name. The word, which has since been entered into the Oxford English Dictionary, refers to a woman who is sexually attractive and shapely, specifically in the buttocks area.<sup>23</sup> The “-licious” part of the word signals desire, presumably through the mouth, referring to a sensorial taste, an oral delight. In this sense, “jotalicious” points to a celebration of queer Latinx desires. The sensorial dimension of “-licious” also summons ideas of oral sexual pleasure that satiate both sexual and literal appetites. The re-fashioning of “bootylicious” to “jotalicious” interweaves a queer pop culture icon (Beyoncé, and her booty) and an English-language phrase to an expression of queer Latinidad. In her interview, Julieta shared that she came up with the name while on social media and saw an ad for a

grocery list app called Jot-alicious, intended to make jotting down grocery lists more enjoyable. As with the first image (Figure 1), the phrase privileges a bilingual and queer audience who could identify with, be turned on by, or be drawn in by such a phrase. The exclamation point after “jotalicious” emphasizes the celebratory, affective tone of the word. Jotalicious! visually and linguistically commands attention and its hypervisibility is hard to avoid. As I previously mentioned, drag shows in the southern California area usually take place at established gay bars and clubs where a notable drag queen will host the show. The drag shows of these more mainstream events attract their crowds with names like “Cherry Night” (a ladies night), “Boybar” (for younger gay men), or “Club Papi” or “Club Leche” for gay Latino men. DCQOC’s events were specifically intended to attract working-class, LGBTQ Latinxs, some of whom identified as undocumented—communities familiar with both Spanish and English-language pop culture.

I am also interested in the second part of the title “Dragraciad@s Sin Verguenza” as the word “drag” queers the meaning of a commonly used Mexican phrase. The word “desgraciado/a” refers to a miserable wretch or unfortunate person.<sup>24</sup> The word will often be used as a form of insult, frequently exclaimed in your favorite telenovela right before a face slap. The word carries the connotation of someone who is disgraceful or undesirable. The group plays on the similar spelling and sound of the word “drag” to create a word that makes “miserable” more appealing by turning it into “drag”. The inclusion of the “@” also demonstrates a more inclusive use of the word, paying note to the dragraiser of two years before. The inclusion of “sin verguenza” (or shameless) adds the unapologetic energy of the group and of a drag show. Many of these phrases rely on connotation, or on the delivery and context of the message. For many who have been chastised, discriminated against, for being

queer and/or for performing in drag, the theme of the event reinforces an unapologetically queer Latinx celebration. On the group's Instagram page, the caption to this flyer reads: "Are you ready for a taste of Jotalicious?!?!?!? Join the Dragaciado@s Sin Verguenzas for the @decoloresqueeroc Drag Fundraiser this Friday at The Shark Club in Costa Mesa". The caption invites for the audience to have "a taste of Jotalicious" signaling the participation of this queer celebration.

The following three flyers I analyze are from different socials that the group hosted around Valentine's Day and Halloween holidays. Often times, the group would host parties or socials to recruit new membership but also to create spaces for queer and trans Latinxs in Orange County to socialize and build community. There are only two gay bars in Orange County and a host of others that have designated "gay nights". Most of these venues are 21+ as well as predominantly spaces frequented by white gay men. The drive from Orange County to other gayborhoods, such as Long Beach or West Hollywood, is often too far and inaccessible for folks in Orange County. The DCQOC parties were always local and usually hosted at one of the member's houses. Sometimes these socials would also function as fundraisers for the group on a donation base. DCQOC were cognizant to not deny entry to anyone who could not afford the suggested donation. The group's parties, like their dragraisers, make references to Latinx cultural icons and practices to attract a wider membership.

### **Queer Love, Desire, and Apapachos**

While the drag shows that DCQOC hosted created spaces for queer and trans Latinxs in Orange County to grow together, build community, and carve out physical and linguistic space, the same visual and linguistic strategies were used for their more explicitly social

events such as their Valentine's Day and Halloween house parties. In this section I analyze two Valentine's Day party flyers and one Halloween party flyer, to consider the ways in which DCQOC use their spaces to create sites of queer love, affection, and desire. These spaces are important in considering which public spaces are designated for such feelings, tastes, and movements to take place, outside the typical gay bar. Often times, because queer of color desires are often marked as excessive, perverse, or deviant, these parties were vital for the community in Orange County.

The next flyer was used for a Valentine's Day social the organization hosted in February 2014 (see Figure 3). The name of the event "Besos y Apapachos" (Kisses and Cuddles) evokes a parody nod to a telenovela-style title.<sup>25</sup> The flyer incorporates the use of Spanglish, images of drag queens and kings, and evokes a working-class rasquache queer aesthetic. The subtitle reads, "A pari presented by DeColores Queer Orange County" with the event information on the bottom. The two hashtags used for the event located on the bottom left of the image read "#APAPACHAME" and "#CursiQueer" in bold pink letters. The background image shows two of the group's members in drag embracing and dancing with each other. Julieta is dressed in a button-up shirt with a fedora-style hat and a fake mustache, while Mateo is dressed in a black halter dress and a red wig. Julieta gazes towards Mateo, with her hat low enough to cover her eyes. Mateo gazes toward her with his left arm raised leaning against the wall. In the background, the photographer's reflection is seen in the mirror.

The use of Spanglish on this particular flyer is not extensive but I draw attention to three significant linguistic "moments": the use of the word "pari" and the hashtags



decoloresqueeroc



♥ 14 likes

decoloresqueeroc "Besos y Apapachos" this Saturday!! Come learn about @decoloresqueeroc and have a great time! #CursiQueer #Apapachame

Figure 4, Besos y Apapachos, 2014.

“#APAPACHAME” and “#CursiQueer”. To begin the word “pari” is a Spanglish pronunciation of the English word “party”. The decision to use the word “pari” instead of “party” or “fiesta” demarcates a stylistic choice more closely aligned with Spanglish practices, and more specifically, Mexican-styled phonetics. This flyer’s use of Spanglish words offers a different connotation to the queer politics of Spanglish compared to the previous flyers I discuss. For instance, this flyer evokes a queer rasquache aesthetic. The use of the telenovela-styled title, and the look of the image (covered in hearts, different colors, and the drag queen and king), speak to a Spanish and Spanglish-speaking, working-class, and U.S. Latinx sensibility. The Spanglish spelling and pronunciation of the word “pari” signals a working-class idea of conviviality and quotidian practices. Similarly, the hashtags used on this flyer orients the audience to an affective classed and queer sensibility.

The use of hashtags on social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram provides users the ability to “tag” their posts with relevant thematic labels.<sup>26</sup> For instance, if a user posts a status about a Beyoncé concert, hashtags referencing the artist, the name of the show, songs, or the geographical location of the show might be used for a given post. Often times, certain hashtags will become popular trends on social media and even have memes created with them.<sup>27</sup> The two hashtags used for this event, I argue, evoke a queer Latinx working-class sensibility. The word “apapachar” means to be affectionate, or cuddle, not exclusively in a sexual or romantic sense, but meaning more towards smothering with affection. “Apapachar” carries a connotation of excessive affection. Even though it is a Spanish word, “apapachar” carries a queer connotation in relation to queer love—in this case, a valentine, romantic display of kisses and cuddles.

The second hashtag, “#CursiQueer” also reinforces this queer Latinx classed sensibility by pairing the words “cursi” and “queer” together. To begin, the term “cursi” tends to refer negatively to things that are tacky, tasteless, or corny. The pairing with “queer” orients the reader to consider the *pari* as a Valentine’s Day event for those who want to celebrate their *cursi* queer selves with an abundance of *besos y apapachos*. I think about the young queer Latina seeing this flyer on Instagram and resonating with the *besos y apapachos*. I think of the trans Latinx boy feeling down about not having a date on Valentine’s Day and seeing his friend’s invite to this event on Facebook. My thought is that for them, these flyers granted them a literal and metaphorical invitation to participate in a queerness that did not exist anywhere else in the local community. She might long for those *apapachos* that her mother no longer provides for her since she were rejected after she came out. He might be intrigued by this celebration of *cursiqueer* or that the image displays two queer folks in drag holding each other lovingly and perhaps, tragically. In this vein, I want to consider the possibilities of Spanglish that extend beyond the linguistic switching of codes.

For those of us whose Spanglish use comes naturally, reading words like *pari* and *cursiqueer* signal an invitation to participate in the queer desires the party celebrates: the desire to be a part of a queer community; the desire to find a romantic or sexual partner or partners; or the desire to find a safe space to live your best queer life. The flyers, purposely in Spanglish, privilege the bilingual reader so as to attract queer Latinxs and their families to attend the group’s events. Sexuality studies scholar Juana María Rodríguez writes about the non-othering of Spanish (which usually is marked with italics or quotation marks) on promotional materials of an AIDS social service agency in San Francisco as a method to reach a larger audience,



Neither the Spanish nor the English is italicized or visually marked as “different” in the text, creating a visual seamlessness as it moves from one language to another. The insistence on code switching from English to Spanish as well as from street vernacular to political theory blurs the boundaries of these discourses. Words such as “xenophobia” or “rasquachi” may not be equally accessible to all readers, yet the aim is not to create a text based on the lowest common denominator of language, but rather one that provides a diversely literate audience a point of entry to the text.<sup>28</sup>

The flyer, while mostly in English, caters to a Spanglish-speaking, queer Latinx audience with its use of culturally relevant and significant words, images, and cues. In a sense, the marginalization of a language reflects the marginalization of its speakers. In this vein, the language used in DCQOC’s flyers reflects the audience’s experience. My discussion in this chapter seeks to reiterate the queer possibilities of Spanglish. Whereas sociolinguists have situated the significance of Spanglish as the cultural and linguistic practice known as code-switching, thinking of Spanglish more queerly calls for a different approach to language practice. After all, language does more than translate or communicate meaning, but as demonstrated here, has the potential to invoke feelings, remember tastes, or express desires that cannot be fully expressed in Spanish or English.

### **No te metas con mi Cucu-y!**

In October 2012, DCQOC hosted a Halloween house party and fundraiser, calling it “No te metas con mi Cucu-y!” (see Figure 4). The flyer’s background is a hot pink color with a Día de los Muertos sugar skull on the top with spider webs in the two top corners in black. The rest of the flyer contains the name and details of the event. The name of the event references the decades-old, iconic cumbia song heard regularly at Latinx parties, “Mi Cucu” by La Sonora Dinamita (*Mi Cucu*, 1988). The Halloween party, like the Valentine’s Day house parties, were intended to draw the community to raise funds for DCQOC’s projects and annual conference. However, they served a double purpose in how they created queer

Latinx spaces in the community outside of the local LGBT Center or local gay bars—both predominantly white gay spaces. In addition to the use of Spanglish to attract the queer and trans Latinx community in Orange County, the flyers’ use of cultural markers made sure that the invitation spoke to bilingual Spanish- and Spanglish-speaking, working-class, Latinxs.

Hailed as one of La Sonora Dinamita’s most popular and iconic songs, “Mi Cucu” is a playful cumbia that uses sexual innuendo and banter between a presumably cis heterosexual couple. While the song’s lyrics serve as one long, problematic catcall between a man and a woman who is not consenting to his advances, the song is often played at Latinx weddings, parties, and dances. The “cucu” in question here stands in as a euphemism referring to a woman’s buttocks.<sup>29</sup> In the song, the male voice proclaims, “Que lindo es tu cucu, Bonito tu cucu, Redondito y suavecito” (English translation: How lovely is your cucu, How beautiful your cucu, So round and soft) signaling an aggressive sexual advance being made to a woman whose cucu he desires. The woman in the song responds with, “No te metas con mi cucu, Porque te doy una cachetada!” (English translation: Don’t get involved with my cucu, Because I will slap you!”). In a sense, the use of “No te metas con mi cucu-y” as the name of the event highlights the refusal of unwanted sexual advances in the song. However, the addition of the y to Cucu for this event contextualizes another cultural signifier, El Cucuy, or the boogeyman.<sup>30</sup>

To keep within the Halloween theme, DCQOC uses the figure of El Cucuy, of Mexican folklore, to refer to the boogeyman who hides in children’s closets or under their beds. El Cucuy, like, La Llorona, often gets used as a scare tactic for parents to discipline Dragada,” the Cucu-y flyer interweaves markers of Latinx culture—“Mi Cucu” and El Cucuy—with an intentional gesture to queerness and desire, using the line from the song “no



**NO TE METAS  
CON MI CUCU-Y!**

Halloween Party/ Fundraiser Benefiting  
DeColores Queer Orange County

Friday October 26<sup>th</sup> 2012 9pm-?  
1033 W Saint Gertrude Pl Santa Ana, CA 92707

DJ Virtigo, drinks, snacks, & a costume contest!  
Free shot with a \$5 suggested donation!

*Figure 5, No te metas con mi cucu-y*

te metas con mi cucu”—to speak to the clashing cultural nuances of queer Latinx experiences and narratives. Both the song and the folklore of El Cucuy are also about policing bodies, messages learned in these cultural narratives. And while the name of the event itself is not in Spanglish per se, the flyer was intended to draw queer and trans Latinxs in the community, regardless of their abilities to speak English, Spanish, or Spanglish. In fact, with the majority of their events, one need not be fully bilingual in Spanish to *catch* the references.

I turn my attention now to two flyers for the annual conferences that DCQOC hosted, in 2012 and 2015. Both of the following flyers incorporate patterns similar to those previous flyers discussed in this chapter, by using linguistic markers (queer Latinx language practices) and visual markers (imagery and cultural references) to attract Latinx audiences. As mentioned before, the annual conferences were the biggest events that DCQOC would host each year. The conference would be composed of several workshops in English and Spanish to address the needs of the queer Latinx community in Orange County, California. Both conference names also have a sensibility that could speak to Latinx parents, which was a goal of DCQOC to bridge chosen and of-origin families.

### **The Conferences – Jotería in Spanglish**

In the summer of 2012, DCQOC hosted their 4<sup>th</sup> annual conference in Santa Ana, California, and called it “Queer In My Own Way: Owning our Jotería in Orange County”. The main images used for promotion of the conference were pictures of different members of DCQOC being embraced by their mothers. The event was held in El Centro Cultural de Mexico, in the heart of downtown Santa Ana. The flyer used Mexican tejidos as a border around an image of one of the members, Mateo, hugging and kissing his mother’s forehead on the right, and the event details on the left side (see Figure 5). In the black and white image

with Mateo, and his mother, Esperanza, he affectionately kisses her forehead and wraps an arm around her while she looks directly into the camera. They both hold a sign that reads, “Como padres debemos apoyar a nuestros hij@s” (“As parents, we must support our children”).

The event’s name on the flyer is translated as a subtitle, reading: “Mi familia, a mi manera: Orgullosamente representando nuestra jotería en el condado de Orange.” The group’s translation gestures toward an intentional interpretation versus a literal translation, because of the larger audience the group intended to reach. This conference flyer in particular contains a majority of the information translated in both English and Spanish. For this event, the organization sought to reach a more inclusive crowd that included family members and relatives of the queer and trans community in Orange County. By including the event information, the organization pushed to reach the parents of Orange County’s Latinx queer communities. In a blurb under the event details, the flyer reads, “DeColores Queer Orange County invita a padres, amigos, y familiares de personas gay, lesbianas, bisexuales, y transgéneros a nuestra conferencia con talleres completamente en Español” (“DeColores Queer Orange County invites parents, Friends, and relatives of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people to our conference with workshops completely in Spanish”). Right under the blurb, the flyer lists two of the workshops, which will be conducted completely in Spanish. The first is titled, “Oye, Mij@, y porque se dicen jot@s?!” (“Listen, Mij@, why do you call yourselves jot@s?!”) and the second is called, “Hij@s con padres del mismo sexo y la aceptación familiar” (“Children with same-sex parents and family acceptance”).

The flyer for the Conference “Queer In My Own Way” speaks to a multilingual Latinx community with an intention of finding common ground on questions that many queer

DeColores Queer Orange County presenta,



4ª Conferencia Anual de la Comunidad  
**QUEER IN MY OWN WAY**  
 OWNING OUR JOTERIA IN ORANGE COUNTY

*Mi familia, a mi manera: Orgullosamente representando nuestra jotería en el condado de Orange*

Sabado | Agosto 4, 2012 | 9a - 4p  
 El Centro Cultural de Mexico 313 N. Birch Street, Santa Ana, CA

*Evento Comunitario Gratis!*  
 Talleres | Comida | Recursos | Vendedores | Entretenimiento

DeColores Queer Orange County invita a padres, amigos y familiares de personas gay, lesbianas, bisexuales y transgéneros a nuestra conferencia con talleres completamente en Español.

Talleres en Español.:

- "Oye, Mij@, y porque se dicen jot@s?!"
- "Hij@s con padres del mismo sexo y la aceptación familiar"

La Familia de DeColores Queer Orange County 

 Preguntas? Contacto: [DeColoresOC@gmail.com](mailto:DeColoresOC@gmail.com)  
[facebook.com/DeColoresOC](https://www.facebook.com/DeColoresOC)  
[tumblr.com/DeColoresQueerOC](https://www.tumblr.com/DeColoresQueerOC)

diseño:  design [design4comunidad@gmail.com](mailto:design4comunidad@gmail.com)

Figure 6, *Queer In My Own Way, Conference. 2012.*

and trans Latinx children might receive from their Spanish-speaking parents. Besides the powerful image and messages on these flyers, the organization used cultural and linguistic markers that spoke to an immigrant, working-class, Latinx, but more specifically Mexican community. The name and spirit of the event was a call to bridge chosen and of-origin families in culturally relevant forms (which I discuss more in-depth in Chapter 4). The conference that the group hosted in 2015 also served as a nod to the family connections but also more defiantly and unapologetically called for revolutionizing queer Latinx communities in Orange County.

The conference, called “Que Pride, Ni Que Pride! Revolutionizing Our Orgullo” served as the 6<sup>th</sup> and final day-long community conference hosted by DCQOC (see Figure 6). This event served as the last conference DCQOC hosted, because of an indefinite hiatus the group began in the summer of 2016 (discussed in the epilogue). The theme for this event was a direct critique of the mainstream LGBT celebration of Pride that often centers on “coming out” as the privileged form of liberation. The group was intent on addressing the needs of the community that were more urgent than same-sex marriage. For instance, the conference was hosted only one year after the murder of their friend and member Zoraida Reyes, and so the group made sure to have workshops for trans communities in Orange County to connect them with resources.

The flyer was created by one of the group’s members, who drew it by hand and scanned it to make it the conference’s official image. On the right-hand side of the image, which has a mostly white background, a multi-colored piñata in the familiar shape of a burro hangs from a rope, as if having been hit. One candy with the word “gay” falls out of the piñata as do the other images used to signify the conference’s theme. A high heel shoe with

6th Annual community conference

# ¡QUE PRIDE, NI QUE PRIDE!

Revolutionizing our orgullo

DeColores **Queer** Orange County

**Saturday | August 15, 2015 | 9am - 3:30pm**

6th Annual Community Conference

# ¡QUE PRIDE, NI QUE PRIDE!

REVOLUTIONIZING OUR ORGULLO

**Saturday | August 15, 2015 | 9am - 3:30pm**  
**C04: LGBT Center on Fourth**  
**305 E. 4th St., Ste. 200**  
**Santa Ana, CA 92701**

**PLEASE REGISTER!**

All folks who register before August 12th will receive a raffle ticket to be entered to win prizes!

Just go to:  
[bit.ly/DCQC2015](http://bit.ly/DCQC2015)

**FREE COMMUNITY EVENT!**

There will be:  
 -Workshops  
 -Food  
 -LGBTQ resources  
 -Queer friendly vendors  
 -Entertainment

Stay connected:  
 Facebook: [Facebook.com/DeColoresQC](https://www.facebook.com/DeColoresQC) | Instagram: [@DeColoresQueerOC](https://www.instagram.com/DeColoresQueerOC)  
 Email: [DeColoresQC@gmail.com](mailto:DeColoresQC@gmail.com)

Figure 7, Que Pride, Ni Que Pride, Conference. 2015.



The trans flag colors (pink, baby blue, and white) appears to have been what broke the piñata. The other images below the piñata are a rainbow-colored lipstick, a fist with two Lotería cards (El Nopal and La Conchita), as well as the DCQOC official logo of the sacred heart. The right side has a yellow and orange background with the event information.

The event's name refers to a common Mexican Spanish saying that translates to a playful rejection of something one does not agree with. For instance, a child asking their parent for a cookie might get the response, "Que cookie, ni que nada!" as in "Nice try! But you're not getting a cookie." That clunky translation is precisely my point in this dissertation. That feeling, that sensation, the exact sentiment cannot be translated from Spanish to English. It is a type of delivery that one might hear from an older Mexican person. The message here depends on the speaker, and how it's enunciated, the gesture, and the vocal tone to discern the "seriousness" of the playful rejection. Julieta remembers coming up with the name for this specific event:

Julieta: This year, the whole "Que Pride, Ni Que Pride" I actually brought that one up.

JSF: Yeah? Own it, girl!

Julieta: I just—it was funny because my parents say that. Not "pride" but they say, "Que descuidada!" you know? My mom always says that stuff. So, I love bringing things my mom says when she's mad.

JSF: Those are the best ones!

Making the event and its theme relatable was important for DCQOC and many of the members credit their creative names, flyers, and events as a huge reason for the presence the organization had in the community for over eight years. In an article published by *OC Weekly* to announce the conference, the journalist saw the event as a space that might shine "a light

on what OC's gay rights movement might look like and fight for if it gave its browner community members its due consideration."<sup>31</sup> The event, like the flyer, was an important moment for the members of DCQOC to call out the whiteness of the mainstream LGBT movement and to mark a space for the needs, experiences, and identities of the local queer Latinx community.

## **Conclusion**

As the flyers in this chapter demonstrate, visual and linguistic tools work in tandem to create invitations to queer Latinx spaces centered on community, desire, family, and excess; after all, there is nothing neat and orderly about a drag show. By appealing to a queer and trans, multi-lingual (Spanish, Spanglish, and English), and Latinx community, the use of Spanglish coupled with cultural visual markers speaks to the affective sense of belonging heard (and in this case, seen) within the flexible sounds of Spanglish. This chapter sees Spanglish as a strategy for negotiating different social worlds but also for crafting new imaginations.

The flyers are also important archives of a time and space where queer and trans communities made history by unapologetically carving out space, time, and making change happen. The flyers serve to archive as well as evoke a sense of memory and dignity. In addition to serving as archives of queer Chicanx and Latinx histories, the traces of these moments through the flyers remain on many of the members' bulletin boards, as bookmarks, at the bottom of one's purse, or in one's office. They are traces of queerness in the space of Santa Ana, where there are few intentionally designated queer spaces. While they serve a function to promote an event or provide information, often times because they are so

embellished aesthetically they end up finding new lives as art in people's offices, rooms, or refrigerators (as they frequently did for me during my time organizing with DCQOC).<sup>32</sup>

The flyers used by DeColores Queer Orange County may not have been legible to non-Latinxs or non-queer folks, but that may also be precisely the point. The political implication of Spanglish as a queer practice lies in its legibility to those who will be let in on the joke, the pun, or the reference. These queer expressions, both visually and linguistically, work to create and speak to a queer of color working-class sensibility. In these creations, we find the possibility for change, for a future, for liberation.

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<sup>1</sup> Many gay Latino fans have embraced the song "Todos Me Miran" as a gay anthem for its lyrics and music video highlighting different gender and racial identities. Eddy F. Alvarez, Jr. discusses the significance of the song in his article, "Finding Sequins in the Rubble: Stitching Together an Archive of Trans Latina Los Angeles," *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 3, no. 3–4 (November 1, 2016): 618–27, <https://doi.org/10.1215/23289252-3545299>.

<sup>2</sup> Alvarez, "Finding."

<sup>3</sup> Alvarez, "Finding," 620.

<sup>4</sup> The word "dragraiser" has been used in many LGBTQ activist and community-organizing spaces. A Google search yields many of the events hosted by DeColores over the years as well as many of their member's profiles.

<sup>5</sup> Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands: The New Mestiza = La Frontera*, (San Francisco: Spinster/Aunt Lute, 1987); Bonnie Urciuoli, *Exposing Prejudice: Puerto Rican Experiences of Language, Race, and Class*, (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996).

<sup>6</sup> Urciuoli, *Exposing*.

<sup>7</sup> Ana Celia Zentella, *Growing Up Bilingual*, (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1997): 80.

<sup>8</sup> Héctor Domínguez Ruvalcaba, *Translating the Queer: Body Politics and Transnational Conversations*, (London: Zed Books, 2016): 4; *Queering Translation, Translating the Queer: Theory, Practice, Activism*, eds. Brian James Baer and Klaus Kaindl (Routledge, 2017); and *Queer in Translation*, eds. B.J. Epstein and Robert Gillett (Routledge, 2017).

<sup>9</sup> Domínguez, *Translating*, 4.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Lawrence LaFountain-Stokes, "The Queer Politics of Spanglish," *Critical Moment* 9 (2005): 5.

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<sup>12</sup> Tomás Ybarra-Frausto, "The Chicano Movement/The Movement of Chicano Art," In *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, edited by Ivan Karp and Steven Lavine, 128-150 (Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991).

<sup>13</sup> Ybarra –Frausto, "The Chicano Movement," 131; and Rafael Pérez-Torres, *Mestizaje: critical uses of race in Chicano culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006).

<sup>14</sup> Tomas Ybarra-Frausto, "Rasquachismo: A Chicano Sensibility," in *Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation, 1965–1985*, ed. Richard Griswold Del Castillo, Teresa McKenna, Yvonne M. Yarbrow-Bejarano (Los Angeles: Wright Art Gallery, 1991): 133.

<sup>15</sup> Ybarra-Frausto, "Rasquachismo," 133.

<sup>16</sup> Horacio N. Roque Ramírez, "'Mira, yo soy Boricua y estoy aquí': Rafa Negrón's Pan Dulce and the queer Sonic latinaje of San Francisco," *CENTRO Journal* 19, no.1 (2007): 274-313.

<sup>17</sup> Norma Mendoza-Denton's *Homegirls: Language and Cultural Practice Among Latina Youth Gangs*, (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008).

<sup>18</sup> For more on critical readings of Malintzin, see Norma Alarcón, "Traddutora, Traditora: A Paradigmatic Figure of Chicana Feminism" *Cultural Critique*, No. 13, The Construction of Gender and Modes of Social Division (Autumn, 1989), pp. 57-87; Jorge Guaneme Pinilla "Hijos de la Chingada: El complejo de hibridismo latinoamericano" *Universitas Humanística*; Octavio Paz *The Labyrinth of Solitude: Life and Thought in Mexico* 1961.

<sup>19</sup> E. Patrick Johnson, "Mother Knows Best: Black Gay Vernacular and Transgressive Domestic Space," In *Speaking in Queer Tongues: Globalization and Gay Language*, edited by William Leap and Tom Boellstorff, (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2004): 251-278.

<sup>20</sup> E. Patrick Johnson, "Mother Knows best," 257.

<sup>21</sup> Queer Xicanx artist Lambe Culo created a screen-printed t-shirt series in 2013 called "House Mothers" where stencil faces of Chicax cultural icons appear with the words "House Mother" in old English font. The series included labor activist Dolores Huerta, Mexican actress Maria Felix, singer Chavela Vargas, Puerto Rican transgender performer Angie Xtravaganza (Mother of the House of Xtravaganza), and Mexican artist Frida Kahlo. For more of their work visit: [www.lambeculo.com](http://www.lambeculo.com).

<sup>22</sup> Michael Hames-García, "Jotería Studies, or the Political is Personal," *Aztlán: A Journal of Chicano Studies* 39:1 (2014): 139.

<sup>23</sup> [http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/us/definition/american\\_english/bootylicious](http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/us/definition/american_english/bootylicious).

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.spanishdict.com/answers/130818/what-does-desgraciado-really-mean>.

<sup>25</sup> For instance, the title sounds similar to a skit that is regularly performed on the television show *Saturday Night Live* called "Besos y Lagrimas". The skit is usually only performed when a Latina/o celebrity hosts and mocks the lack of dialogue on Telenovelas by panning into each character's face with dramatic music while they dramatically say things like "Si!" or "No!" in Spanish. Such skits have included Salma Hayek, Jennifer Lopez, Christina Aguilera, and Sofía Vergara.

<sup>26</sup> Taylor Jones, "Toward a Description of African American Vernacular English Dialect Regions Using 'Black Twitter,'" *American Speech* 90, no. 4 (November 1, 2015): 403–40, <https://doi.org/10.1215/00031283-3442117>; André Brock (2012) From the Blackhand Side: Twitter as a Cultural Conversation, *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 56:4, 529-549, DOI: 10.1080/08838151.2012.732147; Sarah Florini

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Tweets, Tweeps, and Signifyin’: Communication and Cultural Performance on “Black Twitter”, *Television & New Media* 2014, Vol. 15(3) 223–237; Sanjay Sharma “Black Twitter? Racial Hashtags, Networks and Contagion” *New Formations* no. 78 (2013): 46-64.

<sup>27</sup> Tanya Horeck, “#AskThicke: “Blurred Lines,” Rape Culture, and the Feminist Hashtag Takeover,” *Feminist Media Studies* 14, no. 6, (2014): 1105-1107; Samantha C. Thrift, “#YesAllWomen as Feminist Meme Event,” *Feminist Media Studies* 14, no. 6 (2014): 1090-1092; and James Alexander McVey, and Heather S. Woods, “Anti-racist Activism and the Transformational Principles of Hashtag Publics: From #HandsUpDontShoot to #PantsUpDontLoot,” *Present Tense*, 5, no. 3 (2016): 1-9.

<sup>28</sup> Juana M Rodríguez, *Queer Latinidad: Identity Practices, Discursive Spaces*, (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 54.

<sup>29</sup> While “cucu” refers to a buttocks, “cuca” is used to refer to a woman’s vagina in certain contexts. Puerto Rican drag queen, Cynthia Lee Fontaine, rose to fame on RuPaul’s Drag Race in 2016 with her often-referenced “cucu” being part of her stage persona. Her two YouTube shows are called “Cucu Confessions” and “Memoirs of my Cucu” (<https://mic.com/articles/172720/6-things-to-know-about-cynthia-lee-fontaine-the-14th-queen-on-ru-paul-s-drag-race#.srIrWXksV>).

<sup>30</sup> Frances R. Aparicio, *Listening to Salsa : Gender, Latin Popular Music, and Puerto Rican Cultures*, (Hanover, NH ; London: University Press of New England [for] Wesleyan University Press, 1998).

<sup>31</sup> <https://ocweekly.com/decolores-queer-oc-looks-to-revolutionize-pride-during-weekend-conference-6467208/>.

<sup>32</sup> For more on Chicano posters and art see: Tomas Ybarra-Frausto’s “Rasquachismo: A Chicano Sensibility,” in *Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation, 1965–1985*, ed. Richard Griswold Del Castillo, Teresa McKenna, Yvonne M. Yarbrow-Bejarano (Los Angeles: Wright Art Gallery, 1991; and Rafael Pérez-Torres, 2006. *Mestizaje: critical uses of race in Chicano culture*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

#### IV. Articulating Latinx Genders and Sexualities: Language, Body Codes, and the Policing of Gender

*We ask, should our translations conform to audience expectations or transform them? We dance between, always doing both, by the very act of being.*  
(A. Finn Enke, “Translation”)

*Dicen que lo que se ve no se pregunta, mijo.*  
[author’s translation: *They say that one does not question what is visible, son.*]  
(Juan Gabriel, 2002 Univisión interview)

#### **Introduction**

In the days following the death of Mexican music icon Juan Gabriel, many conversations circulated around the late singer’s sexuality. The discussions and suspicions surrounding his sexual identity followed him throughout much of his career. These questions around his sexuality are not surprising: after all, he was a Mexican man who sang songs about longing, desire, and tragic heartbreak, all while performing in colorful flamboyant ensembles. His movements, all uniquely his own, blurred strict rules of compulsory heteronormative masculinity by both US and Mexican norms. His dancing conjured effeminate gestures in the ways JuanGa (as he was commonly referred to) shimmied his shoulders and shook his hips. Following his passing in August 2016, social media feeds were filled with photos, performances, art, and interviews of the late singer. One video clip, in particular, circulated extensively of an interview he did with Fernando del Rincón on Univision in 2002. During the interview, del Rincón pointedly asks him if he is gay. The now infamous question came after decades of not articulating and non-stated “knowing” by fans of El Divo. Through very playful banter, Juan Gabriel flirted with his response to the question that until then had been chalked up to chisme, speculation, or *el que dirán*. His

response, “Dicen que lo que se ve no se pregunta, mijo” [translation: They say that one does not question what is visible, son].

Juan Gabriel’s response to del Rincón made many viewers uncomfortable. Some wanted to deny his adamant rejection of gender norms through his speech, music, dress, and performance. Others chose to erase the implied or perceived traces of queerness so as to not taint their own carefully-constructed heteronormative imaginaries of El Divo. Yet, others reveled in the debate as to whether he was, or was not, in fact, admittedly gay. I consider the spectacle and discussion upon the passing of Juan Gabriel’s queerness to set the context of how Latinxs talk (or do not talk) about sexuality, and more specifically queer sexualities. I include the public discussion surrounding Juan Gabriel’s sexuality in this chapter as an opportunity he gave us to unpack how gender and sexuality amongst queer Latinxs are marked and articulated. What fascinates me about this interview and his response is not so much whether we gained any insight into JuanGa’s sexual desires but rather the approaches in which his gender and sexual expressions are made tacit, or implied, but never explicitly named.<sup>1</sup>

The following chapter explores how genders and sexualities that exist outside the confines of heteronormativity are negotiated and articulated by queer and trans Latinxs in the context of the biological family, or family of origin. I refer to different excerpts from the participant interviews I conducted with members of DeColores Queer Orange County (DCQOC) to understand the different movements, sounds, words, and embodiments that get marked as other and how these markings affect coming out, or disclosure, within the context of families of origin.

We are socialized to gender roles at a very young age—from color preference (boys should like blue, girls should like pink) to the gendered division of toys (girls play with dolls, boys play with cars).<sup>2</sup> Embodied markers of gender are also learned at a young age. Phrases such as “Las niñas no se sientan así” [“Girls don’t sit that way”] or “Los machos no lloran” [“Boys don’t cry”] may be familiar for some Latinxs. In the two years I spent working with DCQOC, I was welcomed to be a part of their conversations on gender and sexuality, both casually in the weekly meetings and more formally in the personal interviews I conducted. Childhood memories of queerness and coming out stories also were common topics in their family support group (the focus of discussion in Chapter 5). In this chapter, I discuss the following: 1) the linguistic and embodied negotiations at play in articulating queer sexualities and 2) the politics of translation in coming out as LGBTQ amongst Latinxs.

Through personal interviews, archival analysis, and field observations, several themes emerged in relation to how the participants made sense of themselves, their connections with their families of origin. Particularly the following themes emerged: non-traditional narratives of ‘coming out’ to family, especially ‘coming out’, especially ‘coming out’ as a continual process; the struggles of ‘coming out’ in Spanish; and specific childhood memories where the participant’s gender or sexual orientation was marked in specific memories.

I frame my work within the context of queer linguistics, which is often referred to as lavender linguistics (as discussed at length in Chapter 2). Sociolinguists William Leap and Tom Boellstorff suggest that research surrounding language and sexuality does not require a definitive discourse for or by queer communities. Instead, Leap and Boellstorff call for such practices to be observed in context.<sup>3</sup> In other words, the focus should not seek to determine how a given community speaks but rather understand the different practices used (in context)



that hold social meaning for the speakers. In this vein, I incorporate the contributions of queer linguistics with the developing corpus of work in the field of queer Latinx studies and *jotería* studies whose discussions in queer theory, literature and performance, ethnography, and oral history studies have brought forth studies on the nuanced complexities of the lived realities of queer Latinx communities.<sup>4</sup> My discussion in this chapter complicates this growing body of literature by examining how queer Latinx communities interrogate the complex practices and modes of communicating queerness within the family context.

The discussion of coming out within Latinx communities has been framed within ideas of disclosure and non-disclosure of sexual non-conformity within the family of origin context. For instance, sociologist Katie Acosta discusses three tropes of disclosures among Latina families: 1) erasure of nonconformity (or erasure by control or manipulation) where the use of religion functions as a rationalizing form of rejection, or the disclosure includes not telling other family members, or they are sworn to secrecy; 2) sexual silencing (where family is complicit with pretending queer relationships are platonic; and 3) avoidance after disclosure (where subject and family are both complicit in erasure despite disclosure in an effort to maintain family bonds).<sup>5</sup> The trope of “sexual silencing” is achieved through a performed sense of normalcy if the queer person’s sexuality is never acknowledged or verbalized. It requires a carefully performed sense of respectability and negotiates queer relationships under the guise of platonic friendships. This framing follows Carlos Decena’s hallmark research on the tacit subject, where ‘coming out’ is sometimes cast as redundant speaking to the potential tension of disclosure.

Much of the scholarship concludes that families can also be sources of contention for queer individuals, and not just units of financial and emotional support.<sup>6</sup> Families of origin

can also be manipulative and controlling all in the name of protecting the heteronormative family unit. Decena's work demonstrates how family acceptance is often dictated by economic dependence where class privilege allows for nondisclosure, or disclosure is deemed irrelevant because of financial dependency on the queer person in the family. As Acosta writes, the construction and sway of La Familia can be empowering but also disempowering. Focusing on sexual disclosure or 'coming out' within Latinx families disrupts the narrative of "the closet" as a static construction, or coming out as a one-time, cataclysmic event. As queer folks, we are constantly negotiating the bounds of coming out, whether personally, romantically, or professionally. My mother, for instance, makes a point to remind me that when people ask me about my research topic I am inevitably "outing" myself as queer as well. I then must remind her that sometimes that is the point. However, I propose a reconfiguration of the concept of 'coming out' that limits the understanding of how queers live. The following discussion builds on the existing scholarship in reshaping the concept of acceptance from the need to sustaining familial bonds and explores what it looks like to practice family acceptance and open up discussions as a community.<sup>7</sup>

The complex dynamics involved in coming out offer a rich platform to observe and understand the intersections of language, gender, and sexuality in queer Latinx communities. Coming out is a process of translating and articulating yourself on your own terms; in many ways it marks how one claims a non-heteronormative existence to a presumably heteronormative audience. To understand gender and sexuality as fluid social constructs allows for a greater freedom in the expressions of alternative genders and sexualities. For many US Latinxs, negotiating and making peace with our different identities presents just one set of challenges in understanding these processes internally. The process of translating

and expressing these identities to our families, friends, and communities involves different strategies, methods, and words to do so. The problem, however, arises in having the “right” words and tools to express in a language that may have once been their first, but over time became their second language, or whose family members communicate dominantly in another language. The act of translation implies an exchange of knowledge, words, or ideas, as the root *trans* comes from Latin meaning: to carry across.<sup>8</sup> Translation is less about carrying a meaning in a linear or unidirectional movement. Translation is the carrying across in either direction: English to Spanish, Spanish to English, Spanglish. There is no first meaning that then evolved into its translation.

Within the concept of coming out, translation is the revealing that happens in disclosing parts of yourself that were assumed to either have been nonexistent before or have not been named. I propose that instead of referring to this process as “coming out”, we consider this process an articulation, much like translation, to embody the naming of one’s own identity rather than revealing some undisclosed secret about themselves. Coming out as marking a before and after period limits the ways in which gender and sexual non-conformity function in the real world. Coming out imposes a binary framing of time, as if one’s queer subjectivity was not queer, or non-existent, before coming out, or that post coming out implies some type of all-encompassing liberation. For many queer communities of color this is not always the case. A. Finn Enke theorizes translation as the negotiation of expression, and asks, “With what do we replace the parts we let go?” noting that so much is always lost in translation, regardless of the language. If we do not have the vocabulary to articulate ourselves fully and authentically, what does it mean to be queer and identify as such in Spanish, or in Spanglish? Enke reads the poetic dance of translation as follows:

From one language to another, translators of poetry must decide: what demands unwavering loyalty? The meter, the rhyme, the literal word, or the use of space on the page? Translation creates two things: first, something new; and second, the illusion that there was an original from which the translation sprang. But there is no original: the poem is a medium, a conveyance. We ask, should our translations conform to audience expectations or transform them? We dance between, always doing both, by the very act of being.<sup>9</sup>

How queer Latinxs come out to their Spanish-speaking families of origin requires courageous decisions that rely not only on the linguistic but also on the embodied translations. If the linguistic translation is determined by vocalizing their gender and sexual difference, then the embodied translation incorporates the affective and performed articulation of gender and sexuality. I am cautious not to conflate gender and sexuality in this sense. I am more interested in unpacking the ways that non-normative gender performances are aligned with sexual non-conformity for the participants of this study.

The voices of the participants in this dissertation were recorded across the span of three years during my time organizing with DCQOC, from 2014 to 2017. During my time with the organization, I got to know many of the members personally and have since become close friends with many of them. The questions that the participants were asked in the interview revolved around their own upbringing, how they expressed their queer identities to their families, and their activism work conducted with DCQOC. From there, each interview usually took off in its own direction based on the participant's responses. For this dissertation, twelve participants total were interviewed. I am using data from nine of those interviews that were conducted with members of DCQOC. The other three interviews were conducted with some of the mothers from La Familia, the parent support group and the central focus of Chapter 5. All participant names are pseudonyms to protect their identities. These excerpts are not intended to encompass a unified experience for what it means to be

queer and Latinx but rather present a complicated understanding of the different navigational strategies and processes used by this community to articulate their identities.

The focus here on childhood memories and interactions with families of origin follows from Decena's methodological approaches in his own work. For instance, Decena discusses how the consultants in his book *Tacit Subjects: Belonging and Same-Sex Desire Among Dominican Immigrant Men* (2011) recollect memories, knowledges, and codes that they learned from childhood to construct their own articulations of gender and sexuality. Through an in-depth analysis of his participants' childhood memories, Decena sees how his participants rely on discursive and embodied meanings. He states, "By analogizing gender to language, I foreground the body as a site of signification not by observing bodies in movement (e.g., through participant observation) but through an engagement with the words the informants used to describe and interpret their childhoods."<sup>10</sup> This approach moves away from positivistic methods and shifts the focus to what he refers to as "the challenge of using words (and memory) to describe and map out what the body says, and what their bodies said."<sup>11</sup> The following discussion centers the navigational strategies used by the participants in this study to make sense of their gender and sexual identities by examining memories of words and embodiments that were marked and/or policed.

#### *Linguistically negotiating queer identities*

How the participants understood and expressed their own gender and sexual identities varied from person to person. Each participant fashioned their own ways of defining their gender and sexual identities to their families (and for themselves) in ways that were relevant to the context, place, and people they encountered. The following interview excerpts are not organized chronologically, but rather based on common themes that emerged across the

interviews. The first set of excerpts demonstrate some linguistic negotiations used by participants to explain how they discussed or articulated queer gender and sexual identities to their families of origin.

I begin my discussion with an interview I conducted with Sam, a trans Latinx boi from Santa Ana, who was 25 at the time of the interview. I met Sam at a local coffee shop in Santa Ana, where he began the conversation by telling me his pronouns: “My pronouns are he, him, his. Handsome. Guapo. Or daddy. I really like Daddy, just saying...or papi.” Sam is notorious for being one of the group’s biggest comedians, often cracking one-liners during meetings that were met with laughs, enhanced by his infectious, hearty laughter. Sam explains that as a trans boi, he experienced various stages of coming out to his family; first, in expressing his desire and attraction toward women, and later, in identifying as a transgender man. In the following excerpt, Sam discusses how he never came out as a lesbian to his mother before his transition process, but rather framed his disclosure in terms of desire:

Sam: But when I first told my mom about—I never told my mom I’m a lesbian. I told her, “I love women,” at first. And so, my mom’s like, “No pues, te gustan las mujeres, eres machorra” [author’s translation: No, well, you like women. You’re a machorra]. Okay? So, I don’t know if, you have, you ever heard that term?

JSF: No, I don’t know that word.

Sam: So, the word “machorra”—people are gonna look at me like, what?!—So, the word in itself—it’s very ironic—because the way I came to know that word it came to mean, like, women who love women. But, specifically butch women—very masculine-of-center women. She still calls me that because she still has a hard time seeing me how I see myself. So, my family is probably the only people that I will still allow—they don’t call me Sam. They’ll call me Samantha, which is... people call it their “dead names.” I mean, for me it’s not part of me being dead, it’s just like that’s how they knew me, you know? ... But like when my mom told me that word, I was like, “What? What does that mean?” you know? So, she explained to me, like, “It’s women liking women.” But then a friend later on told me, “You know that that

word, it's actually like a good thing." And I was like, "What do you mean?" She told me that where her mom's from—who is also from Mexico—her mom told her that it means strong women. And I feel like when I do tell my mom—even though I do identify as trans—like, for her to understand I'll be like, "Yo soy machorra" [author's translation: I am a machorra]. But I take it as, like—I reclaim it.

From this excerpt, Sam explains how he framed his queerness in relation to desire and attraction when articulating this part of his identity to his mother. Here, the intersections of gender and sexuality involved in translating ideas of gender and sexuality to his mother offered an alternative to coming out. Sam's declaration of his love for women to his mother does not embrace a specific gender or sexual identity, but his desire is registered as queer. Conversely, Sam's mother registers the Spanish word "machorra" to mean lesbian, and more specifically, as a butch or masculine woman, which could be possible given Sam's gender presentation as a boi. Sam's gender presentation has been difficult for his mother to process, and his responses show that he finds that "machorra" offers a space for mediation between them. In a later part of the interview, he mentions that he feels that has occasional breakthroughs in terms of her understanding when his mother refers to him, in the Spanish gendered term of endearment, "mijo." For Sam, maintaining his close relationship with his mother is important, and his reconciling and reclaiming of the term "machorra" links both his and his mother's worlds to make sense of his identity as a trans man attracted to women.

Within trans communities, folks will sometimes refer to their names given at birth as their "dead names" in contrast with their chosen names, often paralleled with their gender transition process. In the example above, Sam discusses how he only allows his family to refer to him with his "dead name" as a way to negotiate his family's processing of his gender identity. Sam's narrative demonstrates that family acceptance does not always rely on such stark understandings of either acceptance or rejection. As part of a working-class, immigrant

community, familial ties are important, not just for Sam, but for many of the other participants as well. Finding a term to make those links and connections between Sam and his family demonstrates that family acceptance for communities of color must adhere to the cultural practices to truly resonate. However, Sam's story is compelling for numerous reasons—for one, it offers a critical example to think about how language and gender inform each other to create an affirming vocabulary in Spanish. Second, Sam offers a unique take on his own gender identity formation based on what he considers his mother's gender presentation to be.

Often when discussing gender politics within Latinx communities, one might think about the role men play in creating gender norms, especially in the performance and construction of masculinity. Sam's interview reveals that in his case, as did many of the other participants, it was his mother who taught him how to do masculinity. He says:

But, like, my mom, like, the way I am now has a lot to do with my mom. Like I even tell my friends, my mom wasn't super feminine. I don't remember my mom wearing a lot of makeup, or whatever. But I think a lot of my characteristics of how I am, like, that I like to connect with people, that I like to talk, come from her. I even think aspects of my masculinity are from her. So, I always—when I talk about who I am, how I identify as, like, a trans man—it's more like a lot of cisgender men identify what their masculinity from their father's side—I don't. For me, my dad, he's always provided. I guess that's probably like the only thing that I get from my dad's side of his masculinity or what not, but I feel my mom had a lot of like—she's always been like the head of the household in regards—like, she's the one that controls all the money.

For Sam, he believes his mother to be the source of his performance of masculinity as a trans man. He acknowledges his father's influence but ties it more to providing financially.

Hearing Sam describe his mother made me consider the discussion earlier in this chapter on the word "machorra." Perhaps in her own way, Sam's mother celebrates the potential strength in the word as a more butch woman. The following excerpts focus more specifically



on how participants articulated their queer sexualities more explicitly to their parents and the different factors involved in those negotiations.

When participants discussed the different ways they articulated their sexual preference to their parents, many spoke of their stories in affectionate and often humorous ways despite the stories sometimes outlining difficult memories of their youth. While these narratives all vary, my purpose here is far from attempting to find a unifying thread in how queer and trans Latinxs articulate and express themselves to their families. My discussion here also does not intend to categorize experiences by each participant's gender and sexual identities. Despite self-identifying in different ways, what groups these diverse voices and experiences is the manner in which they enact their agency in how they choose to navigate and present themselves within the context of their families of origin.

In the following excerpts, participants articulate their queer identities to their parents by having direct conversations with them. Here, we see a departure from Decena's work where gay Dominican men engage in tacit meaning-making about their sexual identity. The narratives below, from Julieta and Alberto, demonstrate how participants choose specific ways to help their families understand the process of acceptance. Meanwhile, Angelica and Rudy offer some differing experiences of disclosure and non-disclosure. In many of these cases, the participants describe how they sought to explain their sexuality to their parents in ways that might facilitate their initial understanding. Julieta, a queer cis woman from Buena Park, shares how she strategized telling her parents with a timeline to best assess the situation. Julieta, one of the main leaders in DCQOC, came out to her family at the age of 25 after she had been organizing with the group for many years. Julieta, who identifies as queer and as lesbian, chose to share her sexuality with her parents by referring to her preferences:

I kinda gave myself a deadline. I was like, “I’m gonna tell them by this Friday so they have the weekend to grieve it,” you know? They don’t have to go to work. Umm, so I got them together in their room. They were putting up cortinas. I was like, “O, se ven bien” [translation: they look good.]. I was like, “Oh, I gotta tell you guys something.” They were like, “Qué?” [translation: What?] and I was like, “Sobre mis—umm, a lo mejor han tenido sospechas de mis preferencias?” [translation: about my—umm, perhaps you have had suspicions about my preferences?] And I was like, “Yeah.” [laughs] And that was it. And I started crying. [laughs] So they knew what I was talking about. Then I started crying and like, my dad was quiet. He started saying, “Tu sabes que te queremos mucho” [translation: You know that we love you very much.]. My mom was really calm. She didn’t cry or anything. She went up to me and hugged me. She was like, “No llores. No es nada malo” [translation: Don’t cry. It’s nothing bad.]. I was like, “Nomas no quiero que se sienten mal” [translation: I just don’t want you to feel bad.]. Then like, “No! No es nada para sentirnos mal,” she’s like, “Vete a tu cuarto y descansa. Despues hablamos” [translation: No! It’s nothing for us to feel bad about. Go to your room to rest. We’ll talk later.].

Julieta describes her conversation with her parents to have been mostly accepting with both parents responding with love and affection, albeit awkwardly. However, there was an instant move by her mother to postpone the conversation until the next day, perhaps to process the news themselves, but also for Julieta to rest easy knowing they were going to still love her. Julieta, who was 29 at the time of the interview, identifies as a queer Chicana. She explains later in her interview that she realized in the moment she froze and did not want to say “lesbian” to her parents, framing it instead as her parents having “suspicions” about her “preferences.” Often times for queer and trans Latinxs, the cultural and linguistic limits make having these conversations difficult. In addition to the lack of openness around queer sexualities, Latinxs must deal with the lack of affirming language for queer identities in Spanish. Julieta notes that due to her having said “preferences” coupled with her crying, her parents understood clearly she was referring to her sexual identity. In this instance, again, we see how the linguistic and embodiment messages work together to express sexual and gender dissent for Latinx families. However, Julieta’s narrative parallels Sam’s decision to not use the term “lesbian” as that word carries more loaded connotations in Spanish.

What many of the example discussed here demonstrate is the messy linguistic terrain many queer and trans Latinxs in the US must traverse in order to articulate and translate in Spanish, English, and/or Spanglish to their families of origin and for themselves as part of larger Latinx communities. In the previous examples, for instance, Sam and his mother find common ground through the use of the word “machorra” to understand his masculine presentation and his desire for women. Julieta’s distancing from the word lesbian also speaks to the cultural associations around that term, and the finite assertion of such identity. Instead by saying “preferences” she redirects the conversation to a more subtle way to tell her parents about herself. In the following excerpt, Alberto, a gay Latino cis man, describes how he sought the help from a gay men’s magazine to tell his mother he was gay. Of all of the participants I interviewed, Alberto was the only one who discusses how he chose to articulate his queerness to his mother by writing it in the form of a letter. Alberto, who is originally from Guadalajara, Mexico, was a member of DCQOC from its early days when the group was first founded.

I don’t know if you’ll remember but there used to be a magazine called *XY*. It was a young gay man’s magazine, you know. And, they used to have a survival guide. I loved that survival guide. Someone let me borrow it. It was a gay classmate that I used to talk to here and there. And, he let me borrow it and I loved it because there was a draft letter for coming out. And I actually used that letter. I translated it in Spanish. And I made it my own. And I had that letter ready for me because, you know, when you come out as gay, umm, parents sometimes challenge you: “It’s just a phase. You can change.” And I was afraid that that was gonna be my parents’ reaction. I was afraid that was gonna be my mom’s reaction: “Oh, you know, if you go to this church camp, you’ll be fixed.” Or, I really thought that they were gonna do that, you know. So, what I did is I addressed everything in that letter. Like, I’ve already tried to change. I’ve already done this. I already went to a priest.

The magazine that Alberto refers to, *XY Magazine*—a gay men’s publication that was in circulation from the late 1990’s to the early 2000’s—was marketed as a lifestyle magazine for young gay men known for having young, white gay men on the cover.<sup>12</sup> In his interview,

Alberto recalls going to the closest Virgin Record Store (in Orange) to buy the magazine, which had a special issue that included the survival guide he mentions. Here, Alberto uses the resource of the survival guide and translates it into Spanish to share with his mother. Alberto's account shows his attempt to communicate with his mother by speaking her terms in using "religious" language (i.e. by saying he had already sought out a priest for support and by his fear of being sent to a church conversion camp). This example also speaks to the creativity in finding ways to communicate his sexuality by using borrowed resources (i.e. the magazine), that were available to him at the time.

The excerpt above also highlights the different navigational strategies used to articulate queer sexualities within Latinx familial contexts. Alberto's decision to seek a letter template shows an agentive teenager trying to make sense of this new world to his mother; however, he notes the need for translation to come out to his Spanish-speaking mother. Stories like Alberto's serve as a reminder of the lack of resources and tools for LGBTQ youth of color, particularly Latinxs, to engage in bilingual, or multilingual, conversations around sexuality. However, despite having the template as a tool, Alberto also discusses the trouble he faced with finding appropriate translations of words to include in his letter:

Yeah. It was just like a straight-up translation, you know? And it was a little difficult coming up with certain terms that wouldn't sound as demeaning. You know? Like, gay is not so demeaning, right? At least, not anymore. In Spanish, probably the equivalent of that would be joto. Which does have some negative connotation, and it still does. We have done almost the same thing as the Gay Rights Movement where we've taken the word and used it. Now we're joteando right? Now we use it loosely but some people still have a hard time. Some Latinos have a difficult time using that term.

Alberto describes the difficulties in finding language that did not sound demeaning. He was adamant about recognizing the term "joto" but not wanting to use it in his letter because of the loaded connotations (see Chapter 2 for more on the term and its reclaiming). While he

acknowledges the move by some Latinx folks to reclaim the word, he knew that word would not be received well in the letter to his mother. He ultimately ended up using the term “homosexual” as a less demeaning, (although in English, more demeaning) way of articulating himself to this mother:

I think I remember just using the term homosexual [in Spanish pronunciation]. You know, homosexual! You know? Because I couldn't find any other nice term, you know? And I think that's the thing about Spanish, is that the words can come out a lot harsher than in English. In fact, in Mexico, they use gay. That's the common term now: gay! Because using maricón, using joto, using other terms, it's demeaning. That's because that's the context that they use. I think, like, it's not really about the word. I believe this in every other setting. It's not necessarily the word, but the context. That's the most important thing. And unfortunately, the word joto, thankfully we're changing the context of it. The meaning's the same! In a way. It's still a gay person. But we're changing the context of it, right? And hopefully very soon those terms will not be as demeaning. It is hard, it is difficult. And it was difficult for me to translate that. But I did it. I managed it. I think because I was just so... frustrated, and determined, that “No. This is who I am.” Because while I was writing the letter I was questioning myself, too. I was questioning my identity. I wanted to be able to express myself either way, English or Spanish, equally. I wanted that. And I wanted my mom to know who I am whether I was writing this letter in English or Spanish, you know? I wanted the meaning to stay the same.

Alberto's comments reveal the importance of context in language usage and word choice when articulating queerness. Alberto mentions the frustration and determination in finding the right language to fully express himself in both Spanish and English. In this example, Alberto's coming out was less about referring to a closet, but rather making sure the meaning and context were appropriate to fully present himself as gay to his mother. However, in some cases, participants could not find common ground with their families of origin when trying to articulate themselves. In his interview, Alberto notes that even though “homosexual” may have been less demeaning, it was more productive to use than “joto” or “maricón” demonstrating the significance of context when using queerer language practices or lexicon.

He sees hope in the reclaiming of “joto” but speaks of its wider acceptance as not fully achieved, or not yet there, in Muñoz’s vision of queerness and futurity.

As I discuss in Chapter 2, the reclaiming of “joto” has proven to be popularized in certain activist, artist, and academic spaces, mostly among Mexican-descent and Chicana communities. Alberto’s perspective on “joto” speaks to the very real concerns and violence the word carries in more hostile contexts. Some of the members in DCQOC openly accepted the term, while in some cases, there were other members who could not bring themselves to enunciate the word. However, those who embraced it found an unapologetic resiliency in the word. For instance, Mateo discusses context on when to use “joto” or “jota”:

I use male pronouns. But I’ve always used, you know, female pronouns as well, sometimes. With friends, with respectable boundaries. Or like the word “jota”, you know? Some friends and I call each other “jota” but it’s never with malicious intent. It’s always been about us consciously using that word because, you know, that word has carried negative connotations for several years. As something that we’ve grown up sort of fearful of, I think we’ve all made the conscious decision of reclaiming that word, and spinning it around, and turning it into an empowering term that we call each other. But not in any sort of negative demeanor. It’s always been a very friendly, a very supportive, sorta like pushing you to be yourself. Words of encouragement, I guess. And I love that! That we’ve reclaimed that. It’s taken some of our parents off, you know? It’s taken them aback a little bit, because when they grew up, when they were our age, that word carried a really negative connotation! For them to see their kids using it so freely, it kinda makes them—they’re like, “Well, what are you saying? Why are you saying that? That’s not right!” And that’s when we have to educate our peers, or our parents, or family, those that are older. Like, yeah, at some point it did carry some—that sort of harm. But not anymore. We have to teach people about reclaiming language, which is something that within DeColores we use a lot.

Mateo’s comments about “respectable boundaries” signal, again, that context is important when it comes to queer language practices, especially within communities of color. Knowing who you can and cannot engage with in such practices comes from a sophisticated understanding of bodily and verbal codes. After all, as many of the participants indicated,

Latinxs are acutely aware of the violence of words like “joto” or “maricón” can have. For example, Julieta recalls her father using those terms to discipline her brother:

Wherever my dad, my dad sometimes would call my brother “niña” or “maricón” whenever he didn’t want to man up or do something at the house, right? I would get really offended.

The attempt at emasculation that Julieta describes often falls on boys, who are called girls or faggots when they are not performing acceptable forms of masculinity. When those words are not being used as slurs, parents often communicated messages about that terminology in relation to their children’s safety. For instance, Rudy recalls their mother’s comments about publicly wearing a “maricón” t-shirt:

I feel like she always wants to know where my whereabouts are. And I don’t think she questions my brothers all the time. Yeah, I think she—it’s attributed to my safety. She’s always like, “Ten cuidado cuando uses esa camiseta que dice ‘maricón!’” you know? [translation: Be careful when you wear that t-shirt that says “maricón”].

An analysis of verbal and bodily codes provides a unique perspective of how embodiment works to create social, gendered dynamics. For example, in *Tacit Subjects*, Decena writes about how his participants came into their gender identities as men through “transfers of knowledge about body codes through demonstration, explanation by analogy, imitation, and critique.”<sup>13</sup> Decena states that attention to verbal and bodily codes

demands an analysis of the political stakes in quotidian interactions and analysis of these men’s collaboration with others in producing competent interpretations of the situations they faced and their social locations.<sup>14</sup>

For Decena, such political stakes can be explored when analyzing the “communicative practices the informants deployed to engage the worlds and the others who surrounded them,”—or what he terms as *code swishing*.<sup>15</sup> He parallels code swishing with code switching by noting “the ability of speakers to mobilize and circulate specific and recognizable signs to communicate with interlocutors who possessed the requisite literacy to interact as

speakers.”<sup>16</sup> He marks the gender dissent in the “swish” of code swishing, where the humor or mariconería contributes to the performative aspect of the communicative practice. I am cautious to make simplistic parallels between Decena’s work and my argument here as that would erase the unique racial, linguistic, and class differences between Chicana and Dominican communities. However, a comparison is useful here to note how the participants in this study also construct their joto identities through “analogy, imitation, and critique” amongst their chosen and queer families.

Despite the participants of this study being activists and immersed in the local Latinx and queer politics in Orange County, many of them still faced challenges in navigating their families of origin. Each participant commented about the varying levels of acceptance their families of origin practiced. While the examples above speak to the different linguistic navigational strategies, there were also cases where despite both parties best efforts, some participants and their parents were unable to find common ground when queer sexualities and genders were expressed or disclosed. Some participants made comments of their parents being accepting of gays and lesbians but still needing to learn more on how to support trans and gender non-binary communities. For instance, Rudy, who identifies as genderqueer, speaks about the support they received from their mother when they first came out as a gay man, but later had difficulties when they shared with their mother that they identified as genderqueer. As Rudy explained,

...[someone] brought up to me that my mom still identifies me as gay. I don’t identify as a gay man. I remember I had a conversation, also with my mom, a while ago—it’s been like a year, about being queer. Not only in my sexuality, but being genderqueer. She was just like “Oh.” I honestly think that—there’s like this thought in my head that my mom might be transphobic. She supports trans people but she would never ever...she thinks she supports if I was trans. But I don’t think I believe it cause she’s always like “You’re gay!” Or like with this, like, being queer... The reason why I don’t identify as a gay man is because it’s—I feel like it’s trans exclusive. It excludes



trans people. As if you would never date a trans person—that’s why I open up being queer with my sexuality. Obviously, I want to leave that open but I don’t think my mom... I think my mom supports trans people. I think that’s true. But I don’t think that... And I don’t know, maybe it’s like—I don’t wanna say she’s like overtly transphobic. I think these are things that she’s still processing.

The distinction Rudy makes between their mother’s acceptance of them as a gay man and their reluctance to accept them as trans pinpoints the need for greater understanding of genders outside the male/female binary in Latinx communities. Rudy’s rationale for using genderqueer was anchored in their need to be more inclusive of who they might date (“As if you would never date a trans person”) but lacked the language to articulate this identity to their mother. In many cases, translations for these identities and experiences are lacking because they are still evolving. Rudy’s comments about the limitations of a gay identity, as many of the other participants mentioned, also signals a more intersectional approach to understanding identity. In social justice/activist circles, as was the case with DCQOC in Orange County, gay as an identity was often associated with the mainstream, White, cis, gay and lesbian rights movement that is known to be exclusionary of trans and gender non-binary people of color.<sup>17</sup> Acceptance, in this case, had degrees where cis gay identities might be received with a better response as opposed to those articulating gender non-binary and trans identities.

While many of the participants shared their unique experiences of sharing their gender and sexual identities with their families, one participant shared a different approach. In the next excerpt, Angelica, a queer Peruna from Buena Park, describes how not articulating her queerness in the form of a grand announcement also functioned as a way to express her sexual identity. Angelica who was born in Peru, came to the United States at a young age and shared that she felt more like a Chicana having grown up in predominantly

Mexican neighborhoods. Angelica, was also the only member who was not Mexican (besides me being half Chilean), which presented different cultural challenges in dialoguing with her mother who is Peruvian and evangelical. I include Angelica's narrative because it exists outside the parameters of implicit and explicit articulation:

Umm, well that's what's crazy. It's just that I haven't... Since I don't...like, identify as any of these things, like, I haven't felt, for me personally, the need to be like, "Hey! I'm this or I'm into this." So...but they're aware of like where I stand. And, like, my mom knows that it's like, "Okay. Whoever she meets and if she's attracted to them, like, that's all that matters." So she started to kind of understand that. But I haven't felt, like, the need for me to have this coming-out thing.

In this excerpt, Angelica explains never feeling the need to specify an identity or have a "coming-out thing" with her family. While she does identify as queer in her social and activist circles, her understanding with her mother is rooted in attraction and desire, rather than a specific marked identity. From her explanation, her mother understands that Angelica might be attracted to people other than men, but for the sake of navigating their relationship Angelica did not feel the need to label such desires. Desire would be foregrounded in many of the participant interviews I conducted, especially when they recalled their youth and childhoods. The following section outlines participants' early memories of desire and attraction.

#### *Remembering queer childhoods, desires*

When I asked participants to talk about their childhood with me, many would talk about their families, where they grew up, and would often remember a particularly memorable event that for them marked their gender or sexual difference. These memories of their childhood speak to the social, linguistic, and embodied codes the participants navigated and engaged with in their own developing identities as children and later as adults. I refer to the work of Carlos Decena here again as his close analysis of childhood memories of the men

he interviewed revealed much about how they became intelligible to themselves as men through different embodied and linguistic codes.<sup>18</sup> Decena situates his analysis by comparing gender to language; he says,

...I foreground the body as a site of signification not by observing bodies in movement (e.g. through participant observation) but through an engagement with the words the informants used to describe and interpret their childhoods.<sup>19</sup>

In taking this approach in his analysis, Decena notes that the purpose is to use words and memory to make sense of how his participants constructed their gender identity in relation to the embodied and linguistic codes they used. In a similar vein, I am interested in how the participants in this study remembered themselves as children in relation to having certain body and verbal codes marked. The following examples demonstrate how participants' memories of crushes, or attraction, even as children, informed how they navigated social expectations.

The participants who shared about their childhood crushes did so in nostalgic and innocent ways. Many of them lit up when talking about those memories. These examples show how participants became themselves, or came to know themselves as queer in their youth. For example, Julieta remembers having a crush on another girl when she was a child:

But I think as early as I was, like, maybe two or three, I remember my mom's comadre's daughter—who I still know, right?—like, I remember having, like, I remember feelings for her. Like, we'd play—she would tell me, “Oh, vamos a jugar, like, esposo y esposa.” And like—I was like, “Okay, yo soy el esposo.” And like, I would be all up, like, want to kiss her, hold her hand, and hug her when we were in private, right? So, I think I was always a little jotita, you know? Even, like, growing up, I just remember having a lot more girl crushes, than, like, having any kind of—like, being drawn to boys. So, I think secretly I just had little girl crushes, or crushes on girls. Like, reflecting back I would remember crushes that I had more when I was eleven, or twelve. And, like, in high school, too, I remember, like, two main crushes that I had on, like, girls. But I never really explored that idea in my head. Or told anybody about it...So, as early as—again, going back to memories—earliest, since I was little I knew something was different about me. I had like a little queer spirit or something.

Julieta recalls being a young child and having a crush on her mother's friend's daughter. She remembers playing "esposo y esposa" (husband and wife) and wanting to take on the role of the husband--understanding that in order to display affection, she would have to adopt the esposo (heteronormative) role. She felt affection for this other girl and remembers being affectionate toward her when they played. These girl crushes that she outlines through the rest of her adolescence depict nostalgic memories of innocent love. She mentions that she was always a "little jotita" and had a "little queer spirit" inside of her, which situates a positive and loving relationship to her queerness as a spirit guiding her throughout her youth. Something about remembering childhood crushes helps me consider queerness or coming into queerness less as a linear process but more as a process that moves with the ebbs and flows of different moments and temporalities, as discussed in Chapter 1. Julieta's memories of her girl crushes as a child challenge the binary notions the closet that one is either in or out of.

How the participants remembered their own childhoods also shed light on how race and ethnicity were constructed in relation to their sexuality. For instance, Julio, who is from Anaheim and was 26 at the time of the interview, describes the racial dimensions of his crush in a light and playful manner. In the following example, Julio talks about the racialized aspects of his first childhood crush at the age of five on a white boy in his class:

JSF: Can you say a little more about the "crush"? Or what you remember?

Julio: Umm...I don't know. Maybe cause I was watching too much *Power Rangers* and there were too many white kids on TV. [laughs] That I felt like that's what I liked.

JSF: So, he was white?

Julio: Yeah! He was a white boy. [laughs]

JSF: [laughs] Damn! You started early! [laughs]

Julio: I know! That colonialism though. Yeah, so there was this white kid in my class. I remember I liked his haircut. I think that was the biggest part of it. His bowl haircut.

JSF: Yasss! The 90's?

Julio: Yeah, '95. [laughs]

In this exchange, Julio and I, discuss his childhood crush on a white boy with a bowl haircut in his class. He credits watching *Power Rangers* and all the white kids on television for his crush. While he remembers this crush fondly, it also serves to situate how he sees his socialization as a child being informed by messages, images, and codes that situated whiteness as desirable. Julio jokingly comments that his crush was because of colonialism. I include this quote to consider how memories of crushes inform how the participants saw themselves as younger queer people. Julieta and Julio's discussions on their crushes help understand how participants' memories of their childhoods either taught or challenged social gender norms and expectations. However, crushes and attraction were not always remembered so fondly. The next example demonstrates how indirect messages about queer relationships served to navigate one participant's coming out process.

In an earlier example, I explained how Alberto used a template from a gay magazine to draft a letter to his mother about his sexuality. In his interview, Alberto explained that his family was "extremely" Catholic and that growing up they were very conservative, especially when it came to gay issues. So much so, that despite Alberto coming out to his mother and siblings, he has yet to have a vocal conversation with his father about it. Despite meeting Alberto's long-time partner and knowing they live together, according to Alberto, his father refuses to acknowledge the reality but has managed to maintain a "friendly" relationship with

him and his partner. In this next excerpt, Alberto describes how his family reacted to his befriending of a classmate who end up becoming his first boyfriend:

Right before I even graduated from high school, I befriended someone that was very flamboyant. And I met him through a friend...through a friend kind of a thing. And we started to date. And he became my first boyfriend. Like, real boyfriend. Yeah. And, it was very obvious that he was gay and my family became really alarmed. Everybody became really alarmed. And they were asking me like, “Why are you hanging out with him? People are gonna think that that’s who you are. They’re gonna associate you with someone like him. And my mom has always known that I’ve liked, like, politics and things like that. And she’s like, “Oh, you know, you will never be able to run for office in the future if you associate yourself with people like that,” you know? And I was like, “Well, first of all, how do you even know I’m gonna run for office ever,” you know? “I’m not even a U.S. citizen, okay? So, second of all, like, who cares! You know, I’m friends with everybody. What’s wrong with me being friends with someone who’s gay?!” And that’s how it kinda started. It just alarmed my family.

Alberto describes how his visibly “flamboyant” friend who later became his first boyfriend “alarmed” his family by his mere association with Alberto. In not so subtle ways, their messages about what others might say or perceive about him became the central focus. The messages he received from his family were all around his lack of possible career opportunities if he were to “associate” himself with “people like that”. These messages weighed heavily on Alberto, who after giving his mother the letter he wrote her created a list of all the famous LGBT people in history—Frida Kahlo, Alexander the Great, and Madonna to name a few—and added his name at the bottom of the list as a way to show his mother that he would still do great things in his life as a gay man. These messages about queerness speak to a reality that many of the other participants brought up about their parents as well: indirect (or overtly direct) messages about homosexuality as inappropriate or unacceptable, especially in relation to economic survival and future career opportunities.

Indirect messages about queerness or queer people arose in many different ways, but the participants who share their stories were keenly aware of when those messages were

being communicated by parents or other family members. Alberto explains that after his family saw that he was spending more time with his flamboyant friend, they began using his curfew as a way to monitor the time he spent out with friends. He says:

Alberto: And...it became so alarming to them. For instance, when I was in high school I had two really good friends who I used to always hang out with. And one of them had a car. So, after school we would always be hanging out. And they would drop me off home pretty late. I had a pretty flexible, like, curfew. And sometimes I could spend the night. And my parents were very trust—like, they trusted me a lot. And they let me come home whenever, kind of a thing. And when I started hanging out with him, with this boy, all of a sudden curfews started to come in. And my parents became more strict and started asking more questions, who I was hanging out with. Things that never happened before.

JSF: Right.

Alberto: So, that's how I became more alarmed myself. Like, "Oh shit!" Like, something's up. And I started challenging them, too. Like, "Why am I getting all these curfews all of a sudden?"

JSF: Right.

Alberto: And they never directly said, "Because you're hanging out with a homosexual!" you know?

JSF: Right. Of course.

Alberto: But it became a lot of arguments going back and forth.

In this example, Alberto highlights how he was surprised at his parents' unusual strict curfews once he started hanging around his gay friend in high school. The sudden curfew served as a way for his parents to mark the relationship (whether they thought it was just a friendship or something more) as publicly and privately inappropriate. Alberto's comment that his parents never directly said the curfews were because of his gay friend's sexuality should serve to remind that messages such as these—whether direct or not—were instrumental in how participants register ideas about intimacy, attraction, and desire.

The final section examines different ways that participants learned codes about gender expression, and movement through multiple forms of policing, whether by their families, and at times, themselves.

*Embodiment, codes, and policing*

The responses gathered from interview participants demonstrated that conversations about gender and sexuality occurred in both explicit and coded, or tacit, ways.<sup>20</sup> These tacit cues and messages that were shared and exchanged with parents often relied on knowledge both parties agreed on, even if silently. These messages came in the form of disciplinary messages about gendered appropriateness, respectability in front of adults, and concerns with *el que dirán*. These messages about their bodies, and their movements, impacted how participants learned “proper” and socially-acceptable forms of comportment, movement, and gesture.

The participants overwhelmingly had memories where they “learned” or “came to know” gendered and sexual politics, from very young ages. They may not have had the understanding of these concepts as such back then but they were informed by the ways people reacted to their movements, voices, and behaviors. So much of the rules that participants learned about their bodies had everything to do with what socially acceptable forms of respectability children were expected to perform, especially in more public or communal spaces. However, there were exceptions. For instance, Camila, a 25-year-old trans woman from Santa Ana, recalls a story where her father overlooked her femininity as a child when he and his friends were drinking:

I remember that growing up, there was this one incident when I was like, ten years old. My dad’s friends were out drinking in the garage and one of my dad’s friend was like, “Oh, why don’t you dance for us on top of the truck? We’ll throw money at you.” And my dad was there! And he allowed this to happen! I was ten! So, you see



this chubby little kid who likes to dance, who just wants a buck... who just wants a buck for the paletero. So, you know, I was just like, right there. To me it was like, “Why isn’t my dad mad when I dance in front of these people?” Like, at parties. My dad was just—I guess he was too drunk to notice. But I would always dance like really feminine and to Shakira! And move my hips. So, there were these moments where my dad kinda picked—he’d pick and choose when to let me have it for being who I was.

In her interview, Camila explains that her father was always very hard on her as a child for displaying an affinity toward “feminine” practices such as wanting to watch telenovelas with her mother. In this example, Camila recalls questioning the appropriateness of dancing for her father and his friends due to the policing of her femininity she received from her father. Camila’s understanding of her father’s picking and choosing when her femininity was appropriate also seems aligned with the fact that he was drinking and probably using his child to entertain his friends. However, Camila’s choice of words, with “letting her have it,” is an interesting take where she implies her father grants her femme presentation permission. I also want to emphasize the choice of words does not refer to any type of disciplinary action, where one might say “I let them have it”—I clarified and Camila is referring to acceptance, as in letting her have acceptance. Camila negotiates her femme presentation of appropriateness based on her father’s social cues to the degree that she was surprised when he allowed her to dance femininely like Shakira in front of his friends.

Camila’s account echoes what Decena writes of his own socialization where his father did not allow him to be affectionate in public in addition to teaching him that men did not visit the restroom together. These different examples demonstrate how Latinx youth learn specific codes without an explicit addressing of why certain practices were acceptable (dancing like Shakira in front of a group of men) and others (going to the restroom with other men) were not. These narratives, while vastly different, demonstrate how the embodiment of

gender difference manifests when addressed explicitly versus when the messages are implied through different parental commands.

Many of the gay and transfeminine participants in this study shared stories where their bodies or gestures were policed for being linked to feminine mannerisms, performances, or gestures. These narratives hit me the hardest to me throughout my interviews. Stories about parents or relatives reprimanding them for how they walked, talked, or acted were all too familiar from my own childhood. Whether it was a male relative telling you not to cry “like a vieja” or “boys don’t cross their legs”—what was deemed appropriate and acceptable was made clear to me at a very young age. The following examples demonstrate how the policing of femininity among different participants highlights the navigating queer and trans youth do in these familial contexts.

Two of the participants in particular, Rudy and Julio, have more detailed memories of being told how to comport themselves as children. While they both have had very different experiences as adults (Rudy as genderqueer and Julio as a cis queer man), both share similar stories of what it means to be raised as a young (presumably straight) boy. For example, Rudy recalls his neighbor and her husband’s comments about the way he walked:

She was like my caretaker when I was little. Well, her husband—they used to take care of me. And the way that I would walk, my butt would move from left to right. And, so, I remember one day that I was coming back from school, and they were like, “You need to not walk like that.” And they, like—her husband made fun of me. It was, like, a quick remark, but I remember that that was like, “Oh my god!” I was unaware of the way I walked.

Rudy’s memory of being called out for how they walked impacted how Rudy navigated familial and adult spaces as a child. They grew up with four brothers who were rough and often teased and beat up Rudy as a kid because Rudy was shorter than the rest of the brothers. These moments are significant as they evidently marked a specific time for Rudy,

and other participants who shared similar stories, where they were learning how to act (and not act). Julio had a similar experience in his youth:

I don't know what the expression is. I forget the expression. But anyway, so I had my wrist bent, like, in front of my mom, when I was talking to her. I was waving my hand, all very—just very loosely. [laughs] She, like, slapped it! She was like, “No le hagas así!” and then I remember—I think I was like nine or ten—and I remember thinking, “Why did she slap my hand over my wrist being very, like, flamboyant and just, like, bent and, like, doing my thing?” I think, in retrospect, I think about it and think, “Oh! Because she saw, like, femininity and was, like, wanting to stop that from maybe—not necessarily that that equates, like, you know, something that's queer. It could be and to, like, a lot of people it does. I think for me, later on I realized that was part of her trying to, like, control it, or, like, not letting it *come out as much*.  
[author's emphasis]

In Spanish, some people will refer to an feminine man as having *la mano caída* (a limp wrist). This was the expression Julio was trying to think of in his interview. He refers to waving his hand loosely which caught his mother's attention that she made him stop upon witnessing it. While during the interview, Julio made sense of her actions, as a child, these messages could be very frightening and in some cases traumatizing. The specific calling out of these feminine mannerisms for the participants spoke not only to how their bodies were being socialized but also how these movements signaled the possibility of developing queerness for the participant's families.

In addition to receiving messages, comments, and directions on how boys should act, especially in public, some of the participants also shared how gender roles and gendered expectations dictated how they moved within familial spaces. For instance, in this next excerpt from Julio, he describes that when he turned twelve years old gendered house chores became something to avoid for fear of being perceived to be queer or not man enough:

At that time, I was, like, twelve. So, there were certain progressions and certain things that my role as a boy at that age was becoming. Or stereotypically should have been. Or whatever. That I was like, “Oh, I think at this age I'm supposed to do this and I don't do it the way it's supposed to be done, then I rather them think I'm lazy then,

like...[laughs] Than have them rip me a good one just because, like, I didn't do it right. And me get all mad and all sensitive. It was a hot ass mess but, you know, that's how it went! That's how it happened. There's moments like that, where I remember that I was like, "Oh! I don't want to do that ever again because I feel like I'm gonna fuck it up. I don't wanna fuck it up because then I'm gonna be outed. Or like, I'm gonna out myself and Imma get all sensitive about it. I think my cousins knew. Like, one of my cousins lived with us and I think my mom knew, too.

In this quote, Julio talks about preferring to have his family think he was lazy rather than have to do the house chores that involved more manual labor such as cutting the grass or construction work. For Julio, acceptable forms of masculinity were tied to being able to do yard work. His concern was that he would not know how and either get frustrated with himself or risk being outed to his family. He goes on to discuss how his mother was the person who encourage the "male" duties and was reluctant to let him participate in the kitchen:

Which is why she also pushed me so much—she was the one—my dad would never, like, force me to do anything, actually. It was my mom who would say, like, "Go help him." Like, you know go help him do the lawn, clean the yard, all that kind of shit. And I wish I could've learned how to cook, actually. Because at this point I would've been so good at it. But, there were moments, also, around that time, where they would make tortillas a mano and I was all about it... And I wanted to learn! Yeah! I was like, tortillera! I wanted to be a tortillera but she wouldn't let me! There were moments like that when I would grab the masa. She'd be like, "No, déjalo. Go help your dad," and all that stuff. Even up to the point where I was, like, later in my teens, I still wanted to do more of that. But I don't think she was so comfortable with it. Even though my dad wasn't around. So, there are moments like that—it's interesting, though, because it was mostly my mom. My dad had nothing to do with—a lot of it.

Julio describes that much of the policing on the proper gender roles came from his mother who did not want him helping in the kitchen and sent him outside to help his dad. In a later part of the interview, he reflects on how after his parents' divorce these duties began to be given to him as he was indirectly being pushed to take the role of "man of the house". Julio tells his story with laughter and humor, but the story demonstrates how disciplining bodily and verbal codes were used to maintain a heteronormative standard in many Latinx families.

However, some participants shared memories as well of when they were surprised by a parent's or relative's positive reaction to their gender dissent as children. Their surprise in these two examples highlights that even children as young as five know how to read gender and acceptable behavior. In a later part of her interview, Camila discloses that while it was heavily policed as a child, she found resilience and strength in her feminine identity:

I feel like having survived my growing up queer and growing up feminine—the fact that I didn't focus on that so much when I was growing up, I think helped me because it kinda gave me that “I don't give a fuck” attitude. Like, this is who I am and there's nothing you can do about it. You can't beat it outta me. It helped me focus on other goals, like school, and working, and making money. It was always like my queerness was primary, but it was secondary to everything I was doing. Queer was—I mean, femininity—was something that lived within me and who I was. It wasn't something that hindered my ability do things. So, I think that my dad being the way he was did help me. I remember I once wrote that, “I've learned to take what life has, the hard times that life has given me, because they're nothing harder than what my dad has put on me.”

In the excerpt above, Camila discusses her how her femininity served as a tool to navigate other dimensions of her life, despite her father's negative actions and comments toward her. In this case, her gender identity functions as a navigational tool where her drive was not impeded by attacks on her femininity. Camila discusses her upbringing as a hurdle she overcame despite being read as queer and feminine by her family. By situating her femininity as living within her, Camila's narrative also points to how even though her embodiment of femininity was policed, it was also the very source of her resilience and embracing of her identity. The surprise in seeing adults in their lives let them be themselves as children came up in a few interviews, mostly because they were contrasted with more explicit memories and experiences of policing.

When adults were supportive of what might be deemed effeminate behavior, participants demonstrated sincere surprise in their recollections. The surprise came in happy

memories for these participants, where they were able to remember moments where they got to live their truth even if unaware of what it all meant as children. In a similar vein to Camila, Rudy remembers singing to Selena songs as a young child on a drive home from Mexicali with their aunt and uncle:

But I remember when I was a little kid—it's so funny because it's so cliché—that Selena was playing. So this was probably like 1995, or 1996, that I was driving with my aunt. I think my aunt was—I don't know for what reason, but I was just like, "Oh, I'm gonna go home with my aunt." So, I was in the back seat and then it was my aunt and then my uncle—and they're my oldest aunts and uncles. We were driving down a highway out in the desert on the way back from Mexicali. And the Selena song goes on and I was just like, "Bidi bidi..." [laughs] I started singing and dancing to it and getting into the groove of the song, all in the presence of my aunt and uncle. [laughs] And then that always stuck in my—they were like, "Oh! You like this song?" you know? They were so encouraging. They were not at all appalled of me liking this song. I think it was a good experience... Like, I didn't know at the time, like, "Oh, I'm gay," or anything. It was just like, "I like this song." For me, it was just one of the few times that I could actually express myself.

Rudy's words here demonstrate a useful narrative to consider what future generations of queers of color can look like if supported to be themselves, as they are, from a young age. I include these last two examples to consider how hope operates in these memories of queer childhoods. They offered possibilities of what life could look like without the fear and violence rooted in homophobia and transphobia. Whether it was Rudy's age (the innocence of dancing as a child) or the universal love for Selena amongst Latinx communities, Rudy's in-car performance of "Bidi Bidi Bom Bom" demonstrates glimpses of what a liberated queer body can feel like or be imagined as in their recollection of it.

## **Conclusion**

The narratives discussed here demonstrate how queer Latinxs must forge their own way of disclosing (or not) their sexualities by articulating gender differences and queer sexualities. Participants worked through how to navigate the notion of potential familial

rejection or disownment. These responses situate the disclosure of one's sexuality as operating within the realm of potential rejection but also with an intention of retaining familial bonds. I want to be conscious of the fact that for many, disclosure is not an option, or as one participant mentioned, even necessary. Keeping a level of "normalcy" could be necessary for emotional and financial support. Furthermore, I think we must consider redefining coming out, or disclosure, among communities of color. These narratives challenge ideas of the "closet" as a static binary construction where one is either in or out. For queer Latinxs, the negotiation becomes complicated due to the lack of affirming or empowering language regarding queerness and sexuality in Spanish or Spanglish. Coming out does not always equate liberation for some folks; however, thinking about this process as coming into one's queerness opens up how queer genders and sexualities are expressed.

Queer Latinxs are not always concerned with disclosing and navigating their social worlds purely on expressing their gender and sexual identities. We do not hide in the closet. Some can turn it off and on. Some cannot. Some try. Some do not care to. Sometimes we forget. The threat of violence is more pressing for those who do not fit within or near the parameters of normative genders. Some have the privilege of not thinking about it. We don't live our daily lives in the closet. We may police our bodies, our voices, or appearances. Or not. The movements of queer and trans people of color will always make others uncomfortable. Even if we are not moving or speaking. Movements do not mark us inherently. But our movements have social meanings and we are constantly signifying and being read. Bodies hold meaning and are signified differently. These movements can also be used to navigate or negotiate difference: in the family, home, relatives, at work, with peers, with the bartender, with the barber. These movements allow for us to hold each other

accountable, lovingly, to deconstruct how queerness and non-conforming sexualities are lived and experienced within Latinx communities.

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<sup>1</sup> Carlos Decena's groundbreaking work in *Tacit Subjects*, on how gay immigrant Dominican men navigate their social worlds refers to sexuality that is implicated as "tacit subjects." Broadly speaking, Decena situates the tacit as, "what binds people to one another and what makes networks, solidarities, and resource sharing possible and sustainable are forms of connection that cannot be fully articulated but can be shared, intuited, and known" (2-3). For more, see *Tacit Subjects: Belonging and Same-Sex Desire Among Dominican Immigrant Men*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

<sup>2</sup> For more on gender socialization, see: Frieze IH, Parsons JE, Johnson PB, Ruble DN, Zellman GL, *Women and sex roles: A social psychological perspective*, (New York: W. W. Norton, 1978); M. Raffaelli, and L.L. Ontai, *Sex Roles* (2004) 50: 287, <https://doi.org/10.1023/B:SERS.0000018886.58945.06>; and Becky Francis, "Gender, Toys and Learning." *Oxford Review of Education* 36, no. 3 (2010): 325-44. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03054981003732278>.

<sup>3</sup> William Leap and Tom Boellstorff, eds., *Speaking in Queer Tongues: Globalization and Gay Language* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004).

<sup>4</sup> Lionel Cantú, Nancy A. Naples, and Salvador Vidal-Ortiz, *The Sexuality of Migration: Border Crossings and Mexican Immigrant Men*, (New York: New York University Press, 2009); Larry La Fountain-Stokes, *Queer Ricans: Cultures and Sexualities in the Diaspora*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009); Ricky T. Rodríguez, *Next of Kin: The Family in Chicano/a Cultural Politics*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009); Decena, *Tacit*; and Horacio Roque Ramírez, "Sharing Queer Authorities: Collaborating for Transgender Latina and Gay Latino Historical Meanings," In *Bodies of Evidence: The Practice of Queer Oral History*, edited by Nan A. Boyd and Horacio N. Roque Ramirez, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2012).

<sup>5</sup> Katie L. Acosta, "How could you do this to me?": How Lesbian, Bisexual, and Queer Latinas Negotiate Sexual Identity with Their Families. *Black Women, Gender, and Families* 4:1 (2010): 63-85; and Katie L. Acosta, *Amigas Y Amantes: Sexually Nonconforming Latinas Negotiate Family*. Families in Focus. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2013.

<sup>6</sup> Cantú, et al., *Sexuality of Migration*; Decena *Tacit Subjects*; Acosta, *Amigas y Amantes*.

<sup>7</sup> See for instance, Acosta, K. L. (2013). *Amigas y amantes: Sexually nonconforming Latinas negotiate family*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/sf/sou044>; Alarcón, N., Castillo, A., & Moraga, C. (Eds.). (1993). *The sexuality of Latinas*. Berkeley, CA: Third Woman Press; Bowleg, L. (2008). When Black + lesbian + woman ≠ Black lesbian woman: The methodological challenges of qualitative and quantitative intersectionality research. *Sex Roles*, 59, 312-325. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-008-9400-z>; Chávez-Leyva, Y. (1998). Listening to the silences in Latina/Chicana lesbian history. In C. Trujillo (Ed.), *Living Chicana theory* (pp. 429-434). Berkeley, CA: Third Woman Press; Duggan, L. (2002). The new homonormativity: The sexual politics of neoliberalism. In R. Castronovo & D. D. Nelson (Eds.), *Materializing democracy: Toward a revitalized cultural politics* (pp. 175-194). Durham, NC: Duke University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822383901-007>; Muñoz, L. (2010). Brown, queer, and gendered: Queering the Latina/o "street-scapes" in Los Angeles. In C. J. Nash & K. Brown (Eds.), *Queer methods and methodologies: Intersecting queer theories and social science research* (pp. 50-58). Burlington, VT: Ashgate. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315603223>

<sup>8</sup> A. Finn Enke, "Translation," *Transgender Studies Quarterly* 1, no. 1-2 (2014): 241-244.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. 242.



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<sup>10</sup> Decena, *Tacit*, 113.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* 113.

<sup>12</sup> For more on gay media and publications, see Katherine Sender, "Sex Sells: Sex, Taste, and Class in Commercial Gay and Lesbian Media." *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 9, no. 3 (2003): 331-365; Michael Hitchcock, "True Art Sells Itself: *XY Magazine* and the Gay Press in Digital-Age America." *The Historian* 79, no. 2 (2017): 80-99.

<sup>13</sup> Decena, *Tacit*, 114.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* 142.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* 142.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* 142.

<sup>17</sup> For more studies focuses on racism within the gay community, see: Denton Callander, Christy E. Newman, and Martin Holt, "Is Sexual Racism Really Racism? Distinguishing Attitudes Toward Sexual Racism and Generic Racism Among Gay and Bisexual Men," *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 44, no. 7 (October 1, 2015): 1991–2000, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-015-0487-3>; Sulaimon Giwa PhD Candidate DipPE BA MSW & Cameron Greensmith PhD Student BA MA (2012) Race Relations and Racism in the LGBTQ Community of Toronto: Perceptions of Gay and Queer Social Service Providers of Color, *Journal of Homosexuality*, 59:2, 149-185, DOI: [10.1080/00918369.2012.648877](https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2012.648877); Ibañez, Gladys E., Barbara Van Oss Marin, Stephen A. Flores, Gregorio Millett, and Rafael M. Diaz. "General and Gay-Related Racism Experienced by Latino Gay Men." *Journal of Latina/o Psychology* 1, no. S (2012): 66–77. <https://doi.org/10.1037/2168-1678.1.S.66>.

<sup>18</sup> Decena, 113.

<sup>19</sup> Decena, 113.

<sup>20</sup> Decena, *Tacit*.

## V. “Mijito, que es ‘binary’?”: Acceptance, Activism, and Accompliceship in Immigrant Families

The first half of the title of this chapter (“Mijito, que es ‘binary’?”) comes from an actual text message I received from my mother one day while she found herself in a social media discussion surrounding gender. She saw a discussion unfold on Facebook about Lalo Alcaraz’s comic strip that had been published that week (see Chapter 1 for a more in-depth discussion on the comic strip). Latinx Twitter went into a frenzy debating whether or not the comic strip was making fun of gender non-binary folks who identified with the term “Latinx”. Now, my mom, who is very Facebook savvy, wanted to engage in the dialogue that was happening online and was asking me to help her break down “gender binary” and “transgender” for her friends on social media. I replied with, “Binary means having two sides or being composed of two things. So when someone says they identify as gender non-binary it means they don’t identify with the notion that gender is only female or male.”

This interaction provides a fitting entryway to this chapter because it situates how immigrant families navigate queer identities and genders, as well as situates my personal entryway to this work, in navigating my own path regarding family acceptance. This chapter will demonstrate how family acceptance and parent activism inform each other within this community to open up dialogues about queerness and queer sexualities within Latinx communities and families.

I knew that my interest in researching and writing the experiences of queer Latinxs was obviously personal; however, through the research process, and definitely the writing stage, the work revealed the different emotional and intellectual investments I had consciously and unconsciously made. While my parents were mostly supportive when I initially shared my queerness with them, it was a journey that has had many ups and downs

with my relatives. Specifically, tensions intensifying with my evangelical Republican tías when they felt it appropriate to cite Bible verses to me on Facebook for everyone to see their public shaming of my sexuality. Naturally, at the time I was very upset and hurt. Shame is a heavy weight for queer Latinx boys. But over time, I felt I could handle hearing the stories of queer Latinxs, and how language is used to navigate family contexts of different kinds. My thought at the time was that there had to be other ways of “doing” queer and Latinx.

Exploring other ways of “doing” queer and Latinx meant looking for different narratives and experiences that complicated how we understand Latinx family dynamics. Focusing on what happened after queer sexualities were disclosed meant having to understand how language, emotion, and space were vital components for the communities to dialogue about sexualities.

I was intentional about not wanting to write about “coming out” narratives when I started this project. Something about “coming out” felt too tied to binary thinking. The narratives I had been used to reading were too white, too mainstream, too centered on heteronormative (and homonormative) experiences. As other chapters in my dissertation demonstrate, there are many linguistic and cultural strategies that queer Latinx language use to reshape how we think about doing queerness, about doing family, and about doing activism in Latinx communities. For instance, in Chapter 2 I theorize the use of the “x” in Latinx as a queer language practice that enables multiple articulations of queerness that do not rely on the gendered rules of Spanish. I highlight the movement of the X to craft innovative, inclusive, and affirming words for gender non-binary and trans communities. In Chapter 3, I discuss how the fluidity of Spanglish parallels queer experiences and feelings, enabling its use as a tool for articulating queer Latinx identities. However, when it came to

the matter of Latinx families, I soon realized that the translations I was interested in were not just linguistic but also about how the bonds created in this community were established and maintained through the activism that took place in Santa Ana, California.

The initial premise for this work was that Latinx families did not have the vocabulary to talk about queerness, queer sexualities, and gender non-conformity in affirming and supportive ways. The long list of pejorative and derogatory words we heard growing up about queer communities are all too familiar.<sup>1</sup> All preconceived notions about how Latinx families interacted with each other when it came to discussing sexuality had to be put aside to listen to the participants' narratives, experiences, and voices throughout my time with the organization. I learned extensively about language meant, how bonds were maintained, and the many different ways queer folks navigate these important social spaces from the queer Latinx community, and their parents, in Santa Ana, California. This chapter identifies and maps out the processes within which the parents of La Familia interpreted and processed their emotional realities tied to their children's articulating of queerness in order to envision a shared queer future with their families, both chosen and of-origin.

My goal for this chapter is to unpack how these monthly pláticas on queerness that take place within La Familia provide a space where parents dialogue about queerness in ways that extend beyond "coming out" narratives and family acceptance. The major themes that emerged from the interview data focused on the parents' own coming out process (as parents of queer children), support for future generations of queer children, recognizing queer desire, and the significance of shared emotional spaces. I argue that these queer pláticas function as discursive and embodied bonds to engage in safe and intentional discussions surrounding queer sexualities, enacting a queer temporality.

## **El sitio, La Familia LGBTQ+**

The space created by La Familia has become a transformative site for Latinx families to think and feel their way through their children's sexualities. The monthly meetings function as sites where families establish bonds and kindships with other parents and families to process how to better support their queer and trans children, together. In the following chapter, I analyze participant interviews with the parents of La Familia and the members of DeColores Queer Orange County (DCQOC) and discuss my observations as a member and participant of these spaces as well. Often times when we think of activism, we might think of youth and/or labor movements, and political action, advocacy, or mobilization as occurring in the streets. Similarly, scholarship on immigrant families tend to be centered around discussions of migration and labor.<sup>2</sup> My work intervenes into those discussions by centering the activism of immigrant families, particularly mothers, who organize around queer and trans rights in Orange County.

Now, many of the members recall the origins of La Familia, noting that there was a strong desire from the members to include their parents in their community organizing. One of DeColores' earliest mission statements included the line: "The revolution begins at home." It is in this vein that the members began to organize with their parents to bridge their chosen and of-origin families. A few of the core members' mothers began to meet monthly and eight years later the group remains active despite DeColores' indefinite hiatus in 2016. As many of the parents will explain, La Familia is a space for parents, relatives, or friends of LGBTQ folks to share space and dialogue about LGBTQ Latinx issues. In their informational material, La Familia advertises itself as a support and education group for people with LGBTQ relatives.

La Familia's meetings follow an informal format each month. Each meeting begins with introductions by everyone in attendance. The parents who attend regularly often make sure to mention that they are there because of their children being queer, to the point that a common introduction would sound like, "Hola! Soy Esperanza y mi hijo Esteban es gay" ("Hello! My name is Esperanza and my son Esteban is gay."). The group always makes sure to do a special welcome for any new parents or members who attend. If they feel comfortable sharing, they begin with hearing their stories, other times the new parents will just sit quietly and not participate. La Familia's meetings, however, are lively, even emotional, convivial spaces. The group sits in a circular arrangement where everyone faces each other. A table in the back is usually covered completely with the dishes each parent brings as part of the potluck style the meetings are conducted in.

The parents meet every month at the LGBT Center OC, located in Santa Ana, California, off the I-5 freeway's 17th Street exit. While much of what is now considered Downtown Santa Ana has experienced the impact of gentrification, the Center is located in a predominantly working-class immigrant Latinx community. The large rainbow flag waving near the entrance of the center marks the queer space in the neighborhood which is integrative with the taco trucks, lavanderías, and Money Order businesses surrounding the Center. Often times while attending meetings, the members and I would buy treats from the elotero who would pass by during meeting times. And when the elotero was not around, one could always count on the parents to show up to the meeting with all types of Tupperware and dishes to share at the meeting.

The arrangement is conducive to create more intimate and vulnerable space where parents socialize, bond, and get to know each other. It's not a stuffy meeting with an agenda.

The mothers share stories about their personal lives, about food, and whatever pendejada El Trumpudo has said that week. The transformational work that I have witnessed there has been in the ways the mothers (and some fathers) encourage vulnerability, questions, and offer their own consejos to new parents starting their own coming out process as parents of queer and trans children. The mothers create a space that affirms emotions and other parents' challenges in learning how to accept and practice acceptance with their children. They model family acceptance by reinforcing the necessity for open communication.

These mothers are about practice. The mothers are also attentive to the different needs sought out by the parents and children who come to that space. They offer to go to your parents' house or invite them over to their own homes for dinner or cafecito. They offer to communicate through phone, email, and even Skype. Families who attend La Familia are creating more open ways to practice queerness within public and private spaces. The emotional labor that happens at La Familia deviates from white-oriented, gay and lesbian support groups, such as Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (otherwise known as PFLAG), which are often English-only and well-funded spaces. The La Familia group speaks to the cultural and affective nuances from their perspective as working class, immigrant, Latinx communities. A key factor in this space is that the meetings are conducted almost exclusively in Spanish, and this is one of very few queer spaces where Spanish-speaking queer folks and their families can come together.

Often times, the literature on Spanish-speaking queer spaces in the U.S. tends to focus on gay Latino bars and/or HIV and AIDS health clinics.<sup>3</sup> While these are equally important sites to consider how language, specifically Spanish, operates within queer contexts, the

discussion on La Familia re-orient the focus to the everyday manifestations of queer within familial interactions.

The emphasis on the significance of Spanish here highlights the significance of language in meaning-making, particularly around issues of gender and sexuality. While many of the parents code-switch to Spanglish during the meetings, many of them are fluent in English as their jobs require them.

The community-building that happens at La Familia demonstrates an example of how to navigate and negotiate the bridging of chosen families and families of origin. For the purpose of this study, I refer to chosen families (often referred to as queer families) as kinships based on ties, relationships, and connections that are chosen rather than determined by some essentialist or biological factor.<sup>4</sup> In contrast, I consider families of origin to be familial kinships significant in a person's upbringing. I purposefully am not referring to these ties as biological families to push against biological determinism as constitutive of a family unit. I prefer families of origin to signal one's upbringing (or many upbringings) with family members that includes adoptive families, foster families, or families where a relative besides the birth parent raises the child.<sup>5</sup>

The concept of la familia and queer sexualities within Chicana Studies has been discussed and theorized within the need of re-imagining heteronormative constructions of biological and chosen families.<sup>6</sup> The links between queerness and la familia within Chicana Studies have been framed within different types of kinship and familial bonds that sustain queer Latinx communities. For instance, Cherríe Moraga's imagining of Queer Aztlán called for a re-configuring of the concept of the biological family. This framework positioned Chicana queers to craft their chosen families for survival as well as to create a sense of



belonging and empowerment. Richard T. Rodriguez furthered this discussion in his book *Next of Kin: The Family in Chicana/o Cultural Politics* (2009), by complicating the possible tensions of chosen families and expands the idea of queer Chicanxs negotiating both biological and chosen families. Rodríguez cautions that many public queer spaces such as the gay bar or community organizations can reinforce inequality if they do not attend to the different needs of queer women, and I would add, transgender or gender non-conforming communities. More recently, scholars like Carlos Decena, have begun to explore how immigrant Latinx families discuss, or do not discuss, queer sexualities through tacit, or implied, practices.<sup>7</sup> Decena writes about how discussions around same-sex desire amongst gay Dominican immigrant men and their families were undertaken tacitly through embodied codes and communication.<sup>8</sup> Building on these scholars' work on Latinx families, I want to consider how Latinx folks enact queer temporalities when queer sexualities are explicitly, and intentionally, disclosed, discussed, and affirmed.

In discussing Latinx families here, I do not imply that the work happening at La Familia is the only avenue to a more sustainable future. Nor do I mean to imply that these family dynamics are static or essentialist parts of Latinx families. Building community and chosen families are not exclusive to queer communities if we think of different family arrangements, such as single-parent households, grandparents and parents co-parenting, or extended families living together or in close proximity. For instance, godparents, or padrinas/os, are often important figures in Latinx communities that may similarly parallel ideas of chosen family, not based on bloodlines. The madrinazgo/padrinazgo in Latinx families is useful to consider ideas of chosen families that may not necessarily be tied to

sexuality.<sup>9</sup> In a similar vein, other queer of color scholars have written about alternative ideas of family, especially amongst queer and trans black communities.<sup>10</sup>

Oral historian and performance studies scholar E. Patrick Johnson writes about the significance of vernacular and cultural practices that establish familial bonds, emotional networks, and support for queer and trans black communities, specifically in the realm of the ball scene.<sup>11</sup> Johnson's work beautifully analyzes and contextualizes ideas of family, home, and community in his work. The use of "family" as in "he's family" often functions as a linguistic strategy to mark one's queerness, whether perceived or known. For instance, in an interview with one of his participants, Johnson asks about the term "family" as signaling someone who is gay, "Rob" replies with,

Because they're included whether they want to be or not. It's like black people who try to act white. No matter how much they try to get away from who they are they still black. And most black folk will still claim them even if they don't claim their blackness. Black is black like gay is gay. And family is family. We just have to love all of our disillusioned brothers and sisters.<sup>12</sup>

While Johnson is weary of these somewhat essentialist understandings of identity, he does call this use of family "a more enumerative practice than that among heterosexual black families in that homosexuality often places an individual outside the bound of "blackness," "home" and "family."<sup>13</sup> This type of inclusive maneuver is what I am interested in with the communities at La Familia. Inclusion through emotional bonds and care become an important aspect that revolve around negotiating emotional currents in the space, brought forth through a recognition of queerness or queer desires amongst their children.

### **Queer time and Latinx futurity**

I continue my discussion on queer futurity from Chapter 2 to start thinking about the queer possibilities of familial bonds and in emotion, in addition to the queer futures

envisioned in Spanglish. I argue that the space created by the community of La Familia offers a time and place to make room for feeling, emotions, and the often-complicated process of sharing one's queerness with families of origin enacting a queer temporality where through the processing of such feelings enables an envisioning of queer futurity.

Queer theorists who write about time have turned to a more temporal orientation in their work developing the concept of queer time, or queer temporalities, in contrast to what we may consider 'straight time'.<sup>14</sup> Queer theorist Lee Edelman is considered one of the more influential texts in regard to queer time. Edelman writes about queer time as necessary to challenge the logic of 'reproductive futurism,' which centers the figure of the Child.<sup>15</sup> His argument calls for a disavowal of the future, as he believes that, "queerness names the side of those not 'fighting for the children', the side outside the consensus by which all politics confirms the absolute value of reproductive futurism."<sup>16</sup> José Esteban Muñoz builds off Edelman's work but critiques his complete disavowal of the future.

Muñoz's insightful contributions to exploring queer time comes from his work in *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (2009) where he situates queerness as "not yet here."<sup>17</sup> Muñoz, follows Edelman's stance on the dominance of reproductive futurism, however critiques its antisocial, antirelational political proposition.<sup>18</sup> Instead, Muñoz encourages a utopian re-envisioning of the future, rather than its complete disavowal. Through close readings of literature, art, and performance, Muñoz calls for, "an ordering of life that is not dictated by the spatial/temporal coordinates of straight time," but rather poses the possibilities found in queer temporalities and queer futurity. His work also critiques Edelman's idea of a universal queer subject, whereas Muñoz contends that "imagining a queer subject who is abstracted from the sensuous intersectionalities that mark our

experience is an ineffectual way out.”<sup>19</sup> It is in this vein of Muñoz’s work that I situate my discussion on queer temporalities created within the space of La Familia.

Other scholarly contributions to the growth of queer time scholarship have echoed Muñoz’s work about the need for an intersectional approach to queer temporalities. For instance, Jasbir Puar situates queer time as “impelled by an anticipatory temporality, a modality that seeks to catch a small hold of many futures, to invite futurity even as it refuses to script it”.<sup>20</sup> Puar suggests that “queer times require even queerer modalities of thought, analysis, creativity, and expression,” orienting queer time to considering the different ways queer temporalities exist and are enacted.<sup>21</sup> Puar’s work builds off what Muñoz proposes as a need for an intersectional perspective when thinking about queer time. Queerness manifests in multiple ways, for multiple identities, therefore creating many futures. However, a majority of the work has focused almost exclusively on analyses of literature, art, and performance to consider, envision, and debate queer temporalities.

More recently, scholars writing about queer time have begun to respond to the need for considering what we can know by studying time in relation to communities and lived experiences.<sup>22</sup> For example, Geographer Natalie Oswin explores how Singapore’s move toward global city status is developed through the city-state’s heteronormative ideas of reproductive futurity.<sup>23</sup> She notes that queer bodies should not merely be met with inclusion into ideas of development, instead she sees a queering of time as vital, “to argue for the need to interrogate, denaturalize, and challenge not just the homosexual-heterosexual binary, but also the family norm. For this norm plays a constitutive role in rendering many lives precarious.”<sup>24</sup> Her work follows Edelman, Puar, and Muñoz in calling for an expansion of queer time in addition to the politics of pragmatism, often associated with the move toward

legalizing same-sex marriage.<sup>25</sup> My work in this dissertation, and more specifically in this chapter, takes this call to move into discussions around temporality as they are experienced in everyday life, as it pertains to notions of queerness within Latinx families and communities.

If we consider ‘straight time’ to be the social order of heteronormativity, scholars of queer time remind us that we must start thinking queerly of time, making room for the intersections of those bodies and communities that fall outside of straight time, whose experiences are marked by their gender, race, class, sexuality, ability, and legal statuses. Queer futures are necessary for imagining another way of being in the world, and more importantly, imagining whole new worlds altogether. As Muñoz so cogently writes:

The present is not enough. It is impoverished and toxic for queers and other people who do not feel the privilege of majoritarian belonging, normative tastes, and “rational” expectations...Let me be clear that the idea is not to simply turn away from the present. One cannot afford such a maneuver, and if one thinks one can, one has resisted the present in favor of folly. The present must be known in relation to the alternative temporal and spatial maps provided by a perception of past and future affective worlds.<sup>26</sup>

A queer reading of time must take the present into account because queer futures are constructed through the “alternative temporal and spatial maps” of the here and now, and the then and there.<sup>27</sup> The alternative temporal and spatial maps that manifest within the La Familia space and community are useful to unpack the multiple ways Latinx families navigate the silences, whispers, tensions, and shame wrapped in the process of expressing queer and gender non-binary identities. The key point from Muñoz’s work is that he enjoins us to consider about how we arrive to greater openness in the world, to envision queer futures and possibilities.

To queer time, or to enter a queer temporality, we must consider what it means to interrogate the idea of a straight time. We must begin to unpack and untangle the arbitrariness of how straight time orders our social world. Muñoz situates the anticipatory nature of queer time as a means to how we achieve a multiple futurity, with many possibilities;

Queerness's time is a stepping out of the linearity of straight time. Straight time is a self-naturalizing temporality. Straight time's "presentness" needs to be phenomenologically questioned, and this is the fundamental value of a queer utopian hermeneutics. Queerness's ecstatic and horizontal temporality is a path and a movement to a greater openness to the world.<sup>28</sup>

My intention here is to consider the "ecstatic and horizontal temporality" of queerness as it manifests in the affective worlds of the parents and families within La Familia. The affective worlds that help construct this queer Latinx temporality are demonstrated within the intentional making of space in La Familia where emotion is not only expected, but felt and processed, collectively.

These queer *pláticas* bridge queer and chosen familias, for both children and parents, which complicates traditional notions of heteronormative Latinx family structures. I explore how these parents navigate their own coming out process as parents of queer children, as well as how they craft alternative forms of queer familia through affective parenting and dialogue. Situating queer time in relation to family acceptance and queer Latinx communities pushes us to consider the ways queer and trans people of color organize and mobilize their local communities. In the larger dissertation project, I propose using Latinx time, or Latinx temporalities, to consider the working-class, racialized, and gendered strategies and performances Latinx communities enact to re-envision different worlds for themselves in the

present. A Latinx temporality allows for an envisioning of a world where queer and trans people color thrive alongside their families of-origin.

### **The interviews with las mamás**

Which brings me back to las mamás in Santa Ana, California. La Familia's queer pláticas are less concerned with a surface level type of family acceptance, but rather actively supporting their queer kin in emotional ways. These mothers are about practice, and as one of the moms explained in her interview, none of the parents are doctors, therapists, or psychologists—their work comes from what they know and what they have experienced. I would like to share some excerpts from my own pláticas with some of the mothers of the group. In this chapter you will hear from las señoras Alicia, Marta, and Esperanza (all of which are pseudonyms). I want to consider how their understandings of familia, of negotiating homophobia, and of their own coming-out process as parents of queer children help us to further understand how organizations like La Familia offer entry ways to step 'out' of straight time. These women's words reminds us of the different ways bonds are created in affirming queer sexualities and gender non-conformity. The space creates discursive and embodied bonds which are instrumental in affirming queer sexualities and gender non-conformity, therefore enacting a queer temporality.

Building on the scholarship about queer temporalities, I am reminded that queer time happens and plays out in place and space meaning that queer time has a geography.<sup>29</sup> How queer time happens in a given space then marks the material realities of such a space. La Familia's use of their space, their re-imagining of familia, and the emotional labor that takes place there manifest these material realities creating entryways into undoing static notions of gender and sexuality.

In the following section, I analyze participant interviews, community observations to identify and map out them multiple ways within which the parents of La Familia interpreted, critiqued, and processed their emotional realities tied to their children's articulating of queerness. I contend that in order to envision a shared queer future with their families, both chosen and of-origin, we must consider how stepping out of straight time's narrow hold by making space for emotion can be a productive form of practicing family acceptance. Specifically, I look at different examples of how the space helps parents shape and re-envision queer temporalities through the following: building emotional bonds and kinships with other parents; processing their own 'coming out'; recognizing their children's queer desires; and the importance placed on queer youth who will need support. Queer theorists focused on and critical of reproductive futurism encourage me to consider how these different exchanges, pláticas, and bonds created within La Familia establish queer temporal moments that push against a heteronormative idealized future, and rather opt for different possibilities for their children and the larger local community.

The parents, and specifically the mothers, of La Familia demonstrate and model alternative ways of 'doing' family in their local communities. I should note that La Familia has on average 8-10 people who attend consistently each month, with new faces attending off-and-on depending on the month. The three women I interviewed from the group are unofficially the core members of the space. They are most active in scheduling and hosting meetings, events, and parties through La Familia. All three women identify as Mexicana and each has a son who identifies as queer and/or gay. There are other parents who attend the space regularly with children who identify as queer women, transgender, and gender non-binary folks. However, these three women agreed to participate in the interviews. Alicia,



Esperanza, and Marta are also the liveliest in the space, constantly cracking jokes, sharing chisme, and engaging in their own señora banter, a queer performance in and of itself.

### **Parents ‘coming out’, chosen families, space**

The first example comes from la señora Marta. Marta is one of La Familia’s leaders and most active members. She is lively, always cracking jokes, or sharing stories of her son and his husband. Marta, a single mother, often hosts La Familia’s holiday events at her home, which she decorates elaborately. In this excerpt from her interview, she discusses the challenges of finding resources to help her support her son. She notes the challenges in wanting to better support her gay son but not finding resources at first.

Como buena mamá yo ya sabía que mi hijo era gay. Pero, tenía yo, la palabra era, vergüenza, preguntarlo porque no me atrevía. No me atrevía yo porque decía yo, si se lo llego a preguntar posiblemente el, en lugar de salir del closet, se va meter más. Desafortunadamente, busque ayuda con psicólogos y les decía yo, que como le decía a mi hijo, como le preguntaba si era gay. Los psicólogos me decían, “Así. Así como usted me está preguntado.” Entonces igual, o sea, yo me quedaba, “Este no me va a ayudar.” Traté de buscar en la iglesia, igual la respuesta. Lo que me dijeron era que resara yo mucho y que pidiera yo por mi hijo. Igual, tampoco me ayudaron. Entonces, este, fue que—fue un proceso que tienes ir entendiendo como va a salir tú también del closet.

Like any good mom, I already knew that my son was gay. But, I felt—the word is shame—to ask him because I didn’t dare to. I did not dare because I said, if I ask him, there is a possibility that instead of coming out of the closet, he will get further in. Unfortunately, I looked for help from psychologists and asked them, “how do I ask my son if he is gay?” The psychologists told me, “Like that. Just like are asking me.” So, anyway, I was like, “They are not going to help me.” I sought out the church and got the same response. They told me to pray a lot and pray for my son. So, they did not help me either. So, this, it was—it was a process that you have to start understanding how you’re going to come out of the closet as well.

[author’s translation]

For Marta, seeking support on how to even initiate the conversation with her son was lacking. After consulting a psychologist and the church, she still felt like she needed something else. La Familia became the space where she was able to have those

conversations. The space created by La Familia is a dynamic space where queerness is centered as well as the parents' desire to learn, grow, and better support their queer kin. Through dialogues, kinship and community-building and the space enables a suspension of heteronormativity as the lens to understand, think, critique, and practice family acceptance. These interactions create spaces for pláticas, consejos, and support where Latinx parents are invited to dialogue and engage in conversations surrounding queer sexualities and gender non-conforming identities. The space and the connections and kinship amongst the members creates an alternative support network where notions of family, queer desire, and queer kinship are grappled with and processed together. It is for this reason that I am intentionally emphasizing the emotional labor undertaken by the parents in this space as a type of accompliceship, rather than allyship.

In the next example, la señora Esperanza talks about dealing with her neighbors who often used pejorative terms to refer to gay men. Esperanza is one of the mothers who many of the DeColores members flocked to when dealing with unaccepting parents at home. Her son, Mateo, is queer and was also one of the main organizers in DeColores. Meeting every month is necessary for this transformative learning to take place. The conversations, work, and learning that happen at La Familia does not end in that space once the meetings are over. The facilitators of each meeting encourage the families to take what they learned and apply it in their daily lives. In this vein, parents become advocates and experts in their local communities on queer lives, experiences, and issues. For instance, in her interview, la señora Esperanza mentions how she constantly corrects her neighbors who insist on using the pejorative “puto” in reference to a gay man:

Tengo unos vecinos que me encanijan, porque cuando se refieren a un gay, dicen ha que...que un [en voz baja] “puto”. Entonces les digo, “no se dice así.” O que

un...cual es la otra palabra? Y yo los corrijo. “Cuando se refieren a esta clases de personas, se dice así!” Entonces dice, “Ay si! Usted siempre nos dice pero pues se nos olvida,” pues como son medios, de allá del rancho. Y si, este, nosotros con mi familia no he tenido ningún problema, al contrario, lo han visto bien. Y en la familia de mi esposo, pues no me importa.

I have some neighbors who piss me off because when they refer to a gay person, they say... that he’s a [in low voice] “puto”. So I tell them, “That’s not how you say it.” What’s the other word? “When you refer to this type of person, you say it like this!” They say, “Oh, yes! You always tell us but we forget,” you know, they’re from the rancho. And in my family, I haven’t had any problems. On the contrary, they’ve treated [my son] well. And in my husband’s family...well, I don’t care.  
[author’s translation]

Esperanza demonstrates how the space also teaches the parents how to navigate homophobic comments in the local community. Her comment about her neighbors being from “el rancho” for saying pejorative words for gay—while seeped in classed and racialized sentiments about working-rural class experiences—also pinpoints the overly common ideas we hear in Latinx communities about queer folks and working-class folks. However, her decision to correct them stems from many of the conversations the group has about addressing homophobia in other social spaces, whether at home or at work.

The type of accomplices here is about the active practicing of being one’s accomplice. An ally says “I support you,” whereas an accomplice has already jumped in to help. This type of family acceptance is not tied to one-time event—it is continuous in that learning, sharing, and teaching, are on-going dialogues and conversations that are always contextualized through time and space. An accomplice uses their positionality to make space for those bodies and voices in the margins to be centered. This understanding family acceptance broadens how we understand normative familial structures. For one we often do not expect those who identify as allies to take on so much emotional labor. The parents in La Familia go above and beyond, respond practice.

Part of this deeper engagement of accompliceship stems from how the space is conducive for the parents themselves to create bonds and kinships with other parents navigating their children's queerness. There are not many physical spaces where we can imagine Latinx parents and their queer kin creating meaningful relationships with other parents who are not relatives or biologically-related. For the parents, learning how to navigate their relationships with their queer children can often present a difficult task. In fact, virtually every participant I interviewed claimed that even when their parents openly "accepted" their queer sexuality, it was often followed with "but no one needs to know." Many of these comments were linked to ideas of "el que dirán" which I will discuss later.

### **The Future (of) Queer Children**

Queer temporalities encourage a stepping out of the linearity of straight time. In that stepping out of straight time, we should be able to imagine different possibilities that are inclusive of non-normative genders, sexualities, desires, tastes, connections, and ways of being in the world. One common theme that arose in the interviews with the mothers was their understanding of the need for the space after their children grow up. In other words, there is a feeling of anticipation within La Familia of future queer kids and their families who will need the space to process their sharing of queerness. In the next example, Alicia makes an interesting point about how the organization serves a larger purpose than her own personal relationship with her gay son. He is now in his mid 30's and helps her and the other mothers keep the organization running. In this example, she talks about her reasoning for staying in La Familia.

Una familia cuando se tiene comunicación, amor, respeto es una familia. Yo al grupo, así siento como mi segunda familia. Todos nos respetamos y nos queremos y todo. O sea que, por nuestros hijos quizás no hemos todas juntado... Yo estoy muy contenta en el grupo y todo. Y pienso seguir caminando para poder ayudar a mas jóvenes y

todo. Y yendo a las escuelas y todo para que—muchos niños no caigan en el bullying y todo. Pienso seguir allí. Ahora ya pues mi hijo no necesita el apoyo mío pero ya estoy allí para apoyar los demás que sigan llegando.

Family is when there is communication, love, respect...that's a family. And I feel the group is my second family. We all respect each other and love each other. If it wasn't for our children, we may not have come together...I am very happy with the group. I plan to continue on this path to help more young people. Going to the schools so that children aren't subjected to bullying. I plan to continue there. Now that my son doesn't need my support, but I am there to support the rest [of the youth] who will continue to arrive. [author's translation]

Alicia highlights the comradery but also the community that is created at La Familia. As a son of an immigrant mother who also participates in the space, hearing their mothers talk so affirmingly about their queer children was a unique experience in the research process that reminded me of the impact of their work. She addresses the love the parents feel for each other while mobilizing to support their kids and the larger LGBTQ community in Orange County. This love establishes a “second family” as Alicia discusses, where they come together because of their queer children. These bonds created over their children's sexualities offers another reading of chosen or queer families in this case. Alicia notes the future queer and trans children who will come through the space. For Alicia, a future of thriving queer children is possible, and tangible, and happening every month in the meetings they hold.

For immigrant families to imagine a future where queer, trans, and gender non-binary communities of color thrive presents a much-needed narrative as a focal point of inquiry. Because, as Muñoz discusses, the future rooted in reproduction yields an imaginary of a (presumably) white, middle-class, heteronormative, nuclear family unit. This line of thinking situates white children as deserving of the future, where children of color are not. As Muñoz writes,

...but that is all the more reason to call on a utopian political imagination that will enable us to glimpse another time and place: a “not-yet” where queer youths of color

actually get to grow up. Utopian and willfully idealistic practices of thought are in order if we are to resist the perils of heteronormative pragmatism and Anglo-normative pessimism.<sup>30</sup>

In many ways, the parents in La Familia queer time in their practice by envisioning a world queer youth of color ‘actually get to grow up’ and thrive amongst their chosen and of-origin families. Resisting the pull of heteronormativity allows for Latinx futurity to be possible, allowing for worlds to be made where homophobia and transphobia cause ruptures in familial networks. To be able to support the larger queer Latinx community, all of the mothers mentioned that to be able to continue doing the work of family acceptance, they all must continue learning and growing together.

La Familia’s dynamic site offers a space for immigrant families to come together to process their children’s coming out. The organization also functions as an educational site, where families can freely ask questions they may be too embarrassed to ask or share with their children. Additionally, many of the mothers note that they believed they were practicing acceptance until they started participating in La Familia and realized they had much more to learn. For instance, in this excerpt from her interview, Marta discusses her realization that she had a lot to learn in terms of practicing family acceptance:

Yo llegué a ese grupo de La Familia porque a mí—pues mi hijo es gay...José. Él había salido como unos dos meses antes, entonces él no me había hablado de ese grupo. Fue mi hija la que me dijo que existía un grupo que se llamaba La Familia. Y aunque supuestamente yo me sentía, este, bien cómoda con mi hijo de que era gay, de que había salido del closet, o que habíamos salido del closet, pensé que estaba yo bien y pensé que yo ya había salido también del closet. Pensé que yo aceptaba yo a mi hijo. Pero estaba yo en un veinticinco por ciento de en realidad aceptar todo eso. Nada más que lógico, pues yo no sabía cuál era el proceso en seguir. Entonces mi hija le dijo a mi hijo que le dijera donde estaba el grupo y repito—cuando llegué al grupo que en realidad me faltaba mucho camino por recorrer.

I came to this group La Familia because my—well, my son is gay...José. He had come out two months before, so he had not told me about that group. It was my daughter who told me that there was a group called La Familia. And although I

supposedly felt, this, very comfortable with my son that he was gay, that he had come out of the closet—or that we had come out of the closet, I thought I was fine and I thought I had already come out of the closet. I thought I accepted my son. But I was at twenty-five percent of actually accepting all that. Even though, logically—because I did not know what was the next part of the process. Then my daughter told my son, to tell him where the group was, and I repeat—when I arrived to the group, [I realized] that in reality, I had a long way to go.  
[author's translation]

For many of the parents, as Marta describes in the above quote, verbally accepting their queer children was only the first of a much larger journey in learning how to actively practice acceptance and support their children. Again, she discusses the parents' own coming out process as parents with queer children. Part of the learning experiences that take place within La Familia are part of the different visions of the future imaginable with their families of origin seeing them as whole people by accounting for their sexual and gender identities.

The way the mothers describe realizing the need to learn more offers a non-linear understanding of family acceptance. It demonstrates to parents that family acceptance can evolve in multiple ways. Understanding family acceptance in this way moves away from thinking about acceptance as a one-time occurrence and rather as a need to continue dialogues and practice openness. The emotional sharing and vulnerability that happens in this space creates a temporal shift in how the parents and families relate to acceptance. Their children's disclosure of their sexuality, becomes an entry way to a more complicated understanding of their queerness rather than an initial one-time moment of acceptance. In a similar vein, Esperanza discusses how before coming to the La Familia meetings, she had a more surface level understanding of her son Mateo's queerness:

Yo pienso que si porque...antes cuando yo sabía que el era gay, yo sabía que era gay. Pero hasta allí. Pero ya de ahora que vamos al grupo y todo, uno va aprendiendo cosas que tiene que tener su pareja. Y entonces entre Mateo y yo hay mucha comunicación. Mucha confianza. No me acuerdo exactamente si antes la teníamos, pos si la teníamos, pero más—ahora está más estrecha.

I think that because...before when I knew he was gay, I knew he was gay. But that's where it ended. But now that we are going to the group and everything, one starts learning things, that your they have to have a partner. And between Mateo and I, there is open communication. A lot of trust. I do not remember exactly if we had it before—well, we had it, but it's much closer now.  
[author's translation]

The space of La Familia, as described by Esperanza, highlights that need to actively practice family acceptance and make questions acceptable. They elicit dialogue on topics that might not be discussed either privately, but less likely in public. Both excerpts from Marta and Esperanza depict how parents in La Familia start to re-orient themselves to being open to difference, and moving toward such openness through feeling and education.

The bonds created amongst the parents and their children are important given the preoccupation with “el que dirán” (which translates to what other might say. In sharing their stories, their concerns, their questions, the members of La Familia foster an alternative understanding of family where a sense of collective responsibility unravels. As Marta explains, the parents learn to support each other by sharing their personal stories:

Nosotros mismos, entre como La Familia, entre los integrantes los papás de la comunidad LGBT...Q!—nos apoyamos con nuestras propias historias. Y en las historias, basadas en las historias de los otros papás, nosotros podemos sacar nuestras propias conclusiones si lo estamos haciendo bien, o si podemos mejorar a nuestra vida basado en las experiencias de la vida real, de personas reales. Eso es nuestro grupo.

Together, as La Familia, amongst the members, the parents of the LGBT...Q! community—we support each other by sharing our own stories. And with our stories, and the stories shared by the other parents, we are able to draw our own conclusions to see if we are doing right, or to see if we can better our lives based in real life experiences, based on real people. That's our group.  
[author's translation]

Marta's description of La Familia presents the significance of stories, personal accounts of how the parents navigated supporting their children before finding La Familia, as the source



of their support. Recognizing that other parents must process and deal with the same issues opens up the possibilities of trust to learn from and educate each other. The meetings serve as sites where the parents can make time to think, reflect, debate, and ask questions to more clearly understand how to support their kids. Marta makes sure to include that the members of the group are able to support each other by hearing real-life stories, based on real-life people.

Building on the scholarship on queer temporalities, I am reminded that queer time happens and manifests in a given place and space, meaning that queer time has a geography. How queer time happens in a given space is always marked by the material realities and intersections of race, class, gender, sexuality, and legal status. La Familia's use of their space, their re-imagining of familia, and the emotional labor that takes place there mitigates these material realities creating entryways into undoing static notions of gender and sexuality.

### **Queer desire**

For the parents in La Familia, acknowledging their children's queerness was the first of many steps they would have to take to learn how to practice acceptance as accomplices. In the last section, I described the turning point that many of the parents experienced in realizing they had much to learn in better supporting their children and those LGBT kids in the community. This chapter centers the processing after (and in some cases, before) disclosure of queerness happen in Latinx families in Santa Ana. One of the other salient themes to emerge in the mothers' responses was when they had to face their child dating or bringing a partner home for the first time.

Recognizing their children's queer desires was an adjustment for many of the mothers. Many of them shared the many different stages that is part of the process: acknowledgment, denial, grief, clarity, support, willingness to learn and grow. I remember my own first time having to enunciate the word "boyfriend" to my mother when I was getting ready to introduce my first boyfriend to my parents. We did not refer to him as such—he was my "friend" even though we all damn well knew. As I discuss in Chapter 3, many of the queer and trans Latinx participants share their strategies for navigating such conversations with their parents. In this chapter, I discuss how the mothers of La Familia share their own first encounters in having to confront their children's sexualities.

A discussion on recognizing queer desire among immigrant families is crucial to any discussions on queer futurity, and in this case, Latinx futurity, for the future must account for multiple queer desires to move toward liberation. Muñoz reminds us that queer futures do not undermine the need for desire:

Queer futurity does not underplay desire. In fact it is all about desire, desire for larger semiabstractions such as a better world or freedom but also, more immediately, better relations within the social that include better sex and more pleasure.<sup>31</sup>

According to Muñoz, recognizing queer sex and desires is imperative to make queer futures a possible in the present. For some parents it might be recognizing there is an amiga or amigo that has started to come around more often. For others, it might be witnessing hand holding, using, saying I love you, or the queer tones in one's voice. For instance, Marta discusses an interaction with her gay son when he wanted to bring a partner home to meet his family:

Entonces me dijo mi hijo, 'mami, pues como lo voy a presentar como a mi amigo si es mi novio?' Entonces, ay! Cuando dijo 'mi novio' fue que si entendí que—ay caray—es la realidad. Porque se me hizo difícil escuchar la palabra 'mi novio' invocada de mi hijo varón.

Then my son said to me, 'mom, how am I going to present him as my friend if he is

my boyfriend?’ Then, ay! When he said ‘my boyfriend’ was when I understand that—oh, dear—it’s the reality. Because it was difficult for me to hear the word ‘my boyfriend’ invoked from my son.

[author’s translation]

For Marta, hearing the words “mi novio” marked the moment of having to face her son’s new partner. Again, she goes on to say how she thought she was practicing acceptance until she realized she had her own processing to go through. In many ways, first recognizing it began their process in learning how to not admonish, or erase their child’s queerness, but coexist with it. The next excerpt from Esperanza also outlines a similar process when seeing a photo of her son Mateo kissing another boy as a teenager.

Often times, the recognition of their children’s queerness, while startling at first, opened up more communication and support for their children. In the following excerpt, Esperanza shares a similar anecdote to Marta’s above where she is confronted with her son’s queerness without warning. In her discussion, Esperanza highlights another mention of the closet that differs from Marta’s proclamation of having to come out as parents of queer children.

Esperanza: No. Steve salió—bueno lo saqué yo del closet cuando andaba el en el high school. Y ya, este—pues ya hace rato. Cuando nos llevó a esas juntas, ya tenía rato que yo lo había sacado del closet.

JSF: Y que quiere decir eso? Que usted lo sacó del closet?

Esperanza: Porque el no me dijo que era gay. Sino que, digo todo?

JSF: Si. Pues, lo que usted quiera.

Esperanza: Cuando yo le hablaba para que se fuera a la escuela, yo miré una—le miré una foto que tenía allí con un muchacho se estaban besando. Entonces yo lo miré y dije, “Que pasó? Que está pasando aquí?” Entonces ya cuando se despertó, le enseñe la foto y le dije que es esto? Entonces dice, “Ay amá, perdóneme que se haya enterado en esta manera. Pero es que soy gay.” Entonces yo di vuelta a...y lo dejé allí. Entonces se levantó el y se fue a la cocina a seguirme. Y me dijo que

lo perdonará. Y que era gay, y que esto, y que el otro. Pero al mismo tiempo y me puse a pensar que si yo, que lo cargué en mi panza nueve meses y lo estaba rechazando, si eso hacía yo, que iba hacer la demás gente? Entonces di la vuelta y nos abrazamos, lloramos, y le dije que así yo lo quería, que lo amaba, y que era mi hijo, y hasta la fecha.

[author's translation]

Esperanza: No. Mateo came out—well, I brought him out of the closet when he was in high school. And, well it's been some time since he took us to those meetings. It had been time that I took him out of the closet.

JSF: And what does that mean? That you took him out of the closet?

Esperanza: Because he didn't tell me he was gay. But rather—do I say it all?

JSF: Yes. Well, whatever you would like.

Esperanza: When I went to wake him to go to school, I saw... I saw a picture he had there with a boy, and they were kissing. So, I looked at it and said, "What happened? What's going on here?" Then when he woke up, I showed him the picture and asked him, 'what is this?' Then he says, "Oh, mom! Forgive me for finding out in this way. But I'm gay." Then I turned around...and left him there. Then he got up and went to the kitchen to follow me. And he asked me to forgive him. And that he was gay, and this, that, and the other. But at the same time and I started to think that if I...that I carried him in my belly for nine months and I was rejecting him, if that was what I did, what would other people do? Then I turned around and we embraced, we cried, and I told him that I loved him, that I loved him, and that he was my son, and to this day.

In this example, Esperanza discusses her son's coming out where she notes that she took him out of the closet, rather than Mateo telling her himself. I find these discussions from the mothers about witnessing queer intimacies crucial to make sense of the processing that takes place within La Familia. Esperanza seems to recognize her own reaction as a smaller scale of the potential violence and treatment Mateo would endure out in the world. I want to consider the ways that these articulations of queer desire for the parents mark a temporal shift where time is organized around *el que dirán*. For the parents begin to realize that in their kids

coming out they might be prone to experience different types of violence and harassment as queer and trans people. The potential threat in *el que dirán* and possible violence marks an urgency in their understanding of time and survival.

These interactions about acknowledging desire, and the concerns for what these articulations are often the main reason many queer Latinxs communities struggle with coming out. There is an unsettling sense of concern, fear, and in some cases, shame. *El que dirán* is entirely about shame—bringing shame to the family rooted in public embarrassment. Every time a parent tells their kids, “I accept you but don’t tell anybody,” they mean, “We are afraid of the shame it might bring.” *El que dirán* is its own temporality, informed by the possibility of shame, or what shameful thing others might say. I think of my own mother, again, when her goodbyes on my way out of the house changed after I came out to my parents. Knowing that my place of socializing would be at gay bars, she started saying “*Cuídate*” (“Take care of yourself”) as I left the house, something that until that had only been reserved for my sister, Yasmin. However, these excerpts all refer to a time before the mothers arrived to *La Familia*. My focus here is to attend to how processing the shame, the vulnerability, can lead to stability, and healthy relationships with their queer and trans children. *La Familia* crafts a world where queers of color and their chosen, and of-origin families, deserve the stability to thrive.

### **Shared Futures, Emotional Geographies**

In this chapter, I have discussed how queering our sense of family and acceptance offers new inroads to openness in Latinx families regarding their queer children. The space of *La Familia* is transformative because not only are the families free to think about queer sexualities and their own processes, or their kids, but the space becomes a base for

“adaptation, community, and shared futures.”<sup>32</sup> In this sense, both chosen and of-origin families can build community together and bridge the links in queer people’s multiple social networks.

The un-doing of heteronormativity as the litmus test for familial relations queers familial bonds, especially within and amongst families of origin. As the mothers explain, they are not certified therapists, but as mothers in the community, working out these issues is part of a collective parenting and support for queer communities whose families have abandoned them physically and/or emotionally. The space that is La Familia works as an emotional site to unpack and process queerness, and different desires, together as a community.

Some cultural geographers have begun to explore the connections between affect, emotion, and space and place.<sup>33</sup> For instance, geographers Joyce Davidson and Christine Milligan write about embodying emotions in what they describe as emotional geographies.<sup>34</sup> They write, “Emotions can clearly alter the way the world *is* for us, affecting our sense of time and space.”<sup>35</sup> Paying attention to how emotions alter the world around queer Latinx communities and their families re-emphasizes the need to think of immigrant communities as experiencing feelings, not as abstractions. Recognizing and archiving how immigrant families feel about queerness is an important move toward greater understanding and acceptance.

Emotions are, without doubt, an intractable if intangible aspect of all of our everyday lives. They are embodied and mindful phenomena that partially shape, and are shaped by our interactions with the people, places and politics that make up our unique, personal geographies. Clearly, our emotions *matter*. They affect the way we see (hear and touch...?) the substance of our past, present and future; all can seem bright, dull or darkened by our emotional outlook. Moreover, whether we crave emotional equilibrium, or adrenaline thrills, the dynamic nature of our being-in-the-world entails a degree of instability for all of us. Whether joyful or heartbreaking, emotion has the

power to transform the shape of our life-worlds, expanding or contracting, creating new fissures or fixtures we never expected to find.<sup>36</sup>

The parents at La Familia are making time and space to feel shame, grief, joy, hope. La Familia offers a space where shame is dealt with collectively. The transformations that some of the mothers discuss, happen in what they *feel* when they are in the space—which can be pain or discomfort, it is not always joy. But by engaging with these feelings in relation to queerness, some parents witness a re-calibrating of their own discomfort.

I want to note that while the space and community created in La Familia has been transformative for many, there have been families who are not ready or do not feel comfortable in this type of setting. The interactions with new parents are not always perfect. Some parents will visit once and never come back. Others react in a hostile manner when confronted with having to discuss their children's sexualities. The mothers know they cannot help everyone, but respect that some parents need to do their own healing before they are ready to share in a group setting.

There is something to be said about the families who are most active in the group are mothers of queer or gay cis men. While there are other parents who attend who have queer daughters, trans, and non-binary children, they were not as willing to share their narratives with me. Those specific family dynamics are just as important and necessary to really unpack how family acceptance happens with different queer identities in Latinx communities.

## **Conclusion**

The excerpts from these queer pláticas indicate how spaces like La Familia offer new entryways for families to bond, grow, and learn from each other. I refer to them as queer temporalities in the sense that they are disrupting normative forms of social interactions that are gendered, classed, and racialized. These dialogues open up the possibilities of grappling

with taboo subjects and feelings such as grief and shame. Topics that even in the privacy of one's own home could be potentially difficult. What these excerpts from the mothers tell us is that radical love for their children allows for the development of alternative ways for queerness to exist in Latinx communities. They use humor, they are affectionate, they know that even if for a few hours a month they can provide a familial bond to ease the process of figuring out one's queer identity.

Spaces like La Familia allow us to see ourselves as capable of a future and as part of a larger community, and a longer legacy of queer ancestry. They remind us that we are not without a lineage. This type of community formation allows us to see ourselves as part of a thriving community, that we're visible and present. For Latinx queers to have the possibility of imagining a future, and shared future, with their community, bridging chosen and of-origin families becomes one way to move those interactions forward.

It is also a reminder that narratives about immigrants are complex and multiple. It lets us see immigrant families as activists, and that social justice work must always be coalitional and interwoven within the social fabric of the everyday experiences of Latinx communities. Jotería studies scholars José Santillana and Anita Revilla Tijerina remind us that jotería students, scholars, and activists must grapple with the intersections of race, class, and gender, “in a loving environment that helps guide them from feelings of marginalization and oppression to spaces of reclamation and transformation.”<sup>37</sup> La Familia has taken this call and practices it in all the work they do. The way they practice family acceptance creates spaces that guides the queer children from feelings of marginalization to a space of radical love and transformation.



The space is intentional about having explicit conversations around queerness, sexuality, family bonds, acceptance, and gender expression. The transformational work is rooted in the building of community amongst parents who are invested in learning more to not just accept their children as queer but to put acceptance into practice. It is my hope that this work serves as a potential model for creating spaces in other locations for queer Latinx families, meaning chosen and of-origin, to continue to thrive, love, and resist in the face of oppression and inequalities.

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<sup>1</sup> Susana Peña has an extensive discussion on pejorative terms for queer people in her book, *Oye Loca : From the Mariel Boatlift to Gay Cuban Miami*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013). I also have a more in-depth discussion on joto in Chapter 2.

<sup>2</sup> For excellent analyses of immigration and labor, see Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, *Doméstica : Immigrant Workers Cleaning and Caring in the Shadows of Affluence*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Ruth Gomberg-Muñoz, *Labor and Legality : An Ethnography of a Mexican Immigrant Network*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Enrique Ochoa and Gilda L. Ochoa, *Latino Los Angeles : Transformations, Communities, and Activism*, (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2005).

<sup>3</sup> Juana Maria Rodriguez, *Queer Latinidad: Identity Practices, Discursive Spaces*, (New York: New York University Press, 2003); and Horacio Roque Ramirez, “‘Mira, yo soy Boricua y estoy aquí’: Rafa Negrón’s Pan Dulce and the queer Sonic latinaje of San Francisco.” *CENTRO Journal* 19, no.1 (2007): 274-313.

<sup>4</sup> Cherríe Moraga, “Queer Aztlán: The re-formation of Chicano tribe.” *The last generation: Prose and poetry* (1993): 145-74; and Ricky T. Rodriguez, *Next of Kin: The Family in Chicano/a Cultural Politics*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009).

<sup>5</sup> Katie L. Acosta, “Queering Family Scholarship: Theorizing from the Borderlands,” *Journal of Family Theory & Review* (2017): 1-13.

<sup>6</sup> Cherríe Moraga and G. Anzaldúa, *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, (New York: Kitchen Table, Women of Color Press, 1983); Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands: The New Mestiza = La Frontera*, (San Francisco: Spinsters/Aunt Lute, 1987); Carla Mari Trujillo, *Chicana Lesbians: The Girls Our Mothers Warned Us About*, (Berkeley, CA: Third Woman Press, 1991); Tomás Almaguer, “Chicano Men: A Cartography of Homosexual Identity and Behavior,” In *Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*. eds. Henry Abelove, Michèle Aina Barale, and David M. Halperin (New York: Routledge, 1993): 255-273; Moraga, “Queer Aztlán,”; Rodriguez, *Next of Kin*; Carlos Decena, *Tacit Subjects: Belonging and Same-Sex Desire Among Dominican Immigrant Men*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011); Katie Acosta, *Amigas Y Amantes: Sexually Nonconforming Latinas Negotiate Family*, (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2013); and Acosta, “Queering Family Scholarship.”

<sup>7</sup> Decena, *Tacit Subjects*.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

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<sup>9</sup> See, for instance, E. Patrick Johnson, “Mother Knows Best: Black Gay Vernacular and Transgressive Domestic Space,” In *Speaking in Queer Tongues: Globalization and Gay Language*, eds. William Leap and Tom Boellstorff (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2004): 251-278; and his other chapter, “Quare” Studies, or (Almost) Everything I Know about Queer Studies I Learned from My Grandmother,” in *Black Queer Studies: A Critical Anthology*, eds. E.P. Johnson and Mae Henderson, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 149-150.

<sup>10</sup> Johnson, “Mother Knows.”

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. 260.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. 260.

<sup>14</sup> Lee Edelman, *No Future : Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004); Jack Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*, (New York: New York University Press, 2005); Jasbir Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Duke University Press, Durham, NC, 2007); Muñoz, *Cruising*; Aimee Carrillo-Rowe, ““... Your Ancestors Come”: Tracing an Abundant Present in Adelina Anthony’s *La Hovicona Series*,” *GLQ* 19, no. 2 (2013): 215-247; and Deborah R. Vargas, “Ruminations on Lo Sucio as a Latino Queer Analytic,” *American Quarterly* 66, no. 3 (2014): 715-26.

<sup>15</sup> Edelman, *No Future*.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. 3, original emphasis.

<sup>17</sup> Muñoz, *Cruising*.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. 96.

<sup>20</sup> Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages*, xix.

<sup>21</sup> Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages*, 204.

<sup>22</sup> Jodie Taylor, “Queer Temporalities and the Significance of ‘Music Scene’ Participation in the Social Identities of Middle-Aged Queers,” *Sociology* 44, no. 5 (2010): 893–907; and Natalie Oswin, “The queer time of creative urbanism: family, futurity, and global city Singapore,” *Environment and Planning* 44 (2012): 1624-1640.

<sup>23</sup> Oswin, “The queer time of creative urbanism.”

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. 1637.

<sup>25</sup> Edelman, *No Future*; Halberstam, *In a Queer Time*; Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages*; Muñoz, *Cruising*; and Oswin “The queer time of creative urbanism.”

<sup>26</sup> Muñoz, *Cruising*, 27.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. 27.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. 25.

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<sup>29</sup> Joyce Davidson & Liz Bondi, "Spatialising affect; affecting space: an introduction," *Gender, Place & Culture*, 11, no. 3 (2004): 373-374; Joyce Davidson and Christine Milligan, "Embodying emotion sensing space: introducing emotional geographies," *Social & Cultural Geography*, 5, no. 4 (2004): 523-532, and Joanne Sharp, "Geography and gender: what belongs to feminist geography? Emotion, power, and change," *Progress in Human Geography* 33, no. 1 (2009): 74-80.

<sup>30</sup> Muñoz, *Cruising*, 96.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. 30.

<sup>32</sup> Cantú, *Sexuality of Migration*.

<sup>33</sup> Davidson & Milligan, "Spatialising affect,"; Davidson & Bond, "Embodying emotion,"; Sharp, "Geography and gender."

<sup>34</sup> Davidson & Milligan, "Spatialising affect."

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. 374.

<sup>37</sup> Anita Tijerina Revilla and José Manuel Santillana, "Jotería Identity and Consciousness," *Aztlán: A Journal of Chicano Studies* 39, no. 1 (2014): 167-179.

## VI. Epilogue

What we need to know is that queerness is not yet here but it approaches like a crashing wave of potentiality. And we must give in to its propulsion, its status as a destination. Willingly we let ourselves feel queerness's pull, knowing it as something else that we can feel, that we must feel. We must take ecstasy.  
-José Esteban Muñoz

Imagining a Latinx future requires hope. The purpose of envisioning and enacting a Latinx future is not about blind optimism, or naivete. For the future to manifest, it needs hope. As people of color, as Latinxs living in the United States of America, we need hope. We are keenly aware and astutely perceptive to the real racialized threats we face for being queer, for being working-class, for loving queerly. Latinx temporalities are enacted through the hope we develop through experiencing marginalization and oppression. Hope is a gift from the ancestors, shouting “échale ganas!” The activism that took place in Santa Ana, California over the course of this dissertation project was built upon ideas of hope engaged with the promise of action. The activists of DeColores Queer Orange County created spaces and events for Latinxs in Orange County to congregate, to love, to mobilize together.

When the cards are stacked against your entire community, hope for a queer future, for a Latinx future, is what propels us to continue to fighting and resisting. That hope is not tied to Capitalism, or broken promises by the State—the hope for Latinx futurity is grounded in action to organize and establish different temporalities of family, of love, of language. I chose to write about and focus on hope to demonstrate how the communities in Santa Ana fought for their right to exist and thrive.

Creating alternative models of family, of articulating queerness, of doing activism, and doing Latinx, are how we begin to disrupt the systems in place that do not make room for our multiple identities and experiences. The risks for our community are far too real and

painful. When the Central for Disease Control releases the alarmingly high rates of HIV infections amongst men of color who have sex with men, we must have hope. At the current rate, one in four Latino men who have sex with men will contract HIV in their lifetime, for black men it is one in two, and for white men it is one in eleven. That is what systemic racism and homophobia looks like. Hope for a Latinx future must include treatment and prevention efforts to stop the spread of HIV in our communities.

The summer of 2016 was a desperate reminder of the need for hope. On a summer night on June 12, 2016, a 29 year old security guard brutally massacred 49 people and wounded 53 others at the Pulse Night Club in Orlando, Florida. The tragedy took place on Latin Night, which attracted the predominantly Puerto Rican community, those of who made up a majority of those who lost their lives that night. I had never experienced such deep grief for complete strangers the way I did in the weeks after Pulse. Violence against queer and trans communities of color runs rampant in this country. The increasing number of brutal murders of trans women of color, again especially black and Latina, should be labeled an epidemic for the rates with which these women experience violence for merely existing.

As I discussed throughout the dissertation, the violence hit home when Zoraida Reyes was killed in the summer of 2014. I never met Zoraida personally, but we were both at UC Santa Barbara as undergraduates around the same time. We were both Chicana/o Studies majors, and perhaps could have sat in classes together without ever having met. Once, I made the connection of who she was—having heard wonderful stories about her from faculty—I felt a closeness in learning about her spirit, and fierceness, from her friends and loved ones in DeColores. My second time coming to a DeColores space was Zoraida's candlelight vigil

that took place on 4<sup>th</sup> Street in Santa Ana once it was announced that she had been found dead.

I drove from Santa Barbara to my parent's home in Whittier and then went straight to Santa Ana to make it to the vigil on time. As I parked and tried to get a sense of where I was and where the vigil was to happen, I realized I had not spent much time in that area and did not know where to go. I started walking toward the main street, La Cuatro, where I saw a young Latina woman carrying a huge bouquet of sunflowers. We made eye contact and at the same time asked each other, "Are you going to the vigil?" We both were relieved when we realized we were trying to get to the same place and decided to walk together. We shared that we had heard about what happened through Facebook and felt compelled to attend. Neither one of us knew Zoraida personally.

We agreed to walk and stand together during the vigil. She took a few flowers from her bouquet and gave them to me so that I could also place some flowers at the end of the vigil. I met many of the participants on a day when they lost one of their dear friends and fellow activists. I heard many of them speak publicly about their memories of her, through tears, funny stories, and Gloria Trevi songs playing in the background, Zoraida's favorite. We cried together. She leaned on my shoulder. When the vigil concluded, we hugged and said our goodbyes, and I never saw her again. I did not know then that in two strangers mourning together for another person we did not know was also enacting a type of Latinx temporality where family did not rely on of-origin ties, biological ties, or even on chosen family—this was a mourning for a trans sister we never met. In that moment, we felt the loss and grief together.

That memory stays with me because I had never experienced community in that manner—it felt so sincere, so loving, and so genuine. From then on I experienced many other beautiful and tragic moments alongside the members of DeColores Queer Orange County. These experiences compelled me to focus on the hope, on the love, and the belief that the work that was taking place in Santa Ana was significantly impacting the local queer Latinx community. It allowed me to see that through grief, pain, and violence, the community came together to be stronger and really push to make Orange County safer for queer and trans Latinxs, particularly those who were undocumented.

### **DeColores Queer Orange County**

Thinking about time more queerly is also fitting when considering the timelines of the organizations I worked with to complete this dissertation. While DeColores Queer Orange County had been at the forefront of the undocuqueer and trans rights movements in Orange County, the group went on an indefinite hiatus in the summer of 2016. There had been differences amongst some of the members, and several of the members had different ideas for what direction the organization should move toward. These differences ultimately caused the group to stop meeting and eventually it was decided that the organization would no longer be active. Some of the former members have discussed being open to the idea of starting the organization up again, but at the time of this writing, no plans are set for that to happen. Many of the members, and myself, have all remained very close friends, part of each other's chosen families.

The unfortunate truth is that often times grassroots organizations do not last because of lack of resources, accessibility, or capacity. In a way, DeColores Queer OC marked its own queer time, temporarily (well, more than temporary, 2008-2016) by running for as long

as it did. The reality was also that many of the members were growing up. Some got married, others went to graduate school, others took on jobs with more responsibilities. They also, more or less, had established solid ties with their families of origin, thanks to the support of La Familia.

To this day, La Familia is still active, despite DCQOC's decision to be stop organizing. The mothers of La Familia are energetic to continue growing the group of parents. They have new parents continuing to arrive in the space. The future is being made present. La Familia's presence in the community is undeniable and the parents' commitment to continue organizing is a reminder of the need for spaces such as this one. La Familia also gained two permanent members because of my collaboration with the group—my parents, Juan and Graciela (my unofficial “research assistants”).

### **My own family acceptance**

After I had completed the fieldwork portion and after DeColores stopped meeting, my parents became active members of La Familia. They have spoken at panels at college campuses and at the Mexican Consulate, to talk about how we can work to address family acceptance of LGBTQ people in Latinx communities. My parents used to want me to keep my sexuality to myself when I first came out, they were afraid of what the world might say or do to me. Over the years, and many long conversations, we have developed a stronger relationship. They meet my partners (when I have them and only if its serious, of course). They have attended gay clubs for fundraisers and for some of my friends' events. We had to rework our expectations and perceptions of time, to imagine other ways of doing family, and La Familia was instrumental in making that happen.



## Conclusion

We have power as Latinx communities. We have different voices. We are artists. We are thinkers. We are lovers. We resist. We show love. Throughout this dissertation, I have called for a reading of Latinx that is a call to action. A call to demand more and better for our people. A call to acknowledge the violence that heteropatriarchy, misogyny, homophobia, and transphobia operate amongst and against our communities. Because the shift should make us uncomfortable. The shift to the X or any other linguistic or cultural practice that is met with suspicion, should remind us that the future is not always reserved nor guaranteed for people of color.

Aligning ourselves with different, and more inclusive visions of the future will be necessary to truly dismantle those forces that are against our communities. Or as José Esteban Muñoz would say, by *disidentifying*—with those standards of family, of love, of language, of time. That is how we carve out space for Latinx futures. Latinx temporalities are enacted in the worlds we create that do not abide to normative tastes and standards. Muñoz reminds us that, “Our charge as spectators and actors is to continue disidentifying with this world until we achieve new ones.” Feeling the propulsion of a queer future, of a Latinx future, as demonstrated in this dissertation, is the much-needed reminder that other worlds are possible to live, love, and thrive in.

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