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Jotería-Historias: Theories from the Fringes

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A Dissertation

Presented to

the Faculty of Arts and Humanities

University of Denver

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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by

Robert Gutierrez-Perez

June 2016

Advisor: Bernadette Marie Calafell

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## ABSTRACT

By collecting the cultural/historical narratives of gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning (GBTQ) Chicanos of Colorado, this research project locates theories in the flesh, or theories of resistance and agency, in the forms of *cuentos*, *pláticas*, *chismé*, *mitos*, *testimonios*, and *consejos* to explicate a queer of color performance of intersectional and decolonial politics. To set the context, several historical and political snapshots of LGBTQ Chicano experience over the last 500 years are reviewed to demonstrate how communication about, for, and between LGBTQ Chicanos operate in a liminal state (*nepantla*) where violence, marginalization, and oppression are the cultural norm. To honor the performative, queer, and decolonial approach to this project, the Four Seasons of Oral History Performance was developed and utilized as a cyclical, creation-centered method for collecting and sharing social science research. In the end, LGBTQ Chicanos are challenged by inter- and intra-generational divides that make “coming-out” regardless of age in this historical/political moment a traumatic event where ones intersectional cultural identity is under attack from multiple vectors. From these erasures, traumas, and violence, LGBTQ Chicanos create theories in the flesh to carve out spaces to survive and thrive from the fringes: this work collects their histories.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### Narrating Theories in the Flesh

I see an island. Not a piece of Earth surrounded by a body of water, but a kind of canyon island surrounded by a seemingly endless fall into a dark ravine. I live on this rock with others that are more or less like me. We have been here all our lives. Some of us know why, others refuse to remember, and still others long to return to the other side of the gorge. We've tried to build a bridge to the mainland many times, but there are never enough supplies or resources to support the creation of a complete bridge. How long can we stay on this island? Something in me is different, and I am afraid the others will notice. Even here, there are people who don't belong. If they continue to throw us into the gorge, will our bodies become the bridge we've always dreamed of?

There is something very powerful about a story. As the old adage goes, history is written by the victors. So, what of the marginalized? Do they not have a story about power, culture, and history worthy of (re)remembering?<sup>i</sup> Or, as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak asks, "Can the Subaltern speak?" This research project is about how gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning (GBTQ) Chicanos and Xicanos<sup>ii</sup> generate theories of agency to carve out spaces to live and sometimes thrive. It is about articulating a praxis for resisting multiple forms of oppression by focusing on how everyday performances of

identity and culture challenge master narratives of power and control. Specifically, I am interested in locating those “theories in the flesh” utilized by LGBTQ Chicanos/Xicanos to survive the multiple oppressions they encounter at the intersection of race, gender, class, sexuality, and nation. When and where experiential, embodied, and intersectional knowledge is centered in everyday life is the critical location for collecting/remembering a theory in the flesh.

Theories in the flesh are epistemologically connected to the experiences and scholarship of nonheteronormative mestizas/os dwelling in the borderlands of race, class, gender, geography, ethnicity, sexuality, and citizenship (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands*; Arrizón; Moreman, “Memoir”; Willink, Gutierrez-Perez, Shukri, and Stein). However, the lived experiences of LGBTQ Chicanos over the past 500 years are rarely if ever archived, considered, or heard, and therefore, the experiential knowledges of Jotería<sup>iii</sup> are underrepresented, marginalized, and silenced in popular, historical, and academic texts and culture. As such, the personal and political experiences of Jotería are “lived legacies of colonialism, racism, xenophobia, homophobia, sexism, and heterosexism” (Hames-García, “Jotería Studies” 136). Theories in the flesh are located within the everyday lives of Jotería and are done/made to push back on master narratives of identity, culture, and history.

Although theories in the flesh can be collected from analyses of poetry, literature, theatrical performance, paintings, dance, music, cultural artifacts, and autobiographies (Hurtado, “*Sitios*”), this project focuses on locating theories in the flesh within the

historical narratives of LGBTQ Chicanos. These historical narratives weave in and out of everyday performances of identity, culture, and history, and often times, these narratives address embodied experiences of fragmentation and hybridity, such as the transgression of crossing “boundaries of genre, of method, of content, of disciplines” (Hurtado, “Theory” 215). Gloria Anzaldúa describes this experience as a mestiza consciousness where one develops a “holistic, nonbinary way of thinking and acting that includes a transformational tolerance for contradiction and ambivalence” (*Reader* 321). As a form of experiential knowledge, theories in the flesh emerge “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” (Moraga and Anzaldúa 23). Therefore, theories in the flesh utilize the traumas experienced in/on the body to create and enact a form of resistance or agency that is at once verbal, nonverbal, physical, psychological, emotional, and spiritual—it is praxis turned theory turned praxis (Madison, “Occupation” 214).

For example, many LGBTQ Chicanos/Xicanos do not have any stories (*cuentos*) from LGBTQ elders and ancestors to help them make sense of themselves to others or to themselves (Martínez, *Making Sense*), so when we are at our most dire need, we have no one to turn to for advice (*consejos*) for a safe space to engage in talks or chats (*pláticas*) about who we are or for a positive image of ourselves in myths, legends, or folklore (*mitos*). Our *testimonios* go unheard and unrecorded and separated from each other by time, space, and cultural norms/values/beliefs, others only know our narratives through *chismé* (gossip). Theories in the flesh are shared through these narrative forms because

narratives erupt out of embodied experiences within specific cultural, geopolitical, relational, and economic circumstances embedded in everyday life. These often hidden, invisible, or forgotten *Jotería-historias* express experiences that can aid other LGBTQ Chicanos in understanding their identity and culture in the present (Pérez, “Jotería”; Revilla and Santillana). Given that LGBTQ Chicano experiences are intimately connected to the history and politics of the geographic regions currently known as the U.S. Southwest and Mexico, it is not an accident that LGBTQ Chicanos know little to nothing about our *jotería-historias*.

As forms of subjugated knowledge, theories in the flesh are committed to understanding power as operating simultaneously at the intersection of multiple identity and socio-cultural constructs. Kimberly Crenshaw first theorized the term “intersectionality” within critical race theory to explicate the particular struggles of Black women trying to receive justice in the U.S. legal system. As a theory of oppression that reveals the (in)visible, interlocking, and multiple levels of power operating within an identity, a performance, or an interaction in a particular time and place (Hames-García, *Identity Complex*), intersectional knowledge generation and critique requires an acknowledgement of one’s relationality to power through an understanding that we each occupy spaces of privilege and oppression simultaneously (Calafell, “(I)dentities”; Hill Collins; Jones and Calafell). Within this intersectional understanding of power, relations of oppression and resistance are viewed as fluid, contextual, and complex. Indeed, understanding theories in the flesh as experiential, embodied, and intersectional becomes

a useful tool for collecting and remembering the historical narratives of LGBTQ Chicanos towards the goal of honoring their embodied experiences in the borderlands.

### **A Borderlands Lens to Narrative Theory**

“You have to be careful with the stories you tell. And you have to watch out for the stories that you are told” (King).

This research project is focused on collecting and remembering the historical narratives of LGBTQ Chicanos/Xicanos, yet I am cognizant that placing these theories in the flesh into scholarly conversations surrounding identity, power, and culture necessitates an ontological shift in how we think about narrative theory. Narrative theory and criticism has developed from multiple perspectives across the sub-disciplines of Rhetoric, Organizational Communication, Health Communication, and Critical/Cultural Communication (Clair, et al.), and as a dialogic, contested, and aesthetic performance, narratives are embodied acts of storytelling that involve a performer and audience whether in-person, published, spoken, or via the internet (Harter; Lindemann). However, as Horacio N. Roque Ramírez, the late LGBTQ Latino oral historian, discusses: “You get very hungry to know more of the history...because we’re dealing with a community of color in the U.S. where a lot of them are immigrants, many of them are undocumented, and they’re queer bodies” (141). Given the community and the theoretical commitment to locating theories in the flesh in everyday life, this project shifts to a borderlands lens to the collection and (re)membering of historical narratives, and as such, LGBTQ Chicano

historical narratives are theorized throughout this project as performative, queer, and ultimately, decolonial acts.

Shifting to performance means that narrative is both a doing and a making (Peterson and Langellier). Eric Peterson and Kristin Langellier explains that

narrative is performative in that the bodily capability for narrating constitutes or realizes a narrative (what is done) by its exercise (the doing); and narrative is performance in that the bodily ability to narrate brings into existence or actualizes one possible narrative rather than others (something made) and that is distinct from the activity itself (the making). (174)

Through this viewpoint, the storyteller (me), narrator (interviewees), characters (people and institutions), and audience (you) are always already embedded socially and culturally in communication practices (Peterson and Langellier). Meaning narratives not only do and make, but also, “they recite, repeat, and represent...narrative forms already circulating in local communities and in popular culture” (Peterson and Langellier 178). Understanding narrative as a performative act acknowledges that narratives require “bodily participation in listening and speaking, reading and writing, seeing and gesturing, and feeling and being touched. In all of these instances, some body performs narrative” (Peterson and Langellier 175).

Collecting and remembering the historical narratives of queer of color bodies means understanding that the situational and material conditions of this community are ordered by intersectional structures of power. Indeed, intersectionality is a “critical hermeneutics that register[s] the copresence of sexuality, race, class, gender, and other identity differentials as particular components that exist simultaneously with one another”

(Muñoz, *Disidentifications* 99). In other words, I, like others, have taken a queer approach to identity and narrative research (Jones and Calafell) because narratives are not neutral, transparent, or fixed (Peterson and Langellier 176), and these historical narratives are just as much queer as they are raced, classed, and gendered. Acknowledging these narratives as a queer act is also about putting my own body on the line with/for the LGBTQ Chicanos that I interviewed because I *am* a LGBTQ Xicano. Additionally, accepting the intersectional nature of storytelling moves to an understanding that narratives can reinforce and resist master narratives simultaneously (Calafell, “Disrupting”; Jones and Calafell; Sowards and Pineda; Willink, “Economy”; Zukic); thus, this ontological shift aligns narrative theory with theories in the flesh in that both can serve as forms of oppositional discourse or counternarrative (Miller; Willink, et al.). Specifically, I contend that LGBTQ Chicano/Xicano historical narratives can be understood as decolonial acts of resistance and agency. What do we lose when we refuse to (re)member our Jotería?

### **(Re)membering as a Decolonial Act**

(Re)membering a history of conflict and coalition is an active act that draws tactics of resistance from historical narratives “dis-membered by a history of ideological violence” (Hames-García and Martínez 4). In the case of LGBTQ Chicanos, these narratives of the subaltern disrupt the “habitual and habituating [colonial] patterns of behavior” that are constrained by modern “situational and material conditions,” which are “ordered by multiple and dispersed discursive practices and conventions” (Peterson and

Langellier 178). Therefore, locating GBTQ Chicano theories in the flesh emerge from an “understanding [that] something as vast as the colonial/modern world system can begin with the glances exchanged between two cholos at a bar” (Hames-García, “Jotería Studies” 135). Remembering historical and cultural expressions of postcolonial queer subjectivities articulates a borderlands space in experiential, embodied, and intersectional configurations, and further, remembering is about pervasively proliferating, multiplying, consolidating, and dispersing these historical articulations towards the goal of social justice (Aldama; Langellier). Lisa Flores explains, “remembering the past is not about cultural separatism but about reenvisioning the future through the past so as to assure survival” (39). As a purposeful act focused on the goal of “connecting bodies with place and experience, and, importantly, people’s responses to that pain” (Tuhiwai Smith 147), remembering the historical narratives of GBTQ Chicanos is a decolonial act that pushes back on master narratives of culture, history, and identity.

However, as a decolonial act of resistance and agency, remembering is equally concerned with membering those marginalized or subaltern voices with an ethic of care that speaks to/with subaltern voices and not for (Alcoff). In other words, GBTQ Chicano historical narratives do not simply need to be included in popular and scholarly conversations surrounding culture, history, and power, which is a powerfully decolonial act in and of itself; but rather, membering these narratives means allowing the cultural norms, beliefs, and values of the subaltern to dictate the theories and methods of analysis and presentation on their own terms. Given that narrative “moves away from singular,



monolithic conception[s] of social science towards a pluralism that promotes multiple forms of representation and research” (Bochner 134), this research project embraces a borderlands lens to narrative theory that remembers and members LGBTQ Chicano historical narratives to better reflect the cultural complexities of the community from which these narratives originated. In the following sections, I define and provide an example for each of the narrative forms under analysis within this project to further explicate my borderlands lens to narrative theory.

### **Cuentos**

*Cuentos* are cultural stories told and retold as a form of collective memory that often serve a pedagogical function. *Cuentos* are stories of survival and resistance for and to marginalized people that often challenge master narratives about a community. For example, in many Chicana/o communities, the *corrido*, or the revolutionary ballad, is a musical/lyrical form of telling stories about the everyday experiences of being Mexican, Mexican-American, and/or Chicana/o. These *cuentos* told through song are lessons that re-interpret, re-member, and re-tell history through a borderlands lens that reflect the values, beliefs, and norms of the culture. Stereotypes that Mexicans are lazy, dumb, and/or dirty are directly challenged through the highly accessible *cuento*, and stories of hard-working *campesinos*, struggling first-generation college students, and respected elders and ancestors are passed down as correctives to dominant master narratives of a community or group of people.

In this project, historical narratives that invoke cultural identity and/or the process of cultural identity construction are considered *cuentos*. Quoting Adams and Goldbar, Tanya Marina Mote argues, “our sharing of stories, yelling about our joys and fears, telling of how we survive, who we love, how we hate, how we deal with attacks towards our lives, how we celebrate—*todos estos cuentos* are the secret to our survival as *gente*” (100). As a kind of folk history, these *cuentos* are cultural in that they describe how the interviewee came to understand himself/herself as Chicano/a and GBTQ. Additionally, these *cuentos* are historical in that one’s identity is mutually constitutive. Hames-García describes mutual constitution as “rather than existing as essentially separate axes that sometime intersect, social identities blend, constantly and differently, expanding one another and mutually constituting meanings” (*Identity Complex* 13). When encountering a *cuento*, the narrative hails and must be interpreted through a matrix of domination that includes Latino, Xicano, Anglo, Black and Native American identities (and more), and further, the reader/listener of this *cuento* and her/his positionality to the *cuento* can only be understood through this characteristic of mutual constitution in the formulation of an intersectional identity.

In other words, I know I am Xicano because of the historical existence of Latino identities, and additionally, raced understandings of Latino/Chicano/Xicano sexuality, gender, class, ability, age, etc. move fluidly and contextually in tandem with how Others who do not claim these identities perform their own identities (and vice versa) (Hames-García, *Identity Complex*). The historical impulses and affective registers that catalyzed

the politics of the moment are revealed in analyses of *cuentos*, and this project highlights how narratives of identity construction are vehicles for transmitting theories in the flesh that help GBTQ Chicanos navigate the historical/political terrain of decoloniality.

### **Pláticas**

*Pláticas* translates as “chats/talks,” and many Chicana feminists have engaged these “intimate conversations” as a method for locating resistance in the everyday lives of the subaltern (Ayala, Herrera, Jiménez, and Lara). *Pláticas* gather familial and cultural knowledge through the act of communication, and often times, this narrative form produces knowledge by sharing thoughts, memories, ambiguities, and new interpretations through personal and group conversations (Godinez). For example, as an insider/outsider, I am aware that my communication with GBTQ Chicanos is an intimate affair. There are certain topics, areas of interests, and performances that only emerge when in communication with other GBTQ Chicanos. These *pláticas* reveal not only areas of mutual recognition with other cultures and identities, but in this historical moment, these narrative forms showcase the communicative spaces where GBTQ Chicanos generate knowledge and where they choose to politically and materially push back on master narratives.

For example, E. Patrick Johnson, in *Sweet Tea: Black Gay Men of the South*, organized the collected historical narratives into the following *pláticas*: growing up/ family life, politics of coming out, role of religion, sexual activity, glimpses into transgendered lives, love and loss, and generational dis/continuities. Given the amount of

interviewees and the specificity of the geographic region, this project highlights *pláticas* as a tactical space where LGBTQ Chicanos critically interrogate silence, silenced bodies, and experiences of voicelessness. For instance, as a major hub of the Chicana/o movement in the 1960s and 1970s, the Denver Chicana/o community has continued to act politically to elect local and national officials, provide bilingual social and health services to those in need, and resist cultural assimilation and decimation within a settler-colonialist historical context. LGBTQ Chicanos from Colorado are connected to these same histories and politics, and their *pláticas* or chats/talks in everyday life contain theories in the flesh that share knowledges often violently silenced within Colorado.

### **Chismé**

“What we enjoyed most was the chismé, the gossip we could share with each other” (Rodríguez 65).

As a vehicle for narrating theories in the flesh, *chismé* or gossip/rumor is a narrative form that “allows for an infinity of other truths, whether or not these counter truths are substantiated” (Moreman, “Rethinking” 1). Therefore, *chismé* can be emancipatory in that “meaningful possibilities occur when we decide to think beyond our given truths” (Derrida qtd. in Moreman, “Rethinking” 1). For LGBTQ Chicanos, some of the only ways we learn about each other, especially in our early years, is through *chismé*, and in many ways, *chismé* contributes to and constructs our daily labor of intelligibility. The labor of intelligibility is the “everyday labor of *making sense of oneself* and of *making sense to others* in contexts of intense ideological violence and interpersonal

conflict” (Martínez, *Making Sense* 14). The labor of making LGBTQ Chicano/Xicano bodies and performances intelligible to others and to oneself is challenging because of “the systemic erasure of queer people of color from the social imaginary (i.e., they are simply *not* represented and therefore rarely thought of as important)” (Martínez, *Making Sense* 14). Because of this absence, *chismé* becomes an important *cuento* that LGBTQ Chicanos utilize to open up possibilities beyond the socio-cultural contexts in which our identities emerge. Further, *chismé* becomes a transport/conduit/connection from which historical knowledge is transmitted to LGBTQ Chicanos across time and space.

However, like other narrative forms, *chismé* has the potential to be harmful to LGBTQ Chicanos when their bodies and performances are distorted or exploited in popular culture or the historical record through a “diminutive incorporation” (Martínez, *Making Sense* 14). In other words, their experiences are trivialized through a process of coercion where as long as they “remain entertaining, marginal, witty, and benign” they are allowed visibility (Martínez, *Making Sense* 14). The labor of intelligibility is not motivated by a desire to “be recognized or accepted by society on society’s terms” (Martínez, *Making Sense* 14), but rather, this labor is a form of resistance to dominant structures to insist that we are a people with agency—that we are not *chingados* (fucked ones). As queer people of color struggle to be seen as “legitimate bearers of knowledge,” we create theories in the flesh to “interpret [our] lives accurately,” to “find community backup and solidarity,” and to resist/survive multiple, interlocking oppressions that incite confusion and fear, normalize ridicule and violence, and actualize

displacement through social isolation (Martínez, *Making Sense* 14). *Chismé* analyzed through the labor of intelligibility becomes a historical/political battleground over the sign—who gets to define what it means to be a LGBTQ Chicano?

### **Mitos**

For this project, *mitos* are understood as a form of sacred poetics performatively done/made by “religious actors” to “manage the often harsh and potentially overwhelming conditions they confront—the battle for survival and more, dignity, love, freedom—by deploying the most powerful weapons in their arsenal: signs, myths, rituals, narratives, and symbols” (León 5). Chicana feminists have re-visited and re-deployed indigenous Mesoamerican myths to push back on heteropatriarchal structures within Chicano/Latino cultures. *Cuentos* of legendary and mythological figures, such as Coatlicue, Coyolxauqui, Cihuacóatl, La Llorona, La Virgen de Guadalupe/Tonantzin, Tlazolteotl, and Malintzin Tenépal, record history, provide archetypes for other ways of being and thinking, push back on stereotypes, and so much more (Alarcón; Anzaldúa, *Borderlands, Interviews, Reader, Light*; Arrizón; Calafell, *Latina/o*; De La Garza; Flores Carmona; Garza; González-López; Heredia; Lara; León, *La Llorona*). For instance, Grisel Gómez-Cano charts the historical record of the Mexica pilgrimage from Aztlán to the Mexico Basin alongside Mexica *mitos* (myths/legends) of goddesses to track the slow move towards more patriarchal societal structures in Aztec society,<sup>iv</sup> and further, she connects these *mitos* through an anthropological approach to historical events and figures whose lives influenced the very creation of these goddesses and their various *mitos*.

To cope with the trauma of living in perpetual liminality due to their colonial condition, Chicanos often draw on these *mitos* of Mesoamerican gods and goddesses in their celebrations, art, and literary works to create worlds in the present that are more livable (Gómez-Cano). As a theory in the flesh, Luis León describes this social-historical phenomenon as a religious poetic:

Through a strategy of *performed* and *narrated* religious discourse, tactics, and strategies, social agents change culturally derived meanings and, indeed, the order of the phenomenal world by rearranging the relationships among symbols and deftly inventing and reinventing the signification of symbols—especially those held sacred. (4)

However, *mitos* can entrap the everyday performances of culture and identity into tropes of monstrosity, so like other narrative forms, *mitos* have the potential to silence LGBTQ Chicanos and reinforce dominant narratives of otherness and difference (Calafell, *Monstrosity*).

For instance, in the fourth grade, I begged my mom at la pulga to buy me an old, tattered, hardbook titled *Mythology* by Edith Hamilton, and I consumed all 300+ pages of that tome in days. I loved it: The heroes and heroines; the grand triumphs and tragedies; and of course, the gods and goddesses. In California, my teacher was baffled with what to do with me during our two-week unit on mythology because I knew every myth and character. In the end, I built Star Trek buildings and characters out of index cards and made up stories for them set in the stars until we moved on to math. My point is that we never covered Mesoamerican myths, so until attending college, I never knew about the *mitos* of my people and the socio-historical and cultural theories in the flesh they offered

in the present. For LGBTQ Chicanos, we name ourselves as the descendants of the original inhabitants of this continent, and as such, the systemic erasure of our myths, legends, and folk heroes and healers is a colonial violence that robs us of our history, culture, and religious poetics. *Mitos* are narrative forms that serve “power as an ideological mechanism of social control, exploitation, and domination” and are “also effectively deployed in attempts to destabilize those very same forces by people who have access to only the bare resources that constitute conventional power” (León, *La Llorona* 5). How do LGBTQ Chicanos deploy *mitos* to make their lives more livable?

### **Testimonios**

In Latina/o communication studies, *testimonios* are utilized as an intercultural approach to critique rhetorical discourses surrounding marginalization, oppression, and/or resistance. In part, *testimonios* are political in that they deploy a vernacular rhetoric meant to raise international consciousness surrounding an experience (Scholz). This *testimonialista* does not consider herself the sole authority on an issue, yet as a speech act, the narratives (re)told purposely speak for communal experiences against dominant discourses (Bernal, Burciaga, and Flores Carmona; Delgado “Rigoberta”; Scholz). Specifically, *testimonios* are a form of collectivist discourse that create “new understandings about how marginalized communities build solidarity and respond to and resist dominant culture, laws, and policies that perpetuate inequity” (Delgado Bernal, et al. 363). For example, Holling examines femicidal violence in Ciudad Juarez utilizing *testimonios* as a method of social science research. She argues for a rhetorical/cultural



understanding of *testimonios* that examine how language is used, identifies rhetorical function(s), theorizes appeals created, and analyzes the political critiqued conveyed (“So My Name” 317). From this epistemology, *testimonios* are considered a text, video, performance, or audio that serve a political, methodological, and pedagogical purpose with a social action telos towards solidarity from the reader/witness (Delgado Bernal, et al.; Holling, “So My Name”; Reyes and Curry Rodríguez).

For instance, Rigoberta Menchú, an indigenous Guatemalan woman, received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1992 for her *testimonio* in the book *I, Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala*, which brought to light the plight and violence experienced by Mesoamerican indigenous peoples. Delgado explores Menchú’s *testimonio* as a form of collectivist discourse as an argument for more (inter)cultural nuances to rhetorical criticism (“Rigoberta”). Furthering this work, Avant-Mier and Hasian explore and analyze the controversies that erupted in response to Menchú’s *testimonio*, principally by scholar David Stoll, to defend the heuristic value of *testimonios* to communication studies research. In particular, Avant-Mier and Hasian identify four key discursive functions: (1) a sense of autobiographical truth; (2) a sense of solidarity and potentiality for alliance-building; (3) as a supply of discursive materials for historical remembrances; and (4) as a counter-hegemonic device (330). Whether rejected, accepted, or critiqued, *testimonios* generate a collectivist discourse that functions to blur “the traditional boundaries that exist between fact and fiction, material truths and social truths, and the acts of recording and witnessing” (Avant-Mier and Hasian 330-331).

In the process of collecting historical narratives, I was confronted with *testimonios* of empowerment that mirrored the rhetorical functions outlined by Avant-Mier and Hasian. As an oral historian with a borderlands lens to narrative theory, I had to grapple with each *cuento* collected to consider whether it was my place to label or offer analysis to anything occurring within the narrative. The questions became: Is it my place to speak for them? Isn't this their *cuento* to tell? Collecting *cuentos* can and does challenge the oral historian because *testimonios* ask the researcher to take a back seat to the informant. If "the collective goal of testimonio is to name oppression and to arrest its actions whether as genocide, racism, classism, xenophobia, or any other type of institutionalized marginalization" (Reyes and Curry Rodríguez 527), then, the one giving the *testimonio* must voice their own story to the dominant culture--without the researcher's interpretation. In this project, I share two *testimonios* collected about empowerment as further evidence to and scholarly discussion on the potentiality of this narrative form to Latina/o communication studies.

### **Consejos**

*"En boca cerrada no entran moscas. 'Flies don't enter a closed mouth'" (Anzaldúa Borderlands 76).*

"'No te dejes' ('Don't let them do that to you' or 'fight back') (Martínez "Joto Passivity" 240).

"Being Chicano and being queer means you are transgressive no matter where you go. As queer Chicanos, we fit in nowhere and we fit in everywhere" (Pérez "Out" 291).

All of the previous quotations by LGBTQ Chicanas/os would be considered *consejos* or cultural sayings/advice that offer theories in the flesh explicitly for and directly to other GBTQ Chicanos. As demonstrated by Anzaldúa in the above cultural saying, the deconstruction of common or taken-for-granted sayings that are aimed at silencing “wild tongues” exposes the “tradition of silence” disciplined into the minds and bodies of (LGBTQ) Chicanas/os (*Borderlands* 75-76). Further, in the cultural saying offered by Martínez above, he breaks his own silence surrounding incest and embodied cultural-patriarchal impulses to theorize “why some queer Latino youth may not ‘fight back’ when faced with homophobic violence, and what the seeming inaction might tell us” (“Joto Passivity” 237). By postponing a response to violence, Martínez explains that jotería “postpone falling into dominant scripts and repertoires and they postpone practicing masculinity in misogynist and homophobic terms” (“Joto Passivity” 243). Cultural sayings contain intricate relationships with control and dominance, so LGBTQ Chicana/o deconstructions of these taken-for-granted sayings expose these relations and reconstruct theories in the flesh from these embodied experiences in the borderlands.

In this project, *consejos* were solicited from each of the participants at the approximate end of the interview, so *consejos* are sometimes *explicitly* theories in the flesh meant for and directly to other GBTQ Chicanos. For instance, reflecting on his experiences of graduate school, Enrique Daniel Pérez shares this *consejo*: “I understand that many of the opportunities that I was given for advancing as a graduate student and getting scholarships, fellowships, and teaching gigs happened because I just happened to

be hanging around the department a whole lot” (“Out” 283). In this narrative, Pérez offers insights into what he did with his body, where he strategically placed it, and the potentiality for success if this performance is mimicked by other LGBTQ Chicanas/os. Or, as he explains, “when you are hanging around the department so much and a faculty member gets information about a scholarship or fellowship, they are much more likely to share it with you or encourage you to apply for it” (“Out” 283). Although perhaps an everyday narrative act of advice, *consejos* are historical and political, because as numerous (LGBTQ) Chicanas and Chicanos in the academy have critiqued, academia continues to function as a white supremacist, capitalistic, cisheteropatriarchal structure of power that marginalizes (queer) people of color (Anzaldúa, *Interviews, Reader*; Calafell, *Monstrosity*, “Did it Happen”, “Future”, “Mentoring”, “Performance”, “When Will We All Matter”; Calafell and Moreman, “Envisioning”; Del Castillo and Guido, Facio and Lara; Hames-García and Martínez; Martínez and Gutierrez-Perez; Moreman and Persona Non Grata). The *consejos* remembered in this project offer theories in the flesh meant to be deployed by other GBTQ Chicanos to carve out spaces to survive and possibly thrive.

### **Conclusion: Narrating Theories in the Flesh**

Given the lack of research, continued socio-cultural marginalization, and violent manifestations towards GBTQ Chicanos/Xicanos, this research project seeks to address the following research questions: (1) What are the historical narratives that shape how GBTQ Chicanos understand and perform their identities? (2) How do these narratives inform how GBTQ Chicanos make sense of their relationships with others and

themselves? (3) What theories in the flesh do LGBTQ Chicanos utilize in their everyday lives to survive and resist on the peripheries of multiple, oppressive, power structures? Theories in the flesh are located where experiential, embodied, and intersectional knowledge is generated in everyday life, and by shifting to a borderlands approach to narrative theory, I aim to collect and (re)member the historical narratives of LGBTQ Chicanos/Xicanos as a performative, queer, and decolonial act. Further, a borderlands shift demands a greater attention to the scholarly contributions offered by *cuENTOS*, *pláticas*, *testimonios*, *chismé*, *mitos*, and *consejos* through the lens of theories in the flesh. Indeed, these ontological shifts reverberate throughout this research report because speaking with/to LGBTQ Chicanos means entering another world.

In Chapter Two, we begin the transformation through a historical review of LGBTQ Chicano experiences to simultaneously provide a context for the collected *jotería-historias* and clarify the potentiality of *jotería-historias* to understandings of culture, identity, history, and power. As a culturally dualistic experience, the historical marginalization of LGBTQ Chicanos/Xicanos is intimately connected to the porously and frequently crossed U.S./Mexico border for over half a millennia. Indeed, many Chicanos/Xicanos consider themselves a twice-colonized people with a mestizo heritage of racial, ethnic, cultural, and political mixing and mingling (Anzaldúa, “The Homeland”; Watts), and because of this cultural dualism, Chicano/Xicano history is drawn from *both* Mexico and the U.S. *and* is not adequately captured by either (Delgado, “All Along the Border). Chicano/Xicano history manifests within the broad geographic space of Mexico,

California, Arizona, Nevada, New Mexico, Texas, and parts of Colorado and is deeply connected to the mythos surrounding the legendary homeland of the Aztecs—Aztlán. To enter into this cultural dualistic experience, I review the meanings of *joto*, *cuiloni*, *puto*, *maricón*, and *passivo/activo*, which are all derogatory labels for GBTQ Chicanos, through several historical snapshots from both the U.S. Southwest and Mexico to create a context for the *jotería-historias* collected in this project.

To critically collect and (re)member the theories in the flesh of GBTQ Chicanos, Chapter Three explicates the method of the Four Seasons of Oral History Performance (FSOHP) utilized within this research study. In the early stages of this project, it became clear that a decolonial, cyclical, and creation-centered approach to the collection and (re)membering of the historical narratives of GBTQ Chicanos was essential to speaking with/to this marginalized and underrepresented community. By following the four *conocimientos* of the Four Seasons approach, FSOHP does not necessarily deploy new methods, but rather, it is an ontological shift that deploys methods at different times and towards different goals. This chapter defines each season and the methods utilized/ deployed within each. To demonstrate the shifts that a decolonial, cyclical, and creation-centered approach embody, I provide intimate examples from the field for each season of FSOHP. As an insider/outsider, I had to put my body on the line just like my interviewees, so to further introduce the reader into our world I share personal journaling, poetry, drawings, affirmations, and field notes to offer a glimpse into the everyday life of a GBTQ Xicano.

In Chapter Four, I utilize poetic transcription and performative writing to poetically and rhetorically share the *cuentos*, *pláticas*, *mitos*, *chismé*, *testimonios*, and *consejos* collected and (re)membered through the FSOHP method. In Chapter Five, I selectively analyze the *cuentos* collected to highlight the multiple inter-/intra-generational silences within LGBTQ Chicano communities; the traumas and subsequent theories in the flesh created from coming out as a LGBTQ Chicano; and the multiple vectors and levels of identity, culture, and power LGBTQ Chicanos navigate to make sense of themselves and to make sense of themselves to others. In the final concluding chapter, I review the performative, queer, and decolonial underpinnings of this research report to explicate some of the possible future directions this work can take. *Jotería-Historias: Theories from the Fringes* collects the cultural/historical narratives of LGBTQ Chicanos of Colorado to locate theories in the flesh in the forms of *cuentos*, *pláticas*, *chismé*, *mitos*, *testimonios*, and *consejos*, and further, this project explicates queer of color performances of intersectional and decolonial politics from the fringes.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Snapshots of *Jotería* History, Culture, and Politics

#### Remembering *Jotería*

Voyagers  
gather the blood vessels  
pumping arteries into capillaries  
spongy foreskin      pulled back  
brown tasting  
like caterpillar nights  
inching up a cool blade of grass  
fingers      stroking up and down  
a pre-Columbian  
milky way

Sacred fire  
bring white-hot charcoal dreams  
bring shamanic might  
scald us  
red

burning  
heartbeats cracking  
purple twilight  
glowing

la luna voyeuristic  
tall grass like the sea  
nibbling my two-spirit  
feathers  
daring to pluck  
each one gently



rolling down hillsides  
our bodies in a turbulent cycle  
    cresting waves  
    barely missing destruction  
    noses above water  
    salt tightening throat  
around memories  
corrupted  
made far-fetched  
made un-American

It feels right  
trusting myths of Joto elders  
who tell their own histories:

    stoned dead  
    made into slaves  
    stricken with plague  
    picking your grapes  
    sin papeles

because they might give you pride  
in your holes  
chords stretched open  
a chorus singing  
burdened  
no more

### **The Nepantla State**

“Let us not be afraid of who we are. We were made exactly the way we were meant to be” (Doring 23).

As of late, this *consejo* has meant a lot to me because the current historical and political moment requires that all of my low self-esteem issues need to finally be handled. As I have written about elsewhere, my “racial/ethnic mestizaje alongside my bisexual-gay-queer identities in tandem with my working-class positionality” has “made

performing and understanding my particular manifestation of masculinity a difficult and nearly impossible task” (“Disruptive” 94). This life-long experience betwixt and between so many cultural worlds has felt disorienting, confusing yet transformative. Like Anzaldúa, I name this state “nepantla,” a Nahuatl word for in-between space, and I claim this edge on the edge home because “there is a livedness and spirituality in *nepantla* that can continue to shape our identities” (Gutierrez-Perez, “Warren-ting” 202). Living in nepantla “means dealing with the fact that I, like people, inhabit cultures and, when crossing into other mundos, shift into and out of perspectives corresponding to each; it means living in liminal spaces” (Anzaldúa, *Light* 3). *Jotería* history and politics are in a constant state of nepantla; therefore, (re)membering snapshots of *Jotería* cultural dualisms means entering into a state that challenges the colonial/modern gender system, which has erased *Jotería* experience for the past 500 years.

Given the complexities of intersectional identities, this literature review is only a snapshot of the vortex of forces that *Jotería* have navigated throughout world history and politics. However, there are no direct historical accounts from *Jotería* within this review because they simply do not exist, or are rare, modern occurrences—hence, the necessity of this project. Fernando Delgado explains, “the border informs, if not defines, Chicano cultural experiences and formation” (“All Along the Border”), so Chicano/Xicano history inhabits a long temporal heritage that includes: American imperialism and settler-colonialism, the on-going Chicana/o movement, the pre-columbian era of the Aztec, Spanish conquest and inquisition, colonialism, and neocolonialism. As such, *Jotería*

history and politics are a culturally dualistic experience deeply connected to the colonial/modern gender system operating within the Americas.

The colonial/modern gender system emphasizes “categorical, dichotomous, hierarchical logic as central to modern, colonial, capitalist thinking about race, gender, and sexuality” (Lugones 742). Further, as this chapter will prove, “emerging conceptions of gender, sexuality, sin, and perversion intermeshed thoroughly with the development of the colonial/modern racial regime,” which in turn

brought about a Eurocentric conception of gender and sexuality that eventually evolved into understandings of heterosexuality, homosexuality, and gender hierarchy that remain inseparable from the colonial encounter and that continue to influence modern practices of gender and sexuality today. (Hames-García, *Identity Complex* 52)

In the edited anthology, *Queer in Aztlán: Chicano Male Recollections of Consciousness and Coming Out*, Rigoberto González describes the influence of the colonial/modern gender system on *Jotería* in everyday terms:

I also know that growing up gay means worshiping the white male body—the dominant flesh on pornography, the dominant character in fiction and film, that dominant face on gay magazine covers. White is beautiful, white is beautiful. And you, little Mexican boy, are not white. (González 47)

The modern/colonial gender system encourages conformity by force and remains highly flexible in culture and communication (Hames-García, “Queer”). In effect, this system casts colonial others as “violent and barbaric sexualities or as developers of mysterious and libertine erotic arts” and “as hypersexual beasts in a state of nature or as asexual prudes caught up in overly repressive moral traditions” (Hames-García, “Queer” 40-41).

In this project, my interviewees and I push back on this master narrative as an act of resistance to the colonial/modern gender system. Beginning in Colorado, I discuss how the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848) opened up the area we now call Denver to U.S. American imperialism, specifically in the form of settler-colonialism. This set a precedent for racism and xenophobia that necessitated the emergence of Denver as a hub for the Chicano Movement in the 1960s and 1970s. However, the straight, cisgendered male-dominated movement continued to exclude and marginalize Chicanas and *Jotería*, so throughout the 1980s to the 2000s, Chicana feminists and *Jotería* worked through art, activism, and scholarship to transform the movement into a more inclusive space. Like within the early part of the movement, these folks drew on the symbols, myths, and culture of the Aztecs and Mexico to gain empowering images and narratives from their ancestors, such as the god/dess Xochiquetzal/Xochipilli. Yet, looking specifically for *Jotería-historias* during the conquest and (neo)colonial Mexico reveals only snapshots of what it meant to be a nonheteronormative mestiza/o with alternative gender and sexuality performances in these times. By reviewing the culturally dualistic experiences of *Jotería*, this chapter immerses the reader in another world where tactics of resistance and agency must be deployed carefully and purposefully—ones life is often at stake.

### **The Founding of Colorado: American Imperialism and Settler-Colonialism**

Chicanos of Colorado are connected to a history and politics of U.S. American imperialism and settler-colonialism. A re-occurring theme within Chicano identity and culture is feeling like one is constantly in a nepantla state due to this long history of racist

and xenophobic oppression. As mestizas/os of varying degrees of Native American, European, and African (and more), Chicanos draw their politics by reclaiming their various indigenous heritages as a source of empowerment and community pride. Prior to the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848, Native land (Colorado) was divided up between the Spanish and French, then the Spanish and U.S. American, and after the Mexican War of Independence, Colorado was divided up between Mexico and the United States of America. The treaty that ended the Mexican-American War signed over a third of Mexico's northern territory to the United States. Overnight, citizens of Mexico living in California, Nevada, Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, and parts of Utah and Colorado woke up with the border having crossed them. Finding themselves under assault from U.S. American settlers, military, and government politics, these Mexican-Americans began to experience a second colonization led by U.S. imperialism.

Although Mexican citizens were supposed to receive the same rights and privileges as Anglos, this part of the treaty was quickly disregarded because of racial prejudices and stereotypes.

Far from having a privileged status, Mexican-Americans faced discrimination very similar to that experienced by African-Americans. Excluded from public facilities and neighborhoods and the targets of racial slurs, Mexican-Americans typically lived in one section of town because they were not permitted to rent or own property anywhere except in the "Mexican Colony". (Martinez 211)

For instance, when California became a state it was clearly written in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo that laws and legislation would be produced in Spanish and English. However, a populace that can understand the rules governing them worked against

incoming White settlers because Mexican citizens held the rights to too much of the property and land of California. In order to wrestle away their resources, the bilingual mandate was quickly changed, which gave an advantage to incoming White settlers.

In Colorado, settler-colonialism took the horrific form of genocide against the Cheyenne and Arapahoe peoples during the Sandy Creek Massacre. Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, an indigenous historian, writes that “the First and Third Colorado Volunteers,” who were “assigned to guard the road to Santa Fe,” mainly “engaged in raiding and looting Indigenous communities” (137). On November 29th, 1864, Dunbar-Ortiz describes how 700 Colorado Volunteers butchered and mutilated the Cheyenne and Arapahoe peoples:

They camped under a white flag of truce and had federal permission to hunt buffalo to feed themselves....Without provocation or warning, they attacked, leaving dead 105 women and children and 28 men....[John] Chivington and his volunteers burned tepees and stole horses. Worse, after the smoke had cleared, they had returned and finished off the few survivors while scalping and mutilating the corpses—women and men, young and old, children, babies. Then they decorated their weapons and caps with body parts—fetuses, penises, breasts, and vulvas. (Dunbar-Ortiz 137)

Chivington and all 700 Colorado Volunteers were neither prosecuted nor reprimanded —“signaling a free field for killing” (Dunbar-Ortiz 138). It is worth mentioning that the founder of the University of Denver (DU) was a well-documented instigator of the Sandy Creek Massacre, and two out of the five interviews were with LGBTQ Chicanos who attend or did attend this university. As a space created out of the dark shadow of American Imperialism and settler-colonialism, this project is a direct resistance to a place

that was never meant for our Chicano bodies from its inception.

### **Denver Chicano Movement History**

In 1876, Colorado became an official state within the United States, and within this racist and xenophobic environment, Colorado was one of the states that allowed KKK members to ascend into several high-level government offices in the 1920s. Born in Denver, CO on June 18, 1928, Rudolfo “Corky” Gonzales was one of eight children and was raised by a single father from Chihuahua, Mexico who had served in the 1910 Mexican revolution (Vigil 5). Gonzales, through his work as a poet, activist, and community leader, was key to making Chicano first and foremost an identity built on cultural pride through social protest and political organization. In fact, Denver was a major hub within the Chicano movement during the 1960s and 1970s, and the Crusade for Justice (CFJ) with their charismatic leader Rudolfo “Corky” Gonzales were very influential throughout Colorado and the nation.

From a family of fieldworkers, Gonzales began working alongside his father at age 10, and in 1946, he graduated high school at 16 (Vigil 5). During a brief but successful career as a boxer (1946-1957), Gonzales used his earnings to fuel two small businesses, and he even used his fame to enter politics as Denver’s first Chicano Democratic district captain among other political organizing achievements in the late 1950s to 1965 (Vigil 8-9). Unlike his other Chicano contemporaries, such as César Chávez, Gonzales was not a spiritual pacifist, and influenced by his revolutionary father, he “saw politics and life as a struggle in which there were winners and losers. He had

made a living for himself and his family with his fists and literally fought the toughest men in the world” (Vigil 10). Dissatisfied with the Democratic party’s ability to respond to the needs of the Chicano community, Gonzales left mainstream politics in 1966 to establish the CFJ (Vigil 11-26). The CFJ flourished during the late 1960s with members consisting of young and middle-aged men that participated in organizing high school walkouts, college-level Chicano student groups, raising funds and holding social events for barrio youth, establishing Escuela Tlateloloco, and the infamous 1969 1st Chicano Youth Liberation Conference (Vigil 81-99). However, what about Chicanas and *Jotería*?

### **El Movimiento and La Transformación Eras**

After decades of marginalization and underrepresentation, Mexican-Americans began politically organizing alongside other minority groups to create positive images of themselves and gain back the rights promised to them as U.S. citizens (Delgado, “Chicano”). The Chicano movement often points to “El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán” as its beginning, and within this historical moment, leaders and folk heroes, such as Reies López Tijerina, César Chávez, Rudolfo “Corky” Gonzales, José Angel Gutiérrez, and Dolores Huerta, emerged across Aztlán<sup>v</sup> to create a patchwork of social movements referred to as *El Movimiento* (Cisneros; Fernandez and Jensen; Hammerback and Jensen; Jensen & Hammerback, “No Revolutions,” “Radical”; Sowards, “Rhetorical Agency,” “Rhetorical Functions”; Sedano). However, this movement era has been critiqued for being too patriarchal, too heteronormative, and embodying the worst parts of machismo,



such as aggressiveness, male-domination, cultural nationalism, and a resistance to embodying anything feminine (Anzaldúa *Interviews*; Dicochea; Garcia).

For example, “El Plan” states: “*Brotherhood* unites us, and love for our *brothers* makes us a people whose time has come” (emphasis added, Anonymous 1). Alma Garcia charts the actions undertaken by Chicana feminists during this time to create space for themselves, which I have termed the “La Transformación” era. Additionally, Perlita Dicochea describes how Chicanas pushed back on racist white feminists and misogynistic Chicano males during this era. Indeed, while the militaristic Chicano movement has waned, Chicana feminists, such as Cherríe Moraga, AnaLouise Keating, Bernadette Marie Calafell and Karen Davalos, have continued to fight for social justice by adapting to queer theorizations and often utilizing intersectional analyses of race, class, sexuality, and gender. Chicanas have transformed the movement into a more inclusive form of resistance that continues to bring various peoples into the political ideology of Xicanisma (Castillo).

This Xicanisma standpoint is aligned with and is a precursor for the goals and commitments of *Joteria* studies. *Jotería* studies is a decolonial political project that challenges homonormativity, modernity, and social hierarchies based on racial, gendered, sexual, classed, and aged differences (Bañales). Challenging coloniality means making visible the

powerful reduction of human beings to animals, to inferiors by nature, in a schizoid understanding of reality that dichotomized the human from nature, the human from the non-human, and thus imposes an ontology and a cosmology that,

in its power and constitution, disallows all humanity, all possibility of understanding, all possibility of human communication, to dehumanized beings. (Lugones 751)

By utilizing borderlands theory and its subsequent expansions and transformations, *Jotería* studies offers a critique of culture, history, and society that utilizes a mestiza/o consciousness to hold theories of intersectionality and discourses of postcoloniality in tension (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands*; Bañales; Gutierrez-Perez, “Disruptive”; Keating, *Transformation*). Therefore, *Jotería* critique often implicates and interrogates white supremacist capitalist cisheteropatriarchy as it manifests and is propagated as part of everyday life within the modern/colonial gender system.

*Joto* is a derogatory label used to discipline, describe, categorize, and hurt LGBTQ Chicanos/Xicanos (Bañales), and *joto* roughly translates as “faggot” or “queer.” As a homophobic slur, *joto* is beginning to be reappropriated by LGBTQ Chicanos/Xicanos as a “dramatic gesture toward resignifying the term and refuting the negative connotations that it has carried historically” (Bañales 156). For example, Shane Moreman has introduced *joto* into intercultural communication studies as an identity that understands itself and draws empowerment from a fundamental understanding of intersectionality. He writes, “My Latino + gay + male positionalities cannot be exclusively isolated” (“Rethinking” 5). *Jotería* studies emerged out of Chicana/o studies and “can be considered a critical site of inquiry that centers on nonheteronormative gender and sexuality as related to mestiza/o subjectivities” (Pérez, “Jotería” 143). Like the Chicanos, Chicanas, and Chicaxs that came before them, *Jotería* draw on the myths, history, and

politics of Aztlán to challenge master narratives of invisibility and disempowerment.

### **Sexuality in the God/dess Xochiquetzal/Xochipilli**

Given this ontology and epistemology, I demonstrate through the *mitos* and images of the Xochiquetzal (feathered flower of the maguey), god/dess of nonprocreative sexuality and love, how there was a socially-sanctioned place for nonheteronormative sexualities, intersex, and genderqueer persons prior to the Spanish conquest (Murray; Sigal). Xochiquetzal was both male and female, and in her male form/aspect, she was called Xochipilli (prince of flowers), and s/he is considered the deity of homosexuality (Murray). Prior to the Spanish conquest, conceptions of male homosexuality had a place in Mexica society that did not involve the violent destruction of male homosexuals as a norm. In fact, a popular board game played everyday called Patolli featured Xochipilli as a player that upon a player rolling a “0” would take one of six offerings (maguey, gold, etc.), and once one player had lost all six offerings, Xochipilli gifted all the offerings to the winner.<sup>vi</sup> Patolli had been played throughout Mesoamerica for over a millennium, and it was one of the first things outlawed by Catholic priests during the Spanish conquest and colonialism. Chicanos/Xicanos frequently draw on the images, metaphors, myths/legends, and culture of the Aztecs and other Native American tribes to locate their cultural pride and identity in being brown (Delgado, “Chicano”, “All Along the Border”; Marez).

Like most of the gods in the Aztec pantheon, s/he had a positive and negative aspect:

In Xochiquetzal's positive aspect, s/he was the deity of loving relationships and the god/dess of artistic creativity; it was said that nonreproductive love was like art—beautiful and rare. In his/her negative aspect, s/he was the deity of sexual destruction; s/he incited lust and rape, and inflicted people with venereal disease and piles. (Murray 61)

These aspects were not gendered in that the female was positive and the male was negative; rather, Xochipilli/Xochiquetzal were one dynamic being. For instance, Xochipilli, in a famous representation of the god/dess protected in the National Museum of Anthropology in Mexico City, is depicted wearing a mask with his legs crossed and happily singing while fully covered in flowers, psychotropic plants, hallucinogenic mushrooms, and animal skins (Cartwright). Indeed, there are no gendered pronouns in Nahuatl, and the word *teotl* (god) has no gender, so the Aztec gods and goddesses, who did not live by human rules, did not follow the strict gender divisions that we now understand within the colonial-modern gender system (Hames-García, *Identity Complex*, “Jotería”; Sigal).

Xochiquetzal was a principle god/dess within Aztec mytho-cosmology who served an important purpose in regulating cultural norms; in ceremonies for fertility, agriculture, and curing; and in everyday rituals (Carrasco; Sigal). For the Mexica, spirituality is deeply interconnected with nature and the cosmos, and specifically, the soul was thought to be connected to breath and the wind, to birds and death, to one's shadow and a spirit double, to rocks and the heart, heat and fire, and tonalli (or one's name, calendar days, astrological signs, and spirit animals) (McKeever Furst). For example, there is a story of Xochiquetzal seducing a man who became Scorpion, which suggests

that the Mexica were prudish and wary of “excess” in private, and although some public rituals were erotic and orgiastic, sexual acts were generally thought to be radically connected to nature, the functioning of the universe, and everyday life (Murray; Sigal).

The story is as follows:

In the scorpion story, the [warrior] man went to the mountains to fast and, most important, refrain from any sexual activity. If he successfully maintained his vigil, the gods would give him the power to kill his enemies. Upon Xochiquetzal’s successful seduction of the man, however, a warrior beheaded him and turned him into a scorpion. . . . In the tale of the scorpion we find a warning: a violation of a vow (in this case, the man’s vow not to have sexual intercourse) can lead the gods to disempower you (turn you into a scorpion). (Sigal 8-9)

This story has many cultural ramifications for Mexica society and everyday life. First, there is the quotidian aspect of survival in the tale because when one was stung by a scorpion, then a curer/healer would recount this story to the afflicted man or woman and the curer/healer would simulate or actually partake in sexual intercourse with that scorpion-stung person (Sigal). The curer as Xochiquetzal and the afflicted as a conduit of Scorpion re-enact the ritual performance of the story to remind “the scorpion that, because he failed to maintain his vigil, he cannot kill this person” (Sigal 8). In this case, the sex act of Xochiquetzal may have disempowered the man but offered salvation to humankind because scorpion stings were a regular and potentially dangerous everyday occurrence faced by the Mexica in their lives (Sigal).

Second, this is not a story of chaste and puritanical sexuality, but rather, a story of balance and a warning against excess. The Mexica believed in a spirituality that was radically interconnected with all things, so sexual acts in excess or in lack were

potentially dangerous to society and the universe. A warrior who makes a vow of celibacy to maintain male potency is also maintaining balance with/in the cosmos, and to receive the blessings of the gods in warfare, he must take his vows and warrior role/duties solemnly as an act of spirituality. Although not necessarily a desired sexual act for Mexica males, homosexual acts were not understood as “sin,” but rather, sex acts between men were accepted in certain ceremonies and rituals. In fact, male-male desire and sexual acts were accepted in moderation and balance and not all same-sex intercourse was accepted the same way (i.e. being the receiver in the sex act was not as tolerated as being the inserter) (Sigal).

Finally, as a dual-gendered deity, Xochiquetzal’s seduction of a man offers an understanding of the place of male homosexuality in pre-conquest times. *Cuiloni* is a Nahuatl word that “derives from ‘someone/something taken,’ and is clearly related to the anus, thus one taken from behind” (Sigal 193). However, the literal translation behind the term is contested, and it has been speculated to mean sodomite, faggot, one who is fucked, queer, passive sodomite, or *puto* (Sigal). The *cui-* means “to take” and *-oni* is a passive modifier of a verb, so *cuiloni* refers to the passive position in sodomy (Sigal). Further, the word *tecuilonti* means to “cause someone to do *cuiloni*” and thus refers to the “inserter” position during anal sex (Sigal 193). However, Pete Sigal notes how the sexual performance of *cuiloyotl*, or “sodomy, homosexuality, the act without which the *cuiloni* could not exist” (177), within Nahuatl documents was viewed as deserving denigration but not the people themselves (193). Homosexual acts were related to the gods, sacrifice,

and ritual, and as a warrior/war-centric society, the Nahuas did not connect *cuiloyotl* to “sin,” but connected the sexual act to excess (Sigal 197). As Sigal explains *cuiloni* “would not reference an internalized sexual identity, but rather would specify a contextual set of sexual characteristics based upon one’s actions at a given time, actions that presumably would require confession” to the Aztec goddess of excess Tlazolteotl (Sigal 197). Although the receptive male was stigmatized, the Mexica placed an emphasis on the sexual act not the person, and as such, male same-sex acts and desire had a place within Aztec society; in other Native American spaces, neither the act nor the person were stigmatized, and like the Mexica, the LGBTQ male had a place within society, culture, and the order of the cosmos.

### **The Religious and Military Conquest of New Mexico**

In this project, all my interviewees’ family and ancestors still live in or are from New Mexico, and in prior generations, their heritage came from various parts of Mexico and Europe. Throughout the 15th to the 17th centuries, Spanish armies set up colonial cities and military outposts to control the Pueblo peoples of what is now known as New Mexico, and there are many atrocities that were committed against indigenous peoples at this time. For example, after Acoma residents refused to surrender willingly, Spanish conquistadores punished the indigenous people brutally: “all men over the age of 25 had one of their feet severed. Children under the age of twelve were distributed as servants for monasteries and households” (Gutiérrez 54). In tandem, Franciscan monks during the 17th century wreaked havoc on the social and gender systems of the native Pueblo

peoples in the name of Christianity. Friars humiliated fathers before their children by emasculating them; for instance, friars would “grab him by the testicles and...twist them until the man collapsed in pain” or “buggered [them] for their insubordination, a posture that the Spanish regarded as a sign of submission” (76). However, prior to the arrival of the Spanish, the Pueblo peoples lived in an egalitarian system that separated labor between men and women and “third gender” persons (Gutiérrez).

For instance, men were tasked with spinning and weaving, hunting, and protecting the community, and women cared for the home, the hearth, and the construction of housing (Gutiérrez). Similar to the Mexica, the Pueblo peoples believed in a radical interconnectedness with nature, the cosmos, and human beings, and for the Pueblo peoples, many ceremonies meant to commune with the gods, bring success in the hunt or war, make rain, or cure afflictions were entirely in the realm of men. It was believed that women’s “enormous control and power over seed production, child-rearing, household construction, and the earth’s fertility” (Gutiérrez 33) needed to be balanced with the potency of masculinity. As Ramon A. Gutiérrez explains,

On a daily basis women appropriated men’s vital energies: the crops they planted, the children they engendered, and the meat from their hunts. Men thus frequently renewed their energies by segregating themselves from women...because potent femininity polluted and rendered male magic impotent, men abstained from sex with women for a prescribed period before and after their rituals. (33)

For example, in the story of the Flower and the Scorpion in the previous section, the warrior was preparing for war by abstaining from sex. Although I would argue that this belief system continues to place women in a male-dominated society, this understanding



of balance between the sexes is connected to the cosmos and to nature, and ultimately, this separation of labor created space for an important place within Pueblo society and culture for a third sex—the two-spirit.

The two-spirit individual is one who is half-man/half-woman and is not necessarily an intersex person but the term can include intersex persons depending on the indigenous culture. Gutiérrez uses the anthropological term “berdache”<sup>vii</sup> for two-spirit peoples and describes them as “biological males who had assumed the dress, occupations, mannerisms, and sexual comportment of females as a result of a sacred vision or community selection” (33-34). In the male-only ceremonies, two-spirit individuals entered the ritual space as female impersonators thus allowing the men to maintain control of all aspects of the sacred, yet still, together they could invoke both female and male energies within the ceremony (Gutiérrez). The basic meaning behind the two-spirit was that “as [a] sacred half-man/half-woman who conjoined all that was male and female, she was a living symbol of cosmic harmony” (Gutiérrez 35). When two-spirit persons were located within a community, there were typically always four,<sup>viii</sup> and upon one of their deaths, a search for a new two-spirit began amongst all the pregnant women.

Although they were allowed to take a husband later in life, the two-spirit individual was a balancing force within the community that mitigated conflict through the use of her/his body as an erotic release. Boys and bachelors were segregated from women until they were married in order to “master male esoteric lore,” but additionally, it was a way to lower potential conflicts between elder or senior married men who could enjoy

sex with females and younger, unmarried males who were not allowed to be with women (Gutiérrez 35). Therefore, the principle role of two-spirit individuals besides the labor they undertook alongside women was to be sexual conduits for the men of the community. She/he was not allowed to refuse herself/himself sexually to any man (Gutiérrez). Gutiérrez speculates that this “may have been why the Spaniards called the berdaches *putos*” (35). *Puto* is a gendered Spanish word with many derogatory meanings: male whore, gay, and homosexual, and the term has some similarity to the English connotation of “sissy” or “fairy” (Gutmann). Yet in this particular time and place, LGBTQ males held a sacred space where their identity and homosexual acts were not stigmatized in the same way because a different sexual ideology operated within New Mexico prior to its conquest and colonization. To be clear, two-spirit people did not experience a utopian existence within their communities, and *puto* continues to be a derogatory term used to label LGBTQ Chicanos/Xicanos. As an example of this modern/colonial gender system, all my interviewees had heard or had been called the word “puto” in their lives. Like in the case of the two-spirit individual, *puto* is a term that continuously fails to capture the complexity of LGBTQ Chicano/Xicano identity, culture, and experience.

### **The “Famous 41 Maricones” and the Plight of (Neo)Colonial Mexico**

In colonial Mexico, a *mestizaje* culture emerged where Spanish, African, and Indigenous American ideologies and biologies intermingled yet never fully integrated, and as an epicenter of transculturation, this historical moment indicates the utility of gathering *jotería-historias* and the intersectional and multiplicitous topography LGBTQ

interlocutors have had to navigate in order to avoid murder and violence. *Maricón* is a derogatory Spanish word for a gay man similar to the English word “fag,” and it is often utilized in speech acts to insult, threaten, or question the sexuality of LGBTQ Chicanos/Xicanos. After the first contact, the conquest of Mexico becomes synonymous with not only religious conquest but with sexual conquest (Anzaldúa, *Interviews*; Chasteen).

Quoting Esteva-Fabregat, Alicia Arrizón writes,

in countries ruled by Spain, conquistadores, motivated by their insatiable sexual appetite for Indian women and their incredible sense of power as colonizers, frequently accumulated large numbers of concubines...by the end of the sixteenth century, mestizos were a new majority. (6-7)

Further, “before the conquest, there were twenty-five million Indian people in Mexico and the Yucatán. Immediately after the conquest, the Indian population had been reduced to under seven million” (Anzaldúa *Borderlands* 27). The combination of mass penetration/rape/concubinage of Native women and increased indigenous death because of disease created a racial mixing that led to the emergence and proliferation of the mestiza/o (Delgado).

In fact, the Spanish implemented a complex and intricate racial caste system that increased from six categories to more than 16 racial categories by the end of Spanish rule in the early 1800s (Chasteen). For those who claimed a LGBTQ identity, this transcultural mixing or mestizaje meant grappling with several sexual ideologies: “Thus a different identity was born in the minds of the Hispanized Nahuas. Now a hybrid figure that combined the Hispanic puto, the seductive African man, and perhaps the Nahua cuiloni

emanated from the fulcrum of the colonial enterprise” (Sigal 203). There are few glimpses into what nonheteronormative mestiza/o life would have been like in Spanish colonial times, yet through court records, homosexuality and sodomy was punished by stiff fines, spiritual (Catholic) penances, public humiliation, floggings, or death. Murray explains how during the Spanish Inquisition mass executions of homosexuals occurred in Mexico City between 1656-1663 in a part of the city called San Lázaro. After the Mexican independence from Spain in 1821, “the intellectual influence of the French Revolution and the brief French occupation of Mexico (1862-67) resulted in the adoption of the French legal code, in which sodomy was not a crime” (Murray 62). Although this did not allow for overt homosexuality, a covert underground sub-culture for *maricones*<sup>ix</sup> did emerge during the neocolonial Porfirian regime (1876-1911) (Carrillo; Chasteen).

As an example of what collecting *jotería-historias* could potentially offer, I recount the events surrounding the infamous “*El baile de los 41 maricones*” also known as the dance of the 41 faggots. Prior to 1901, Mexican male homosocial bonds were not viewed as homoerotic (in the modern sense) and gender was already in an absolute binary of masculine and feminine with no other options (Irwin, *Mexican*), and “since heterosexuality was seen as the only natural form of sexual relations, the erotics of relations between men, even conspicuously visible, were ignored” (Irwin, *Mexican* 49). For over 30 years, Porfirio Díaz ruled Mexico as a dictator. During this neocolonial era, Díaz “imposed strict political control, encouraged European and U.S. investment, and gave special influence to a group of positivist thinkers called Científicos” (Chasteen 328).

By heralding in the external influences of Europe and the United States, this neocolonial moment allowed those elite Mexicans of the aristocracy and educated classes who traveled outside of Mexico to return with more liberal thoughts about sexuality (Carrillo).

On November 20th, 1901, Ignacio de la Torre, Porfirio Díaz's son-in-law, attended *El Baile de Los 41 Maricones*, and "as the story goes, half the men were dressed as women, half as men" (Carrillo 18) when the police raided the party and arrested 41 men.<sup>x</sup> Ignacio de la Torre was rumored to have been the missing man because the police recognized him, and his identity was protected by/for Porfirio Díaz (Carrillo). Not only did this event give rise to the number 41 becoming a symbol of Mexican male homosexuality (Irwin, *Mexican*), but also, it created Mexican slang where "*cuarenta y dos* (number forty-two, the one who got away) refers to someone who is covertly *passive* (a male who is sexually receptive to other males)" (Murray 63). Newspaper reports capitalized and proliferated on the scandal because many of the men were elites; several *corridos* (folk songs) and illustrations transformed *El Baile de Los 41 Maricones* into popular legend and literature (Irwin, *Mexican*); and with these reports, songs, and illustrations, the infamous dance of the 41 *Maricones* changed how Mexican masculinity and sexuality was viewed within a modernizing Mexican society.

After immediately being jailed, these 41 *Maricones* were punished through a variety of humiliations. In illustrations, the 41 were depicted as men with large mustaches in dresses, and further, these men were ridiculed repeated in newspapers over several weeks and months (Irwin, *Mexican*). Murray writes that many of these men were forced

to sweep the streets in dresses, and Carrillo explains that all 41 were sent to do forced labor in the Yucatán. Although some were able to pay fines to avoid the embarrassment of sweeping the streets, all were “inducted into the Twenty-fourth Battalion of the Mexican Army...to dig ditches and clean latrines” (Murray 63). However,

much of what we “know” comes from fictional accounts, and many presumably factual versions contradict each other...the 41 themselves are never given the chance to speak; their history lies in the hands of critics and gossips who did not participate in or even witness what happened. (Irwin, *Mexican* 357)

Like most of history, LGBTQ *Jotería* experiences are remembered for us rather than with us. As I return again and again to my *Jotería*-historia, I desperately wish to hear from one of the 41 to tell me how they were treated, how they were able to survive, and what truly happened to them. What are the theories in the flesh lost to us in this moment?

### **Challenging the Colonial-Modern Gender System**

The Ball of the 41 as *the* moment when male homosexuality entered the modern public imagination locked into place conceptions of *passivo* and *activo* that LGBTQ Chicanos/Xicanos must now continue to navigate in the present. As I have written about elsewhere, conceptions of *passivo* and *activo* are often conflated with effeminacy and class positionality where skin pigmentation (i.e., race and ethnicity) is a perceived determinate of sexual or gender role performed (“Brown”). *Passivo* (passive) and *activo* (active) describe positions during anal sex, and further, a *passivo* is considered the more effeminate of the coupling. As such, the *passivo* is looked down upon, because (within the cultural logic) what kind of man would want to be and/or act like a woman? For

example, in a study done of 294 Latino gay men in New York City, it was found that perceptions of masculinity in a partner determined the sexual role performed:

When the partner is perceived as more macho, more aggressive, taller, endowed with a bigger penis, darker, more handsome, more respondents report they are more likely to take the receptive role in oral and anal sex. Conversely, when the partner is perceived as more effeminate, less aggressive, shorter, with a smaller penis, lighter skin colour, or less handsome, more respondents are more likely to take the insertive role in oral and anal sex. (Carballo-Diéguez, Dolezal, Nieves, Díaz, Decena, & Balan, 2004, p. 163)

The “Famous 41” was a catalyst for and mutually constituted some of the characteristics of machismo that LGBTQ Chicanos still navigate in the present.

To be *passivo* is an ultimate shame because it is believed that you are less than a woman, because unlike a woman who has “no choice,” you had a choice and you chose effeminacy. Calafell writes about how Chicana and *Mexicana* women are locked in a virgin-whore dichotomy that restricts the possibilities for women within Latino culture (“Pro(re-)claiming Loss”; *Latina/o*). Further, men are expected to be macho, central in all aspects of life, and deeply sexual, while women are supposed to be self-sacrificing, passive, and without sexuality (Anzaldúa, *Interviews*; Stavans). The history of conquest and colonialism in which Mexican men and women were made passive and subordinate to the Spanish furthers the cultural dislike of passivity in men (Paz). Whereas the *passivo* is shamed, reviled, and open to physical/emotional/spiritual violence from the heteronormative structure, the conflation of effeminacy with a specific sexual position creates an interesting gender-inflected hierarchy for LGBTQ Chicanos/Xicanos to navigate where the *activo* can maintain a masculine identity.

Essentially, there are two sexual ideologies operating contextually within Chicano culture that creates a complex landscape to navigate. Irwin explains that one ideology defines male homosexuality “according to sexual object: men, whether masculine or effeminate, who desire other men, whether masculine or effeminate, are regarded as homosexuals” (“The Famous 41” 365). This ideology is in line with dominant constructions of homosexuality in the U.S., but there is another sexual ideology that does not compete with this construction but rather coexists alongside it (Irwin, “The Famous 41”; Gutmann). Irwin continues his explanation,

the other view defines it [homosexuality] according to sexual aim: men who wish to be women, who want to play “the woman’s role” in sex, who desire to be penetrated by other men, are homosexuals, while men who penetrate other men remain men, untainted by homosexuality. (“The Famous 41” 365)

In this ideological construction, an *activo* as the “agent of action” is thought to be “an *hombre macho*, a real victor, and to him went the spoils of his conquest, that is, sexual dominance of a passive object” (Nesvig 699). As stated earlier, sexual domination of a passive object is deeply connected to the conquest of Mexico and machismo, and therefore, “the sex (male or female) of the object of penetration is immaterial” as long as one is the *activo* penetrator (Nesvig 699). Under these circumstances, homosexuality is acceptable in certain contexts, yet the *activo* is only able to avoid stigmatization on the basis of gender; he is still seen as a male, but only by other males, rarely from women, and never from mainstream society (Nesvig 721). Chicanos/Xicanos have internalized



these viewpoints and externally perform varying degrees of this ideological continuum, depending on the environment, the people, and the dominant cultural logic.

In other words, I've met, been desired, and physically intimate with men that afterwards still consider themselves straight because of the sexual act performed during sex, yet other men who do not accept this ideology have deeply questioned their sexual orientation with all the confusion and self-hate that this discovery entails. In this case, co-existing sexual ideologies maintained patriarchy by adhering to gendered understandings of dominance and/or internally defending the status quo to maintain a dominant perception of oneself in society. LGBTQ Chicanos/Xicanos must navigate this fluid and contextual terrain everyday as part of their labor of intelligibility. While maintaining performances of masculinity and sexuality that keep us safe, we must still find ways to express our sexual desire. This is a labor of survival and resistance that LGBTQ Chicanos/Xicanos have undertaken throughout history.

For example, José Esteban Muñoz builds on intersectionality to develop the theory of disidentification through ethnographic observation and textual analyses of queer of color performances. Disidentification is a “third mode of dealing with dominant ideology, one that neither opts to assimilate within such a structure nor strictly opposes it; rather, disidentification is a strategy that works on and against dominant ideology” (Muñoz, *Disidentifications* 11). Disidentification recycles and rethinks fixed messages to scramble and reconstruct it into a form that exposes the exclusionary and essentialist circuitry of dominant ideologies (Muñoz, *Disidentifications* 31). By shifting

and adapting quickly to dominant discourse and performances, queer people of color performatively utilize a politics of ambiguity to survive and resist in the moment of communication (Calafell, *Latina/o*; Muñoz, *Disidentifications*). As a mode of analysis, disidentification is about understanding the “management of an identity” for a minoritarian subject who does not have the privilege of having a history or a futurity, so to make livable spaces for themselves, she/he exists only in the present, and this “burden of liveness” is a “critical negotiation in which a subject who has been hailed by injurious speech, name, or a label, reterritorializes that speech act and the marking that such speech produces to a self” (Muñoz, *Disidentifications* 185-189). The minoritarian subject works on and through the privileged/oppressed intersections of identity instead of against and with them. This theory in the flesh is understood as an embodied strategy that works in the moment of communication to resist the “flux of discourse and power” to survive and negotiate a “phobic majoritarian sphere” (Muñoz, *Disidentifications* 4-19).

To analyze the embodiment of the colonial/modern gender and sexuality scripts utilized and resisted within the performances of queer people of color, scholars have developed a variety of research methodologies towards a decolonial telos of locating resistance and agency (Arrizón; Calafell, *Latina/o*; Hames-García, *Identity Complex*; Muñoz, *Cruising*). As such, this project joins this scholarship by working at and in the borderlands between art, activism, and academia. Narratives of LGBTQ Chicanos/Xicanos matter because they operate within simultaneously privileged and oppressed intersectional historical positions as minoritarian subjects, and therefore, they offer a

multiplicity of tactics and strategies (i.e., theories in the flesh) created to survive and resist dominant ideologies, such as patriarchy, racism, colonization, heteronormativity, and capitalism (to name a few). As Pérez explains, “we have much to learn from our Jotería--wherever they may be, and however they may express themselves” (“Jotería” 145) because these theories in the flesh are capable of healing the colonial-modern, patriarchal separation between flesh and spirit (Calafell, “Rhetorics” 113; Lara and Facio 11; Madison, “Occupation” 213; Saavedra and Nymark). Anzaldúa writes “Art, reading, and writing are image-making practices that shape and transform what we are able to imagine and perceive” (*Light* 44). In order to address how the *process* of researching and writing within this project participates in LGBTQ resistance and agency, I explicate the Four Seasons of Oral History Performance as a cyclical, creation-centered ontological approach to social science research.

## CHAPTER THREE

### The Four Seasons of Oral History Performance

#### **Affirmation from White Buffalo Calf Woman**

I respect myself  
I respect the relationships, people,  
and beings I encounter  
in the world

On all levels and directions,  
I have surrendered to peace  
I am ready to live life fully  
and freely

#### **Four Seasons as a Cyclical, Creation-Centered Approach**

The *Affirmation from White Buffalo Calf Woman* came to me as a blessing to repeat throughout the day to push back on the negative images, stereotypes, and violence disciplined daily into my body as queer man of color. I share it here with you (the reader) because performative writing as a method for sharing research asks you to touch and feel me the writer in ways that co-create an in/between space that can be spiritual (Gutierrez-Perez, “Warren-ting”). For example, in Chapter One, I purposely chose to open up with a story, and in Chapter Two, I purposely began with a poem that I have been working on for the last five years. To honor the lives of LGBTQ Chicanos, I needed these poetic blessings at the beginning of each chapter to make ceremony. Even *Affirmation from*

*White Buffalo Calf Woman* was/is a performative move meant to continue that drum beat—and we are doing this labor together. Decolonial writing comes to terms with the spiritual aspect of everyday embodied acts, including writing and (re)membering (Anzaldúa, *Light*). Didn't you expect to see a poetic opening to this chapter? Are you surprised? By invoking the creative imaginary of the reader towards the goal of fleshing the spirit and/or spiring the flesh (Facio and Lara), I understand that “words are spiritual—they carry with them power and energy which lives through them. It is this spiritual force of words which enables them to create reality” (González, “Four Seasons” 646). Within this onto-cosmology, words are not simply symbols on a page but are expressions of our very soul.

Writing is a kind of “spiritual activism” capable (if properly cultivated over several seasons) of utilizing inner work towards a social justice telos of outer acts of resistance and agency (Anzaldúa, *Reader*; Facio and Lara; Keating, *Transformation*). By making myself as vulnerable as my interviewees did with me, I hope to honor their narratives of oppression, resistance, and agency by offering each poetic blessing in this work to those *Jotería* ancestors that struggled before us. Throughout this project, I have had to roll over every dark dank secret in my life. This has felt like (re)living over and over the same real or imagined trauma from my queer of color past like a night tremor. As the human instrument in this research project, my hidden vices, those dark sides of ourselves we refuse to see, are blindspots or shadow beasts that blur and obscure my ontological lens (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands*). Everyday life is a “constant suck of

[ideological] remolinos—vortexes composed of new ideas, technological shifts, cyber-age information, new class systems, new communities—demanding our attention” (Anzaldúa, *Light* 86). Writing is immersed in colonial histories and politics, such as in their symbology systems, philosophies, worldviews, perspectives, and perception (Anzaldúa, *Light*), and therefore, writing through and about everyday woundings, nature(s), readings, images, and spiritual activism reveal the processes of culture, history, and power operating through and with the human instrument.

In many ways, I, as the researcher, had to adapt to the nature of the Four Seasons of Oral History Performance (FSOHP) method in my everyday life—my entire ontological approach to life changed. It is at once jarring and blissful to move through the cyclical aspects within each individual season and within the larger seasonal process—over and over again. De La Garza<sup>xi</sup> explains that within creation-centered ontologies “all knowledge is valuable, but wisdom is only attained from completions of cycles” (González, “Four Seasons” 645) because “it is not just that something cannot be reversed; it is that whatever we say will keep moving along the circle of life and *come back to us*” (González, “Four Seasons” 646). The Four Seasons approach is an ontological shift to social science research that draws on a cyclical, creation-centered understanding (conocimiento) of world events and history.

FSOHP does (and does not) introduce new methods to those utilized in performance (auto)ethnography, rhetorical criticism, and oral history performance (OHP) because as a ontological shift it is an embodied act that challenges the way we write

about communities on the peripheries. Yes, I precisely deployed a variety of familiar methods within the FSOHP, such as the taking of field notes, personal journaling, and in-depth interviewing (González, “Four Seasons” 628), but I have also drawn upon performance methods, such as (border) arte as meditation, poetic transcription, and performative writing aesthetics,<sup>xii</sup> to allow historical narratives of LGBTQ Chicanos dictate their own rules of inquiry and presentation. Utilizing these various methods, I came to the following four *conocimientos*: a belief and value in natural cycles, radical interconnectedness, preparedness, and the discipline of harmony/balance. The following sections outline these four understandings or *conocimientos* that guided me during the research process, and each of the *conocimientos* learned here are based on the guiding ideals developed by Amira De La Garza. As a methodology each *conocimiento* is *intimately* connected to each other as are each of the Four Seasons, and the FSOHP is guided by these four *conocimientos* that demand a rigorous ethic geared towards reflexivity, cultural and queer conceptual nuances, and decolonial approaches to research and every day life.

### **Conocimiento #1: Natural Cycles**

Movement through natural cycles is the heart and center of the Four Seasons approach and is “rooted in the belief that all natural experience is ordered in cycles, which are then reflected in the processes and experiences of all living beings” (González, “Four Seasons” 632). For example, in the Spring of my OHP, I struggled like a seed underground breaking its shell, reaching tendrils downward into the dark. Diligently, I

pushed gravel, dirt, and filth out of my way in a desperate search for minerals, nourishment, and the cool, crisp, taste of water. To illustrate this alternative movement through time and space, my Spring did not take 3 months like in the Western calendar, but rather, it took 8 months to complete as I prepared physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually for this project. There is an aspect of “appropriateness” within the natural cycles of the Four Seasons that does not rely on any academic “fixed point of experiential demarcation” (González, “Four Seasons” 632). I, the researcher, had to reach particular inner/outer or personal/political *conocimientos* before I could move into the next season. At times this growth was frightening and at other times transformative. In each season, this circular and natural orientation towards time, space, and the spirit required a different kind of movement through everyday life—it was a humbling process.

### **Conocimiento #2: Radical Interconnectedness**

“Creation-centered cultures share a close relationship with nature, and with the yearly cycles that govern life. Spiritual and social rituals reflect those cycles, respecting the interdependence between all things” (González, “Four Seasons” 636).

As De La Garza describes in the epitaph, a creation-centered approach understands that there is a radical interconnectedness to all things. This *conocimiento* is rooted in an awareness that there is an “arbitrary nature [to the] boundaries that we construct for ourselves in our social experience” (González, “Four Seasons” 633). For instance, in the Summer of my OHP, I reached out to the highly cultivated “gatekeepers” that I developed during my Spring, and after feeling lost after few potential co-witnesses



emerged from those coveted border patrol agents, I was chastised by a fellow gay Latino scholar and colleague: “*Why haven’t you put your call on Facebook?*” In my quest to hold onto “rigid disciplinary and academic dictates of what ‘counts’ as a source of knowledge or information” (González, “Four Seasons” 633), I, as a gay Xicano, never considered asking my own Chicano/Latino/Mestizo family or gay/bisexual/trans\*/queer/questioning friends for help. Here I am, an insider/outsider connected to my community and a dedicated advocate for those on the peripheries, and I never once considered how “research is [an] intimate, organic and interdependent” process (González, “Four Seasons” 635). Why did I put up a wall between my community and me? As a spiritual experience of knowing and being, radical interconnectedness is an onto-epistemological shift “to expand perception; to become conscious, even in sleep; to become aware of the interconnections between all things by attaining a grand perspective” (Anzaldúa, *Light* 38). By centering oneself in this *conocimiento*, one navigates everyday life with a spiritual awareness that disrupts and/or bridges dualistic thinking that transgresses the colonial/modern borders between us/them, body/mind, and man/nature.

### **Conocimiento #3: Preparedness**

With an awareness of radical interconnectedness and natural cycles, there is an element of preparedness or an understanding that “one simply can not enter into that for which he or she is not prepared appropriately” (González, “Four Seasons” 634). This element emerged in the Spring of my OHP when I found myself avoiding the IRB application process. I was self-sabotaging my project by taking on guest lectures for

colleagues' classrooms, sitting in on an excellent course, volunteering for two organizations, and so much more. One morning, an affirmation from White Buffalo Calf Woman came to me during my meditation/personal journaling—it clicked. I knew how I was going to do this project. Then, an immense melancholia overcame my body that had me crying in the car with my husband during a drive to our friends' brunch. I was finally ready to begin the interview process, but I had no time to do it. I had to face my shadow beast. Who is she/he? The process of relinquishing my lectures, explaining missing classes, and removing myself from obligations that I had convinced myself were set in stone was how I moved from Spring to Summer. Sure, the extra time allowed me to finally complete the IRB process, but it was a mental and emotional *breakdown* and a subsequent realignment of my priorities that ultimately completed the Spring cycle. I was finally prepared.

#### **Conocimiento #4: Harmony/Balance**

All three *conocimientos* will “manifest themselves in the ultimate awareness that all forms of experience must be respected and given attention, due to their interdependent nature” (González, “Four Seasons” 634). For example, in the Summer of my OHP, I was exhausted from the heat of the interviewing process. In a moment I now regret, I did not follow my own ethics regarding how transparent I would be with my project. I felt exhausted from the Summer and rushed to set an interview without sending the same information I sent to all my co-witnesses. In response to my lack of preparedness and my lack of awareness of interconnectedness and the cyclical process, the potential

interviewee canceled our interview and felt exploited. Anzaldúa writes that “methods have underlying assumptions, implying theoretical positions and basic premises” (*Light* 4), so “it is the *application* of the methods within a paradigm that often demonstrates the ontological positioning of the researcher” (González, “Four Seasons” 637).

As this narrative reveals, I had fallen into what Conquergood describes as the “custodian’s rip-off,” which is essentially about selfishness. The custodian’s rip-off is a moral/ethic performative stance where the “strong attraction toward the other coupled with extreme detachment results in acquisitiveness instead of genuine inquiry, plunder more than performance” (Conquergood 70). I am confessing this to you because within the FSOHP: “What you think is a flaw simply tells you what is culturally valued, not what is ‘wrong with you’. They are guides that lead you in the direction of what you might need” (González, “Four Seasons” 638). Following these four *conocimientos*, I moved through the Spring, Summer, Fall, and Winter of OHP being reflexive at all stages of the research process to honor the cultural and queer nuances of each interviewee and to understand my own indoctrination into colonial-modern gender systems in both personal and political forms.

### **Spring: Tilling the Soil**

Let me be free  
No worries or regrets  
No Saturday morning chores  
No check off that list, this list,  
and not in the good-for-nothing  
never-take-the-dog-out-kind of way

There is labor in stillness  
There is depth  
buried like a seed  
en nuestra madre

Why can't you appreciate my two spirits?

Stirring, churning, bringing meaning  
I want to binge watch tv in peace  
I want to consume too much porn  
I want to sit in silence

Neither quiet or complacent  
Everyday life is a struggle, a war,  
an inner battle for control

search, searching in the darkness  
what it means            to be

### **A Seed will not Grow without being Planted!**

In the above poem, I share my experiences of the Spring with images, metaphor, and symbols to acknowledge the multitude of possibilities inherent in this season. Yet, I want to bracket the core tenants and key processes of this methodological season because the Spring has its own cycle that must be completed. (Re)performing the “stirring, churning, bringing meaning” of my Spring through poetry is an attempt to plant a seed for this project. Like roots growing in darkness the Spring acknowledges that “there is labor in stillness / there is depth.” Let me be clear, my Spring was not easy. Every day of my eight month Spring cycle was “a struggle, a war, an inner battle for control.” It was an

always and never-ending preparation that did not stop when I did or did not read, meditate, image-make, or write poetry. As De La Garza explains:

During the spring, the human instrument is being prepared for fieldwork. This is a time for much introspection and honest observation of the self. What are your strengths and flaws? This will tell you much about your methodological preferences and choices once you are out in the field. (González, “Four Seasons” 638)

For me, the Spring was a natural beginning to the end of a prior Winter season of this same project. In my department our dissertation proposal cannot be defended until you have completed a four question comprehensive exam and then you must construct the proposal document as well. In rare form, my Winter began and ended over Winter break and Winter quarter. During the hectic winter celebration season, I was taking my comprehensive exams over a marathon period of three weeks that ended in a grand total of 126 pages. Entering my Winter quarter, I, with the help of my advisor, constructed a 70-page proposal and defended and passed it by the end of March. I am happy to report I passed with distinction, and as my words on the page demonstrate, I have received the blessing of my academic elders to begin this project. Yet, it didn't *feel* like the whole story. De La Garza explains, “A seed will not grow without being planted!” (González, “Four Seasons” 634). Like a rabbit skinny from hibernating too long, I knew it was the moment of Spring because I was exhausted and empty. To survive that prior Winter of this project, I had to give everything to those comprehensive exams and proposal. Pieces from my multiple souls were shocked out of my body to complete my writing/career/life/

identity goals. I barely survived.

### **(Border) Arte as Meditation**

“Learning how to detach one’s self from things held dear, including one’s ideas, was at first practiced in the spring by bracketing one’s biases and limitations” (González, “Four Seasons” 645).

“Border art remembers its roots—sacred and folk art are often still one and the same” (Anzaldúa, *Light* 53).

(Border) Arte as Meditation (BAM) is a method I utilized to adapt my body, mind, and soul to the Four Seasons Approach. BAM is an epistemological mestizaje of Anzaldúan concepts with those of De La Garza lived through each of my limbs as I moved, performed, and communicated. “Border Arte” tries to decolonize spaces with its aesthetics and “deals with shifting identities, border crossings, and hybridism—all strategies for decolonization” (Anzaldúa, *Light* 63). Whereas “Art as Mediation” is a method utilized by De La Garza to describe a practice of creating art towards the goal of reflexive engagement with the self, world, and beyond (De La Garza 14-18). BAM is the process I utilized to remain reflexive throughout each season and build my awareness of natural cycles and radical interconnectedness. When I was prepared to move forward, I could *feel* it. No one told me when to move on, and yet, at the same time everything told me it was time to move on.

For me, I dived into my body in the most physical way I knew how—weightlifting. Weightlifting is one of the few physical activities that my father and I did

together. I wasn't a great athlete, and it didn't help that if I messed up the ride home would be filled with either verbal or physical abuse. Alongside weightlifting, I began a consistent low impact cardio regimen (if I push too hard I get painful knots in my lower back and hip), and after spending time with De La Garza at a Summer Creative Ethnography Institute, I consistently integrated the practice of yoga into my BAM. These practices proved useful to reduce my stress and to rebuild my body after a tough Winter. In addition, I utilized tarot and oracle card decks as anchors to my practices to help me focus my daily meditations on my personal biases, expectations, triggers, and shadow



Figure 3.1

practitioner.

In Figure 3.1, I share one of the many images created through BAM. Indeed, throughout the rest of this chapter, I will continue to share poetry and images created

issues, some of which I have shared previously (González, “Four Seasons” 639). In this way, activities such as reading, media viewing, passive observations of relevant cultural sites, and personal journaling all became a kind of religious poetic worked through the body—a spiritual labor germinating within the

during each season of this project as both a decolonial performative writing move and a valid form of knowledge in its own right. In this particular image, I was shocked after completing it because I found that the woman staring back at me *looked* like me. She/he embodied where I belonged and where I am now. I named myself Xochito which is the male form of “Little Flower” in a kind of Nahuatl/Spanish, she/he, xe hybrid. At the beginning of my Spring, I was in a traumatized state from the pressures of Winter, but mainly from the politics of inclusion/exclusion operating within academia. Betrayals, lies, and gossip surrounded and followed my presence into every classroom, hallway, conference, and department office because as a queer person of color I am not safe. Ever. My BAM practice in the Spring was a constant diving into my mental, psychic, and spiritual wounds through my navel. Xochito came to me as gift. A mirror to finally see myself as others see me. Aren’t I so queer flipping my long hair? Don’t you love the sound of my elaborate shells when I move and laugh? What a shock my intersectional voice must be! Like pink lightning flashing across a tumultuous yet beautiful purple sky. La luna voyeristic in the corner lighting my dark and stormy path. What is Xochito doing in the river? Why is xe pouring water back into the stream? Is xe healing my susto (spiritual shock)? Xochito is my nahual, and Xochito is also my shadow beast. Xe’s questions and yearnings manifest in anger, fear, helplessness, addictions, numbness, disillusionment, and depression and operate like a blank eye affecting all we see, so we can maintain illusions of safety and entitlement (Anzaldúa, *Light*).

**Where do I belong?**



*“Search your heart.* This is very important, and is perhaps the most important aspect of preparations. *Why* are you doing this?...Be honest about your motives, even if they are embarrassing” (González, “Four Seasons” 641)

I’m scared to go home. I’m terrified that I won’t fit in. That to my friends and family, I would be unrecognizable—a monster even to them. After posting about lumbersexuality on social media for weeks, talking about it with my colleagues and friends all over Denver, and sharing my lumbersexuality research with my students in an amazing class lesson, my joke about lumbersexuality with one of my closest friends back home in California absolutely fell flat. In fact, she and the rest of our friends and family thought I was calling her a lesbian and interpreted my confused attempts to explain the joke as mocking and belittling her gender and sexuality. As the first in our friend circle to get pregnant, everyone felt an (un)natural need to leap to her defense with raised voices, aggressive body posturing, and a strange use of height as the taller ones glared down at me. It was tense. First, to learn that lesbianism is perceived as an insult to these people I called friends was a heteronormative violence, but further, she knew nothing about my latest most talked about personal/professional interest. That misunderstanding destroyed and/or injured several bridges to others in that space. I won’t soon forget how they jumped in with their not-so-subtle disciplining of gender and sexual norms. How scary to not belong anywhere!

### **The End of Spring**

If the “spring is actually a gradual entry into the field, a sort of ‘pre-ethnography’” (González, “Four Seasons” 642), then how do I know when I, as the research instrument, am ready? Sure. Academia and their ceremonial (bureaucratic) rituals have long held power as the colonial determiner of research preparedness. However, within the FSOHP method, whether or not I am ready is radically interconnected to my own spiritual journey (González, “Four Seasons” 646). To end the spring, I had to learn that “you can not force seasons to change” (González, “Four Seasons” 642), but “when a shift of awareness happens we must create a new reality” (Anzaldúa, *Light* 45).

Go for a walk  
Buy some flowers  
Move up into the new  
spirit, trusting  
open y vulnerable:

I blamed you for being  
poor, second-hand food  
a la Chingada  
sowing seeds from different trees  
mahogany deep

Love, You loved.  
Volunteering, La familia,  
Laughter, Afternoons  
on the porch, the east wind  
en su cara

Whispering, “seek silence,  
seek truth, seek  
within”

Stress is coming  
Adventure pushing up into the horizon,  
sorrow, inner transformation  
don't postpone, don't forget

Love grows.



Figure 3.2

### **A Summer of Oral History Performance**

In Fig. 3.2, the moon (my guardian) looms high in the sky as Owl (wisdom through transformation) makes a presence in my BAM practice. There is flowering and pumpkins ripe for the picking, and there is light! Light is everywhere. Metaphors for the Summer are “growth, labor, community-building, work, youth” (González, “Four Seasons” 639),

and the nature of the Summer is “intensity,

requires nourishment ‘rain’, attention to details and nurturing, testing of limits on all dimensions, rebellion, conflict, “heat”, rules are semi-learned, form is

emerging” (González, “Four Seasons” 639). Summer is the time to reach out to

participants, perform the in-depth interview, maintain personal journaling, continue

weightlifting and yoga regularly, member-check with the community, and sustain your

BAM practice (González, “Four Seasons” 639). My Summer season took three months to

complete, and it took place between November and January. In fact, oral history interviewing took place from December 8th, 2015 to December 22nd, 2015. The “heat” was almost unbearable.

**“Until one learns to engage in conflict and stay, one does not know what members of a culture are like” (González, “Four Seasons” 643)**

I am avoiding the hard work of locating the origins of my self-hate. Whose voice is telling me these lies about myself? I look in the mirror, and I hear him: “Ugly. Fat. Ugly.” I hear him when interacting with people: “They hate you. You don’t belong.” I feel stuck in self-hatred, and I want to break free from these bad habits. In my meditation and personal journaling, I wrote down these thoughts: “Where does this destructive influence come from and who needs it?”

### **Oral History as Performance**

OHP is a method that takes its “impetus from formal or informal oral history interviews” (Pollock, “Introduction” 4) and materializes these historical narratives in a “live representation as both a form (a container) and a means (a catalyst) for social action” (Pollock, “Introduction” 1). OHP interviewing views the narrative event unfolding between teller and told as a performance that contains “linguistic, paralinguistic, kinesic, proxemic, artifactual, and olfactory dimensions” (Madison, *Critical* 34). This remembering of past and present events often enfold in a “poetic rendering and linguistics layering” between the telling and the told (Madison, *Critical* 34-35). As a performance, oral history interviewing is embodied in intersectional

meanings and contextual relationships of power. Indeed, it is the inherent value of gathering the teller's symbol system and their own phenomenological theories of what it means/meant to experience the historical event that makes oral history interviews a provocative methodological tool (Madison, "Occupation"). Additionally, it is what the teller remembers and values as she/he tells her/his historical subjectivity that is under analysis within this method. It is between the telling and the told where theories in the flesh are narrated.

### **Oral History Performance as a Dialogic Performance**

"We cannot be subjects without dialogue, without witnessing" (Madison, "Dangerous" 829).

My first interview for this project was with a gay Chicano friend from Commerce City, CO. We first met when we co-presented a workshop on LGBTQ Latinos for a local university together in 2014. As graduate students, he and I immediately connected before and during the workshop, yet after some time, we lost touch. Like all the participants, he chose his own pseudonym, and Jay met me for the interview in the community room of my apartment complex in the Uptown neighborhood of Denver. I remember it was cold in the room, and my recording had several moments where we laughed together as I tried to fix the thermostat. Afterwards, I couldn't help but flirt with this intelligent, caring, and attractive human being. This time we have stayed in dialogue long after our interview was completed.

Oral history interviewing is a dialogic performance because it is a method that utilizes the strains and frictions between difference and identity to have an “intimate conversation with other people and cultures” (Conquergood 77). In the moment of dialogic performance with my interviewees, I remained present by paying attention to the embodied, purposeful, reciprocal, and contextual performatives of my co-witnesses (Madison, “Dialogic”). As not only a form of respect, dialogic performance and dialogic performatives acknowledge the power dynamics within the researcher-narrator relationship (Johnson, “Introduction”; Madison, “Dialogic”). A shift to dialogic performance acknowledges that “participant-observation does not capture the active, risky, and intimate engagement with Others that is the expectation of performance” (Madison, “Co-Performative” 826), and like Johnson, I believe that dialogic performance is “a kind of performance that resists conclusions, it is intensely committed to keeping dialogue between performer and text open and ongoing” (Conquergood 75).

#### *Dialogic Performance as a Co-Performative Witnessing*

OHP interviewing as a dialogic performance is about co-performative witnessing an Other culture as a feeling, sensing, being, and doing witness (Madison, “Co-performative Witnessing”). Due to the holiday season, each interview was conducted under the shadow of upcoming family interactions and community responsibilities. This spectre of Christmas loomed large during all the interviews. For example, my second interview was with a gay Chicano named Positivo via Skype. Positivo is completing his

Ph.D. outside of Colorado, and because of his own dissertation project, he had to skip Christmas with his family in Denver this year. With Positivo, I felt an immediate connection to his story because I was skipping Christmas this year also. To set up an interview with my interviewees, I utilized a snowball method similar to E. Patrick Johnson in *Sweet Tea* in which I reached out first to local community members and friends, and from there, I was connected to each of my interviewees. For the last three years, I have served as an active committee member for the La Raza Youth Leadership Program and Conference in Denver, CO, so I turned for recruitment help to the many leaders, volunteers, made-family, and friends who have been kind enough to let me advocate alongside them for our various interconnected communities. Like Positivo, I am a GBTQ Chicano in academia and part of the history and politics of the Denver metro area, so we are a witness to each other's story. I can't just take his narrative and run.

Co-performative witnessing is to live in the borderlands of contested identities, to put your body on the line within an Others' soundscapes of power, and to engage in a politics of "response (ability)" (Madison, "Co-Performative"). By recognizing that we are sharing the OHP interview time not to maintain fixed understandings of marginalization but to witness the contestations of identities and culture within history, co-performative witnessing places the researcher into the borderlands "where you speak 'with' not 'to' others" (Madison, "Co-Performative" 828) Placing one's body on the line with an Other is a political act that illuminates, coalesces, and engages with soundscapes of power that are hard to capture in text (Madison, "Co-Performative" 829). As Madison explains,

“Soundscapes carry with them the liveness and immediacies of sounds overlaid by worlds of inter-animation and gesture” (“Co-Performative” 828). To co-witness an Others’ contested identities in a soundscape of power is a political act that requires “we do what Others do *with* them inside the politics of their locations, the economies of their desires and their constraints, and, most importantly, inside the materiality of their struggles and the consequences” (Madison, “Co-Performative” 829). Further, co-performative witnessing is about an ethics of response (ability).

Response (ability) means that “I do not have the singular response-ability for what I witness but the responsibility of invoking a response-ability in others to what was seen, heard, learned, felt, and done in the field and through performance” (Madison, “Dangerous” 192). As my “idealized ‘subjects’” and I became “ordinary people with human frailties and faults” in front of my eyes (González, “Four Seasons” 643), I began to feel mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual fatigue from co-performative witnessing their narratives of oppression, resistance, and agency. Throughout the interview process and in check backs with my interviewees, I was “intellectually, relationally, and emotionally invested in their symbol making practices and social strategies” (Madison, “Dialogic” 323). In Appendix A, I share the interview guide utilized for this project that served as a fluid framework to move through issues of machismo, gender, sexuality, and history. Further, each interview lasted between 1-2 1/2 hours, and check backs (1-2 depending on the interviewee) were conducted in the media form most convenient for the interviewee (Skype, e-mail, text, or Facebook messenger). As such, I felt surrounded by



the “far and wide entanglements of power’s disguises and infinite forms” and experienced a need to respond to power’s consequences and operations (Madison, “Dangerous” 193).

Utilizing BAM, I remained reflective and reflexive of my role as a researcher while I co-performatively witnessed these dialogic performances with my interviewees. Madison writes, “we don’t stop at our mirror reflections, but recognize the resonances that ripple and expand to a thinking about thinking—a metasignification—that inherently takes our contemplations and meanings further out, beyond our own mirrored gaze” (“Dialogic” 322). As an approach that embraces the borderlands of identity struggle, embodies contextual soundscapes of power, and enacts an ethic of response(ability), my Summer of FSOHP is rooted in the “feeling/sensing home” of the body to undertake the dangerous work of entering “what is often hidden in plain sight—the convolutions and complications below the surface, the systems that generate and keep surfaces in place” (Madison, “Dangerous” 190). Additionally, as a project rooted in decolonial thought, a move to valuing and uplifting body epistemologies is a political move that directly confronts the scriptocentrism of the academy (Conquergood).

*Trusting yourself is part of love. Take the jump into the unknown. Even if it scares you to death.*

As a dialogic performance and an act of co-performative witnessing, the Summer of OHP remembers the memories and members the subjectivities of the teller and the told

in the *cuento* being shared (Pollock, “Introduction”). Shopes describes this phenomenon: “interviews record what an interviewer draws out, what the interviewee remembers, what he or she chooses to tell, and how he or she understands what happened, not the unmediated ‘facts’ of what happened in the past” (120). These memory performances are “stories performed, re-membered, to create knowledge” of the past (Willink “Domesticating” 22). As explained earlier, Chicano/Xicano communities draw on indigenous traditions of orality in their everyday lives, such as *cuentos*, *chismé*, etc., that represent “years or centuries of knowledge woven into indigenous cultures passed down orally from one generation to the next” (Trimble, Sommer, and Quinlan 15). Therefore, the OHP interview, as a historical/cultural interpretation of an interpretation with a tendency towards contextualizing the teller’s individual and personal life, understands communication as both a process and a product, which ultimately is an ontological and epistemological stance that acknowledges how performance and performatives verify the existence of resistance and agency (Noriega and Barnett; Pollock, “Moving Histories”; Shopes).

### **Fall: Poetic Transcription and The Found Poems**

“Autumn is the cool down; it is exhilarating and intoxicating to reach a sense of completion that is dangerously misleading” (González, “Four Seasons” 644).

The image of Figure 3.3 perfectly epitomizing the affect and experience of the Fall season. The image depicts a bright and blooming frontier range with large purple and



Figure 3.3

black/gray mountains rising high into the distance. The sky has large, pink, fluffy clouds into which an outline of a celebrating figure is lifting up their arms—a jubilant release. In the corner, a black bird serves as a warning that the Fall has its own challenges within its own cycle to learn and grow from. Metaphors for the Fall are harvesting, release, celebration, and adulthood (González, “Four Seasons” 640). The nature of the Fall is in:

compiling all gathered forms of data, theoretical saturation is reached, memos have been developed and tried in the field, celebration of completion of field work, leave-taking behaviors which respect the relationships formed, leaving the field, organization of materials, decisions about focus begin to be made, personal journaling. (González, “Four Seasons” 637)

Listening to De La Garza describe the Fall, you almost have to laugh at that celebratory figure. There is still so much work to be done.

I met Andres in a local Starbucks in Aurora, Co. In the background, I can hear the busy hustle and bustle of the coffee shop, but undaunted, my youngest participant is a storyteller expertly weaving theories in the flesh in the forms of *cuentos*, *consejos*, y

*testimonio*. Listening to the recording, I am caught up in the process of classification: is this moment *chismé* or is it an example of a *plática*? However, each time I listen, I am back in that coffee shop co-performatively witnessing this narrative again and again and again. I am beginning to understand that the basic nature of the Fall is “‘reaping what was sowed’, community celebration, ‘gestalt’ of experience begins to form, winding down, breaking away, self-knowledge, feasting and celebration of accomplishments” (González, “Four Seasons” 640). Andres is a 20-year-old gay Chicano with deep roots within the undocumented community. How can I classify such a complex human being into a single



Figure 3.4

narrative form? It is wrangling betwixt and between this external/internal tension where “decisions on the perspectives for analysis must be made” (González, “Four Seasons” 645).

For example, Figure 3.4 depicts the labor of the Fall as an external and internal battle for control: a striving for balance/

harmony. The image of a cracked white mask draws the eye to the center of the depiction. Lightning cuts across the top in a spectrum of pink to yellow to

orange to the center. Yet, there is a centrifugal force erupting out shattered glass-like fragments in those same colors. The ripe fruit growing from the staff symbolizes how “the ‘fall’, or harvesting portion of a ceremony is the time when the fruits of the ceremony are shared and celebrated communally” (González, “Four Seasons” 637). The moon is again watching but this time in the form of a crescent just to the left. In the background of this transformational chaos is a wise, kneeling figure in grey assuring that this labor is all part of the season.

### **Transforming Huitzilopochtli**

What type of warrior will you be?

smoking your last toke  
praying for affirmations  
needing to face fears  
of failure, truth,  
owning your own poverty  
of spirit

reading, witnessing,  
willing to fight with  
not against

It won't be as hard as  
you're thinking trust me

It is what the world wants  
Ehecatl blowing, breaking,  
busting my pipe  
my bank account  
my looks  
my precious  
ego

To sit between new worlds  
cloudy, disorienting, yet  
more real

It is scary moving to the  
frontlines, La Frontera

Dressed in pink, screaming con La Llorona  
nalgas por fuera

serving justice up     another head  
on a stick

How do you plan to fight?

### **Poetic Transcription and Found Poems**

Poetic transcription is a performance method that aims to share the narratives of marginalized community members in a form that captures the visual, tactile, olfactory, and aural aspects of the original performance. For example, Madison used this method of “placing words on a page to resemble the rhythm of the human voice” in her work collecting Black women’s oral history traditions as a way to come closer to “capturing the depth inherent in the indigenous performance” (Madison, “Occupation” 217). Poetic transcription attempts to enter/contain the spirit of the narrative and its range of meanings, give ownership of the words to the narrator, and make visible the depth of the narrator’s performance (Calafell, “Disrupting”, *Latina/o*; Faulkner). Following Sandra L. Faulkner’s process of transcribing poetically, I began by “highlighting participants’ exact words and language from interview transcripts with colors” that symbolized the six narrative forms I was looking for (31). Later, I cut and pasted “the essential elements in

an effort to reveal the essence of a participant’s lived experience” (31). However, it wasn’t until I began to transform the narratives into found poems that these performative utterances began to embody the meanings, rhythms, and aesthetic choice of words my interviewees were trying to convey (Calafell, “Disrupting”; Madison, *Critical*).

Found poems are poems created from research that “was not intended as poetry, but you will declare it such through your choice of ‘found’ parts in your research” (Faulkner 133). Utilizing *cuentos*, *pláticas*, *chismé*, *mitos*, *testimonios*, y *consejos* as found parts, I gravitated to narratives that were “most interested in storytelling” (Faulkner 24) and embraced these performative utterances by placing words “symbolically in relation to how they are uttered” (Madison, *Critical* 240). Were these choices wrong? I met Aja through a local community leader, and because it was Christmas, Aja would be in Denver instead of in San Francisco, CA. We conducted the interview in the same cold, community room as Jay. However, Aja is 28 years old, and she grew up in the Northside neighborhood of Denver, CO. She identifies as transgender and Chicana, and listening to her narratives, she is clearly a musician and artist. She moves through the world to her own rhythm, and it was only after performatively placing the words on the page with an eye towards the poetic that I could *feel* her. How can I practice a “tentative certainty” about my findings and choices during the Fall?

De La Garza discusses how in the fall you might be tempted to believe that “one has certainty about the culture” (González, “Four Seasons” 645). However, the year is not yet over, and a Fall researcher must practice a kind of tentative respect for boundaries

while simultaneously not forgetting that “it’s a work of art even as s/he interacts with it as if it were reality” (Anzaldúa, *Light* 41). For example, I met Toni at Hamburger Mary’s in Denver, CO the day it was changing its name/franchise/sign to M Uptown. As the oldest interviewee, Toni is a 40 years old gay/bisexual Xicano that has been involved in local Chicano activism his whole life. He brought his assistant with him to the interview, and as we drank and chatting, the assistant sat there on his phone the whole time. When trying to classify some of Toni’s narratives, I originally had one as a *consejo* but later changed it to *chismé* as I remembered how Toni told his story of empowerment and self-esteem with a mischievous glee—an activist fire in his eyes. Additionally, when placed alongside the other narratives, Toni’s narrative seemed to demand a different place in the meta-narrative unfolding in the act of writing. If Winter will be a time of writing, sharing, and publishing ones’ work, then Fall is about harvesting and enjoying the fruits of ones’ labor.

### **A Winter Performance**

“It is time  
to consider what  
the human instrument has experienced  
subjectively.

It is a time  
to anticipate one’s  
future  
life, having been through  
the ethnographic  
experience.

It is a time  
to journal honestly  
while simultaneously



explicating one's theories and ideas about the culture" (González 646).

Imagine a simple stage with five performers standing on a double-tiered choir stand. A spotlight on each of their faces, there is an emptiness between them, and to highlight this lack, scattered lights shine directly down onto the choir stand highlighting the nothingness. Each empty spot honors the lost history of *Jotería* ancestors forgotten. De La Garza argues that "the human instrument should write to *say something*" (González, "Four Seasons" 646), so although the metaphors for the Winter are incubation, hibernation, retreat, waiting, solitude, and elder, don't be fooled—"Winter is the deadliest of seasons if one is not prepared" (González, "Four Seasons" 644). In the Spring, we cultivated seeds that took root, and bravely, we inched out into the sky only to endure the heat of the Summer. By trusting ourselves and co-witnessing others, we bore fruit, and what a celebration we had in the Fall! But, the year is not over. There are several narratives to share, and even now, my lower back hurts from the repetitive bending and lifting required of Fall's harvesting and sorting. *Ahora*, we are in a "time of rest and waiting" and a "time when the meaning of the ceremony is received and understood" (González, "Four Seasons" 637). *Pero*, looking at the faces of all my friends and community members spotlighted on the stage, I need to make sure I am prepared to write and share.

Upstage to the left is Toni (Age: 40) behind Andres (Age: 20), because at the end of our interview when I asked them about where they wanted to be in 10 years, they both wanted to run for political office. They are connected somehow. Center left, Positivo (Age: 28) and Jay (Age: 35) stand on the lower tier and there is a space between them and Andres, which is marked by a light. Aja (Age: 28) stands solitary on the lower tier downstage right. There are several lights marking the space between her and the cisgendered males. At 4 A.M just before sunrise, I feel moonlight wake me up and urge me to the computer screen:

If what you do will reflect back, or come back, to you, then actions must logically be careful. What one writes about the people will inevitably come back to the writer in his or her life. It is not a light enterprise. In fact, it is quite serious. (González, “Four Seasons” 646)

Words are powerful, spiritual, and “the very act of recording in writing the essence of culture changes it to something it is not. It freezes it” (González, “Four Seasons” 645). Utilizing poetic transcription, I have transformed the narratives collected through oral history interviewing into found poems, but it is in the Winter that decisions must be made about how one shares the gifts given to you by the community.

As a project that aims to locate theories in the flesh for LGBTQ Chicanos/Xicanos, performative writing as a aesthetic method of inquiry opens borders, removes disciplinary walls, and stands on shifting sands “to let the culture dictate the language and the rules of its existence” (Willink, et al. 303). Theories in the flesh “emerge out of an interlocutors’ lived reality and experiences struggling to feed themselves and their families, to cover

their heads with a roof, or to avoid/survive physical, emotional, mental and/or spiritual violence” (Willink, et al. 307). For example, Calafell has utilized performative writing as a method to honor the experiences of the Chicanas/os throughout her scholarship, and utilizing her work as a muse to guide me through my own performative writing process (*Latina/o*; “Mentoring”; *Monstrosity*; “Rhetorics”), I also acknowledge how performative writing is evocative, metonymic, subjective, nervous, citational, and consequential (Pollock “Performative”). By viewing the reader as a co-performer in the production of the text, the performative writer invites dialogue, loose ends, and multiple audiences.

Shhhh! It is starting. Toni opens up the performance with his *cuento*, and then, he moves downstage center and kneels as if starting a fire. A warm red, orange, and yellow light crackles up from the stage as Toni tends the hearth. Positivo then Aja then Andres then Jay share a *cuento* and join Toni around the hearth. It is a moment of chatter and laughter. Performative writing *embraces* the reader with care and passion; *enacts* evocative imaginings that lift the words from the page and places them in motion; *embodies* the sensations, experiences, and knowledge from the interview in the act of writing through a particular body with a particular political voice; and *effects* people and space, because as a performance, performative writing champions the political struggles, tensions, and advocacy with/to its subject(s) (Madison, *Critical* 220-232). Suddenly, the performers freeze and the stage goes dark. A spotlight highlights Positivo who shares a *plática* downstage left, the returns to the hearth and freezes. Afterwards, Jay shares a *plática* downstage right, returns to the hearth, and the action returns.

The basic nature of the Winter is a slower pace, conservation of energy, wisdom, incubation period of creativity, success is determined by previous “year,” confrontation of “mortality,” cold (González, “Four Seasons” 640). It is lonely writing. My partner is getting agitated. Even now, his text messages ping across my screen: “*Can you change the laundry to the dryer?*” “*My boss is being such a jerk right now!*” “*I love you.*” Performative writing turns “the personal into the political and the political into the personal” (Pelias 420) and features lived experiences invested in a world that is communicatively co-constructed and interconnected (Pelias 419). De La Garza explicates that writing about a culture during the cold of the Winter transforms the researcher because they must make public—private narratives and experiences (González, “Four Seasons” 646). The tasks during the Winter are: writing the ethnography, submissions, revisions, performances, decisions regarding extent to which your knowledge will be shared, journaling about new tacit knowledge, theoretical sensitivity, and personal development, speculation on future directions (personally and professionally), decisions regarding how relationships from the field will be maintained, rest (González, “Four Seasons” 640). Can you see why my previous Winter of this project was so brutal on my body, mind, and spirit?

The action continues near the community fire as Toni shares some *chismé* from his youth in San Francisco, CA and Andres shares some about his gay Mexican-American uncle. Bolstered by the eldest and youngest, Positivo shares *un mito* about down low or in-the-closest Chicano culture, which inspires Jay to disclose how the myth of the birth of

Huitzilopochtli (Aztec war and sun god) reminds him of his relationship with his mother. I think it is because of this disclosure that Andres is willing to share his *testimonio* about being gay, from the undocumented community, and a Chicano. After Andres' narrative, the five, starting with Toni and Jay, embrace on stage and as all the cisgendered men move away from the fire into the darkness upstage. Aja remains behind tending the fire. The firelight is dimmer now as Aja tells her own *testimonio* of empowerment and struggle. It is telling that she is alone onstage as she remembers her history in Denver, CO. After her *testimonio*, she, too, moves into the darkness of upstage, and the fire slowly goes out. However, after a dramatic pause, the spotlight on the performers faces and missing *Jotería* return for Andres then Aja to give a brief *consejo*. The performers stand silently as the spotlight on their faces go out one by one; the missing *Jotería* lights remain for just a few seconds before also going out. Like Anzaldúa, as I am "putting images together into story (the story I tell about the images), I use imagistic thinking, employ an imaginal awareness. I'm guided by the spirit of the image" (*Light 4*). In the following chapter, I utilized performative writing to present the found poems from the OHP process as a kind of staged production on the page. Like Johnson, I have chosen, in the next chapter, to share these narratives uninterrupted by description and analysis to allow the reader to have a role in the performance. It is my greatest hope to one-day share these theories in the flesh beyond the page to the stage as a gift back to the community that has embraced me.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Theories from the Fringes

#### Cuentos

*Toni: "Our Struggle Has Been One of the Hardest for Centuries"*

You know that would probably make a lot of sense  
why there was such a rift between the older generation and the newer people coming out  
cause we felt there were  
years between each generation.

We couldn't relate to each other  
we were kinda thrown into this adult world  
there was no middle ground

Now that you asks this question  
it makes a little more sense  
cause there weren't  
generations upon generations  
of people to learn from and  
the older guys were totally  
jaded

You know  
They were jaded and mean  
and so, we  
experienced our own form of  
being jaded  
or mistreated  
by the adults, but  
now, thinking back  
they had probably had

a lot of barriers  
a lot of hurt  
hatred

towards society

They were just  
reflecting on us

You know,  
we had to grow up — really quickly  
it's cool  
to look  
at this newer generation  
and they're — actually — looking and expecting love

I don't think I actually expected love  
until I was almost thirty  
when I was younger  
I think I would have really liked to have it  
but after being out  
for a few years

I didn't think it was possible

Now, I see  
21 - 22 year olds  
wanting marriage  
and love  
and families  
and stuff  
and that was something  
we didn't even think of

Like, this new generation  
doesn't have to experience that  
because of the education they've been given  
and all of the different in-roads that  
a lot of the older generations had to give them  
and I would just wish that they would

respect that  
a little more  
cause our struggle has been  
one of the hardest  
for centuries

*Positivo: "That's The Only Spots I was Able To Go"*

I actually went to Tracks for the first time cause I had a friend who was a lesbian and she came out.

She's like, "Do you want to go?"

At the time I was pretending to be straight.  
I didn't really say it. I was like, "Cool, I'll go.

Yeah, like I was just you know 'Girl, suuuure!'"

We went the first time it was just an eye-opening experience.

I was 16.

I think I remember trying my first cigarette.

I got this big old headache  
in the club.

I'm just laying there.

She was all like, "Don't lay  
like that  
at a gay club."

It was the second time that I went with her

No, one time I think I went by myself.

I met this guy there

He was wanting to dance

He was touching me

I was like, "Um, neeeever had this before?"

That was like the first

and he was the first guy that I was with.

I remember just getting his number



talking to him more  
That's when we actually went and hung out at Cheesman Park.  
Cheesman Park was the spot to go.

He was the one that told me,  
"You've got to be careful about Cheesman Park, because  
if you do come by yourself  
and you park,  
people are going to think  
you're looking for sex  
or looking to hookup."

He basically gave me the rules  
of this is what the park is,  
this is where people come hookup.  
Obviously this is regulated.  
Cops come at 11  
because it had that image.

If you'd go on Sundays,  
you could just go cruise by,  
but you could also sit there and hang out  
but also it was an opportunity for you  
to kinda just see what's out there.

Nowadays people have the Facebook,  
but I remember  
when I was in college  
Facebook was only  
if you went to college.  
Again, it's like thinking about  
social media and all that.  
At least for my days,  
that was the only outlet:  
going to Tracks  
or going to Cheesman.

I know this is bad  
but I had a fake ID  
I've had two fake IDs.  
They're pretty legit

because I wasn't taking someone's identity  
It was my picture and my name  
It just was a different address.  
But, it wasn't for the alcohol  
it was more just to go into the bars.  
I want to get to know more.

I feel that from my experiences  
being a 17 and 18 year old  
and being in that community

guys were like, "So what's  
up?  
Oh, he's a youngin'"

They knew  
when there was prey there  
that they could prance on

I think for me  
it was a shock  
it was sort of  
wanting to figure out who I was  
in this community  
trying to figure out  
what is there to offer in this?

That's the only spots I was able to go to.

*Aja: "Am I Ready to Bring this Up? Are They Ready to Change their Language?"*

Knowing that there are some places where I  
will have to kind of hide that  
mostly around my family was  
definitely at the foreground  
of my mental preparation for coming  
to Colorado.

Getting ready today I  
kinda put my ambiguous

like, androgynous  
boy drag  
like boyish drag on  
but then I have my makeup on hand  
when I'm  
walking into a space where I  
don't feel like I'll see any of my family members  
because I'm not really ready  
I think  
to have that conversation  
today

We did talk about what

like what

pronouns she would use for me, or  
if any

We pretty much determined that  
not using pronouns  
might be the easiest

I asked her if it would be hard for her to use he pronouns

and she was like, "Yes,  
that would be very hard for me  
and I don't want to do that."

I was like,  
"I fully respect that."  
We agreed on just  
not gendering me  
She is fully expecting  
my parents  
to refer to me as  
Albert,  
he, his,  
son.  
After everything,  
my parents call me son.

I haven't really realized  
how much  
that happened  
until this recent  
this trip right now  
which I know is  
another kind of factor in  
Am I ready to bring this up?  
Are they ready to change their language?  
I want to say yes to all of those  
but in actuality  
I'm not sure.

*Andres: "I'm Not Cool With That"*

I don't think I have a type.  
I mean, I hope I don't.  
When I was younger  
When I was 16, when I was barely coming out  
I was really looking for that masculine man  
who was probably 6 foot.  
I was probably attracted to white men.  
Now I'm like,  
no White men  
They colonized.  
That's the oppressor.

This is all going on the interview? Whatever.

Now I'm like sort of in this space where  
racially I'm kind of anti-White right now  
and I'm people of color power  
That translates into my romantic life

I don't talk to white men.  
I don't want to be attracted to white men.  
If a White man is attractive,  
I remind myself that:  
He is not brown

He probably will never understand  
the full range of identities,  
and expressions,  
and oppressions  
that our people have faced.

That's a very close-minded way of thinking about it,  
but maybe in the future my mom says I'll end up with a white person  
so maybe in the future I'll have a white husband or something.

In terms of this spectrum of masculinity  
I used to be attracted to the hypermasculine  
I wanted that.  
I would tell myself  
“I'm attracted to men.  
Why would I want like —a woman? “

I was very unaware of about like  
power structures and things like that.  
This was pre-college.  
Now, I find myself attracted to  
a wide range of individuals.  
They can be very feminine  
and very flamboyant,  
or they can be very masculine.

I find that  
the men who are more masculine  
are the ones that  
I don't find a lot of connection to  
because, they express their power  
in different ways  
than I do.

I don't like that.  
I don't like that.  
There's a difference between the way I  
express power and the way that I  
communicate and like the men that I  
might be attracted to, right?

There was this guy  
that I was talking to.  
He had been  
in a really abusive relationship.  
He shared way too much the first time,  
but he showed me pictures  
of his eye, it was black  
broken ribs  
and stuff like that.  
I was like,

“Whoa, that really sucks.

I've never been in a relationship like that.

I would never

let it get that far, I think.

I would make sure I was communicating enough with my partner."

We've been talking for a while.

At one point

he started to yell.

He said, "If you don't shut the fuck up,  
I'm going to throw this cup at your face."

That was the end.

He was very hypermasculine.

He cared a lot about how he sounded

He cared a lot about not sounding gay

I was so turned off by that.

I was like, that's not what I want, you know?

I'm attracted to a wide range of people,  
but it really comes down to how you  
present masculinity

If you're presenting it in  
a way that's oppressive  
for me or for other people  
or for anyone around you

I'm not cool with that.

*Jay: "Changed the Game"*

The worst one was  
we were                    four years in deep  
we were                    obviously at the  
comfortable level of our sex life  
                                  we were young  
  
                                  we were young  
                                  early twenties

He started talking about  
introducing someone else to our bedroom  
and I was very curious  
because he was my first boyfriend  
and my first sexual experience  
in terms of penetration  
                                  So I was  
                                  I was like,  
if this is who I'm going to be with for the rest of my life  
I need to kinda be interested  
in what's happening out there  
I'd be open to it  
It was really his idea but I'd be open to it  
                                  He said,  
                                  "But I don't want you to get jealous and  
                                  I don't want you to blah blah blah."

"I'll be fine." You know,  
back then, it was really funny  
It's very much the same now.  
                                  I don't care.  
                                  We're together.  
                                  You're coming home with me, so  
                                  this is just sex, right?  
So we engaged in that for a while  
multiple                    instances where we  
invited someone  
into our bedroom  
had sex and

it was fine  
until one of the suitors  
showed interest more in me than him

Changed the game.

We were coming back from the bar.  
We were having  
ups and downs at that time  
It was towards the end of our relationship (we were really struggling)  
We'd break up for a week  
get back together  
you know that whole thing (we were young)  
He was drunk  
telling my older brother  
in the car (drinking and driving, according to him)  
telling him that he  
just loved me so much  
that he just loves me  
just wants to be working

My older brother is extremely outspoken like I am  
if not worse  
He said, "Well if that's the way you feel that's the way you should treat  
him  
and blah blah blah blah blah"  
Then they started going back and forth.

Back and forth  
Back and forth  
Back and forth

My brother had bought him a chain  
for Christmas you know  
a little silver chain and  
Cruz was crazy  
was in the backseat  
was pissed  
that this conversation was taking place  
so he opened the door



so he could be let out  
while the car was moving

Of course I'm driving  
I slam on the brakes  
I'm like, "What are you doing?"  
He jumps out of the car and starts walking  
I'm like  
you know  
following him trying to get him in the car  
He rips the chain off  
and throws it in my brother's face  
cause my brother's car window  
he was the passenger  
his window was down  
trying to get him to get back in the car too.  
That pissed my brother off  
so I stopped the car  
I get out  
I go to him  
and I'm like, "Cruz,  
you need to get in the car."  
I open the door for him  
I'm like,  
"Get in the car."  
and he just  
*pop* me  
right in the mouth

That was it.

My brother got out of the car  
literally beat the liv-ing  
crap out of him  
Threw him in the back seat  
Took him to my apartment  
where my little brother  
was living with us at the time  
bring him upstairs bloody  
I throw him in the shower

clean him up  
I had to take him to the hospital in the morning  
broke rip  
and just beat his face up real good and...

I stayed with him.

Kind of shunned my brother off a little bit  
cause I was a little angry with him for the experience  
until we broke up  
we broke up  
and I let him  
live with me still cause  
financially he was just so unstable  
he never could hold a job  
He started  
sleeping with a gentleman in the apartment complex  
that we lived in  
even though we weren't together  
I was just like that's so disrespectful  
I eventually kicked him out  
That was the end of it  
But yeah, his issues with jealousy and rage  
were just to this day  
still cause problems  
I still hear that he has issues with alcohol.  
I still hear that he abuses his current boyfriend.  
Pretty sad.  
Pretty sad.

## **Pláticas**

*Positivo: "A Whole New Can of Worms"*

I remember  
I went through a depressive state  
It was very depressing  
I always knew I was gay  
since I was five years old  
I've had an attraction

but I didn't know what it was  
For me, it was hard  
to channelize that  
and to share that

I remember  
in high school  
there was a low point in my life  
I remember  
I went to my brother's house  
He wasn't there at the time  
but his wife was there  
then my second oldest brother  
was there

I remember  
at one point  
I had told them  
I was thinking about committing suicide  
They didn't know why  
and I didn't really share it with them  
but before I could even  
share my feelings  
I had a cousin  
and my sister in law had said:

"Was it because of what your brother did to you when you were  
younger?"

That's where I was like, "Wait, what?"

What they had said  
was that some family  
had mentioned that  
my older brother had molested me when I was younger  
until this day  
I don't know  
if that was true or not  
because I haven't confronted  
it was just that moment

where I didn't talk about my sexuality  
It just completely took me out of my motive

"No I was completely talking about a whole other thing,  
but you opened a whole new can of worms."

*Jay: "It Just Wasn't Talked About"*

Mm-hmm.  
Absolutely, we do not talk about it.  
For example,  
my mother has

three siblings:  
one sister, two brothers

One of her brothers is gay.

As a matter of fact — well  
The one brother who is gay,  
my uncle,  
had gotten married to a woman had two children and then divorced and  
had lived downtown forever. As far as we were concerned that's what he  
did.

He had a roommate named John for-ev-er  
like, 15 years  
then John one day just moved to a different state (broke up)  
and I didn't actually know my uncle was gay  
until I was 18 and he came out to me  
after I came out to him  
then all of it made sense

Now, I'm starting to get suspicious,  
because he had some  
rainbow beads hanging from his car's rear-view mirror.  
I noticed the rainbows,  
so I started talking  
more about myself  
cuz I was like, "You have to be gay

or this wouldn't be hanging in your car  
basically."

He picked me up every morning for work.  
One day  
one morning  
he goes, "Well mijo,  
I'm gay too.  
I'm sure you already know that."  
I was like, "I didn't know for sure, but.."

He opened up a lot about that.  
I was like,  
"Why doesn't anyone in our family ever talk about this?  
It would've been so much better for me."  
The sad thing is,  
his oldest son is gay  
and his daughter's oldest daughter  
is a lesbian.

He's a grandfather now.

He just said  
it's just something we don't talk about.  
and I said, "Why did you —  
Did you know you were gay?"

He said "Yes."

"Then why did you get married?"

He said, "Truth?"

I said "Yeah."

He goes, "I thought she was a lesbian."

I said, "Well,  
how did you get by  
so long

without it being talked  
in front of the children? and  
how did you talk to my dad about this?!"

He said, "Me and your dad didn't talk about this.  
We still haven't talked about this."

I said, "What the hell?  
He has to know what these beads meant"

He said,  
"No,  
he never questioned it  
so if he questioned it  
he didn't question it with me  
he goes one day we were driving in the car,  
and he asked me why I had these beads hanging up  
from my rear-view mirror.  
I said, 'Oh,  
I'm part of Jessie Jackson's Rainbow Coalition.'"

and my dad believed him

and so  
it just  
wasn't talked about

## **Chismé**

*Toni: "It Changed My Whole Way Of Thinking"*

I remember meeting  
a guy that had visited  
the gay and lesbian community at CU, because  
he was in a CU fraternity  
and he was visiting Colorado  
so he got to stay at the frat house for free  
so him and I had a little rendezvous  
and friendship

I remember seeing him out there  
and he introduced me to one of his friends  
It was almost two in the morning I had never been out that late in the city  
and it was still kinda scary to me  
So I started to cry

This guy is like why are you crying  
Well I have never been alone in the city by myself  
So he let me stay with him  
for the night  
and was totally cool  
I told him about my situation  
and he had a couch bed  
and he told me I could stay with him  
for 200 a month if I were to clean his house

in a thong  
once a week

Well I was a cheerleader  
in a size 27 waist  
with a kick ass everything  
So I agreed

That is when I learned  
that I could be empowered  
by who I was and my sexuality  
and it changed my whole way of thinking  
and I learned to really utilize  
different aspects  
of myself in order to spring myself into the community  
and after that  
I don't think I have been fearful  
at all about my sexuality

*Andres: "We Don't Talk About My Uncle"*

My uncle  
who we don't talk to

not because he's gay  
but because he's a horrible person

For Halloween  
every year  
he dresses up as a woman  
and he performs in drag  
and I'm pretty sure he's trans  
or something  
There are so many rumors that he has sex with men  
My dad  
He's okay with it  
He loves his brother  
even though he's a horrible person

He only dresses up as a woman      in drag      out of a joke  
but he performs really well  
I think that's how he feels most comfortable  
He's not really somebody I look up to but  
he's somebody I know  
in the family  
that's is also probably LGBT  
but he'll never come out.

There was this whole thing where he bought a club  
with one of my dad's friends  
My uncle is undocumented  
My dad's friend is documented  
He needed the friend to sign for the club  
The guy      invested      thousands of dollars into  
buying the club  
My uncle was supposed to pay him back  
because my uncle can't get a loan from the bank  
to pay for the club

My uncle started  
going and being a part of the club  
and being a part of the scene  
He started money laundering  
    He would say he made X amount



but didn't really make X amount  
then he would put the money elsewhere  
and that was fine for him  
but the credit on the line  
and the people who were visible  
about the club  
were my dad's friend  
who he's known for 20 years before I was born

The guy told my uncle, "Hey,  
you need to pay me back this money  
because I know you're making way more than you say you are  
I know you're involved in illegal activities."  
There was this huge fiasco  
where my dad  
was asked to choose between his brother  
or his friend  
My dad was like,  
"You're my brother,  
but what you're doing is really bad and  
I can't stand by that, so  
I'm going to stick with my friend."

It turned into this huge fiasco.  
It was so chaotic.  
My uncle ended up threatening our family on Facebook  
and telling us he was going to kill us and  
his wife ended up telling my mom, like  
"If I ever see you on the street  
I'm going to kick your ass."  
My mom is not a confrontational person  
My mom is typical, submissive  
Mexican mom  
where she's just going to go about her day.  
This woman was threatening her.  
We ended up calling the cops.  
The cops were like, "Well,  
they haven't done anything,  
so we can't really take this  
as an immediate threat."

My dad's car was stolen.  
People broke into our garage.  
Somebody blew our tires.  
A bunch of things started happening.  
We know it's my uncle.  
Who else would it be?

There was this one point where somebody  
almost killed the guy who owns the club  
Like, they held him at gunpoint  
so he is in a whole legal battle with  
my uncle now  
We are completely detached  
from that side of the family.  
My dad still loves him, I'm pretty sure  
They hate my dad  
They are horrible horrible  
My dad cries a lot.  
That's where his masculinity  
is not shown in traditional ways  
He is very vulnerable  
with his immediate family. So yeah,  
we don't talk to my uncle

### **Mitos**

*Positivo: "The Straight Whisperer"*

I've had experiences  
where I've had Okay,  
you're getting really into my life  
I've been called  
the straight whisperer  
because what I've noticed is  
that I get a lot of guys  
that just feel comfortable  
being around me

I've had experiences  
where I'll go out drinking with friends

and I've had friends  
who will claim that they're straight  
but then when we go out  
or do something  
ended up having them touching me  
or wanting to go  
another level with me  
I don't what it was or what not  
but I still to this day  
those are the experiences that I've had the most  
which makes my gay experience interesting

I've had more  
people that are in the closet  
or don't know what they want  
approach me  
versus guys  
who know what they want  
That was also a habit I got into  
of being with guys who are on the DL  
because they are on the DL

That's what I guess attracted them  
That's where I can see the privileges of  
I'm masculine enough  
that these guys were like, okay  
Then when I would educate them  
I felt like they were comfortable enough  
to then share these stories

I've had people come to me and say  
good friends  
that are like, "I've messed around with guys,  
but you're the only one I could tell  
because I'm going to keep  
a straight identity."

It's sad,  
but those are the experiences that I got

that I was like  
I don't want to live like that

I can't.

*Jay: Coatlicue and Huitzilopochtli*

Up here is Coat-la-coo-ey (“I usually pronounce it Kwat-lee-quey”)  
which is the mother

It starts with her.

She has the very interesting story

with Huitzilopochtli (The sun god and war god)

She got impregnated by feathers

You know the whole story

The creation story

She's sweeping her house

A ball of feathers comes down and impregnates her

She has children the stars

No the moon is one of her children

I want to say the stars

but the stars is the sister and the sister

gets dismembered

and thrown into the sky

and the whole reason

there's a fight

is because the children find out

that she gets impregnated by this ball of feathers

who happens to be Huitzilopochtli

in her womb

and he's understanding that they're coming to kill her

behead her

for what has happened

upon them getting to her

he jumps out of the womb

which is so hilarious to me

and he kills his siblings

dismembers the sister

You can see her arms and legs

are all dismembered

and thrown into the sky  
to make the stars  
Getting my arms sleeved  
was a very big commitment, because  
I want to be a professional  
but I also want to be my authentic self  
Part of the conversation  
for doing all of this, specifically was  
just in general  
every tattoo I have on my body  
means something specific  
My mother's death  
was a very big loss  
and the primary focus  
and influence on why  
I'm at where I am at today

If you come from a similar background as I do  
then you know that  
you don't disobey your mother  
I couldn't stop thinking that  
she would roll over in her grave if  
I sleeved myself out  
unless I chose to dedicate them  
completely to her  
So both arms are completely dedicated to my mother  
They all are representations  
of something in regards to her  
The creation story  
even though I'm not mad at my siblings and stuff  
and I don't wish they were dismembered  
and thrown up into the sky  
it was more about Huitzilopochtli protecting her  
and his thoughts towards his mother  
I just viewed us as you know  
I would have been her ride or die  
type of guy

## Testimonios

*Andres: "I Can't Just Go Back to Colorado"*

I started doing sex education work  
when I was 15 years old  
around the time  
when I was still not sure  
about coming out  
The biggest thing for any activism is  
storytelling. They were always like  
tell us your story.

My story was always about  
the friend who was pregnant  
and I wanted to help her  
Poor Selena, she's so sad.  
She's in eighth grade  
She doesn't know what she was doing.  
But, that was just a fake story  
The real story underneath was  
I'm gay  
and I don't know how to talk about it

For a whole year  
I went with this organization  
I went to D.C.  
and I went to parts of the United States  
telling this story that was not mine  
telling a story that I didn't feel connected to  
Finally, when I came out  
it was then  
that I could really  
tell my story  
and speak my truth  
I ended up coming out  
to the legislature  
in Colorado.  
I testified for a bill  
and told them I'm gay  
you're all Republican

and you don't understand me  
That was very powerful for me  
to be able to do that

After I did that on the state level  
other organizations have been reaching out to me  
so I can share my story  
and I can  
speak up

I think that my  
LGBT activism  
and my activism around sexual health education  
has been framed  
by my story of being  
closeted, a youth of color, by  
being outed  
by coming to terms with my sexuality  
and what that was like

On the other hand,  
my activism  
in immigration  
has been tough because  
I am documented  
I didn't know if I was going to be accepted  
in the immigrant community  
because I have a lot of privilege  
that they don't.

But I took a trip to Tucson  
where I walked  
part of the migrant trail in the desert  
I met with people in detention  
I spoke with an 18 year old  
and I was 18 at the time  
who was gay and brown  
and wanted to study theater  
and I was studying theater at the time

He was like a reflection of myself  
I was like, "oh shoot!"

I need to do something  
I can't just go back to Colorado and  
pretend like it never happened

*Aja: "One of the Most Powerful Political Moments"*

Since moving  
to California  
my sense of politics  
has expanded exponentially  
and also gotten stronger over time

Here, it was  
it didn't seem like anything needed to change  
I had the family  
We all  
took care of each other.  
There were other people around  
but they were all doing their thing  
It didn't feel like  
gentrification was a thing, really  
when I was growing up  
You know it wasn't a concept  
that had hit  
an area like Denver.  
In that way  
my politics were just a little shut off

I knew  
I knew I was queer  
and that shaped a lot of how I  
viewed the world  
like sixth, seventh, eighth, ninth grade  
in high school  
Right now I guess the most  
recent political action I was involved in  
was in San Francisco a couple weeks ago  
There's been a tug-of  
a push-and-pull kinda fight  
to not have a jail built in San Francisco  
My partner has actually been spearheading a lot



of the actions  
around getting that jail  
not to be built  
I've been to No SF Jail  
Coalition meetings and  
board of supervisor meetings  
where they vote on the actual project  
and tried to shut that down  
with our voices

That's something that I never really felt here  
other than  
when the Democratic National Convention was in town  
That was Obama's first year, maybe  
For me,  
that was my first large political moment  
was during a critical mass bike ride  
that went through downtown  
zig-zagged up and down 16<sup>th</sup> Street Mall  
We eventually got stopped by the cops  
for getting too close to the Pepsi Center  
I was in the front of this mass ride  
There was a moment  
when the police stopped us  
and I looked back  
and saw 500 people  
with bikes in the air  
behind me (I'm already getting like)  
That was one of my most powerful political moments  
that I think I have had as a teenager  
being able to feel  
that tension between the people and the police  
taking over  
our town  
pretty much  
for that you know two weeks of time  
It pretty much felt like a police state  
which was something I'd never felt  
prior to that

In a way that  
was an eye-opening experience  
to see that cops could so easily take over our city  
in a way that was actually  
hurt a lot of the people  
who have lived here  
their whole lives

## **Consejos**

*Andres: "Shifting the Way I Think About Myself"*

We give advice to other queer people  
What I would say is  
there is a lot of power  
in your multiple identities  
there is a lot of power  
in every single part of who you are.

You are not just queer.  
You are not just Chicano.  
You are not just American  
or undocumented.

You are a  
whole lot of things at once  
and you have a lot of  
privilege also

I would really ask them to  
think critically about their privilege

I would ask them to think critically about  
power and why they have power  
and how they are willing to execute that power  
in ways that are not harmful to other people

I would also ask that self pity  
is not going to  
do anything for them  
that it won't do anything for me

There's a lot of power in their identity  
and they should find that  
and work really hard to find that  
    It gets better with time  
    not like the next day  
    but that feeling of self pity  
    and feeling bad about yourself  
    is not going to improve your situation at all  
Maybe that's too American of me to think that way, but  
for a long time I felt a lot of self pity  
and then afterwards I was like  
my mom can only love me so much  
before I actually start believing it  
you know, and actually start  
shifting the way I think about myself

*Aja: "A Space Where I Am Ready"*

That Sylvia Rivera speech  
has been something that  
    I always think about  
    She points out so many  
    accurate observations  
of the way that cis-gay people  
    and the invisibility  
    the trans invisibility  
that exists within the LGBTQ community.

With so many trans women of color  
    losing their lives  
    at the hands of street violence  
    police violence  
    male violence  
I feel is another source of sadness  
    but also power  
    that brings a lot of people  
within the trans community  
    in the Bay Area together.

Any time  
I find out

about a situation  
that's happened recently  
or something in the past  
that I didn't know about  
or someone connected  
to somebody else  
a friend that lost another friend  
and hearing these stories  
just hearing them so much  
is overwhelming at times

It is  
a combination of my Latino roots  
in Colorado  
and my queer and trans  
roots flowering  
for lack of a better word  
provides me with so much empowerment  
which is something  
with recently coming out to my close circle of friends  
I'm needing that sisterhood  
and that empowerment  
and finding that  
I've been navigating it slowly  
mostly internally  
but now I feel like I'm in a space

## CHAPTER FIVE

### (Re)Membering the Resistance ofGBTQ Chicanos de Colorado

I am in a space where I can see the past as a long journey up a mountain. I am about to reach the summit, and I am afraid. I know when I arrive at the highest point and inhale the view that I will see. This was only a way station. A momentary stop on the path. I do not know what mountain or lake or broken bridge may come next for me. Looking back at that long, rocky, and bloody trail, it feels good to stop and remember. It is bittersweet. The wind blows from the west prompting me to turn around and watch the sun set. In the darkness, I (re)start my journey.

(Re)membering *cuentos* ofGBTQ Chicanos de Colorado challenges master narratives of history, culture, and politics through a multiplicity of theories in the flesh. As a theory of identity, multiplicity “understands social identities as *mutually constitutive* (rather than as discrete and separable)” (emphasis in original, Hames-García, *Identity Complex* xi). Not only do each of these identities mean something different to each interlocutor, but additionally, meaning is generated internally as ascribed identities clash intersectionally with avowed identities (i.e., ethnicity, citizenship status, sexual orientation, gender). Theories in the flesh are created within the clashes, fissures, critical junctures, and traumas experienced within this matrix of domination (Hill Collins). For

instance, disidentification and the labor of intelligibility are two theories in the flesh co-witnessed during FSOHP interviewing that have been previously articulated by queer Latino scholars from within and outside of communication studies (Calafell, *Latina/o*; Gutierrez-Perez, “Disruptive”; Martínez, *Making Sense*; Muñoz, *Disidentification* ). Theories in the flesh carve out spaces to survive and thrive from the fringes by purposefully working through a process of praxis turned theory turned praxis, or a cyclical process of “decolonizing reality consist[ing] of unlearning consensual ‘reality,’ of seeing through reality’s roles and descriptions” (Anzaldúa, *Light* 44). As part of this shift in reality, multiplicity radically claims that what happens to me is a reflection of you—we are in this together.

For instance, GBTQ Chicanos are challenged by inter- and intra-generational divides that make “coming-out” regardless of age in this historical/political moment a traumatic event where ones intersectional cultural identity is under attack from multiple vectors. Thus, the labor of intelligibility, or the labor of making sense of being Chicano or *Mexicano* and GBTQ, is an everyday trauma that can only be understood in juxtaposition with other identities. In essence, I am asking: how can we “see” the interconnections between us? In the prior chapter(s), I have aimed to remember the *cuentos* of GBTQ Chicanos de Colorado uninterrupted by description and analysis to honor the experiences of my ancestors and co-witnesses; however, to member these same *cuentos*, I want revisit these narratives to highlight theories in the flesh and GBTQ Chicano performances of history and politics.

Like most narrative forms, these *cuentos* blurred and bled together making categorization difficult. In fact, as aGBTQ Xicano, it is important to note how because of my own identity each dialogic performance co-witnessed performatively together was also an example of knowledge production within aGBTQ Chicano *plática*. At times, these *pláticas* were part of the *cuento* told, or they were the entire *cuento* co-witnessed. At other times, *cuentos*, *pláticas*, *mitos*, *testimonios* and/or *consejos* involved some sort of *chismé*. Rather than attempt to create six different analytical lenses for six different analyses ofGBTQ Chicano historical narratives, I follow the wanderings of these narrative forms betwixt and between three thematics: the multiple inter-/intra-generational silences within (GBTQ) Chicano communities; the traumas and subsequent theories in the flesh created from coming out as aGBTQ Chicano; and the multiple vectors and levels of identity, culture, and powerGBTQ Chicanos navigate to make sense of themselves and to make sense of themselves to others.

### **Queer of Color Performances of History and Politics**

#### *Generational Dis/Continuities*

Articulated by Johnson in *Sweet Tea*, I, too, encountered generational dis/continuities during my dialogic performances of co-witnessing withGBTQ Chicanos. Specifically, I was struck by the rift between the older generations and the newer generations of (GBTQ) Chicanos, and how this rift affectively registers in both inter- and intra-generational communication within the family and within romantic relationships. As I highlighted spatially in the staging of these *cuentos*, there is a culture of silence that

(dis)allows theories of the flesh to be narrated intergenerationally between LGBTQ Chicanos. Further, this culture of silence is also intragenerational in that LGBTQ Chicanos (young and old) are not “out of the closet” to their families in the Euro-American construction of this term. Instead, as Jay, one of my co-witnesses, explains, “It just wasn’t talked about.” How does one makes sense of themselves and makes sense of themselves to others in this culture of silence? How does one resist and have agency in this cultural context?

### *Intergenerational Culture(s) of Silence*

Toni, the eldest co-witness, discusses this intergenerational culture of silence as an embodied historical and political inheritance from prior generations. He yearns for the newer generations to understand that “our struggle has been / one of the hardest / for centuries” and that we inherited this struggle (its victories and failures) from our queer elders in the form of cultural disciplining onto/into our bodies. In his *cuento*, Toni explains how the “older guys were totally / jaded / You know / They were jaded and mean” and how his generation “experienced our own form of / being jaded / or mistreated.” Later, Positivo re-iterated this generational dis/continuity when he discusses his first experiences at a gay club at 16 as a kind of predator/prey relationship: “guys were like, ‘So what’s up? / Oh, he’s a youngin’ / They knew / when there was prey there.” As LGBTQ Chicanos undertake the labor of finding community support and backup, they encounter a predator/prey gay male culture that objectifies their bodies, fetishizes their



youth, and exoticizes their *mestizaje*. Rather than create communities of understanding and sharing, LGBTQ Chicanos encounter a culture that continues patriarchal, White supremacist, and capitalist hierarchies within gay spaces and places.

Navigating the multiplicity of gender, Whiteness, and capitalist hierarchies is an intersectional labor of intelligibility for LGBTQ Chicanos in LGBTQ spaces. John T. Warren defines Whiteness as a privilege enjoyed simply because one appears white (“Whiteness” 185-186), and as a privilege, Peggy McIntosh writes that Whiteness functions as “an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools, and blank checks” (79) that “I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was ‘meant’ to remain oblivious” (78). For Latinos, Whiteness stereotypes brown male bodies as the “Latin Lover” or the heterosexual, affectively excessive, and hypersexualized “Latin Papi” (Moreman, “Rethinking”; Moreman and Calafell, “Buscando”). In LGBTQ spaces, these stereotypes mirror the dominant heterosexual culture and refract into social scripts that drain queer Latino bodies of their subjectivity. They become objects for the enjoyment and desires of White bodies, or as Lawrence La Fountain-Stokes writes the “main interest in Latino culture often seems to be to find a fuckable boy toy” (56). Fetishized and eroticized to fit a capitalist impulse, LGBTQ Chicanos have little power within the hegemonic construction of whiteness and masculinity in LGBTQ spaces.

However, Toni, in a moment of telling *chismé*, discusses how he used this hierarchical, predator/prey culture to his advantage to survive away from Colorado in San

Francisco, CA as a younger man. Toni describes himself at this time in his life: “I was a cheerleader / in a size 27 waist / with a kick ass everything.” Toni’s body fit easily into the fetishized image of the fit, portable, and young “Latin Lover” that could and would fulfill all your desires. Utilizing his “kick ass” body, he finds shelter during a scary night wandering alone in the city, and further, he secures a stable and affordable place to stay: “and he told me I could stay with him / for 200 a month if I were to clean his house / in a thong / once a week.” For Toni, the ultimate lesson from this *cuento* is that he could use his raced sexuality and the predator/prey culture to feel and be empowered as a LGBTQ Chicano. By working with and through a harmful ideology rather than against, Toni disidentifies to create space to resist an impoverished living situation and a possibly violent situation (i.e., wandering around alone at night).

To challenge master narratives, LGBTQ Chicanos utilize disidentification in their everyday lives to survive this culture norming/disciplining process. Gossip and rumor are narratives that often stand in for genuine communication about the lives and experiences of LGBTQ Chicanos. As a form of resistance, LGBTQ Chicanos transform spaces and challenge binary understandings of gender and sexuality by using rumor/gossip to open up *pláticas* about sexuality and gender. Queerness is connected to the feminine in the dualistic culture of LGBTQ Chicanos, so one is seen as weak, disempowered, and monstrous if one does not perform correctly or at the right times (Calafell, *Monstrosity; Paz*). For example, Ricky Martin, a Puerto Rican pop singer and performer, publicly navigated the difficult terrain of gossip and rumor about his gender and sexuality in the

early 2000s. Drawing on Muñoz's theory of disidentification, Calafell charts Martin's public performances of politics that utilized ambiguity to disrupt gender/sexual binaries to maintain a masculine identity through *chismé* rather than against. She writes that because of Martin's light-skinned privilege he "carried the privilege of visibility, enabling him to pass from the terrain of Latina/o Otherness into the public space of whiteness and imbuing it with difference" (*Latina/o* 90). Some of this difference was cultural navigating competing understandings of masculinity and sexuality that Martin bridged with his public performances of dance, resistance, mestizaje, and passing (87-88).

In media portrayals and commentaries, Martin's body is simultaneously eroticized and Othered by playing a sexually ambiguous game of "is he or isn't he" (Calafell, *Latina/o* 100-104). In a (in)famous interview with Barbara Walters in 2000, Martin is pressed to answer rumors of his sexuality yet rather than adhere to binary understandings of sexuality, Martin "remains staunchly, discursively ambiguous" (108) working through both the politics of naming (refusing to answer the question) and the Latin Lover stereotype (Martin's body as spectacle/object) to disidentify. Of importance for this study, Martin essentially does not dispute or directly challenge *chismé*, but he works through and with it to transform the rumor into an international space to discuss the politics of coming out for the larger Latina/o culture. In 2010, Martin officially came out of the closet, but in order to maintain his career and public acceptance of his gender and sexuality performances, he utilized *chismé* and disidentification to protect himself and survive the onslaught of two cultural expectations on his body and identity.

GBTQ Chicano generational communication is full of fissures, cracks, and empty spaces because each generation has had to grapple with the violent realities of being LGBTQ and Chicano in different historical/political moments. Speaking about the older gay generations, Toni notes how “They were just / reflecting on us” because “they had probably had / a lot of barriers / a lot of hurt / hatred.” For example, Toni explains how his generation never expected to find love but “this newer generation...they’re—actually—looking and expecting love.” Growing up as a LGBTQ Chicano in the 80s and 90s, Toni witnessed many friends and mentors lose their lives to the HIV and AIDS epidemic. In the midst of Reaganomic policies of silence on the epidemic, Toni faced a different historical/political environment from Andres who is beginning his adult life in the current post-gay marriage moment. In this case, love and the possibility for love mark a significant political and historical rift between the generations. Whether old or young, LGBTQ Chicanos face a culture of silence within the LGBTQ community that upholds oppressive structures of power based on race, gender, and class, and within their own Chicano community, LGBTQ Chicanos face a culture of silence that pits them against their own brothers and sisters, fathers, mothers, and extended family members.

#### *Intragenerational Culture(s) of Silence(s)*

Passing on and/or forgetting to pass on historical and political traumas to the next generation is rooted in a culture of silence that is intragenerational. Meaning that fissures, cracks, and junctures left unaddressed within a generation (familial, communal, global) are passed on for the next generation to grapple and struggle with. In the narratives co-

witnessed, intragenerational struggles within the family and within romantic relationships effected and affected future LGBTQ Chicano experiences of identity, culture, and history. In the *plática* between Jay and his older gay uncle, Jay's uncle explains how he is still not out to his own brother: "he never questioned it / so if he questioned it / he didn't question it with me." Likewise, Andres notes that his "horrible" gay uncle is not officially out to the family, but instead, his sexual orientation is the topic of many rumors. These unaddressed silences and rumors at the intragenerational level of communication have<sup>xiii</sup> ramifications for future generations.

For example, Positivo, in a *mito* of "down-low" or DL culture, explains how his ability to pass and perform a cisgendered masculine identity has made the majority of his sexual and romantic exploits with Latino men who identify as "straight." At the intragenerational level, Positivo is a LGBTQ Chicano grappling with a dualistic culture of competing ideologies of sexuality and gender alongside and with other LGBTQ Chicanos. This socio-cultural ideological matrix was inherited from prior Chicano generations, yet at the intragenerational level, the struggle to hold an empowering view of one's sexuality and gender is a similar story of silence and violence that echoes throughout the centuries. LGBTQ Chicano men internalize the modern/colonial gender system, and in an insidious fashion, they begin to view their intersectional performances of gender and sexuality as monstrous, sinful/blasphemous, criminal, or unnatural. For instance, the majority of my interviewees had experienced deep depression because of their identities that led to either suicidal thoughts or attempts at suicide. Although each of my interviewees are out of the

closet to their families, LGBTQ Chicanos are still forced to live double-lives where their desires and performances of gender/sexuality must be hidden or carefully performed to maintain community support and safety. For those not out of the closet, living two, three, or sometimes four lives depending on the context takes a mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical toll on LGBTQ Chicanos, which manifests in addiction, aggression, and violence.

In these collected *cuentos* and *pláticas*, violence materialized in the form of abusive relationships. Jay and his first boyfriend clashed not only because of a lack of positive gay relationships to model, but the maintenance of the *activo-passivo* binary and machismo led to physical violence. Even in Andres' *cuento* of being threatened by a DL man, the potential boyfriend "was very hypermasculine / He cared a lot about how he sounded / He cared a lot about not sounding gay." Further, the threats of violence came after the potential boyfriend shared that he was recently in an abusive relationship: "he showed me pictures / of his eye, it was black / broken ribs." Intragenerational silences maintain the conditions in which each new generation must grapple with the baggage of the prior generation. Unaddressed *pláticas* and *chismé* within the family, community, or world sit like a grain of sand in an oyster irritating and agitating the mouth. Each generation adds its own layer to the irritant until consciously or unconsciously some one or thing cuts it out and removes it. Now, the traumas of generations past and present are a pearl of knowledge (*conocimiento*) to be shared with others as cultural currency—a kind of equipment for living (Burke).

*Utilizing Pláticas and Chismé to Address Culture(s) of Silence*

Within LGBTQ culture, there are generational dis/continuities that reinforce dominant narratives, and LGBTQ Chicanos work with and through these master narratives to resist and survive their material realities. Generational dis/continuities are a consistent theme throughout LGBTQ Chicano *cuentos* and *pláticas* because silence is all that LGBTQ Chicanos can expect when trying to make sense of themselves and make sense of themselves for others. For instance, Andres lacks an elder role model to help him undertake his labor of intelligibility. Even though Andres has a gay uncle who “dresses up as a woman / and he performs in drag,” this potential ally within the family is “not really somebody [Andres] look[s] up to” because of his uncle’s violent and criminal behaviors towards his friends and family. In the case of Jay, he shares a *plática* of when he came out to his older gay uncle, and in response, his uncle finally came out to him. Jay asks his uncle, ““Why doesn’t anyone in our family ever talk about this? / It would’ve been so much better for me.”” Like Jay and Andres, LGBTQ Chicanos face a culture of silence within their Chicano communities and families because nonheteronormative performances of sexuality and gender are tolerated as long as they can be ignored or excluded from the space.

Indeed, highlighting generational dis/continuities is an attempt to heal the historical/political divide through the personal because culture(s) of silence are ingrained inter-and intra-generationally in the everyday. In the narratives co-witnessed, *pláticas* and *chisme* were utilized by the participants to address the condition of being silenced and the culture of silence in LGBTQ and Chicano communities. In the *plática* shared by Positivo,

he was only able to access a memory of sexual abuse by his brother by engaging in chats/conversations with his family. Further, it is worth noting that facing depression and suicidal thoughts Positivo utilized *pláticas* to reach out for support from his family. However, *pláticas* can open up “a whole new can of worms” because addressing familial silence is a dangerous labor that LGBTQ Chicanos engage in to understand themselves.

Holling researches the dynamics of the Chicana/o *familia* and Chicano masculinity within a case study of *Resurrection Blvd.* (RB), which aired three seasons between 2000-2002 on the cable network Showtime (“El Simpático”). The Chicano *familia* is viewed as exceeding a blood-lineage-based view of family, and *la familia* is male-dominated, patriarchal, and maintains a gender-based family structure (“El Simpático” 93). Chicana/o *familias* have varying degrees of egalitarian relations among marital couples, a strong emphasis on family solidarity, extended relations, affectionate and close bonds, and celebrations of life-cycle rituals (“El Simpático” 94). These characteristics of *familia* fluctuate depending on the degree of urbanization, industrialization, acculturation, and socioeconomic status, and not to mention, the influences of one’s spirit, qualities, and respect for elders and genders (“El Simpático” 94). In discussing how hypermasculinity or *machismo* comes into being within the *familia*, Holling cites the colonization of Mexico by the Spanish: “one view presupposes a pathology among Mexican and Mexican American men who suffer from feelings of inferiority, weakness, and powerlessness for which outward demonstrations of masculinity compensate” (“El Simpático” 96). However, she offers a second view that



claims the association between hypermasculinity and Mexican males is an assimilation to the Spanish cultural value system and worldview, which emphasized masculinity, patriarchy, and strict gender role adherence (“El Simpático” 96). Holling writes, “Within that context, Chicano masculinity is born from experiences of colonization, oppression, and resistance, as well as influenced by cultural attitudes of what constitutes a ‘man’” (“El Simpático” 96), so

the “tough macho” reflects behavioral characteristics of machismo, whereas the “tender macho” reveals the expression of emotions and behaviors most associated with femininity, that is, adoration and sensitivity toward children, expressing vulnerability, and close, perhaps even intimate, physical contact between men. (“El Simpático” 97)

GBTQ Chicanos navigate the difficult terrain of gender and sexuality utilizing *pláticas* and *chismé* to address familial cultures of silence that upholds binary, hierarchical thinking, such as the “tough macho” over the “tender macho.”

In the case of Jay, his *plática* with his gay uncle opened up a space where they both could reach across the generational divide to come out of the closet to each other. Moreover, Jay becomes a resource and confidant for his uncle to share the secrets of his former marriage and the trauma of the intragenerational divide. By addressing silence, *pláticas* are opportunities to utilize listening and dialogue towards the goal of alliance building, which are all powerful forms of advocacy. These alliances can provide critical support for LGBTQ Chicanos within the family to maintain a positive self-image in the face of negative images at the local, national, and global level. Each participant utilized *pláticas* to build knowledge by addressing culture(s) of silence, and LGBTQ Chicanos

utilize these familial or personal *pláticas* to resist and have agency within a complex and dynamic social system.

Oftentimes, gossip and rumor can be part of the violence of heteronormativity that queer folks must grapple with in order to carve out spaces for themselves (Yep, “Violence”). In my own experience, *chismé* has been an oppressive narrative form yet it is also one of the few tools at my disposal to defend/protect myself. There is an element of breaking silence or “narrative trespass” within this narrative form that makes the theories in the flesh communicated within *chismé* particularly potent for resistance and agency (Abdi). For Toni, gossiping about the first time he felt empowered by his sexuality was a moment that I couldn’t help but share. Without positive images and histories to draw from, it felt important to share a narrative where same-sex desire and sexuality protected and defended Toni against master narratives where LGBTQ Chicanos should be ashamed of their bodies. In Andres’ *chismé* about his gay uncle, he humanizes the experiences of an older generation of LGBTQ Chicano—we are not without flaws. Further, Andres’ *chismé* addresses how undocumented communities navigate a system that does not want them to be business owners and how not all fathers within the Chicano community are afraid to be vulnerable with their feelings. In sharing the *chismé* about sexual empowerment, undocumented experiences, and male vulnerability, remembering LGBTQ Chicano *cuentos* and *pláticas* challenges the colonial/modern gender system and other master narratives of control, such as citizenship, class, and coming out.

### **Politics of Coming Out**

As the previous section discusses, bodily and boundary violations, border shifts, and identity confusions shock LGBTQ Chicanos into a new way of reading the world, and in confronting culture(s) of silence, LGBTQ Chicanos create theories in the flesh in a process of praxis turned theory turned praxis (Anzaldúa, *Light* 86). These fissures and cracks are inherited from prior generations, yet they operate within the current historical/political moment in the form of intragenerational dis/continuities. In co-witnessing these narratives, I was surprised by the amount of “coming out” narratives that emerged from our dialogic performances, and how each interviewee utilized different performativities of disidentification to open up space for their identities. Specifically, “the phrase ‘coming out of the closet’ refers to the experience of coming out into a queer identity...It also refers to coming out into a community of other similarly identified people, which entails personal and political dimensions” (Chávez, *Queer* 84). To further explicate the effects and affects of generational dis/continuities, I highlight how LGBTQ Chicanos create theories in the flesh out of their “coming out” narratives, and how they then turn and utilize these traumatic experiences as a praxis of resistance in their everyday lives.

For instance, Aja, as a transgender Chicana, articulates an understanding of identity as fluid and contextual, and through her *cuento*, we glimpse at the complex cultural history navigated by transgender Chicanas. Transgender communication grapples with the historical baggage of the medical/psychiatric models that view “transsexualism as a mental illness that, uniquely, could be treated with a combination of psychological, hormonal, and surgical interventions” (Rosario 91). Indeed, the term “transgender” is a

more recent label that emerged from the community to combat the static and pathologizing medicalization model (Stryker in Spencer). As an umbrella term, transgender “describes a subject-in-motion” for “any gender expression, identity, or presentation that varies from what we might understand as normative” (Spencer xi). Prior to Christmas, Aja was worried about how or if she should come out as transgender to her family because transgender narratives of coming out challenge dominant narratives circulating that maintain the gender and sex binary and the assumed Whiteness of transgender experiences.

For instance, further complicating the visit, Aja’s transgendered girlfriend was going to be arriving in the next few days to meet the family for the first time. As two transgendered women in a romantic relationship, Aja challenges the woman/man, feminine/masculine, and gay/straight binary narrative that the Chicano *familia* and the U.S. and Mexico promulgate. Her *cuento* articulates how she performed her identity differently depending on the context. At home, she was prepared with her “boy drag,” but she was ready with her “makeup on hand” for those spaces more inclusive of her evolving identity. Aja, as a Chicax, understands how the family surveils and constrains gender categories, so in this context, non-normative identities are marked as different and cissexism and transphobia manifest in often violent and domineering forms of privilege (Johnson, “Cisgender”). Transgender experiences “challenge the dominant cultural assumption that gender is invariant and that a misalignment between body and identity is deceptive or less ‘real’ than someone whose body and selfhood are congruent” (Johnson,

“Cisgender”). Addressing cissexism and transphobia, Aja and her girlfriend undertook a *plática* before the visit to discuss tactical ways to resist the gender norming practices of Aja’s family. As a form of disidentification, Aja and her girlfriend decided to work on and through the Chicano family ideology instead of against by purposefully not gendering Aja in their interactions.

As Aja undertakes the labor of articulating her identity to others and herself, she challenges the assumed Whiteness of transgender experience. From within and outside the discipline of Communication Studies, transgender studies has been critiqued for centering the experiences of White folks and marginalizing transgender of color narratives (Chávez, “Pushing”; Galarte; Johnson; Rosario). In a speech in the wake of transgender teenager Leelah Alcorn’s suicide in 2015, Lourdes Ashley Hunter, National Director of the Trans Women of Color Collective, describes the current moment for transgender women of color:

We are dying and what are you doing? What are you doing to stop the murders of trans women of color. Right here in the United States, 12 trans women of color were brutally murdered. Trans women of color are 50 times more likely to be impacted by HIV, the average income of a trans person is less than 10,000, over 40% of trans people attempt suicide...If you want to fix something, we need to fix this shit now.

As an intersectional experience, Aja’s narrative highlights the importance of race and class in constructions of gender and sexuality. Focusing on the materiality of transgender subjects, the politics of coming out are a complex and fluid terrain that LGBTQ Chicanxs navigate within and outside of their *familias*.

Looking deeper into the coming out narrative of Andres, he narrates the process of praxis turned theory turned praxis necessary to create a theory of the flesh. At 16, Andres was “barely coming out,” and at that time, he “was really looking for that masculine man” who was “6 foot” and White. Later, he notes how internalized racism, classism, homophobia, and heteronormativity materialized in the form of the *passivo-activo* binary. He “was very unaware of about like / power structures and things like that.” However, after exposure to critical texts in college, Andres creates the following theory: “Now I’m like sort of in this space where / racially I’m kind of anti-White right now / and I’m people of color power / That translates into my romantic life.” Andres puts this theory created out of praxis to work in his love life by rejecting White men and White beauty as the ideal (“I don’t talk to White men / I don’t want to be attracted to White men”). Further, after threats of violence from love interests within the community, Andres “find[s] that / the men who are more masculine / are the ones that / I don’t find a lot of connection to,” and he puts this theory to use by rejecting hypermasculinity, masculine gender norms, and patriarchal forms of aggression and violence. Theories in the flesh transform everyday traumas into equipment for living that LGBTQ Chicanos utilize to resist dominant narratives and to have agency over their circumstances.

As a different performance of culture with different historical affective registers, “coming out of the closet” is a performative act that must be (re)performed over and over again for LGBTQ Chicanos. As Jay explains in his *plática*, his gay uncle “had a roommate named John for-ev-er / like, 15 years / then John one day just moved to a different state

(broke up).” Although his uncle had found love, it did not translate to him coming out to the rest of the family. In fact earlier in his life, Jay’s uncle “had gotten married to a woman had two children and then divorced” claiming that he thought his wife was a lesbian when he met her. Even after both of these events in his life, Jay’s uncle is still not out of the closet to his family, and although two of his nephews, oldest son, and granddaughter are LGBTQ, he has chosen to be “out of the closet” to varying degrees with each. Jay’s uncle is struggling within multiple cultures of silence to come to terms with his identity as an elder LGBTQ Chicano. In this coming out narrative, we glimpse the struggle of the older generations as they find themselves in a historical/political moment where coming out of the closet at the inter- and intra-generational level is a new and frightening expectation.

Coming out is not a one-time, one-size-fits-all performance of empowerment (Abdi), and “the coming out process can be long and complicated” (Urquijo-Ruiz 251). In Jay’s narrative, we are co-witnesses to Jay’s uncle coming out to his nephew; remaining in the closet with his brother-in-law, son, and goddaughter; yet out to his ex-wife and out enough in certain spaces to have had a 15 year long gay relationship. This narrative challenges the “simplistic definition of queerness: closet—coming out—happiness!” (Aiello, et al. 111). Indeed, “the metaphor of coming out of the closet and the politics of the closet have been central to contemporary western queer experiences” (Chávez, *Queer* 84), and although the politics of coming out can be inclusionary, the politics have a radical dimension within this Western construction, such

as “to declare their presences, demand systemic changes, and resist and disrupt assumptions of normative culture” (Chávez, *Queer* 84). However, as the previous examples showcase, non-White and non-Western constructions of identity, family, and culture do not have the same privileges or norms, so coming out for LGBTQ Chicanos is often a traumatic experience. They are not safe to perform “coming out” as a performative act because to mark desire and publicize gay sex is taboo within Chicana/o culture, and as a community-oriented culture, we need our families to survive our material realities on the fringes of society (Gutierrez-Perez, “Brown”). LGBTQ Chicanos regardless of age undertake different labor(s) of intelligibility that must be repeated over and over because of this cultural, historical, and political context.

### **Intersectional Labor(s) of Intelligibility**

The labor of intelligibility is a reoccurring theme throughout each *cuento y plática* regardless of categorization because this labor is an intimate part of the process of transforming traumatic experiences into theory into praxis. As a reminder, the labor of intelligibility is a process of making sense of oneself to others and making sense of oneself to oneself (Martínez, *Making Sense*). This is the everyday labor of being seen as a legitimate bearer of knowledge, of interpreting one’s life accurately, finding community back-up and solidarity, and resisting oppression (Martínez, *Making Sense*). By resisting oppression, I am referring to the labor of how you grapple with confusion and fear, with ridicule and violence, and displacement through social isolation (Martínez, *Making Sense*). Throughout the last two sections, I have discussed this labor in reference to



generational dis/continuities and coming out narratives, but in this final section, I want to highlight how every narrative grappled with oppression in some form.

For Jay, his lack of access to the older generations, to understandings of his identity in popular culture and history, and to social services geared toward LGBTQ issues landed him in an abusive relationship with few options to leave. Although Jay's brother is also a LGBTQ Chicano, internalized homophobia and heteronormativity affected all three cisgendered men, such as strict gender and sexual role adherence, aggression, alcoholism, and domestic violence. After a failed attempt to move from an exclusively monogamous relationship to one of polyamory, Jay's relationship turned emotionally and physically abusive. Jay repeatedly mentions, "we were young" throughout the narrative meaning that he has since utilized this traumatic experience to understand what love is and is not. In the process of understanding what it means to be a LGBTQ Chicano, Jay creates a theory in the flesh, or an awareness and sensitivity to machismo that he deploys to avoid issues of jealousy and rage within other possible relationships. Additionally, this *cuento* has a pedagogical function in that Jay's narrative describes the tell tale signs of abuse, and how through family support and personal growth/empowerment, Jay was able to survive that relationship and repair his relationship with his brother. His abusive partner did not undertake the same difficult labor of intelligibility to create theory out this moment of jealousy and rage ("I still hear that he has issues with alcohol / I still hear that he abuses his current boyfriend"). To create a theory of the flesh, one must be willing to work on and through a traumatic experience—it doesn't just happen.

Throughout each narrative and each theme, GBTQ Chicanos undertake particular labors of intelligibility because of the multiplicitous and intersectional nature of culture(s) of silence. “Being brown” or the affects of race and ethnicity on masculinity and sexuality can be traced along the vectors of class. Class<sup>xiv</sup> arose as a persistent theme within the narratives, and what is interesting about this theme is that the interviewees seem to conflate being brown with masculinity. For example, Jonathan Xavier Inda makes the argument that race operates in performatively similar ways as gender (à la Judith Butler), and Inda outlines how “the place that Mexicans have historically occupied within the United States’ racial hierarchy has depended strongly on the pigmentation of their skin” (77). He discusses how if one is light-skinned they often receive privileges associated with Whiteness,<sup>xv</sup> and if one is dark-skinned, then one is often racially marginalized. He writes “their skin was not only read as a sign of their inferior social status, it also served as a justification for keeping them in that position” (79). This marginalization of people based on skin pigmentation occurs in Mexico as well as in the United States, and Inda notes that light-skin

has been associated with a host of positive qualities such as beauty, cleanliness, humanity, and civilization...Conversely, dark skin whether ‘black’ or ‘brown,’ has traditionally been figured as the embodiment of inferiority and subordination. It has been linked to such traits as ugliness, primitiveness, animality, and dirtiness. (qtd. in Almaguer 82)

This stratification of society inhibits upward mobility for dark-skinned Chicanos and class is often conflated with sexuality as well as gender.

Irwin, in *Mexican Masculinities*, discusses how working-class men are often considered more macho than upper-class men because of class biases and clothing fashions. Irwin analyzes Mexican literature during the early 19th century and points to this time when “lower-class masculinity was being marked as sexually dangerous and roughly masculine” (60). On the opposing side, “civilized upper-class men were not committing violent crimes, but it seemed their soft, cultured style was leading them into dreaded effeminacy” (60). It is not that upper-class men are not considered masculine, but it is that effeminacy during this time became connected to homosexuality (via “The Famous 41”). Thus, “lower-class versions of masculinity, then, reflected degeneration into barbarous historical patterns while upper-class versions reflected the decadence of modern civilization” (64). Class intersects with sexuality for Chicanos because of this historical conflation of how one dresses and its connection to effeminacy, which if one is upper-class, then you could afford and wear the clothing of the privileged soft laborer.

Fernando Delgado and Márez offer excellent examples of how class perceptions and its intersections with race and sexuality operate on Chicanos. Delgado questions the continuing beliefs that Chicanos are not worthy to be in the privileged space of the academy because of race/ethnicity: “Do they see me as the dean? Do they only see me as Brown? Does my Latino identity subvert my credibility and authority?” (“Reflections” 162). Essentially, Delgado because of his skin-color is viewed as part of the lower-class, and even as a well-accomplished scholar, his legitimacy is constantly questioned. In addition, Márez notes how working-class style is often judged as inappropriate for Anglo

spaces and exhibitions of this Brown style are avoided or shoved to the margins. He writes “to those who do not appreciate it, working-class brown style can be too ornate, too gaudy, too florid, too loud, too busy, too much--an embarrassment of riches” (122). However, working-class aesthetics are the preferred choice for Chicanos that want to maintain a masculine gender performance according to the culturally dualistic logics of Latino culture. Chicano men are caught in a kind of catch-22 where their gender and sexuality performances are always already oppressed because of race or class hierarchies, yet because of patriarchy and heteronormativity, they experience privileges and benefits that they will defend (sometimes violently) from women and LGBTQ people. In their everyday lives, LGBTQ Chicanos/Xicanos deal with the politics of class and race, and their perceived performances of excess are in fact biases related to maintaining structures of oppression mutually constituted alongside gender and sexuality.

The labor(s) of intelligibility are intersectional acts that inform how LGBTQ Chicanos utilize their available choices to learn about themselves and about how to explain themselves to others. For example, in Positivo’s *cuento*, he articulates how for LGBTQ Chicanos of Denver that the only spaces available to build community were Tracks and Cheesman Park. As a community on the periphery, politics of shame have an effect on urban zoning whereas LGBTQ businesses and spaces are often (un)consciously targeted and shut down (Warner). Meaning that LGBTQ folks have fewer and fewer spaces to undertake the labor(s) of intelligibility, and given the hierarchical, predator-prey culture, these places are not necessarily the safest spaces to learn about oneself. Positivo

explains that because of this isolation and lack of knowledge he suffered from deep depression and suicidal thoughts yet in the face of sexual abuse and mental/emotional issues, Positivo used these traumas to create theories in the flesh by working through his past and present oppressions to arrive at place where he is about to graduate with a doctoral degree. By examining intersectional labor(s) of intelligibility, LGBTQ Chicano narratives offer a pedagogical function that seeks to guide others through the difficult moments of their own lives.

### **(Re)Starting the Journey**

In his final *consejo*, Andres demonstrates the pedagogical function of sharing one's labor of intelligibility with others as a form of narrating theories in the flesh. Andres makes the argument that LGBTQ Chicanos should embrace their intersectional identities as a form of empowerment. He states: "You are a / whole lot of things at once" continuing he says "there is a lot of power / in every single part of who you are / You are not just queer / You are not just Chicano / You are not just American / or undocumented." Andres faces ridicule and violence from his queer and Chicano identities because of larger structures of power, including homophobia, heteronormativity, xenophobia, and racial injustice. Additionally, he experiences, like many LGBTQ Chicanos, a split between his identities that can be confusing and can incite fear (i.e., Chicano, American, undocumented), but still, Andres advocates for wholeness and embraces the power of self-love as a radical act of resistance. He proclaims that "self pity / is not going to / do anything for them / that it won't do anything for me," and instead he ask us all to "think

critically about / power and why they have power / and how they are willing to execute that power / in ways that are not harmful to other people.” In this *consejo*, Andres narrates a theory in the flesh that pushes back on master narratives, such as self-hate, self-pity, and “it gets better,” by arguing for an embrace of borderlands identities and cultures. All of them.

In this chapter, I have wandered between *cuentos*, *pláticas*, *chismé*, *mitos*, and *consejos* of LGBTQ Chicanos de Colorado highlighting some of the themes that a borderlands lens to narrative theory (re)member. Looking back on the path that we have taken together, I can’t help but wonder what other forms disidentification and the labor of intelligibility can take. I wonder what other theories in the flesh are being utilized by LGBTQ Chicanos across the U.S. Southwest? And, I wonder what theories in the flesh are created and deployed by Chicana lesbians? As a way station, this project is a snapshot of Colorado from a very particular location at a very particular time, but the generational dis/continuities, politics of coming out, and labor of intelligibility archived here are not particular. For instance, these themes were also located by Johnson in the oral history narratives of Black gay men of the South, and Roque Ramirez in the oral history narratives of LGBTQ Latinas/os of the San Francisco Bay Area. Additionally, many of the theories in the flesh utilized by LGBTQ Chicanos are articulated by Chicana feminists and queer of color scholars (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands, Interviews, Light*; Martínez, *Making Sense*; Muñoz, *Disidentifications*). LGBTQ Chicano experiences of culture, politics, and history are particular, but given the cultural dualism of this community immersed in the

modern/colonial gender system and in histories of settler-colonialism, these narratives implicate a multiplicity of persons of all races, classes, sexualities, and gender. As a tactic to (re)member *cuentos* of LGBTQ Chicanos, this thematic analysis is not a complete rendering of experience, but through the theory of multiplicity, I invite the reader to fill in the gaps with their own experiences, identity, culture, and history. I invite you to look back at our journey and ask: where do I fit? Rather than leave these oppressions as particular, I hope you will shift with them and integrate them fully into your reality. This is your story too.

## CHAPTER SIX

### A Conclusion

#### **Future Directions in Jotería Communication Studies**

When I was growing up in California, I wish I had a survival guide to help me navigate the embodied and intersectional experiences of being a nonheteronormative mestizo with performances of gender and sexuality that marked me as different. In the first grade, I remember falling in love with the girl on my right and the boy on my left at the same time. Her name was Mary, and his name was Mike. Running around hunting for bees by myself, it would have been nice to know why at this private Christian school I was always alone during recesses. Forever after, recess was my least favorite part of the day until the end of high school when I finally found a queer family. We hung out at “Jock Island” at Oak Grove High School, and I was able to find a language to articulate what my body had already felt long ago. This project was conceptualized as a survival guide for future Jotería to utilize in their everyday lives to survive and take agency over their particular situation(s), but it is also an invitation or bridge to address culture(s) of silence in all spaces and places.



GBTQ Chicanos from Colorado understand and perform their identities within culture(s) of silence(s) from multiple directions and levels. In Chapter Two, I reviewed how Chicano culture is immersed in a politics of cultural dualism betwixt and between the U.S. and Mexico. Chicanos de Colorado in particular are immersed in a history of settler-colonialism and U.S. American Imperialism. Facing historical racist, classist, and xenophobic oppression, GBTQ Chicanos are embroiled in the politics of the modern/colonial gender system that create competing ideologies of their sexuality and gender performances, so they grow up knowing themselves only as *jotos*, *putos*, o *maricónes* stuck in complex and contextual binaries of *passivo/activo*. When I was growing up, I wish I knew more about the history—those two-spirit, cuiloni Xochipillis. The ones meeting in secret under a pre-Columbian milky way. Rolling down hillsides, plucking each feather gently, and knowing that they fit in the grand scheme of the universe. Let me be clear, their love and desire was misunderstood then too, but at least, they did not have to make sense of themselves to each other or the world.

Carrying the baggage of the last seven generations, GBTQ Chicanos make sense of their relationships with others and themselves within a state of *nepantla*. This in/between space is disorienting, confusing, and traumatic, but it is also a space of transformation and possibility. Anzaldúa explains it as a space where like the moon you have been ripped apart and thrown in all directions of the sky: from this state of fragmentation, you are compelled by an imperative to put yourself together even if your arm must become your leg or your head your hand (*Interviews, Light*). Facing inter- and

intra-generational dis/continuities, coming out as GBTQ and Chicano to one's family and community is still a traumatic and potentially dangerous performance that must be performed over and over because GBTQ Chicanos make sense of their relationships with others and themselves in multiple culture(s) of silence. These gaps in knowledge are confronted in the form of *pláticas* and *chismé*, but sometimes the knowledge created or remembered in these narrative moments are traumatic in itself.

Looking to the next generations, I see myself in the latest data, and I wish there was a survival guide out there for all of you to know that *Jotería* is beauty, power, and love. Recently the Human Right Campaign released groundbreaking research that surveyed nearly 2,000 LGBT Latina/o youth between the ages of 13 to 17, and the findings show that each of you are inheriting the same baggage as our ancestors.

When asked to describe the 'most difficult problem facing them in their life these days,' LGBT Latino youth most often cited three issues related to their LGBT identity: (1) lack of acceptance by parents and family; (2) fear about being out or open; and (3) trouble at school, including bullying. (HRC 12)

These themes were highlighted in my project in the various inter- and intra-generational dis/continuities and politics of coming out. However, as a survival guide, I need to do more than name our oppression and highlight our labor of intelligibility.

GBTQ Chicanos utilize their *nepantla* states on the peripheries of multiple, oppressive, power structures to create theories in the flesh to survive and resist. Given the everyday nature of tactics of resistance, I argue that acts of advocacy, such as listening, reflexivity, critical literacy, alliance-building, dialogue, and speaking up, are

performative, queer, and decolonial potentials for LGBTQ Chicano agency. Utilizing the method of the FSOHP explicated in Chapter Three, I undertook this project with a decolonial ontological shift to social science research that focused on reflexivity, cultural/queer nuances, and performance/performativity. As I listened, reflected, and dialogued, I was transformed by the process, and by sharing the historical narratives of LGBTQ Chicanos, I am speaking up as an advocate to build alliances on the page and the stage. The more critically literate my various interconnected communities are the better. In remembering LGBTQ narratives, I want to advocate for and share the following *consejo*: the power of narrative and the imagination can transform the world.

For example, before moving into the Winter of this project, I sent all the found poems to my co-witnesses for their approval and feedback. In my Skype check-in with Positivo, he shared with me that he gave the found poems to his current boyfriend, and they had a long *plática* about the narrative themes because he had never shared them with his boyfriend before. This follow up is further evidence that *pláticas* address silences, but additionally, it is an example of how LGBTQ *pláticas* generate more LGBTQ *pláticas*, which essentially address further silences as interlocutors listen and dialogue with each other. The *cuentos* and *pláticas* de LGBTQ Chicanos de Colorado in this project highlight themes, but they are also starting points for opening up space to discuss the needs and experiences of people on the periphery. In the following sections, I discuss future directions for this project in performance studies, queer of color critique, and transgender

communication studies.

### **Future Directions in Performance Studies**

FSOHP is a decolonial method that utilizes an ontological shift to a cyclical, creation-centered approach to social science research and everyday life; however, this shift is also a move towards the critical, queer, and performative. Around the turn of the 21st century intercultural communication studies undertook a critical paradigmatic turn that sought to investigate and dismantle power and privilege in multiple cultural and global communication contexts (Collier, Hegde, Lee, Nakayama and Yep; G.A. Halualani, Mendoza, and Drzewiecka; Halualani and Nakayama). Following the trajectory of the subdiscipline of Latina/o Communication Studies, this project contributes to calls within the subdiscipline for more work in performance studies (González, Calafell, and Avant-Mier; Holling, “Retrospective”), and within the discipline of Performance Studies, there is a push for more work in the borderlands between performance and rhetoric (Fenske and Goltz). Specifically, this work “look[s] for ways to mix theoretical and methodological perspectives from Rhetoric and Performance to create more culturally nuanced reading strategies and research approaches” (González, Calafell, and Avant-Mier 7). Given the current historical/political moment, this project will be staged as a one-man show or as a staged production as a form of critical performance pedagogy to speak up and share these theories of the flesh back to the community.

The nature of the Winter of FSOHP is writing, but it is also about sharing and performing your research with and for your community. Madison explains that

theater and performance *show ourselves to ourselves* in ways that help us recognize our behavior and life worlds as well as the behavior and life worlds of others, for better or worse, as well as our/Others unconscious needs and desires. (Madison, “Dangerous” 193)

By moving from the page to the stage, this project follows the path of Johnson in *Sweet Tea* where he not only published the collected oral history interviews with Black gay men of the South, but he staged the performance as a one-man show in the a “reader’s theatre” style similar to Anna Deveare Smith in her staging of narratives from the 1992 L.A. Riots (Johnson, “Page to Stage”). Although I am confident in my abilities as a performer, I am conscious of the following *consejo* from a fellow LGBTQ Chicano scholar: “*Pero como dice el refrán*, ‘what doesn’t kill you makes you stronger’ ¿qué no? Yet to become stronger, one must first realize one is weak” (Manuel 39). In case my abilities as a performer do not best honor the historical narratives of LGBTQ Chicanos, I have created a staged production for the LGBTQ historical narratives presented in Chapter Four that I would like to tour within the Chicano community.

As outlined in Chapter Five, there is a pedagogical function within LGBTQ Chicano historical narratives that offer an opportunity to enact a praxis of change through a critical performance pedagogy. Paraphrasing Pineau, Hao writes “meshing critical pedagogy with performative pedagogy...allows us to consider how students’ and teachers’ bodies—as well as the classroom space—are performatively ideological” (273) and “performative pedagogy puts an emphasis on how performance matters in understanding identities and bodies as political and ideological” (273). In looking at

future directions for this work, theories in the flesh, the FSOHP method, and performances of *Jotería-historias* offer a variety of new approaches and perspectives to the classroom space. Whether as a staged production or brought into the communication classroom, this project utilizes the pedagogical function ofGBTQ Chicano narratives to effect material change for the community by sharing its theories in the flesh through performance.

### **Future Directions in Queer of Color Critique**

In this project, I have highlighted the embodied and performative aspects of living in nepantla and the process of creating and implementing theories in the flesh to change ones' material circumstances, yet I have also (re)membered the historical narratives ofGBTQ Chicanos with an attention to the queer and cultural nuances of this community. However, in the process of co-performatively witnessing, I was struck by and unprepared for the amount of religious/spiritual narratives of resistance.

Second only to African Americans, Latinos are the most religiously observant population in the country.... Faith is deeply embedded in Latino lives—in the communal practice of worship, the devotional life of individuals, and values that inform family experience. (HRC 5)

Given the scope of this project, I did not have the time or space to fully develop and theorize this aspect of the interview process, and in future work, I hope to further develop “religious poetics” as a queer of color critique of discourse and performance that addresses the culture(s) of silence surrounding spirituality as a pivotal intersection within queer theory.

As previously mentioned, religious poetics are “a variation on the ways religious discourse is performed and symbols are deployed,” which is “distinguishable by an emphasis on the intersection of the sacred and political” (León, *Political Spirituality* 29). León draws on several theories to explain and create his innovative form of rhetorical criticism: *mestiza/o* consciousness, *nepantla*, *nepantla* spirituality, the Coatlicue state, *La Facultad*, and *nepantilism* (*Political Spirituality*). Further, as a performance studies scholar, I am very familiar with the concept of *poiesis*, which is a making, doing, and acting process of artistically drawing out. As the root word for poetry, *poiesis* is an important concept for understanding, creating, and analyzing cultural performances. From this location, León further elaborates that “the method of religious poetics disrupts social norms; it probes, challenges, and dismantles the oppressive structures wrought of a colonial enterprise that underpinned and still supports racial, gender, and class histories” (29). Moving into the realm of aesthetic communication allows León to mark the frequent spiritual, gendered, and racial border crossings within the complex and hybrid mythological narrative.

For example, in Jay’s *mito*, he (re)tells the mythos of Coatlicue, the Mexica mother goddess of creation and destruction, and Huitzilopochtli, the Aztec sun god and war god. During the interview, Jay’s sleeves were slightly rolled up, and when I asked him about the images that ran from his wrist to his shoulder on both arms, he (re)told “the creation story.” However, Jay’s version, like most (re)tellings of *mitos*, was different from the version that I had been researching throughout my time in graduate school. He forgot

about Coyolxauhqui, the daughter of Coatlicue, imagining her not as the moon but as the stars, which in most versions the stars are Coyolxauhqui's 400 god-brothers also slayed by Huitzilopochtli ("She has children the stars/ No the moon is one of her children / I want to say the star"). In imagining Huitzilopochtli, Jay drew on his experiences of losing his mother at a young age, and subsequently, Jay grew up with all men until his father remarried. His mythological narrative is filled with masculine agency choosing to (re)tell this myth with violent and aggressive words like impregnated, dismembered, thrown, behead, and kill.

As León writes, myths are "narratives that make truth claims, establishing worldviews and identities not verifiable by historical, modern, or scientific methods" (13). What this means to a scholar of intercultural communication, rhetoric, and performance is that myths are powerful forms of communication that produce and reproduce dominant cultural values, beliefs, and norms that continue colonial/modern discourses, which inevitably implicate historical/political hierarchies of race, gender, class, sexuality, nationalism, and religious intolerance. Meaning that more attention needs to be paid to the power relations, discourses, and rhetorics deployed by mythos in our ever-globalizing local and international culture. However, "mythos defies modernity's demand for verifiability, claiming this its tellers' self-referential authority serves as an implicit evidentiary basis" (13), so myths (re)produce oppressive social structures, but this defiance of verifiability and self-referential authority opens up a space where "the oppressed can speak and be heard in the language of myth, often challenging the status



quo, whose regulatory narratives emerge as eternal truths” (13). By examining myths of *curanderas*, *nepantleras*, folk heroes, and mythological archetypes, León develops a methodological tool to interrogate systems of domination and resistance within the everyday, taken-for-granted discourse of mythology to make visible the resignification process of religious poetics (*La Llorona; Political Spirituality*).

Returning to Jay’s *mito*, he sets the mythological scenario in a deeply patriarchal and masculine viewpoint given his own particular location in culture and society; however mid-way through his *mito*, he begins to transform Huitzilopochtli to make this sun and war god a source of empowerment through the mother-son relationship. Jay discloses that “every tattoo I have on my body / means something specific” and that his mother “would roll over in her grave if / I sleeved myself out.” The (re)telling of this myth is a purposeful attempt to grapple with the trauma of loss and death. The images of Coatlicue and Coyolxauhqui means something beyond its original meaning, and Jay utilizes these religious poetics to make his life more livable. Jay’s tattoos are “completely dedicated to [his] mother,” and “They are all representations / of something in regards to her.” For Jay, he does not view this mythological narrative as the birth of war in the world or the subjugation of women over men within the Aztec mytho-ontological worldview. For him, “it was more about Huitzilopochtli protecting her / and his thoughts towards his mother / I just viewed us as you know / I would have been her ride or die / type of guy.” A religious poetic is worked through the body to heal from loss and is deeply connected to identity, culture, and history. After first identifying the mythological narrative in terms

of masculine agency, Jay later works through and with this ideology to disidentify and transform Huitzilopochtli into a different kind of warrior—a loving son who is protector and savior for his lost mother.

Anzaldúa muses that

according to an ancient indigenous concept, when you fall into a problem, a spirit has entered you and is influencing your mind. If you apply this concept to modern-day problems, you could say that compulsions, obsessions, and negative reenactments are forms of ‘spirits’ that provoke us to leave everyday reality.  
(*Light* 34)

Religious poetics address a lingering problem facing the LGBTQ community that causes harmful compulsions, obsessions, and negative reenactments to enter and influence our individual and collective soul(s). Indeed, I agree with Yep when he writes that the violence of heteronormativity is akin to “soul murder” (“Violence”), and although I agree that embracing the potentiality of queering/quaring/kauering/crippin’/transing and thick(er) intersectionalities as advocated by Yep is a powerful mode of addressing soul murder (“Thick(er)”; “Queering”), I argue that healing from soul murder requires queer of color critiques of discourse and performance that address spirituality as a pivotal intersection within queer theory.

*Jotería*, “two in three (66%) LGBT Latino youth [say] religious leaders were a source of negative messages about being LGBT” (HRC 27). We ignore spirituality, faith, and religion to our own chagrin. In looking to future directions in queer of color critique, this project models the kind of integration of spirituality into the research process that I am arguing for. Additionally, in the example of Jay’s *mito* of Coatlicue and

Huitzilopochtli, religious poetics as a critical/performative lens to cultural criticism offers an approach to addressing the power and persuasion of mythos appeals. For instance, scholars within intercultural communication, religious studies, and performance studies have researched the mythos surrounding Cesar Chavez, La Llorona, Malintzin Tenépal, and Martín Cortés as a form of cultural critique (Calafell and Moreman, “Iterative”; León, *La Llorona; Political Spirituality*; Moreman and Calafell). Embracing the intersection of spirituality highlights the decolonial, performative, and queer spirit of this work because it speaks to one of the many culture(s) of silence that LGBTQ Chicanos navigate in their everyday lives.

### **Future Directions in Transgender Communication Studies**

With the recent publication of *Transgender Communication Studies: Histories, Trends, and Trajectories*, one of the editors writes that

this collection, the first of its kind in the communication discipline, asks students and scholars of communication to think seriously and thoroughly about gender identity on its own terms. The “T” too often tacked onto the end of “LGBT” demands a spot at the center of communicative and rhetorical analysis. (Spencer ix)

After co-witnessing the historical narratives of Aja, I wholeheartedly agree that part of the shift to more spiritually-inflected queer of color critique is also a shift to more inclusion for transgendered communication studies. Elsewhere, I have advocated for transgender women of color and for intersectional work that measures our community successes by the safety of our most vulnerable members (Martinez and Gutierrez-Perez). Yet, during the interview with Aja, my own cisgendered and cissexual privilege spilled

into the *plática*, and it was not until the final part of the interview that I moved away from the questions I've been asking Chicanos to questions meant for a Chicana.

In Aja's final consejo, she articulates a theory in the flesh that allows her to maintain self-love and inner peace in the face of a world that hates her. First, she draws on a historical figure, Sylvia Rivera, to point to the long history of oppression against trans people by the LGB community and the world. Sylvia Rivera was a transgendered Puerto Rican woman living in New York City who stood up for trans people during the early Gay Liberation Movement in the 60s and 70s until her death in the early 2000s (Dunlap). She was rumored to have part of the June 28th, 1969 Stonewall Riots shouting: "It's the revolution!" (Dunlap). Drawing on the *leyenda* (legend) of Rivera, Aja notes how murder, street violence, police violence, and male violence continue to be "another source of sadness." However, rather than freezing in melancholia, Aja articulates sadness as an affect of empowerment "that brings a lot of people / within the trans community / in the Bay Area together." Aja explains that "hearing these stories / just hearing them so much / is overwhelming at times," and by drawing on her Latino, queer, and trans relationships in Colorado and California, Aja is able to love herself in the face of multiple, interlocking structures. Like a cloud in the sky, Aja is surrounded by an atmosphere of hate, violence, and murder, but within her inner nebulous, she draws on trans sisterhood and family/friend acceptance to flower "for lack of a better word."

In this project, one of the many ways in which I challenge the modern/colonial gender system is by making space for and advocating with transgender Chicanxs. In

particular, Aja's narratives push back on analyses of transgender communication that leave out race as an important factor. Further, Aja speaks back to master narratives that would have us forget that transgendered people are part of our community and history. For instance, what does it mean that a transgender Chicana participated in political actions in downtown Denver during the Democratic National Convention in 2008? After New Year's Eve, I reached out to each of my interviewees to wish them a happy holidays and to update them on my transcription progress. Via text, Aja excitedly disclosed that she had come out to her family, and her and her girlfriend's visit had been a great trip home. What does it mean that the Chicano family accepted their transgender daughter? In projecting this work forward, Aja's narratives of transgender Chicana experience is a direction that would contribute to this nascent subdiscipline of Communication Studies and lay a foundation for *Jotería* Communication Studies as an inclusive space for transgender women of color research.

### **Performative, Queer, and Decolonial Acts of Self Love**

When I was growing up as a LGBTQ Xicano in California, I wish I had a survival guide, or something/anything that told me I wasn't a monster (Calafell, *Monstrosity*). Throughout this project, I have remained focused on the four *conocimientos* of the FSOHP method to navigate each seasonal cycle to remain performative, queer, and decolonial in the acts of writing, researching, and living everyday life. As a political and historical snapshot of *Jotería* culture, history, and politics, this project is not a complete picture of a complex and nuanced cultural community, but it offers several insights into

theories in the flesh, generational dis/continuities, politics of coming out, intersectional labor of intelligibility, borderlands narrative theory, and creative acts of the imaginary. Drawing on and dialoguing with Latina/o Communication Studies, this work navigates the borderlands between intercultural communication, rhetoric, and performance studies to argue for a critical/performative turn that highlights reflexivity, cultural/queer nuances, and decolonial acts of resistance. In the end, I hope that this project recognizing the power of narrative, the imagination, and self-love to create radical acts of resistance. From historical/political erasures, traumas, and violence, LGBTQ Chicanos create theories in the flesh to carve out spaces to survive and thrive on the fringes—this work collects their histories.

I am not a victim  
I am a not a champion  
I have thrived

Overcoming every obstacle  
It has felt like survival  
Hopeless, yet

Guido advises  
“to feel resentment and bitterness  
towards those I once trusted  
gives them the power and attention  
they may have been seeking” (115).

Agency, change, changing,  
mentor, role model, scholar,  
poet, performer,  
teacher

This didn't just happen  
someone hurt me

on purpose, but

It happened.

Transforming, ripping  
off my own arm  
beating, reattaching  
the new and unexpected  
fighting, championing  
history

It happened.

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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A: Oral History Interview Guide

#### **Chicanismo**

1. Explain your understanding of what it means to be Chicano/Xicano. How do you identify as Chicano/Xicano?

#### *Prodding Questions:*

1. What Denver/Colorado neighborhoods have you lived in? Why?
2. What schools did you attend? What did you learn about Chicano history?
3. How old were you when you first understood yourself as Chicano/Xicano? How did you know?
4. What symbols or images do you think of as “Chicano/Xicano?”
5. How would you describe a Chicano/Xicano politics?

#### Transition Questions:

1. Although we have touched on this topic to some degree, I wanted to transition to some questions about your gender, specifically what stories did you hear about Chicano/Xicano men when you were growing up?

#### **Masculinity**

2. How does your masculinity inform your understanding of being Chicano/Xicano?

#### *Prodding Questions:*

1. How do you typically like to dress? Do you dress differently around different people? Why?
2. Where did you learn how to be a man? What advice did you receive?
3. What are the positive qualities of being Chicano? What are the negative qualities of being Chicano?
4. How is a Chicano man different from other men?
5. Have you ever experienced discrimination as a Chicano? How?

#### Transition Questions:

1. Although we have touched on this topic to some degree, I wanted to transition to some questions about your sexuality, specifically what stories did you hear about gay Chicano men growing up?

### **Sexuality**

3. How does your sexuality inform your understanding of being Chicano/Xicano?

#### *Prodding Questions:*

1. Are you open about your sexuality? Why? Why not?
2. Who knows about your sexuality? How did they learn about your identity?
3. Have you ever been in love? How did you know it was love?
4. Are there any places where you feel safe and comfortable in your skin? Why?
5. What type of person are you attracted to? What qualities does your perfect partner(s) have?
6. Have you ever experienced discrimination because of your sexuality? How?
7. What advice would you give to other Chicanos with a similar background about living in Denver or Colorado?

#### Transition Questions:

1. Although we have touched on this topic to some degree, I wanted to transition to some questions about Denver history, specifically what stories did you hear about the Chicano movement growing up?

### **History**

4. How has the history of Denver and Colorado operated in your life?

#### *Prodding Questions:*

1. How did your family arrive in Denver/Colorado?
2. Were you or have you ever been involved in the Chicano movement?
3. Are there any stories about Denver/Colorado that only a native would know?
4. Are there any local heroes that you look up to? Why?
5. What local issue(s) are most important to you? Why?

## 6. What local, historical moments are most vivid to you?

\* Not all of these questions will be asked, but rather this guide will be utilized as a point of reference throughout each conversation.

<sup>i</sup> Throughout this project, I utilize the method of performative writing to resist singular definitions and expand the possibilities of language and text to convey meaning. In this instance, I am simultaneously asking about membering groups or individuals that have been excluded and remembering their experiences and histories.

<sup>ii</sup> Chicano/a is used periodically throughout this dissertation for two reasons: 1) If the literature or author refers to this term for their analysis or for self-identification, then I have chosen to respect the language used in the document or by the author. 2) Xicano/a refers to an emerging política among the youth, the queer, the activists, and the artists, so Chicano/a is employed to refer to a politics of an earlier era within the movement. Chicano/a is employed to mark this generational difference and additionally continue to mark the difference between this political identity and Mexican identity. Xicana/o indicates a “re-emerging política, especially among young people, grounded in Indigenous American belief systems and identities” (Moraga, 2011, p. xxi). Additionally, the “X” is Xicana/o comes from the Nahuatl spelling of the “ch” sound (Moraga, 2011, p. xxi), and unlike earlier understandings of Chicanismo, Xicanismo “recognizes the multidimensional and intersecting nature of identities” (Rios, 2009, p. 57). For the Xicana/o, gender, sexual orientation, and decolonialism are fully recognized and included in understandings of race, ethnicity, and class for Xicana/o culture, activism, scholarship, and creative works (Bañales; Luna). Further, Xicanisma/o is a transnational political identity that includes rather than excludes those with historical legacies in the Caribbean, Central, and South America (Rios, 2009, p. 57). Finally, Chicax is an emerging identifier that resists the colonizing effects of gendering language within Spanish to include transgender, intersex, genderqueer, and other gender-nonconforming members of the community.

<sup>iii</sup> As I have written elsewhere, “in Spanish, *jota/o* means ‘fag,’ and *Jotería* is imperfectly translated as ‘faggotry’ or ‘fag-ness’” (“Disruptive” 92). *Jotería* is utilized throughout this research report to refer to an identity category, a cultural practice, and a social process (Bañales).

<sup>iv</sup> It should be noted that “patriarchy” is an inaccurate word for the type of male-dominated society structure of the Aztec. Particularly, because the worldview of the Aztec is derived from an deep understanding and reverence for balance/discipline in harmony. Although through the lens of Euro-American constructions of class, gender, sexuality, and nation, we can feasibly use the term “patriarchy” to connote the shift from the inclusion women warriors to the subjugation of women. It is not entirely accurate given the cultural context and is a nuance worth mentioning given this project’s decolonial telos.

<sup>v</sup> Before they founded their capital of Tenochtitlán, the area now known as Mexico City, the Aztecs, more accurately known as the Mexica, migrated from North to South from the U.S. Southwest. This historical and utopian homeland of the Mexica is called Aztlán and is a source of utopian pride, culture, and politics for Chicanos/Xicanos (Delgado, “Chicano”; Watts). As such, the history of Aztlán is a borderlands experience.

<sup>vi</sup> I discovered this game oddly enough in the Apple iTunes app store. The small part of the gameplay shared here was learned by frequently playing the game during the Winter of this project.

<sup>vii</sup> Berdache is not a Native American term, and it actually comes from the Arabic *bradaj*, which means male prostitute. Given the importance of this positionality to the pueblo peoples, I utilize the term “two-spirit” to acknowledge the indigenous concept of this individual as one who is a container for the energy and spirit of both the masculine and feminine in the same body. Additionally, the prior term’s connection to prostitution does not honor that actual sacred function of the latter term, so my use of two-spirit is a more accurate descriptor of this person within the Pueblo community.

<sup>viii</sup> As Gutiérrez explains, “four was a sacred number to the Pueblo Indians; there were four horizontal directions, four seasons, four lengths to the Wenimats, four days of preparation before ritual, etc.” (34).

<sup>ix</sup> This underground subculture of gathering places for men to engage in sexual acts with other men was called “el ambiente” (Carrillo). Paraphrasing González Rodríguez, Carrillo explains that “*El Ambiente*, meaning “the milieu” or “the environment,” was a code to refer to the world of same-sex desire throughout the century” (18).

<sup>x</sup> It is interesting to note that a lesbian party was raided on December 4th, 1901 in Santa María, but this later raid was less publicized (Murray). This event illustrates three points: (1) lesbianism continued to occupy an invisible place within Mexican society, which is a continuation of Spanish confusion with female-female desire dating back to the conquest and colonization (Murray; Sigal); (2) There was clearly a subculture of lesbian gathering places during this neocolonial era in tandem with LGBTQ male subculture; (3) the lack of publicity of this later police raid notes the violence and discrimination faced by LGBTQ interlocutors during the time of changing views of male sexuality.

<sup>xi</sup> Amira De La Garza changed her name from María Cristina González, which she details in her book *Maria Speaks: Journeys into the Mysteries of the Mother in My Life as a Chicana*.

<sup>xii</sup> These methods will be explored in greater detail later in the document.

<sup>xiii</sup> Cisgendered is a term utilized to “disrupt gendered normativity” (Johnson, “Cisgender” 138). Johnson explains that, “If one’s sex identity matches her/his morphology, the s/he is cissexual. If one’s gender identity aligns with sex morphology, s/he is said to be cisgender” (138). Like Johnson, I utilized these terms and definitions because “sex and gender are most frequently identified in relationship to a stable and socially binding center when, in fact, the categories of sex and gender are constructed and performed” (138).

<sup>xiv</sup> Although Art does not specifically apply to this analysis of Chicano masculinity and sexuality, it is interesting to note that Ramón García in his article “Against Rasquachi: Chicano Camp and the Politics of Identity in Los Angeles” describes the separation of High Art and popular culture as a class issue. “This separation and contention between the High and the Low is fundamentally a class distinction: popular culture defined as working-class culture and High Art defined as the property of bourgeois culture” (213). Additionally, for the Chicano artist, there is a racist move to place he/she into low or popular culture simply because of his/her “race.” “The dialectical relation between High Art and popular culture (mass culture), or the categories of High and Low that have demarcated the politics of Art in North America, do not place the Chicano artist in the same place as his/her white counterpart” (213).

<sup>xv</sup> Many Chicana feminists have written about this light-skinned versus dark-skinned dichotomy as it applies to class. For instance, Gloria Anzaldúa discusses how she wasn't allowed to go outside and was treated differently from her siblings by her mother because she was darker than the others (38). Additionally, Bernadette Calafell in "When Will We All Matter? Exploring Race, Pedagogy, and Sustained Hope for the Academy" writes of her own skin pigmentation: "As a light-skinned Chicana who was often misread, I had the 'privilege' of not outing myself as a woman of color" (350). Both women are discussing the intersection of class and race for Chicanas.