DISSERTATION

TESTIMONIOS OF LEADERSHIP:

EXPERIENCES OF QUEER CHICANA/LATINA ADMINISTRATORS

IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

TESTIMONIOS OF LEADERSHIP: EXPERIENCES OF QUEER CHICANA/LATINA

ADMINISTRATORS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

The purpose of this study was to examine the leadership experiences of out, queer, Chicana/Latina higher education administrators. These professionals are not only underrepresented numerically, they are also often the only one—or one of few—in their departments or divisions. Grounded in critical race theory, LatCrit, and Chicana Feminist Epistemology, this study conceptualized the ways in which the participants navigated and negotiated their experiences of oppression. The methods of testimonio and pláticas were used to gather the data in a way that also included my own experiences and perspectives as the researcher in a reflexive process. The findings not only reflected the real consequences of oppression for these participants, but the dynamic ways in which they consistently addressed the isms and phobias they faced. Using Anzaldúa's (2015) Coyolxauhqui Imperative as a guide, the two main themes identified were: (1) unmaking: the sources of fragmentation and (2) making and remaking. The sources of fragmentation themes illuminate the many ways in which the participants' lives and experiences were fragmented by oppression and the subthemes included: the labor of oppression parkour and consequences for living and leading from a place of authenticity. The making and remaking themes refer to how similar to the the Coyolxauhqui Imperative, these participants addressed the fragmenting experiences through rebuilding and the subthemes included: thriving in nepantla and intentional healing for nos/otras. The testimonios of the participants offer insights to how to create new, more equitable realities in higher education and leadership via their transformative and iterative process of critical liberatory praxis.

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To my advisor and my committee…I have the most chingona advisor on the planet. Dr. Muñoz, you pushed me in ways that were really way harder than I had prepared for. I was expecting the traditional academic push; expand more here, substantiate more there, etc. What I was not prepared for was how you pushed me to align my bodymindspirit in a more authentic way. You got this thinker to actually feel some things, especially when you asked me things like "what's in your heart right now?" Your guidance and support were sacred to me. Thank you for helping to make me more whole in this process. Dr. Sisneros, thank you for consistently checking in and believing in my ability to do this in a way that was so certain. Your certainty helped me believe that it was going to be possible, like an inevitable truth. Thank you Dr. DeMirjyn for helping me remain culturally rooted during this process. Your expertise was always appreciated and I thank you for being a fierce role-model and sharing my deep love and affection for Frida. And to Rev. Dr. Washington, you have shown me in so many ways how to make social justice real in my life. Getting this degree is part of that and you have been a critical sounding board for me in the process. Thank you for the phone calls, texts, and conversations that kept me swimming.

Finally, to the participants in this study…EC, Elijah, Frida, Luz, MB, Sofia, and Victoree…you inspired me. I felt privileged to have been able to bear witness to your testimonios. The community we built through this process was beautiful and fierce. Thank you for the laughter, vulnerability, knowledge, healing, and joy. You are sacred to me.

DEDICATION

For my ancestors.

You are my past and I am rooted in you.

For my sons, Mateo & Santino.

You are my future and you give me hope.

For my wife, Monica.

You are my always and I am grounded in love because of you.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Cuentito: I identify as a queer Chicana/Latina. Both of those terms are not the most accurate, yet they are what are understood by most others and fit me the most when I think of how I describe myself in ways people can identify. If I were to more closely and accurately name myself, I would say I'm a mostly-not-straight, brown woman from northern New Mexico. Those words do not fit nicely into check boxes. While the terminology is perhaps vague, and while I had experiences that made me feel left out in certain spaces, I am clear about who I am and feel secure in all of it.

Introduction

"I will not be shamed again
Nor will I shame myself."
- Gloria Anzaldúa, (1987)

"You're so lucky you were born a Chicana, mija. That means you were born with a cause." I heard this and other similar statements from my family and community as I grew up. It was both an affirmation of who I was and a reminder of my duty to my culture, my community, and myself to work for "the cause." Of course, as a young person I did not fully understand or appreciate what they were telling me and as I grew older I began to see what they might have been trying to convey. However, I still framed having a cause from their understanding of the world. By the time I was in college, I started to formulate for myself what it meant to be born with a cause. Now that I have language for ontology and epistemology, I can see the early roots for these concepts being planted by my family and community.

After college, I entered the field of higher education and began working as an advisor for a college access program. It was a racially diverse department where I was able to serve students who came from first-generation college going and low-income families. It was personal work for me because I identified in the same way as the students and I was a participant in the same program back home. It was the perfect landing spot for me post undergrad. Then, because of

homophobia, it became a hostile and oppressive work space. As a young administrator, I was

faced with one of the most difficult professional challenges I would have to navigate.

"Trust me, I have the support of the university president on this with me." This is the

statement I received after a colleague asked me to take down a campus LGBT pride week poster

from the outside of my office door. My colleague was Latino, like me. He grew up poor and was

a first-generation college student, like me. He was raised Christian, like me. I had gone from

being a leader in the department and getting the regional "Rising Star" award from our

professional association to being the center of work-place conflict, for no other reason than

putting up a poster for the campus pride week and being an out, queer person. I was in shock

because of the affinity I felt for the space was turned upside down. It was "my people" who were

carrying out toxic and oppressive behaviors towards me as the only out, queer person on staff.

All of the learning I had done in undergrad about historical context, identity, and sociopolitical

environments did not prepare me for navigating this situation. As a professional, I could not

protest, I could not write letters to the editor, I could not start a boycott. The situation lasted over

a year and I ended up navigating it with the support of a few colleagues. There were virtually no

other queer women of color colleagues on campus from whom to seek advice. Successfully

navigating that experience gave me insight about myself as a person, a professional, and a leader

that remains with me today. Through that, I was able to define and commit to how my personal,

professional, and academic cause is rooted in social justice and liberation for all.

I open this study with a personal testimonio about how I came to understand how the

intersectional oppressive systems of racism, sexism, and heterosexism have had an impact on me

because it is, in many ways, the genesis of my own theorizing. I am a queer, Chicana higher

education administrator who has worked on predominantly white college campuses for my entire

professional career. As a queer woman of color, my identity has been inextricably tied to my professional experience. While my story is not necessarily the norm for all queer Chicana/Latina administrators, it also is not an isolated example of identity-based oppression in the workplace. Understanding my own experience and the experiences of others like me is a source of knowledge and theorizing (Benmayor, 2012). Having multiple marginalized identities makes navigating the higher education environment particularly challenging (Bowleg, Huang, Brooks, Black & Burkholder, 2004; Aranda, et al., 2014). There is much to learn from stories like these so that individuals, groups, and institutions can progress towards greater equity and liberation.

Problem Statement

Early in my doctoral program, I began to do basic searches of dissertations to start narrowing my domain of interest. I went to a popular dissertation search database and entered the term "queer women of color" in quotes and hit enter. The resulting page had autocorrected and asked, "Did you mean QUEEN women of color?" No. I did not. I had to reword my search terms to find dissertations in this domain of inquiry. I moved to a different search database that would open my search beyond dissertations. I again entered the same search terms in quotes. The result this time was "No results were found." Clearly, there are other databases with studies on this population. However, these two examples are indicators of a lack of empirical research on queer women of color in higher education. When I narrowed the field to queer, Chicana/Latinas in higher education and added the layer of leadership on, the results were again virtually non-existent.

Additionally, the multiple layers of experience based on identity for queer, Chicana/Latinas are complex and therefore somewhat challenging to examine. Within the Latinx community, there has been a historical avoidance of exploring or overtly talking about Latina

sexuality (Alarcón, Castillo, & Moraga, 1993). Rooted in cultural and familial traditions, queer, Chicana/Latinas deal with homophobia and sexism within the community (Ramos, 1994). In this context, they navigate the disclosure of their sexual orientation identity in a way that accounts for what it could potentially cost them (Acosta, 2010). At the same time, it is difficult for queer, Chicana/Latinas to find community in the queer/LGBT community because of experiences of racism in those spaces. The sociopolitical experience of queer, Chicana/Latinas at the intersections of their identities needs to be better represented in scholarship.

Research and scholarship on queer, Chicana/Latinas in higher education, either as students, faculty, or staff, while on the rise, is still limited (Alimahomed, 2010; Tijerina Revilla, 2010). Much of the literature where this population is the focus is from disciplines outside of higher education. In fact, when considering studies conducted with LGB people in general, much of that work has only included white people (Croom, 2000). There is a growing body of research of any combination of these identities that focuses on students with very little focusing on professional staff. While some insight can be gleaned from research done with students, it is not exactly the same. Lastly, much of the research centering queer, Chicana/Latinas and/or other queer people of color is rooted in deficit and/or comparative approaches. For example, studies focus on elements such as stress, non-conforming expressions, or crisis response (Balsam, Molina, Beadnell, Simoni, & Walters, 2011; Bowleg, Huang, Brooks, Black, and Burkholder, 2003; Ramirez, Gonzalez, & Paz Galupo, 2017). While these types of studies are important, the literature that exists is only a small representation of what is possible.

Additionally, when considering how to frame how queer Chicana/Latina administrators' experiences as professionals and as leaders, a few problematic issues arise. First, as mentioned, there is paucity in research focusing on queer, Chicana/Latina administrators. Another issue is

related to research on leadership as well as the framing of the concept itself. Much of the most cited and well-known leadership theories have been written from a dominant perspective, be it white, male, or the like (Dugan, 2017). Most of the leadership scholarship has been written by white men and from the context of a business perspective (Ayman & Korabik, 2010). This framing has left out the consideration of identity and social structures of power and oppression.

Lastly, and connected, there is an equality approach to leadership. Leadership is treated as though there is a buffet of choices and one needs to simply choose which theory/approach fits them best or might be best for the situation. This equality approach does not consider how historical and contemporary sociopolitical issues have an impact on how queer, Chicana/Latinas—or any other minoritized population—has real barriers to being able to "just pick and apply" any leadership approach. What is needed is an equity approach to leadership; a critical recognition that not all people can embody or practice a leadership model/framework and have successful results because of systems of oppression. This concept leads to the last problem: the prevailing approach to leadership is that it fails to incorporate the experiential knowledge of minoritized populations. For example, many leadership theories have trait elements, such as charisma or other personality traits. Using this approach disproportionately favors normative traits in some but not in others. What charisma looks like in one community is not necessarily the same in another. It also preferences the individual over the collective. Both the gaps and the limitations of the current body of research on queer, Chicana/Latinas were the drivers of the purpose and significance of this research study.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of queer, Chicana/Latina administrators and their leadership experiences in higher education. The aim was to conduct the study in a manner grounded in an intersectional Chicana feminist approach that is asset-based and focused on the strengths of the participants' experiences in the context of institutions that are often limiting and oppressive yet, can paradoxically represent liberation through education. Using critical race theory (CRT) and LatCrit theory, I centered the voices and testimonios of queer Chicana/Latina administrators to interrogate and address institutional erasures and marginalization to promote equity and liberation for folks who might look like and experience the world like the participants and I do.

Significance of Study

Queer, Chicana/Latinas operate within institutions that, from their inception, uphold dominant narratives around race, gender, and sexual orientation. The very presence of queer Chicana/Latina administrators in institutions of higher education is an act of resistance and disruption, particularly if they are practicing leadership in formal or informal roles because of a lack of socio demographic representation (Ayman & Korabik, 2010). Like in my story in the opening of this chapter, even within in a space where I was not a numerical minority in terms of gender and race, I was disrupting and resisting dominant expectations of me as Chicana/Latina. I was experiencing the ways in which the "permutations of our identity components" as Latinx people in some ways brings us together and in others, at odds (Hernández-Truyol, 1997). As queer, Chicana/Latinas resist and disrupt dominant narratives of leadership in higher education they simultaneously cultivate avenues to expand what leadership means. "Leadership" as a framework has been framed as neutral in terms of identity, particularly culture, gender, sexual

orientation and with virtually no inclusion or exploration of other social identity implications (Eagly & Chin, 2010; Santamaria & Santamaria, 2012). This study gives insight to the limitations of those dominant assumptions. Additionally, as issues of identity-based bias and oppression continue to arise on campuses across the country, having more examples of how to lead from minoritized people's experiences can help to both address situations in the immediate sense as well as shift institutional barriers to promote more inclusive and liberatory spaces for students, staff, and faculty at large. Lastly, this study was significant because of the centering and amplification of voices, experiences, and stories of a population that goes largely unheard and ignored in higher education leadership scholarship.

Research Questions

Three main research questions guided this study and were informed by the literature, theoretical perspectives, my epistemological framework, and my own experiences. The questions are grounded in the paradoxical reality that institutions of higher education are both sites of oppression and opportunity for queer Chicana/Latina administrators.

1. What are the lived experiences of queer Chicana/Latina administrators in higher education at the intersection of race, gender, and sexual orientation?

2. In what ways do queer Chicana/Latina administrators negotiate and navigate racism, sexism, and heterosexism?

3. In what ways do queer Chicana/Latina administrators practice and name leadership in a higher education context?

Next, a list of terms and their use that will guide and create parameters for the study will be explained.

Use of Terms

Because of the varied terms used for the identities centered in this study, clarifying the use of terms is critical. Defining the terms is limiting in that it creates finite boundaries around concepts. In this study, the terms are less important than the context, their use for participants, and the stories that they help illuminate. In this way, the language of the study emulates the liminal space that queer, Chicana/Latinas inhabit (Anzaldua, 2015). The following list is not meant to be exhaustive or finite.

- *Chicana:* In its simplest form, this term refers to women of Mexican descent who were born in the United States. However, there is also a larger sociopolitical context to the term because of how it grew out of the Chicana/o movement of the 1960's and 1970's and how it rejects the Eurocentric notion of Hispanic (Elenes, 1997).

- *Cuentito:* The Spanish word for "little story." These cuentitos will be used throughout the study to infuse my own autobiographical testimonios.

- *Intersectionality:* Intersectionality and intersectional are not the same. Intersectional refers to how a person's various social identities intersect and the impact of that intersection. Intersectionality refers to how structures and systems of oppression marginalize *people* with intersecting, minoritized identities (Crenshaw, 1991).

- *Latina:* Similar to Chicana, the term Latina is rooted in rejecting the Eurocentric term of Hispanic and is rooted in including the indigenous and African elements of the Latina identity (Elenes, 1997). In this study, Chicana/Latina is used to capture the broadest identifiers.

- *Leadership:* There are an abundance of leadership definitions and conceptions based on the vast number of leadership theories. For this study, leadership will be not specifically

defined because some of the problematic and dominant assumptions upon which the concept of leadership is built (Eagly & Chin, 2010). Like all the other terms, leadership is socially constructed. It is an interdisciplinary, values-based process that focuses on people, process, and outcome to advance particular goals (Dugan, 2017).

- *Minoritized:* The term minoritized will be used instead of minority. This considers the institutional and structural inequities that render a person's identity a "minority" despite perhaps not being a minority in every context. It also considers the social construction of identity (Harper, 2012).

- *Parkour:* This term references a style of free walking where individuals "overcome the constraints of their environment" using extreme or unorthodox body movements to get from one place to another (Saville, 2008, p. 893). People who practice parkour, jump, tumble, roll, scale, leap, stretch and more to overcome and traverse the built environment.

- *Queer*: The term queer is nonheteronormative and intended to be a broad, umbrella term for sexual orientation identities that have been historically and contemporarily marginalized such as lesbian, bisexual, gay, pansexual, etc. It is a contemporary term taking back what was once used against the community in an empowered reclamation although the acceptance of the term is not universal. The use and definition are elastic in that it can and does shift in context (Jagose, 1996, Pérez, 2003).

There is power in language. This list meant to name the terms and how they will be used in this study while recognizing there is much fluidity and context that is important to consider particularly because most terms are socially constructed. Additionally, when referencing the participant's stories, each person's self-selected words will be used. This includes use of Spanish and Spanglish. Translations will be used where appropriate and necessary.

Summary

In this study, I investigated the experiences of queer, Chicana/Latina administrators in higher education and explored their leadership experiences in that context to highlight how these people resist and disrupt dominant narratives of leadership and cultivate more socially just spaces. As institutions of higher education continue increase their sociodemographic diversity, using a status quo approach to leading those institutions remains insufficient. The lack of research centering queer, Chicana/Latina administrators from an asset perspective calls for urgency to remedy that and to legitimize their experiential knowledge.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Cuentito: I remember the feeling I had when I was first introduced to This Bridge Called My Back. I was an undergraduate student in my sophomore year, just fully realizing the entirety of my identities as a queer Chicana/Latina. It was a transformational experience reading works by Moraga and Anzaldúa. I had a visceral reaction to reading words that were affirming of my racial, gender, and sexual orientation identities. It was as if what I had felt, known, and experienced was not just in me, but in us as queer, Chicana/Latinas. After undergrad, I didn't see myself in scholarship anymore because I turned to a career and academic trajectory in higher education administration. This doctoral program has offered me the opportunity to see myself in scholarship again. Discovering LatCrit and Chicana Feminist epistemology have offered yet another transformational educational experience that has had a far-reaching effect on me personally and professionally.

Introduction

Empirical research on queer Chicana/Latina administrators in higher education is limited. What has been studied about queer people of color, in general, often comes from disciplines outside of higher education (Johnson & Javier, 2017). Higher education research that is focused on this population typically focuses solely on women of color, lesbian identity/sexuality, or women, or some other combination therein (Bilodeau & Renn, 2005; Jean-Marie & Lloyd-Jones, 2011; Loue, 2009; Rankin, 2003; Rodriguez & Boahene, 2012; Turner, González, & Wong Lau, 2011). The experiences of queer, Chicana/Latina administrators are an important source of knowledge and give insight to the ways in which higher education institutions can become more socially just.

The term queer is a broad term that is not neutral and is inclusive of a body of terms for sexuality outside the dominant norm of heterosexual or straight (Pinar, 1998). Three distinct social identities are interwoven in queer, Chicana/Latina identity: sexual orientation, gender, and race/ethnicity. Each of these identities holds significance, and ideally, the intersection of all three identities should be the focus of this literature review. However, because of the limited nature of the body of research through an intersectional lens on queer, Chicana/Latinas, research that

focuses on these distinct individual identities and combinations therein are explored. All three (race/ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation) represent socially constructed identities and the intersection of those identities influence how queer, Chicana/Latinas experience systems and structures of oppression (Jones, Kim, & Skendall, 2012).

The experiences of queer Chicana/Latina higher education administrators are rarely recognized or validated, in large part due to the dominant paradigms and narratives of whiteness, sexism, and heterosexism that exist at these institutions. As Delgado and Stefancic (2012) noted, "the ordinary business of society – the routines, practices, and institutions – will keep minorities in subordinate positions" (p. 27). Systems and structures of dominance and oppression target these identities and have a particular impact on the way queer, Chicana/Latinas experience and navigate their professional administrator roles on campus (Balsam, Molina, Beadnell, Simoni, & Walters, 2011). An intersectional approach to this research centralizes the impact of these simultaneous identities on the lived experiences of queer, Chicana/Latinas.

A review of selected, relevant theoretical and empirical research grounds this literature review. The first section explores three theoretical concepts which frame and inform this study and my positionality. These concepts and theories are critical to the methodological approach and analysis of data. Additionally, the concepts align with the significance and purpose of the study in that they aim to develop research and action rooted in social justice and liberation. The second section explores literature on multiple marginalized identities and queer women of color in higher education. While not ideal, looking at the impact of social institutions and the oppressions that exist for women of color, queer women, and combinations therein help to form a greater understanding of their experiences. Finally, the third section concludes with concepts of leadership and critical leadership in the context of higher education administration. This section

sets the context for how leadership is often framed in higher education in ways that most often exclude considerations of the impact of identity. Additionally, approaches to leadership and social justice are explored to give insight to how marginalized folks often come to understand their own leadership. These three sections of the literature review contextualize the experiences of queer, Chicana/Latina administrators in higher education.

Theoretical Concepts Framing Study

To explore the experiences of queer Chicana/Latina administrators in higher education settings, I used LatCrit and critical race theory (CRT), intersectionality, and Chicana feminist epistemology to guide the design of the study, including data collection and analysis. I used LatCrit and CRT as my primary theoretical frameworks because of the centrality of racialized experiences for queer women of color (QWOC) (Bowleg, 2008) and because a key component of CRT is intersectionality. CRT was born out of legal scholarship in the 1970s when critical legal scholars of color sought to address the systemic racial inequities faced by people of color in the judicial system (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Lynn & Adams, 2002; Tate, 1997). Since then, the framework has continued to develop and be utilized in educational research to interrogate and address racism and the intersections of other oppressions (Hernández, 2016; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Ledesma & Calderón, 2015; McCoy & Rodricks, 2015; Parsons & Plakhotnic, 2006). While CRT centralizes race and racism as a core element, LatCrit furthers the aim with a more specific focus on Latinx issues such as ethnicity, culture, and sexuality, to name a few (Solórzano & Bernal, 2001, Vialpando, 2004). I used an intersectionality frame to focus on the participants' whole identities rather than segmented, singular parts. Crenshaw (1991) was the pioneer in naming intersectionality as a framework with her work on the disparate oppressive treatment of Black women in the judicial system. Lastly, I framed my own positionality and

epistemology as a researcher from a Chicana feminist epistemology standpoint for both myself

as a researcher and how it informs the design of the study.

Critical Race Theory

There are at least five foundational elements of critical race theory (CRT) that are

common in educational research (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). The first is the intercentricity of

other subordinated identities with race (Solórzano & Yosso). Drawing from Crenshaw (1991),

this tenet is central to researching the experiences of queer, Chicana/Latinas from a CRT

framework because it centralizes the other subordinated identities of sexuality and gender along

with race. The second tenet is the challenge to the dominant or master narrative with counter-

stories (Solórzano & Yosso). The commitment to social justice is the third tenet. The remaining

two tenets are centering the experiential knowledge of marginalized people and employing a

transdisciplinary perspective (Solórzano & Yosso).

Storytelling, a methodological tool of CRT, is essential for minoritized groups to

challenge dominant narratives (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Because CRT centralizes the focus

on race and also requires that intersectionality is considered and addressed, it therefore allows for

the interrogation and inclusion of gender and sexuality along with race (McCoy & Rodricks,

2015). Having participants tell their stories and give voice to their experiences challenges the

status quo and dominant narrative with their own counterstory. Delgado and Stefancic (2012)

stated, "critical writers use counterstories to challenge, displace, or mock these pernicious

narratives and beliefs" (p. 49). Therefore, it is not merely enough to have research participants

who represent marginalized identity groups. The stories must be told by and for the marginalized

and minoritized to interrogate systemic racism and oppressions. Their experiences must be

voiced as they will break and reform oppressive dominant narratives and discourse (Espinoza &

Harris, 1997). The interconnectedness of identities such as race, gender, sexuality must be interrogated (Parker, 2015). As Ladson-Billings (2000) explained, "the point of working in racialized discourses and ethnic epistemologies is not merely to "color" the scholarship. It is to challenge the hegemonic structures (and symbols) that keep injustice and inequity in place" (p. 271). Using the counter-stories in this study illuminates and interrogates the intersectionality and experience of structural oppressions of queer, Chicana/Latinas and therefore promotes social and institutional transformation.

Latinx Critical Theory

Latinx critical theory (LatCrit) is a branch of CRT that takes a more specific framing of Latinx experiences and issues. LatCrit seeks to illuminate experiences of Latinx communities that are often missed in the Black/white binary (Espinoza & Harris, 1997). Iglesias (1997) specifically noted about LatCrit that it "expanded beyond the limitations of the black/white paradigm to incorporate richer more contextualized analysis of the cultural, political, and economic dimensions of white supremacy particularly as it impacts Latinas/os in their individual and collective struggles for self-understanding and social justice" (p. 178). LatCrit is expansive and together with CRT furthers the work of addressing subordination and oppression in institutions (Valdes, 1996). One of the key ways this is important for this study is that LatCrit has explicitly seeks to give voice to the textured intersections of race, sex, and sexuality (Valdes, 1996). As Solórzano and Delgado Bernal (2001) further stated, "LatCrit is a theory that elucidates Latinas/Latinos' multidimensional identities and can address the intersectionality of racism, sexism, classism, and other forms of oppression" (p. 312).

In education, LatCrit theory takes on a social justice frame in that it works to link theory with practice with in an institutional structure that has both the "potential to oppress and

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marginalize co-existing with their potential to emancipate and empower" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). In this way, LatCrit demonstrates how learning about and from queer, Chicana/Latina administrators' experiences can have lasting policy and practice implications. In affirmation of the social justice aim, "LatCrit theory is conceived as an antisubordination and antiessentialist project that attempts to link theory with practice, scholarship with teaching, and the academy with the community" (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001, p. 312). In higher education, these linkages are critical for creating and sustaining environments for queer, Chicana/Latina administrators to have voice in their experiences and leadership. Because of their multiple marginalized identities, LatCrit is sensitive to the "exponential effect" of the interaction of each of these oppressions (Villalpando, 2004). The idea of exponential effect is not about exploring how the participants are "the most oppressed" but rather how LatCrit helps to nuance and name those experiences in a clearer way (Yosso, 2005). The research questions guiding this study are aimed at inviting participants to name and explore those nuanced, intersectional experiences.

Intersectionality

The prevailing approach to considering social identity is to focus on one identity at a time despite having people identify with multiple and intersecting identities (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010). This propensity is particularly problematic when considering the ways in which oppression has an impact on people who hold multiple marginalized identities such as queer, Chicana/Latinas do. Wijeyesinghe and Jones (2014) noted, "intersectionality highlights that it is not possible to grasp an understanding of the complex interplay of power, privilege, and social structures if we view forms of oppression as singular and separate units" (p. 15). Crenshaw (1991) stated, "because of their intersectional identity as both women *and* of color within discourses that are shaped to respond to one *or* the other, women of color are marginalized

within both" (p. 1244). Her point can be further applied to the additional identity of queer, Chicana/Latinas. She is a woman (gender), queer (sexuality), and Chicana (race/ethnicity). In most contexts in the United States (U.S.), her identity is looked at with 'or' rather than 'and'; queer or woman or Chicana (Barnard, 2004). One of the many benefits of an intersectional theoretical and methodological approach is that it is cross-disciplinary and can be applied to any higher education context (Cho, Crenshaw, & McCall, 2013).

One element of intersectional identities for Chicana/Latinas that often gets overlooked is sexuality. Sexuality is an identity that does not typically get associated with professional identity, partially because it is sometimes seen as personal or private. However, this identity is part of regular professional, interpersonal interactions. For example, it is common for people to ask their colleagues about weekend plans, and this easily includes inquiries about family. Navigating disclosure is a factor for queer, Chicana/Latinas in the workplace because it has an impact on how they create professional relationships and how they are perceived both as a person and as a professional. Orne (2011) talks about the concept of "identity management" instead of identity development as it relates to sexuality. The concept is that one can be related to virtually all aspects of identity for queer women of color (QWOC) as they navigate their institutions. The institution and other oppressive systems cause material consequences and requires queer, Chicana/Latinas to develop skills to navigate dynamics that surround their multiple minoritized identities.

Queer, Chicana/Latinas and other QWOC are subject to what some call a "triple jeopardy" of oppression, noting the intersection of three oppressions: racism, sexism, and heterosexism (Aguilar, 2012; Bowleg, Huang, Brooks, Black, & Burkholder, 2003; Gatz, Gease, Tyler, & Moran, 1982; Jeong & Horne, 2009; Rosenfield, 2012). Each of these identities

represent a marginalized identity in U.S. society and QWOC experience stressors and microaggressions that are byproducts of racism, sexism, and heterosexism (Balsam, Molina, Beadnell, Simoni, & Walters, 2011). Sanchez-Peña, Main, Sambamurthy, Cox, and McGee (2016) noted LGBT women of color engage in typical work of higher education as faculty or staff, but also have the additional burden of dealing with organizational policies rooted in whiteness, patriarchy, and nativism. Additionally, QWOC must confront norms from both the dominant culture (white, male, heterosexual) as well as the marginalized (people of color, women, queer) groups with which they belong or with which they identify (Parks, Hughes, & Matthews, 2004). Because of the potential to not conform with any of the dominant norms or accepted norms within marginalized groups, QWOC often find it difficult to fully integrate into any of the communities with which they belong or identify (Bridges, Selvidge, Matthews, 2003). There is interest in better understanding how these dynamics affect queer Chicana/Latina administrators specifically.

Having multiple marginalized identities also has organizational implications. As many institutions claim interest in promoting diversity, even if only in name (Patel, 2015), many of these efforts are led by or assigned to people of color and other minoritized populations. Harris (2013) asserted, "because the burden of achieving diversity falls solely on the shoulders of women and minorities, the majority escapes any culpability for programmatic results" (p. 801). In this way, people of color are not only marginalized based on their social identities, they are then also held responsible for efforts that should be the responsibility of the entire organization instead of one person. This phenomenon further marginalizes and taxes people of color, specifically women of color, disproportionately (Harris, 2013). Turner (2002) added that experiencing multiple marginality also makes it so institutions will "define out" a person based

on how they do not fit the expectations of the organization despite the requisite qualifications. Being "defined out" is essentially finding that women of color do not fit the organization based on how they name oppression in the organization when they in fact were hired or appointed work on such issues. In this way, queer, Chicana/Latina administrators could be both personally and professionally defined out of higher education institutions.

Chicana Feminist Epistemology

Chicana feminist epistemology frames more than just race and gender. Born out of the work of many Black, Native American, and Chicana scholars in the 1990s, Chicana feminist epistemology is an emerging epistemological framework in educational research (Delgado Bernal, 1998). The framework seeks to challenge the dominant, hegemonic traditions of educational research by making the social, political, and cultural identities and experiences of Chicanas and other Latinas central to the research. The historical erasure and invisibility of these stories and experiences have led to and continue to contribute to the oppression of dominant narratives in education.

Chicana feminist epistemology makes the connection between a researcher's epistemology and methodology more overt and intentional. It therefore does not require the research to exclusively be focused only on Chicanas, but that the epistemology of the researcher will be central to the research questions asked, the approach to the subject, and method (Delgado Bernal, 2002). By adopting a Chicana feminist epistemology, researchers engage in discourse that connects research, community, experience, and social change (Delgado Bernal, 1998). Raced-gendered epistemologies (Delgado Bernal, 2002) allowed me as the researcher to privilege the stories of queer, Chicana/Latinas and see them as holders and creators of knowledge that is expansive to educational research.

One of the key elements of CFE is the concept that Chicana researchers have "cultural intuition" (Delgado Bernal, 1998). Delgado Bernal noted that cultural intuition is similar to Corbin and Strauss' concept of "cultural sensitivity" in that they both help the researcher give richer more sensitive meaning to the data (p. 563). The intellectual, spiritual, and political are interwoven in this concept of cultural intuition (Calderón, Delgado Bernal, Pérez Huber, Malagón, & Vélez, 2012). The four sources of cultural intuition include: personal experience, existing literature, professional experience, and analytical research process (Delgado Bernal, 1998). This approach not only brings unique perspectives, it also contributes to theory, methodology, and pedagogy (Calderón, et.al, 2012). Chicana feminist epistemology compliments critical race theory, LatCrit, and intersectionality in that the voices of marginalized people are central to the research for the purposes of interrogating and transforming systems of domination.

Queer Women of Color

Because the research on queer, Chicana/Latinas is so sparse, this section begins with the broader body of research on queer women of color. The lack of presence of queer women of color in higher education settings is not new. However, there has been little attention paid to them as a specific group and even less attention to the research opportunities in which they are central. Much of the research on QPOC in higher education that does exist has been focused on students (Aguilar & Moon Johnson, 2017). Research-based or narrative-informed scholarship is nearly non-existent for queer or LBG women of color (Croom, 2000; Loue, 2009). For example, when looking at LGBT history, race and gender differences were rarely considered and frequently ignored (Beemyn, 1997). When considering the dominant norms, they framed from a white, heterosexual, cisgender male framework. Additionally, not all experiences of QWOC are the same, despite having many shared identities. The ways in which race, gender, and sexual

orientation are experienced by an individual vary because of many factors including historical and sociopolitical contexts (Moon Johnson & Javier, 2017). For example, LGBT people of color are more likely to hide their sexual orientation than their white counterparts are to avoid harassment (Rankin, 2003). The impact of oppression has material consequences that have yet been fully researched for queer, Chicana/Latinas.

Bowleg, Huang, Brooks, Black, and Burkholder (2003) focused on multiple minority stress and resilience in their grounded theory study on the experiences of Black lesbians. They used the multicultural model of stress and the transactional model of resilience as their theoretical frameworks to understand the "relationship between Black lesbians' experiences of stress due to racism, sexism, and/or heterosexism, and their resiliency in spite of these stressors" (p. 91). There were 19 participants in their study and they were asked questions about the challenges they face in terms of race, gender, and/or sexual orientation (p. 92). The authors findings related to minority and multiple minority stress as well as resilience. In terms of stress, the authors explored the findings by racism, sexism, and heterosexism, with racism being found to be the most stressful challenge.

Interestingly, when considering sexism, the participants were not able to separate race from gender. Participants named heterosexism as being challenging within the Black community but the least significantly stressful when compared to racism and/or sexism. The impact of "triple jeopardy" on stress resulted in the participants having to 'code switch,' which is in reference to being able to adjust how they performed their identities in different contexts, in order to navigate dominant cultures, particularly the workplace (Bowleg, et al., 2003). In terms of resilience, while there were findings connected to all aspects of the theoretical model, one of the most significant was that "despite the challenges of racism, sexism, and/or heterosexism, many interviewees had

supportive relationships that sustained them, especially during times of stress" (Bowleg et al., p. 101). This finding is positive and asset-based rather than deficit focused in that it centered how the participants thrived rather than were deficient in some way in light of systemic oppressions.

The ways in which queer women of color navigate systems of oppression can be examined in ways beyond stress and resilience. In an empirical ethnographic study grounded in an intersectionality perspective, Alimahomed (2010) examined how queer women of color experience marginalization. Specific attention was given to the intersections of racism, classism, and sexism and how they shape the representation of politics and identities for the participants. The concepts of outsider-within and differential oppositional consciousness were utilized to frame how the participants' experiences "challenge hegemonic notions of queer identity and politics" (p.151). Outsider-within, originally coined by Patricia Hill Collins, references the status of Black women who had historically been given "insider" access to white society by nature of their work and yet have always remained "outsider" by virtue of white supremacy (Hill Collins, 1986). Differential oppositional consciousness as described by Sandoval (1991) refers to the ability of women of color to change tactics and approaches based on the situation to challenge dominant narratives. This study was conducted over the course of one year, collecting data from 25 participants who self-identified as queer women of color and were overtly identified with their race, class, sexuality, and gender in order to remain focused on the intersectionality framework (Alimahomed, 2010).

Four main themes emerged from Alimahomed's (2010) study. First, resisting dominant 'coming out' narratives, gave insight to the complexity of being out and queer in multiple spaces (Alimahomed, p. 157). Dominant 'coming out' narratives refer to the ways in which queer folks are often made into a monolithic group with a common experience with having a disclosure

moment of their identities. This theme illustrated how the context for each participant matters to both how they come out and how they are out. The second theme was representation as invisibility and relates to how stereotypes negatively affected the participants. When the participants did not conform to the white, queer forms of expression, they were rendered invisible because they were outside of the dominant norm. The third theme identified was the politics of invisibility. Most of the organizations that the women worked with or participated in typically only focused on one of their subordinated identities. Participants had to be strategic about how they navigated the politics of honoring all of their subordinated identities and how they experienced them in their contexts. The last theme of structures of invisibility focused on how there is a lack of formal organizations that center queer women of color. While the participants said that the existing spaces were accessible in some ways, they were still having to navigate the politics of their identities in those spaces (Alimahomed, 2010). This last finding supports what Bowleg, et al. (2003) found in their study about Black lesbians needing spaces that recognize their intersectional identities.

Bowleg (2008) followed up on her 2003 study in her article titled "*When Black + Lesbian + Woman ≠ Black Lesbian Woman: The Methodological Challenges of Qualitative and Quantitative Intersectionality Research,*" with an in-depth critique of intersectionality approaches. One of the most significant critiques is the requirement of intersectionality research to examine the interplay of social power and not just that hierarchies exist (Bowleg, 2008).

> For researchers interested in intersectionality research, the notion that social identities
> and social inequality based on ethnicity, sexual orientation, sex/gender (and one could
> add a host of other identities such as class, disability status, etc.) are interdependent and

mutually constitutive, rather than independent and unidimensional (Bowleg, 2008, p.

312).

While this study includes references to intersectional identities, the focus of the research question and interviews with participants uses an intersectionality approach reinforcing the mutual wholeness of identity. And, while participants might still address experiences singularly, as in the research noted above with the particular saliency of racialized experiences, the design of the study should remain focused on intersectionality. As the title of this study suggests, intersectionality should not be looked at as additive but rather as a whole in itself.

These noted studies are significant in that they give insight to the impact of intersectionality on queer women of color. The concept of outsider-within was captured by the experiences of the QWOC feelings of invisibility in representation, politics, and structures of queer/LGB movements. There was also a saliency of race named in these studies that needs to be further explored. The women in these studies resisted the dominant narrative of being queer/LGB by engaging an oppositional consciousness where they insisted on identifying in an intersectional way and calling for spaces where intersectionality is central. While exclusion was the norm in the past, this research shows that progress has been made in that there is more representation of QWOC. Yet, there continues to be invisibility and marginalization that needs to be addressed from an intersectionality perspective to continue to move forward. Considering the scarcity of research on the intersectional and simultaneous nature of queer, Chicana/Latinas identity, what follows will explore the three elements of this identity singularly or in combination.

Women of Color in Higher Education

The term women of color is a broad category naming the intersection of race and gender. The term includes women who self-identify as being from a marginalized or minoritized

racial/ethnic group who have been targeted by racism in the United States (Tatum, 1997).

Howard-Hamilton and Williams (1996) conducted a study on women of color in student affairs

in mid-management positions. The purpose of the study was to understand the career choices of

women of color in student affairs. They surveyed 90 women of color, ranging 23-89 years old, to

understand how they perceived their work environment and how their progression in their career

had an impact on their environmental comfort. The two instruments used were the Career Paths

in Higher Education Administration and the Environmental Comfort Scale. An ANOVA analysis

of variance was conducted. The most significant finding of the study was that the first positions

in student affairs of WOC had a significant impact on current and future career patterns. Tied to

this finding is that it is important for WOC in their first positions to see other professionals like

themselves in the hierarchy of the organization to connect with the possibility for her own career

trajectory. The findings of this study compliment the findings of a study on pre-tenure faculty.

Another study also found that representation matters for women of color in faculty roles.

In a phenomenological, qualitative study, Martinez and Welton (2015), explored how pre-tenure

faculty of color navigated their cultural identities in a predominantly white educational

leadership department. The study was grounded in the theoretical frameworks of biculturalism

and hybridity. Both frameworks illustrated that people of color learn how to operate in multiple

cultural worlds. The study sought to understand the lived experiences of 12 pre-tenure faculty on

their tenure process in predominantly white departments. Data were collected from a larger study

of 55 pre-tenure faculty of color working on various four-year universities across the country.

Individual, semi-structured, and audio recorded interviews between 30 and 90 minutes were

conducted in 2012 and 2013 (Martinez & Welton, 2015).

The findings indicated the faculty of color were already conscious of identity politics that existed in their predominantly white, male departments. Four distinct themes emerged and were titled using direct quotes from participants. The first theme "I don't look like a professor…they don't even acknowledge me," illuminated how faculty of color experience racial microaggressions in the department and are seen as a threat to the dominant culture of the department (Martinez & Welton, 2015). Women of color faculty named an additional layer of an added level of marginalization due to the intersection of their gender. The second theme was "Proving we deserve to be here [in the academy]" (Martinez & Welton, 2015). Participants experienced the ability to engage in the concept of biculturalism, being able to navigate in two cultures, but not hybridity because the dynamics of the predominantly white department did not allow for self-authorship. The participants said that they experienced deficit thinking, higher and double standards, and judgement from the white faculty in their department. The third theme, "Don't [just] sit in the ivory tower" was centered on the nature of research being done by faculty of color (Martinez & Welton, 2015). Many of the participants conducted research on marginalized populations and felt their white counterparts were doing more "traditional" research and were in a state of complacency around engaging in identity. In fact, many of the faculty of color were hired to the department specifically because of the focus on diversity in their research. Yet they felt marginalized in the department because of it. The final theme that emerged was "cultivating mindfulness to work through difficult situations (Martinez & Welton, 2015). The most significant element of this theme is that there were faculty of color who found it easier to navigate the sociopolitical landscape of their predominantly white and male departments and those participants named mentoring and prior knowledge of the challenge of navigating in this context. All four of these findings are important to consider when looking at

the experiences of QWOC on campus, particularly because many of the participants' responses were centered in the intersectionality of their identities. They were not only based on their racialized identities. Last, the study showed that faculty were less likely to embody the concepts and principles of equity and inclusion with colleagues as they were with the students that they teach (Martinez & Welton, 2015). This finding has implications for why researching QWOC and queer Chicana/Latina administrators specifically in higher education leads to creating more equitable and inclusive spaces for faculty and staff, and therefore has an even deeper impact on the environments that are created for students.

Gender Identity and Expression

Gender is one of the key elements of identity for queer, Chicana/Latinas. There is a dominant narrative for individuals who identify as women in terms of how they identify and express their gender, and specifically for QWOC (Wilchins, 2004). Gender dominance is upheld in both the ways men and masculinity is center and how femininity is normalized to uphold the role of men and masculinity (Schippers, 2006). This dominant narrative demands that women express femininely, with long hair, wear make-up, and behave in ways that are "attractive" to men. Dominant cultural norms are not amenable to intersectionality in that they often insist on expressing in specific ways. For example, there are clear scripts about how to express one's womanhood or manhood that are often rooted in whiteness. Generally, when considering the norm, it is from a white, heterosexual, cisgender male framework. The gender identity and expression of queer, Chicana/Latinas is directly affected, influenced, and interconnected to and with their sexual orientation and their race/ethnicity.

Turner Johnson (2014) conducted a phenomenological study to explore the experiences of women in higher education in sub-Saharan Africa with a focus on identities, gender

performance, and intersectionality. Data were collected from five senior administrators who were all from sub-Saharan Africa and worked at public institutions in the region. The women were purposefully and critically selected because of their work in higher education in the region. One to two-hour hermeneutic interviews were conducted with attention given to context, career trajectory, gender acts, and commitments. Transcripts were created from each interview and analyzed. The analysis was conducted using themes around core lifeworlds of the participants. The transcripts were read selectively to isolate relevant statements and phrases. A descriptive phenomenological account of career, identity, and gender work was the final product of analysis.

The most significant finding of the study was that participants both conformed to and defied gender performance expectations through enacting gender norms and personal agency in the context of highly gendered cultures and institutions. While this study was situated in a context outside of the U.S., it gave the insight that intersectionality, as well as gender performance within and outside of norms led to ontological sovereignty over the lives of the participants and their careers. It also provided context for the gendered nature of work in higher education.

Parent and Moradi (2011) conducted a quantitative study on gender expression as it related to conformity to feminine norms that offered additional psychometric data in the use of the Conformity to Feminine Norms Inventory, CFNI-45. There was a gap in research focusing on the way women conformed with feminine constructs and Mahalik et al. (2005) developed the Conformity to Feminine Norms Inventory (CFNI). Parent and Moradi (2011) developed the CFNI-45 which was based on the original CFNI but with fewer questions, making it more accessible for research and clinical practice. The analysis focused on a nine-factor model using

the "chi-square statistic with degrees of freedom" (p. 962). The researchers also examined measurement invariance around the dominant and non-dominant racial/ethnic identity groups.

The most important finding as it related to QWOC in higher education is there were no significant differences across socioculturally dominant and non-dominant racial/ethnic groups. That is not to say that gender norm conformity was the same for both groups (Parent & Moradi, 2011); quite the contrary. The study showed women experienced expectations around feminine gender conformity. Additionally, it supported the insight that both dominant (white) and non-dominant (women of color) navigated conforming to dominant cultural norms of femininity.

Gender identity and expression are a central component to the experiences of QWOC in general and for queer, Chicana/Latinas. This selection of studies illustrate that women are affected by dominant gender norms and expectations and that intersectional identities influence experiences. Whether or not queer, Chicana/Latina administrators conform to norms impacts them both personally and professionally.

Queer/LGB Identity

Unlike race or gender, the history and research of LGB identity in education is virtually non-existent before the early 20th century (deLeon & Brunner, 2013). The term queer has a younger tenure than lesbian and gay and has been intentionally chosen as the primary sexual orientation term here because of its critique of heteronormativity and the connections between sexuality and gender (Driskill, Finley, Gilley, & Morgensen, 2011; Moon Johnson & Javier, 2017). While sometimes an umbrella term, it is not a neutral term. The word queer is a politicized reclaiming of a word once used to marginalize the LGB community. Much of the limited research on queer identity is rooted in research where lesbian, bisexual, and gay were the

more common terms (Alimahomed, 2010). As Alimahomed stated, "there is a dearth of empirical research that privileges the experiences of queer women who are subordinated by intersecting structures of domination" (p. 151). Research that includes lesbian, gay, bisexual identity as a focus is included in this review because of the lack of substantial empirical research on queer identity in higher education. While there is growing research on queer theory and queer identity, much of higher education remains the same in terms of its treatment and marginalization of LGBT people and much of it is focused on students (Renn, 2010). LGBT faculty, staff and administrators still suffer many of the same prejudices which can limit their ability to support students and further their career goals (Rankin, 2003).

LGBT identified people experience unique challenges on college campuses ranging from homophobia and microaggressions to fear and exclusion and beyond based on their sexual orientation, gender identity and/or gender expression. A comprehensive study, known as the Rankin Study, sought to examine the experiences of LGBT people across the country as it relates to campus climate (Rankin, 2003). The study had 1,669 participants who self-identified as LGBT students, faculty, and staff from fourteen institutions (Rankin). Overwhelmingly, respondents characterized their campus climates for LGBT people as homophobic and unsupportive (Rankin). In a qualitative study, deLeon and Brunner (2013) interviewed seventeen out and closeted lesbian and gay educators about how they navigated their LG identity in their professional lives. From this study, the authors developed a Cycle of Fear model that captured the themes from the participants' experiences. They identified two major themes: Fear-Losses and Fear-Gains (deLeon & Brunner). The first theme, Fear-Losses, included safety losses (i.e., hostility, personal protection, & increased caution) and self/opportunity losses (i.e., assimilation, silence, overcompensation, etc.) as elements (deLeon & Brunner, p. 171). The second theme,

Fear-Gains included social gains (i.e., unique perspective, heightened awareness, courageous trail-blazing, etc.) and personal gains (i.e., strength, comradeship/connections, integrated identity, etc.) as elements (deLeon & Brunner, 2013, p. 171). This study added to the literature in that participants were able to name how they channeled their negative experiences and fears into productive opportunities. However, it did not explore the need to address institutional or systemic bias, exclusion and oppression.

Queer Chicanas/Latinas

As mentioned before, there is paucity in the research about queer Chicanas/Latinas and even less on them as administrators in higher education. Much of what is published is either focused on students or outside the field of education, often in psychology. Additionally, when Chicana/Latina sexuality has been studied, it has mostly been done from a heterosexual frame (Acosta, 2010). Therefore, this section is to highlight literature focused on Chicana/Latinas to provide greater context for this study.

Acosta (2010) conducted a qualitative study on lesbian, bisexual, and queer Latinas focused on how they negotiate their sexual identities with their families. The study was conducted over 14 months and used 40 interviews with first- and second-generation Latinas located in the northeast United States who identified as lesbian, bisexual, or queer. The study found Latinas use different disclosure strategies based on their gender and social position within their families. The participants shared experiences about what happened to their relationship with their families after they disclosed their sexual orientation.

Three themes were identified, capturing what their families did after disclosure. The first was "erasing nonconformity" (Acosta, 2010, p. 73) which represented how families essentially responded in a way that erased the disclosure. The women who experienced this tended to be

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younger and financially dependent on their families. Many of the participants named this erasure caused them to feel insecure and privileged their parents' wishes over their own sexual orientation identity. Parents would engage in this erasure to avoid disowning their daughter. The next theme was "silencing strategies" which referred to the ways families "tacitly accept sexual nonconformity without ever directly acknowledging it" (Acosta, p. 76). This theme emerged most frequently with migrant Latinas and represented how families generally did not discuss sexuality with one another. This strategy worked by parents not interfering with the daughters' lives and the daughters then carried themselves in a way that did not bring attention to that part of their lives. This arrangement was upheld as to not bring shame to the individuals, family, or community. The final theme was "avoidance after disclosure" which referred to the arrangements that were made after the daughter disclosed her sexual orientation identity and the family later chose to have the disclosure be essentially unheard (Acosta, p. 79). One of the ways this had an impact on participants is through isolation. Some participants even physically moved away from their family to navigate the arrangement. This arrangement was most connected to the concept of living in a borderlands space for participants because they felt stuck between their family's culture and U.S. dominant culture.

This study is significant because it illuminated some examples of the levels of complexity for queer Latinas navigating the disclosure process of their sexual orientation identity. "Coming out" is not a static, specific, or one-dimensional experience for queer Latinas. The cost of coming out was sometimes too great for the participants in the study and it prevented them from disclosing, yet it allowed them to maintain relationships. The family aspect for queer, Chicana/Latinas is a significant one of influence for their identity and experience.

In another study on Chicana/Latina students, Tijerina-Revilla (2009) explored the concept of sexual identity among women who were all a part of a student organization on a large college campus. While the study did not focus explicitly on queerness, it was a central aspect of the study in that the members of the student organization were explicitly seeking to challenge and disrupt heterosexist politics and practice, along with other oppressions through their activism. Through participatory action research, the author worked with the students over the course of five years. All participants were a part of a muxerista student organization called Raza Womyn. According to Tijerina-Revilla (2009) a muxerista is "a person whose identity is rooted in a Chicana/Latina feminist vision for social change committed to ending all forms of oppression, including but not limited to racism, classism, sexism, homophobia, and citizenism" (p. 48). One of the key elements of this ideology is that the women in the organization saw themselves as "a resister and questions all authority and social constructs…specifically gender and sexuality roles are vehemently questioned and rejected" (p. 50). This perspective pushed participants to reconstruct their sense of self and their identity specifically as it related to being queer, Chicana/Latinas. This study illustrated the interconnected and intersectional nature of race, gender, and sexuality for the students in the study. Importantly, it also highlighted the ways queer, Chicana/Latinas are consistently challenging dominant norms on college campuses.

This section of the literature review has given a snapshot of relevant research focused on queer women of color and more specifically, queer, Chicana/Latinas and the elements of identity and structures of oppression they face in the context of institutions such as family and higher education.

Higher Education Leadership

The theoretical concepts and frameworks that guided this study (CRT, LatCrit, CFE, etc.) are rarely if ever used when considering leadership in general or more specifically higher education leadership. Many consider the purpose of higher education to be to prepare students to be better leaders in an increasingly diverse world and workplace (Aguirre & Martinez, 2006). Yet, leadership in the context of higher education continues to be framed from dominant perspectives. Additionally, literature is lacking specifically about how leadership manifests in a higher education context (Vroom, 1983). Deepening the gap, higher education leadership is often conflated with administration, particularly presidents and their cabinets, despite there being leadership practiced at all levels of the institution.

The conceptualization of leadership and leadership theories have evolved in response to contextual, economic, political, and social influences. They should reflect both those contexts in addition to the individuals who take on leadership roles. However, early leadership theories align with privileged identities, reflecting specific traits, behaviors, and styles that differ from those of historically marginalized groups (Eagly & Chin, 2010). Since then, little has changed in the conception of leadership. Social movements like the Civil Rights Movement and the Women's Movement questioned traditional power structures and the leaders who controlled them. Followers of these movements conferred leadership to those who best embodied the values, perspectives, and beliefs of the people they represented and the larger social movement that called them to action. As opposed to earlier leadership theory, where particular traits were considered to be necessary for leadership, such as the Great Man theory of the 1840s when men were considered to have been bestowed with gifts from God in order to lead (Spector, 2015).

With that line of thinking, there were many people and ways of leading who were left out. However, trait approach to leadership lasted long thereafter.

Even in contemporary times, leadership as an area of study is frequently and consistently framed from dominant lens and is most often considered to be neutral in terms of social identity (Ayman & Korabik, 2010). One need only look at the "leadership section" at your nearest bookstore; the shelves are lined with books written by mostly white men from a business context. However, in a broader sense, the concept leadership is often referenced outside of scholarship. In elementary schools, students learn about developing the leaders of tomorrow. In high schools, students are encouraged to participate in extracurricular activities because it helps them develop their leadership skills. And in higher education, leadership is a central theme from administration, to students, faculty, and staff. In this context, there is opportunity to make the concept of leadership more complex and consider perspectives, experiences, and approaches to leadership that build upon and expand the current scholarship.

When considering the higher education context, leadership takes on a more specific frame and role. For students, leadership gets framed in how it is developed via curricular, co-curricular, and extra-curricular opportunities. For staff and faculty, leadership is paradoxically nebulous and specific, often associated with and studied from a positional frame and used to address institutional challenges and needs (Smith & Wolverton, 2010). Leadership gets seen and experienced differently by each of those constituent groups (Bensimon, Neumann, & Birnbaum, 1989). Higher education leadership is looked at both from a theoretical and methodological frame (Aguirre Jr. & Martinez, 2006). These frameworks have broad influence on the direction of higher education institutions. Therefore, having an identity neutral basis of framing leadership maintains the status quo for minoritized populations and perpetuates systems of oppression.

Critical Leadership

The research on the field of leadership as a discipline, competency, and theory is vast. Just about every discipline has leadership components that are researched and promoted. Leaders are often framed from the role, or influence, or power one has within society or an organization. Day (2000) asserted that leadership roles come with and without formal authority. Still, there is little research on leadership from a critical perspective (Dugan, 2017). Dugan illustrated how critical leadership studies can transform how leadership is researched, considered, and approached.

> Themes offer areas for attention when deconstructing and reconstructing leadership theory and include de-romanticizing leadership as inherently good and positive, examining how leadership may reinforce domination and control, and affording greater attention to social location. (p. 58)

Critical leadership considers identity and further insists on identity not be considered singularly, but in its multiplicity and in its context (Santamaria & Santamaria, 2012). In this way, a connection can be made to the many ways queer, Chicana/Latinas practice critical leadership when they work on campus and engage in affecting change. To narrow the field, the areas of focus for this review include social justice, finding and building community, and Chicana/Latina leadership as a means to engage in a more critical framing of leadership.

Social Justice

Critical race theory and LatCrit, Chicana feminist epistemology, and intersectional framework all have social change as a primary element of their approach and requirement of research. The centrality of social justice in leadership is paramount because it requires that one identity is not prioritized over the other (O'Malley & Capper, 2015). These themes connect

explicitly to QWOC and queer Chicana/Latina administrators because of their likelihood of taking on these types of roles because of their identities in the context of higher education either formally or informally.

In their study on educational leadership programs for social justice, O'Malley and Capper (2015), looked at how aspiring principals are prepared for social justice leadership. They focused on equitable leadership for LGBTIQ people as a measurement of the program's commitment to social justice (O'Malley & Capper). Their quantitative study was grounded in feminist theory and public pedagogy. They surveyed 218 full-time faculty members from 53 different principal preparation programs. Descriptive analysis was performed on the Likert-type scale responses and constant comparative analysis was performed on open-ended questions.

There were several important findings from this study. First, addressing the LGBTIQ identity in principal preparation programs to promote social justice leadership was contextual. The integration of LGBTIQ identities influenced and was influenced by the context in which the programs reside. The study provided empirical evidence that sexual orientation and gender identity were the differences that were least attended to in principal preparation programs which included social justice leadership as a part of their program. Lastly, it provided a justification for the benefits of social justice discourse within educational leadership programs (O'Malley & Capper, 2015). This study was also the first of its kind which is important because it illustrates the lack of a significant body of research on the topic of QWOC and social justice related research in education. The present study contributes to this body of knowledge from a particular set of experiences of queer, Chicana/Latina administrators.

Summary

While there is a growing body of research of queer students of color in higher education, there remain significant gaps in the literature regarding queer, Chicana/Latinas and more specifically those in administrator roles. This review of literature intentionally began with the theoretical frameworks because of how they are influencing this study towards an end that is rooted in social justice and action. There are several examples in the research that centralize LGB women and women of color but not necessarily the intersection of those identities and much of that literature comes from the field of psychology. There was a shallower pool of research focusing on queer women leadership, queer women of color, and virtually no research on queer, Chicanas/Latinas in higher education. The literature looked at both challenges and assets of identity in experiences for QWOC in various contexts. All of these examples are segregated, fragmented versions of the main focus of this research. While there are similarities between the experiences of LGBT folks and people of color on many college campuses, they are not the same (Aguilar & Moon Johnson, 2017). This study aims to generate a richer understanding of the experiences of queer, Chicana/Latina administrators and their simultaneous and intersecting identities and what that understanding can contribute to knowledge and action for change to make colleges and universities more inclusive for all. Last, this study contributes to illuminating structures of oppression faced by queer, Chicana/Latina administrators through critical queer, Chicana/Latina epistemologies so such structures can be deconstructed and transformed to advance social change in higher education. My motivation has now deepened to more explicitly bring the voices and experiences of marginalized communities into the leadership discourse.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Cuentito: In my preliminary exam at the end of my coursework one of my committee members suggested that I utilize my own personal story and voice in my dissertation. The thought of it both excited me and intimidated me. It made me think about why I was doing this study in a deeper way and what I wanted to do with it. I learned that I was drawn to the critical paradigm in a course early in my program because of the emphasis on action and social change. I reflected back to when one of my professors introduced me to "me-search." I wanted to do research that did something, that made me feel something. I wanted to research with people and be able to do something meaningful with my participants that would help us use our stories to not only create and contribute to knowledge but to also take action toward shifting the status quo in higher education.

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of queer Chicana/Latina administrators and their leadership experiences in higher education. Using testimonio and pláticas, participants' stories about their lives were examined to make sense of experiences as higher education administrators and leaders with particular attention given to their leadership experiences (Kim, 2016; Slay & Smith, 2011) within a methodological framework of LatCrit and Chicana Feminist Epistemology. Testimonios were used to expose dynamics of power in their experiences as well as pláticas to bring a collective consciousness to the individual stories. Additionally, participants were asked to reflect on their intersecting identities rather than each identity in isolation. Avoiding additive questions about identity reflects an intersectional research approach. This chapter includes information on the methodological stance, my positionality, informed consent, coresearcher information, and methods.

Methodological Stance

Qualitative research is complex and ever changing in ways that reflect the present historical moment and is ideal for researching people's lived experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). It also requires researchers to be clear on their paradigm and worldview (Jones, Torres, &

Armino, 2014). This critical qualitative study centered the voices and experiences of queer,

Chicana/Latina higher education administrators and utilize a testimonio approach rooted in

LatCrit (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). The weaving of testimonio with plática is an intentional

choice. Each of these connects in ways that centered the voices and stories of each of the

participants as individual holders of knowledge while also recognizing the knowledge of the

group. This approach directed the study in a decolonial manner in that the participants were also

a part of the analysis.

My epistemological stance is rooted in Chicana feminist epistemology. Chicana feminist

epistemology centralizes the social, political, and cultural identities and experiences of Chicanas

(Delgado Bernal, 1998). In this context, I looked at those aspects in the context of higher

education for queer, Chicanas/Latinas as they related to their lived experiences as administrators

and in their leadership practices. As the researcher, I used my own cultural intuition to add depth

and richness to the meaning and analysis of the data. The primary focus of cultural intuition

sources for participants was their personal and professional experiences. I then used the other

remaining two sources of existing literature and analytical research processes to maintain

alignment with the framework of Chicana feminist epistemology.

Because this study focused on the stories/counterstories of the participants, a thematic

narrative analysis was an appropriate approach (Clandinin, 2006). Counterstories as part of CRT

and LatCrit can:

> …serve at least four theoretical, methodological, and pedagogical functions: (1) they can
>
> build community among those at the margins of society by putting a human and familiar
>
> face to educational theory and practice; (2) they can challenge the perceived wisdom of
>
> those at society's center by providing a context to understand and transform established

belief systems; (3) they can open new windows into the reality of those at the margins of

society by showing the possibilities beyond the ones that they live and demonstrating that

they are not alone in their position; and (4) they can teach others that by combining

elements from both the story and the current reality, one can construct another world that

is richer than either the story or reality alone. (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001, p. 475)

Each story/counterstory was told in the words and from the perspectives of the participants and

thematic analysis provided the avenue to analyze the data from the stories (Riley & Hawe, 2005).

In this way, the seemingly mundane events were to illuminate themes that are related to social

change (Riessman, 2008).
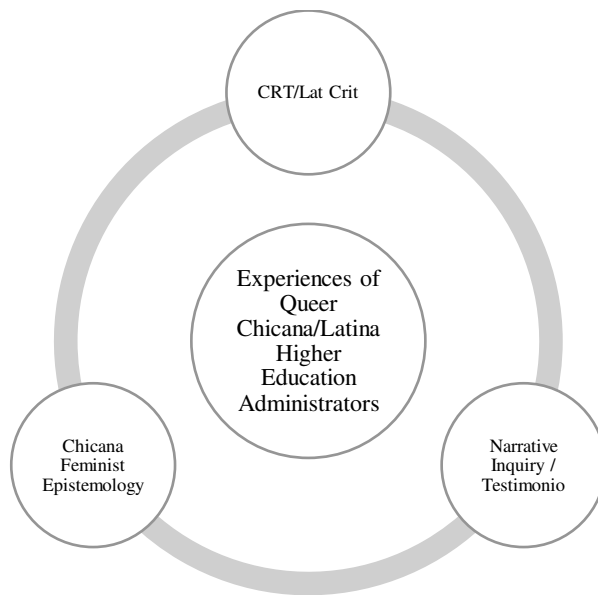
Figure 3.1 Research methodology

Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry was an ideal methodological approach for this study given the aim of

the study was to understand the experiences of queer Chicana/Latina administrators in a way that

challenges dominant narratives. The research questions, while straightforward, were complex

and recognized the intersectional experiences of racism, sexism, and heterosexism within the

context of higher education. As such, the ways in which narrative inquiry privileges participants'

stories to analyze thematically is congruent with a LatCrit approach and Chicana feminist

epistemology. CRT, LatCrit, and CFE all recognize that queer, Chicana/Latinas' experiences are

sources of knowledge. Participants told and retold their stories and interpreted their experiences

on their own terms (Bhattacharya, 2017). Narrative inquiry is a mechanism to explore that

knowledge and is "valuable when conducting gender-based research because if focuses on

narratives as experiences lived and told" (Simmonds, Roux, & Avest, 2015, p. 36). Narrative

inquiry demanded that I made connections between what is seen and unseen because the

narratives do not speak for themselves (Lutrell, 2010; Riessman, 2008). It is a reflexive process

between the participants and I that took a historical, reflective view and put it into the present

through story.

In addition to the research questions, the theoretical and epistemological frameworks also

weaved in well with a narrative inquiry approach. CRT and LatCrit focus on storytelling and

counterstorytelling as central and that the experiences of people of color, queer, Chicana/Latinas

specifically in this study, are critical to making progress toward social justice. By affirming these

stories, narrative inquiry makes experiences and lives "narratable," which "implies value and

attributes reality" (Frank, 2002). The participants telling their stories reflected a reality that

remains not fully explored, particularly because they might likely challenge dominant narratives.

Related, Chicana feminist epistemology calls upon us as researchers to "decolonize our research

and practices" (Calderón, Delgado Bernal, Pérez Huber, Malagón, & Vélez, 2012). Through the

storytelling process in narrative inquiry, participants had greater access to agency and

authenticity because of the centrality of story, thus opening up opportunity for engaging in

"queer Chicana/Latina intuition" (Tijerina-Revilla, 2010). Last, narrative inquiry encourages

"aesthetic play" becuase it allows for creativity to take a role in the serious work of research (Kim, 2016). The use of my own cuentitos was a way to include my own testimonios and engage this "play" and creativity to open avenues of reciprocity in the research process.

Testimonio & Pláticas

Testimonio is a form of reflexive narrative that has an overtly political intent (Prieto & Villenas, 2012; Reyes & Curry Rodríguez, 2012) and yet moves beyond traditional notions of narrative because the storyteller's perspective on resisting oppression is privileged rather than the researcher's (Brabeck, 2003). There is urgency in the testimonios of queer, Chicana/Latina administrators as these voices are virtually ignored in higher education research on administrators and therefore, this study has the "overtly political intent" afforded by the testimonio approach (Prieto & Villenas). Testimonio invites participants to tell their stories of transcending oppression and explore their liminality as queer, Chicana/Latinas in their own voice and furthers those stories via a collective consciousness. There is a focus on collective identity while still insisting on the specificity of individual experience (Brabeck, 2003). The queer, Chicana/Latina administrators in this study shared their own experiences as they related to the community in order to create a common consciousness.

By adopting a testimonio approach, it necessitates both the participants and I had particular roles to play in the process. First, is a matter of relationship and community. One of the questions posed by the Latina Feminist Group (2001) was, "how do we bear witness to our own becoming?" (p. 12). This question was emblematic of how testimonio was embodied in this study. Bearing witness is one of my main responsibilities and privileges as a researcher.

> Testimonio allows Chicana/Latina researchers to document and inscribe into existence a
> social witness account reflective of collective experiences, political injustices, and human

struggles that are often erased by dominant discourses. (Pérez Huber & Cueva, 2012, p.

393)

This required I build authentic relationships with each of the participants as individuals and

invites the opportunity to build a "community of witnesses" via a focus group (Brabeck, 2003).

Second, testimonio is a process by which stories are affirmed and voices are empowered

(Beverly, 2008; Reyes & Curry Rodríguez, 2012). In the interactions I had with participants and

those they had with each other, affirmation and empowerment was overtly embodied. Last, each

of us had a role in the process of revealing and reflecting (Pérez Huber & Cueva, 2012). As

participants revealed their experiences, stories, and counterstories orally, they were

simultaneously revealing and reflecting. As the researcher, I aimed to reveal what interpretations

I made from their stories and reflected on their feedback of those interpretations. Testimoniando

is a collaborative way to resist oppression and injustice (Benmayor, 2012). As the researcher, I

also engagedg in "testimonial disclosure" by using cuetntitos, mini autobiographical stories

(Latina Feminist Group, 2001) that shared my own voice, story, and experience.

     A way I elected to build these testimonios was through a Chicana/Latina Feminist plática

approach. Culturally rooted dialogues, called pláticas, allows for us to learn about ourselves in

relation to others (de la Torre, 2008; Espino, Marquez Kiyama, 2010). Pláticas allow for more

authentic relationships and dialogue to occur. In this way, incorporating pláticas supports the

testimonio methodology. In this study, a group plática was also used with the participants. The

method helps to "make connections between everyday lived experiences and the research

inquiry," (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016, p. 112) therefore aligning with the research questions

of this study as well. There are five main principles of pláticas that were used in this study: (1)

research draws upon Chicana/Latina feminist theory; (2) honors participants as co-constructors

of knowledge; (3) makes the connections of everyday experiences and the research inquiry; (4) potentially creates a space for healing; and finally (5) the components of reciprocity and vulnerability with the participants along with researcher reflexivity (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016). Each of these principles were present in this study and supported the methodological choices to respond to the main research questions.

Positionality

As Jones, Torres, and Arminio (2014) suggest, one of the most fundamental aspects of a qualitative research study is to ascertain and name the relationship between the researcher and the researched. One must consider both the relationship of the researcher to the participants as well as to the topic being explored (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2014). I was centered in conducting research with people rather than on them, which is a praxis disposition (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2014). When one of my faculty members introduced me to the concept of "me-search," I was drawn to the idea. I realized that I had rarely, if ever, seen myself represented in anything I had studied outside of Ethnic Studies. For this study, and for a testimonio approach, voice was a central element for both the participants and researcher (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). My voice, story, and experience were connected to those of my participants. My grounding as a researcher looking at this topic was to illuminate these stories to promote community of support within the group and use what we learned to promote a more socially just higher education environment.

My Topic and Me

I was drawn to my doctoral program because I had been interested in and worked in various leadership positions (formal and informal) for much of my career in higher education. I thought earning a Ph.D. in Higher Education Leadership would allow me the opportunity to

contribute to positive change in higher education as well as potentially open career options for me in the future. Being committed to social justice as a person and professional, I also knew I wanted my scholarship to be rooted in concepts of liberation and justice.

Most of the time when people of color, women, and/or queer folks were mentioned in coursework, it was an additive approach or an afterthought. For example, in learning about leadership theory, we learned about the most common theories first and then how "special populations" would or would not fit into those models. It was as though concepts of identity and systems of power and oppression were not connected to concepts of leadership, finance, quantitative research, or literature reviews, etc. It felt like something was missing particularly because I experienced a professional life where many of these topics were always influenced by dynamics of power, oppression, and identity.

My decision to ask questions that were best answered by a qualitative narrative inquiry study that is focused on queer, Chicana/Latinas is based on many factors. I think back to my undergraduate experience and am reminded that as a first-generation, low-income, Chicana attending a predominantly white institution, I struggled first and then thrived. During my first week of classes I was at a social event and a Latino asked me, "what are you?". I responded with, "I'm a freshman." It was the first time I had been asked to identify racially/ethnically in that way. I had grown up in a community where most folks looked like me. I had entered a community and a campus where I was one of few. Once that student clarified his question, I responded with, "Oh, I guess I'm Hispanic." His dissatisfied reaction to me communicated that I had much to learn.

I struggled at first. I was experiencing dissonance around not just my racial/ethnic identity, but others as well. I found ethnic studies and began to find footing that helped me

understand myself and the world around me in ways that were meaningful and important. I felt a sense of agency to own my identities authentically as a queer Chicana. I began to take on leadership roles on campus and my academic performance strengthened. I studied abroad. I was one of four women who founded a chapter of a Latina sorority, the first on our campus. I participated in student government. I graduated with a double major in Spanish and Mexican American studies. I was so far from the place where I started four and a half years earlier.

In my first job after graduation, I immediately took on leadership roles beyond my formal role. I began to develop my professional identity that was grounded in social justice praxis. When I began to experience homophobic treatment from people with whom I shared a racial/ethnic identity, it was devastating. I felt that I was doing so well, yet others found a way to exclude me and diminish my work. I was pushed to the brink of leaving the job that I loved and had already invested so much. I turned to my community. They helped me rethink leaving the job and I was able to fight the injustice I was experiencing at work. I prevailed. I once again found my agency and voice to not only survive that time, but to thrive and continue to contribute to our students, department, and greater campus efforts. I applied and was admitted to a graduate program in student affairs. During that process, I once again experienced dissonance around being one of the few both as a student of color and a queer student. I once again sought a community of support and was able to find success.

These are all just a few examples of my own experiences as a queer Chicana in higher education that have led me to this topic. I have had the opportunity to share my stories with students and staff with whom I share one or more identity about my experiences and the act of sharing those stories have been mutually beneficial. The stories that I collected through this

study illuminated the ways in which we/they resisted and disrupted dominant narratives, particularly about leadership and cultivated new narratives.

The Participants and Me

While I share many identities with the participants of this study, our stories are not monolithic or one dimensional. My most salient identities are my race/ethnicity, gender, and sexuality. I was talking with a few colleagues in an informal setting at a leadership retreat weekend a few years back. We all identify as queer, women of color and work in higher education. We quickly and easily began to share our experiences with each other as college/university administrators. The conversation felt affirming, therapeutic, comical, challenging, and magical all at the same time. We decided to stay in community and begin to do other things together. We proposed a session for national conference on queer women of color practicing self-care and it was accepted. We have now done the session multiple times at different conferences. Hearing women's stories in those sessions showed me my experiences are not isolated events and they are pervasive because of systems of oppression that exist across geography, institutional type, and professional levels. When the participants in the sessions spoke, there was power in the room. There was support, affirmation, laughter, shock, love, and strength in the room. The sessions all ended with how we as QWOC can practice decolonized self-care. While these examples were focused on a broader racial group, I felt like I was with my people.

The relationships built with the participants as individuals and as a group was central to the research process for me. The idea of building rapport with the participants is only surface level. I could not hear their stories and be in relationship with the participants a way that was only about getting their stories. I heard their stories and was with them in the telling of them. I

bore witness to their experiences and connected them to my own or to other stories. We used the stories and the experiences to inform what can be done so the knowledge can be used to promote liberation for ourselves and others. As Romo-Carmona writes, "we establish our experience as valid and real, be begin to analyze, and that analysis gives us the necessary perspective to place our lives in a context where we know that to do next" (1994, p. xxi). My role as an "in-group" member allowed for richer conversations and we started in a place where an "out-group" member might not have been able to. This factor was also complicated in that I had to remain diligent and focused on their stories in their own words rather than make assumptions and/or connections they did not express. I wanted to get the participants' stories without grounding my questions in deficits or comparisons. So much of what I had been exposed to was how I/we challenge or change or do not fit into established norms, models, or concepts. Being grounded in Chicana feminist epistemology (Delgado Bernal, 1998) allowed me to focus on and be guided by cultural intuition and allowed for the participants to do the same.

Participant Selection

I used multiple sources to identify participants for the study. Purposive and convenience sampling were appropriate for this study as I was looking for a specific group of no more than 12 women. As identity labeling can be personal, fluid, and dynamic in nature, I utilized the language below to identify participants.

1. Identify as Chicana and/or Latina. Self-identifying categories could include any group under these categories such as Puerto Rican, Mexican-American, Hispanic, Brown, Mexican, etc.

2. Self-identify as a woman. Gender is not a binary and gender expression varies greatly within gender identity.

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3. Self-identify as queer, lesbian, bisexual, or any other minoritized sexuality. The term queer will be the term used for the study, and participants can use whatever identifier feels most true to them.

To identify potential participants, I used two primary channels for recruiting participants. The first was via social media. There were a few groups of which I am a participant that helped me spread the word to candidates who meet the criteria. Those groups were GLBTQA Women of Color in Higher Education, QTPOC Colorado, and Queermunidad of Colorado. In the social media groups, participants could either email me directly at Carmen.Rivera@colostate.edu or direct message me within the social media platform. I also sent emails (Appendix A) to professional networks announcing the study. Interested participants were able to communicate with me directly via email.

The final two criteria for participants pertained to their status as administrators and level of "outness." Participants had to be employed in administrative, non-faculty roles on campus and had to have been in higher education for a minimum of five years. Focus was on the minimum number of years in administrator roles rather than titles because of the variation in organizational structures across institutions and because of the limited number of potential participants. Last, all participants had be "out" with all of their identities; meaning that they had to be working in their environments without concealing their race, gender, or sexuality. This requirement was of particular relevance because of the group plática portion of the study.

Informed Consent

Informed consent began with the recruitment phase and continued through completion of the data collection phase. It was critical that participants felt they had the ability to withdraw participation at any point of the study for whatever reason without fear of negative

consequences. At the onset, I created recruitment materials outlining the study, clarifying language, and articulating the requested commitment level and estimated duration. I sought a larger pool of participants than was needed for the study in the event someone had to depart the study and negatively impacting the sample. Additionally, I outlined the technological specifications, needs, and uses of the study. For example, each participant had to have access to a computer with a web camera to conduct the video interviews. Also, they were informed the interviews were recorded on the hard drive of my computer for transcription and data analysis.

Due to the level of complexity in language and identity management related to the population of the study, I included extensive information to help participants fully understand the scope of the study. I framed the racial/ethnic terminology as Chicana/Latina intentionally to include both a politically rooted term and a general term. I was clear that identifying in any other way as it related to Latinx identity was acceptable and participants would be referred to as such when specifically referencing them throughout the study. Gender is embedded in the words Chicana and Latina. The study was focused on women and the concept of gender identity is complex. Therefore, the language indicated the study was seeking self-identified women and all forms of gender expression were included within that. Last, I clarified the term queer, while non-neutral, was used to encompass sexualities such as lesbian, bisexual, pan sexual, and the like. Related to this identity, the fact there was a group plática component to the study in which participants met one another was explicitly explained, particularly because confidentiality could not be guaranteed in that context. When referencing specific participants, I used all the terminology they specified and when referencing the group in general, I used the more general terms I selected for the study.

Methods

In this section, I will outline the procedures I used to collect the data for my study including the interview protocol, analysis procedures, trustworthiness, limitations, and delimitations. My methods were consistent with critical race methodology, LatCrit, testimonio, and Chicana Feminist Epistemology.

Interview 1	• Initial individual semi-structured interview with each of the participants
Focus Group	• All participants gathered for online video plática to explore themes that emerged together
Final Interview	• Individual semi-structured interviews to present themes and get last thoughts/reflections
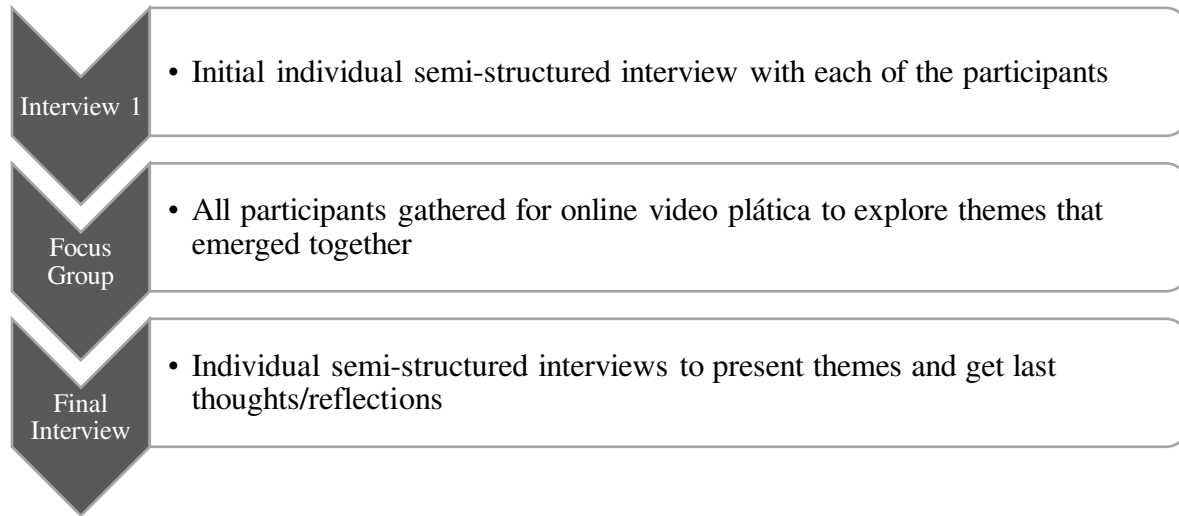
Figure 3.2 Method outline

Interview Protocol

Upon IRB approval, I began the recruitment phase using purposive sampling. In the recruitment materials, there was a link to a secure form all interested candidates were required to submit. The form collected participants' demographic information as well as a few short-answer questions. The short-answer questions were focused on why they were interested in the study and what they hoped their participation would potentially create. Once the final pool of candidates was identified, I conducted individual semi-structured interviews with each participant. Each interview was conducted in person or via an online video conference service and recorded to the hard drive of my computer instead of an online location. Subsequent to the individual interview with each of the participants, I conducted a group plática where all the participants participated

via the online video conference recorded locally versus online. Additionally, I maintained field notes throughout the process secured on my computer as well. Last, I conducted a final interview with each of the participants via video conference.

The group plática interview was also a methodological strategy used. There was an opportunity incorporate and make deeper meaning from the emerging themes and narratives via a shared conversation. The group plática created a context of support where dialogue, community, and solidarity promote authenticity and a liberatory space for testimonio to occur (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2014). The participants each had time to introduce themselves sharing a brief snapshot of their story. The group plática then moved to a quasi-facilitated discussion allowing the participants to coalesce and explore what they thought about the initial themes and allowed them to make connections across experiences. Because of the isolating experiences queer, Chicana/Latina administrators can experience, the group plática was a great way to elicit insights that would have been more difficult to get to in individual interviews alone.

Last, I conducted final individual semi-structured interviews to allow for member-checking and follow up on the themes that emerged from the first individual interviews and the group plática. The aim with interviews was to foster an experience that was conducive to participants being as honest and open as possible. Considering my positionality as it connects to them and their experiences promoted genuine interactions. I openly shared my experiences when appropriate without making my story be the center. Sharing my narratives in moderation helped to build trust and community with participants. By focusing on strong relationships, I hoped to create an environment where participants were able to be their whole selves and let their authentic voice tell their stories. Honoring voices and stories was one of my greatest responsibilities as a researcher. Last, intentionally fostering a sense of community and

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connection during the research process promoted the creation of a community of support subsequent to the study which was an element of the actions/praxis of the study.

Data Collection

All data collected throughout the study was treated ethically and with integrity. All information and data collected or created was kept locally and securely. All video recordings were also recorded on the local hard drive. Any interviews conducted in person, were audio recorded locally and securely. Below was the timeline.

Table 3.1 *Data Collection Timeline*

Data Method	Themes	Means	Completion
Individual Interviews	Identity & Leadership	Recorded Zoom	December 2018
Group Platica	Themes that emerged from interviews	Recorded Zoom	February 2019
Final Individual Interviews	All Themes	Recorded Zoom	March 2019
Sharing of analysis	All Themes	Email	June 2019

As the data were collected, they were analyzed at each step so emerging themes were explored at each step with the participants. This approach was alike the constant comparative method often utilized in grounded theory research. In narrative inquiry, it is a way to approach the data with a sense of curiosity and to allow for space for "aims and ends" to be worked out (Kim, 2016, p. 187). Last, a research journal was maintained to keep track of emerging analysis and reflections of interactions with participants.

Analysis Procedures

This study utilized the four basic elements of qualitative narrative research: codes, categories, patterns, and themes through an inductive process (Bhattacharya, 2017; Kim, 2016).

The relationship between my voice as the researcher and the voice of the participants was central to analysis (Clandindin & Connely, 2000; Kim, 2016). While my story and voice were not part of the data, they do affect how I interpreted and analyzed the data. I used phroneisis, ethical judgment, in the three dimensions of narrative inquiry; temporality, the personal and social, and the place (Kim).

Once I selected participants, obtained signed consent, and interviewed all participants, I used the secure, encrypted, and password protected online platform, dedoose, to manage the data. All interviews will be recorded, then transcribed and stored in dedoose. The group plática was also recorded, transcribed, and stored there.

There were two main components to the thematic content analysis: coding and maintaining a research journal. First, I took an inductive approach to coding the data to by reading and re-reading the transcripts (Bhattacharya, 2017) to begin to elucidate meaning (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2014). Kim (2016) suggested "flirting" with the data by approaching it with curiosity and through an iterative process moving "in and out of steps" (Bhattacharya). I used four basic elements to code: codes, categories, patterns, and themes (Kim). Part of this process was done in dedoose and another was done via mapping. Foundational to this process was framing the coding from a CRT, LatCrit, intersectionality, and Chicana feminist epistemology perspective, looking for connections to instances of resisting oppression and dominant narratives, nepantla, cultural intuition, and engaging in social justice to name a few. This approach allowed for me to re-present participants' stories in a way that was both honoring of the theoretical perspective of the study and ethical.

Second, I maintained a detailed research journal throughout the data collection and analysis phases. Journaling included memo writing which were meant to capture thoughts as they

relate specifically to the codes, categories, patterns and themes (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2014). Additionally, a more general research journal was maintained that began at the inception of the study that included references to literature, metaphors, thoughts that were forming about the process, and more general and meta reflections. This journal was intended to deepen my reflection on how these thoughts was influencing my analysis of the data. Finally, my own cuentitos were included in the analysis as a way of representing the reflexivity required in testimonio and plática methodologies. They represent my own reciprocity and bearing witness to the co-construction of the research with the participants.

Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, the concept of trustworthiness is used to convey a study's credibility and authenticity (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). The mechanisms used in this study to ensure trustworthiness were member checking, the use of a research journal, and a peer reviewer. Participants were asked to review transcripts via email. They were emailed and given information on the role of member checking in qualitative research and a timeline to get back any edits. Additionally, the step of sharing the analysis of the data was yet another layer. This collaborative approach was consistent with a critical methodology (Creswell & Miller, 2000). I also used a peer debriefer who was external to the study along the whole process. She acted as a sounding board as well as a person who read the study as it developed to challenge, affirm, and pose questions to develop the strength of the study. An important element of selecting a peer debriefer was that she had to have insight to the phenomenon that was being studied (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Therefore, I selected someone who has similar identities and experiences to the participants and me, as well as had familiarity and align with the theoretical approach. Additionally, part of my own ethics was to have participants who have voice about the data

collection and analysis. For example, if they wanted to remove parts of their testimonio for whatever reason, I did so. Conversely, when someone wanted to change how they participated, I worked to accommodate their needs as long as it did not adversely compromise the research design or her participation.

Limitations & Delimitations

The limitations and delimitations were set by the focus and purpose of this study. One of the primary limitations was the small number of participants who participated in the study. The number of queer, Chicana/Latinas is already a limited population and this study only represented the stories and experiences of a small number of them. Another limitation was that the focus of the study was only inclusive of the identities of sexuality, race/ethnicity, and gender primarily. There were other salient, marginalized identities that had material effects on the participants' experiences but were only included peripherally.

There were two primary delimitations. The first was that the study only focused on self-identified women. While there are more options for gender identity, this study did not explore those. Last, the focus was on higher education administrators with a minimum of five years' experience, narrowing the field even further.

<div align="center">

Summary

</div>

The methodological approach was designed to satisfy the purpose of this study which was to understand the experiences of queer, Chicana/Latina administrators in higher education. This chapter provided the methodological stance, including researcher epistemology and theoretical perspective framing the study. It also outlined the specific methods that were used to conduct the study in a manner congruent with qualitative research and the narrative inquiry

tradition of testimonio and plática specifically. Chapter four will introduce the participants of the study.

CHAPTER 4: PARTICIPANTS

Cuentito: While I was spending so much time in the data, it was as though these participants were with me. Not just with their words, but with their energy. As I listened to their testimonios, I felt their stories not just in a way of empathizing, but in a visceral, embodied way. The pauses. The tilt-your-head-back laughs. The unspoken pain. The unapologetic confidence. The contradictions. I noticed them, I felt them. While our experiences may have been different, I knew theirs and they knew mine. I was carrying their stories and their words with me all the time. Their words became my mantras ... "I cannot stay silent anymore" or "I am unafraid" or "I cannot carry this on my soul" are still with me. As the process progressed, they checked in with me to see how writing was going. They sent encouraging emails and texts. Their stories and voices were with me all the time. I felt tremendous responsibility to share their/our stories with such care, respect, and honor.

This chapter highlights the participants of this study to better understand the findings. Each of the participants had been in higher education administration for at least eight years and they supervised professional staffs who varied in number of years' experience from one to nine. They all had earned their master's or doctorate degrees in education or a related field. In addition to the three main social identities central to this study, each named other salient intersections of identities that were central to their experiences both historically and contemporarily. Table 4.1 below briefly illustrates the demographic data of the participants.

Table 4.1 *Participants*

Name	Region	Years in the field	Title	Functional area	Self identifies as…
EC	West Coast	9	Associate Dean	Student Affairs & Equity	Cis Woman Chicanx/Latinx/Mexican American
Elijah	West Coast	9	Associate Director	Undergraduate Research	Gender non-conforming Queer Latinx
Frida	Mountain West	14	Associate Professor/ Director of Program	Academic faculty department	Mujer Queer/fluid Chicana/Latina
Luz	Mountain West	8	Director	Access Programs/ TRiO	Cis Woman Queer Latina
MB	Mountain West	24	Director	Access Programs & Transitions	Androgynous Female Queer/Lesbian Latina/Cubana
Sofia	Mountain West	9	Director	LGBTQ+ Center	Cis Woman Queer Latinx/Mexicana
Victoree	West Coast	14	Director	Cross Cultural Center	Womxn Queer Chicanx Latinx

Introduction to the Participants

What follows are more extensive introductions to the participants. The pseudonyms were selected by the participants and the summaries are reflective of questionnaire data as well as what was gathered through the testimonios and pláticas. These introductions are meant to give insight to who was a part of this community of participants, their multiple intersecting identities, and is not representative of their whole identity or experience.

EC

EC is originally from the west coast and has lived in her home state her entire life. She is a second-generation college graduate and comes from a mixed generation family, one of her parents migrated to the U.S. from Mexico and the other has been in the U.S. for generations. Her college experience began at a community college, then went on to earn her bachelor's degree from a public university. She began her testimonio with:

> I've been in higher ed for eight years. I am a career changer, so in my twenties, I was trying to get into the film industry. My undergrad is in Film & Media Studies and so I was really kind of on that path but I was getting closer to 30 and I didn't have insurance, and I didn't have necessarily a full-time, regular gig, and it was becoming increasingly apparent that a lot of the folks that were getting those opportunities were not queer, were not brown, were certainly not plus-sized. I mean, my identity in the film industry was almost identical in terms of the challenges that I faced there that I'm facing now in higher ed, I don't think it's really changed. If anything, it's worse in the film industry, because it's so ... I don't know what the word is. It's just visual. It's a visual industry, and so, you really literally bring your identity wherever you go. So anyways, long story short, that didn't work out, which was a bummer for me because I'm really creative and I love art in all forms.

In addition to her educational background, she later then spoke of how she identifies in terms of her sexuality and gender expression:

> So, in terms of sexual orientation, I came out when I was 18. I came out to my mom when I was 18 and it was probably, like everybody else's story I imagine, one of the hardest things I'd ever done. I didn't think that my mother would disown me, at all. I

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mean I have a really progressive radical mother but I just knew I was going to disappoint her. So, I guess, in terms of the influences, there was always a sense that growing up Catholic, that hetero story, was just that was it, you know? You married a man and you had babies. And I knew, from like the minute I was probably five or six, that that just wasn't going to be my reality. I had no desire to be a parent. I had no desire to be "the feminized role" that my mother kept trying to push me into. The minute I could start choosing my own clothes, I was like, never get dresses and that just wasn't how I identified. I definitely identify more, I guess, masculine of center, if there's a way to categorize that. But that was always viewed negatively, like to be a tomboy wasn't a good thing. So, lesbian or gay was just bad. It was one of the worst things you could be because it just meant that you were disappointing your family and you were doing something wrong. Like, it was just wrong. So, yeah. Definitely negative, just wrong. It was illicit, you shouldn't be doing it.

Her career as an out, queer Chicanx/Latinx/Mexican American administrator has been full of challenges rooted in marginalization. Because of the only or one of a very few in these oppressive professional environments, she has faced emotional and physical tolls. She has questioned whether this is the field for her.

She has a kind and ambitious energy that is not fully seen by her organization. She aspires to earn a doctorate and continue to work in higher education but is unsure of in what capacity that might be. During this testimonio and plática process, EC was very candid about how she was struggling in transitioning to a new role and named that the community built through this process was helpful for her.

Elijah

Elijah is originally from the southwest and has since settled on the west coast. They named having familial challenges in their early childhood, including the loss of a parent and violence, as being defining for their experience in adulthood.

Like I said, I'd lived and grown up in [the southwest] all my life. At that point when I was at [Southwest University], I made the conscious decision to not be in contact with my biological family. The reason did I that was directly related to my identity as a queer individual. It became very clear to me that I was not safe around them, both physically and mentally and emotionally, and so I had to decide was I going to try and maintain a relationship with my two younger brothers for their sake and risk my safety? Or was I going to just leave it all behind, including my relationship with my two younger brothers? I chose to leave it all behind because I was like, 'I'm no good to them because I'm not around,' so I was lucky. If I end up coming back around, then I end up coming back around. But at this point, if you were to ask me today do I see myself reconnecting with my biological family, the answer is absolutely not, not at this point. I don't know if it'll ever happen, and I'm okay if it doesn't. So, I made a conscious decision to not communicate with my biological family, and so my [adoptive] family was super supportive of that. I told my mom and my family, I said, 'If I'm going to really make a break from all this violence, really, I need to not be in [the southwest]. I need to get myself out.' So, after graduate school, that was the perfect opportunity to go somewhere because I knew I could find a job anywhere where there was a residence hall...right?

This decision to prioritize their safety and mental and emotional health led them to move across the country to work at an institution in the South. Here they were the only out, queer, Latinx person in their division of student affairs. They spoke of their experience:

> Yeah, so I went from [the southwest] to [the south], and I didn't… Right? I was like, 'I want something different,' and I definitely got what I was asking for. It took me a long time to break into the LGBTQ community because they were like, 'Are you for real? Are you trying to infiltrate our community and hurt, be malicious?' and things like that. I mean, because there's tons of gay-owned establishments in Asheville, but you don't know that because for safety reasons, they don't publicize it. They have fricking Pride in October when it's freezing because none of the gay haters are going to come out in the snow and shank you or whatever, right? But after I went in multiple times to my supervisor, ready with my resignation letter in my back pocket, ready to hand it in and be like, 'I can't do this. Y'all are crazy,' like, 'It's just not safe here,' right ... But I was very lucky to have a supervisor who was extremely supportive despite our ideological differences.

They had been wanting to pursue a doctoral degree and the timing was right for them to go to the west coast for their program. In their first job after earning their doctorate, they soon began experiencing familiar oppressive dynamics at work. Despite being out of the south and in a more metropolitan city, they were experiencing homophobia, heterosexism, and cissexism at levels that made it impossible to stay at the institution. In their current role, they have experienced fewer marginalizing behaviors and attitudes as well as finding meaningful forms of support and affirmation.

Throughout the testimonio and plática phase of this study, Elijah approached me and the process with such candor and commitment. They talked openly and honestly about painful experiences of discrimination as well as empowering ones such as living more authentically in a gender non-conforming space during the time of this study. And as it is outlined in LatCrit and in testimonio/plática methodologies, we have begun to build a community of support as a result of this research process.

Frida

Frida was born and raised in the south-central part of the U.S. and has called many places home since then. She was raised by a fierce single mom after her father died when she was a very young child. She saw education as her way out of poverty and was a very committed student. She spoke of her educational experience:

So, I decided to apply, and I got into [Ivy League University]. I went, and it was really, really difficult. It was very elitist, not just elite but elitist and racist and classist and homophobic and sexist, but it was also a place where I met students of color who were activists. I had staff and not so many faculty, but more staff mentors who were student affairs folks who really guided us and encouraged us to become activists, and I think because of the activism, I was able to survive and create a community for me. So, I finished [Ivy League University], and I went on to my Masters at [Metro Ivy League University] in anthropology and education. I decided that education was what would get me to accomplish my goal, which was to fight discrimination. In undergrad, that was when my critical consciousness was raised around particularly race, not so much everything thing, but race and class, I think, because of the other folk of color who were teaching us, a few professors, but mainly students.

A striking part of her journey is that despite having earned degrees from some of the very best institutions in the country, she had a difficult find landing a faculty job after earning her doctorate. She was successful in finding a faculty position in an ethnic/gender studies department after her long search process where she has been for almost 15 years. In that time, she has contributed significantly to the institution serving in roles such as director of the program and chair of the department, the first queer Chicana/Latina in those roles. Another significant part of her journey during this time is she became a parent almost overnight, taking in two young children of a family member who was no longer able to parent them.

Frida is clear about who she is as a scholar activist and is unafraid to claim space and create space for others. She expressed:

> And so, really connecting to that activist identity, committed to ending oppression, all kinds of oppression and in all forms of our life, whether it's personal or professional. Right, so, my Mujeristx identity is the really huge part of how I see myself and how I lend myself both academically and personally. I also very strongly with the work of Gloria Anzaldua, and my students here at [at my university] tag themselves Anzalduistas a long time ago, and it really does encompass ... Anzaldua takes the Chicana feminist work to a different level that, still, people haven't necessarily been able to encompass in all of their work, right?

During this research project, she inspired the other women in her plática group and provided deep experiential knowledge and wisdom. She played a key role in helping to build community and deepen the experience.

Luz

Luz was born in Mexico and raised in the mountain west. She grew up undocumented but did not become aware of that until she was in high school and was beginning to apply to colleges. She spoke of her story:

> I grew up undocumented. I grew up very low income. But those weren't things that I really knew about myself until much older and it was I think that I just got like through school or like in like engaging with friends. I started to realize like that I didn't have like what other people had. Like I didn't grow up feeling like that about being poor. I felt really happy. But then I would go to my friends' houses and see where they were at. So, class had been a big part of my whole journey, like life in general. I've been really aware of class. And then through high school, in school always I did really well. I was super active in clubs and organizations and sports. And I always wanted to go to college. But when I wanted to apply for jobs and like driver's license, that's when I started realizing that we didn't have documents. So, we had like temporary protective status at the beginning. So, we had social security numbers. But I didn't know that, that was different than having residency or citizenship. So, I was like, 'Yeah, I'm gonna go to college and I'm gonna work. I'm gonna do all these things.' I remember going to college visits with professors or with teachers and then finally realizing, 'Well, yeah. Like I can't go to college.' And then when I was a senior my parents got the appointment to get our permanent residency. And all of a sudden it was like a possibility. Like, 'Oh, you can now go to college.

In this story and other parts of her testimonios, she spoke of the intersections of her identity and how they influenced her life. She continued:

Sometimes people ask me, like even right now, like when I interviewed for this job

someone asked me how old I was. And I know that's not legal and it wasn't like in a bad

intention. But I think they were just surprised and I feel like when I think back about like

why, I think about [my daughter]. I had her really young and I had to like get it together

and I had to figure out how to finish school, get a job and continue making money. I

didn't have a lot of money and so I had to figure out how to survive. And so I finished

[college]. I had her when I was a junior. And then I was part of a women's leadership

program there. It was actually for non-traditional women. So, it was like non-traditional

age, but also mothers. And that really gave me a different kind of community at [college].

It kind of opened the door for me to think about grad school.

She later also spoke of homophobia in the workplace that ultimately led her to leave the

institution where she was working. Luz is a compassionate and empathetic leader who is often

underestimated or undervalued because of how young she is perceived to be. She has begun to

consider pursuing a doctorate degree and has been successful in getting more professional

opportunities at this institution.

MB

MB arrived to the rocky mountain west via the southeast, midwest, and east coast. She

was born and raised in the southeast by Cuban immigrant parents who came to the U.S. as

unaccompanied youth. She started her testimonio with:

I identify as a queer Latina. And I go she, her, her as the pronouns. And I also have the

identities of working class and someone with a disability and who's disabilities increase

every day. Perhaps every hour. A couple things, so my journey is my parents came from

Cuba as unaccompanied youth in the 60's and they were without their families and lived

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in orphanages and foster care. So, that imprint of their life experience really made a formative impact on me. About helping others and about valuing family above all things because the ultimate sacrifice for freedom was their parents sending them ahead without them.

Early experiences of racism in school almost had MB not attend college. She had to advocate for herself and in some ways, disregard the discouragement of school administrators and faculty. She attended a large public institution in her home state for her undergraduate degree.

After undergrad, she went on to earn two master's degrees; one from the same institution as her undergrad as well as one from a large public institution in the northeast. She has worked in several functional areas in higher education, but her focus on social justice and inclusion has remained a constant in all her roles over her almost 25-year career. She spoke of experiences influencing her career path:

I feel like I have noticed whiteness and I'm very cognizant of what comes from white culture and that people deem professional. And that's been my major strife the last 20 years of a lot of stuff that is being said of this is the professional way to behave, comes from a context of, this is how white culture behaves and there is no space for other cultures or ways of being. So, I've always been drawn toward working in multicultural environments, international environments, because I feel more at home. And even within my current job the sense of whiteness was so deafening when I started working there. Having switched from a multicultural team and [international education] to going to the [teaching and learning], my only saving grace recently has been my ability to hire and my new hires are bringing in multiple different perspectives. Not the same as me.

Early on, she had colleagues say they did not want to work with her because she was gay. Despite having to navigate homophobia in almost all of her professional environments, she has remained out.

MB is a reflective and thoughtful person. She was very candid about how the experiences of oppression intersections of her race, class, gender, sexuality, and disability have all had an impact on her in both her professional and personal life. And despite all of that she remains hopeful and optimistic. She brings that energy into her supervisory relationships of both students and professional staff. Her testimonios are a representation of a long journey of navigating systems and still remaining true to oneself.

Sofia

Sofia is proud of being from the borderlands. She was born in Mexico and she and her family moved to the U.S. when she was in elementary school. And despite growing up in a city that was majority Latinx, she still faced racism and prejudice as she grew up and through high school. She has supportive parents who had gone to college and were able to advocate for her and help her navigate some of those challenges. She began her testimonio:

Sofia, pronouns she/her/hers, identify as a cis-queer Latina. I was born in Mexico and came to the States when I was six. I grew up in the Borderlands. Yeah, spent a lot of my childhood, so like would do ... High school, would do school year here and then summers in Mexico, which I think has really formed a lot of my identity. Did my undergrad at a large land grant institution. It was a former all-male military school, which impacts a lot of the tradition, the culture there…it's very white. It's very Christian. Still leadership, very male dominated. Did my undergrad in kinesiology and then, after that, I taught middle school PE and health for two and a half years; the gayest, the gayest; and left after feeling

like it wasn't a place where I could fully be out. Left for feeling like I can't talk to my

students and my players in the ways that I want to have conversations with them about. I

had a mentor in undergrad who had talked to me a little bit about working in higher

education. I was also living in the community that I was teaching and so, I literally

couldn't go to the grocery store without running into my students or go to the movies, so

it was difficult to date, right? And, then, live my life without feeling like I had to be

concerned about being out

In addition to her race/ethnicity and sexuality, her gender expression and class played a role in

how she identified:

And femininity and then feeling if I cut my hair, am I giving up my brownness? But,

then, feeling like I rock my short hair and none of my cousins in Mexico have short hair.

None of them do. So what does it mean to ... I know now that when I go there, I am

perceived as or I am Americana, right? They call me gringa. It's like the negative

messaging is actually around ... is when I go there, right? Of the not-enoughness. And we

have privilege that we have grown up here and have had access to things that they

haven't. I certainly know that I make a lot of money compared to some of my family. We

have wealth access and class access and education access. And, then that comes with the

perception of being the stuff they put on you about being not enough. But then around

coming out to my family in Mexico, it was like they would always ask me about my

boyfriends. And then when I came out, they just stopped asking.

Her story illustrates the complexity and contours of the intersections of her identities. Her

testimonios shed light on personal, professional, and academic experiences of isms and phobias.

After going to graduate school and working in the rocky mountain west, she moved to the south and worked at a large public institution. She was the only out, queer, Latina in her division. She experienced sexism, racism, and heterosexism in ways that she had never before both in her professional and professional life. She was in survival mode the entire time she was there. At her new institution, she has found more support and affirmation in her identities and has begun to carve out her role as a leader on campus. She is a committed professional who is a fierce advocate for marginalized students. She takes on leadership roles that are beyond her job responsibilities. Her testimonio reflects her connection to her culture, family, and community.

Victoree

Victoree was born and raised on the west coast and that is a big part of who she is. She has tremendous pride in where she is from. Both her parents migrated to the U.S. from Mexico and she grew up in an intergenerational home and community. As a first-generation college student, Victoree she had negative experiences of racism and homophobia that had an impact on how she engaged academically. The sole anchor for her in her undergraduate experience was the multicultural center on campus. It was also in that space where she developed her interest in higher education as a career and helped her develop her identity. She said about her identities:

> Yeah, so in pan-ethnic, Latinx, I guess, spaces, I would say Latina or Latinx, depending on what's happening. That's in pan-ethnic spaces. In LGBTQ spaces, I specifically identify as queer Chicana. That's my politics around that. In Latino spaces, I don't know that I always want to come out as queer until it's necessary. I don't know that I want to lead with that sometimes in pan-ethnic spaces. So yeah, depending on what's happening, I might add that later. But in queer or LGBTQ spaces, queer Chicana as well aligns with

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my politics and positionality and what I'm reading, things that I might bring up. Yeah. I

tend to assert myself more clearly in those spaces. Yeah.

Related to this, she spoke of how cultural centers both as a student and an administrator have had

major influences on her:

I got my fill of education and speakers and actual contact with radical people in cultural

centers, not in the classroom by any means. Yeah, the classroom was a really horizontally

violent space. I still feel that way sometimes about Latino spaces that don't even have the

A or the X. I already go in with caution. If you didn't even think to put the X, consider the

X, or do the A, the O, and the X, which is a big old debate right now, if you didn't put

that at the center of how you define the space, then I'm already entering with caution. I'm

not going to lead with my queerness. Yeah. Or maybe I will. Again, it depends on how I

want to assert myself.

Her story gives insight to the complexity of oppressive experiences within and across identity

groups. These experiences fuel her continued work in higher education administration.

After working in the field for a bit, she then pursued her doctorate in higher education.

She was a student representative for her institution's governing board during her doctoral

program and she credits this experience for learning so much about how universities operate. As

the first out, queer, Latina student representative, she was a vocal advocate for students. She has

built her professional career in and scholarship about cultural centers. She credits cultural centers

as being the reason she stayed in college, a space for her critical learning about power and

oppression, and a place where she belonged. Now in her work in cultural centers, she aims to

create and maintain those spaces for and with students.

Victoree has self-assured energy that is rooted in her values. When she spoke of her work and her life, she did so with clarity and passion. She frequently speaks in metaphor, giving her testimonios texture and vivid imagery. In addition to her professional and scholarly ambitions, she has a strong drive to have a healthy and whole life that is rooted in joy and community.

These participants have almost 90 years of combined experience in higher education administration and have served in a variety of functional areas. And while they all had individual and unique experiences, they also had significant commonalities with the pervasiveness of oppression. They all clearly identified how they had to navigate racism, sexism, and heterosexism and many of them had salient class consciousness as well. They were all in various points in their own relationship to how they navigated it spanning from still working to find their voice all the way to speaking and acting confidently with little fear of risk or consequence. They are leaders, activists, scholars, chingonas, storytellers, resisters, and healers. The following chapter will review the findings of the study.

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS

Cuentito: I had been carrying Anzaldúa's book, Light in the Dark in my bag for more than a year. Everywhere I went, it went with me. It went with me to work, coffee shops and to local, national, and international destinations. I would read pages on a plane. I read it to my sons. I would read a page between meetings. It went with me to 3 queer weddings. I didn't read it in sequential order. I would open it to random pages and read that page and soak in the wisdom as though it was a tarot card or horoscope or gospel. On our queercation with some of our closest queer friends, we read from it in nature to set collective healing intentions. It had in a way, become a security item, connecting me to my doctoral work beyond coursework and a seemingly never-ending task list. I wanted to read the whole thing, but for some reason, it did not happen in order or in haste. It was in time, in community, and in my own time. In there was the Coyolxauhqui Imperative, the thing that made my data make sense, but I just didn't know it yet. It was with me the whole time. As most things are. With us, in us, the whole time.

In this chapter, I present the findings from the testimonios and pláticas with the participants that transpired over five months. The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the leadership experiences of queer, Chicana/Latina higher education administrators. As outlined in the methodology, findings from a study rooted in CRT, LatCrit, and Chicana Feminist Epistemology include a reflexive approach with the participants and the researcher. Arriving at these findings was an iterative process that included coding, categorizing, theming, and member checking at multiple stages throughout the process.

The findings from the experiences of these queer, Chicana/Latina higher education administrators begins with a brief introduction to the Coyolxauhqui Imperative, which frames the findings. Then, the identified themes will be explored through the participant testimonios and platicas. Throughout the chapter, I will also share my own testimonios in the form of my cuentitos when they are of particular relevance to the findings.

Living the Coyolxauhqui Imperative

The themes I identified through the analysis process initially seemed to be divided into two main categories: the experience of oppression and the resistance to oppression. They were clearly connected and related but that seemed overly simplified. The Coyolxauhqui Imperative, as Anzaldúa (2015) frames it, is a necessitated way of making and unmaking the self in the context of oppression, "woundings, traumas, racism, and other acts of violation que hechan pedazos nuestras almas, split us, scatter our energies, and haunt us" (p. 1). Figure 5.1 and the imperative references the metaphorical exploration of the story of an Aztec god who was beheaded and dismembered by her brother, the god of war, through a Chicana feminist lens. From a politicized perspective, the story of Coyolxauhqui's dismemberment can be seen as patriarchal violence rooted in dominance (Gaspar de Alba, 2014).

Figure 5.1 Illustration of Coyolxauhqui

It is from a politicized perspective where Anzaldúa (2015) builds her imperative, framing the result of patriarchy and oppression as fragmenting. For these participants, their experiences of oppression had a fragmenting effect, in essence, making them feel less whole and torn apart.

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From this fragmenting, the imperative suggests that a re-making—a re-unification—of the fragmented parts must occur in order to continue to resist against and survive the fragmentations of oppression. This cyclical process takes the image of Coyolxauhqui and theorizes it into the imperative rooted in the constant demand and need to be healing from this oppression, this fragmentation. It is through this cyclical relationship between fragmentation and remaking that individual and collective testimonios of the participants take shape.

In this study, all participants' testimonios spoke of how they experience oppression, particularly racism, sexism, and heterosexism in their personal and professional lives as leaders. These themes were categorized as "sources of fragmentation" and include: the labor of oppression parkour and consequences for living and leading from a place of authenticity. In response to these fragmentations, participants also found ways to transcend oppressive dynamics and environments. These are the themes of "making and remaking" and include the following subthemes: thriving in nepantla and intentional healing for nos/otras. Each of the themes were further explored in more nuanced detail by three subthemes. While the data were presented in order, the relationship is important as each subtheme is in response to the other. The testimonios of fragmentation and making and remaking are not to be seen as independent from one another or discreet. Rather they are interconnected and as the imperative suggests, are in constant cycle of fragmentation and remaking for healing and building of something new that transcends the impact of oppression.

Unmaking: Sources of Fragmentation

Negotiating and navigating oppression in the participants' professional and personal lives caused fragmentation in the material consequences of isms and phobias they faced. They experienced oppression at the textured intersections of race, gender, sexuality, class, ability,

documentation status, gender expression, and age. In fragmentation, participants felt alone, voiceless, lacked agency, faced a spectrum of consequences, and a myriad of other byproducts of oppression. Their stories illustrate the intercentricity of their identities and the nuanced experiences of oppression at the intersections of those identities. The following themes give insight to the types of fragmentations the participants spoke most about.

The Labor of Oppression Parkour

All participants told stories and expressed the impact of having to negotiate and navigate oppression and dominant norms. Their testimonios were full of sometimes seemingly unreal experiences that made it clear that what they had to do was not just endure but go to extreme extents to be able to remain in their jobs, connected to family, or just survive. The image that came to mind was them jumping through, around, above, and below obstacles that came their way, a metaphoric or symbolic version of the sport, parkour. Parkour can be described as a style of free walking where individuals "overcome the constraints of their environment" using extreme or unorthodox body movements to get from one place to another (Saville, 2008, p. 893). People who practice parkour, jump, tumble, roll, scale, leap, stretch and more to overcome and traverse the built environment. Parkour is not just a fancy way of walking. It requires practice, awareness of the environment from multiple perspectives, and risk is always present. In similar way, the participants had to overcome the constraints of oppressive environments that are marginalizing to them in often precarious or extreme ways that require tremendous mental and emotional fortitude where risk is always present. The three main subthemes related to this theme were: "I can't think of a single one": Structural invisibility; "You should just take some medicine or something": Negotiating disclosure; and "We endure a lot of shit": Oppression at the intersections.

"I can't think of a single one:" Structural invisibility. Each of the participants named they were often the only, the first, or one of very a very few out queer, Chicana/Latinas in their workplace. This lack of representation varied from occurring in an immediate department all the way to the division level. It was not just about being almost non-existent numerically, but it also signified a professional, emotional, social, or academic invisibility. Sometimes they were the only Chicana/Latina and quite often they were the only queer Chicana/Latina. When put into perspective, it might have meant that a person was *one* amongst nearly 1000 in a division at a large institution or that they were the very first queer Chicana/Latina in a role, in 2018. This dynamic was isolating, tokenizing, and set the participants up to be under intense scrutiny. Elijah, for example, in one of our interviews struggled to even think of another queer Chicana/Latina in their institution. They said:

> Like I can't think of anyone. I can't think of anyone, you know. Like if they are out there, they're not ... yeah I don't know, you don't want to put the onus on one individual to like go out to a community, but at the same time. Like you know, there's not many of us out there. Or if there are pockets of communities, there're places like, you know, cold Colorado, you know? They're not in like sunny [beachtown] man, or anything like that, you know? Because at the end the day, we have to go where the work is.

Here, Elijah illustrates how needing to go where there is work is often more of a serious consideration than knowing they would be the only one. Knowing they had worked at several institutions and still were at a loss to name one person is indicative of how many queer Chicana/Latina administrators find themselves navigating institutions alone.

Additionally, some participants felt like they were tokenized in the workplace. Experiences such as being asked to represent certain populations on committees or being told

they were a diversity hire evidenced this dynamic. Several participants spoke of this dynamic of feeling they were hired for a "diversity interest" in indirect ways. Elijah however, had a very direct and explicit experience related to being a "diversity hire:"

> Yeah. I had experiences like colleagues would tell me in staff meetings the only reason I was hired was because of my last name and the fact that I'm gay. So, I was multiple check boxes for the university. I was a diversity hire.

Elijah had colleagues directly say what other participants had a hunch people were thinking but not saying. This occurrence is what I named as a "three-fer dynamic," allowing institutions to check off three diversity checks: a woman, a person of color, and a queer person. Elijah's treatment is an example of the conditions this creates for some administrators.

The awareness of being the only one was common with participants. They all named it in direct and indirect ways. Some said it nonchalantly and moved on, as though it was insignificant despite their stories seeming anything but. Others were very connected to how it made them feel. MB for example spoke of being the only one during both of our individual interviews. During our first conversation it came up as it connected to her early career and in the context of the early 1990s:

> So, I was the only out, queer person on my staff. There were other queer people I'm firmly convinced, some secretive and some not knowing it yet. But at the time I was one of the only so I took that responsibility seriously because I knew that there were others who were and either didn't know it yet or couldn't say it yet and I was out for them.

In our last conversation, she nuanced the experience of being the only one, making connections with the importance of representation, but that it also comes with a cost.

It's the role model, the affirmation. I don't know, just it makes me realize if you're only

one and everyone else is the same, how draining that can feel. So, when I think about

sexism and hetero-sexism and just some of this country's political environment with

Latinos, that can be tiring.

EC and Sofia also spoke of being numerically underrepresented. For EC, it happened in more

than one instance at more than one institution around different parts of her identity. In one role

she was one of few Latinas, despite being at a minority serving institution:

I think part of it was because of the department that I was in, Student Life, at the

community college isn't really looked at ... it isn't as respected, I think, as it may be at the

four-year. I wasn't a counselor and there also weren't very many brown women, quite

frankly. Even though our student population was extremely diverse, and we were

absolutely a POC serving community, the administrators, of course, were mostly male

and, with the exception of maybe one or two black folks, maybe one or two Latinos, by

and large it was like 70%, 80% white, male and cis and straight.

Here, she puts the fact that she was one of a few into context with the institution and the students

they served. EC later talked about her current role, again, one of a very few:

I'm navigating being an administrator, being a manager now, being in a position of

authority and also being institutionally out. And, I have to tell you, and I think I already

shared this, I'm the only out administrator out of 65 or so administrators, district-wide. I

know I'm not the only LGBT person but I'm certainly the only one that's out about it.

Technically, I'm only one of two brown Latinx administrators, out of 65 or 70 folks.

Again, EC makes connections beyond her own experience and in the context of her being in a

leadership role. Sofia also spoke of being the only one in an entire division:

Feeling like I didn't have colleagues. I was the only Latina in the division of Student Affairs. The entire division of Student Affairs…So, it was super isolating, and then [southern town] is fucked up. I mean, when we were moving there, people called [southern town] a blue county in a red state and I'm like, "This shit's purple, not even blue." Yeah, it's still the South. It's still super white. All the migrant communities lived on the outskirts of [southern town]. Yeah, so accessing anything brown-related, I had to really be intentional about finding it an hour and a half away in [southern big city].

Lastly, Frida and Victoree both explicitly spoke of being the first in their roles. Being the first in a role also brought with it a level of negotiation and navigation. Frida's testimonio gave insight to her experience:

So, then, I was the first ... I'm pretty sure the first Chicana Latina queer chair probably in the whole university, but especially in the college. Our college is the most diverse…I was the first one to have that level of basically power in the institution, and it definitely shifted my whole life and perspective on how things get done at the institution. I, once again, became the only brown person amongst predominantly white males and maybe a sprinkling of white women. I started to feel like I did in undergrad like I was quiet when ... and scared to talk amongst a room full of white folk. In undergrad, it was white elite, predominantly males that took up the most space, and then, in the chair meetings, it was predominantly white males and sometimes, white females. I just had not been in that space in a long time.

Of particular note in this excerpt is the resurgence of feelings from her undergrad experience despite having earned more degrees and attained the title of associate professor. That was the effect on her. Victoree also spoke of being first in her role:

I've been the first ... There's a lot of room for firsts for folks of color and queer folks of

color in particular. I think this generation is going to arrive at a lot of firsts. I've been the

first in a lot of my roles. Yeah, so here I'm the first queer director that they've had at the

cross-cultural center.

Victoree noted the significance of time, in that she believes queer folks of color will continue to

be the first in roles because of the time we are living in. From these testimonios, it was clear that

being the only, one of the few, or a first is taxing and requires tremendous navigational skill to

traverse the obstacles of higher education contexts.

   "You should just take some medicine or something:" Negotiating disclosure. For

many participants, various parts of their identities are not immediately visibly recognizable.

Disclosure is often associated with the labor having to come out as queer to people, which was

certainly true for every participant. However, it also related to other identities such as having a

disability, undocumented status, and even racial/ethnic identity. The experiences of disclosure

ran the full spectrum of being supported and affirmed all the way to experiencing harm and

threats of violence. These experiences then influenced how they would decide to conceal parts of

their identity in certain contexts or not.

   Luz had multiple experiences with having to negotiate and navigate disclosure in clear

and complex ways. In one of her previous professional roles, she had negative, consequential

treatment after coming out:

   Yeah. So, when I came out I was working at [Urban University]. Like going through the

   divorce and all of it, it was just like a lot. So, I started sharing with people at work. I

   actually had a really bad experience at work, which is one of the reasons why I decided to

   leave [Urban University]. So, one of the people that I worked with started making

comments about me. Like my sexual orientation to the students that I supervised about

me being confused and me not knowing what I wanted and all this stuff. Started saying

that I was cheating on my ex. I don't even know her very well. Like she was the

administrative assistant. Well one of the students told me. And it was like a big thing and

we went through an EO process. But before we finished it I was just like really

exhausted. Like my supervisor, who is awesome, I think they were also really good

friends and so it was hard. I didn't feel like she showed up how a supervisor should have

in that. And I just don't think she knew enough about sexual orientation to advocate or to

understand why, like what was happening was not okay. And so they made her apologize

to me. And she's like, 'I don't even know why I said these things. I don't know where they

came from. I don't believe any of these things about you.' But I'm like, 'They come from

somewhere. You don't just go around saying all these awful things about people.' But by

then it was like done. It was like, 'I don't wanna work here. I don't wanna feel like I'm

working in a place that's hostile.' So, I started looking for other jobs then.

She also had an additional layer of disclosure with her daughter in that she also had to navigate

disclosure because of having two moms as illustrated in her continued comments:

But now, figuring out how to navigate my queerness with her and how that has an impact

on her and her coming out all the time or being ashamed of us. It's just been on my

mind…you know…she is hanging out with more friends and so we're around more

parents and so we have a good relationship with her dad so we'll all show up in spaces

together. And people are like, "what's happening?" trying to figure out who is who and I

don't know, it's just like a constant trying to figure out how to show up in different

spaces, not only at home with family but also in public spaces.

Luz's testimonio was, unfortunately, a clear example of the material consequence of disclosing identity, particularly queerness, in the workplace. Her experience at Urban University literally altered her career path, she had to leave the environment all together. For MB, there were elements of power that were significant for how she came out at work:

> So, I don't find in my current role, I have just been open but it's just been part of me and there's been no show of a coming out because I also have power. I have power in my position so it matters less if people have an issue with it because there's only one other person above me. That changes a lot. Because then I meet the students who, we have a student in our learning community, she's Latina, sophomore, same as I was when I came out, just came out to her parents. They reacted very poorly, just like mine and she is struggling. Financially and to find her way. And it's a good reminder that we're in 2018 and here this young lady is experiencing what I experienced in 1991. So, it still continues.

For MB, her position and authority at work offered some insulation from consequences she once felt at work for being out. What she also reflected on was that for younger folks on campus, not much has changed in terms of the potential cost for coming out. MB, Luz, and Frida later spoke about this together in our first plática in greater detail.

> *Luz:* I think there's a few things, definitely family dynamics. In terms of being a queer woman within a highly religious family, I'm always thinking about how to show up in different places, like when we go visit family or my parents. I recently got married last year and most of my family didn't come. And I think about I don't know, it's always a constant struggle of figuring out who is with me and who is not with me and my mom has come a long way and I know that she would kick anyone's ass in my family now. But it was definitely a long road and it's just my mom. But when we are with everyone together,

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it just gets really hard and then I think about the impact all of this has on [my daughter] and I think when she was little and I came out she was proud and she would go to school and be like, 'I have two moms, I have three moms and a dad.' People are like, what? But now, figuring out how to navigate my queerness with her and how that has an impact on her and her coming out all the time or being ashamed of us. It's just been on my mind…you know…she is hanging out with more friends and so we're around more parents and so we have a good relationship with her dad so we'll all show up in spaces together. And people are like, 'what's happening?' trying to figure out who is who and I don't know, it's just like a constant trying to figure out how to show up in different spaces, not only at home with family but also in public spaces. And then also generational tension between again, in family. I think a lot of generational tension at work. I feel like I'm always, I feel really young and the work that I do, I'm not feeling like I have a voice in certain spaces because I'm like a certain age and that has been on my mind lately as I entered this new role. But I've always had stuff, because I was a young mom and so I was feeling like I'm too young to be where I'm at. So…those are a couple of the tensions are being queer and then like the age pieces for me.

Frida: Okay, I'll go next. I mentioned that my family is a challenge I think, because more than anything because of the needs that we have. The hardest part for me being in academia has been reconciling with the fact that my family, one that the goal of going to college, making money and taking care of a family is not easy enough, it's not an easy thing to do. It's both a burden and it's unrealistic and unreachable. The reality is that for people who grow up in poverty, the majority of our families will continue in poverty… But everybody accepts me being queer, everyone accepts me being radical and feminist,

so that part is really easy at home but I think just the realistic status of our lives outside of the university makes the university hard to take serious sometimes. Especially my privileged colleagues and then also there's a lot of guilt involved. Because of everything that I do for everybody on campus, I'm always helping all the colleagues, all the students, all the committee members and yet I feel like my family has incredible needs that I'm never gonna be able to meet. So those are my biggest tensions.

MB: I agree with you, sometimes the insanity, you hear student stories or your own stories and sometimes I wonder why I'm spending so much time and money trying to advance my education in this field when I just think it's part of the game. I do believe in education but it's also organized in somebody else's game.

Here, they complicated the notion of disclosure over the course of time and context. And for Frida in particular, while she had acceptance as a queer person, that level of acceptance from her family did not necessarily benefit her in the work place or in the demands of her outside of the academy.

Connected, disclosure also related to life outside of work as well as other identities that ultimately had an impact on how participants had to negotiate across contexts. Having to navigate disclosure with family was a common struggle. Victoree's testimonio exemplifies this struggle:

I came out, and my dad thought I was going to tell him that I was pregnant. So, he was like, 'Oh okay.' He sort of took it as he was relieved, because he said his worst nightmare was that we would get pregnant from some cholo in the town that we were living in. He almost took it well. But then my mom agonized and thought she did something wrong. Took it really personally. Yeah. I stayed with my brother for two weeks, and then I came

back to live with them. Then my dad, he said, 'If you're going to stay with your brother, you better pay rent.' I was like, 'I'm not trying to stay with my brother.' I know. He's so rude. He's like, 'You better help him out in the house.' I was like, 'I'm not staying with him.' I'm like, 'I'm going to come home. I'm just giving my mom time to calm down.' He was like, 'Okay, well just be patient with your mother.' He's like, 'I know this is a new country and people do this.' He was so like, this is normal here.

She later spoke of how her immediate and extended family continued to struggle with coming to terms with the reality of her sexuality. She even had to deal with the tension at her wedding to her longtime partner. Another participant also named not having family members present at their wedding because of their lack of support.

MB gave insight to her experience as a light-skinned Latina and having a disability that is not always outwardly expressed. She often has to disclose her racial/ethnic identity and disability in addition to her sexuality. Her story of a recent experience at work illustrates this dynamic:

And it's so funny, because I appear very white. I went to a staff of color and faculty of color joint meeting, and I went up to ask for a tag to write my name. And the gentleman at the counter told me, 'This is for staff of color.' And the two women of color with him said, 'She *is* staff of color.' He was like, 'Oh. Oh, I'm so sorry.' I was like, 'Yeah, I know I look pretty white.' And yay. I'm like, 'Yes,' and something about ... and understanding that there's privilege that I get because I can navigate those. Some people can't tell I'm queer, which just blows my mind, because most people can. I don't even have to out myself anymore. People are just like, 'Yeah, you're gay.' But I find that in this new environment, I'm having to claim my identity, because it may not be visible. That's been

disability, that's been ethnicity, and then that's also been queerness. Maybe that's why I'm

so damn tired.

This story highlights the complexity of the work of having to disclose identity. She was clear

about the tension between having privilege as well as oppressed identities. The closing sentence

sums up one of the many byproducts of the labor constantly having to disclose. Disclosure

certainly represented the ways in which the participants had to evaluate the environment from

multiple perspectives to assess risk and then decide on a course.

"We endure a lot of shit:" Oppression at the intersections. One of the central themes

common to all the participants was they explicitly named how, at various points throughout their

personal and professional lives, they had a more complex experience of oppression at the

intersections of their identities. One of the common intersections that affected their experiences

was having grown up in poverty. The impact of poverty on their other identities and experiences

influenced how and why they wanted to pursue a college degree and how they frame their own

work today.

Frida's story clearly illustrated how she developed her class consciousness from a very

young age. She talked about growing up in poverty and made direct connections to how it

connected to her personal, professional, and academic life. She opened our first interview with

the following:

> I grew up in pretty much in poverty, raised by a single parent. My father died when I was
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> eight years old. He was only 30, maybe 31, and so, my mom was single parent that raised
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> three of us. She had very minimal education. She left high school, was pushed out of high
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> school because she got married when she was a senior in high school, and they weren't
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> allowed to go to school with their husbands. So, she had to leave school, and she was also

never really supported in school by her family because she had a learning disability that was never diagnosed, but she was a very fierce, strong ... She is a very fierce, strong woman who raised the three of us, and I think along the way, my mom realized that ... I remember one of the stories that I recall is that even though she hated school because she struggled in school, and the teachers were racist and awful towards her, she met Henry Cisneros, who was the first Hispanic/Latino mayor of San Antonio, and I remember her telling me that he was encouraging these poor Mexican and Mexican American folk who were ... At my sister's school actually, he was telling them that they had to encourage their kids to go to college. And I think that, coupled with just wanting something different for her kids, made her want to support us. So, even though she never had a college education, she committed herself to making sure that we were supported at school. So, even though we were very poor, she never asked me to work.

She later went on to talk about how she saw college as her way out of poverty. She excelled and really focused in high school and was able to earn a scholarship to an ivy league school for undergrad. She also made connections to how this consciousness influenced her leadership. Frida's story was emblematic of most of the other participants motivation to go to college was rooted in having grown up in poverty.

Conversely, Sofia spoke of growing up in a family that had more of a middle-class status, but the intersection of nationality connected to class for her. She and her family came to the U.S. from Mexico when she was a young girl. She had clarity on the fact that she grew up with more means than her family back in Mexico. he reflected on how that showed up for her:

So what does it mean to ... I know now that when I go there, I am perceived as or I am Americana, right? They call me gringa. It's like the negative messaging is actually around

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... is when I go there, right? Of the not-enoughness. And we have privilege that we have grown up here and have had access to things that they haven't. I certainly know that I make a lot of money compared to some of my family. We have wealth access and class access and education access. And, then that comes with the perception of being the stuff they put on you about being not enough. But then around coming out to my family in Mexico, it was like they would always ask me about my boyfriends. And then when I came out, they just stopped asking.

This story is an example of the nuanced experience of the intersection of more dominant identities with subordinated ones, embodying the concept of nepantla, the in-between space. It is an example of how they had to navigate holding multiple truths at the same time.

For Luz, the particular intersections she had to navigate in addition to her class were her age, parental status, and growing up undocumented. The particular contours of having to navigate systems at intersections was clearly evident for Luz. She connected how these experiences impacted how she waited until later in her life to come out as queer. She also talked about becoming a parent in college and consistently being perceived as young:

But I think that was what started my whole educational career I feel like. So that's kind of like where I began my education. I went to [Local University]. Again, I was like super involved in a lot of things [in college]. I also had a daughter in college and that totally shifted my future. I feel like I had to grow up really fast. Sometimes people ask me, like even right now, like when I interviewed for this job someone asked me how old I was. And I know that's not legal and it wasn't like in a bad intention. But I think they were just surprised and I feel like when I think back about like why, I think about [my daughter]. I had her really young and I had to like get it together and I had to figure out how to finish

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school, get a job and continue making money. I didn't have a lot of money and so I had to figure out how to survive.

Oppression at these intersections keeps showing up. To be asked how old you are in an interview for a director role is not only absurd, it is illegal. Yet, she found herself having to navigate how to answer that question and hold the tension that those folks had the fate of her getting that job or not in her hands. She has had to navigate at the micro level as well as the long-term macro level.

This theme was a clearly a place of connection for the participants during our plática. Participants framed the impact of oppression on them from an intersectional frame. They all spoke in ways that connected to and built upon each other's stories.

MB: You know what's funny for me, the thing that's resonating, I don't know where it would fall under here but it came in Luz sharing some of her story and when she was talking, I heard visibility and having a voice. And it struck in me, starting to think about experiences and times where I have not felt like my voice has been heard because of either gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity or the intersection of all of those. And that feeling invisible and being so frustrated because the story being told, the narrative being told isn't inclusive of everyone's experience and I can see it so clear, because my experience wasn't like everyone else's that's in power. And so these are all situations where I'm in rooms with people making decisions and there being a vacuum of other voices and other people being visible to them. I don't know if that falls under leadership?

Carmen: It could be something. Yeah. But if that's what sparked for you as you were thinking and hearing these stories, yeah for sure.

MB: Visibility and voices, that really just stood out to me.

Luz: Yeah I think in terms of visibility and voice, like finding spaces within the institution where I feel like I'm seen, whether that's like it's spaces with colleagues or any place where I can be who I am. But sometimes we are talking about being in meetings where people ask a lot, why are we talking about this? And then being able to go back to my office and the students, and feeling like my voice matters here and I'm seen here. That has resonated a lot with me so finding spaces within the institution or even outside of it where I feel like I am seen as also, I feel like working in higher ed is so much…I've struggled with it for a long time and sometimes I struggle with it now, that my value of who I am as a person is tied to the work that I do, my education and this pressure that I'm not as valuable if I'm not all these things or if I don't have a PhD or all of these things. Yeah. So just finding my own value and feeling that it's not just tied to the work that I do or to what I have or don't have. It's the visibility and all of those pieces, trying to find my own worth for myself and define it for myself and defining for myself versus the institution defining it for me.

Carmen: Yeah. For sure. Yeah, I think that it's really hard especially when I think about you, what you said about being asked in your interview about how old you are. And how you got to this position so fast, I feel like they would never ask that of a dude.

Luz: No.

Carmen: Yeah, how about for you Frida, are any of these resonating or landing particularly saliently right now?

Frida: Yeah, I think I'm thinking about several of them. They're all very salient in my life and in my daily thoughts and practices. I said I'm applying to these jobs and partly I'm applying to them because I feel like I've outgrown my institution. I feel really resentful of

the administration who I feel like they didn't really appreciate the work that I did, I felt

like while they pretended to be in partnership and support, they really did work to push

me out. And giving work to sustain me in that position, I felt like for me being the first

and only Chicana chair on campus and then doing one term, while I think it was actually

really good that I did only one term, because again I want to get my full professorship

before I do any administration and I don't even want to be an administrator and at the

same time there's power in administration, it's really easy.

From all of these testimonios and the plática, it was clear the location of oppression was rarely

associated with just one identity. Rather, it was an interconnected experience of oppression that

the participants had to negotiate and navigate. The systems and institutions at which these

participants worked and went to school were fraught with obstacles that were intentionally or

unintentionally upheld, necessitating extreme navigational skills from the participants.

Cuentito: I am from the high desert of northern New Mexico where generations of my family have come from. The earth is red and brown and black. The sky goes on for days and the sun beats down relentlessly. It is a rugged terrain. Yet, things grow there. Sage, yucca, alfalfa, quelites, cactus, capulin. Tradition, love, and community also grow there. I, along with several of my cousins, spent every school break and lots of weekends with my gramita and grampo on the ranchito. My gramita was industrious and fierce. She made blankets out of old jeans. They were like a weighted blanket before that was a thing. She wore red lipstick. And still does in her 90's. She's fierce like that. They told us stories of our land and about how the white men came to steal it. And how we fought them off. We were taught to be proud of where we come from. Of being brown and speaking Spanish (or Spanglish in many cases). When doing work with my dad on the ranchito, he would say things like, 'mija, we always save nails or wire, porque we might need them or someone else might.' An overt lesson in our status as having meager economic means but an abundance of cultural means. At the trailer park we grew up in 'the city,' I remember when we would all get the government commodities, we'd be psyched about it at home but embarrassed at school. Like my gramita, my mom is the queen of making something out of nothing. She would cut our hair, sew all the things, and make us home cooked meals. Out of almost nothing. I was developing my class consciousness without being aware of it. By the time I reached high school I knew what it meant. My family carried shame about it, so we tried to mask it as best we could most of the time. In college, I experienced so much dissonance not only around growing up poor but around my racialized identity. I was a manita, from northern New Mexico. I didn't realize that was so complicated for others to understand what that meant. I was assumed to be from another country from white people and from Latinx people I was thought to

be strange because I didn't have an immigration story or relatives in another country. I developed shame around my racial/ethnic identity for the first time as an almost grown up. So, then in college when I came to fully accept that I was queer, there was no way I was going to tell my family. It would only bring us more shame. It would be years before I came out and lived authentically as a result. It seems so long ago though. Pride and shame are a tenuous mix of emotions to hold about who I am and where I'm from.

Consequences for Living and Leading from a Place of Authenticity

All participants spoke of how, despite the many fragmenting ways in which they experienced oppression, they worked hard to be their true, authentic selves in as many settings as possible, including and especially at work. Inclusion and social justice are central to their work and life. In this vein, being their authentic selves in all their identities was a critical component of that as a means to address racism, sexism, heterosexism, and beyond. Living and leading authentically looks like many things, including speaking up in instances of inequity, choosing a career path where they can remain committed to social justice, having a gender expression and professional aesthetic that challenges and resists normative expectations, using culturally relevant approaches with students, and much more. However, it has come at a cost for them. The main categories in this theme are: "There was zero room for error:" Being under constant surveillance; "You're not welcome here:" Pervasiveness of isms and phobias; and "Damn, we're tired:" Embodied trauma.

"There was zero room for error:" Being under constant surveillance. One of the ways the participants authentically led was by being committed to advocating for marginalized folks on campus. They were often affirmed in this role by being asked to serve on committees or work on campus-wide initiatives and in some cases, it was a formal part of their job. However, their supervisors or colleagues did not always appreciate their advocacy and approach. It was like a "not like that" kind of treatment. They were policed in how and what they could say, how

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they dressed, and how they performed "professionalism." In EC's role, this has happened in very overt ways:

Being told after a meeting that I shouldn't have said what is aid because it countered what the administrative narrative is that we want to relate it to faculty. So, because I sided with faculty it was almost like I was on the wrong team. Being told that that was probably not the most effective communication I could have used, and to not do it again. Then also to be ... Then I'm prepped for meetings, so I'll be called in when we're going to have a meeting with faculty and I'll be told, 'I know this is how you feel EC and I appreciate that you're passionate about this subject, but I need you to hold the party line while we're in this room and we can talk about it afterwards, if you want.' But I mean, listen, I think even if I were outside of this room I don't think it's a secret that I don't share certain philosophies with certain folks but I also think that's why they hired me because I can then be that person to give voice to some folks, who don't feel comfortable giving voice to their own passion. I don't know.

An interesting component of this story was how she felt like she was hired because of the way she would advocate for students and yet was still highly policed about the way in which she did that. Sofia also shared an explicit way she was stifled in her work:

Absolutely. And stifled not just in clothing, but even how and when you talk in meetings, making sure ... Our admin assistant used to say this to the students all the time, "To act right, do right, be right." So, feeling like we had to always have our shit in a line and it had to be good and there was zero room for error because of the scrutiny.

This example illustrates how the policing impacted a person physically: how they dressed and how they behaved. She went on to say when she and her other queer women of color colleagues

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wanted to dress in ways more aligned with their authentic gender expression, they would all agree to do it on the same day so that there would be safety in numbers. The ways in which the participants expressed their physical aesthetic, was a counter-narrative, breaking with the rigid gendered expectations of the work environment. The concept of being under surveillance was present for all participants in overt and covert ways.

"You're not welcome here:" Pervasiveness of isms and phobias. There was a material consequence, an actual fragmentation in their lives, for living and leading authentically for almost all participants. For one participant, colleagues did not want to work with her because she was queer. Another began to be mistreated by colleagues and was not supported after coming out to them. For another, it looked like having to leave an industry for which she had studied in undergrad and had dreamed of working. All examples are not just emotionally challenging, they are examples of actual, material consequences of oppression. Elijah chose to leave one of their jobs because of how their complaints of being treated less than were going ignored. They spoke about continued consequence after having left the office:

> She still doesn't respond, is totally blackballing me. I'm just like, 'You know what? I'm going to continue to be the bigger person because I know I didn't do anything wrong.' I left. Yes, it was super inconvenient for them. But I left because I came to you, and you didn't support me. I was telling you that this guy was making feel uncomfortable, and the reason I didn't want to come to work anymore was because of him. You did nothing. I told her directly that I had a strong feeling that it had to do with my queer identity, and the fact ... Here's the crazy thing is my partner would come over to the office to have lunch or do whatever, and he would talk it up with her. I'm convinced that ... I still to this day strongly believe it's because I'm more masculine presenting. [The admin] had a hard

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time with it. Yeah, it was his issue, but it impacted me every day to the point where I

didn't want to go to work. And I felt really unsupported in a place that I thought I was

going to be supported.

Elijah thought moving to a more metropolitan area on the west coast would set them up to have a

less oppressive environment than they did at the university in the south. However, they ended up

having an experience that was more toxic and full of isms and phobias to the degree that made it

impossible to remain in their role. Likewise, MB also decided to leave her role because of an

increasingly oppressive work environment. She noted:

So I want to make sure I don't totally become used to it and I start to settle with things.

And I will say that when I look back, it was some of the white privilege I was dealing

with staff, and it was the shit in a more white kind of culture that was emerging that made

me leave. We have some people in power that have very good hearts, but they do not

realize how their whiteness is acting out and even how class impacts. I will say, I stopped

enjoying my job as much, because these folks were not aware of their blind spots.

She later went on to elaborate and say she was having to carry more of the diversity and equity

work load and there was little significant progress being made. The dynamics of whiteness were

taking a large enough toll on her to make her find a new job.

"Damn we're tired:" Embodied trauma. It is almost without question these

fragmentations of the body/mind/spirit would have a detrimental effect on the participants'

emotional, mental, and physical health and wellbeing. There were experiences of depression,

isolation, anxiety, panic attacks, and physiological manifestations of all of these in the body.

Most participants were in therapy and named that practice as a critical factor for their ability to

remain in higher education. They were holding not only their own experiences, but those of their

students and colleagues as well. Sofia spoke of an experience just after graduate school that still has taken an emotional toll on her to this day. Her story exemplified the ways in which isms and phobias pull apart the elements of ourselves that hold our worth. It is not merely how we are made to feel. There are actual realities that fragment and cause suffering. She spoke of an experience that has had lasting effects on her:

> I mean, I think my experience in [my graduate] program, just around, a) struggling with all the bullshit of my cohort, but then also feeling like my professors were assholes to me, and then sending messaging about ... like calling up employers, telling them to not hire me because I'm an angry person of color. When I found that out, I don't know… it yeah, I cried for a long time and I think it took me a long time to even unpack it, right? To be like, 'No, I am worth being in this field.' See, out of all the things, I'm crying about this specific thing, right? Yeah, yeah, yeah. So, somebody I thought I trusted. I think it took me several years to let go of the narrative that [the institution] had created about me as a professional.

Even as we spoke, years after this specific incident, Sofia was still welling up and getting emotional about the impact of the oppressive treatment she experienced. Elijah also spoke of the impact to them. They wanted to be there for students and yet they were experiencing treatment that made it hard to remain:

> 'Damn we're tired.' You know, like we're just tired. Like we're tired of holding so much space for so many other people. You know, being expected to still produce this quality, life changing transformational experience for students, you know? But at the same time, we're still here.

Elijah's comments about being tired are reflective of not only the toll on themself but the additional layer of having to, wanting and needing to, be there for students. The spaces we often occupy expect so much from us to show up in a particular way for people and institutions. Victoree shared being with her students is the best place for her in the cross cultural center and when she is out of the space is when it is the most taxing on her well-being:

> But the moment I leave to go serve on a committee, I come back aggravated. And I talk it through with my staff, but some of that stuff will stay with me until the end of the day when I'm driving home. So, I have to psyche myself up when I have days where I'll have maybe three back to back meetings, and I know some slime is going to land on me. I know it. I know slime is gonna land on me from these meetings and that I'm gonna be irritated, I'm gonna be aggravated. I need buffer time before I go, I need buffer time when I come back, because I come back irritable. 'Cause I went and I got slimed on. By men, and by women who also play into power politics like that. White women and women of color. So I'm just like, 'Wow. How do I still say what I need to say, still figure out how to wield my power and my sword in those spaces, but then come back tired from carrying it?' You know? 'Cause if you have to arms up all the time, that's exhausting. But there are days like that. There are days like that and when I go home and I get in my car and I still feel funky, I'm like, 'Oh, today was really bad.' And there are some days that I can get in the car and tune it down and keep it moving or whatever, right?

Victoree descriptively used "slime" as a way to convey the feeling she gets from having to navigate and negotiate outside of her affinity space on campus. It had an immediate effect on her that was tiring and made her irritable. She found a way to get to a better space mentally and

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emotionally. All participants talked about how they have to be intentional to address the ways in which the institution taxes their emotional and mental health especially.

Cuentito: I was 6 years old. Maybe 7. Sometimes I think it's strange that I don't remember exactly. That's one of the ways trauma affects our brains...we can't remember all the details. Only blurry snapshots exist in my memory of what happened. He was much older. Like much older. Probably in his 50's at the time. I knew what he did was wrong, because no other grown-ups made me keep secrets. He set a course for me that I had no choice in charting. When I reflect on that experience and others, I see a trail of events that made me arm up and put up walls. If no one gets beyond the walls, I won't get hurt. I made choices about my life that I didn't understand were rooted in my traumas. I became an overachiever. I wanted to leave home for college. I sabotaged all my relationships by cheating or dating folks who I knew weren't a good match for me. In college, my default setting was me against everybody. I chose a line of work that would allow me to focus on serving others while I could remain guarded. Even now, I drive the bus. I keep it moving. I don't allow myself to get overly attached to or bothered by things. I have learned to compartmentalize my life as a mechanism to survive. By not acknowledging my feelings and experiences, I have taught myself to dismiss, ignore, downplay the ways in which trauma has been embodied in my life. I hate to cry. When I start, it is virtually impossible for me to stop because it all then comes flooding out. I struggle with fully acknowledging how I have experienced the fragmenting effect of oppression and its lasting implications for my work and for who I am as a leader, administrator, and person. I continue to drive the bus. And I don't always want to.

Making and Remaking

In many ways, the means by which these participants experienced oppression at the intersections of their identity necessitated a response, a mechanism by which they could continue to survive and thrive in their environments. A way to find light in the dark, as Anzaldúa (2015) helped us consider. These testimonios and the process of making and remaking are both counter-narratives to the dominant and oppressive systems and norms they face. According to Anzaldúa, the integration of our fragmented parts back to a unified self is a result of our conocimiento, our awareness and awakening, from having to make meaning of the experiences of harm, discrimination, and oppression. Making and remaking is a form of resilience and healing not only for the individual but the community as well. The participants spoke of the times in their lives, past and present, where they made conscious choices to resist, reject, and heal from racist, sexist, and heterosexist treatments. The spectrum of how this showed up for them was vast,

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illustrating the complex contours of experience and possibility. The two major themes of making and remaking were: thriving in nepantla and intentional healing for nos/otras.

Thriving in Nepantla

Drawing from Anzaldúa's (2002) concept of nepantla, chicana feminist epistemology and theory identify how Chicana/Latinas often occupy an inbetween space, a virtual and/or physical borderland. Being from and living in an inbetween space offers insights and perspectives that others cannot see or know. Sometimes being in this space is disorienting or fragmenting. It is in the understanding of the space, the conocimiento, and moving to seeing this position as an asset where it can and does become a location of making and remaking. The three categories under this theme are: "I felt liberated:" choosing to live openly and authentically; "You become more and more conscious:" Building reflexive practice; and "We've been socialized in the schoolhouse of resistance:" Centering social justice to disrupt the forces of fragmentation.

"I felt liberated:" Choosing to live openly and authentically. In the words of Reverend Dr. Jamie Washington (2006), "when we show up authentically, we create the space for others to do the same" (Social Justice Training Institute closing remarks, 2006). Each participant expressed how, at different points in their life and/or career, they made the choice to be their authentic selves, openly and unapologetically. While for some, it came with great loss, it was a conscious choice to prioritize their own well-being and to disrupt the status quo. The descriptor "chingona" came up several times as a way to name how they have come to confidently accept their full selves and are empowered to put that out in the world that does not always or readily accept them as they are.

Authenticity took on several forms in the participants' testimonios. Elijah spoke about being in a place of discovery and evolution around their gender identity during this study.

And so, in recent ... since our first conversation, I've embraced using they, them, their.

And since I've done that, it started to feel a little bit more comfortable, with myself. Like

using those for myself. And so, I even went as far a like putting in my signature, for

work, like all my emails, pieces like that. And you know, now I'm trying to, whenever I

give the talk or anything like that, or introduce myself. I make sure to say my gender

pronouns every single time. I'm like, there's no question. Like I'm putting y'all on notice,

right?

During our first conversation, Elijah and I spoke about how their gender identity was feeling

complex at the time. We did not get into the details of what that meant for them, but by our final

interview, they had made the conscious decision to embrace the complexity and start using

different gender pronouns and living more authentically, out in the world in this regard. At work,

they were not only disclosing this part of their identity, but also taking leadership for helping

others understand what this meant for themselves and others.

Related to this concept of helping others understand, Sofia framed her leadership on

campus as rooted in being authentic as a way to disrupt dominant norms:

I think about where do I work to make sure that I'm showing up as authentic as possible,

both in my chingona-ness but also in my vulnerabilities around not knowing or it being

hard, or a lot.

For her, showing up in a complex range of feelings is a means of being authentic. She did this in

her personal aesthetic, her relationship building, in how she worked, and beyond. Frida further

connected to this idea during one of our pláticas:

Luz's comment about your aesthetics, your clothing. Carmen knows I have a big old

Frida Kahlo tattoo. I wear my short dresses. I'm a very sexy person and I don't hide that I

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like that and I've had colleagues say, oh is that really professional? Other feminist

colleagues say that's professional? I still sometimes question the length of my dresses and

then push myself to still show up the way that I show up. Wear my chanclas when I

wanna wear chanclas. I don't dress up unless I feel like dressing up.I don't go to places

where I'm not comfortable. There's just at every level lots of disruptions and I've been

able to strengthen the ways that I show up in the places that I find that my strength in.

All of these participant's testimonios illustrate how, despite marginalizing environments and

expectations, they continued to work toward and live as their authentic selves, even and

especially when they were evolving.

    "You become more and more conscious:" Building reflexive practice. There is an

awareness built out of occupying space that is inbetween. Participants spoke of not feeling like

they fit in to queer spaces or brown spaces or women spaces; that each of those spaces were

often othering or marginalizing. Even in Chicana/Latina scholarship the use of metaphors like

"trenzas" meant to connect folks, alluded to a form of femininity in which some participants

could not see themselves. That feeling of not fitting in prompted tremendous reflection of their

position, identities, and where they occupied both privileged and oppressed identities. They used

the information they learned from this reflexive perspective to build themselves up, be in

community, disrupt oppressive environments, and to heal from mistreatments.

    Luz's testimonio illustrated reflexivity in how she made sense of her identities and career

trajectory. She expressed how her previous experiences informs her decision making and her

leadership. She said:

    Yeah. Because I know the impact that it has on me and how I don't know. I work in

    TRiO. We don't get paid very much. So, I think some of my own experiences help me

really think about where other people might need some support. I also think about the things that I ... even like my work in general and the work that I do now is very much informed by identity. I have pursued very specific roles. Like with students of color, first gen, low income, undocumented students. And because of my own experiences. I remember I was working in multi-cultural affairs mostly and I remember someone once told me that I needed to get out of multi-cultural affairs because I was gonna get pigeon holed into this one thing. And so that's actually one of the reasons why I decided to take the advising job at [Urban University]. And I realized like, 'No. I'm not happy here. This is not the work that I wanna do.' So, yeah, I think identity informs a lot of the work that I do and how I show up in my leadership.

Her testimonio weaves together her experiences, and in a way, illustrated of the fragmenting and making and remaking process. Related, EC shared a story about how she had to reflect on her own identities, socialization, and experiences in order to not replicate oppressive systems:

That's definitely something that I'm beginning to wrestle with more. And now that I'm a manager and I have the ability to be supportive of my staff I'm being more mindful of that. I'm trying to be more mindful of that. It's hard sometimes, I'll admit. 'Cause I'll be like, 'Well what do you mean that's like the third time your kid is sick this week.' I will say that to myself. And then I will reflect, and I will take a few minutes and I will think, 'EC, breathe. You don't have a child.' And then I reply, 'Okay, cool.' So I am proud of myself that I do all that reflection. I come home and I talk to my wife. But then at work, I'm like, all right ... and in the back of my mind I'm like, God I hope I'm not being made a fool. Like God, I hope this kid is really sick. But you know, as Jamie told my wife, she's like, 'Even if it's not babe', she's like, 'that's on them.'

To make sense of nepantla, one has to reflect. The participants had their experiences, learned about their identities, and then came to a different understanding. Their reflexivity was demonstrated in so many of their stories and was a source of how they were able to remake themselves time and time again.

"We've been socialized in the schoolhouse of resistance:" Centering social justice to disrupt the forces of fragmentation. In every instance and in multiple ways, participants spoke of social justice as a guiding principle and motivator for action in almost all aspects of their lives. They did not speak of social justice only as it relates to work, but as a central tenet of their life. It showed up in what they chose to study, how they supervise, what they read, what professional development opportunities they sought, how they parented, and how they lead, and beyond. In several of their counter-stories, they illustrated they were acutely aware of the dynamics of power present in multiple contexts. They all spoke of their own self-work on better understanding their own privileged identities and power in their roles. This finding was one of the closest aligned with a central tenet of CRT.

For example, Victoree had a clear framing on how her work and leadership was and will always be centered in social justice and liberation:

> The other thing that I think is on the flip side of transcending oppression is liberatory habits of practice. Like the practice of liberation. I think that I am constantly trying to figure out what that looks for me, because I don't always want to be in the sunken place. The disruption has a goal. The disruption has a goal of literally making room for other people. I think that, for me, is about liberation, and making space, and creating space, and I feel like I'm in a place where I'm trying to identify those micro habits and micro actions that always, at the end of the day, make me feel like I can release but then make

somebody else also feel like they're seen. I can see this very quickly in meetings with

administrators and students where admin are always trying to cut students off and having

to be the person that's like, the students are actually the leads you need to listen to them,

or whatever. Then I see it in other admin meetings with folks in power that are privileged

take up all the damn space and having to be the one to say, there's 12 other people in the

room, can we hear from them. Just these micro habits that are really just liberatory

practice. For me, I find myself trying to lean on that side a lot more now because, back to

the leadership question, that's the type of leader that I want to be. I want people to work

for me because this person is going to be about it. Some changes are really going to

happen on that campus.

The confidence with which she spoke was clear. She had purpose in her work for herself, her

students, and the institution. She actively engaged in critical resistance to promote voices of

those who are marginalized, not just those who share her own identities.

Sofia also had a clarity about the ways in which she actualized her social justice

philosophy as exemplified in her story about her role as an administrator and supervisor:

So that kind of like, "Here's the system, here's where I can bend and flex," I'm not going

to punish somebody because of the fucked up system that I've existed in, right? I think

that's an example of how and I think all of that is rooted in race and gender, and certainly

the class privilege that I now have to all that I'd have had, but that I've moved up in

certain ... So every time I've moved up, I've been able to like, "Oh, I should've done that."

And so, then, I use that to influence the next time, but then to support someone else in

that process now, as well.

Again, framing how the system is inequitable, she used the power and authority she gains in her progressive work experience and focuses on not colluding or replicating dynamics wherever she can.

In one of the pláticas, the ways in which centering social justice praxis came up in several ways. The theme was woven throughout much of the conversation in overt and subtle ways. The participants had been talking about how they practiced leadership on their campuses and they began speaking of how and why they challenged the status quo or overtly exclusionary or marginalizing policy/practice. It was not merely out of habit or personal interest. There was an urgent need to resist and push against oppression in their work cultures and environments. It was through their own experiences with oppression they were able to develop the perspectives and skills to diagnose and engage instances of oppression on themselves and others.

> *Sofia:* Even in my ... I think the theme that I heard in all four of our stories is we all push
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> back in some way or another. Some folks receiving negative feedback about pushback,
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> and certainly I'm receiving appreciation. Today we were sitting in this meeting and I'm
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> like, that can't be the only thing you ever appreciate me for, is how I push back. There has
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> to be ... tell me I'm funny, fucking something.
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> *Carmen:* Tell me I have impeccable fashion sense.
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> *Sofia:* Yeah, something. I think about the continued weight on us to always be the ones
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> pushing back. Then the feedback, whether it's positive or negative, that has consequences
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> over time for us. Whether that's on our bodies, on our beings.
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> *Carmen:* What keeps us doing it then?
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> *Victoree:* We're made like this.
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> *Sofia:* We're Aries. We can't help ourselves.

Carmen: You said you were made like that, Victoree?

Victoree: Yeah. That's how I was made. That's how I came out.

EC: The thing is if it wasn't me at that table it'd be some other person and somebody's got to do it. At my institution if it's not me, honestly, they're going to hire somebody else that probably looks like them which is going to be another older white dude. I figure while I'm here we might as well try to fuck some shit up and see what happens.

Carmen: Yeah but there's something in each of us, I know that you're saying that you were made this way, and I know that part of that was also a result of having to ... You have your dad, the "tu port tu" kind of thing. That was built in you in some ways and then having to navigate some of that stuff. I think what you're saying is if it's not me then it won't happen. There's plenty of other folks who look like us who are just like ...

Victoree: They're just sitting there.

Carmen: Yeah. They're just fine.

Victoree: Sure. That's fine. For them.

Carmen: What keeps you in it then?

Victoree: Because I need to sleep at night. I can't go home, waking up in the middle of the night, I should have said this, this, this. Those are sleepless nights for me. I need to go home feeling like I said the things that are important and I can be at peace with myself at night.

EC: Yeah. Also, I think ... I second that absolutely but I think also too for me it's like I experienced so much as a student, I navigated so much toxic BS and just so much drama that didn't need to be there because there weren't people like me in those positions to help

me. Because of that, for me I don't want another student, I don't want another [little EC], to go through that if I can help it. I think that's what keeps me going in a lot of ways.

Sofia: I can't help but think that it is attributed to the intersections of our identities, why the need to have to do it. Like you said, I think there are folks of color that I can think about that I've experienced in my career that don't say shit are mostly straight. What is the intersection of being a queer woman of color that drives this I have no choice. Not just my students' lives but my life depends on me saying something. Whether it's for pushing change or I just don't want to hold this coraje so I'm just going to let it out because I got to let it out.

Victoree: The queer circles I talk about queer women of color, queer people of color being the chosen people. You know? That continue to speak. That being really important. Silence is treason. Silence is betrayal. We learn that from a lot of our civic and civil leaders in a lot of different ways. I can't go to bed disappointed in myself. That is the worst because it's not even about other people it's about my own ... I can't go to bed feeling bad about what I did not do because that eats me at night. My biggest fear is to be a disappointment. To my parents, and my students, and my community, my grandma. That list is endless.

The plática illustrated the way past experiences inform current practice and how social justice was a value and a praxis for the participants' leadership. They each experienced marginalization at the intersections of their identities, and from this inbetween place, they sought to use their power and/or influence as leaders to disrupt the systems that continue to necessitate resilience.

Intentional Healing for Nos/otras

Intentional focus on self-care and healing in the context of community was a way to make meaning of the past experiences of harm and to be rooted in the present for the participants. Participants spoke of how they had to learn this practice, most often by seeing it role modeled or by being pushed or encouraged by others. Not all participants named what they did as self-care. Some used words like healing, growing, community rooted self-care, or self-love and others. As such, this theme is in the frame of the concept of "nos/otras" as outlined by Anzaldúa (2015). She used the term with a slash, noting the nos (us) and otras (others) to theorize a third point of view in recognition of living outside of a binary (Anzaldúa).

In similar ways, participants spoke of their own healing and the healing of others who shared their identities and beyond. The intentional focus on healing and self-care was a way of making and remaking that allowed for participants to reconcile the contradictions and fragmentations of their experiences. Their actual practices varied widely and there was also quite a bit of overlap in them. Three main categories demonstrated this theme: "Silence is betrayal:" Using voice for self-advocacy; "You have to have a place to put it or unpack it, disarm it before it weaponizes against you:" Building and sustaining intentional queermunidad; "I can't carry this on my soul anymore:" Prioritizing emotional and mental health; and "We have to do it differently:" Resistance through love, joy, and pleasure.

"Silence is betrayal:" Using voice for self-advocacy. All participants mentioned having to learn to be their own greatest champion. This method of making and remaking was a critical one in that it required the participants to voice what they needed in the face of overt and covert isms and phobias. Advocating for themselves meant they had to stand up to supervisors, refuse to be tokenized, confront staff members, and more as leaders. It was a constant for most of them

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that had ebbs and flows in terms of how successful they were at it and yet they all said that they always recognize the importance of self-advocacy. For example, Elijah spoke of having to speak up for yourself, even with supposed allies:

> When shit gets hot, when shit gets hard, they turtle, right? They go back to their shell. You know, and I'm just like, Man, like I wish these folks who have privilege. Whether it be cis privilege or you know, racial privilege, or anything like. Like when things get hard, I wish you would be more than just a sticker ally. Where you have like your sticker and you know. Sticker on your outside of your door, you know? Like don't be a sticker ally, like engage man. You hear someone, you know, is getting misgendered or getting mistreated, like you got to be able to say something. It's so exhausting to be able to have to do that 24/7. You know?

The dynamic Elijah spoke of was also mentioned by other participants. While it was great to have other colleagues who were supportive and worked to be allies, they still had to advocate for themselves in that context as well. Sofia referenced a way of framing self-advocacy as loyalty for self:

> I'm a very loyal person and I think the learning to be loyal to myself first where I think that I've put loyalty towards others above myself at times. The only person ... Not just people in relationships but institutions too. I think that there's been times where I have stayed too long in a role because of feeling like I needed to be loyal, or I made this commitment, those kinds of things. All of that … whenever the fuck they want. I think the re-framing being loyal to myself first and not at the expense of ... Not being loyal to others at the expense of myself.

Participants managed to advocate for themselves and find their voice in a variety of situations. There was a continuum and a commonality that was the more they did it, the more confident they were in themselves and their ability to do it again.

"You have to have a place to put it or unpack it, disarm it before it weaponizes against you:" Building and sustaining intentional queermunidad. One of the most mentioned elements of the participants ways of navigating and negotiating oppression was through community. Each participant spoke about the ways in which they sought out community and built it for others to make sense of the oppressive and fragmenting experiences they had. Community was not defined specifically or universally. For some, it was folks who supported them on campus, while for others it was a close group of friends and colleagues who identified as queer, women of color. Community was also colleagues who shared common grounding in social justice to students who motivated and inspired them. In whatever form community came or was created, it was an integral component for making and remaking for the participants. In this way, self-care was a form of community-care.

One tangible example was when Elijah spoke of the experience of applying and interviewing for their job in the south. After the on-campus interview they asked to chat with any out, queer folks in the division:

> Then, the day after, the lady who was my supervisor for four years, called me and just wanted to check in. I told her, I said, 'I need to talk to someone who's out on campus. I need someone who's going to give me the real real of what's going down on campus.' She asked me…At the time, she was like, 'Okay. Was there something that happened?' I was just thinking to myself, I can't tell this lady this. I don't know who she is. I know that she's going to be making a decision on hiring me or not, so I didn't feel comfortable at the

time doing it. So, I was like, 'No. I just want to know what kind of environment I'm getting into.' I totally lied to her. I ended up talking to, at that time, she was the ... She was married at that time to a woman, and she was the director of campus rec, basically. I had met her during the interview process, also rocking a suit and tie, queer as hell, like whatever. She told me definitely some ... She told me the truth, right? Everything she told me was like ... I just experienced it when I was there. But she also told me that if I give it a chance, I could find a really good community there. She was really honest and transparent. I'm really grateful for that. Still very good friends with her and her wife, and they have a daughter now, stuff like that.

Elijah's testimonio illustrates how seeking someone with shared identities, in this case sexuality, helped them create community in addition to providing important data for decision making about uprooting their life and moving to this new job in the south. In the end, the person with whom they spoke became a true member of their community there, and remains so today.

All the participants also spoke about how their community is made up of a variety of folks: friends, family, colleagues, affinity group members. These communities proved to give sustaining energy and support. EC spoke of this for her:

My community. The homies that I have here whoever else we can scrounge together, get together, it's amazing. When we have all of our little LGBTQI other, our coordinators, our queer family. Those are definitely the moments that absolutely refuel me, I guess you could say, in a way that I didn't maybe have five years ago. Not that it didn't mean as much, but it wasn't as important five years ago whereas now it's like, oh man, alright, I'm going to schedule our lunch date or our brunch date right now because it's going to happen because I can't cancel it.

EC spoke of her group of friends and colleagues as critical to helping her make sense of her experiences, both professional and personal. Her community was a priority for her. In a different way, Sofia spoke about how her community provided safety for her in her work environment in the south:

But, at the higher up, it was all dudes, all dudes. And then a lot of closeted gay men, which was also ... a lot of closeted white men. Yeah, which was really, really, really fascinating. Yeah, we're in the 21st century. But it's literally dangerous for them to be out. It's dangerous. So when [my colleague] started there, we started doing things like, we would all, as an office, my male colleague, we would all wear bow ties. But it was like a, 'We're all gonna do this,' not just like on any given day am I going to show up in my button-up, my Oxfords, and wear a bow tie. It was going to be like - a day. Yeah. [My friend], even, her and I have unpacked a lot of our gender expression stuff there. I mean she would also wear blouses and flats. And, now, has also shifted out of that, and we've talked about that shared experience of what it means to now no longer be there and be able to be more comfortable in how we show up at work in terms of our gender expression.

Sofia's story illustrates how community can also provide safety in the environment. She also became friends with those colleagues and they remain in contact despite all having left that institution.

Cuentito: Comadres, chingonas, malcriadas, sinvergüenzas, traviesas, cabronas. We are all of these and more. Unapologetically complex. And it takes work to hold all that. We are each other's hype crew. We help ground each other, believe that we are worthy, encourage our successes, and help us heal our wounds. The specific we…my closest queer brown chosen family. The general we…the queer women of color I meet at work or out in the world. We see each other. We need each other. We know it when we meet. They help me be me. Outwardly, I project an air of confidence while inwardly, I work really hard to truly believe in that self-confidence and I am better able to because of my community. I remember planning my wedding with my

soon-to-be-wife. We were exploring what we were going to wear. I was so stressed about what I should wear. She wanted to wear a wedding dress. I certainly did not and I also didn't want to wear a suit. I was stuck. I didn't want to look like a groom because I wasn't one. We were the first queer people we knew to get married. We didn't have a script. I was carrying a lot of internalized homophobia and internalized sexism without being fully aware of it. Fast forward a decade and my wife and I officiated 3 queer weddings in one year. Our community had fully blossomed. It made us reflect on how different things are. Today, I wouldn't be stressed about what to wear. I see other queer andro femme women getting married and being fully themselves. They are younger than me and have helped me more fully accept and embrace the space I occupy in this world. I love wearing button down shirts and blazers with giant earrings and red lipstick. It's neither this or that, not masculine but not feminine either. A good friend of mine and I work on the same campus and we joke that we have a work uniform. We have a similar aesthetic that disrupts the norm and are affirmed every time we see each other on campus. We show up dapper, with our button ups and oxfords. We wear 'men's' pants because they have pockets. 'Women's' pants are oppressive. They don't have pockets. And I only carry a wallet, not a purse. So, women's pants don't allow for me to carry my wallet. It may seem trivial, but it is the litany of constant little reminders like this of how I don't fit the 'women's' mold. Finding the confidence and security to be true to myself has come by doing my own work and being in community with others who have similar experiences. This same friend and I present on the need for self-care within communities of queer women of color. That space is sacred for us. There is magic and love and laughter and healing in the space. It is the community, the seeing ourselves in others, that helps us forge our own way. I am the best version of myself, in large part because of the other queer women of color in my life.

"I can't carry this on my soul anymore:" Prioritizing emotional and mental health.

Connected to the theme of self-advocacy, prioritizing emotional and mental health was a theme that earned its own recognition in the testimonios of the participants. Being in therapy, creating and maintaining boundaries, being selective about their time, and being open about the multiple ways they need to take their mental and emotional health seriously are examples of how this materialized for the participants. EC was candid about how therapy has been important for her:

> I'm in therapy. I've been in therapy now for the last like four months. I've been on and off in therapy. I think it's a wonderful thing. It's like going to the dentist for me. And so I've talked to my therapist about this, in terms of, overall just the sense of how I'm navigating being an administrator, being a manager now, being in a position of authority and also being institutionally out.

Part of why she started going was because of the conditions of her work. She spoke about being the only out, queer Chicana/Latina administrator on her campus. It was isolating, and her treatment was causing her tremendous stress.

Sofia spoke about how as a supervisor and leader of her department, she had to really be clear about setting boundaries as well as pushing her staff to do the same:

And being pretty clear with folks that this semester has been a lot; I have felt overwhelmed most of the year with the amount of work, and being clear about we can't sustain, the center can't sustain. Setting boundaries and without feeling like I have to just do everything even though I'm still doing a lot. I think about how do I be authentic both in here's where I need to push, but then here's also where I can't do it anymore. I can't ... We've got to set boundaries for ourselves. I think that that sets up a space for my staff to also be able to also say no, be able to also create their own boundaries for themselves, both as students and then as employees.

Role modeling boundaries is not only good for the staff, but it also created an environment that was healthier for all. Participants spoke of having to maintain boundaries with family because of harm. Frida spoke of the need to maintain boundaries over the course of time:

The hardest part is to take care of family and that's been my ongoing responsibility, challenge so I think I'm old enough to build boundaries but I think it's still hard. Everybody needs some of my time and energy and money. And that's always been true, it's even more true when I live near.

Elijah's experience with their biological family caused them to have extremely rigid boundaries for their own physical safety and mental health:

I made the conscious decision to not be in contact with my biological family. The reason did that was directly related to my identity as a queer individual. It became very clear to me that I was not safe around them, both physically and mentally and emotionally, and so I had to decide was I going to try and maintain a relationship with my two younger brothers for their sake and risk my safety? Or was I going to just leave it all behind, including my relationship with my two younger brothers? I chose to leave it all behind because I was like, 'I'm no good to them because I'm not around,' so I was lucky. If I end up coming back around, then I end up coming back around. But at this point, if you were to ask me today do I see myself reconnecting with my biological family, the answer is absolutely not, not at this point. I don't know if it'll ever happen, and I'm okay if it doesn't.

They later spoke of an important meeting with a counselor:

She had markers out on the whiteboard on the whiteboard ledge. Then, I said, 'Can I write on this whiteboard?' and she said, 'Yes.' So, I literally stood up there for the first 50-minute appointment, and I just wrote. I wrote things like the sexual abuse, and things like violent home, and losing my mother at a young age, and coming out as gay, and all these different kinds of things that had happened throughout my life up until that point. I said, 'I know that we're not going to be able to get through all of this,' and I said, 'and I know a lot of these things are connected.' I said, 'But I can't carry this on my soul anymore. It needs to stay on this damn whiteboard and not on me.' I was so lucky to have a counselor who would send me articles to read, would send me ... I have this workbook called The Courage to Heal, and it's about ... It's four folks who have experienced sexual

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violence, and it walks you through ... It's almost like a workbook. It walks you through

different reflection things and things like that.

Elijah's story was an outlier among this group in terms of the severity of the boundary they had

to create for themselves. And yet, it is an example of how they had to prioritize themselves to be

safe and healthy. Their story was one of conscientious making and remaking.

Luz, Frida, and MB also explored how they have needed to focus on self-care as a means

to prioritize their emotional and mental health during our plática. As they reflected on their

experiences, they spoke about what they would tell their younger selves if they had the chance:

MB: Okay, what I watched especially in folks who work with ethnic studies, gender

studies, work with multicultural student populations and things like that, is I watch that

we give it our all and burn out and then we're no longer helpful to ourselves, to our

students because we've given everything. And what you talked about, there's some people

literally not working or doing, they get to save the best parts of themselves for their

family or maybe wasted or whatever. But they get that choice and it's not that we need to

be stingy or anything like that, but we need to play the long game. And the long game is

lasting our entire healthy lives so that we can fight constant and see that change and

impact lives. And so for me I'm really, the self-care, I talked about it with my new staff

here and I really want to focus on self-care, thinking about queer Latina women, how do

we take care of ourselves, especially with different intersecting identities that each

identity may be pulling us and we all move together, how do we take care of ourselves so

that we last a long time?

Frida: I agree with you that the self-care is one of the biggest lessons that I've learned

but I think the way I think about it now, is that overwhelmingly those of us who grew up

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in for example, either poor families or marginalized in whatever way, we've been busy

taking care of our families and then we come to the university and we take on the same

goal of taking care of our community there. There are the students and whoever are part

of our networks, and all of that is good and important, yes. But I think what happens is

we develop co-dependent behavior, literally meaning that we're taking care of others to

the expense of our own health and our own well-being. And so, I don't know how to tell

people except to introduce them to co dependence and say, "Don't be codependent to your

family, don't be codependent to your job, don't be codependent on your activism. You

have to take care of yourself, otherwise you won't be able to take care of other people. So

yes, build a community, yes commit to everyone else, if your healthy, if your needs are

being met. I also think my younger self didn't know a damn thing about therapy.

Everybody needs some therapy, you know, get a coach, get a therapist, get a friend who

can coach you, who can co council you. Someone who you trust and don't hold all the

bad, all that pain and trauma in, because it doesn't go away, it just keeps emerging. I

would tell my younger self, one you're on the right track, two, get some therapy, three,

take care of yourself before you try to take care of everybody else.

Carmen: Yes. Yes. Luz?

Luz: Yeah. I'm about to cry over here. I agree with all of that. I would probably, yeah,

same. I would take my younger self to take care of herself because I, or just to breathe. I

feel like I had been holding my breath for so long and not taking care of myself and

taking care of everyone else and it had some major health impacts on me. And I'm still

trying to figure that out. Sometimes I have to remind myself to breathe. Because I can

still feel myself holding my breath. So, I was reading some things, there's an artist who

posted something on Instagram about dreams, and clenching your jaw. I had been having a lot of pain in my jaw and I had gone to the dentist. The article was about how trauma comes out in our dreams. And I was thinking even in my dreams I'm not breathing. I'm gasping for air when I wake up at night. So, I think I would tell myself to really take care of herself and find ways to let out all of the trauma.

Carmen: Yeah. I would tell myself to care less about what other people think or say because when I came out to my mom, she said I was a disappointment you know. And that she would not accept me. Fast forward all these years, she's always so down for me and my wife and our kids. But at the time, it fucked with me so bad. And so how do I hold the tension of being fiercely loyal and responsible for my family and not caring as much about what they said or what they thought. Not just my family, but my friends. Or my colleagues. Or my bosses or anything like that. I would tell myself to be like, kind of what you were saying Luz a little bit, more using myself as my internal compass and to listen to myself and to really pay attention to that instead of letting so much external influences, not dictate but kind of, really have an impact on how I saw myself. And my worth too.

Frida: I just wanted to thank you all because those are all really great advisement's, they're powerful and really beautiful. Thank you so much.

The consejos for themselves in this platica exemplified the process of making and remaking in community. They reflected and shared their wisdom as a means for communal healing. Subsequent to this portion of the plática, participants spoke about how they would like to stay in community beyond this conversation. Despite never having met one another, a community began to be built in the brief 90-minute conversation.

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"We have to do it differently:" Resistance through love, joy, and pleasure. Last, love, joy and pleasure were key elements of how the participants centered their own self-care and healing. While finding and prioritizing joy in the face of oppression can be seen on its own, as a critical act of resistance, for these participants it was a central component of how they healed the wounds of their experiences. As hooks (1994) asserts, "A culture of domination is anti-love. It requires violence to sustain itself. To choose love is to go against the prevailing values of the culture" (p. 293). These participants framed love, joy, and pleasure as a way to resist, therefore going against the prevailing culture.

Frida experienced an oppressive work environment as a faculty member and the chair of her department. As a leader, she is rooted in building community and prioritizing social justice. That framework for leadership is often faced with entrenched animosity. Even in the face of that context she was certain about finding joy:

> So in many ways, yeah, I decided to stay here because I do find a lot of positive things, a lot of strength, a lot of joy. I love working with my colleagues, I love looking back and being able to see all the things that I've created at an institution that didn't think that we even existed, didn't even know we were there. So yeah, I love that opportunity, even with the hard stuff.

She later revisited the topic:

> Like you know, there's this really strong base and foundation for those of us who are critical, who are resistors, who you know are doing all of this work and saying, 'Actually no, we have to do it differently, and I find joy and pleasure in doing this work.' I see that in my colleagues, and my friends, and my students, and my community members that are queer Chicanas on-campus and even off-campus.

She had also shared that one of the ways she was able to recognize joy as important was through the healing she had done and through reading radical feminist authors like hooks (1994) and Anzaldua (2015). Luz spoke of how being in community has brought her joy in this work:

I think that has been one of the greatest joys, finding community, people, yeah…that are gonna be like ride or die. And we have our little queer-cations together. We're raising kids together. We are traveling together, things that I think sometimes I am with this community and I'm like wow, we're actually here together on the beach or we're all queer and our kids are around, it's just these moments of wow, this is my life. And being with the community, my community, I feel that is one of my greatest joys. I think about the impact that that has on my daughter and her just being able to see other examples in her life of parents and family and even that, even for a second if that makes her feel like it's going to be okay. So I find a lot of joy in that. I feel like, I got to a point in my life, it took me a long time to come out later and when I came out I made a decision, this is who I am, whether you're with me or not, this is who I am. And so I'm just trying to find the joy in it and the people for me have brought me a lot of joy.

Doing the work differently was a great way to look at how making and remaking was a meaningful way of addressing the fragmentations of oppression. Finding and centering joy is one of those ways.

In one of the pláticas, the participants got energized around how they had each experienced a shift in how they framed their work. They all spoke of how they had made a conscious choice to love their work and to approach it from that perspective. The shared stories of why this was important for them and for their leadership:

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Luz: Like Frida said earlier, I really love the work that I do and I feel a lot of privilege that I get to do the work that I do, like after Trump was elected and I called my mom and I was really upset and I was calling her to just kind of talk through everything. And she was like, 'ni modo mija, oh well. Hay que echarle ganas. We've got to keep going.' And it was a reminder of I get to be in these spaces and be critical of all these things and then there's my mom and my family who is undocumented and they're like, just keep going, we're here, we can only live our lives, we're gonna have fun, we're gonna love, we're gonna dance every chance we get. We're gonna drink. So I do really love the work that I get to do and that is what drives me but also my family and knowing that it's more than just about me. I'm both the people that came before me but also for the future, my daughter, or the students. So my partner works on campus and we'll show up together to spaces and walk in and the students will be like, 'Oh you all are so cute.' And I know that it makes an impact that we're there in those spaces even though sometimes those spaces are hard and shitty but it matters that we're there. That kept me going, I think the hope that things can get better, that even just taking up space there, that it has an impact on those around us.

Frida: Totally, I think I already mentioned that I love doing it and then I love my students and I even love my colleagues and I count that a great success because I was personally responsible for hiring the people who I work with, at least three quarters of them. So here's the things that bring me back. I can already see the difference. I see it everyday and I see it immediate and I see it long term. I think that folks who work at the university, we do have a privilege over let's say, teachers. Teachers teach kindergarten, they don't get to see what that kindergartner does all the time. But in four years I will

know what my students get to do. So I started 14 and a half years ago, my students are now PhD's, now they're working in communities, they're lawyers, they're doing social justice work across the country. There's nothing that anybody can say to deny that the work that I did and the work that Danny, who was my advisor, there's an immediate response to the work that we've done across the country and so for me it's very rewarding.

MB: For me, for 20 years I did things that were meaningful and had an impact. And then in the last four years I worked, I don't even know what I was doing but I got paid well to be bored. And I remembered distinctly feeling bored and feeling like I wasn't contributing, wasn't making a difference. At the time in our politics, it just was the most crucial. And for me seeing the past of what I had done and realizing right at that point a few years ago, I wasn't doing that, made me do a lot of value alignment and say I need to get back into it. And where I want to most focus on is access. Who even gets to be at the university? And how I get to thinking about it and I know that people have been saying the same thing for a while but now I can be an additional voice right next to them, also saying it and using the experience of the last four years of some different language and talk that I have learned to be able to sell it in different ways. But to make people think about access, and access in every way of climate, of economic support, of creating curriculum and all these other classes that make majority students have to think about it too what already minoritized students know. And so yeah, I feel alive and I know this isn't about me, it's about the work and it's about students getting different paths for them and their family, so that they get to be a part of the movement forward. And I truly believe in the turn and pull and I always have and so that's what I want to continue doing.

This plática highlighted the ways in which they aligned their work with their values. The alignment was an example of how the participants engaged in a making and remaking process because it reframed how they were engaging in their work. They were fully aware of the elements of their environments that were fragmenting, and by choosing to love their work and find genuine joy and fulfillment in it was a form of critical and transformational resistance.

Transcending Oppression Via Liberatory Praxis

Consistent with the framing of the Coyolxauhqui Imperative, participants were in an ongoing process of reconstructing themselves and their environments in new, more inclusive and equitable ways despite the risk and consequences. This making and remaking cycle was a critical transformational resistance strategy for these participants. These testimonios illustrated the contours of oppressive and liberatory experiences of these participants rather than defined them universally. They were able to identify oppressive systems and recognize the paradox of leading from within their system of higher education. The ongoing cycle of making and remaking from fragmenting experiences creates opportunity for new realities through liberatory praxis.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, REFLEXIONES

Cuentito: My younger brother's name is Diego. Diego Rivera, just like the famous Mexican muralist. I remember him getting a book when we were kids about Diego and his murals and in it, I learned about Frida Kahlo. I was immediately hooked and obsessed with her, although I wouldn't make the real connections as to why until much later in my life as an adult. By the time I was in undergrad, my youthful curiosity had developed into a full obsession. And this was way before she was popular. I sound like an old rock star staking claim to something sacred before it became mainstream. But that's what it was like for me. I would say Frida is my hero and no one knew who she was. It's different now, but my obsession remains. For me, as I later had the language to name, she was and is an embodiment of a nepantlera. She gave me permission to bend rules around gender expression, sexuality, and politics. She showed me how to embrace flaws and be accountable to my mistakes. She showed me that it was ok to be the smart kid...the creative kid...the smart-mouth kid...the mischievous kid. She figuratively and literally made and remade herself, unknowingly showing me the way.

This study was not mine. It was ours, the queer, Chicana/Latinas of this study. It was ours along with our families' and our communities' and our ancestors' study. At some level, it seems inadequate to think this work can be summed up in a few pages. It feels more accurate that this would be a beginning or continuation rather than an end. The community that was built or deepened through this process with the participants and I along with the theorizing from an embodied space feels almost too big, too sacred to be able to fully do justice to in a single paper. Thus, this chapter's aim is to pull the pieces of this study together and to in order to see how this study is connected to what is yet ahead.

The purpose of this qualitative study examined the leadership experiences of queer, Chicana/Latina higher education administrators. As outlined in the methodology, studies rooted in CRT, LatCrit, and Chicana Feminist Epistemology include a reflexive approach with the participants and the researcher. This study was guided by three main research questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of queer Chicana/Latina administrators in higher education at the intersection of race, gender, and sexual orientation?

2. In what ways do queer Chicana/Latina administrators negotiate and navigate racism, sexism, and heterosexism?

3. In what ways do queer Chicana/Latina administrators practice and name leadership in a higher education context?

The methods of testimonio and pláticas were used to address these questions through a narrative approach that centered both the individual's story and the collective experience. This discussion focused on the two main themes of "sources of fragmentation" and "making and remaking" along with the elements of their subthemes. Based on the findings, a model for critical liberatory praxis for queer Chicana/Latina leaders in higher education was presented followed by recommendations for action. These findings and subsequent analysis were put into context with existing literature. Next, recommendations for action are presented. The chapter concludes with a leadership manifesto for the participants and those who experience the world in similar ways to us as queer, Chicana/Latinas or as other silenced minoritized folks.

Overview: Findings, Existing Literature, and Testimonios y Pláticas

The design of this study was key to gathering the data relative to the research questions. The methodology of testimonio and pláticas ushered the relationships necessary to gather rich data to capture a picture of both individual and collective experiences (Delgado Bernal, Burciaga, & Carmona, 2012, Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016). The findings were complex and provided data to sufficiently respond to each of the research questions guiding the study. The sources of fragmentation included the subthemes of: the labor of oppression parkour and consequences for living and leading from a place of authenticity. And finally, the making and remaking subthemes included: thriving in nepantla and intentional healing for nos/otras.

Theoretical Connections: Intersectionality, CRT, LatCrit, Chicana Feminist Epistemology

The study was informed and guided by critical race theory, LatCrit, and Chicana Feminist Epistemology. Each of these frameworks were central to the interview protocols and making meaning of the data collected. The participants' experiences and testimonios reflected many of the tenets and components of these theories.

Intersectionality materialized for the participants in overt and pervasive ways. The concept of intersectionality illuminated the "triple jeopardy" of marginalization for these participants at the intersection of racism, sexism, and heterosexism primarily (Aguilar, 2012; Bowleg, Huang, Brooks, Black, & Burkholder, 2003; Gatz, Gease, Tyler, & Moran, 1982; Jeong & Horne, 2009; Rosenfield, 2012). The participants all clearly spoke to the ways in which this particular intersection had negative effects on their professional, academic, and personal lives. Their testimonios and counternarratives illustrated how they used differential oppositional consciousness (Sandoval, 1991) as queer women of color to challenge dominant narratives from multiple approaches and perspectives because of their intersectional experiences.

Frida spoke overtly about the need to be resisting in different contexts when she said, "I think Chicana Latina feminists in the academy, overwhelmingly, were constantly struggling with how much to rebel, how much to adhere to political respectability politics or professional respectability politics." Her testimonio along with others from this study spoke to how they had to navigate and negotiate from the intersections of their identities because of their position as an outsider within (Hill Collins, 1986).

Another significant intersection that all participants spoke of having a significant impact was class. In big and small ways, the socioeconomic status of their family of origin had a salient impact on how they experienced other oppressions from an early age. Other intersections

included documentation status, parental status, age, and disability. The participants' testimonios illustrated nuances of marginalization at each of these intersections. And as Bowleg, et al. (2003) asserted, these identities and experiences were not additive, but rather they were a position of their own that necessitated specific navigational awareness and understanding.

The theoretical frameworks of CRT and LatCrit were also evident in the findings. From a CRT lens, the intersectionality of race with all other marginalized identities was one of the most pervasive connections for participants (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). They each spoke directly about the saliency of race in their lived experiences, especially in their professional and academic lives. Sofia's testimonio beautifully illustrated the way race was central and connected to how she experienced other parts of her identity and others' identity. She mentioned moving to the mountain west for graduate school and leaving her predominately brown Southwestern community. While in graduate school, she expressed tension about her making meaning of her race, "the access that education gave me in terms of creating time and space and knowledge to talk [race], Like our families don't do that. My mom doesn't do that..." Understanding her race perhaps provided her the tools to think more critically about her other identities while in her professional role, as she states, "…working in TRIO, I would say opened my eyes to my social class privilege…. Overseeing the Undocumented Student Services Program allowed me to understand nationality privilege." She clearly named of the awareness of a racialized experience and then moves into the connections to other identities, including their privileged identities. Participants' experiential and embodied knowledge was rooted in an intersectional frame that remained clearly connected to their race while they learned about themselves and others, which aligns with CRT (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

Additionally, also congruent with LatCrit, participants centered their work and leadership from a social justice perspective at the intersection of their race, sex, and sexuality. As Solórzano and Yosso (2001) asserted, higher education can be both a location that oppresses and empowers. These participants' social justice and leadership counternarratives supported this assertion. They experienced various isms and phobias while in college and as professionals in higher education that then informed how they led. Luz, for example, used social justice as her framework to supervise her staff and that her efforts stem from "a lot of pieces of her identity." For example, Luz described a then recent event at which there was a Spanish speaking family and she translated her comments into Spanish. After the event the parents were so appreciative they cried. She said, "So, I think about cultural pieces. How do I bring in language, music, food into the spaces that I'm a part of?" While she and the others experienced oppression in higher education contexts, they also said they were empowered by mentors and community to counter that oppression through their commitment to social justice.

Last, the elements of Chicana feminist epistemology were present in the data collection process and findings as well. The methodology was aligned with CFE and I was aware of my positionality and sensitivity with the participants as the researcher. I built community with the participants in real ways that were not only rooted in this research project but more importantly, connected to our collective liberation. The very act of doing this research in community was an intellectual, spiritual, and political endeavor (Calderón, Delgado Bernal, Pérez Huber, Malagón, & Vélez, 2012). The personal and professional experiences of the participants were analyzed not only by me as the researcher, but by the participants through member checking and through the reflective portions of the pláticas. By being in a collective and reflexive research process, I was not apart from the participants and testimonios, but rather interconnected. In this way it is a

decolonial approach to research because I am not conducting research *on*, but rather *with* the participants. Future explorations and interrogations need to be more overt about how to use CFE when a study includes gender expansive participants. There has been exploration on how CFE can be utilized by non-Chicanas and the same will have to be done with how to be intentionally inclusive with gender non-conforming, non-binary, and trans folks.

Sources of Fragmentation

The participants' experiences of their identities in higher education contexts at the intersections of race, sexuality, and gender was supported by the limited body of research on the topic. Consistent with the study done by Bowleg, et al. (2013), participants did not readily separate their gender from their race when speaking of their professional experiences. Additionally they often spoke of the need to code switch in the various spaces they occupy. In fact, a few participants named their worry about having to code switch so much, that they have worried about the lasting effects of that coping strategy. They feared the code switch version of themselves would become the norm and they would forget who they truly were.

Disclosure was another common theme in the testimonios of the participants. Similar to the findings from Alimahomed (2010) and Acosta (2010), participants' stories of coming out and disclosure varied greatly. While all the participants were out personally and professionally, the way in which that transpired for them was vast. For one, it meant they had to cut all ties with their family of origin. Elijah opted for their own health and safety when they were younger because their family of origin did not accept that Elijah was gay. For Sofia, it was a relatively easy and supportive process with her family and perhaps even anticipated. While her family was supportive, she faced homophobia in college and in her professional career that ultimately led her to have to move from her home community. And for MB, coming out was the genesis of her

activism during a time when being gay or queer was seen as an aberration even more than it is today. She was a teenager when she came out and it was during the height of the AIDS crisis. Her family members were fearful and didn't understand. She responded by becoming active in the queer community and her activism continued throughout her life. Each participant had to manage their identities and the disclosure of those identities in both professional and personal contexts (Orne, 2011).

Alimahomed (2010) also spoke of the concept of invisibility. That concept showed up with these participants as well. At various times throughout their professional career, they were made to feel invisible by individuals and systems. This finding was also connected to the fact they were often the only queer Chicana/Latina on their staff. For Sofia, being the only one in her entire division at a very large public research institution was one of the most challenging times in her life. For Elijah, this reality forced them to have to seek community off campus in a hostile environment. Related, participants often did not conform with the dominant norms at their institutions or accepted norms within their marginalized groups, and therefore found it difficult to fully be a part of the communities with which the belong or identify (Bridges, Selvidge, Matthews, 2003). The isolation they experienced was pervasive over the course of their professional experiences with little exception, and often was exacerbated when they gained more formal leadership roles. When the participants took on leadership for social justice and inclusion in their professional roles, they indeed were "defined out" of their organizations as described by Turner (2002).

It was clear that for these queer, Chicana/Latina administrators oppression had a fragmenting effect on their identity and existence. They experienced emotional, psychological, and physical harm and marginalization as a result of dominant norms and oppression. Frida

spoke to this throughout our pláticas. She talked about "trying to navigate your truth and your real identities in the face of a place that has not been created with you in mind, right? And in fact, it's been created to keep many of us out." She later mentioned the toll to pay "when you're a radical, feminist, queer person, especially as an activist and scholar." While the participants were not actually dismembered as in the story of Coyolxauhqui, the politic of the story remains alive in the experiences of these participants. The cost of fragmentation was tremendous. And what was also clear in their testimonios was they found ways and created ways to transcend those oppressive systems and environments. Through the ongoing and iterative process of making and remaking, they created new, more fortified versions of themselves to create new realities for others.

Making and Remaking

The fragmentations of oppression were not these participants' undoing. Despite the many material consequences they faced, they found ways to transcend through the process of making and remaking. They had coraje; the Spanish word for both rage and courage. They had rage because of the injustices they experienced while also having courage to continue to work for, fight for individual and collective liberation. Sofia spoke directly about this in one of our platicas. She said, "I do think that we are super powerful in the ways that we ... the ways I observed and have observed folks laboring for their institutions, for their families, for their communities ... experience a lot of oppression and still moving forward." She talked about how even and especially within community, transcending oppression was and is a matter of necessity in many ways. The leadership participants provided for their work and communities was rooted in social justice and often went unnoticed by their institutions.

In many ways, the literature on higher education leadership seemed disconnected or irrelevant to the findings of this study, particularly because of the pervasive way in which leadership scholarship is often framed as "neutral" in terms of identity (Ayman & Korabik, 2010). Participants humanized leadership by seeing leadership rooted in identity instead of apart from it. This stance allowed for them be reflexive of their own identities in the context of their environment and engage in more relevant forms of leadership. For EC, this looked like speaking up on behalf of marginalize students and staff even when she got reprimanded for it. For Victoree, leadership looked like resistance to dominant cultural norms around time and professional dress. They all utilized their epistemic privilege and authority garnered from their experiences of fragmentation to choose from multiple courses of action to work within and across difference (Narayan, 1988). For participants, social justice and leadership were interconnected. In fact, when specifically asked about leadership, they almost all named it as a means to create greater equity. In a slight way, this connects to the framing of critical leadership as explored by Dugan (2017) and Santamaria and Santamaria (2012). Participants practiced leadership out of necessity for themselves and others, rather than as a means in and of itself.

The ways in which participants made meaning of their fragmenting experiences and showed up as their authentic, holistic selves were varied, creative, and rooted in love and liberation. By thriving in nepantla, they disrupted the cycle of oppression. They advocated for themselves and they sought out, built, and sustained communities and practiced leadership in ways rooted in love. They created more inclusive spaces just by being themselves. There was an element of evolution and development to each of their stories in terms of how they arrived at the examples of making and remaking. The findings of this study presented rich responses to the research questions.

Answering the Research Questions

What are the lived experiences of queer Chicana/Latina administrators in higher education at the intersection of race, gender, and sexual orientation? It is one thing to understand and conceive of the dynamics of oppression from a theoretical or abstract perspective. It is an entirely different thing to be in community with people and hear their stories of the feelings and real-life consequences of being marginalized. The lived experiences of these participants were complex and varied. Yet, there were significant commonalities in their testimonios as well. They all clearly experienced and could name the impact of oppression at the intersections of their identity. They were tokenized, isolated, rendered invisible, silenced, undermined, and policed in their professional lives, even when they had formalized power in leadership roles. They had been told their leadership was unorthodox or were disallowed from leading all together. These experiences of isms and phobias manifested in embodied trauma that they had to invest intentional energy to heal from. In their personal lives, they experienced many of the same things. Yet, they were all committed to living and leading from a place of authenticity. Despite these pervasive effects of oppression, the participants found and made ways to transcend those conditions for themselves and others via multiple individual and communal practices.

In what ways do queer Chicana/Latina administrators negotiate and navigate racism, sexism, and heterosexism? The labor of oppression parkour theme was where much of the response to this question came from. The navigational and negotiation skills of these participants were nuanced and expert to combat the dehumanization of the isms and phobias they faced. In almost every context, they were navigating oppression at varying levels and subsequently needing to negotiate what that meant for how or if they were able to respond. Much like the sport

of parkour, these participants had to overcome the many obstacles and constraints placed upon them by their environments (Saville, 2008). The metaphorical image of having to leap, bend, stretch, jump, roll, duck, or leap was fitting for what was shared in their testimonios. Their critical and conscious resistance and disruption often occurred by their mere presence in a space. As a result, the participants intentionally engaged in reflection to make meaning of their experiences and to take action that would address oppressive cultures, environments, and experiences. They all named the need to heal from the fragmentations. Practicing self and community care was central for dealing with the continued realities of their oppressive environments. Their resistance through love, joy, and pleasure were counternarratives that sustained themselves and their community.

In what ways do queer Chicana/Latina administrators practice and name leadership in a higher education context? While each participant practiced leadership in formal and informal ways, they did not always name what they did or how they are as leaders. For them, leadership was born out of necessity. They had to excel in school, take on familial responsibilities at an early age, or speak up for students or other marginalized populations at work because few else would. These few examples illustrate how leadership manifested for them. They didn't conceptualize leadership as a trait or a process to accomplish a task. It was almost exclusively rooted in people, in making conditions more equitable, and as necessary to survive. They conceived of leadership in broad forms and contexts; formal roles such as supervisors, informal roles, in familial contexts, as well as in the community. There was no consensus on a singular definition or how to practice leadership. In professional settings, these administrators all spoke of how they center social justice in all that they do in a way that was similar to what Sandoval (1991) referred to as differential oppositional consciousness, drawing upon their lived experience

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to creatively address dominant norms. For them, leadership was not merely a process and a relationship. Leadership looked like disrupting, resisting, challenging, storytelling, healing, acting, and building.

Importance of Testimonios and Pláticas

The way in which this study was conducted was almost as important as the findings. The methodology was rooted in a Chicana feminist approach necessitating the connections between research, community, experience, and social change (Delgado Bernal, 2002). While I had never met some of the participants in person, I created community with them via this research project. This project was not me engaging strangers from an expert distance. It was a reflexive process by which we traversed scholarly, professional, and personal space through our testimonios and especially in our pláticas (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016). The pláticas were a transcendent and sacred space. At the beginning, the participants were unsure of how to engage, and by the end, a community of support had been built. We grappled with our experiences as leaders, scholars, parents, administrators, and activists. Those conversations offered spaces for healing for us. These testimonios are the products of the interviews and pláticas where the process and outcome were of critical importance to the theorizing of the findings.

A Model for Critical Liberatory Praxis

The participants engaged in the iterative and cyclical process of making and remaking as a result of the fragmentations of oppression both as individuals and for/with communities. Operating from a place of neptantla, the participants consistently had to engage in the process of meaning making from marginalizing experiences because the in between spaces they occupied disrupted the status quo. They reflected on their experiences of oppression, made decisions on how to make and remake themselves as a result, and then they created new realities. Therefore,

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this was not merely a reflective process but rather one of action that had implications for themselves and others. The cycles were not necessarily linear or immediate to the oppressive conditions. In fact, sometimes it took years to uncover the path to making and remaking in order to take actions that would shift the status quo. The model below illustrates the process.
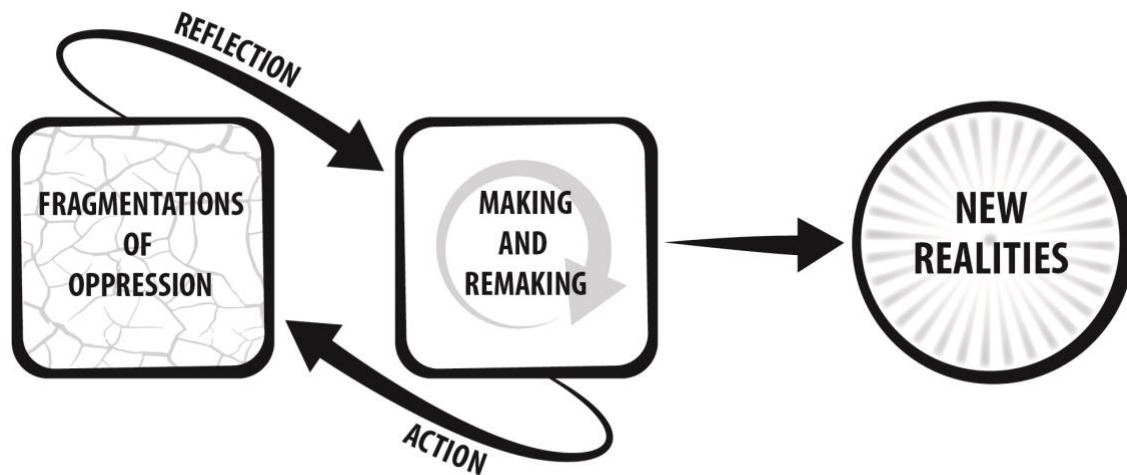
Figure 6.1 Model for critical liberatory praxis

The process by which participants engaged in critical liberatory praxis varied and had implications beyond the individual experience. Take for example the dominant expectations of gender expression in professional higher education settings. Several participants named the fragmenting effect of normative gender expression expectations at work such as being misgendered because of how they looked and dressed, the need for safety in numbers when dressing out of the "feminine norm" of professional dress, or disapproval of culturally informed style of dress. Participants reflected on those treatments and consequences, made and remade meaning and their own vision of themselves, and then took action. Action looked like being overt about pronoun usage, choosing dapper dress days with other folks on campus, wearing culturally relevant clothing for interviews and presentations, or dressing sexy to work. These

examples not only allowed for the participants to create new realities for themselves in their deepened level of authenticity, but also for the organization because the dominant norm had been disrupted. These new realities can either be sustained or reversed based on many factors, including the commitment of the organization to either upholding the status quo or creating more equitable cultures and environments. When the status quo is upheld, individuals then re-enter the cycle. The model illustrates how the participants in this study navigated racism, sexism, and heterosexism, along with others, in order to survive and thrive. These testimonios of liberatory praxis shift reality and promote healing for individuals.

Recommendations for Action

This study explored the experiences of queer, Chicana/Latina higher education administrators, with a particular focus on their leadership. While these testimonios are those of individuals, much can be learned from their collective experiences and take critical action to promote equity and liberation within higher education (Delgado Bernal, Burciaga, & Carmona, 2012). For example, in the process of this project, one participant made affirmative choices to live more authentically in their gender identity and began to identify more as gender non-conforming.

As I set up this study, I questioned how I would create the parameters for participants. While this was one person's story, it continues to have implications for how I conducted this study and will continue to challenge my thinking around gender identity for future studies and work in the future. These recommendations are rooted in creating more inclusion, equity, and liberation.

Recommendations for Folks of Color

It was clear from most of the participants in this study that race was a central identity for their experiences. Yet, they were not always able to be their authentic selves within communities of color because of the intersections of other marginalized identities, namely gender and sexuality. Queer, Chicana/Latinas have to navigate institutions that were created by and uphold dominant culture and are also still confronted with those norms within marginalized communities (Parks, Hughes, & Matthews, 2004). For example, within Latinx groups and communities, the participants often faced sexism and heterosexism. These recommendations aim to diminish the levels of oppression within marginalized communities in higher education.

- *Engage the intersections.* While sharing a minoritized racial identity might be a space of connection, it is not the only factor. In communities of color, we can and do perpetuate dominant norms. Considering intersections by asking who is present and who is not, by avoiding binaries, and many more active ways will create more equitable and inclusive spaces and movements.

- *Interrogate internalized oppression.* We need to look at how we maintain the status quo with how we uphold dominant norms and narratives about our multiple marginalized identities. By looking at how we have internalized these norms, we can better see the interconnectedness of oppressions.

- *Heal in community.* One of the participants of this study made a profound observation about how we often gather as communities of color for celebrations, rallies, or other causes but rarely gather for overt community healing. By healing in community, we create more sustainable change for ourselves as individuals and our communities as a whole.

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Recommendations for Practicing Accomplices

In each of the participants' stories, there were mentions of allies and accomplices who were using their institutional and social power to dismantle oppression. Support is through being an ally is insufficient to shift dominant norms. From our dominant spaces, we need to be accomplices in sustained action to make cultures, systems, and environments more equitable. Because even when these participants practiced leadership from formal positions, they often encountered obstacles. Accomplices would help change those dynamics and conditions. Elijah's testimonio illustrated how they often needed allies who didn't show up consistently. They referenced how allies often "turtle" when things get challenging, by going into their shells. Elijah also expressed a need for accomplices to be more than "sticker allies" by going beyond putting stickers on their office doors declaring that they are supportive of a particular movement. Their story illustrated the cost of the labor they had to constantly to for themselves and others. When participants did have accomplices to challenge those conditions, they were able to more easily overcome those obstacles or didn't have to at all because of effective interventions by others.

- ***Read, learn, and challenge the status quo by intervening.*** The participants in this study provided a great deal of labor to their organizations, including educating colleagues. By having practicing allies and accomplices take responsibility for their own learning, the labor is lessened for queer, Chicana/Latinas and other minoritized groups. Accomplices must then take their learnings and apply them by taking action to intervene in oppression and dominant norms.

- ***Interrogate internalized dominance.*** It is not enough to be nice. The participants in this study were continually harmed by their nice colleagues because of the unchecked dominance that they held and from which they operated. By interrogating the multiple

ways you are granted benefits and privileges, you can begin to take greater accountability

and responsibility for fostering more equitable organizations and relationships.

Additionally, you can learn to trust and rely on the epistemic privilege of minoritized

colleagues to further the work of equity and inclusion.

- ***Build your fortitude to engage in identity-based work.*** Fragility around dominant

  identities is a barrier to doing equity work. Getting feedback about identity-based power

  dynamics is a critical skill to shift the status quo. You can expect distrust from

  marginalized communities despite thinking that you yourself have not done harm. The

  work is to not take things personally but to do deep personal work to be able to get

  critical feedback that disrupts the status quo of supremacy culture.

Recommendations for Higher Education Institutions

Higher education institutions had the paradoxical condition of being both a location of

oppression as well as a location of empowerment for the participants in this study. They

experienced consistent microaggressions as well as other long-lasting material consequences of

oppressive treatment both as students and as professionals. Participants were clear in the need for

institutions of higher education to be less oppressive, therefore lessening the need for

marginalized populations to be quite as resilient to make it in these environments and cultures.

One participant, Frida, spoke clearly of this in her testimonio when she named "there are very

few people in higher education that are truly committed to eliminating racism, sexism,

heterosexism, classism, anti-immigrant discrimination, ableism, ageism." She also noted that in

many ways, a university's success has been dependent on who it excludes. Frida had a clear

understanding of how her identities and lived experiences informed her leadership and made it

particularly relevant for her own role and made a clear call for higher education administrators to

also take on the responsibility of being accountable for creating more inclusive and equitable institutions.

- ***Ongoing diversity, equity, and inclusion work across all employment types, including executive leadership.*** The participants named one of the prevailing approaches to doing inclusion and equity work on campus was to invite external consultants to campus and expect those episodic approaches to do the hard work of creating campus-wide inclusion. Clearly, from the experiences of these participants at the many institutions in the multiple functional areas in which they led, this approach does not work. There needs to be a broad and deep approach to creating real change that includes but not limited to training, capacity building, coaching and evaluating processes, policies, and procedures to eliminate supremacy culture. Structural and formal opportunities to develop systems of feedback, accountability, and engagement as it relates to inclusion and equity work must be created and maintained.

- ***Build capacity for recruiting, retaining, promoting, and developing more folks from minoritized identity groups.*** Getting more minoritized people to campus is only part of the equation. While representation surely matters, as it did for the participants in this study, equity will not be achieved by mere numbers. When the participants in this study had positional power, it did not necessarily equate to better conditions, and in some instances, it worsened them. A more intentional focus on retention, development, and promotion can help both the individuals and the institution.

- ***Reframe leadership.*** Leadership in higher education had been narrowly defined in the experiences of the participants in this study, and therefore they struggled to name how they practiced it overtly. Reframing leadership to include the ways these participants

practiced it such as via storytelling, resisting, creating community, prioritizing

marginalized people, and others, will offer more opportunities to create more inclusive

and equitable campuses.

Recommendations for Future Study

There is plenty more room for research that is centered on queer, Chicana/Latinas in

higher education. Other areas could include various functional areas in student affairs, faculty,

administration, and at different levels of experience. Additionally, the participants all hailed from

the west and southwest and therefore future studies can broaden the geographical locations of

participants to gain more insights. As was represented in this study, there are ways that gender is

a specific identity that has multiple intersections within it that could also be further researched. A

critical priority of future research is that there be support and encouragement that this research be

done by in-group members in ways that are centered in liberation. Additionally, the finding

suggests that there are connections to be made with other related populations and intersections of

identities.

- *Higher education leadership scholarship.* Higher education leadership studies need to

  deepen their connections and exploration of the influence of identity on leadership in the

  context of oppression. Higher education leadership programs can look at how they do or

  don't include social justice in their programs as well.

- *Critical liberatory praxis in higher education.* The cycle identified in this study can be

  further developed with the same population as well as others. More can be explored about

  how this model can be applied to groups or organizations as well.

- *Multiple marginalized identities in higher education.* This study was focused on a small

  group of a small group of higher education administrators. Queer people of color are a

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diverse group and much more can be learned about the experiences of other more specific

populations to get a deeper understanding of the contours of oppression of multiple

minoritized identities.

Reflexiones

At the beginning of this chapter, I spoke of how strange it feels that this paper would end

with a conclusion rather than a commencement of some kind. Having spent so much time with

these participants on this subject seems like only the beginning. The findings of this study

provided a lens through which we can see another perspective, another facet to actively engage

in liberation work and scholarship. The aim of critical studies informed by CRT, LatCrit, and

Chicana feminist epistemology necessitate that action be taken based on the results of the

research. In this study, the process of conducting research was action. What will come of this

study is action. A community of support was forged, a reflection of what these participants do in

their own lives. What they have had to do in order to survive and thrive.

What started as a me-search project, evolved into a we-search project. A project about,

with, and for my participants and me. I had to challenge my academic socialization to even

consider the possibility of this kind of research. I had the white supremacist patriarchal

socialization of my academic experiences telling me this was not a rigorous enough question.

When I told people about my topic, they offered confused facial expressions in return. I was

nervous to tell my family what I was researching. Shame rushed through my body as I nervously

tried to explain what I was researching and why. When data collection began, I knew that all

those doubts and challenges were not about me. The testimonios of these participants were

painful and beautiful for me to bear witness to because they struck so close to home. The

oppression they faced and the extents to which they had to go to navigate it was remarkable and

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devastating; and familiar. The critical liberatory praxis model offers a framework for the participants and others who occupy similar spaces in higher education to make meaning of their experiences. For the institutions who employ us, this research can inform how to cultivate less oppressive environments and cultures. In the end, it is an offering to the participants and their testimonios of transcendence.

A Love Letter of Sorts…A Queer Chicana/Latina Liberation Manifesto

The nopales.
Us.
Nos/otras.
      Strong.
      Resilient.
      Tender.
Our environments are
brutal.
We transcend.

The surface roots of the nopales run across the land, just below the surface. Ours allow us to soak up the joy of our community and show up in our glory despite the conditions. The taproots run deep down into the earth. They make it so that we can withstand harsh deprivation. We go to great lengths to find that which nourishes us.

We wither. We bloom. We poke. We survive. We thrive.

Somos nepantlera/x/es. That space that is ni de aquí, ni de allá AND of here and of there. That inbetween space. It is sometimes a harsh and confusing space. And it can also be a joyful and liberating space. But it is ours. We don't pay rent. We own it because we are from it. Because of it we are critically generous. We give of ourselves, our bodymindspirit to grow from nepantla, so that we can all be more awake and more whole. When we break, we rebuild and rebuild and rebuild. Because like the nopal grows in the desert, love grows in nepantla.

May we always remember that we are stronger than we know while also resisting the trope of being self-sacrificial for everyone and every cause. We bring co/razon to our spaces – the head AND the heart. Our queermunidad has taught us this. We are the head and the heart. By being our whole, true, authentic selves, we forge new realities. More free realities. May we always…

Seek love and joy…

Resist and cultivate…

Find and build community…

Trust yourself…

Heal and rest…
                                       Be free.

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APPENDIX A

PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT EMAIL/ANNOUNCEMENT

Hi…my name is Carmen Rivera and I am currently a doctoral candidate in the Higher Education Leadership program at Colorado State University. I am conducting a qualitative study on the experiences of queer Chicana/Latina higher education administrators and would love to invite you to participate.

My study is motivated by my own experiences as a queer Chicana/Latina administrator and my desires to take leadership roles to create more socially just environments in higher education from a staff perspective. While there is some research on queer Chicana/Latina students, there is almost nothing on queer Chicana/Latina administrators.

I will conduct my study in the summer and fall of 2018. I am seeking participants who are higher education administrators who have been in the field for at least 5 years and have leadership responsibilities. Participants will be interviewed three times in semi-structured individual interviews via phone or online video chat, each lasting 45-90 minutes. Then all participants will gather for a group interview via online video chat. Lastly, there will be one final semi-structured interview. Participants will need to have access to a computer, tablet, or device that has a camera for video interviews.

If you or someone you know might be interested in this project and would like more specific information about timeline, confidentiality, and/or process, please contact me a carmen.rivera@colostate.edu. Participation in this study is completely voluntary.

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Intake Form

All participants will fill out this form prior to the first scheduled interview.

1. What is your first and last name?
2. What is your preferred email?
3. What is your preferred phone number?
4. How do you identify racially/ethnically?
5. How do you identify in terms of your sexual orientation?
6. What is your gender identity?
7. How old are you?
8. What is your title?
9. How long have you worked in the field of higher education?
10. What part of the country do you live in?
11. What type of institution are you currently employed? (Size, type, etc. Describe as you see fit.)
12. Do you supervise full-time staff? If so, how many?
13. What is your current functional area (for example: Residence Life, Advising, Admissions, etc.)?
14. Why are you interested in participating in this study?

Interview 1

45 – 75 minutes
The interview will be semi-structured and dialogic in congruence with a testimonio approach. I have prioritized three questions that I will be sure to ask each coresearcher and the others will be available to use if necessary. Follow-up questions not on this list will be asked in reference to anything the participants say for clarification purposes.

1. Tell me about yourself. What is your story?
2. Talk to me about your salient identities with particular focus on race, gender, and sexual orientation. How do you self-identify and why?
3. What have been your experiences around these identities personally and professionally?
The selection of the next questions is based on the responses to the first three questions.
4. Do you have a coming out story?
5. How has how you identify changed over time?
6. What have been some significant/defining experiences around your identity?
7. How/where did you come to learn about oppression as it relates to race, gender, sexual orientation?

Interview 2: Group Platica

2 hours
All participants will participate in an online video group platica. The aim of the focus group will be to explore identified themes group context.

Interview 3

45 – 75 minutes
Final interviews are focused on meaning making and reflection of both the process and the themes. Questions will emerge from the themes and group platica. The following questions are intended to get the conversation started.
1. What did you think about this process?
2. Is there anything you would like to add or change about what you've shared?
3. What do you think we should do with this research?