

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE

BUSCANDO MI TONAL  
A QUEER CHICANO'S SEARCH FOR SELF IN ACADEMIC LITERATURE

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
For the degree of Master of Arts  
in Chicano and Chicana Studies

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## ABSTRACT

### BUSCANDO MI TONAL

#### A QUEER CHICANO'S SEARCH FOR SELF IN ACADEMIC LITERATURE

By

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Master of Arts in Chicano and Chicana Studies

This thesis attempts to challenge notions about queer Chicanos, contextualize their lives within Chicano/ Latino communities (and in the broader communities in which we exist) and dispute stereotypical, and harmful ideas about queer Chicanos, our families, and lives. It does this by conducting content analysis on Mesoamerican and Chicano Studies literature and presenting and highlighting work by Queer Chicanas/os and contributing the author's auto-historia as a counter-narrative. A second goal of this thesis to examine and contribute to the academic discussion related to queer/ gay Chicano men by using a relational theory focused on sex and desire as proposed by Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano, (2010) and borrow and expand on the concepts of mestizaje and nepantlism as presented by Gloria Anzaldua (1987) in *Borderlands/ La Frontera*. The image of a lost and diseased queer Chicano/ Latinos is countered in this thesis by the idea of Queer Chicano in the process of healing and finding a home in their families and cultures.

*Keywords:* Queer Chicano, Autohistoria, Nepantlah

## CHAPTER ONE

Tonal

if you lose  
your tonal

might as well  
be dead

- Francisco X. Alarcon

In which we begin our academic adventure; stories are told, words are defined, plans are made and questions are proposed.

### **Introduction**

This is how it started. I was born in 1978. I remember that when I was five there was a picture, next to the door in the living room, of a little girl that was about my age and my oldest sister, the little girl's godmother, would often tell me that that little girl was my "novia" (girlfriend) and that I was going to marry her when I grew up. I wouldn't play along. I would just be quiet. Even at a very young age, I knew that this wasn't true for me. I was never attracted to girls as anything but friends. I also knew without actually knowing that I should not disclose this to anybody. I convinced myself that being attracted to girls would come later. That it was maybe something I would grow into. I didn't know that any other option existed.

There were stories that I was aware of growing up of effeminate or sex-crazed person who did not understand proper sexual boundaries, people who were weird,

perverted, child-molesters, and pedophiles. I didn't want to be that, but as far as I knew there wasn't a word for what I was, so I asked myself if maybe this was what I was. I wasn't able to communicate these feelings to anyone. I feared that if I talked about it then my "real" self would somehow be revealed.

I don't remember when I first heard about "homosexuality," but it probably wasn't long after that I went to my local library and looked up anything I could find about it. Unfortunately, the Sun Valley Branch library had only one book on the subject that I could find. Luckily it was "When Someone You Know is Gay" by Susan and Daniel Cohen (1989), a sympathetic and non-judgmental text that served as a bit of "gay" 101 to me. This went a long way towards helping me accept myself, but it did not automatically rid me of all the negative thoughts that I had. To a certain extent I began attributing those negative characteristics to other (particularly older) gay people. The first time someone said they thought I was gay I got angry and cried; I was in middle school at the time and I ran to a friendly teacher and sobbed to her as if I had been accused of something horrible. I knew I was attracted to men, but I didn't want everything that came with a gay connotation. A few years later, when I had just started high school and was about fifteen years old I met a guy around my age whom I was attracted to and who told my friend he was attracted to me. He told her that she should give me his phone number "if I was gay," and I knew that if that was what I had to be to get his phone number then I was. He was the first person "like me" I had ever met

Being "gay" was complicated. I like John Boswell's (1980) definition of the term. He defined gay as admitting socially, or publicly, that you were attracted to your own sex, and that seemed to fit perfectly with me, but the more I learned about "gay men" and

what it meant to be “gay”, the further it took me from my family and culture of origin. As presented to me being “gay” was about a lot more than just whom you were attracted to. It was about camp and musicals, and a set of values that were new and not necessarily relevant to me. I think that for some time I tried really hard to be “gay”. But I knew that culturally it meant a lot of things that didn’t make any sense to me. At some point I realized that “gay” was not really what I was, but there wasn’t any viable alternative for me. Somewhere along the line I read James Baldwin’s *Go Tell It on the Mountain* (1963), and there was something in his work that resonated with me. His queer person of color mindset, and descriptions of desire fit mine, but his works were historical artifacts to me, and there was definitely an incongruity in his discussion of African-American experiences of the church and spirit and my own experiences as a second-generation Mexican Catholic. I appreciated James Baldwin, but I couldn’t see where his experiences fit into my life. He was not a model I could emulate.

Words like queer came into the picture but to my mind there wasn’t much of a difference, culturally, between being gay and being queer. “Queer” was first presented to me as a social construct that is a reaction against the social construct “gay,” but they both come from, and are based in, the same Anglo-European cultural heritage with its mores and ideas about how things should, or do, work. While the social construct “queer” certainly claims to be more “liberating”, at least when compared to the cultural “gay”, it is still fighting for a very European concept of liberty.

I can still remember the first time I saw a “gay” person that sort of looked and sounded like someone from my community, a gay person that was not white or black. His name was Pedro Zamora and he was one of the cast members on *The Real World San*

Francisco. I watched the premiere episode in 1994 and was blown away by the implication of his statement (I'm paraphrasing); "It's the crookedest (sic) street in the world, and I don't want anything "straight" in my life right now." He didn't "come out" in the first episode, but to my 16 year old mind the possibility was enough to prompt me to write enthusiastically about it in a long-lost or destroyed journal. Finally someone like me!

In the second episode he revealed his sexuality, and from what I remember in nearly the same breathe, the fact that he was HIV positive. I was familiar with HIV because my older brother was a health educator at the time, and while we didn't talk about my own sexuality or sex life, I picked up the basics of HIV from him. I don't know what this did for my idea of what it meant to be Gay and Latino, but it did create some distance between myself and the model I was shown. Being HIV positive made him different, and it shifted what he represented to me. His primary struggle (as I understood it) revolved around his HIV status, and not his sexuality, he was a useless model in that regard, because it seemed that his sexuality was not (for him) an issue at all.

Throughout all this I had become politicized in a very "non-gay" kind of way. Through my younger brother, my friends, and popular radio at the time I first heard the music of Rage against the Machine (RATM). RATM was about being conscious of the underlying struggle that girded our lives as people of color in the United States. RATM and other bands like them encouraged me to become involved, and conscious about what societal systems could be capable of, as far as the repression of people and ideas. I learned through them about white supremacy, and cultural imperialism, and the unrelenting and horrible dominance of capitalism, and capitalistic agents in the United

States. Through Rage against the Machine I woke up politically. And this awakening was completely removed from my sexuality.

An appreciation for RATM seemed to push a lot of brown people at my school towards El Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlan (MEChA). According to their website “Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlan (MEChA) is a student organization that promotes higher education, cultura, and historia. MEChA was founded on the principles of self-determination for the liberation of our people. We believe that political involvement and education is the avenue for change in our society.”

And for a lot of people that I know it is and has served that purpose, but I always felt like MEChA wasn't for me. I agreed with a lot of the ideas they were presenting, but the particular chapter of MEChA at Polytechnic High School from 1994-1996 was not overtly friendly to queer people (in line with the surrounding community). I always got the impression there that they thought queer people should not be talked about, they were abnormal, frivolous and to be ignored all at the same time. There wasn't a “place” for me in MEChA, because I don't think MEChA knew how/ where I would fit. My attention turned from MEChA to starting an Amnesty International club at my school, and I didn't really think about MEChA as a possible home for me again.

Many years later I was introduced to Neo-Indigenous Mexican culture via a *Danza* (Indigenous ceremonial dance) group at Richie Valens Park in Pacoima. My brother invited me along, and there, I felt a connection to the ritual and music that I had never felt in a Catholic mass. With my experience in the Chicano community being one of exclusion to this point, I didn't get my hopes up. My fears were realized when I heard

a *platica* (discussion) about indigenous ideas relating to “Ometeotl” a Nahuatl term sometimes translated as dual energy or cosmic duality (defined here as diametrically male and female) and a conversation between *danzantes* (ceremonial dancers) about another *danzante* (ceremonial dancer) who identified as lesbian. The gist of this conversation was; “You can’t be *Mexica* (indigenous Mesoamerican) and Gay. Homosexuality was a disease brought over by Europeans; it didn’t exist here before they got here.”

I again felt that familiar sense of not belonging. I think that at that point it would have been easy for me to just walk away. I wasn’t a *danzante* (dancer), I’ve never been comfortable being part of a group, so I could have easily left that day and scrapped the reclaiming of indigenous identity by urban Mexican-Americans to another heterosexist/hetero-normative exercise, but that didn’t feel right to me. I remembered the movement and the music and the truth that resonated when the *Maestros* spoke and I decided to start looking into it myself.

The first place I looked was on-line. The first place on-line that I found was the “Mexica Movement” website. I found a lot of indigenous reclamation, nationalist rhetoric, and the idea that as a gay person there really wasn’t a place for me in their movement. I remember reading an article about how “the movement” had been derailed by the work of lesbians in Chicano Studies (that article has since been removed). Still to be found on their website are sentiments like the following:

**Gay/Lesbian** as a movement for equality and against discrimination is a positive idea. But when the gay/lesbian agenda is used to dominate, dilute, or destroy

Chicana/Chicano Studies or to attack our heritage, it is then that they become treason to our people. They become traitors who give priority to their sexuality over the liberation of our people. Those with a Gay/Lesbian agenda could have started their own studies without destroying Chicana/Chicano Studies. (2007)

At that time I didn't realize to what extent this idea was outside the present thinking in Chicano Studies. I took this statement at its word because it lined up nicely with my experience of MEChA, but I wasn't ready to give up on the idea of finding a place for myself and other queers in Mesoamerican thought/ culture. I decided to go back to school and find that place.

When I first set out on my academic quest, my question was about cosmology. Something like; how does a Mesoamerican universe with queers in it make sense? I haven't found the answer to that yet. What I have found is that very little information exists about homosexual identity and/or behavior in the context of Chicano lives at any point in history.

In *A Room of One's Own* Virginia Woolf (1929) discusses the difficulty of discussing, and even finding, female fiction authors when so much of the social system has been so fully invested and complicit in the exclusion, suppression, and deletion of women from all areas of relevance, including academia. She writes:

I have no model in my mind to turn this way and that. Here I am asking why women did not write poetry in the Elizabethan age, and I am not sure how they were educated; whether they were taught to write; whether they had sitting rooms to themselves; how many women had children before they were twenty-one;

what, in short, they did from eight in the morning until eight at night. (Woolf, 1929, p. 47)

In the same way my initial endeavor, to find queer men in Mesoamerica, was destined to fail, because social and academic systems have been fully invested and complicit in the exclusion, suppression, and deletion of queer Chicanos from all areas of relevance, including academia. Since the beginning of the Chicana@ movement, there has been a tense and exclusionary relationship between Chicano nationalism and queer identity (Gutierrez, 1993; Segura, 2001). In recent years Chicana@ scholarship, with the influence of Chicana feminism (Anzaldúa, 1987, Moraga, 1983), has become more inclusive of queer points of view; however, there is a dearth of knowledge production from and about queer Chicanos, particularly in relation to queer Chicano history. The academic literature that does exist on/about gay/queer Chicano/Latinos has often been produced by non-Chicano/Latinos, and is sometimes enmeshed in paradigms of sexuality that are not culturally relevant to queer Chicano/ Latinos or misinformed about queer Chicano culture and reality (Chae & Ayala, 2010). The literature also tends to stereotype Latinos and view queer Chicanos as queer “others” rather than as complex human beings existing in relational matrixes within and outside of their communities (Carrier, 1992; Prieur, 1996; Cantu, 2011).

Therefore, the goal of my thesis is to examine and contribute to the academic discussion related to queer/ gay Chicano men. I will use a relational theory as proposed by Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano, (2010) akin to intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991; McCall, 2005) and borrow and expand on the concepts of “mestizaje” and “nepantlism” as presented by Gloria Anzaldúa in *Borderlands/ La Frontera* (1987) to accomplish this. My

thesis will be informed by my auto-ethnography and I will interrogate, critique, and contest the literature on queer Chicanos using my experiences as reference points.

In “Sexuality and Chicana/o Studies,” Yarbrow-Bejarano (2010) calls for a centering of sex and desire in Chicano studies as a method of creating a distinct relational analysis of the experience of Chican@s. She points out that without this centering Chican@ nationalists have often failed to examine their own privilege as heterosexuals because they fail to examine heterosexuality at all. This lack of analysis creates categories of differential oppression like those discussed and examined by Crenshaw (1991) in “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color”. Her theory of intersectionality takes the idea that overlapping social matrixes create social positions that perpetuate social injustice and examines the intersection of said social positions. It will serve for this investigation because I would like to explore the different levels and historical periods of representation that queer Chicano men have access to when attempting to define their existence and experience.

Mestizaje and nepantlism, as proposed by Gloria Anzaldua (1987), will also prove invaluable as I attempt to explore as many aspects of queer Chicano cultural representations I can in this work without having to commit fully to any essentialist identity category. I will use Latino/ Chicano and Queer/ Gay alternately, whenever different theoretical situations call for them (and again making a conscious choice to ignore essentialist identity categories). Another helpful theoretical tool will be the concept of Nepantlah. Anzaldua defined nepantlah as a Nahuatl term for the experience of being wherein the self is pulled or torn between things. I would like to take this position, but rather than focus on the sensation of being pulled or torn I would like to

bring it to its simplest Nahuatl definition of being in the middle. Not as a tearing, but as a sort of liminal stasis. This definition fits with ideas presented by Anzaldua after the publication of *Borderlands* in “Writing, Politics, and las Lesbaderas: Platicando con Gloria Anzaldua” by Keating (1993)

I have chosen relational theory and Anzaldua’s concepts of *mestizaje* and *nepantlism* because I think they complement each other. While relational theory is concerned with societal/ relational matrixes, *mestizaje*, and *nepantlism* are subject positions that exist within these matrixes and are, perhaps, defined by them.

I think it is important for all of these concepts to be grounded in a recognizable physical reality and I am choosing to take a lead from Cruz (2001). In her “Toward an Epistemology of a Brown Body” she describes the concept and process of centering learning and teaching in the physical bodies of Chicanas and our female ancestors. While she speaks specifically of Chicana bodies and the bodies of our grandmothers, I believe that this idea can and must be extended to men’s bodies. Perhaps for queer men particularly the body is an important center of teaching and learning. Where else but in our bodies do we recognize the nature and truth of our desire (one of our defining characteristics)? It is also important to remember that as Yarbrow-Bejarano (2010) points out by calling for a study that puts desire at its center it is not just the bodies of women that have been ignored in academia.

What I would like to do is challenge notions about queer Chicanos, contextualize their lives within Chicano/ Latino communities (and in the broader communities in which we exist) and dispute stereotypical, and harmful ideas about queer Chicanos, our families,

and lives. There is very little existing literature on Queer/Gay Latinos/Chicanos, and my thesis could serve as a repository of existing literature (a bit of an overview) to this point and as a short cut to the fact that very little information about this topic is available I will use my auto-ethnography (life story) as proof, context, and starting point. The data for the research will also consist of historical literature about Pre-Cuauhtémoc society/ thought and the idea of queerness as it relates to this history and thought. Sociological literature about queer Latinos will also be examined as well as literature related to Chicano nationalism. Public health literature about Queer/ Gay Latino/Chicanos will be critiqued. I have chosen to use this literature because it is the most viable to accomplish my goal of accounting for the lack of evidence and participation of and by queer Chicanos in academic literature. All other data will be culled from existing academic literature and will be cited/ cataloged fully. Any information gathered by word of mouth (we have to remember the importance of the oral tradition in indigenous knowledge) will be cited to whatever sources it was acquired from.

### **Clarification of Terms**

Euro-American identity markers sometimes fail to capture the reality, and even existence, of Latino/ Chicano Queers. To begin “Latino” (while useful) is a hegemonic term that destroys and subsumes important differences between the communities being studied (Munoz-Laboy, 2008). For example, the culture and experience of a rural Peruvian immigrant man and a man of Puerto Rican descent born in New York City will differ greatly, but in the United States they could both be classified as Latino. There’s also a danger of looking for people who identify as Straight, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) among Latinos (or in any other non-Western cultural group)

because these identity markers may (and do) not necessarily have any cultural capital in all Latino communities. Addressing the correctness, or consequences, of using different socially constructed identifiers is vital and important work, but it is beyond the scope of this thesis.

For my purposes, I have chosen to use the word Latino to describe the sex (male) and generalized ethnicity of the population I am looking at. This labeling is consistent with that of the literature I will be looking at and will be used to refer to a diverse group of men of colonial-Iberian descent including those with ties to Mexico, Central America, South America, and the Latin Caribbean who reside in the United States. When referring generally to people of this group I will use the more gender inclusive Latin@s (and propose the pronunciation luh-tee-nous respectively).

I will also (not interchangeably) be using the word Chicano. For the purpose of this work a Chican@ is a person of Mexican descent in the United States who is politically active and involved in the struggle for social justice. Traditionally a working class identifier, it can also include people from the middle and upper classes.

I will also be using a number of words to refer to people's sexuality and sexual identity. The first term that has to be defined is Straight. For the purpose of this work to be Straight is to be someone of a biologically unambiguous sex characteristics that places them at the furthest extreme of what we call male or female (as defined by a penis or vagina (respectively)) who is only sexually attracted (and willing to engage sexually) with a person at the other extreme of biologically unambiguous sexual characteristics. Straight can also be defined using gender (the socially sanctioned/ constructed

performance of sex); in this case it is a person who performs one gender and is only sexually attracted (and willing to engage sexually) with a person who performs the “opposite” gender.

I will use Gay to mean the diametrical opposite of “Straight”. To be Gay is to be “just like” Straight people but with the “opposite” object choice. This means that a person with biologically unambiguous sexual characteristics (penis or vagina) is only attracted to persons with the “same” sexual characteristics. Using gender; a person who performs one gender is only attracted to a person who performs the “same” gender.

I will also be using the term Queer to describe a type of disidentification; not Straight, but not Gay either. Queer refutes the idea that there are only two choices and/ or that everyone does (and can) make a choice between the two. Queer includes, but is not limited to (or defined as), persons who perform both or neither genders and are attracted to (willing to engage sexually with) persons who perform both or neither genders. This designation represents a type of anarchy of desire wherein object choice is not necessarily decided before the fact, but can be viewed contextuo-situationally (to coin a phrase). Would this person have sex with that other person? Yes, No and Maybe; for reasons that may have nothing to do with biological sex or socially defined gender, but that may make use of both (and potentially many other things) to create an image of desire that is idiosyncratic.

Rather than trying to single out Gay, Bisexual, or Transgender people in this thesis I am choosing to use the word “Queer” as an umbrella term that describes all biological males who engage in sex acts that are not restricted to biological male-female

or “heterosexual” sex acts. I am using this term because gender and sexuality categories created and used by Europeans often fail to capture the reality of gender and sexuality as experienced by Latinos. While Gay and bisexual exist as an identity category to describe men who are sexually interested in those of the same biological sex, this term is less culturally relevant to Latino groups. For example; in a 2010 study with 2554 Latino respondents to questionnaires Chae and Ayala found that while 3.9% of respondents reported engaging in sex with people of the same biological sex in the last twelve months only 1.3% identified as Gay, Lesbian or Bisexual (2010). The term Queer is useful here because it can take the place of identity markers that are contested and/or not culturally relevant. I am using Queer as a non-hetero or homo-normative category.

I like, and will be borrowing parts of, Somerville’s (2000) definition, or understanding, of Queer:

Queer theory has tended to define itself revolving around the axis of sexuality. To queer becomes a way to denaturalize categories such as “lesbian” and “gay” (not to mention “heterosexual” revealing them as socially and historically constructed identities that have worked to establish and police the line between the “normal” and the “abnormal” since the late nineteenth century. Moving away from the underlying assumptions of identity politics, queer theory has tended not toward locating stable “queer” subjects but rather toward understanding the very process of deviant subject formation that results from a refusal or “failure” to adhere to the prescriptions of compulsory heterosexuality. (Somerville, 2000, p. 136)

In her work Somerville attempts to show the interrelatedness of socially constructed categories such as race and sexuality, in an effort to denaturalize them. She deals explicitly with four categories; “black”, “white”, “homosexual” and “heterosexual.” She discusses how these categories are inventions of the dominant ruling bodies that reinforce each other and are used to divide and control people.

This is relevant to my work because I have to keep in mind the nature of such categories. I do not expect or need to find a complete cultural equivalent to concepts such as Gay, Queer and/or Straight because I understand that these are social constructs, and not naturally occurring categories, used to define people. If the category does not seem to exist, I may infer that it is possible that it hasn’t been necessary for the culture in question to create it. I also can’t and won’t look for a cultural equivalent to these categories because they may not be relevant to the experiences or understanding of the community or individuals I will be looking at.

How sexuality is defined is also an important part of what I will be looking for:

One’s sexual identity, while at times directly linked to one’s sexual activities, more often describes a complex ideological position, into which one is interrelated based partly on the cultures mapping of bodies and desires and partly on one’s response to that interpolation. Thus there is no strict relationship between one’s sexual desire or behavior and one’s sexual identity, although the two are closely intertwined (Somerville, 2000, p. 6).

As far as my work is concerned this could mean that while there may not be a concept or term that translates or corresponds literally to the concept/ word “Gay” it does

not mean that there is no same-sex desire, or understanding of that desire, that goes beyond or around that concept. The lack of an identity marker then does not indicate a lack of behavior or desire. In the same way, we would not assume that a culture without a word that equates to oxygen does not breathe it. Queer can, and has, also been used to describe the non-normative experience of other socially constructed identity markers like race and ethnicity (Arrizon, 2006).

While the creation of Queer identity is certainly something that will influence this thesis, I hope to always keep in mind that, what we call, Queer people of color presenting their ideas about who they are is what this thesis will be about; not the promotion of a Queer sensibility. The reality of racism and ethnocentrism within Gay or Queer communities and racist heterosexism is ever-present; being conscious of it is the one way to attempt to avoid it.

The phenomenon of the “Queer is a white thing” fantasy is strangely reflected in reverse by the normativity of whiteness in North American Gay Culture (Munoz, 1999). While Queer theory claims to be an ethnic/racially inclusive branch of gay and lesbian studies, it has been pointed out, and I have certainly experienced as a “Gay man of color,” that:

Most of the cornerstones of Queer theory that are taught, cited, and canonized in Gay and Lesbian Studies classrooms, publications, and conferences are decidedly directed toward analyzing white lesbian and gay men. The lack of inclusion is most certainly not the main problem with the treatment of race. A soft

multicultural *inclusion* of race and ethnicity does not, on its own, lead to a progressive identity discourse (Munoz, 1999, pg. 10).

Gonzalez (2008) also points to this problem in his “Ofrenda” by stating:

It would be seriously condescending to classify Queer Chicana/os as sexually anomalous footnotes of Chicanismo or to reduce us to the category of Queers with a Latin twist. These types of socially constructed categories perpetuate the isolation of one or more aspects of identity and also create harmful relationships of “others” in regards to established societal norms (Gonzalez, 2008, p. 25).

Other terms which should be defined for this work are: Intersectionality (as defined by Crenshaw, 1991) is a social position theory that accounts for the experiences of people with multiple identities that are oppressed. Rather than analyzing experience by looking at one area of oppression, experience is analyzed by considering all realms of oppression as an intersectional matrix that creates uniquely oppressed identities/ realities.

I will also be using a number of terms borrowed from Gloria Anzaldua (1987) and for the most part use her definitions of these terms. Among these terms is Mestizaje; mixture. This mixture is “racial” and/ or cultural. Mestiza/@/o is used to describe a person of mixed “race,” and/ or culture. For the purpose of this work it will be important to understand Nepantlah; this is a Nahuatl word that translates literally as “the middle” and Nepantlism; the experience and ability to exist between things. Nepantlism can give one the capacity to mediate between potentially conflicting factions/ persons.

Each section of this thesis will focus on a particular understanding of Queer Chicano representation. I am trying to base the structure of it by first and foremost asking

“Where would a Queer Chicano look for representations?” Accordingly, chapter two examines Pre-Cuauhtémoc information sources which rely on colonial artifacts. In this period I will ask what information about queer Mesoamerica exists. And with a bit of foresight; how has the history of colonization served to erase Queer men from Mesoamerican history and thought? Chapter three reviews literature on Chicano and Queer or Gay/Lesbian Studies. I will be asking if and how this literature is complicit in the exclusion/ deletion of Gay/ Queer representation and how the limited images of Latinos/ Chicanos that emerge from Gay/ Lesbian studies represent our community. Chapter four examines and critiques current public health literature related to Latino Men who have Sex with Men (MSM) and HIV. I am looking at this literature because it is the most abundant body of literature related to the topic and I will be asking why it is that most of the existing literature about Queer/ Gay Latinos/Chicanos in the modern context is being produced in the field of public health. And what does this literature say/ teach about us? Finally, in chapter five I will be adding my own experience and auto-historia to this discussion and will ask how a relational theory, using desire as a focus and the body as a center for teaching/ learning be used to address the issues and lives of Gay/Queer Chicano/ Latinos and ultimately; how can the concepts of mestizaje and nepantlism be used to push the discourse on queer Chicanos in the direction of a relational theory?

With these questions in mind I begin this work.

## CHAPTER TWO

In which our hero looks for a model of Queerness in indigenous Mesoamerican culture and does not find it, but does find some clues as to why it isn't there.

### **Introduction**

In *Mexico Profundo*, Guillermo Bonfil Batalla (1996) presents an argument for an understanding of Mexican culture that rejects, what he calls, “the myth of *Mestizaje*” (defined in his work as the idea that the Mesoamerican and Iberian traditions are equally responsible for the cultural traditions of contemporary Mexico and its people). He proposes that the culture of Mexico is Indigenous with a thin veneer of the Iberian. If his argument is sound, then it is not erroneous (or unreasonable) for people of Mexican descent to identify as indigenous. This understanding of Mexicans as culturally indigenous (and not a 50/50 mix of “native” and European) is a challenge to traditional ideas about Mexicans as Mestizo (culturally mixed people), like those found in works like *The Cosmic Race* by Jose Vasconcelos (1925). While Vasconcelos argument refers to mixing of race and culture, Batalla is proposing that regardless of “race” the culture and cultural patterns of Mexico are indigenous.

This understanding of Mexican culture as indigenous has the potential to change our understanding of queer Chicano/ Latino realities. In ““That’s My Place! Negotiating Racial, Sexual, and Gender Politics in San Francisco’s Gay Latino Alliance, 1975-1983” by Horacio N. Roque Ramirez (2003) we can ask if the use of the models presented by traditional (Anglo-American) Gay Rights Movement, as social organizations that dealt

exclusively with issues of sexual freedom, failed to create a longstanding and socially relevant movement for change because those models are not based on an indigenous understanding of self and space. It is also worth noting that as portrayed in this article the traditional (Anglo men's) Gay Rights Movement in Latino communities particularly cannot withstand the pressure of sexism, which can be shown to be a 'gift' from our colonial inheritance or, seemingly, commercialism, as this movement disbanded once a commercial space for Gay Latinos appeared.

In order to view Queer Chicanos/ Latinos effectively through the prism of continuing Indigenous cultural patterns it is necessary to understand the place of queerness in Indigenous culture. It is necessary then to study indigenous culture, particularly the dominant culture of the so called "Aztecs" of Mesoamerica, and ask what place queer people had in their thinking and/ or societies in order to begin to understand our place and potential function in modern culture and community.

In his *Gay American History*, Jonathon Katz (1992) states:

The existence of homosexuality among the people who originally inhabited the United States will undoubtedly hold a certain special fascination for those lesbians and gay men who are today beginning to repossess the national and world history of their people- part of their struggle for social change and to win control over their own lives. One fact that emerges here is that the Christianization of Native Americans and the colonial appropriation of the continent by white, western "civilization" included the attempt by the conquerors to eliminate various traditional forms of Indian homosexuality- as part of their

attempt to destroy that native culture which might fuel resistance- a form of cultural genocide involving both Native Americans and Gay people. Today, the recovery of the history of Native American homosexuality is a task in which both gay and native people have a common interest. (Katz, 1992, p.284)

I would say that this task is also interesting to those of us who identify as Queer/ Gay and Chicano/ Latino because “native” and Chicano/ Latino are not mutually exclusive.

### **Destruction of Documents**

Upon beginning this part of my inquiry I quickly realized something; there is virtually no information about Queerness in Mexico pre-1500. As some of the literature points out it is not surprising that some things do not seem to exist, and are not mentioned for the most part, in the literature relating to Indigenous Mexican culture, as this literature was, for the most part, based on data collected and preserved by Spanish Religious specialists (Clendinnen, 1991). In the introduction to a 2002 translation of Acosta’s *Natural and Moral History of the Indies* Walter D. Mignolo points out that: “It is important to recognize that Acosta’s goal was not to write a “history” of the Indies but to convert the Indians to Christianity” (Mignolo, 2002). The final important point to consider is that the Spanish gaze on Mesoamerican culture potentially influenced not only the attitude that informants presented (as Clendinnen (1991) pointed out), but also the emphasis on the topics under discussion (Shein, 1992). For example, in *The Pre-Colombian Child* Shein proposes that “the descriptions in so many pictograms of the Codex was simply a result of Spaniards’ questions asked of the tlacuilo about the

punishment of children and do not reflect the true frequency or distribution of that activity (Shein, 1992).” That is, the Spanish chronicler influenced not only what was discussed but how and what about it was discussed therefore; I wonder if the perceived negative attitude towards homosexuality is not also a result of the Spanish gaze.

The anti-homosexual bias of the Spanish was apparent in many of the early encounters between them and indigenous people. There is a print with the astounding title “Balboa setting his dogs upon Indian practitioners of male love” from 1594 in the New York Public Libraries Rare Book Room. The Spanish campaign to “convert” the indigenous communities of Mesoamerica involved the wholesale destruction of Native knowledge sources and culture (Batalla, 1996). Very little of what the Indigenous people of Mesoamerica knew and/or believed survived this destruction. As Bierhorst (1992) points out: “No certifiably pre-Corstesian history book from the Valley of Mexico has survived to the present.”

In addition to all of this it is entirely possible, as Gloria Anzaldua (1987) and other Chicana scholars have proposed that the attitude of the dominant Indigenous culture of Mesoamerica at that time was oppressive to women, homosexuals, and those engaging in homosexual behavior. In “Massacre of the Dreamers” Ana Castillo reminds us that “It is imperative to understand that the Aztec-Tenochtitlan Empire was firmly entrenched at the time of the conquest in a phallocracy” (Castillo, 1994). Gloria Anzaldua tells us that; “The Aztec ruler, *Itzcoatl*, destroyed all the printed documents (books called codices) and rewrote a mythology that validated the wars of conquest and thus continued the shift from a tribe based on clans to one based on classes.” And “From 1492-1440 the Aztecs

emerged as a militaristic state that preyed on neighboring tribes for tribute and captives. (Anzaldua, 1987)

This idea of a type of “pre-Conquest conquest” is also found in Bierhorst (1992) where he writes:

In approximately the year 1430, as the new Aztec capital called Mexico Tenochtitlan consolidated its power and began making far-reaching conquests, its ruling elite decided to burn the old pictographic histories. According to the traditional explanation these accounts contained “falsehoods” that could have undermined the realm. Presumably the books that replaced them exaggerated the deeds of the upstart Mexica and codified the legend that the Mexica themselves had founded Tenochtitlan, though we may only guess what changes appeared in the new histories or what earlier records, if any, survived to contradict them.(Bierhorst, 1992, pg. 1)

This is in addition to the destruction and conquest wrought by the Spaniards a hundred years later (Batalla, 1996). In light of this potential double conquest it seems problematic to state anything about Mesoamerican history based on existing documentation. But for most of us the history we have is the history that we have access to, and based on that history Anzaldua (1987) makes the point that there was a historical process in effect that by the time of the conquest had drastically changed Mesoamerican culture from the idealized egalitarianism of some imaginations;

It took less than three centuries for Aztec society to change from the balanced duality of their earlier times and from the egalitarian traditions of a wandering

tribe to those of a predatory state. The nobility kept the tribute; the commoner got nothing, resulting in a class split. The conquered tribes hated the Aztecs because of the rape of their women and the heavy taxes levied on them, The Tlaxcalans were the Aztecs' bitter enemies, and it was they who helped the Spanish defeat the Aztec rulers, who were by this time so unpopular with their own common people that they could not mobilize the populace to defend the city. Thus the Aztec nation fell not because Malinali (La Chingada) interpreted for and slept with Cortes, but because the ruling elite had subverted the solidarity between men and women and between noble and commoner. (Anzaldua, 1987, pg.55)

Because the communities of Mesoamerica represent a diverse cultural group, as illustrated in this quote, even the possibility that Mexica (Aztec) culture was not Queer positive does not necessarily mean that all groups that existed in Mesoamerica were staunchly anti-homosexual. The fact is at this particular point in time all options are equally viable, since we know almost absolutely nothing, because at the beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup> Century European armies and missionaries (in concert) tore through and destroyed much of the high culture that existed in Meso-America at that time (Batalla, 1996).

This is not to say that Indigenous people have not to some extent been complicit in the exclusion or denial of Queerness. As Rifkin (2011) describes in "When did Indians Become Straight?" indigenous intellectuals of North America (and I am expanding this idea into colonized Mesoamerica) have consistently "bribed" dominant or oppressive cultures by representing themselves in a heteronormative frame that does not challenge dominant ideas about sex and gender. Making this even more complicated is the nature of sexual identity categories. As Rifkin (2011) points out in answering his titular question:

“So when did the Indians become straight? In some sense, they never have been, they always have been, and they have never ceased *becoming* so.” (Rifkin, 2011)

One factor that Rifkin is pointing to here is the socially constructed nature of sexual identity categories as defined by Western European ideologies/ academia. As Jonathan Ned Katz (1995) points out in his *The Invention of Heterosexuality*, the ideas of people as categorically defined in terms of sexual desire/ orientation are relatively new inventions. This may help to explain the exclusion of Queer *identities* in some of the work reviewed in this chapter. What there can be no doubt about is that same-sex sexual activity existed and continues to exist not only in human beings who lived and live in Mesoamerica, but also in animal species. In fact, the detractors of homosexual desire as “unnatural” would be surprised by the lengthy list of animal species wherein homosexual behavior has been documented (Bagemihl, 1999).

Considering all of this, I begin my examination of Mesoamerican texts with the premise that in order to fully realize ourselves as individuals we must have integrity. As part of this process we must create and learn to recreate our own potentially lost systems so that our understanding of ourselves are relevant to ourselves and the communities we live in. This includes understanding not only our ideas about ourselves, but also where those ideas came/ come from.

Studying history and understanding the process by which it is created is essential to our understanding of native cultures that are the foundation of our own present cultures. Guillermo Bonfil Batalla talks about the importance of studying language and native concepts because these in turn: “Will tell us about the way in which the universe is

understood in Mesoamerican terms” (Batalla, 1996). The first step in this process is to look at existing history to see what we can learn about Mesoamerican models of Queerness. I want to see how easy it is to access academic information that gives us an idea of Mesoamerican models of Queerness, and what the information I can access tells us about these models.

## **Method**

I gave myself a few guidelines; first, I decided that the texts I would examine would be books and that they should be readily available to any CSUN student interested in basing their understanding of Queer sexuality on indigenous Mexican models. Second, the texts should be general studies that contain some cultural information about the Aztecs and/ or other people in Mesoamerica before the arrival of the Spaniards. Third, the books must have indexes to reference topics and finally; the texts must be in English, I only included this requirement because I am making an assumption that not all Queer Chicano students would be able to access the models and ideas presented in books in other languages (specifically Spanish).

## **Procedure**

I visited the CSUN library over the course of several Saturdays from October to November 2012. I used the online catalog and did various title, subject and key word searches including variations and combinations of “Aztec,” “Mesoamerica,” “Mexico,” and “Mexican History.” This yielded a preliminary list of books that I sought out on the library shelves. I also examined books around the books on my list because books of

similar subjects are grouped together in library shelves. I was able to gather 22 books that met all of those requirements.

Next I checked the indexes of those books for a few key words/ concepts. First (and least likely to yield results because of their recent invention) I looked for indexed references to “Queer” and/ or “Gay,” I then looked for any indexed references to “homosexuality,” which I thought would yield more results because it has existed as a concept for at least a hundred years (Katz, 1995). Next I looked for any indexed references to “sex” keeping in mind Yarbro-Bejarano’s (2010) call to center it in our studies I wanted to see what information could be found about it, and I assumed that if there was no explicit reference to “homosexuality” there might at least be a clue about general sexual attitudes that could indicate an opinion of sexual queerness.

As a point of comparison I thought it would be interesting to look for a completely unrelated topic in the index. I decided to also look for “sacrifice” because it seems to be a topic that is almost synonymous with Aztec civilization. I also thought it would be interesting to see to what extent an act that I would consider violent is documented and discussed because of what it says about the researchers doing the discussing. I also think it will be interesting to see if there is a disproportionate emphasis/ focus on sacrifice because I have to assume that sex and sexuality played a bigger/ more important role in the lives of most of the people of Mesoamerica than sacrifice possibly could, and to talk about what that disproportionate emphasis could mean.

In *Our Inner Ape* Francis De Waal (2005) points out that while human beings are as closely “related’ to both Chimpanzees and Bonobos apes, we are more often than not

ignorant to the Bonobos. He asks if Chimpanzees are called our closest cousins because they are aggressive, hierarchical and resolve conflict through physical and psychological violence while Bonobos are more likely to resolve conflict and relate to each other through sexual interactions of all kinds. He wonders if that difference is what compels researchers to ignore Bonobos. Not only because seeing the Chimpanzee within ourselves would seem to confirm Western thoughts of “animal nature,” but also because it would limit our imaginations when creating alternatives to aggressive hierarchal relationships and societies and make them conform more closely with the aggressive and hierarchical societies that the West has created (De Waal, 2005). It will be interesting to see what Western researchers have made of the Aztecs and Mesoamerican culture as it related to sex and sacrifice.

### **Books (Data Sources)**

This is a complete list of the 22 books that fit the requirements for this study; they are organized chronologically by year of publication.

**Table 1: Available Data Sources on MesoAmerica**

#	Year	Title	Author(s)
1	1943	Ancient life in Mexico and Central America	Hewett, E.L.
2	1958	The Aztecs, People of the Sun	Caso, A.
3	1962	Aztecs of Mexico	Valliant, G.C.
4	1962	Mexico	Coe, M. D.
5	1970	Natural and Moral History of the Indies	De Acosta, J.
6	1970	Daily Life of the Aztecs	Soustelle, J.
7	1971	Aztec Thought and Culture	Leon-Portilla, M.
8	1972	The Aztecs, Maya, and their Predecessors	Porter Weaver, M.
9	1973	Motolinia's History of the Indians of New	Motolinia, T.

		Spain	
10	1973	The Aztecs	Davies, N.
11	1979	The Fifth Sun: Aztec Gods, Aztec World	Brundage, B.C.
12	1980	Native MesoAmerican Spirituality	Leon-Portilla, M.
13	1981	Mighty Aztecs	Stuart, G.
14	1983	Nahuatl Myth and Social Structure	Taggart, J.M.
15	1991	Aztecs, An Interpretation	Clendinnen, I.
16	1992	History and Mythology of the Aztecs	Bierhorst, J.
17	1992	The Aztec Image of Self and Society	Leon-Portilla, M. &Klor, A.J.J.
18	1994	Meso-American Elites	Chase, D.Z. & Chase A.
19	1996	The Legacy of Meso-America	Carmack, R.M., Gasco, J., Gossen, G.H.
20	1999	City of Sacrifice	Carrasco, D.
21	2001	Mexico's Indigenous Past	Lopez, A.A., Lopez Lujan, L.
22	2005	The Aztecs of Central Mexico	Berdan, F.

### Research Findings

As expected none of the 22 books I studied contained indexed references to “Gay” or “Queer.” As discussed above both of these terms are relatively new and culturally specific to a modern Western society, so their non-existence is easy to explain and understand. It is worth pointing out though that for many novice or younger researchers, particularly those not familiar with Gay and Lesbian studies, the lack of Gay and Queer representation could be misinterpreted as an absence of Gay or Queer realities in Indigenous Mesoamerican societies (and not merely as an accident of history).

**Table 2: Indexed References to Gay, Queer, Homosexuality**

	Book Title	Indexed References to:		
		Gay	Queer	Homosexuality
1	Ancient life in Mexico and Central America	0	0	0
2	The Aztecs, People of the Sun	0	0	0
3	Aztecs of Mexico	0	0	0
4	Mexico	0	0	0

5	Natural and Moral History of the Indies	0	0	0
6	The Aztecs, Maya, and their Predecessors	0	0	0
7	Motolinia's History of the Indians of New Spain	0	0	0
8	The Aztecs	0	0	0
9	The Fifth Sun: Aztec Gods, Aztec World	0	0	0
10	Native MesoAmerican Spirituality	0	0	0
11	Mighty Aztecs	0	0	0
12	Nahuatl Myth and Social Structure	0	0	0
13	History and Mythology of the Aztecs	0	0	0
14	The Aztec Image of Self and Society	0	0	0
15	Meso-American Elites	0	0	0
16	The Legacy of Meso-America	0	0	0
17	City of Sacrifice	0	0	0
18	Mexico's Indigenous Past	0	0	0
19	The Aztecs of Central Mexico	0	0	0
20	Daily Life of the Aztecs	0	0	0
21	Aztec Thought and Culture	0	0	0
22	Aztecs, An Interpretation	0	0	1

Only one of the 22 books I studied (4.5%) contained an indexed reference to “homosexuality”; *Aztecs, an Interpretation* (Clendinnen, 1991). What it has to say is not positive:

Sexual preference for one’s own sex was recognized, and deplored, female homosexuality being abused as even more base than prostitution, although its incidence is not clear. There are a few references to male homosexuality in the texts, but those few are suspect, given the Spanish obsession with the ‘unnamable offence.’ Sodomites were also vulnerable to enslavement, being outside the natural law, so the accusation could bring significant rewards. There are teasing hints of Mesoamerican forerunners to the berdache: the biological male who adopted the social role, occupation, and dress of the female; who usually, (though not always) sought sexual partners among men; who often enjoyed high prestige

for his access to the skills of both sexes, and who played his accepted part in many native North American warrior societies.” (Clendinnen, 1991, p.168-169)

Here then we have some information about Queers or at least Queer sex in Mesoamerica, and it is nowhere near being conclusive. While on the one hand I can point to this as proof that homosexuality at the very least **existed** in Mesoamerica, on the other the authors suspicion that the negative attitude found here is influenced by the Spanish historian and not the people of Mesoamerica doesn't get us any closer to finding a place for Queer Chicanos in Mesoamerican thought/ culture. What this entry does tell us is that homosexuality was criminalized, that the Spanish colonizers were obsessed with it, and that potentially there existed a relatively positive Queer model that the Spanish and history have erased/ eradicated.

While *Gender in Pre-Hispanic America* by Klein (2001) did not fulfill the requirements of this analysis (because it is not a general study of Mesoamerica), the author seems to reinforce the above notion that homosexual behavior was viewed negatively in Mesoamerica “Same-sex behavior was thought by Nahuas to cause crops to freeze, livestock to die, and business deals to fail” (Klein, 2001). This author seems to disagree with the notion of the venerated berdache or “two-spirit” in Mesoamerican thought stating that “As agents of trickery and deceit, hermaphrodites, like homosexuals, were therefore not just disapproved of, but often killed as well” (Klein, 2001). The final bit of data on sexuality I pulled from this text is a confirmation of heterosexism as a social norm: “Throughout Mesoamerica, the stable and productive marriage of a fully feminine woman to an entirely masculine man represented the hallmark of social maturity and formed the basis of the socioeconomic order. Gender dualism, in which a male and

female took on complementary gender roles designed to benefit the family as a whole, thus represented the social ideal” (Klein, 2011).

The next subject I thought might provide hints as to Queer models is “sex.” I also wanted to look at “sex” in the context of Yarbrow-Bejarano’s call to center sex and desire in our study. “Sex” yielded considerably more results than “homosexuality.” Indexed references to sex were related to sex acts and sex roles (gender). Six of the 22 (27%) books I studied contained indexed references to “sex.” There were a total of 33 indexed references to sex/ sexuality which means there are an average of 1.5 references to sex in the books I studied.

**Table 3: Indexed References to Sex**

	Book Title	Indexed References to: Sex/ Sexuality
1	Ancient life in Mexico and Central America	0
2	The Aztecs, People of the Sun	0
3	Aztec's of Mexico	0
4	Mexico	0
5	Natural and Moral History of the Indies	0
6	The Aztecs, Maya, and their Predecessors	0
7	Motolinia's History of the Indians of New Spain	0
8	The Aztecs	0
9	Native MesoAmerican Spirituality	0
10	Mighty Aztecs	0
11	Meso-American Elites	0
12	The Legacy of Meso-America	0
13	Mexico's Indigenous Past	0
14	The Aztecs of Central Mexico	0
15	Daily Life of the Aztecs	0
16	Aztec Thought and Culture	1 “Sex, education concerning”
17	The Aztec Image of Self and Society	2 "sexual morality"
18	Nahuatl Myth and Social Structure	1 "Aztec attitude toward"
19	The Fifth Sun: Aztec Gods, Aztec World	2 “sex”

20	City of Sacrifice	3 "sex;" 3 "sexual misconduct"
21	History and Mythology of the Aztecs	6 "sexual offenses"
22	Aztecs, An Interpretation	Sexuality: 3 "attitudes to"; 5 "behavior"; 6 "offences"

Some of the references to sex actually referred to sex roles. While it did not meet the requirements for this study (no index), *Mexico Before Cortez* by John Eric Thompson (1933) includes a chapter called “The Cycle of Life” in which the author presents the typical course of life for men and women (along strict gender lines) and the lives presented assume and reinforce the heterosexual inclination of all parties involved. This same heteronormative “cycle” is reinforced 40 years later in Jacque Soustelle’s *Daily Life of the Aztecs* (1970) which also presents a strictly gendered, and not unfavorable, understanding of Meso-American people and culture. The focus is on the rules for young women, and does not entertain the idea that the daily life of some of the population of Meso-America revolved around a Queer (to a modern Western sensibility) sexuality. *Aztec Thought and Culture* by Leon-Portilla (1971), has one reference to “Sex, education concerning.” It is a sort of speech intended for, presumably heterosexual, young men given by a father which instructs them on proper sexual and social comportment (Leon-Portilla, 1971). In *The Aztec Image of Self and Society* by Leon-Portilla and Klor (1992) there are no references to sex or sexuality, but two references to “sexual morality,” both of which are related to the comportment of young women in relation to sex and appropriate gender roles, neither mention or are explicitly related to same-sex desire.

This leaves five texts with actual references to sex/ sexuality. *Nahuatl Myth and Social Structure* by James M. Taggart (1983) features one indexed reference to “Sex, Aztec attitude toward,” unfortunately that reference ends “*See also Sin*” but the

information referenced is actually telling in a potentially positive way. The author (referencing Garibay, 1970) states:

Hispanics altered Nahuatl ethical and moral thought by introducing the concept of sin – the idea that breaking moral rules earns the wrath of the gods. Even sexual sin, such a concern for the Spanish, did not appear in Aztec belief before the Conquest. Sahagún’s informants regarded sexual pleasure as a gift from the gods (Garibay 1970: 117). To be sure, the Aztec warned their daughters against sexual promiscuity and adultery, but they did not believe that such behavior brought supernatural punishment. They sought to control sexual conduct with a deep concern for family honor, a sense of shame, and men’s fear of dissipating their finite supply of sexual energy and thereby losing their wives sexual voracity in old age (Garibay 1970: 117-128). But the friars and the Hispanic settlers firmly established the concept of sin, particularly sexual sin, in Nahuatl thought. (Taggart, 1983, p.161)

This is interesting and important because while it does not affirm a homosexual identity or category in Aztec social life it does introduce the idea that sex and physical pleasure did not have a negative connotation in “Aztec” thought before the arrival of Europeans. It is important to remember this point as we look at the other texts because wherever we see the idea of sin we have to remind ourselves that “sin” has a very specific definition that would not be culturally relevant to the populations of Pre-Contact Mesoamerica. It also invites us to look to societies that do not view sex negatively as potential models for Mesoamerican understandings of sex and sexuality that can make sense in Chican@ social context based in indigenous cultural patterns.

In *The Fifth Sun: Aztec Gods, Aztec World* by Brundage (1979) there are two indexed references to sex and both refer to heterosexual sex, one in myth and the other as a “sin” among the Aztecs. The first is a discussion of “Precious Flower” (I am assuming this is a translation of Xochiquetzal) and her role as the “goddess of love and springtime” and Tlazolteotl which the author states “literally means filth goddess but should be understood as sex goddess.” He credits both “goddesses” as being very important transplants to Mexica society. The author also indicates some related belief in a quadruple divine aspect of sexual desire in Mesoamerican thought whose mythology “states that they were present as a sisterhood in the darkness which preceded the first rising of the fifth sun and that they, along with the Mimixcoa, represented the stars” (Brundage, 1979). We see here the importance, and venerated understanding, of desire in Mesoamerican life. Most of the other texts we looked at don’t mention that Mesoamerican thought differed from Western thought in its veneration of women and sexuality. The other indexed reference to sex merely states that “sexual activity was unclean and an offense to the gods,” which we have to contextualize with Taggart’s (1983) assertion that sexual offences and “sins” were not exactly the same thing in Mesoamerican thought.

*City of Sacrifice* by David Carrasco (1999) has three references to sex and three to sexual misconduct with one related to punishment of said conduct, and three to the “eating” of sexual “sins”. The three references to sex refer to heterosexual sex exchanged for goods, and the ritual taking of a female sacrifice victim’s virginity by the emperor (as a reenactment of a mythological fertility that ensured/ encouraged broader (agricultural) fertility). The three references to sexual misconduct are in reference to adultery (sex

outside of marriage), and social control of adolescent sexuality. While it is not explicitly stated, there is nothing to indicate that this understanding of adultery and social control (keeping people of different genders from each other to avoid sex outside of marriage) could (or did) happen in a context where people of the same gender/ sex could engage each other sexually.

In *History and Mythology of the Aztecs* translated by John Bierhorst (1992) we find six references to “sexual offenses” (perhaps a more culturally correct term than “sin”) all of which are mytho-historical instances of “sexual offences” being committed by particular individuals. Some of the “sexual offences” are not culturally translatable; such as Quetzalcoatl drinking with his sister (no other details are given), or Quetzalcoatl taking a “country girl as concubine” or a reference to men who “feather themselves” after capturing a jaguar and engage in sex acts with women while “feathered” (against instructions). I suppose that if one had an understanding of Mesoamerican culture these “offences” might make more sense. Some of what is referenced is clearly influenced by the European eye recording it, such as one reference that describes a newly promoted Mesoamerican official’s wife consorting with “the devil” (a personage that, obviously, did not exist in Mesoamerican thought before the Europeans introduced it). There is also a reference to a recent widow who faints (and avoids intercourse) after being propositioned by a ruler and a reference to a ruler who was doing “bad things” with women; “he would thrust his forearm into her crotch and feel inside her body” (Bierhorst, 1992). None of these six “sexual offences” referenced involve or mention homosexuality.

The book with the most references to sex, (and the only reference to homosexuality among them), is *Aztecs, an Interpretation* by Clendinnen (1991). Three

are references to “attitudes”, five are references to “behavior”, and six are references to “offenses.” According to the author, in order to begin understanding Mesoamerican attitudes to sexuality “First they need to be retrieved, obscured as they have been by the intrusion of Spanish Christian anxieties built into the first dictionaries and seminal translations of the sixteenth century” (Clendinnen, 1991). She says this because (as Taggart also points out) “Christian assumptions regarding the dangers of all fleshly (more particularly sexual) indulgence have tended to be superimposed on Mexica understandings.”

Once that is recognized, the first thing that can be said is that words related to sexuality in Nahuatl are also related to “joy” linguistically. The author points out that one Nahuatl word for vagina is akin to “the place of joy” and that many other “joyful” words were mistranslated/ mis-transliterated by Christian scholars to conform to a more sex-negative worldview because in Mesoamerica “The power of lust and its more playful manifestations were celebrated.”

Some other attitudes toward sexuality were related to Mesoamerican ideas about the potency and use of seminal fluid. In some of the primary texts the author cites that seminal fluid is likened to "honey" that can be depleted leaving the seminally deficient man weak and feeble. She also points out that the Mesoamerican understanding of conception was different than that of the Europeans because while they understood that sex was related to conception there is also some evidence that sex was thought necessary to nourish a growing fetus in the first trimester of pregnancy (after that period it was to be discontinued until after birth). The point about Mesoamerican attitudes seems to be that sex was a good thing, but it had to be done within certain parameters in order to preserve

human health, and there isn't much of the queer in it. As the author points out, the lack of queerness is probably due to the Christian imposition of “sin”-based understandings of sexuality that robbed Mesoamerican sex of joy.

The author’s references to behavior reinforce the idea that there were appropriate and inappropriate sexual behaviors. She points out a practice of allowing sexual license to certain young men destined for sacrifice, and ceremonies wherein young men and women were introduced to each other socially (not sexually). She also speaks of the sexual role of women and concludes that; "In such a system women could seem no more than feeders and breeders of warriors, and their casual toys." But this doesn't say everything there is to say about the role of women because as she also points out Mesoamerican society was highly stratified and some women were able to achieve much socially, economically and even politically. The author reminds us here too that we have to be careful not to impose our own ideas/ interpretations on those with a different history and cosmology. What may seem so clear to us about the place and role of women may not be so clear when considered in another cultural context.

To reinforce that idea, in her discussion of marriage the author points out that marriage was a social (not sacred) union and that “There was no rhetoric of sexual subordination in the marriage ritual: no swaddling and leadings and handing from male to male; no affectation of the mental, moral, or physical ineptitude of the bride. What was emphasized was the transference of care of the young man from mother to bride.” This is interesting and important because it not only shows a clear difference between European and Mesoamerican cultural ideas about male female relationships, but it also allows for new ideas and models of sexuality to emerge. If the marriage contract is primarily related

to care-giving (and not dominion over your partners sex to avoid children not of your genetic line (like modern Western marriage)) then a Queer partnership could serve as a mutual care-giving marriage. The last note about marriage and sex is that the partners were then sent to live with each other but did not have sex for at least four days (giving themselves some time to really get to know each other perhaps?) and both of their social lives (what they did day to day) changed fairly dramatically once they were married.

The last set of sexually related references is related to what the author calls “offenses.” In these references again the idea that there were proper times and places for sexual activity is reinforced. Added to that is the information that breaking sexual rules resulted in violent and public disciplinary action, up to and including death. One thing made explicit in these references is the idea that offenses or inappropriate actions had real world physical consequences. Unlike in European thought there was no reliance in Mesoamerica on the idea that the souls of people could be damaged, but there were consequences to actions and those consequences manifested themselves in the physical. The danger was in imbalance and the author points out that the problem with inappropriate sex was that it happened out of place or balance and could lead to imbalance on the individual and social level. This is why, I imagine, the punishment of sexual offenses was (to a modern Western sensibility) so extreme. I am thinking particularly of the idea that adulterers were put to death, stoned, or hanged.

So what does all this tell us about sexuality in Mesoamerica and the study of it? First, it tells us that there is not a lot of information in the books I looked at. Only one of the 22 texts had what I consider an adequate introductory discussion of sexuality. Second, it tells us that we have to be careful in studying this subject not to impose our own ideas

on them, AND not to accept the ideas that have already been imposed, accepted and repeated about them (like the idea that sin was relevant in a Mesoamerican context despite the fact that it has a very particular cultural context and definition). Third, all the texts discuss the importance in Mesoamerican thought of appropriate sexual behavior but this must be tempered by the final point to be pulled which is that (while not a bacchanal) Mesoamerican sexual thought was accepting of the notion that sex was not only joyful, but necessary for the development of healthy human beings.

To end this chapter, and as a final point of comparison, I searched for references to “sacrifice” because I thought it would be interesting to see how much focus and attention is put on what seems a violent (to Western European academic sensibilities) topic. I assumed that there would be many references to sacrifice in these texts, and I was not disappointed. The highlighting of sacrificial practices and complete ignorance of sex or sexuality was a trend that ran throughout most of the texts I looked at. Twenty of the 22 books I studied (87%) contained references to sacrifice. Altogether I found 395 indexed references to sacrifice. This makes an average of 17 indexed references to sacrifice in the books I studied.

**Table 4: Indexed References to Sacrifice**

	Book Title	Indexed References: Sacrifice
1	Aztecs, An Interpretation	74
2	History of the Indies of New Spain	60
3	History and Mythology of the Aztecs	45
4	Natural and Moral History of the Indies	27
5	Mighty Aztecs	27
6	City of Sacrifice	26
7	Native MesoAmerican Spirituality	22
8	The Fifth Sun: Aztec Gods, Aztec World	21

9	Meso-American Elites	20
10	Mexico's Indigenous Past	18
11	Motolinia's History of the Indians of New Spain	16
12	The Aztec Image of Self and Society	15
13	Mexico	14
14	Aztecs of Mexico	14
15	The Aztecs, People of the Sun	13
16	The Aztecs	13
17	The Legacy of Meso-America	12
18	The Aztecs, Maya, and their Predecessors	11
19	Ancient life in Mexico and Central America	6
20	The Aztecs of Central Mexico	1
21	Nahuatl Myth and Social Structure	0
22	Daily Life of the Aztecs	0

There are three books with more than 40 total references to sacrifice. *Aztecs, an Interpretation* by Clendinnen (1991) contains the most references to sacrifice with 74. It also contains the most references to sexuality (15 indexed references total) and the only reference to homosexuality. The next highest indexed reference to sacrifice is *History of the Indies of New Spain* by Duran (1994) with more than 60 indexed references to human sacrifice. The third highest number of references to sacrifice can be found in *History and Mythology of the Aztecs* Tr. John Bierhorst (1992) where we find 45 indexed references to “human sacrifice” and 27 indexed references to “animal sacrifice.” In *Motolinia’s History of the Indians of New Spain* Translated and edited by Elizabeth Andros Foster (Motolinía, 1973) we can find 16 references to “sacrifice,” 22 references to “sacrificial victims” and five indexed references to “self-torture” for good measure.

Six of the books I looked at contain between 20 and 30 indexed references to sacrifice. *Natural and Moral History of the Indies* Jose De Acosta (1970) contains 27 indexed references to “human sacrifice” and five indexed references to “animal

sacrifice.” *Mighty Aztecs* by Gene Stuart (1981) also contains 27 indexed references to human sacrifice. *City of Sacrifice* by David Carrasco (1999) has less indexed references to sacrifice than some of the other texts I looked at; only 26 (which is interesting considering its title). *Native Mesoamerican Spirituality* by Leon-Portilla (1980) contains 22 indexed references to sacrifice of different kinds. In *The Fifth Sun: Aztec Gods, Aztec World* by Brundage (1979) there are 21 indexed references to sacrifice. *Meso-American Elites* by Diane Z. Chase and Arlen Chase (1994) there are 20 indexed references to human sacrifice.

Eight of the books I looked at contained between 10 and 19 indexed references to sacrifice. *Mexico’s Indigenous Past* by Alfredo Lopez Austin and Leonardo Lopez Lujan (2001) contains 18 indexed references to human sacrifice and three indexed references to self sacrifice. In *The Aztec Image of Self and Society* by Leon-Portilla and Klor (1992) there are fifteen indexed references to sacrifice(s). George C. Valliant’s (1962) *Aztecs of Mexico*, has 14 indexed references to “human sacrifice.” In *The Aztecs, People of the Sun* by Alfonso Caso (1958) we find 13 indexed references to human sacrifice. *The Aztecs* by Nigel Davies (1973) also contains 13 references to human sacrifice. *The Legacy of Meso-America* by Robert M. Carmack Janine Gasco, Gary H. Gossen (1996), contains 12 indexed references to human sacrifice. *The Aztecs, Maya, and their Predecessors* by Muriel Porter Weaver (1972) contains 11 references to “sacrifice” and four to “sacrifice of children.” In *The Aztecs, People of the Sun* by Alfonso Caso (1958) we find 13 indexed references to human sacrifice.

Michael D. Coe’s (1962) *Mexico* also contains 14 indexed references to “sacrifice, human” and no references to sex or sexuality. This book also happens to be the

first recommended reading book on Mexica Movement's reading list and only one of two related to Mesoamerican history. Is it any wonder that Mexica Movement can't see a place for sex/ sexuality in their understanding of the Cultura if the books they use to learn about us make the claim (by abstentia) that queer people weren't relevant and maybe even didn't exist?

Six of the books I looked at contain 0-10 indexed references to sacrifice. In *Ancient Life in Mexico and Central America* by Edgar L. Hewett (1943) we find six references to human sacrifice, and also one rather odd (for a book with this title on this subject) indexed reference to Hitler. I have to assume that because this was written in 1943 and Hitler and his fascistic philosophy were heavy on the authors mind. It is still amusing that based on the index Hitler was more relevant to *Ancient Life in Mexico and Central America* than sex or homosexuality (there are no indexed references to either of those in this book). In *The Aztecs of Central Mexico* by Francis Berdan (2005) we find only one indexed reference to "human sacrifice in religion." Only three of the 22 books I looked at do not contain an indexed reference to sacrifice.

One has to assume that sex and sexuality played a bigger part in the lives of most people living in Meso-America then and now than human sacrifice did, but there is very little in the record to validate this. From these examples we clearly see a lack of information on sex and sexuality (Queer or otherwise) in texts about Mesoamerica before European contact and a disproportionate focus on sacrifice. A few of the books mention sex roles, gender, and sex as it relates to morality or rules, but only one has an indexed reference to homosexuality and none of the books make reference to "Gay" or "Queer" in the Mesoamerican context.

The evidenced lack of indigenous based understandings of sexuality may in part explain why it is tempting for Gay Chicanos to reach out from our cultures to the gay community in order to find a place/ space in which to define/ understand ourselves (Rodriguez, 1993). This is encouraged by the emergence of a gay cultural identity that claims to encompass and subsume race and ethnicity.

Because there is not a lot that exists which explicitly states what we are looking for it is important to find new ways to interpret what already exists and look for clues in the cultural traditions of Mesoamerican people. Allowing our imagination to assist us in creating spaces for Queerness in histories that have excluded, ignored, or erased Queer realities, as Emma Perez (1999) suggests in her *Decolonial Imaginary*, is also productive.

Queer Meso-Americans have been excluded or erased from indigenous Mexican history by the actions of colonizers (potentially before AND after the arrival of Europeans). As a result, there is very little information relating to Queer men in Mesoamerica. As far as Pre-Cuauhtémoc Mesoamerican information related to most things, the consensus is that European invaders destroyed any relevant work/ literature (Batalla, 1996; Taylor, 1979). While Batalla (1996) makes a case for the preservation of Pre-Cuauhtémoc cultural forms in Mexico, Queer cultural artifacts would have been particularly hard to maintain. The opportunity for “*disimulo*,” defined by Broyles-Gonzalez (2002) as a type of feigning worship of European cultural artifacts with an understanding that they stood in for Native Mesoamerican artifacts (2002) was not possible for queer cultural artifacts because a positive model of homosexuality did not accompany European invaders. As Broyles-Gonzalez (2002) points out the popularity of the *Virgen de Guadalupe* among Mexicans can be understood as a continuation of the

veneration of Coatlicue or Tonantzin. Both are manifestations of the sacred feminine or the feminine “half” of a dualistically formulated universe. There is, however, no such figure/ concept related to same-sex desire in the European culture exported to Mexico, or maintained in Meso-America post-conquest.

Some relevant ideas about “Queerness” exist in other indigenous American context, particularly in what is now the United States (Katz, 1992; Roscoe, 1998). This literature is problematic as it relates to the study of Meso-American Queerness. European’s stated moral aversion and criminalization of homosexuality throughout what we call the Americas, and according to Rifkin the “bribe of straightness,” often the price of Indigenous participation in the colonizer’s world (2011), has twisted and disappeared these ideas/ traditions. Despite all this, indigenous knowledge can, and does, serve to legitimate Queer lives. Gloria Anzaldua (1987) and Cherrie Moraga (1983; 2011), offer great examples of the reclamation of indigenous symbols and ideas for use in a Queer context. Although; as they point out; the question of non-heterosexist (and non patriarchal/misogynistic) indigenous cultural models in Mesoamerica is further complicated, by the (potentially double) colonization of indigenous thought. Indigenous Meso-American ideas related to gender and sexuality were potentially distorted first by the Mexica (indigenous people of Central Mexico), and then by the Spanish. We can see in Rifkin (2011) and Roscoe’s (1998) work that Native American tribal cultural structures/ beliefs are more conducive to Queer inclusion, the Nation-States of Mesoamerica had moved far beyond the tribal, and potentially far beyond the egalitarian and Queer inclusive long before the arrival of Europeans (Anzaldua, 1987; Castillo, 1994; Bierhorst, 1992). We are at a disadvantage as Queer Chican@s when we try to

justify or explain our existence or nature if all we have to build an argument on is the written data available in institutions of higher learning.

## CHAPTER THREE

Our hero's journey continues from Mesoamerica to Chican@ Studies where he once again searches for relevant cultural models of Queers or sex, and not finding these in the mainstream he ventures to the margins, finds a lot there, and reflects on what it all means.

### **Introduction**

In this chapter I want to talk about Queerness as a subject within the field of Chican@ Studies. Many in Chican@ Studies have found a better understanding of who we are and our place in a modern context by learning about, or connecting, with our history and, particularly, with our indigenous roots. The work of Chicana feminists has empowered many of us by showing us an alternative to dominant (patriarchal) cultural ideas about the place and role of women and men (Gonzalez, 2008). I believe that by defining ourselves (and our own existence) using our own history, language, and agency, we can learn to better control our destinies. As we discussed in the last chapter, the potential empowerment that could come from ideas about ourselves based in Mesoamerican indigenous culture is denied to homosexual men and women who identify as such because it is not easy to find models to ground/ base ourselves in historical literature about Mesoamerica. It is interesting to see if this lack of Queer models and the implicit lack of acceptance or understanding of Queer lives in Mesoamerican scholarship play out in Chican@ Studies.

I will first examine what I will be calling mainstream Chican@ Studies literature, using the same method I used to review Mesoamerican history to look for references to

homosexuality, Gay/ Queer, and sex. My hypothesis is that while there is work in Chican@ Studies that is representative of Queer Chican@s it will not be broadly represented in mainstream Chican@ Studies texts. I want to discuss how this lack of representation can and does affect us (Queer Chican@s) as consumers of these texts, and as subject-agents of study that use these texts as a foundation. I also want to reiterate and explore Yarbrow-Bejarano's (2010) call for a centering of sex and desire and add Queer sexuality to it.

Given the existence of books written by Chican@ Queers, I will review this literature to see and discuss what ideas/ images can be found there. My assumption, based on experience, is that the library of Queer-Chican@ texts will have a lot to say about the Queer Chicano experience, but because it exists outside/ apart/ on the margins of mainstream Chican@ Studies and its impact can be seen as limited. All the vital and important Queer Chicano academic work that I am already familiar with at the start of this study begs the question; what is the model of Queerness that exists in mainstream Chican@ Studies? To what extent does the work found in "mainstream" Chican@ texts reflect Queer realities?

If it is the case that Queer Chicanos and their experiences are not part of mainstream Chican@ Studies, as I am hypothesizing, then we can see that the idea can (and does) emerge that Queer Chicanos are marginalized, or relegated to fields outside of "mainstream" Chican@ Studies. This has potentially harmful effects not only on Queer Chicanos, but on Chican@ Studies itself. And we must ask what exists on the margins of Chican@ Studies that speaks to and about Queer Chicanos?

## **Method**

For the first section of this chapter the same guidelines will be used as in the last chapter; first, I decided that the texts I would examine would be books and that they should be readily available to any CSUN student looking for Queer Chicano models. Second, the texts should be general Chican@ Studies that contain some cultural information about Chican@s and/ or Mexican people in the United States in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Third, the books must have indexes to make references to homosexuality, Gay/Queer, and sex/sexuality explicit and obvious, and finally; the texts must be in English. I again included this requirement because I am making an assumption that not all Queer Chicano students would be able to access the models and ideas presented in books in other languages (specifically Spanish).

## **Procedure**

For this section of this chapter I visited the CSUN library over the course of several weeks in January and February 2013. I used the online catalog and did various title, subject and key word searches including variations and combinations of “Chicano,” and “Mexican-American.” This yielded a preliminary list of books (mostly in the E184. M5 shelves of the library) that I sought out. I also examined books around the books on my list since similar subjects are grouped together in library shelves. I was able to gather 53 books that met all of my requirements.

Next I checked the indexes of those books for a few key words/ concepts. First (and least likely to yield results because of their recent invention) I looked for indexed references to “Queer” and/ or “Gay,” I then looked for any indexed references to

“homosexuality,” which I thought would yield more results because as I stated in the previous chapter it has existed as a concept for at least a hundred years (Katz, 1995). Next I looked for any indexed references to “sex” or “sexuality” keeping in mind Yarbrow-Bejarano’s (2010) call to center it in our studies. I wanted to see what information could be found about it, and I assumed that if there was no explicit reference to homosexuality there might at least be a clue about general attitudes regarding sex that could indicate an opinion on sexual Queerness.

### **Books (Data Sources)**

This is a list of the 53 books that fit the requirements for this study; they are organized chronologically by year of publication and include their author’s/ editor’s (ed.) names.

**Table 5: Available Data Sources for Chicano Studies**

#	Year	Title	Author(s)
1	1934	The Mexican in the United States	Bogardus, E. S.
2	1967	A Mexican-American Chronicle	Acuña, R.
3	1967	La Raza: The Mexican Americans	Steiner, S.
4	1970	The Mexican American People: The nation's second largest minority	Grebler, L.; Moore, J. W., Guzman, R. C.
5	1971	Documentary History of The Mexican American	Moquin, W. (ed.)
6	1971	Chicanos: Social and Psychological Perspectives	Wagner, N. & Haug, M.
7	1972	The Chicanos: A History of Mexican Americans	Meier, M. S. & Rivera, F.
8	1972	Occupied America (1 <sup>st</sup> Edition)	Acuña, R.
9	1973	Mexican Americans	Stoddard, E. R.
10	1975	Assimilation, Colonialism, and the Mexican American People	Murguía, E.
11	1975	The Chicano	Hundley Jr., N. (ed.)
12	1976	Chicanos: Social and Psychological Perspectives	Hernandez, C. A., Haug, M. & Wagner, N.
13	1977	The Politics of Chicano Liberation	Rodriguez, O.

14	1979	Chicano Experience	West, S. A. & Macklin, J. (eds.)
15	1979	The Chicanos: As we see ourselves	Trejo, A. D. (ed.)
16	1984	Chicano Studies: A multidisciplinary approach	Garcia, E. E. (ed.)
17	1984	Chicano Psychology	Martinez, J. L. (ed.)
18	1985	The Chicano Experience	Mirande, A.
19	1987	Chicano Ethnicity	Keefe, S. E. & Padilla, A. M.
20	1988	Toward a Chicano Social Science	Blea, I. I.
21	1988	Beyond Aztlan: Ethnic Autonomy in Comparative Perspective	Barrerra, M.
22	1988	Occupied America (3 <sup>rd</sup> Edition)	Acuña, R.
23	1989	Mexican Americans: Leadership, Ideology, and Identity	Garcia, M. T.
24	1990	Chicano Politics: Reality and Promise 1940-1990	Gomez-Quinonez, J.
25	1990	Undocumented Mexicans in the United States	Heer, D. H.
26	1991	Chicano Politics and Society in the Late 20th Century	Montejano, D.
27	1993	A History of the Mexican-American People	Samora, J. & Vandel Simon, P.
28	1993	Mexican Americans/ American Mexicans	Meier, M. S. & Ribera, F.
29	1993	Mexican Americans: The Ambivalent Minority	Skerry, P.
30	1994	The Mexican American Heritage	Jimenez, C. M.
31	1996	Chicanas and Chicanos in Contemporary Society	De Anda, R. M.
32	1996	Chicanas/ Chicanos At the Crossroads	Maciel, D.R. & Ortiz, I.D.
33	1997	Chicanismo: The Forging of a Militant Ethos among Mexican Americans	Garcia, I. M.
34	1997	Chicano!	Rosales, F. A.
35	1998	From Indians to Chicanos: The Dynamics of Mexican American culture	Virgil, J. D.
36	1998	Mestizo: The History, Culture, and Politics of the Mexican and Chicano	Vento, A. C.
37	1999	Mexicanos: A History of Mexicans in the United States	Gonzalez, M. G.
38	2000	Chicano Renaissance	Maciel, D. R.
39	2001	The Chicano Studies Reader	Noriega, C. A., etc. (eds.)
40	2002	Chicana Traditions: Continuity and Change	Cantu, N. E. (ed.)

41	2002	The Mexican Americans	Garcia, A. M.
42	2003	A Century of Chicano History	Gonzalez, G. G. &Fernández, R. A.
43	2003	The Mexican American Experience: An Encyclopedia	Meier, M. S. &Gutiérrez, M.
44	2004	Chicana/o Identity in a Changing U.S. Society	Hurtado, A. &Gurin, P.
45	2005	The Mexicans	Shane, C.J.
46	2007	Occupied America (6 <sup>th</sup> Edition)	Acuña, R
47	2009	Chicano Studies: The genesis of a discipline	Soldantenko, M.
48	2010	Replenished Ethnicity: Mexican Americans, Immigration, and Ethnicity	Jimenez, T. R.
49	2011	Chicana/o Subjectivity and the Politics of Identity	Gallego, C.
50	2011	Crucible of Struggle: A history of Mexican-Americans from Colonial Times to the Present Era	Vargas, Z.
51	2011	Mexican Americans Across Generations: Immigrant Families, Racial Realities	Vasquez, J. M.
52	2011	Occupied America (7 <sup>th</sup> Edition)	Acuña, R
53	2012	Barrios to Burbs: The making of the Mexican American Middle Class	Vallejo, J.A.

The books span from 1934 to 2012 with 37 (70%) written before the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century and 16 (30%) written (or edited) since the year 2000.

### **Research Findings**

There was a lack of representation in the text reviewed; only six (10.5%) of the 53 books I looked at contained indexed references to” homosexual,” “Gay,” or “Queer”. None of the books had an indexed reference to Queer and only one had an indexed reference to Gay. The other five (9.8%) had at least one reference to homosexual or homosexuality.

**Table 6: Indexed References to Homosexual, Gay, Queer in Chicano texts**

#	Year	Title	Indexed References to:		
			Homo- sexuality	Gay	Queer
1	1934	The Mexican in the United States	0	0	0
2	1967	A Mexican-American Chronicle	0	0	0
3	1967	La Raza: The Mexican Americans	0	0	0
4	1970	The Mexican American People: the nation's second largest minority	0	0	0
5	1971	Chicanos: Social and Psychological Perspectives	0	0	0
6	1971	Documentary History of The Mexican American	0	0	0
7	1972	The Chicanos: A History of Mexican Americans	0	0	0
8	1972	Occupied America (1 <sup>st</sup> Edition)	0	0	0
9	1973	Mexican Americans	0	0	0
10	1975	Assimilation, Colonialism, and the Mexican American People	0	0	0
11	1975	The Chicano	0	0	0
12	1976	Chicanos: Social and Psychological Perspectives (2nd edition)	0	0	0
13	1977	The Politics of Chicano Liberation	0	0	0
14	1979	Chicano Experience	0	0	0
15	1980	The Chicanos: As we see ourselves	0	0	0
16	1984	Chicano Psychology	0	0	0
17	1984	Chicano Studies: A multidisciplinary approach	0	0	0
18	1985	The Chicano Experience	0	0	0
19	1987	Chicano Ethnicity	0	0	0
20	1988	Beyond Aztlan: Ethnic Autonomy in Comparative Perspective	0	0	0
21	1988	Toward a Chicano Social Science	0	0	0
22	1988	Occupied America (3 <sup>rd</sup> Edition)	?	?	?
23	1989	Mexican Americans: Leadership, Ideology, and Identity	0	0	0
24	1990	Chicano Politics: Reality and Promise 1940-1990	0	0	0
25	1990	Undocumented Mexicans in the United States	0	0	0
26	1991	Chicano Politics and Society in the Late 20th Century	0	0	0
27	1993	A History of the Mexican-American People	0	0	0
28	1993	Mexican Americans/ American Mexicans	0	0	0
29	1994	The Mexican American Heritage	0	0	0
30	1996	Chicanas and Chicanos in Contemporary Society	0	0	0

31	1997	Chicanismo: The Forging of a Militant Ethos among Mexican Americans	0	0	0
32	1997	Chicano!	0	0	0
33	1998	From Indians to Chicanos: The Dynamics of Mexican American culture	0	0	0
34	1998	Mestizo: The History, Culture, and Politics of the Mexican and Chicano	0	0	0
35	1999	Mexicanos: A History of Mexicans in the United States	0	0	0
36	2000	Chicano Renaissance	0	0	0
37	2002	Chicano Traditions: Continuity and Change	0	0	0
38	2002	The Mexican Americans	0	0	0
39	2003	A Century of Chicano History	0	0	0
40	2005	The Mexicans	0	0	0
41	2009	Chicano Studies: The genesis of a discipline	0	0	0
42	2010	Replenished Ethnicity: Mexican Americans, Immigration, and Ethnicity	0	0	0
43	2011	Chicana/o Subjectivity and the Politics of Identity	0	0	0
44	2011	Crucible of Struggle: A history of Mexican-Americans from Colonial Times to the Present Era	0	0	0
45	2011	Mexican Americans Across Generations: Immigrant Families, Racial Realities	0	0	0
46	2011	Occupied America (7 <sup>th</sup> Edition)	0	0	0
47	2012	Barrios to Burbs: The making of the Mexican American Middle Class	0	0	0
48	1993	Mexican Americans: The Ambivalent Minority	1	0	0
49	1996	Chicanas/ Chicanos At the Crossroads	0	3	0
50	2001	The Chicano Studies Reader	3	0	0
51	2003	The Mexican American Experience: An Encyclopedia	1	0	0
52	2004	Chicana/o Identity in a Changing U.S. Society	1	0	0
53	2007	Occupied America (6 <sup>th</sup> Edition)	1	0	0

The first reference to homosexuality that I found (chronologically) in *Mexican Americans: The Ambivalent Minority* creates a clear distinction between Mexican-Americans and homosexuals in a discussion of the creation of ethnic neighborhoods (and

voting blocs): “In a strategy followed by the Los Angeles homosexuals who succeeded in incorporating the City of West Hollywood, Mexican politicians and activists felt the need to create a manageable enclave where political skills and leadership could be developed” (Skerry, 1993). The implication (in my reading of this statement) is that “Mexicans” and “homosexuals” exist as separate, and mutually exclusive, categories. For the purposes of finding models of Queer Chicanos the implication seems to be that at least some Mexican political agents modeled their movements on homosexual movements, but there aren’t any Mexican homosexuals or homosexual Mexicans to speak of.

*Chicanas/ Chicanos at the Crossroads* contained three indexed references to “Gay and Lesbian activists” all in a chapter by Ignacio Garcia (1996) titled “Juncture in the Road: Chicano Studies Since El Plan de Santa Barbara” the first reference to list Gay and Lesbian activists as one of a number of groups (along with Marxists and Chicana feminists) that “continued to struggle against inequality on campus” in the 1980’s-early 1990’s. The second reference is a bit of a diatribe about “a small but influential number of Chicana scholars have taken on an adversarial role in their relations to Chicano Studies.” later in the same paragraph: “These gender nationalists find the lurking “macho” in every Chicano scholarly work. Because they are critical of the ideological premises of the Chicano movement they reject much of what came out of it “worse”, in the author’s view is that some have “not limited themselves to attacking Chicanos, but have been extremely critical of Chicanas who do not follow their brand of feminism. Their adversarial approach has created divisions in a number of institutions” perhaps the extreme of this radical feminism (in the author’s view) is that “The Lesbian Chicana scholars have even gone so far as promoting the idea that homosexuality is an integral

part of Chicano culture.” (Garcia, 1996) The author then talks about academic ivory towers and the misdirection that these scholars are taking so one can only suppose that he disagrees with the notion that homosexuality is an “integral part of Chicano culture.” The idea I get from this (as a Queer Chicano) is that Queer Chicanos must be careful not to challenge the premises or accomplishments of Chicano studies and the Chicano movement. We aren’t doing enough for working class people or social justice when we’re just wasting time talking identity politics and fighting for our own brand of “equality.” The last quote is a bizarre welcoming back into the fold for Queer Chican@s because in the author’s opinion “Radical Chicanas and lesbian scholars should not be singled out as the only ones moving away from the community. After all, most Chicana scholars retain a strong sense of community and many participate in community activities beyond the university” (Garcia, 1996). We see then that the author is not saying that all radical or Queer Chicanos are bad, only those that do not actively fight for the goals set out by the Chican@ movement in *El Plan de Santa Barbara*. This admonition is seemingly despite the fact that, as Gonzalez (1980) points out in “The Chicana Perspective: A Design for Self-Awareness,” the drafters of *El Plan de Santa Barbara* intentionally dismissed and ignored issues raised by Chicanas (not to mention Queers) at the time of its writing.

The next book with references to homosexuality is *The Chicano Studies Reader* (2001) which contains four references total to topics related to homosexuality. The first is from “Beyond Difference and Antipathy: The Chicana Movement and Chicana Feminist Discourse” by Segura and Pesquera (2001) wherein they commend a Chicana faculty member for expressing in an interview her resolution to remain active and critical in her pursuit of social justice and includes sexuality-based as a type of oppression. The authors

note that she and a small but vocal group of women call for the recognition of oppression on the basis of sexual orientation within Chicana feminism. The author points out that this is one dimension of the Chicana experience that has not been systematically incorporated into the agenda for Chicana liberation (2001). This indicates that as recently as a decade ago a lot of work needed to be done for the inclusion of Queerness in Chicana (and implicitly perhaps Chicano) paradigms of social justice.

The next reference to homosexuality in this text can be found in “The Folklore of the Freeway” by Eric R. Avila wherein we find a discussion of the understanding of freeways and their use in the work of Gil Cuadros. “In City of God” (his only work published before his death due to complications related to AIDS) Cuadros discusses his relationships to different parts of Los Angeles (connected and intersected by freeways, and discusses his outsider status in mainstream Gay culture (represented by West Hollywood) as an exotic fetish. He talks about his two selves (his “family/ home” self and his “out Gay” self). This isn’t a very rich reference, but at least it points us to Gil Cuadros who in my opinion despite his short life and career is an important and vital Queer Chicano voice.

The next reference to homosexuality “in Chicano Community” is in the introduction to “Chicanas and El Movimiento” by Adaljiza Sosa Riddell; In the preface to her article the author expresses regret for not recognizing homosexuality or calling out heterosexual privilege. The final reference to homosexuality “in plays” does not seem to actually be a reference to anything. The page it refers to does not mention homosexuality at all.

The next, and perhaps one of the most disappointing, reference to homosexuality is from *The Mexican American Experience: An Encyclopedia* (Meier & Gutierrez, 2003) wherein the only reference to homosexuality is in the entry for John Rechy, and all it has to say is that "His novels often deal with urban homosexual life and some are partly autobiographical, according to Rechy." While it is helpful that they point readers in the direction of John Rechy, it is incredibly disappointing that in a book called an encyclopedia there are no actual references to Mexican-American Queerness. The next reference to sexuality lists it as a category with which people identify; there isn't much examination of the experience of them, only a rather general description of the mechanics of social identification. This is found in *Chicana/o Identity in a Changing U.S. Society* by Hurtado and Gurin (2004).

The final text with an indexed reference to homosexuality is *Occupied America* by Acuña (2007) and this is an interesting case. *Occupied America* is a foundational Chicano Studies text with seven editions published from 1972 to 2011 and its author is an important part of Chicano Studies at CSUN. That may be why looking at his indexes as a queer Chicano is so disappointing. In his sixth edition he includes an indexed reference to "homosexuality in Mayan civilization" which is a note that states that at the very least homosexuality existed among pre-contact Maya and is being studied (he includes references to other scholars). However by looking at the two other editions of this work available in the library we see that this reference is not present in the first edition (1972) or in the seventh edition (2011) of his work. There are no references to homosexuality, Gay or Queerness in either of those texts. Despite the Library Catalog's search engines insistence the 2<sup>nd</sup>(1981), 4<sup>th</sup>(2000), and 5<sup>th</sup>(2004) editions of *Occupied America* are not

actually anywhere in the library. The 3<sup>rd</sup> edition has had half of its index ripped out. Because of my chosen methodology they were not examined for this section because they would not be considered easily accessible to CSUN students (by my definition).

We see here that references to Gay or Queer people and issues in mainstream Chicano text are for the most part lacking or problematic. Doing this part of my study inspired sadness and anger in me. As a child I learned to disappear to avoid unwanted (and potentially dangerous) attention. All my life I have struggled not only to find my voice, but to exist fully and unapologetically, and now; confronted with all of these texts that have no time for me, that disappear or refuse to acknowledge or own me I am saddened. I feel myself being encouraged to disappear again. But now I do not feel like I am protecting myself. I feel as if this is a means of being protected against, or simply and more hurtfully, humiliatingly ignored. I feel an anger building up inside of me, and I want to yell at the stack of books, at the library, at the whole world: You may not want to know it, you may ignore and lie about me, but **I** am here! I **AM** here! I am **HERE!** And I guess for now that will have to be enough.

As Gay Chicanos, we are a minority within two historically excluded minorities. In the Chicano community and within the Gay community, we often have to define our existence based on the parameters set by the dominant culture **and** the minority cultures that we exist in.

Gays and lesbians of color are faced with the management of living in three different worlds: the ethnic community, the gay and lesbian community, and the predominantly white, heterosexual community. There are different values, beliefs,

attitudes, and behaviors associated with each of these three worlds. Managing life across those three worlds independently can lead to identity confusion – the person feels he/she is unable to integrate the different aspects of life into a unified whole. (Rodriguez, 1993, pg. 28)

This lack of representation misrepresents the Chicano experience, limits the scope of it, and even hurts Queer Chicanos ability to live full and effective lives. Another thing it robs the broader population of Chicanos of is a potentially empowering and decolonizing understanding of sexuality and its manifestations. This invites the question; what are the views or ideas about sex being presented in mainstream Chicano Studies?

In the next section of this chapter I wanted to look for indexed references to sex in Chicano Studies texts. I also examined Yarbrow-Bejarano’s call to center desire and see how far Chicano Studies has to go in order to make this centering real. I started with the same 53 texts from the last analysis. This time I searched the book’s indexes for references to sex or anything related to sex.

**Table 7: Indexed References to Sex in Chicano texts**

#	Year	Title	Sex
1	1934	The Mexican in the United States	0
2	1967	A Mexican-American Chronicle	0
3	1967	La Raza: The Mexican Americans	0
4	1971	Documentary History of The Mexican American	0
5	1972	The Chicanos: A History of Mexican Americans	0
6	1972	Occupied America	0
7	1973	Mexican Americans	0
8	1975	Assimilation, Colonialism, and the Mexican American People	0
9	1975	The Chicano	0
10	1977	The Politics of Chicano Liberation	0
11	1979	Chicano Experience	0
12	1984	Chicano Studies: A multidisciplinary approach	0

13	1984	Chicano Psychology	0
14	1985	The Chicano Experience	0
15	1988	Toward a Chicano Social Science	0
16	1988	Beyond Aztlan: Ethnic Autonomy in Comparative Perspective	0
17	1989	Mexican Americans: Leadership, Ideology, and Identity	0
18	1990	Chicano Politics: Reality and Promise 1940-1990	0
19	1991	Chicano Politics and Society in the Late 20th Century	0
20	1993	A History of the Mexican-American People	0
21	1993	Mexican Americans: The Ambivalent Minority	0
22	1994	The Mexican American Heritage	0
23	1996	Chicanas/ Chicanos At the Crossroads	0
24	1997	Chicanismo: The Forging of a Militant Ethos among Mexican Americans	0
25	1997	Chicano!	0
26	1998	Mestizo: The History, Culture, and Politics of the Mexican and Chicano	0
27	1999	Mexicanos: A History of Mexicans in the United States	0
28	2000	Chicano Renaissance	0
29	2002	Chicano Traditions: Continuity and Change	0
30	2002	The Mexican Americans	0
31	2003	A Century of Chicano History	0
32	2003	The Mexican American Experience: An Encyclopedia	0
33	2005	The Mexicans	0
34	2007	Occupied America	0
35	2009	Chicano Studies: The genesis of a discipline	0
36	2010	Replenished Ethnicity: Mexican Americans, Immigration, and Ethnicity	0
37	2011	Chicana/o Subjectivity and the Politics of Identity	0
38	2011	Mexican Americans Across Generations	0
39	2011	Occupied America	0
40	2012	Barrios to Burbs: The making of the Mexican American Middle Class	0
41	1970	The Mexican American People: the nation's second largest minority	3
42	1971	Chicanos: Social and Psychological Perspectives	6
43	1976	Chicanos: Social and Psychological Perspectives	4
44	1980	The Chicanos: As we see ourselves	3
45	1987	Chicano Ethnicity	4
46	1988	Occupied America (3 <sup>rd</sup> Edition)	1
47	1990	Undocumented Mexicans in the United States	2
48	1993	Mexican Americans/ American Mexicans	1
49	1996	Chicanas and Chicanos in Contemporary Society	1
50	1998	From Indians to Chicanos: The Dynamics of Mexican American culture	1

51	2001	The Chicano Studies Reader	10
52	2004	Chicana/o Identity in a Changing U.S. Society	2
53	2011	Crucible of Struggle: A history of Mexican-Americans	2

Only thirteen of the 53 texts I looked at (25%) included any references to sex. The first book with an indexed reference to sex is *The Mexican American People: the Nation's Second Largest Minority* by Grebler, Moore, and Guzman, (1970); it contains 3 indexed references to sex. All three are part of a discussion on machismo and the authors attempt to challenge popular notions of machismo by arguing that a “macho” (virile man) is not necessarily primarily interested in dominating women or being sexually promiscuous. It is the only discussion on sex in this text.

The next text with an indexed reference to sex is the first edition of *Chicanos: Social and Psychological Perspectives* edited by Wagner and Haug (1971). This book contains five indexed references to “Sex roles Conflict” and one reference to “Sex roles and family.” All of these references come from three articles, and I would like to discuss the three articles individually. In “On Mexican National Character” by Michael Maccoby the author reinforces the negative ideas about machismo and adds to them that “A Mexican male is expected to dominate women, but many men who are weak and receptive play a role of compulsive masculinity (machismo), all the while feeling frustrated, unaware of their wish to be fed and cared for by women” (Maccoby, 1971). Later in this article he discusses Octavio Paz’s *Labyrinth of Solitude*” wherein (according to Maccoby) Paz points out that “The Mexican woman is outwardly submissive and masochistic, but also closed, hoarding her love, and passively rebellious against male domination and lack of love. The males sadism, Paz writes, “begins as vengeance for the feminine frigidity or as a despairing attempt to obtain a response from a body we fear is

totally insensitive. The Mexican male fears the woman, but in his isolation he finds her an unanswerable enigma and a dangerous power. He knows no way to relate to her other than by force, and the vicious cycle turns.” This is an interesting (and quasi-Mexican-Freudian) reading of Mexican sex roles and conflict. Aside from the bizarre reading of machismo, and broad generalization of heterosexual Mexican relationships as trapped in cycles of abuse it is also incredibly heterosexist. There is no place for, or indication of the existence of, Queer men and women in this construction of sex roles. Unless we are to read Maccoby’s “weak and receptive” man as Queer in which case the brush of Queerness paints wide in this article, but is no less an oversimplified explanation of Mexican (and Mexican American) understandings of appropriate sex roles.

In the introduction to the section titled “Sex Roles and the Family” the editors point out that the common Mexican stereotypes of “macho” (dominating virile man) and “mujer” (in this case: long suffering woman) are to be understood as cultural patterns that exist as extremes the world over, and are not limited to Mexican communities. The interesting point is that they don’t challenge the stereotypes themselves, only the idea that they are exclusively Mexican (Wagner &Haug, 1971).

The final article in this book with references to “sex roles” is *The Mexican American Family* by Nathan Murillo. In this article the lives of sexually differentiated men and women seem to begin at heterosexual marriage, and they only seem to exist in relation to each other (and their ubiquitous children). There is no mention of male and female children (or even single people), there is no indication that sex role differences (or scripts) exist until people enter into matrimony. This erases not only Queers (who can’t or don’t get married), but also heterosexual men and women who do not marry, but

obviously exist and have their own scripts to play out. There is some indication in this article that sex roles are changing for Chican@s at this time, but it is clear that the author believes all Chican@s are experiencing the same degree and path of acculturation, and with this acculturation comes confusion about who is who and what is what as far as sex roles are determined. “The Chicana has the difficult task of gaining for herself the more flexibility in carrying out a greater variety of activities that traditionally have been denied her in the Mexican American culture. In her efforts to do this she runs the risk of diluting and of losing the many distinctive feminine qualities that make her so attractive to the male. The old concept of male-female roles in Chicano society is requiring a painful examination and reevaluation of what is important and what is less important in the functional roles between man and woman” (Murillo, 1971). Again men and women exist primarily in relation to each other; there are no Queers here.

The second edition of *Social and Psychological Perspectives* edited by Wagner and Haug (1976) was published 5 years later and includes another editor (Hernandez, C.A.). It has two less indexed references to “sex roles.” Unfortunately, three are from a re-publishing of Nathan Murillo’s “The Mexican American Family” so again no indication that men and women exist outside the bonds of matrimony. The only other reference to “sex roles” is in “Self Conception of Migrants and Settled Mexicans” by Victor Gecas, and all he has to say is that: “The extent to which there are male-female differences in self-conception could be taken as an index of “traditionalism” or “non-traditionalism” (Gecas, 1976). Meaning that “traditional” cultures are more inclined to enforce or encourage strict gender binaries while “non-traditional” or modern cultures are less likely to enforce strict gender binaries. The labeling of migrant Mexican culture as

“traditional” makes it seem more like a cultural artifact than the active living (changing) culture that it actually is. The sex roles being identified are those described by Murillo and are not inclusive of queer conceptions of men or women.

The next text with references to sex is *The Chicanos: as We See Ourselves*, edited by Trejo (1980). In an article called “The Chicana Perspective: A Design for Self-Awareness” by Silvia Alicia Gonzalez, there is some discussion about sex roles and the heterosexual sex act, and what is communicated is that women are taught to be passive receptacles in order to be viewed as respectable, and how this infringes both on intimacy (because they have to act out a script and cannot be truly themselves) and on the woman’s ability to actualize (because they are so focused on acting the part that it prohibits them from thinking about who they actually are). There is also a discussion of sexism within the movement, and a defense of the work of feminist Chicanas. The author states: “While it is true that unity for La Raza is the basic foundation of the Chicano Movement, it need not be an appeal for unity based on the continued submission of women. On the basis of subordination of women there can be no real unity.” This is a fitting rebuke to the work of Garcia (1996) discussed above.

The next book with references to “Sex” is *Chicano Ethnicity* by Keefe and Padilla (1987). There are four indexed references here, but they all refer to sex as a demographic characteristic. There is no discussion or description of sex roles or sex acts only counts of how many men and women participated or faired in certain studies. The third edition of *Occupied America* by Acuña (1988) contains one reference to “Sexism.” It is a three page history of sexism in the Chican@ movement that seems to state that at that point progress was being made. There is some talk of rape, abortion, and sterilization as issues

in which sexism manifested itself, but no talk of the sex act itself. *Undocumented Mexicans in the United States* by Heer (1990) also contains two demographically based indexed references to sex. Both are counts of men and women that do not provide any information about the men and women included in the totals.

*Mexican Americans/ American Mexicans* by Meier and Ribera (1993) have one reference to “sexism.” The authors discuss the growth of the Chicana movement within the Chicano movement and point out that: “Chicanas participation in the movimiento made them increasingly aware of the chauvinism of its male leadership. They found that they were often as much victims of sexist discrimination within the movement as they were victims of racist and ethnic discrimination outside it.” And “Rejection of a Chicana rights resolution by Corky Gonzales’s first Chicano Youth Liberation Conference at Denver in 1969 made clear their inferior position in the movement pushed them to drive for equality. Their new awareness led at times to acrimonious debates with male leaders of movimiento groups and ultimately led to the founding of a number of Chicana organizations” (Meier & Rivera, 1993). We see here then that there is some understanding that Chicana, and by extension Queer, movements within Chicano Studies or the broader Chicano movement are not necessarily separatist factions fighting against the goals of the broader Chicano movement (as some of the authors above have implied (Garcia, 1996)). Rather these group’s members are categorically disenfranchised individuals fighting for a collective, and thereby more powerful, voice in the broader movement.

*Chicanas and Chicanos in Contemporary Society* by De Anda (1996) contains one indexed reference to “sexism in Catholic Church.” The article in which the reference is found is “Liberation Theology and Social Change: Chicanas and Chicanos in the

Catholic Church” by Cadena and Medina (1996). In a discussion about “Hispanic Women: Prophetic Voices in the Church” the authors ask “If the church is holy and patriarchal, is not patriarchy holy?” and state that Roman Catholics must continue to call the Catholic Church to repent of the sexism inherent in its structures and tenets. There is no discussion of sex here, and the church’s relationship with its Queer children is not discussed.

The next text with an indexed reference to sex is *From Indians to Chicanos: the Dynamics of Mexican American Culture* by Virgil (1998) which contains one indexed reference to “Sexual Equality, Chicanas” which is very similar to some of the data we’ve already examined. The same is true for eight of the indexed references to “sex” found in *The Chicano Studies Reader* by Noriega (2001). All nine are references to everything we’ve already seen; sex roles, oppression, domination, feminism, in the movement, in the family, etc. there does seem to be a more nuanced discussion of the issues presented in this text, benefited perhaps by the academic scholarship that came before it.

The remaining two indexed references to sex matters in Virgil (1998) seem promising in terms of ideas about sex acts themselves. The first is a reference to “Sexual Relations between Chicanos and Anglos” in Gonzalez’s “Chicana Identity Matters” wherein the author discusses frontier Anglo sexual stereotypes of Mexican (women in particular) as promiscuous, and weak (morally and physically), and how these attitudes helped justify/ rationalize their colonial expansions of the United States (echoes of Mesoamerica at contact) (Gonzalez, 2001). The second is a reference to “Sex Relations among Chicanos” in Chela Sandoval’s “Introduction to Configuring Identities.” Here the author proposes that improved relations between Chicanos and men and women

(equality/ parity) can only serve to strengthen love and sex relationships between them. Both of these references are interesting and relevant, and they both come a lot closer to center and discussing desire and the sex act than the other reviewed texts, but both are also exclusively heterosexual. In neither of these references is there an understanding that sex happens between people of the same gender.

*Chicana/o Identity in a Changing U.S. Society* by Hurtado and Gurin (2004) contains one reference to “sex” and one reference to “sexuality,” but both are references to sex and sexuality as categories which people identify with, there isn't much examination of the experience of them, only a description of the mechanics of social identity. The final text in this study that I will talk about is *Crucible of Struggle: A History of Mexican-Americans* by Vargas (2011). It does not contain references to sex or sexuality, but it does contain two references to “sexually transmitted diseases” which is interesting because one has to wonder how and why we can talk about sexually transmitted diseases without talking about the mechanics and dynamics of sex. They are both references to the virulence and deadliness of sexually transmitted infections (specifically syphilis) to indigenous people in California missions, and their spread via assault and rape of Euro-Californian soldiers upon native women.

These two references are an excellent conclusion to this section, because they allow us to see the absurdity of not talking about sex. If we do not talk about sex then it becomes more difficult to find a place for a discussion about sex. If we then cannot talk about sex then how can we talk about all the complexity that comes along with it? If we do not talk about sex then how can we talk about real or full lives? If we refuse to talk about sex then how can we discuss and protect ourselves from sexual violence,

exploitation, sexism, sexually transmitted infections, birth control, and abortion to name a few? And ultimately, if we do not talk about sex or sexual expression then how can we ever begin to talk about sexual Queerness? I see here then that the problem of de facto denial and ignorance is not exclusive to discussions of Queer sexuality. The review of these texts indicates there is no thorough discussion of sexuality (heterosexual or homosexual) in mainstream Chicana and Chicano Studies.

**Literature By and/ or About Queer Chicanos**

In the last section of this chapter I would like to point out some important and relevant work by and about Queer Chicanos to counter the idea found in mainstream Chicano literature; that there are no Queer Chicanos. To do this I will once again make use of the CSUN library. I conducted a simple search in the libraries on-line catalog for “Queer Chicano,” “Gay Chicano,” and “Chicano Homosexual.” After filtering out texts that were looking at “Gay/ Homosexual/ Queer” as one category and “Chicanos” as a separate category, and also books that were speaking exclusively of or about Chicanas (not men) I was left with a list of 26 books. I decided against searching for books using the search term “lesbian” acting under the assumption that Queer Chicanos (like me) looking for models of Queer Chicanos would not think or choose to look for Lesbian Chicana writings. This does not mean that the literature of Queer/ Lesbian Chicanas is not relevant to Queers only that it falls outside of this particular study.

**Table 9: CSUN Library Queer/ Gay Homosexual Chicano Texts by Year**

#	Year	Book	Author/ Editor
1	1991	A Qualitative Study of Identity Development in Gay Chicano Males	Rodriguez, R.
2	1991	Queer Theory : Lesbian and Gay Sexualities	De Lauretis, T.

3	1995	Culture and Difference : Critical Perspectives on the Bicultural Experience in the United States	Darder, A.
4	1997	Show and Tell : Identity as Performance in U.S. Latina/o Fiction	Christian, K.
5	1999	Chicano/Latino Homoerotic Identities	Foster, D.
6	2001	Color-line to Borderlands : The Matrix of American Ethnic Studies	Butler, J.E.
7	2002	Decolonial Voices : Chicana and Chicano Cultural Studies in the 21st Century	Aldama, A.J. & Quinonez, N.
8	2003	Changing Men and Masculinities in Latin America	D'Emilio, J.C. & Gutmann, M.C.
9	2003	Latino/a Thought : Culture, Politics, and Society	Vasquez, F.
10	2003	Velvet Barrios: Popular Culture & Chicana/o Sexualities	Gaspar de Alba, A.
11	2005	Brown on Brown : Chicano/a Representations of Gender, Sexuality, and Ethnicity	Aldama, F.
12	2005	Chicano Detective Fiction : A Critical Study of Five Novelists	Sotelo S.
13	2005	Dancing with Ghosts : A Critical Biography of Arturo Islas	Aldama, F.
14	2006	Butterfly Boy : Memories of a Chicano Mariposa	Gonzalez, R.
15	2006	Chicano and Chicana Literature : Otra Voz Del Pueblo	Tatum, C.
16	2006	El Ambiente Nuestro : Chicano/Latino Homoerotic Writing	Foster, D.
17	2007	A Companion to Latina/o Studies	Flores, J. & Rodsaldo, R.
18	2007	Gronk	Benavidez, M.
19	2007	Liberation Theology in Chicana/o Literature : Manifestations of Feminist and Gay Identities	Alvarez, A.
20	2008	Constructing an Ofrenda of My Memory : An Autoethnography of a Gay Chicano	Gonzalez, O.
21	2009	Gil Cuadros' AZT-Land : A Queer Chicano Literary Heritage	Alvarez, P.
22	2009	Next of Kin : The Family in Chicano/a Cultural Politics	Rodriguez, R.
23	2009	Postnationalism in Chicana(o) Literature and Culture	Hernandez, E.
24	2011	Gay Latino Studies : A Critical Reader	Hames-García, M & Martínez, E.J.
25	2011	La Jotería De UCLA : Queer Latina/o Chicana/o Student Activism	Santillana, J.

26	2011	Mythohistorical Interventions : The Chicano Movement and Its Legacies	Bebout, L.
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The texts that this search yielded cover a variety of topics related to the study and experience of Queer Chicanos and, not surprisingly, they were all published in the last 22 years. They include anthologies on different topics, theses, and studies of artists/ writers and their work, as well as critiques and analyses of certain elements of Chicano Studies. We can see then that there is definitely some work by and about Queer Chicanos in the literature. Looking at the list the first thing that struck me were some obvious omissions. To start I would definitely add the seminal work of Gloria Anzaldua and Cherrie Moraga which did not come up in the search though they are included/ discussed in some of the texts listed. While I excluded “Chicana Lesbian” from my search a lot of work by Chicana lesbians goes beyond the Chicana lesbian experience and should be found on a list of books by or about Queer Chicanos. Anzaldua’s *Borderlands* in particular has a lot to say about the Queer Chican@ experience (male and female). In the same vein it is interesting to see texts about particular author’s lives and works, like *Cuadros and Islas*, but not the texts that they produced or they are known for are on the list. In the next section I will discuss some of these texts and add what I think are some vital omissions to see what models, ideas, and images of Queer Chicanos emerge from the literature.

### **Presentation and Discussion of Queer Chicano Literature**

I will now go through the books that the search yielded. The first text on the list is a dissertation; *A Qualitative Study of Identity Development in Gay Chicano Males*, by Rodriguez (1991) and it is exactly what the title says. The author discusses the formation

of ethnic identities and Gay identities and then the coming together of the two in the identification of gay Chicanos. This is an interesting read, but it is dated and I wouldn't feel comfortable using the data he finds because so much has happened in the last 22 years related to the lives and identities of Gay Chicanos that the veracity of some of his findings may not serve anymore.

The next text on the list is *Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities* which is an anthology that contains Almaguer's (1991) "Chicano Men: A Cartography of Homosexual Behavior and Identity." As the title implies Almaguer's work is meant to be a mapping out of sex scripts and sexual identities that begins with the premise that there is not any relevant work about Gay Chicanos that is not autobiographical. Almaguer concludes that Gay Latinos live in conflicting identity categories, and that there is no Gay (as a social construct identity marker) in Latino (as a social construct or identity marker). This essay was published more than two decades ago, and we will see over the course of this section that that his conclusion is no longer necessarily the case. This text is followed chronologically on the search list by *Culture and Difference: Critical Perspectives on the Bicultural Experience in the United States* another anthology which contains a chapter titled "Working with Gay/ Homosexual Latinos with HIV Disease" by Arguelles and Rivero (1995). This chapter is noteworthy because it is the first reference chronologically that I found explicitly connecting gay Chicanos and HIV, but it will not be the last. The article is written by people who work with HIV+ Gay/ Queer Latinos and it is refreshing to see their perspective. The difference between "working with" and "studying" a particular population proves important. What they have found is that indigenous and Mestizo cultural practices have a salutary effect on Queer Latinos with HIV while

Christian practice tends to have a more harmful effective on them (because of the shaming and blame that come with some Christian practice). This is a good piece and as someone who also works/ has worked with HIV+ Queer Latinos I really appreciate their work. So much has been said about this particular topic since this piece was written that I have devoted the next chapter to examining literature about it.

*Show and Tell Identity as Performance* by Karen Christian (1997) includes a chapter titled “Invisible Chicanos: Gay and Lesbian Identities in the Fiction of Sheila Ortiz Taylor and John Rechy” wherein the author presents a good discussion of the progression of Queer Chicano identity in the Chicano movement and Chicano fiction by focusing on the work of Taylor and Rechy. John Rechy (1964) is one of the authors not included on the search list, who is undoubtedly an important Queer Chicano author. His *City of Night* is a Queer Chicano classic and the oldest example of Queer Chicano fiction that I know of. It is not my favorite book as far as Queer Chicano models only because while I do not doubt that people and places he documents were real its protagonist reads like an emotional fiction to me. Despite that it is an important documentation of a Queer Chicano experience and an unprecedented accomplishment in its time

*Chicano/ Latino Homoerotic Identities* edited by Foster (1999) is an anthology of what seems to be mostly cultural criticism that defines and engages the borders between Queer and ethnic studies and identities. It includes an essay by another important Gay Chicano author that is not to be found in the library search on Gay/Queer Chicanos; Francisco X. Alarcon. In this text Alarcon (1999) identifies himself as a Gay Chicano poet and cites Anzaldua, Moraga, Hernandez and others as important teachers. He says “The feminist movement taught me that the personal is political, that even the most

intimate experience – as that epiphany commonly dismissed as an orgasm – has social and political implications.” (Alarcon, 1999) He also reflects on the absence (at this point more than a decade and a half ago) of Queer Chicano voices. He attributes this to a lack of solidarity among men of color and Queer men of all colors. Alarcon’s work and ideas (as he mentions in this essay) are forced out into the margins of Chicano community and academy, but as someone who has read his work (and chose one of his poems to open this thesis) I know that is not its rightful place.

Next on the list is *Color-Line to Borderlands* another anthology that I include as an example of a text that has a chapter on Chicanos “Thirty Years of Chicano and Chicana Studies” and a chapter on ethnic Queers “Heavy Traffic at the Intersections” but no mention of Queers in the chapter on Chicano Studies. This reinforces the idea that Queer and Chicano are separate and distinct spheres (which they can be) without overlap (which they are not). This is followed by *Decolonial Voices* which is an incredibly Queer inclusive anthology containing chapters about feminism, masculinity in culture and even an entire chapter on the work of Anzaldua. A quick glance at the index shows more than 10 references to homosexuality in many different contexts and, in a passing glance, more than ten references each to Anzaldua, Rechy and Rodriguez (The author of *Hunger for Memory*). This is a great example of a Chicano Studies anthology that not only acknowledges but validates and explores queer Chicano realities in the broader context of Chicano Studies.

*Changing Men and Masculinities in Latin America* edited by Gutmann (2003) while it came up in my search for Queer Chicanos is really more about sex roles and sexuality in Latin America (Mexico, Central, and South), but not really the United States.

This information is important to understanding the cultural context of queer Chicanos, but is not about them so not completely relevant to our search. The next book on the list is *Latino/a Thought: Culture, Politics, and Society* edited by Vasquez and Torres (2003) which contains Moraga's "Queer Aztlan" a vital text from this author which calls on Queer Chicanos to find their sacred homeland in their bodies and themselves in order to be able to spread acceptance and create a nationalism that includes all. It is also in this piece that she calls out Queer Chicano men, Arturo Islas and Richard Rodriguez in particular, for not producing work that represents them as such. Moraga is a seminal scholar involved in both queer and Chicana/@/o studies, and there will be a lot more to say about her in the discussion section of this chapter.

The next book on the list *Velvet Barrios* contains Estrada's (2003) "Macho Body as Social Malinche" which seems to be exactly what Moraga is asking for. Estrada uses an indigenous geo-chronological framework and attempts to balance categories of age and gender and reconcile the agendas of two-spirit, indigenous and Chican@s. He does this by speaking on indigenous rights, colonization, imprisonment, sexual relations, gender roles, violence, and contradictions in the oral and written traditions in indigenous studies as they relate to the study of sexuality and gender variance. He attributes to each direction an indigenous symbol: east is Akatl, north is Tekpatl, west is Calli and south is Tochtli. He points out that the creation of environments where violence is inevitable affect women and the young most and how a reexamination of gender norms and the inherent rights they imply may be beneficial to men and women, gay and straight alike. He also explores Ines Hernandez Avila's concept of a social malinche by critiquing media representations of gay men and searching for the social malinche in them. He then

encourages readers to embrace our own social malinche (as he has) and balance and reconciles the aspects of our own being by becoming familiar with and embracing our own roots (Estrada, 2003). This is rich and empowering work that should be read by all young Queer Chicanos.

*Brown on Brown* by Aldama (2005) is in the same vein as *Chicano/ Latino Homoerotic Identities* an exploration of the intersection of race and sexuality in cultural representations. The author looks at the work of Anzaldua, Rechy, Islas, Rodriguez, Castillo, Ortiz Taylor (all important Queer Chican@ authors) and Edward J. Olmos who is included because of the images of men and masculinity in his films. The book examines what all this work has to say about Chicanos and their ethnicity, gender, and sexuality and the author concludes that for the most part the fictional work presented leaves questions of sexual and ethnic issues unresolved. It is a good resource because it connects and points people to queer Chican@ work that people might not otherwise link or be exposed to.

*Chicano Detective Fiction* by Sotelo (2005) includes a chapter on the work of Michael Nava whose Henry Rios mystery novels I have never read and therefore can't comment on. According to this chapter his novels present us with a Gay Chicano protagonist who, despite his activist nature, is separated from and exists outside of the Chicano community choosing instead to live and interact primarily with Anglos, but making him no less Chicano. His distance from family and community line up, according to Sotelo, with the marginalization of queers from their communities, and the resolution and reintegration of Rios into his family of origin (at the end of his sixth and final novel) represents a type of hope for reconnection and reintegration of Queer Chicanos generally.

The most important thing to me about this book is that it points out the existence of Henry Rios and Miguel Nava, a character and author (respectively) that I am now interested in, but did not have knowledge of before starting this search. In the same vein of looking at Queer Chicano fiction writers *Dancing with Ghosts* by Frederick Luis Aldama is a critical biography that discusses the author's life and work. I do not know enough about Arturo Islas' life to critique Aldama's work, but I appreciate that people will learn that Islas is a Queer Chicano voice because of it. I will have more to say about Arturo Islas in the discussion, but at least from our search we know he exists.

*Butterfly Boy* is a memoir (the first on the list) by Gonzalez (2006). In it he tells the story of his coming out, struggles to embrace and acknowledge the different aspects of his identity and ultimately an understanding and reclamation of himself as a multifaceted and complex person at the intersection of all these identities. This is an interesting resolution to the issues presented by Almaguer (1991) in his work, because the author ultimately creates the space that Almaguer showed was missing for Queer/ Gay and Latino/ Chicano individuals (particularly men) in their community by integrating all the different parts of himself, instead of choosing one aspect of himself over the others.

*Chicano and Chicana Literature* by Tatum (2006) is an introductory overview of Chican@ literature that contains a section on Queer Theory as a context/ method/ foundation for the creation and analysis of Chican@ literature. It is refreshing and empowering to see queer perspectives in what is basically a general Chican@ Studies text. *El Ambiente Nuestro* by Foster (2006) is an examination of Chicano/ Latino homoerotic writing and performance which looks at the work of some of the authors we've already mentioned Alarcon, Nava, Rechy, Rodriguez and adds some names we

hadn't yet seen; Guillermo Reyes, Luis Alfaro, Jaime Manrique, and John Leguizamo to the conversation on Queer Chicano/ Latino representations. In his conclusion he writes that a comprehensive analysis of this work has not and cannot be written until the field is expanded to include more work and writers. This is a good beginning to that work.

*A Companion to Latino/ Studies* is an anthology that shows up on this list because it contains "Looking for Papi: longing and desire among Chicano gay men" by Almaguer (2007). While the title is promising this is a complicated and problematic text. While the author sets out to find the roots of Gay Chicano desire his methods don't seem to be adequate for doing so. He bases his study on the life stories of three men only one of which actually identifies as Chicano (the two others describe themselves as Mexican), all three men have similar family backgrounds (with distant and abusive fathers), and all three men are sexually interested in the same type of man (considerably older and masculine). This is hardly a representative sample of Chicano men from which to theorize or generalize and while the idea of the article is admirable the thought that someone would base their ideas of what is at the root of my desire is what Almaguer gleans from this three men is really troubling to me because I don't see myself represented in any of their lives. This is the second of Almaguer's articles that I have found in this search and both have been problematic to me.

*Gronk* by Benavidez (2007) is a sort of retrospective on the life and work of the Queer Chicano co-founder of Asco. Gronk has achieved his own success and recognition apart from Asco, and his work in different venues is too complex, interesting, and broad to be limited by the label "Queer Chicano artist." As the author writes; "He has transcended categories, in large part by claiming so many" (2007). It is good to see

Gronk represented in this search because it opens up the Queer Chicano perspective to include visual art. Gronk is known for his participation in Asco, his own art, set design, and activism. I am reminded by the ideas of Anzaldua (1987), again and always, that the Queer Chican@ by virtue of our history and potentially something that can't be understood intellectually transcends.

*Liberation Theology* by Alma Rosa Alvarez (2007) includes a chapter on "John Rechy's Spiritualities: Liberation Theology in Gay Texts" which is a discussion of the marginalization of Gay Chicanos from their families and communities, adoption of a "sexual outlaw" moniker (which is the name of one of Rechy's novels) and the author's assertion that by thus identifying Rechy creates spaces for cultural reconciliation and the potential for liberation theology for his protagonists. I discussed John Rechy slightly above, and it is important to remember that his work is semi-autobiographical because we can then see that opportunities for his protagonists may in fact represent opportunities that Rechy himself, and by extension other queer Chicanos may and can encounter.

*Constructing on Ofrenda of my Memory an Autoethnography* by Gonzalez (2008) is a thesis by a self-identified Gay Chicano living with HIV (placing him in another category of disenfranchised intersection) wherein he discusses not only his life story, but the life and work of John Rechy, and the idea that Selena (as an archetype) introduces a complicating element to traditional understandings of women. This is an important and interesting work because it adds to the plurality of Queer Chicano voices, and complicates them by introducing intersectional elements like understandings of gender as an important part of queer Chicano life.

*Gil Cuadros' AZT Land* is a thesis written by Pablo Alvarez (2009) that uses the work of Gil Cuadros, mentioned previously, to examine the questions “How does the creative act of writing define a social-cultural experience in the face of critical circumstances and erasure? How does the creative act of writing shape and inform identity?” These are important questions and Alvarez’s thesis reminds us of the importance of the work that we put on paper to our own survival (even after death). *Next of Kin, Postnationalism in Chicana(o) Literature*, and the *Gay Latino Studies Reader* are the next three books on the list. They are important, worth reading, and will be discussed in the next section.

*La Joteria de UCLA* by Jose Manuel Santillana (2011) is another thesis produced by a CSUN student. In this work the author examines the lives of nine Queer Latino/Chicano student activists who participated in the organizing of the 2006 UCLA Joteria Conference. This is a good work because it gives us an example of queer Chicano community in action and provides an alternative to images of “Gay” community as white and/or apathetic. The final book on the list is *Mythohistorical Interventions* by Bebout (2011) an exploration of how the use of myth and history (hence mythohistory) impacted the Chicano movement and movements within Chicano Studies. It includes a chapter on “Queer Genealogies” where the author discusses the use of myth and history in Queer Chicana contexts. This analysis is good because it makes thematic connections between the ideas of different authors and thereby potentially exposes those authors to broader audiences.

## Discussion of Queer Chicano Text Data

As I look at all the Queer Chicano texts that my search yielded and what they have to say about the experience and experiences of Queer Chicanos the first thing I see is what is missing from the list. The most glaring omissions for me are the works of Gloria Anzaldua and Cherrie Moraga, it would be almost impossible for me to sensibly discuss Queer Chicanidad without talking about them and some of their ideas. About 25 years ago in *Borderlands/ La Frontera* Gloria Anzaldua (1987) expressed her belief that as a Chicana “lesbian by choice” she straddled the divide between male and female. She proposed that this middle ground, which she called *nepantlah* (Nahuatl for middle) could be a vital place for the creation of new cultural models and mediation between opposing social and cultural factions. She attributes this anti-essentialist “new Mestiza consciousness” to her Queerness and also points out that despite the claims of nationalist Chicanos; she did not betray her culture by being a lesbian, but Chicano culture had betrayed her by silencing and excluding Queer and women’s voices. Her exclusion from a search for Queer Chicano literature then is very strange to me.

Reading *Borderlands* was my introduction to the idea that my Queerness was meaningful and said something about who I could, and was supposed, to be. It also was my introduction to the concept that Chicano nationalism did not (as originally conceived) celebrate the lives and work of women or Queers (Anzaldua, 1987; Moraga, 1983; Gutierrez, 1993; Segura, 2001). This topic has been discussed in many works, and according to Rodriguez (2009), in *Next of kin: The family in Chicano/a cultural politics* (which is included on the search list); by centering its focus on family, and then describing “family” in strictly heterosexual and patriarchal terms Chicano Nationalism

effectively deleted women not interested in “traditional” gender roles and Queers from its image and formulation of the Chicano nation. This exclusion of women and Queers can be seen as an extension of the “bribe of straightness” (Rifkin, 2011) discussed in the introduction with a healthy dose of patriarchal thinking thrown in. This exclusion has served to exclude and disenfranchise queer Chicanos from the field of Chicano studies. This disenfranchisement disempowers Queer Chicanos, and may serve to disconnect them from their communities and histories.

The idea that Queers and women are excluded from mainstream Chicano Studies intentionally and with the purpose of disenfranchising them is also present in *Massacre of the Dreamers* (1994) (not on the list) where Ana Castillo states that: “The fundamental basis of nationalism is rooted in a divisive, aggressive, and destructive desire for material power.” Because of its apparent importance in the formation of Chicano consciousness and history it is important to understand how nationalism and sexuality relate to each other in order to get closer to understanding the exclusion of Queers and women. Mosse’s (1985) book on the subject of *Nationalism and Sexuality* is a discussion of the form and influence that nationalism had in Europe in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. While he does not directly address the topic of homosexuality or Chicanos and nationalism, he does discuss the relationship between nationalism and sex roles and some of his ideas apply to Chicano Nationalism. He shows that in effect nationalist movements in Europe before and around World War II, masculinity was worshipped and the community of men was by force recognized as the ruling elite. He points out that in European nationalist rhetoric of this time there is no doubt that there is an exalted place for women, but he also points out that: “If woman was idealized, she was at the same time put firmly in her place.

Those who did not live up to the ideal were perceived as a menace to society and the nation, threatening the established order they were intended to uphold” (Mosse, 1985). This may seem confusing, but for example; a woman’s prescribed role as nurturer and home keeper can be exalted, and women that conform to it can be praised, but failing to conform can be dangerous if the ultimate and undisputed arbiter of power (in this case a public society of men) are responsible for policing women (and other men) to ensure that they conform to their exalted, but prescribed and limited, roles. If a “good woman” is worthy of praise, but is also expected to uphold the supremacy of men (and stay in her place), then alternately a “bad women” is worthy of scorn if she questions or challenges male supremacy (and her prescribed role).

Based on the work of Mosse it seems possible then that the very nature of the nationalism present at the start of Chicano Studies is the reason why “gay, lesbian, and feminist struggles were often seen as antithetical to Chicano liberation” (Rodriguez, 2009). If nationalism needs people to conform to prescribed and limited roles (particularly those based in hetero-patriarchy), and Queers are seen as nonconformists or challengers of the social order then there clearly is no place for them in nationalist discourse (except as outsiders/ nonconformists, etc.). As a means of combating nationalistic exclusion Rodriguez calls for inclusion of Queers and Queer models into Chicano kinship relations.

But where would the models that Rodriguez is calling for come from? In *Loving in the War Years* “Queer Aztlan” Cherrie Moraga (1983), another pioneering Queer Chicana scholar not included on the list, points out the lack of work by queer Chicanos in academia. She points to the work of Arturo Islas mentioned, but not included on the list,

and Richard Rodriguez (*Hunger of Memory*, 1983), not included on the list, and criticizes it for what she sees as a lack of open pronouncement of Queer Chicano reality. She is correct in asserting that in both of these works there is not an explicit acknowledgment of Queerness (coming out), but there was no doubt in my young Queer mind, upon first reading the work of Islas and Rodriguez, that these are Queer Chicano works with models and examples of Queer Chicano lives (though the *Hunger of Memory* author (Rodriguez, 1983) would probably balk at being called Queer or Chicano).

In *The Rain God*, Islas (1991) presents two models of Queer Chicanos, one is exemplified by his fictionalized self, Miguel Chico, and the other is his uncle Felix. Felix is described in the book as a “joto” (fag) and there is no doubt that he is engaging in sex with men. His status as a married and gainfully employed man facilitate his sexual exploits because (it seems) despite the fact that he is queer he is still doing everything expected of him as a man; having and supporting a family. His exploits are an open secret and his family’s view of Felix is not conditioned by his Queerness. He is shown as being close to his family and a competent and effective husband and father (despite his lack of sexual interaction with his wife). The author gives him an important and positive role as the sole family member that greets his grandmother (Mama Chona) in the afterlife (he is also the only one of her children that passes away before her).

While this may not seem like a positive model of Queerness from the perspective of Queer activists calling for coming out as an avenue of empowerment there is no reason to believe that Felix is in any way hiding his sex or sexuality and so he stands as a potential model of Queer Chicanidad, albeit a problematic one. Miguel Chico himself is also a model of Chicano queerness, and despite the fact that he never “comes out” to his

family there is also no doubt that he is queer. What is exhibited is perhaps a view of Queerness and non-disclosure from the perspective of his family. Miguel Chico is very much a part of his family, but the majority of his life as the first one of them to attain a university education is drenched in social (if not sexual) queerness. Looking back I am not sure how I knew that Miguel Chico was Queer (a fact not really made explicit until Isla's second novel *Migrant Souls*). The only thing that I can point to is an ephemeral resonance that effectively communicated it.

The same was true in my reading of Rodriguez's (1983) *Hunger of Memory* there is no explicit communication of Queerness, but throughout the book, and particularly in a chapter that Moraga (1983) points out called "Mr. Secrets" there is no doubt that what he is describing in his autobiography is a Queer reality and model. It is not exactly an empowered model, but nevertheless in his saying that he has no time for women because his schoolwork keeps him so busy and his lament that there are so many aspects of himself that he can never show his family my young Queer heart went out to him. I knew that excuse for perpetual singlehood and I felt his secretive pain.

What is being presented in the texts by Islas and Rodriguez was not a denial of Queer reality, but perhaps something closer to a portrait of life "in the closet." There is an important difference between not presenting Queer realities and not presenting realities that are positive or empowering using the standards of out Gay/ Queer activists. In her study of Latinas and the closet "The Language of (In)Visibility: Using In-Between Spaces as a Vehicle for Empowerment in the Family" Acosta (2011) discusses the importance and viability of using "invisibility" as a position of safety and empowerment. She points out that "Power can manifest itself through invisibility because that which is

not seen can, therefore, not be controlled, regulated, or demonized” and that “By strategically remaining so unseen to the larger non-accepting society, one cannot be chastised for nonconformity.” These are important ideas and I would argue that despite the fact that they do not explicitly state their Queerness Islas (1991) and Rodriguez (1983) are both making use of the strategy of invisibility and effectively communicate their Queerness, because to my young Queer self the reality of their Queerness was clear.

The idea that Moraga (1983) presents that there is no work by or about Queer Chicanos has been the foundation on some scholarship about Queer Chicanos. One example of work founded on this idea is Tomas Almaguer’s (1991) “Cartography of Homosexual Identity and Behavior” (which can be found in *Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities* included on the list). In this essay he uses Moraga’s assertion that there is no work by Queer Chicanos to reinforce the idea (eight years after Moraga) that; “There does not exist any scholarly literature on this topic other than one unpublished study addressing this issue as a secondary concern. The extant literature consists primarily of semi-autobiographical, literary texts by authors such as John Rechy, Arturo Islas, and Richard Rodriguez” (Almaguer, 1991). Here Almaguer points us to another important Queer Chicano voice discussed above, but not included on this list, that of John Rechy (who is not included on the search list, but certainly can’t be accused of not making homosexuality explicit in his work). In his work Almaguer (1991) uses Moraga’s model of Chicana queerness to describe a model of Queer Chicanidad which states that “Chicano men who embrace a “gay” identity (based on the European-American sexual system) must reconcile this sexual identity with their primary socialization into a Latino culture that does not recognize such a construction: there is no cultural equivalent to the

modern 'gay man' in the Mexican/Latin-American sexual system" (Almaguer, 1991) here reinforcing the idea that not only is there no place in Chicano/ Latino literature for queerness; there is no place in Latino culture for it. He also documents a homosexuality that is primarily constructed (based) in models of penetrator and penetrated (active and passive or receptive partners). This model is not unique to Almaguer, and has been present in other cultures and times. As a Queer Chicano at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century I can offer that in my experience this model of homosexuality exists in theory more than practice. In my experience sex and sexuality play out in ways that are infinitely more complicated than the scripts Almaguer was presented with by his research subjects and presents in his work more than 20 years ago.

Moraga's (1983) "Queer Aztlan" (mentioned above) has been criticized for its premise that there is no Queer Chicano work by Rodriguez (2011) who proposes that we have not looked in the right places and spaces for it. She has also been criticized for her "chiding" tone and seemingly separatist attitude towards Gay Chicanos by Calvo and Esquibel (2011) who call for Queer unity instead of the essentialist Gay/ lesbian binary that Moraga seems to present. Finally; it has also been criticized as the foundation of Almaguer's work for its seeming insistence that Queer Chicano work adhere to Queer Chicana models (Cantu, 2011; Viego, 2011). Almaguer's work has also been criticized for its foundational adherence to Moraga's work as the litmus test by which Queer Chicano work is to be judged and for its simplistic and potentially erroneous characterizations of homosexual sex patterns and their resultant cultural roles (Cantu, 2011). Almaguer himself has acknowledged at least some of these critiques as valid, but insists that the models he describes existed at the time of his original writing though he

now states that they were not meant to be generalized to all gay/ queer Chicanos (Almaguer, 2011). Both of the articles that I mention here can be found in *Gay Latino Studies Reader* which despite its title is included on the search list for Queer Chicanos and is a potentially important and necessary work of Queer Chicano representation and expression.

Other important Queer Chicano authors included in *Gay Latino Studies* whose individual works don't show up on the list that I would point out are: Lionel Cantu who passed away in 2012, but whose posthumously published *Queer Migrations*. This book is a wonderful record of queer Mexican, Central, and South American immigrant realities and a representation of potential queer models; and Horacio Roque-Ramirez (2012), currently a professor in the Chicano Studies department of University of Santa Barbara who writes, among other subjects, on the importance of oral history in recording the existence and experience of Queer Latino life in San Francisco.

The importance and power of nationalism as an organizing principle and the Chicano movements current post-nationalist inclination is also discussed in *Postnationalism in Chicana (o) Literature and Culture* (also included on the list) by Hernandez (2009), and it must be remembered that Chicano culture, like all things that are alive is constantly changing, growing, evolving and should not be viewed, revered, or maintained as an artifact. I felt it was important to discuss some of the ideas that spring from Moraga (1983) and Anzaldúa (1987) to show that cultural growth and shift at work in academic literature. From this quick discussion of Queer Chicano literature we can see that there is in fact a lot to discuss and examine. All of this work is important because it

creates space for Queer Chicanos contributes to dialogue that can create paths for entry and reentry into the broader field of Chicano Studies.

## **Conclusion**

From all of these examples we can see that Queer Chicanos exist, and is far reaching and vital. We also have a number of stalwart literary and academic work that has been created by the likes of Anzaldua, Moraga, Rechy, Islas, Rodriguez, Alarcon, and others and widely discussed analyzed and criticized, but none of this work has penetrated the mainstream Chicano texts that I looked at. There is a vibrant social and academic conversation happening in these works, but it would be hard for you to know that any of it existed if you only read mainstream Chicano texts. The work being produced by and about Queer Chicanos serves to challenge colonialism (particularly in the form of heteropatriarchy), white supremacy, disenfranchisement of our population, commitment to activism and a call for a reclaiming of history and reinterpretation of cultural models that can serve to empower Chican@s, and it is not only interested in the lives of Queer Chicanos. Non-Queer Chicano voices do not (as evidenced by the data in this chapter) seem to stand up for or represent their Queer brothers and sisters. If anything the work of mainstream Chicano Studies serves to further disenfranchise Queer Chicanos and reinforces the idea that we exist apart from (or outside of) the broader Chicano movement for empowerment and justice. This lack of representation (even 25 years later) is part of the betrayal that Anzaldua (1987) was talking about in her work.

The primary effect of this betrayal, in my life and some of this literature, is a stepping away from our potentially rightful place within Chicano Studies. This is harmful

to us as Chicanos because it serves to marginalize and disenfranchise us. It is harmful to our communities because it robs them of potential warriors for the causes that are important to us. It is also harmful, ultimately to non-Queer identifying Chicanos and Chicanas because it robs them of knowledge and a fuller understanding not only of their communities and Chicano Studies, but also potentially themselves.

Where do we go from here? I would be remiss if I did not reiterate Yarbrow-Bejarano's call to center desire and sexuality in our study. I have to assume that the lack of discussion and focus on sex is part of the reason that queerness is not discussed. I hope to take her call into the final chapter of my thesis. Seeing this lack of desire and sexuality manifested as stacks of books that do not mention it inspires me to center desire and talk about sex as a Queer Chicano. Equally inspiring is the amount and scope of existent work by and about Chicano Queers. This chapter started with feelings of marginalization and disenfranchisement, but ends in happy reflection and inspiration.

## CHAPTER FOUR

Venturing out of Chicano Studies our hero looks out to see what is being said about Gay Latinos, a broader category that Queer Chicanos fit into, and along with some problematic characterizations finds the idea of HIV as a cultural disease.

### **Introduction**

In this chapter I will change my semantic orientation and instead of looking for Queer Chicanos I will look at the ideas about “Gay Latinos” in academic literature. This semantic shift is necessary to get a handle on what is being said about us in academic literature, but it is problematic for a number of reasons.

First, as stated in the introduction Latino is a large umbrella term that can be made to fit Chicanos, citizens of Mexico, Central and South America and the Caribbean, immigrants from those areas to the United States or any other non-Latino country, and their descendants so the information gleaned is generalized very widely and this can create problems when diverse communities with unique needs, understandings and cultures are painted over with a Latino brush.

Second, while the traditional “Gay” cultural identity may be useful to some Queer Chicano in the beginning stages of accepting our sexual reality (Rodriguez, 1991), it does nothing to free us of the colonizers cultural domination, because the mainstream “gay rights” movement often fights for rights traditionally reserved for straight white males

without much consideration for questions of race and/or socio-economic/ class disparity (Moraga, 2011; Sycamore, 2004).

The third problematic issue with literature about “Gay Latinos” is that, unlike the work on Chicanos reviewed above a lot of this work is produced by non-Latinos and that can create some representational issues. One example I can point to is the documentation of data about the life of former African slaves in the United States. In his study Davidson (2000) points out that the data collected by different sources seems to have been tailored by the respondents based on their perception of who was doing the collecting, and for what purpose.

Presented here as an example of what I can only see as a dangerous cultural misrepresentation of a Gay Latino; I point to “Miguel: A Sex History of a Gay Mexican American” by Joseph Carrier (1992). While the author explains that his essay is one man’s story and that it is not to be used as a benchmark by which to understand all Latinos or even all Mexican Americans who engage in homosexual activity. I would say that the lack of academic work available about Gay Latinos makes any work a potentially important repository or foundation for ideas that could inform the perception of a Gay Latino identity or sensibility.

Miguel and his life path are briefly described and a short sentence that points out that while Miguel died young he did not die of AIDS (as expected?) but rather of alcoholism is included. This is Carrier’s description of Miguel:

Miguel was trim; good looking of average height and build with large, beautiful brown eyes and straight black hair. His demeanor was masculine but only rarely

macho and never feminine. There was no denying his Indian heritage, however and he sometimes exhibited passivity toward the outside Anglo world, something he disliked in himself, and wished his skin color was lighter. (Carrier, 1992, p. 211)

His description of his subject is problematic to me in that he is quick to define Miguel by uncritically using many terms that can be variably defined. First the physical description of Miguel, with its mention of his “large, beautiful brown eyes” seems to exoticize his subject in a sexual way.

His distinction between masculine, feminine and macho (not explained), leaves me wondering how much the author understands about the definitions of gender that Miguel is operating under, and how they might differentiate from his own. There is also the problem of the term macho. It seems that the author is trying to communicate that Miguel acted like a man, not a woman, but he wasn't a chauvinist pig. If this is indeed what he is trying to say then I have to wonder what he bases his ideas of men and women on, and whether his ideas of masculine and feminine coincide with Miguel's. Because Miguel has passed away and the question is never addressed, we will never know.

Further, his equation of “Indian” as passive is doubly problematic. As is the implication that if perhaps his skin was lighter or less “Indian,” then he would be able to assert himself more. The article continues by describing Miguel's sexual awakening and experiences while alluding to a description of Mexican homosexual understanding, stated in the introduction, wherein the man being penetrated is seen as homosexual while the man penetrating is not. Almaguer (1996) has the same understanding.

This is interpreted by the author as an act wherein the man being penetrated thereby loses his manhood while the man penetrating him retains his manhood. This idea begs some clarification, but it is taken as a given. Again, is this the author's understanding of Miguel's beliefs? Or is it what Miguel believes?

The piece also includes an incredibly racist statement or two, such as: "During his final seven years, Miguel reestablished to himself and to other's his Mexican-American identity. He grew a moustache, bought a motorcycle, and got a couple of tattoos" (Carrier, 1992). What the author exhibits throughout this essay is a real lack of understanding of culture and context as far as his subject is concerned. This may be due to his attempting to view someone that he must think of subjectively (his intimate friend) as a subject that has to be examined with sociological objectivity, but it doesn't change the fact that his account is now part of the academic discourse on Gay Latinos.

Is it possible that as Miguel's self-identified "friend" Carrier was not the most appropriate person to document his sex life? And that perhaps his outsider status (as a "non-Mexican") made a difference in terms of the data he did gather, and his understanding of it?

In addition to the issues with the literature on Gay Latinos that I have just pointed out the biggest problem with the work cited above is that once it is published and accepted into the academy the lack of counter narrative to challenge it makes it foundational, and it then becomes the basis for subsequent study of Gay Latinos/ Queer Chicanos. In this chapter I want to discuss how the ideas about "Gay Latinos" and some studies that attempt to explain the spread of Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV)

allow for, and even promote, the idea that Latino/ Chicano culture is what causes high HIV infection rates because according to the foundational texts looked at above and several others (Carrier, 1992; Prieur, 1996; Almaguer, 1991), it is particularly homophobic/ intolerant of Queerness. This chapter is a critique of literature related to queer Latinos and HIV. I want to present what it seems they're saying (namely that our culture is the cause of our HIV prevalence) and challenge/ present what is not being said (our culture is one of many factors that informs our reality).

### **Review of Literature about Queer Latinos and HIV**

I would love to be able to write this whole thesis without having to talk about HIV or Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS). I would like to be able to do that because it would mean that we could get an image of what it means to be Latino and Queer that is not framed around a conversation about disease, but also because it would mean that HIV is not a significant issue in the Latino and Queer communities. I would really like to be able to do that, but I simply cannot. HIV is a blood-borne disease that disproportionately affects the Latino Community. According to Center for Disease Control (CDC) reports Latinos (men) made up 79% of new infections in the Latin@ community in 2009 (more than twice the number as white men). Of these new HIV infections among Latino men, 81% were Latino Men who have Sex with Men (MSM) (CDC website)). These numbers point to the prevalence of HIV in the Latino Queer community and a lot of research has been done on the possible causes.

There is an acknowledgement in the literature that the HIV epidemic is caused by important social, structural and cultural factors that are oppressive, such as homophobia,

racism, and poverty (Diaz, 1999). With this understanding it is important to note that HIV and its prevalence in the Latino community (and among Latino MSM particularly) is a worthy research topic, but for the purposes of this literature review I will not be focusing on HIV. Rather, in the absence of research related generally to Latino Queers. I will be reviewing the social science research conducted regarding HIV in Latino Queer communities to attempt to create a general picture of what it means to be Latino and Queer. However, I do this not only to pull the conversation about Latino Queers out of the confines of research about HIV, but also to begin to address other problems that may be caused or precipitated by the issues found in this literature.

Some of the most striking information is as follows: In a survey of youth in five high schools in the Southwestern United States, Bourdeau (2008) found that Latino youth consider themselves not to be at risk for HIV and that only half of sexually active Latino youth report using a condom. It has also been reported that Latino men report the highest rates of sexual risk behavior (Diaz 1999, Bourdeau 2008). Within a one year period 50% of Latino gay men studied reported that they participated in sex acts that are potentially risky for HIV infection (Diaz, 1999), including high rates of anal sex without a condom (Bianchi, 2007). In focus groups with 397 men from 24 Latino Gay bars in New York, Miami, and Los Angeles, Diaz and Ayala (1999) found that participants viewed HIV infection as inevitable and associated their fatalism with being Latino; holding to the idea that whatever is meant to be is out of the control of human beings (and in the hands of God). These findings provide some context for looking at HIV in Queer Chicano communities. Frequency of condom use is low, and potentially a lot of confusion about how and why individuals become, and can avoid becoming, infected with HIV exists.

## **Issues within the Latino Community according to HIV Literature**

HIV literature points to several issues within the Latino family and community relevant to the experience of Gay Latinos; the underlying issue pointed to is rejection. In ninety minute interviews with 900 self-identified Latino non-heterosexuals in New York, Miami, and Los Angeles, Diaz, Ayala and Bein found that 64% of participants reported being verbally harassed because of their sexuality as children, 70% believed that their sexuality could hurt or embarrass their families, 64% pretended to be heterosexual in order to feel accepted and 29% reported that they had to live away from their families because of their sexual orientation (Diaz, Ayala & Bein, 2004). Similarly, in 33 in-depth interviews with immigrant Queer men in New York City, Bianchi, et al. (2007) found that Homo-Negativity at home (and in their home countries) was cited as a reason for migration.

The idea that homosexuality is a betrayal to the family was also pointed out in focus groups with 27 Gay Latino men conducted by Guarnero (2007). Like those interviewed by Diaz, et al these participants felt the need to hide their sexuality/ sexual development from their families. This study also found that families of Latino Queers in this study react to the possibility of family member homosexuality with silence and homophobic behavior (up to and including physical violence). Participants reported that because of this they feel marginalized in their families and communities (Guarnero, 2007).

In another study, sexual history interviews of 18 “bisexually active” Latino men were conducted by Munoz-Laboy (2008) and participants reported that they felt the need to keep a distance between their families and their sexual development, information about

people they were interested in dating or having sex with, and that they watched/controlled their affect and behavior for signs of stereotypical homosexuality as a means of protecting their families, and themselves, from physical and emotional harm.

The problem of familial rejection exists across ethnic groups in the United States, but it seems to be particularly prevalent for Latino Queers. In-depth interviews with 224 white and Latin@s who identified as lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB), Ryan, et al. found that compared to all other participants (categorized by race/ ethnic identity) Latino men reported the most incidents of familial rejection. The authors point out that familial rejection (and ejection) can be linked to the increased number of LGBT youth among the homeless, in foster care, and in juvenile detention (Ryan, Huebner, Diaz, & Sanchez, 2009). What the author doesn't make explicit is that these children then become ripe for exploitation in all of those environments.

The rejection experiences of Latino Queers go beyond the family and into the realm of religion. In 80 life history interviews of men who identify as Latino and Gay/Bisexual/Transgender (GBT) Garcia, et al. found that 83% of participants were raised Catholic and half of those experienced conflict related to their sexuality within the church. This conflict compelled most of them to leave the church (Garcia, Gray-Stanley, & Ramirez-Valles, 2008).

Another issue that seems prevalent in the experience of Latino Queers is childhood sexual abuse. I include this study under the heading of family and community issues because childhood sexual abuse of Latino Queers, by definition, takes place when these boys are the responsibility of their families. In a study of 307 Latino MSM, Dolezal and Carballo-Dieguez (2002) found that 33% report childhood sexual

experiences (before adolescence) with men at least four years their senior. Fifty-nine percent of these men considered these experiences abuse. They propose that some queer kids are targeted for sexual abuse because they do not adhere to community gender expectations. Contrary to the views of those who claim that childhood sexual abuse “makes” people queer this study suggests that children who *are* queer (in that they express non-normative sexual or gender behavior) are targeted for sexual abuse.

According to the literature, Latino Queers have to deal with a lot of rejection from their families, communities, and even religions of origin. This rejection manifests as migration, physical, emotional and sexual abuse, and even abandonment of home communities and religions.

### **Stigma and Internalized Homonegativity**

Perhaps because of these experiences of rejection and abuse related to being (or being perceived as) Queer, Queer Latinos also have to contend with stigma and internalized homophobia (fear of the homosexual) and/or homo-negativity (negative thoughts associated with homosexuality). This internalization of stigma and homo-negativity has been connected to a number of behaviors that put Latino Queers at risk for various health problems. After conducting interviews with 643 Latino gay, bisexual, and transgender men Bruce, et al. (2008) proposed that increased drug and alcohol use may be coping mechanisms used to deal with internal homosexual stigma. In an online survey of 936 self-identified Latino MSM, Smolenski, et al. found that internalized homophobia can lead to compulsive sexual behavior (Smolenski, Ross, Risser, & Rosser, 2009), which can lead to increased exposure to Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI) like HIV. In a study of 155 HIV-positive Latino men Ramirez-Vallez, et al. (2008) reported that

homosexual stigma leads to lower self-esteem and is associated with depression and loneliness.

### **Gay Latino Mental Health and Substance Abuse in HIV Literature**

Depression is, in and of itself, a serious mental health issue and other mental health issues are also prevalent in this community according to the literature on Latino Queers. In a study mentioned earlier Diaz, Ayala, and Bein (2004) reported that symptoms of psychological distress were prevalent in the 900 Latino Queers that they interviewed. For the six months previous to the interviews 61% of participants reported sleeping problems and 44% reported at least one episode of anxiety or panic. Eighty percent of them reported being sad or depressed at least once in the previous six months and 20% reported feeling sad or depressed often. Suicidal ideation in the last six months was reported by 22% of participants. Fifty-four percent also reported engaging in sexual acts while under the influence of alcohol.

In mental health assessments of 388 Lesbian, Gay and Transgender individuals Meyer, et al. (2008) found that when compared to the general pool of participants the 128 Latin@s interviewed reported slightly higher levels of anxiety disorders, specific and social phobias, mood and major depressive disorders, and alcohol and substance use/abuse. Latinos also reported almost three times more serious suicide attempts than white participants.

In interviews with 643 Latino Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender men Bruce, et al. (2008) found that participants used alcohol and drugs at more than two times the rate as that reported for national (and Latino national) reports by SAMHSA, 33% reported consistent heavy drinking. Substance abuse can lead to risky sexual behavior and 20% of

participants reported engaging in sex acts while under the influence. Using data from the same study Ramirez-Valles, et al. (2008) found a correlation between drug use and risky sexual behavior, defined as anal sex without a condom. Similar results were found in an online survey of 936 self-identified Latino MSM. Smolenski, et al. (2009), report that compulsive sexual behavior and drug use are associated with high-risk sex. They also found that not being able to fit into heterosexual communities (a phenomena discussed earlier) leads to sexual avoidance and/or (on the opposite extreme) compulsive sexual behavior. Dolezal and Carballo-Diequez (2002) found that men who experienced painful childhood sexual abuse (as pointed out earlier; Queer Latino men are disproportionately affected) are more likely to use drugs and take part in risky sexual behavior than those who perceive their childhood sexual experience as not abusive.

We can see then that according to the literature that exists on Latino Queers mental, and other, health issues are related to experiences of rejection and abuse within their families and communities of origin. Homophobia and generalized homo-negativity/heterosexism, are of course not only present in Latino communities and culture. They are also a part of the broader Anglo-European culture that exists in the United States. In addition to homophobia there are a number of issues that Queer Latinos must contend with outside of their home communities. According to the literature chief among these are racism and race-based sexual exploitation.

### **Issues outside of the Chicano/ Latino Community**

In addition to the dynamics found within Latino families that result in internal issues for Latino Queers the literature points to a number of topics that Latino Queers face in the “Gay” and broader community. In their three city study of Latino Queers,

Diaz, Ayala and Beins (2004) found that 31% of 900 Gay men in three cities experienced racism, in the form of verbal harassment based on their race, as children and 35% experienced race-based harassment as adults. Sixty-two reported feeling sexually objectified because of their race and 26% reported feeling uncomfortable in “White” Gay places (Diaz, Ayala, & Beins, 2004). Niels Teunis (2007) has explored the prevalence and problems related to the idea of the Gay community as a white community in the United States, and the racism that results from this construction. He states that despite calls for, and attempts at, inclusivity the “Gay” community image remains a white one. He states that because of this white men ultimately control who is or is not part of the “Gay” community and men of color have to contend with sexual objectification and categorical rejection.

The dynamic of diminished power for men of color sometimes makes them act out specific scripts in sexual encounters that are not necessarily what they would do if they felt they had free choice. Ideas of increased inclusivity and non-discrimination blind white Gay men to the harm that sexual objectification can cause and discussions on the negative effects of objectification are often met with resistance. Teunis interviews (2007) indicate that when men of color have sex with white men they are expected to take the active (top) role and perform according to the myth of the aggressive, insatiable, and hyper-sexualized minority. He also found that when men of color take the passive (bottom) role in sexual encounters with white men these men sometimes act out in a racially abusive way; acting out perhaps, the script of white conqueror and feminized male minority. Both of these stances allow white men to keep their positions of racial privilege in their sexual interactions with men of color (Teunis, 2007). As far as race

relations then, we can see that within what is popularly known as the “Gay” community very little is being done to challenge stereotypes and, in fact, there is a requirement that they be adhered to for the sexual benefit of white men.

Another issue discussed in the literature that affects the lives of Latino Queers, is the potentially detrimental dynamics of fictive kin groups. As we have seen in the preceding literature rejection and displacement are definitely a part of the experience of what it means to be Queer and Latino. Ramona Faith Oswald (2002) discusses how fictive kin networks (or families of choice) are sometimes constructed to take the place/serve the roles that biological families typically serve for people that have been rejected and/or separated from their communities of origin. She points out that while fictive kin groups can and do sometimes serve the needs of people who have nowhere else to turn these groups also have to contend with many issues.

First and foremost, these groups often are not recognized by government agencies and social institutions (including the family) that do not recognize or validate love relationships between partners of the same sex or parental relationships between children and non-biological parents (same-sex partners). She points out that these groups can be complicated by racism, economic inequality, illness, and other adversities. She also points out that while race or ethnically based fictive kin groups (created due to migratory or economic displacement) often include biological family members, queer families of choice do not typically include members of biological families of the individuals constructing them (Oswald, 2002). This is important because while the ties that bind biological families can cut across social lines the absence of biological family members

leave the individuals that construct completely fictive Queer kin groups in the same degree of isolation when social ties are not maintained.

A major issue that Oswald points out but that is only alluded to in most of the literature on Latino Queers is economics. In their three city study Diaz, Ayala, and Bein (2004) found that 61% of the Latino Queers they interviewed reported that they lacked money to purchase basic necessities at least one time in the 12 months previous to the study. The issue of class and economic stability as they relate to the lives of Latino Queers is one that is completely under-studied. What we can say, based on what little exists, is that the myth of the Gay man with a lot of expendable income is not one that fits the reality of the Latino Queers in this study.

The literature suggests Latino Queer men face a number of issues in the communities they live in. They must deal with racism, sexual exploitation, economic issues, and social and governmental policies that deny them the right to create families with rights that are protected by law. What is missing from this literature is information about Queer Latino communities and networks. It is also important to remember that racism and sexual objectification can, and do, also take place within Latino communities.

### **Analysis of / Commentary on Health Literature**

Based on this review of the literature related to the experience of Latino Queers there are many issues to be dealt with/ addressed in this community. None of the studies I looked at are so egregious that they can be discounted. However, a reasonable critique is the limited generalizability of the research findings to a broad “Queer Latino” population. As I mentioned in my introduction, my use of the word Latino is consistent with the use

of the word in the studies I looked at, but I am not convinced that there is such a thing as a general Latino experience. Perhaps these studies can best be seen as a starting point from which to consider the issues found in different communities all labeled Latino. It would be important, for example, to study to what extent familial rejection affects the mental health of different sub-groups within the category Latino and if the differences found can point to more viable solutions for each sub-group.

For the most part, the studies that I looked at recruited populations that were mixed as far as their descent or ties to Latin American countries, and make a point of listing what countries are represented in their studies and whether the participants are immigrants or born in the United States. This makes it possible for us to know which parts of the Latino population are being discussed and to what groups the findings could potentially be generalized. Two of the studies (Bruce et.al, 2008, Ryan et. al, 2009) make no distinction between different ethnic variations, and five of them do not ask participants if they are immigrants or were born in the United States (Dolezal Carballo-Dieiguez, 2002, Guarnero, 2007, Meyer, et al, 2008, Ryan, et al, 2009, Smolenski, et al, 2009) . The studies that do include such information make it possible for us to theorize to those populations, studies that do not include this information perpetuate the idea that Latinos are a homogenous group and that there are not important distinctions within our community.

Another interesting point about ethnicity and the definition of Latino is the exclusion of Brazilians from these studies. While they fall under the definitional umbrella of Latinidad, only one study includes them as part of our community (Bianchi, et al, 2007). This is also the only study where participants could participate in a language other

than English and/or Spanish (Portuguese). Two of the studies I looked at were only accessible to English speaking participants (Meyer et al, 2008, and Ryan et al, 2009), but the study subjects are not presented as English-speaking Latinos. It would have been particularly interesting to see if Ryan et al.'s mental health assessments would have yielded different results for Spanish speaking participants, and if the findings of increased stress could then potentially be attributed to acculturation. As they stand there is no room for that conversation.

Whether or not the findings can be generalized to the entire community I call Latino Queers is also questionable because of the samples that these studies look at. For example, in Diaz, Ayala and Beinz (2004) three-city study all participants were recruited from self-identified Gay Latino club-goers in New York, Los Angeles and Miami. This sample simply cannot be said to represent the reality of all Latino Queers. We would not, for example, canvas self-identified "Straight" (exclusively heterosexual) Latin@ night clubs in those three cities to find a general sample of "straight" Latin@s in the United States. The issue may ultimately be one of access and stigma. Simply put, we won't have access to a representative pool of Latino Queers so long as homosexuality is stigmatized within the Latino community, and in the broader Anglo-community. This does not mean, however, that we can simply generalize the experience of these men to all Queer, and even "Gay", Latinos.

Most of the studies reviewed require that participants have, at least to some extent, identified themselves as Gay, or actively participate in "Gay" spaces. Ryan, et al.'s study (2009) is particularly problematic to generalize to a Queer Latino community because it requires that participants be "out" to at least one parent or caregiver. It is

important here to remember that many Queer Latinos do not identify as “Gay”, so the findings of Ryan et al.’s study can really only be generalized to “out” and “Gay” Latinos.

There also seems to be an educational bias in these studies. While only two are written surveys (which would require a degree of literacy) (Ryan, et al, 2009, Smolenski et al, 2009), half of the studies (Diaz & Ayala, 1999; Diaz, et al, 2004;Dolezal&Carballo-Diequez, 2002; Garcia, et al, 2008; Munoz Laboy, 2008;Smolenski, 2009) reported that the majority of participants have at least two years of college education. It is definitely worth questioning if these samples are representative of Latino Queers, or if perhaps their methods of recruitment are targeting, or otherwise favoring, people with some degree of educational attainment.

The last demographic point I would like to raise is a particularly odd omission; eight of the studies I looked at (Chae& Ayala, 2010; Diaz & Ayala, 1999; Dolezal &Carballo-Diequez, 2002; Guarnero, 2007; Meyer, et al, 2008; Munoz-Laboy, 2008; Ryan et al, 2009; Smolenski, et al 2009) did not screen, or make an explicit distinction between, HIV positive and negative participants. This is odd and interesting to me because for the most part this work is related to the study of HIV prevalence in the Queer Latino community, why wouldn’t it then make sense to look at how the possible “causes” of HIV infection vary in severity by looking at actual rates (or reports) of infection among the participants?

To move to another point, something else lacking in these studies is discussion on the existence of specifically Gay **and** Latino spaces, and communities. While they are alluded to in the recruitment methods of some of these pieces, they are under-studied. It

would be important to know what effect these communities have on the experience of Latino Queers and on the communities in which they live. Perhaps because of the exclusion of focus on these communities, the focus in much of this work is on Latinos in relation to Euro-Americans and it would be interesting to look at Queer Latinos in relation to other Queer Latinos who are perhaps members of different ethnic, social and economic groups. The issues of sexual objectification and fictive kin networks would be particularly interesting to study in these communities.

Issues of class, immigration status, education, and the effect that these three can have on the lives of Latino Queers are also heavily under-researched. As I point out in the introduction the bulk of the research that exists has been conducted in light of the HIV epidemic and so, it seems that the focus of this research is on issues that can be addressed/ resolved in short term HIV prevention interventions. While I would not argue that this work is unimportant I will point out that the political and social consequences of equating Queer Latinos with HIV can be detrimental to Latino Queers and the communities we live in. More work has to be done that presents a fuller picture not only of who Latino Queers are but also what social, health, and other issues we are dealing with.

The idea that Latino culture is a problem that Queer Chicanos/Latinos must overcome, or disease model serves to perpetuate myths about queer/gay men because there is no alternative model for gay/queer Chicanos (in the literature) (Cantu, 2011). Much of this literature focuses on one aspect of the lives of Queer Chicanos/ Latinos and fails to account for the intersectional matrixes of oppression that we live under (Cantu, 2011). The focus on HIV in the literature and the work of Queer/Gay Chicanos speaks to

the importance of HIV prevention in and to our community, and the emphasis on a disease model for Queer/Gay Chicanos. A substantial body of contemporary health literature on Queer Chicano men has been written in the context (and under the shadow) of the AIDS epidemic and its focus is thereby to explain how/why this population is disproportionately affected by this virus. Basically, we only matter/ become relevant as we are sick or dying, or if there is money to be made from keeping us healthy.

The image of a lost and diseased Queer Chicano/ Latino must be countered by the idea of Queer Chicanos/Latinos in the process of healing and at home in their families and cultures (Anzaldúa, 1987). Some work that attempts to connect Chicano/ Latino men to a culture rooted in Mesoamerica exists (Estrada, 2003), but there is very little to give us as a community a history (Taylor, 1979), or place within academia (Hames-Garcia, 2011). Non-canonical sources must continue to be explored (Rodriguez, 2003), and more creative alternatives must also be proposed, explored, and created. In her *Decolonial Imaginary* Perez (1999) proposes that where history and viable models cannot be found it must be imagined and written in. This is potentially a powerful tool for Queer Chicanos. As Anzaldúa (1987) stated before things can be, they have to be imagined.

We see then that there is a picture of Queer Chicanos in the guise of Latino men in this literature, but it was produced primarily by non-Latino/Chicanos in the academic culture of “othering,” or public health workers interested primarily in HIV. As Cantu has pointed out the ideas and images that emerge are problematic, and not necessarily useful for the purpose of empowerment about queer Chicanos and their experience (Cantu, 2011).

## **Conclusion**

This review of the literature shows us that information about Gay Latinos is presented as if our lives are fraught with peril and inclined toward the unhealthy. We have to deal with issues as complex and far reaching as; poverty, racism, alcohol and drug abuse, physical, emotional, and sexual abuse and exploitation, shame and sexual silence, fragmentation, ostracism, fatalism, all manner of physical and mental health issues and barriers related to language, culture, education and immigration which inhibit their access to resources.

These precipitating circumstances create an environment wherein Latino Queers (and people in general) are at an increased risk for ALL diseases (not just HIV). More important is to go beyond HIV; To begin to think about it as a symptom of a broader unhealthy social position and not as a disease that can be prevented if Queer Latinos can learn to mitigate any (or all) of these precipitating circumstances. At a minimum the reviewed literature provides a fairly good starting point to begin to understand issues that are relevant and important to Queer Chicanos/ Latinos and encourages further examination of the issues that have to be addressed not only to avoid HIV, but to be healthy overall.

With this new understanding we can begin to have a conversation that makes it possible to argue that HIV prevention begins at birth, and that it can only be stopped by getting rid of social issues such as poverty and racism. The next (and most obvious) question to me is how I as a Queer Chicano have managed to avoid becoming infected. I wonder if these studies are meant (as a whole to be viewed as predictive). How many of

these circumstances equal HIV infection? Or is it all of the above? Is there something in my story that can give us some clues as to why I have managed to avoid HIV infection?

With these questions I go into chapter 5.

## CHAPTER 5

Our hero presents an abridged and incomplete account of his life from the beginning of life on earth, until the writing of this thesis with a particular emphasis on sex and desire, and has a realization about the importance of curing *susto* (soul fright)

### **Introduction**

Before I applied for graduate school I didn't think there was a place for me in Chicano Studies. I applied for an interdisciplinary M.A. with an emphasis on Religious Studies and Anthropology in 2009 with the intent of looking for the place of Queerness in Mesoamerican cosmology. I figured I could learn some of the history I needed from the Chicano Studies department to do that work. I knew enough to realize that history there would have a different (and potentially more relevant for me) perspective than in the History or Anthropology departments. Still, I debated with myself about whether Chicano Studies would in any way provide a safe space for me. I thought about the MEChA chapter from my high school, and my exchanges with people who always made me feel like there was no place for me in the definition of Chican@, my nerves actually prompted me to miss my first day of class as a graduate student, but then I buckled down and attended the second class meeting.

The first assignment in this class was to write (and share) a poem we were to title "*¿Quien Soy Yo?*" (Who Am I?) wherein we created for ourselves a place and position in the classroom. It was (to my memory) the first time I had ever been asked to think about who I was (instead of just what the subject matter was) in a classroom. From that first

semester I knew that there was a place for me and my area of interest in Chicano Studies. I was also able to compare the information and attitudes of the Chicano Studies professors with that of professors in the Anthropology and Sociology departments (Religious Studies did not offer graduate level courses), and I found myself feeling increasingly uncomfortable in those places.

Along the way I was reintroduced to *Borderlands/ La Frontera* by Anzaldúa (1987). For the first time in a long time I considered her ideas on *mestizaje* and her concept of *nepantlah*, and how those two things resonated with my understanding of myself as a queer Chicano man. This thesis chapter is my attempt to add my story to the literature. I want to consider how a relational theory, using desire as a focus and the body as a center for teaching/ learning, be used to address some experiences and issues I have had and the lives of gay/queer Chicano/ Latinos generally. When I started writing this chapter I thought I knew where it would end. I had accorded to write a self-proclaimed Queer Chicano auto-historia and I reasoned that any proper auto-historia must end in the here-and-now.

I have to remind myself as I begin my story that memory is the only thing that we have that can really tell us how we experienced what happened. It is also something that we create then constantly recreate as we grow older or wiser or learn another piece of our story that helps us add a bit of depth to what we “know.” This re-visioning, remembering, and re-creation of our story, based on lessons we learn, helps inform our memory and allows us new points of view. Informed perspective can give us a new understanding of the why behind what happened and change how we see the things that took place and maybe even the events themselves.

My memory is not a bad starting point as long as I remember how my memory can and does change when other sources are brought in, but in order for memory to be useful it has to be informed by the components that help us create it. If I remember that my father always called me a loser and a failure I have to rely on the memory of another who remembers my dad saying he was always proud of me, even if I wasn't there to hear it, in order to fully tell the story of my relationship with him. In the same way I have official documents that tell me where and when I was born and my mother's input to inform my memory of myself. I do not, for instance, remember what I was like as a baby, but I believe the things I don't have personal memory of can say something about me relevant to the story that I want to tell about myself.

I was not born in a vacuum. I was born into a fully functional universe that existed long before me and that has a story that is relevant when attempting to understand my own story. It would perhaps be egotistical to say that my story is part of the story of Mexico or the United States or the planet Earth or the Universe, but this does not make it any less true.

The next question this endeavor raised for me was a little more difficult to answer; what purpose should this auto-historia serve? I didn't think it would do any good to simply relay my life story. The more I engaged the literature I have looked at in the preceding chapters and reflected on my story the more it hit me; ultimately this project is an exercise in soul recovery. What I need this chapter to be is a presentation of my life and a description of a curing of *susto* (soul-fright) that can itself serve as a cure for *susto*. Knowing this I begin the last chapter of my thesis.

## **History (Social Position 1)**

As far back as family memory goes, which is only a generation or two, we've always lived in Zacatecas, Mexico. Both of my parents were born and raised there in *ranchos* (ranches) that are now called *La Pitahaya* (a type of cactus fruit) and *El Serrito* (the little hillside). They are across a river from each other and half an hour by car from the closest town, called Jalpa. Jalpa is a four hour drive, on the relatively new asphalt road, from the state capitol, Zacatecas. Everything in this part of Mexico is getting closer to everything else because of asphalt. Even *El Serrito* and *La Pitahaya* are closer to each other since the construction of the concrete bridge that now connects them. The last time I went to Mexico as a child, in 1990 when I was about 12, there was only running water a few hours a day and a rickety wooden bridge was the only thing that connected *La Pitahaya*, where my parents have a house, to everything on the other side of the river.

Zacatecas is a bit of a misnomer. It's a Hispanicized form of the Nahuatl "Zacatecatl" which according to my limited understanding of Nahuatl means "person from Zacatlan," "Zacatlan" means the place of grass. So Zacatecas means person from the place of grass but now in Spanish it is itself a place. Let it never be said that the Spanish did their best to understand indigenous languages or cultures. I don't know if any part of my family has lived in Zacatecas long enough for us to claim that we are descended from the Zacatecatl (The people from the land of grass). That part of my story, like the names of my great-great-grandparents, or the stories of the lives of my great-grandparents or even the bulk of the stories of the lives of my grandparents is still, and probably always will be, unknown to me.

My father, Raudel Salazar Garcia, was born in June of 1932 and my mother, Maria Gonzalez Aguayo, was born eight years later in January 1940. My mom says that they've always known each other, or at least known of each other. Around the time my mother was born my father's mother, Guadalupe, passed away. When she died her children became responsible for themselves. At the time of her death my father, who was 7-8 years old, had been leased out to assist in planting or cleaning someone's crops. When his mother got sick they called him back home. He got there just in time to see his mother before she died, and he cries when he remembers her and the trip home to say goodbye.

By the time he was 12 my father was raising and selling his own cattle. While my father and all of his brothers received a primary education, neither of his sisters went to school or learned how to read. My paternal grandparents, by all accounts, did not know how to read either. My mother's parents, on the other hand, both knew how to read and sent all of their children, not just the boys, to school. School in La Pitahaya at that time lasted three years and according to my father the last year was spent mostly in helping the teacher control the younger kids.

My father came to the United States for the first time in his late teens/early twenties as a farm worker; he still has his *bracero* badge from around that time. He came here because it was what every young man interested in making more money did. He would travel back and forth from the United States to his hometown regularly. When my father was 22 he decided that it was time he was married and so he proposed to a few women back home. My mother, who was 14 at the time, was the youngest of them. It was traditional to wait six months from proposal to acceptance, I imagine that this gave the

engaged time to get to know each other a little, but my mother ignored this tradition because on her way to fetch water a few days after being proposed to she heard one of my father's other potential fiancés call her an “*arañita*” (little spider (because of her skinny arms and legs)) and say that if my mother was her biggest completion she didn't have anything to worry about.

My mother then immediately accepted my father's proposal and asked him to ask her father for her hand in marriage as soon as possible. My father's uncle accompanied him to my maternal grandparents' house where they asked her father for his approval. My maternal grandfather, who traveled to the United States in his youth and returned with several prison tattoos that he never talked about (but that my mom's oldest living sister would tease him were gang-related), agreed to the marriage.

My parents were wed January 19, 1955. He was 23 and she had turned 15 four days before. The marriage was a communal affair with some people contributing food and others bringing chairs to sit, and everything else necessary, including musicians and alcohol to drink. My father says he only bought three chickens and the party lasted three days. When the party was over my mother, again ignoring tradition, did not return to her parent's house (which was common practice), but rather went immediately to live in my father's family's two-room *jacal* (house made of earth bricks with a straw roof). They slept on the kitchen floor and shared one itchy blanket. Because his mother had passed, and his sisters, Isabel and Belen, were still single, as the “*señora*” or married woman of the house my mother became responsible for the maintenance of their household.

My mother says that, because she had older sisters that were tasked with helping their mother, when she got married she did not know how to light a fire or do any other kinds of domestic chores. In a *rancho* domestic work goes far beyond cooking and cleaning the house. My oldest brother, Francisco Javier (b.1956), was born exactly 364 days after the wedding and my father and mother fell into a routine wherein he would go to the United States to work and she would stay in Mexico and take care of their children. It is possible to know how long my father was away on each trip by seeing how far apart my brothers and sisters are in age. Celia (b.1959) followed Javier (b.1956) and was followed by Jose Luis (b.1960) who was followed by Maria Guadalupe (b.1963) who was followed by Raudel (b.1966) who was followed by Teresa (b.1968).

For about a year after Teresa was born my father stopped coming back and sending messages or money. My mother and older siblings, except for the oldest who was enrolled in school in Jalpa, spent their time raising cattle. Despite hard times they would not, and could not, sell or slaughter a cow to feed themselves because it would have been deemed inappropriate by the community they lived in to do that without my father's consent and approval.

With no money or communication from my father, my mother knew something was wrong and she sent word to my father through his brother Rosalio that she might want to come to the United States and be united with him, to work and help him raise money. My Tio (uncle) Rosalio told my mother that my father had told him to tell her to stay in Mexico. Then, without my father's consent, told my mom that in his opinion if she wanted to stay married to my dad and make sure he didn't lose sight of the fact that he was married she should do everything possible to get to the United States.

My mother took his advice, left her children behind and, in the company of her younger brother, came to the United States. On her first crossing into the United States she hid inside of the crushed bodies of old cars being hauled into the U.S. When she got to Venice, CA where my father lived at this time, they set up house and slowly began sending for their children. Over the course of the next 5 years they would all be in the United States too. She got pregnant soon after arriving and my brother Jose Cuauhtémoc (b. 1970) was born. He was followed by Erika Yeseñia (b.1975). Because the presence of my brothers, and more importantly the labor they provided, made more income available my family had enough money to buy a house and they did. They moved to a part of the San Fernando Valley called Sun Valley.

A friend of mine once told me that our souls choose the families and situations they want to be born into. I don't know if this is true but if it is then at this point everything was in place for me. This was the time, place and family that I had to, or chose to, be born into. Everything was ready for my arrival. I wouldn't begin to learn about any of the things that I have written here until many, many, years later, but it was all there ready and waiting for me.

It is important to reflect here too on how different my sibling's lives would have been if my mom had not made the trip to reunite with my father. A separated woman with six children in La Pitahaya with no man to speak for or support her could have been the worst kind of anomaly in that place and time. The importance of my mother's journey to the United States to my life cannot be overemphasized. If she hadn't come to the United States I (along with 4 of my siblings) would never have been born!

But born I was; almost eight years after my mom came to the United States on June 15<sup>th</sup> 1978. At that time my parents were involved in the process of establishing legal residency in the United States. They could do this because my brother and sister were born in the United States and were therefore natural born citizens. It was possible at that time to apply for legal residency on the basis of being the parent of a natural born citizen. Part of this process involved moving back to Mexico for some time in order to pay fines and write letters of apology for having previously entered the country “without permission.”

We lived in Mexico until about 1981 when I was three (my younger brother Carlos (1979) was born during that time), and then my family moved back to the United States to the house in Sun Valley that my parents had bought around the time I was born. My father was a gardener and my mother, brothers, sisters, and eventually I would go to work with him whenever we could. When we were too young to go to work my younger brother and I were entrusted to the care of my oldest sister; Celia. She was so much older than us (about 20 years) that growing up we called her “Ma” Celia. My youngest sister Maria de Jesus was born in 1983, and around that time they found cysts in my mom’s uterus and (because of a family history of cancer) she decided to have it removed. There would be no more children, so our family was complete.

The fact that by 1983 my parents could move freely between Mexico and the United States as legal residents and that they owned homes in both countries are vital parts of my story. If it hadn’t been for the amnesty granted immigrants who entered the United States before 1982, signed into law by Ronald Reagan in 1986, my story would have been very different. It also is important to my story that my parents moved us to the

San Fernando Valley because it meant that we were removed from both of their extended families. By moving away from our extended family we isolated ourselves from the broader community too. I grew up in what is called “Joker Town,” where the “Vineland Boys” congregate, but none of my siblings joined a gang. This is probably because we were never really allowed out on the street unless we were at school or working with my dad, though we eventually learned ways around this rule. My dad also told us that there was no such thing as “friends.” In this sense my parent’s mistrust of strangers and need of our assistance at work made it possible for me to focus exclusively on school.

I think that it’s hard for people who were born after 1985 to imagine what the Gay Latino landscape was like in the early to mid 90’s. The first time I remember seeing a Gay Latino on television was in 1994 when Pedro Samora appeared on “The Real World: San Francisco.” I was 16. To that point as far as I knew the only indication that “Gay” Latinos existed was limited to rumors about Juan Gabriel (a popular Mexican singer) and occasional guests on Christina (an Oprah style Spanish-language talk show). I was only exposed to “The Real World” because we could afford to pay for cable.

Because I was a United States citizen eligible for financial aid when I was eighteen (in 1996) I graduated High School and was basically tracked to CSUN (the application consisted of two pages that I filled out in my High School Economics class). At CSUN I started in the English department (I wanted to teach High School English because I enjoyed being in it so much), then moved to Anthropology (because I wanted to learn more about people and what they thought), and then to Religious Studies (because I realized that what was most interesting about people was how they structured their universe, and that could be found in religion).

In 1997 I completed my first year at CSUN and my dad retired. My parents decided to move back to Mexico. They left their house and my little sister Mary in the hands of my younger brother and me. I have to stop my story here and point out my privileged position. I am a natural born United States citizen with access to a relatively free (or borrowed) University education, and some older siblings that had had the same privileges. My parents had been able to purchase a home before I was born (as a result of immigration policies that made their legal residence possible) so I was able to make a lot of decisions with the knowledge that I had a safe place to return to if I needed or wanted to. Thoreau talks about the beauty of living free in the woods, but he doesn't talk about the care and attention of his well-off parents that made that stay in his idyllic cabin possible. I do not want to romanticize my journey without first recognizing my privileges as a natural born United States man (I wonder what my family's reaction to this journey would have been if I had been born a woman) with parents who own property and a supportive family behind me. I also lacked privileges due to other social locations. I am a first generation citizen of color and queer which are all historically (and currently) disenfranchised social positions. Because of these social positions, and their intersections I was exposed to a number of incidents that I now understand to be *susto*.

### **My Life in Susto**

I want to talk about some aspects of my life in the context of *susto* (soul-fright) because learning about *susto* and the possibility of healing from it has a great impact on me. There is an existent body of literature related to *susto*, and it is not the place or purpose of this section to analyze or challenge it. *Susto* (soul fright) has been described in psychological terms as the loss of the psyche (or some part of it) as a result of trauma and

cures for *susto* have also been described in psychological terms as the recovery of fragmented parts of the psyche (Avila, 2000). I would add that any big scare or life changing event that leaves you *desanimado* (literally without animating spirit), or leaves you feeling as if a part of you is missing is *susto*. In my understanding of *susto*, informed by a workshop I attended with curandera (healer) Estela Roman, it is not about the fright or loss of the Judeo-Christo-Islamic “soul,” but rather a complication or interruption of the energy that animates us. Energy is probably as hard to define as the term soul, but at least it moves us away from Western concept of the individual soul that lives on apart from the body after death. My understanding of *susto* as a loss, misplacement, or misalignment of energy is in line with the teachings of some curanderas/os (traditional healers) I have met, spoken to, and learned from. Another thing that Estela Roman taught in that workshop is that these energies, the proper functioning of which have been lost or challenged, must be set right or reintegrated in order for wholeness, integrity, and proper functioning to be realized.

The first experience of traumatic *susto* that I can remember is related to learning about and being scared of dying. When I was about five years old (in 1983) I learned that one day I would die. My oldest sister, while reading about Noah’s Ark to us from a Children’s Bible, said that my body (and everyone else’s) would someday stop working, and that was called death. At that point I could conceive of a body that has stopped, but I could not conceive of consciousness that stopped. This led me to believe that while we lost the ability to animate our bodies our consciousness continued (as was trapped) in our bodies after death. Many nights as a child I would awake and find myself afraid to attempt to move because I reasoned if I was unable to move it would mean I was dead

and that I would then be trapped in an inanimate body forever. No one called my initial crying and subsequent terror upon learning about death *susto*, but there is no doubt to me now that *susto* is what it was.

The second time I can remember experiencing traumatic *susto* is when I learned the name for it. In 1985 I was about seven years old and at my older brother's house. My younger brother and I were playing and running around inside their swimming pool because it had been drained of water. A dog ran into their yard and got in the pool and chased us around and really scared us. Some grown-ups came outside and chased the dog away. My brother's wife took us into her kitchen and rubbed *Manteca* (lard) on our foreheads "*para el susto*" (for the fright). The purpose and function of the cure were not explained to us, and I am still not sure why lard was used. I did feel better after.

These are two examples of trauma-style *susto*, but I believe that there are more subtle forms of *susto* as well. These sometimes take the shape of "microaggressions" typically defined as racist or race-based antagonism that is subtle or covert. This definition has been broadened to include gender, class, and sexuality (to name but a few equally relevant categories) (Yearwood, 2013). This treatment (and *susto*) is potentially more insidious than overt trauma because it is not as clearly delineated or obvious to those of us experiencing it.

For example, my tia (aunt) Belen is probably the first person I can remember who told me that I was "good," but she wasn't the only one. On a visit to Mexico when I was about eight my maternal grandmother also told me that I was "good," and that this meant that I was going to be a priest. She then made me promise that I would be a priest, and I

did. I thought that being “good” meant I had to tolerate everything that happened around me like some kind of mini-martyr. I was “good” and that meant being quiet, not talking or fighting back, and basically being invisible when not needed. I would say that this concept of “good” and the accompanying fear of not being or seeming good is another kind of *susto*, because it distorted my energy; limiting its motion and forcing it to fit a mold of this concept of “good.”

I remember that I always felt that my father favored my younger brother and one of my older sisters told me that my father (who is dark-skinned) favored his darker-skinned children because he took their skin tone as a sign that they were really his (my mother is lighter skinned). This favoritism manifested itself in different ways. Additionally my father’s idea of “discipline” involved some uncontrolled violence. One day my younger brother and I were playing in the front yard and I had a toy that he wanted. He pushed me into some rose bushes, got the toy and ran away. My father walked over to where I was, pulled me out of the rosebushes (where I was tangled in thorns and crying) and hit me for being a “*dejado*” (permissive one). I would also get hit if I ever struck my brother while fighting back. It didn’t make any sense to me. Looking back on this now I recognize that some of my dad’s violence was for the most part random (and almost impersonal because I could not control what color I was), but when it was intentional it served the purpose of attempting to toughen me up and counter the gentle nature that the women in my family interpreted as “good.”

I reasoned, in a child’s way, that if my father didn’t like me, but people did like the fact that I was “good” then I should attempt to excel at being “good.” As a child I learned to be invisible and not get people’s attention unless it was for something “good.”

This served two purposes; any person that noticed me would see that I was “good” and everyone else would be oblivious to my “softness” so I wouldn’t have to worry that it would be met with violence. I learned to do as I was told without thinking about whether it was reasonable or correct. These were valuable lessons that became very useful as I started school. I was a model student. I did as I was told. I didn’t question authority. I was quiet and required very little attention. From the perspective of the struggle for social change/ justice I was “good” in the worse way possible. I was not encouraged to think for myself. I learned to take whatever life gave me without complaining.

While it wasn’t clear yet to me there was definitely queerness related to my being “good” in the sense that being “good” meant not acting like a typical boy. What was perceived as “good” by some of the older women in my family was perceived as permissive or weak by my father. It is interesting too that my grandmother (whom I did not really know) must have picked up on my queerness immediately and tried to steer it towards what she thought was an appropriate venue (the church). I think it’s important to point out here that I don’t think there was anything that could be explicitly called effeminate about me from the perspective of Western European definitions of gender, but there was something queer about my attitudes and demeanor that people noticed.

While we were not raised with the notion that women were in any way inferior to men (neither was inherently better or worse than the other); we were taught that men and women were different in that they were perceived as having different needs, responsibilities and (ultimately) destinies. Using my two oldest siblings as examples, one (male) was afforded the opportunity to attend secondary school in the nearby town of Jalpa while the other (female) was not. There is no doubt that this was a result of their

different genders, but there also was no indication that this was a result of their perceived intelligence, potential for success, or worth. In the same way any self-perception of unmanly “softness” was not internalized by me as a deficiency, only as a difference (one of the definitions of queerness).

All that said; my different-ness was still perceived as dangerous and I go back to Anzaldua (1987) who, because of her refusal to adhere to notions of gender that did not fit or work for her became dangerous. I only wish I had been able to like her proclaim and accept my difference as a positive. Instead I learned to be quiet and tried to be invisible.

Even more difficult to deal with growing up were incidents of subtle *susto* related to race, class, and sexuality. With all my dubious talent for quietude and lessons learned in not complaining school was always easy for me. My mom told me to “be good” every day. This meant doing everything possible not to draw attention to myself. I also thought it was important to achieve and be recognized as smart because we were raised to believe that school was our job until we were old enough to work. I also thought that being smart made teachers like you more. Without realizing it at the time in my education and mind “being smart” translated as “being familiar with white American culture.”

By the time I was in the second grade in 1987 I had, without being conscious of it, learned a lot about what it meant to be a successful white person (American citizen). In an assignment wherein we were asked to draw out our life stories from birth to death I said that I wanted to go to Harvard Medical. I have no idea where I picked up that Harvard Medical was a good thing, but by the time I was eight I carried that idea with

me. I had no idea where or what Harvard was and I had no real interest in being a doctor. I just knew it would be good to *say* that.

Perhaps in part because of this I seemed “smart” to the school, because also in the second grade I was tested for the gifted program. I didn’t know that I had tested as “gifted” until two years later when by chance I noticed my name on the “gifted” list. For some reason that I now attribute to racism my teachers had not been sending me to the “gifted” activities. The other “gifted” kids were White or Asian (like most of the teachers) in a predominantly Mexican-heritage-student school. Being gifted meant attending poetry and computer classes and meeting with the vice-principal a few times a year to work on special projects like dioramas while the kids in my class did regular work. Gifted classes were very different from regular classes.

In my regular third grade class the teacher would hand us a list of words with definitions on Mondays and then sit at his desk and read the newspaper while we “studied” them. We would study these words all week and then have a spelling test on Fridays. This was called “English.” When I was in fifth grade, by virtue of my “high achievement,” I was placed in a low achieving sixth grade class (I guess the assumption was that this class was more advanced than the highest achieving fifth grade class). In that class we spent more than a month on a “group project” that involved memorizing information about a foreign country (from a National Geographic pull-out map) so that we could present it to the class. We literally spent all the time between recess and lunch talking about this project for more than a month, and ultimately most of the kids in the class never actually did, or presented, anything.

The valuing of American (white) culture and devaluing of my home culture continued in interactions between my parents and school. In parent-teacher conferences my teachers would point out how expertly I spoke English (no accent) despite the fact that I needed to translate for my mother (whom I perceived as being judged deficient for not speaking English at all). I got in trouble once for telling a student his mom was fat because he said my mom was old and he and I and our moms met in the Principals office. The principal was African American and the other kid and his mom were White. The meeting consisted of the other kid's mom yelling at me in English and the principal talking down to me in English while my mom watched (without a translator), and then we were excused. All communication between my earlier schooling and home was complicated and sometimes impossible in the same way.

Outside of school we also learned about the relative valuing of cultures. My brothers and I went to work with my dad every summer and winter break. Working with my dad gave my brother and me exposure to the world outside of our house and more opportunities to be taught our relative "place." One of my father's clients had a child around my age so my younger brother and I were invited into their house to play with him while my dad did the yard work. That night my father got a call from his boss and we were accused of having entered rooms that we had never been in and making a mess in her son's room (which he was actually responsible for). Because of the power differential in their relationship my dad couldn't do anything but make us apologize and forbid us from ever going into their house again. We were learning that sometimes rich white people were dangerous this way, and that there was nothing we could do to challenge them.

I went from Glenwood Elementary to Sun Valley Junior High in 1990 and because of my “gifted” status I was tracked into the Honors program. In Junior High I learned about after-school activities for the first time. In an effort to avoid being at home and/or going to work with my dad, I signed up for Future Scholars of America and began spending a lot of time after school with the coordinator of the honors program. I remember that I would hang out in her room after school and help she would let me borrow books to read and give me rides home. One of the books contained the play “The Boys in The Band” in it. It was my first exposure to the idea of a culture of gayness. My “gifted” status automatically put me on “A” track, and “A” track is where Future Scholars (and most (if not all) of the art and music electives) were to be found. If you were unlucky enough to be on any track but “A” you could not participate in any of these programs.

I started High School in 1993 and it followed in the same fashion as Jr. High with “A” track as the only place where students could take honors or Advanced Placement classes (which gave one an advantage when applying to Universities) and those students not tracked onto “A” being excluded from these programs. Marching Band and Drama took the place of Future Scholars as ways to stay away from my dad and home. After school activities allowed me to create a space for myself where I was truly myself. I began to explore my burgeoning sexuality in conversations with friends or by looking for books about it. I felt more myself in the time between school and home, than I ever felt at those two places.

Up to that point I had always been careful to express what I reasoned was appropriate interest in girls. I always claimed to like the girls that my friends said they

liked, but this was as false to me as my saying I wanted to go to Harvard Medical. I had tried to teach myself to act like a “straight” guy because I assumed that it was expected of me, but I was as good at that as I was at pretending to be a fully assimilated American citizen. In 1993, when I was fifteen I was confronted for the first time with the idea that I might be gay. I can honestly say that at this point I didn’t really understand what “gay” was. I knew that I was sexually attracted to men, but I did not understand that that was what it meant to be “gay.”When someone told me they thought I was gay I kind of freaked out. I asked my other friends if they thought I was gay too, and they sort of shrugged and said yes. I ran (literally) to my favorite teacher’s class and told her what had happened, and she didn’t know what to say because she thought I was gay too.

It wasn’t until a year later in 1994 that I was able to say what they all already knew; I was hanging out after school one day outside of a toy store down the street from school when a young man that worked there approached my friend, pulled her aside, and asked her if I was gay. She told him that she didn’t know. He wrote down his phone number and told her that she should ask me if I was and if I said yes she should give me his phone number. She came back to the group and told us what had happened, and I took the phone number without hesitating. That was the first, but far from last, time I “came out.”After my initial “coming out” I came out again and again as I met new people or told people I already knew. My brother started high school a year after me, and soon he found out that I had been coming out. He asked me about it and I told him that it was true; I was gay. He reacted negatively and started telling people at school that he was not in fact my brother, that I was his cousin, or adopted, but not really related to him. He also acted out occasionally at home and would sometimes threaten to “out” me to my family if I didn’t,

for example, let him have the remote control for the T.V. The idea of being “outed” was scary, and I would just give in or let him win whenever it came up.

In 1996 when I was 18 I came out to one of my older brothers, and he “outed” me (with my permission) to one of my older sisters. Over the course of the next year I came out to all of my brothers and sisters, except the oldest whom I don’t really have a relationship with, individually. Their reactions varied from denial (immediate proclamations of “No you’re not”) to neutral (“It’s your life, you have to live it the way you think right”) to positive (expressions of continued love and solidarity). From all of them I got the advice that I should not come out to my parents because it would somehow harm them, and so for the moment I did not.

Having to continually come out presents us with another potential source of *susto* because in not meeting society’s heterosexist expectation we have to not only explain ourselves, but also expose ourselves to physical and emotional violence. There are also consequences to being out that most heterosexuals don’t have to think about. In 2003 I’d been seeing this guy for a little while and he was waiting for a bus with me. The bus arrived and I kissed him good bye. There was a woman on the bus who sat next to me and started talking to me about her daughter. She told me that her daughter was “like me” and that she told her daughter that she has to repent because “people like me” are damned and end up in hell I was so taken aback that I don’t actually remember what I said to her. I had just had a really nice time with someone that I liked and was getting to know. I wasn’t looking to be condemned, but there I was.

Another time in the same year with the same guy; we were walking down the street holding hands near my parent's house. We were still getting to know each other and it felt nice to be around him and hold his hand. Suddenly a guy sitting on his porch starting yelling at us: "FAGGOTS! FUCKING PERVERTS!" I turned to him and I got angry, started yelling back something innocuous like "SO WHAT?!? AND?!?" The guy I was with grabbed my arm and made me keep walking. It happens to me every once in a while, and in the most random of places. Most recently last year (2012) my boyfriend and I were waiting to cross an intersection and a truck drive by and yelled "FAGGOTS!" at us. Being harassed on the street is scary, and while I have never had to deal with more than verbal harassment (and some physical threats) it hurts because it forces you to consider "acting" differently or policing yourself to make sure you don't draw attention to yourself and "invite" violence.

Having to "come out" also created delays in my development as a social being because avenues for normal development (as I understood it) did not seem to exist for me. I did not know, or meet, any other openly Gay people throughout Jr. High and High School, and as a result I did not practice or learn how to gauge or develop my own emotional boundaries or relationship skills until I was in my 20's. As a society we are taught that our teen years are times for romantic exploration; first dates, first loves, etc. For me this was not possible. I did not have a mutual love relationship until my early twenties. I did not actually go on a date until I was 24-25. This means that I was experiencing things that my heterosexual peers had experienced almost 10 years before me. All the lessons that my straight friends had learned about healthy and unhealthy/serious and not serious relationships in Jr. High and High School were brand new to me.

As a queer Chicano heterosexism is not the only issue that I have to deal with. Race and class are also important sites rife with potential for *susto*. I grew up in a predominantly working class Mexican-American neighborhood in the San Fernando Valley located next to the then predominantly white and middle class neighborhood of Burbank. Among my friends Burbank's Police Department have a reputation for misusing their authority and being racist. Around 1999 I was in my early twenties, and I had a number of run-ins with them that proved this reputation was earned. I will give two illustrative examples; One day I was driving my old and ugly (but totally legal) car through Burbank on my way to the library. Burbank has its own library system apart from the city of Los Angeles and I liked to visit it because they had decent resources. That day I had some books to drop off, so I set out. On a random street, for no reason that I could see, a Burbank Police Cruiser pulled me over.

Both of the officers that got off the car were blonde women and while the driver came to talk to me the passenger drew her gun and aimed it at the back of my car. The driver asked me to roll down my window and hand her my license and other paperwork. I was appropriately scared. I had never had a gun pointed at me before and I had no idea why the police felt it was necessary to point one at me now. The woman talking to me looked at my license and asked me what I was doing in Burbank. I told her that I was on my way to the library. She said "What, don't they have libraries in Sun Valley?" At that moment I understood that what I had done wrong was drive my ugly old car through Burbank while looking like a Mexican man. I explained that the library resources in Burbank were good and that I had some books to return, pretending that this was a perfectly normal conversation to have while someone points a gun to the back of your

head. The cop flicked my license and registration in through the window and told me to be on my way. A second run-in with Burbank PD followed the same course, but on that occasion I had my dad and sister in the car with me and that gave me a bit of courage so I asked the officers why I had been pulled over. They claimed I had made an illegal right turn (impossible at the intersection in question), and that I needed to calm down because (after checking my license, etc. and finding no reason to further detain me) otherwise they wouldn't just let me go with a warning. Experiences like this taught me that the police were dangerous, and I would always get nervous when they were around.

Another important source of *susto* in my life was unguided and misused spiritual and metaphysical knowledge. To a certain extent my exploration into the metaphysical was much like my maternal grandmother's call for me to be a priest; a misguided attempt to convert my queer desire into something "good" that never challenged the notion that wanting to have sex with men was somehow inherently bad. Perhaps the biggest *susto* that I ever experienced took place in the year 2000 when I was in my early twenties because of this. My friends and I got together one night to drink psychedelic mushroom tea. It was not my first experience with mushrooms, but it would be the most intense. I had read up on Maria Sabina and The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test, so I thought I was prepared, but I was not. We boiled the mushrooms and I had a cup of tea along with everybody else and then another cup, and then another. I was sitting in a doorway between the kitchen and the living room and the mushrooms were working on me. As I sat in living room of this apartment, I flashed back to the living room of my parent's house as a child. I fought this temporal/ spatial displacement. I didn't want to go where the mushrooms wanted to take me.

I took off my glasses and put them on the floor next to me. There were a lot of people there, and I didn't know some of them. One of my brother's friend's friends was putting out a heavy sex vibe that made me really uncomfortable (I was still a virgin). I stood up. I almost stepped on my glasses. I thought "Whoa, look out, you almost broke your glasses," my glasses were like my eyes. I really cared about them and I bent over to pick them up. Then another thought hit me. I chastised myself because my glasses were a material thing, and I was angry that I was so caught up in the "material" world. I called myself a liar because while I claimed to be pursuing Buddhist practice and renouncing the world and material possessions I still obviously cared about them. I got really angry. Feeling all of this I stood up, lifted my foot and crushed my glasses underneath it. I could feel people starting to get scared, and I was not okay.

I started talking about time and space, and about creating times and spaces where we would feel what I was doing would be appropriate. I started saying, "Don't worry. It's Tuesday, it's 9:30" (meaning it's an innocuous time when everything is still permissible because Tuesday at 9:30 is not too late to be fully awake). I started talking about being in being in different places; "We're on the 152" (a bus line that meant a public space where you could talk about anything you wanted). As I said these things I could see that they were true, it was a Tuesday at 9:30, and we were on the 152. In conversation later some of those present told me that they were there with me. In flashes it felt like we were jumping around in time and space.

Then reality (in the form of people concerned that we were getting out of hand and being too loud) stepped in and tried to calm me down. This made me furious. I overturned a table that had a jar of henna on it and the green powder flew everywhere.

Then I went through the rest of the apartment. I was throwing over things and smashing windows. I went into the bathroom and started slamming my arm against the garbage shoot. It had a window with wire mesh inside that would not break. I walked out of my friend's apartment and noticed that my arms were bleeding. Because of the henna I had thrown around I was covered in green dust. As I walked down the stairs I kicked at rails and smeared blood on the walls. I took my shirt off then I took my pants off. I was completely naked by the time I made it outside. I ran out of steam. Not knowing what else to do I sat down on the sidewalk.

Whatever rage I had, whatever anger I had been holding onto since my childhood, shame about my body and my connection to what I thought of as the material world, all of it was gone. I was exhausted. That's when the police arrived. They pointed their guns at me and asked if I was on PCP. They used white plastic ties to restrain me and waited with me until the ambulance came. The EMT's cut the plastic ties off my hands and put a sheet over me. An ambulance came and they took me to Queen of Angels Hospital where I got stitches, a tetanus shot and then they sent me on my way.

Over the course of the following months I fell into a deep depression. To say that I was *desanimado* would be an understatement. I didn't want to do anything, and I didn't feel that I had anyone to talk to who could understand what had happened. I felt incapable of anything and thought that I wanted to dissolve. As I was handcuffed and receiving emergency care I had seen myself as a cell that had become too full with liquid and had exploded, and that is all I wanted to do now. I wanted to cease existing. Despite this I continued going to work and school. I attribute this to the work ethic that my parents had instilled in me but nothing brought me joy. I felt empty. In *Borderlands*

Anzaldua (1987) describes a similar rupture and place of emptiness as she entered her Cuautlicue State and when I read about it this period of my life resonated very loudly.

*Susto* of a different kind was also a consequence of my first sexual experience. It was 2001 I was 23 and had sex with someone who was closeted and not comfortable with being gay, and when we came it was as if a spell were broken. He pushed me away and ran from the room. I didn't understand what had happened. He locked himself in the bathroom. I heard the shower, a few minutes later he ran out of the bathroom and into his brother's room. A few hours later I awoke and the house was empty. This was a man that I loved and he said he loved me too, but because of his particular cultural indoctrination related to sexuality he pushed me away and didn't want me around anymore. As a result I felt emptiness in my chest that I thought only he could fill. I had given him the part of my soul represented by my heart, and it was with him.

After this experience, and perhaps as a way to avoid dealing with my feelings, I started having sex often and with almost anyone who was willing to. In seeking out those encounters I came across racist Craigslist ads that specified "white men only" or excluded people based on appearance or affect (with lines like "no fats, fems, Mexicans, or Asians"). I also met more than a few guys who could not see me as anything but (and would attempt to define me as) a "passive," "spicy," "little Mexican" because of my race and age.

There was some pain and confusion in my sexual acting out too because as I learned there were people that I was interested in getting to know that only wanted to have sex with me, as there were people interested in relationships that I only wanted to

have sex with. STI's were also part of this reality, and I managed to contract HPV and had some HIV and STI scares that forced me to visit free clinics to receive treatment (and regular HIV and STI tests). The free clinic and pharmacy were places where I felt that I was encouraged to feel shame not just for my sexuality, but for way I was expressing it.

Most of this took place in the San Fernando Valley, specifically North Hollywood. I would avoid going to West Hollywood because in one or two visits to Los Angeles' most famous "Gay" community I quickly realized that as a young poor and socially conscious person of color there was really no place for me there. While I could have sex with people from all walks of life with no problem, interacting and reaching social accord with them was much more problematic. At the intersection of race, sexuality, and class in this period of my life I learned that (to paraphrase George Orwell) all Gays are equal, but some Gays are more equal than others.

Eventually I tried to get away from all of this in 2002 by traveling to Mexico to be with my parents. Being in Mexico was good for to me until one day I let go of the rails on my father's truck and fell off of the back of it. I broke my first rib, and was in intense pain for the next few months. My parents didn't think to take me to a hospital, and I didn't think to ask anyone to take me to one. My rib eventually healed (improperly) without medical attention and now does not connect which causes me a brand of arthritic pain whenever the barometric pressure changes.

After this trip I began another journey that led me eventually to this thesis. It has taken me a lifetime of learning and growing to deal with all the *susto* that I experienced, and the process continues. It is important for me to be able to see all of this as *susto* because having learned what I have about it I genuinely believe that is what it is. By

naming it I could begin to deal with it and see how some of what I have done has worked effectively as a cure for *susto* even without me knowing it. But before I talk specifically about cures for *susto* I think it is first necessary for me to talk (as I have committed to) about the body and sex.

### **The body**

In my current opinion without the body there is nothing. Without material existence and the mass that makes it possible we are only theoretical. In light of this it is surprising to me how often the body is ignored or, worse, subsumed to the mind and soul. As if it is merely a shell that mind or souls inhabit. Like the wrapping for a gift, it is sometimes conceptualized, as something to be thrown away once the gift (soul) is open.

This idea of the body as secondary, disposable and even shameful (something that has to be overcome and broken free of) has a long history in Western thought and certainly in the brand of Catholicism imported to and imposed on Mexico by Europeans (Clendenin, 1991). As far as my relationship to my body, I don't remember anything ever being explicitly being communicated about it when I was growing up, but there were definitely rules. We were always to be fully dressed. I remember that as children my brother Carlos and I would even bathe with our underwear on (we didn't realize this was unusual until we went to a camp through school in 1989 at the age of 11). One time, as a teenager, I sat down to eat wearing a tank top and my father made a big deal about it because in his eyes I was naked. I wasn't explicitly told anything about my body, but I was definitely starting to learn shame about it.

In my childhood and adolescence I did not think I had a lot of control over my body. I was a skinny kid until about the third grade, and then I started gaining a lot of excess weight. Through the rest of my childhood and adolescence I was overweight. I don't think I enjoyed my body very much. When I was about twelve years old in 1990 I started masturbating, and I did get a lot of pleasure from that, but there was always something shameful about it. It always felt like my body was being policed by comments about how much clothing I had on, or how much weight I needed to lose, so any pleasure I got from masturbating was mitigated by the shame I felt, or felt I should feel, about my body.

Through most of my adolescence I was overweight and I learned to define myself as "fat" by and for my family. Being fat was part of who I was. It also saved me from having to reveal my sexuality to my family. As I understood it the assumption was that as a fat, and therefore unattractive, young man I didn't have to think, or worry, about girls or sex. As I got older I started to lose weight, but the idea that I was (and always would be) fat is something I carried with me for a long time.

As far as my body and my relationship to it as a Religious Studies major my interest in Taoist and Buddhist teachings in my early twenties was an important part of my learning to communicate with it. In the Taoism and Buddhism I studied there was an understanding that nature was the ultimate teacher and that getting in touch with the "natural world" was a worthwhile goal. There was also an understanding of impermanence that served to give me a new and broader perspective because I began to understand how little time I actually had. There was also a new understanding of time conceptualized as circles and cycles as opposed to in lines of "progress." And all of these

ideas forced me to look at my experiences and myself differently. With them I came to understand that focusing on my “deficient” body, and allowing that to dictate what I did was not necessary. I read Burton Watson’s translation of Chuang Tzu repeatedly, and I came to understand the degree to which our perspective informs our reality and the absurdity of attempting to force my reality on other people (or vice versa). I also learned the value of relativity and realized the arbitrary nature of “moral” prescriptions. I hadn’t yet fully learned to inhabit and embrace my body (distorted in my mind by my understanding the “material world” was to be overcome). I was a lot more comfortable with being myself, but due to what I thought was a vital religious prescription I had tried to completely cut myself off from my body; particularly sex and sexual exploration (except for my first chaste kiss). It would be a little while before I would as fully integrate sex into my idea of my body and me.

## **Sex**

My first encounters with sex came by way of pornographic magazines stashed away in my oldest brother’s bathroom. No one ever talked to me about sex, but whenever we would visit my brother I would lock myself in his bathroom and peruse the “dirty” magazines he hid in the top shelf of a towel closet. I don’t remember feeling desire by being exposed to these magazines. I think it was more like a fascination with what to my mind was illicit material. Even without desire I was always more interested in the men that I saw in these magazines. As a child I played some genital based games with some male relatives (also children), but they were limited to holding each other’s penises while we urinated or other such interactions that we hid from our parents. These never really

took the form of sex to my imagination because none of us were capable of getting an erection.

These explorations of each other's bodies came to an abrupt end. My aunt caught my cousin interacting with his younger sister in a similar manner and asked him where he had learned to play in such a way. He blamed my younger brother and me, despite the fact that I remember him introducing such play to us. At any rate we were all children (probably under the age of 8), but when my aunt revealed this information to one of my older sisters in my presence it was clear that what we had done was judged negatively. No one told us that it was wrong, but it was communicated in the silence that followed that revelation that it was shameful and inappropriate.

I don't know when I learned that I could masturbate, but I remember that I started masturbating as soon as I could get an erection (and before I could actually ejaculate). This was around the age of 12 and in this period is when I began to conceptualize my sexual desire. By the time I started Jr. High my brothers had all gone on to other jobs (or started gardening routes of their own) so my father hired my sister in law's cousin (who was only a few years older than me) to help work with him on the gardening route. He was the first adult male non-relative that I can really remember spending any considerable time with (by virtue of my continuing to work for my father summers, weekends, and Tuesdays after school) and he is also, perhaps not surprisingly, the first man that I can remember really wanting to interact sexually with.

I did not have the vocabulary or understanding to see myself as "gay" or "queer" yet, but while masturbating I had many fantasies of performing oral sex on him. I don't

know where the idea that pleasuring another man orally was the ultimate realization of sexual desire came from, but all through Jr. High it was all I could think of to do while I masturbated. Growing up I had never seen any of my brothers or father naked, so I had never actually seen another man's penis in person. One day in Junior High (around 1991) I was hanging out with a friend and another boy we sort of knew and the other boy showed us his erect penis. I was genuinely fascinated by it, but my friend was really uncomfortable and told me that my interest in it (and lack of discomfort about the situation) was weird. This was many years before I "came out."

Sex in my teens was limited to masturbation and fantasy. I did not have any opportunity to have sex with a man at all until after I had graduated High School. One night in 1997 I was standing at my bedroom window smoking when I saw a guy who was attempting to ride a bicycle with a broken chain. He would ride a couple of feet and fall off the bicycle and after watching him for a while I decided to go outside and see if he was okay. He was really drunk. We smoked a cigarette together and he asked me if I was gay. I told him that I might be and he told me that if I let him sleep in my bed he would let me do whatever I wanted to him. He was attractive to me and about my age and I agreed to let him in the house. We snuck into my room and climbed into my bed together; he took off his shirt, unbuckled his "Virgen de Guadalupe" belt buckle, and immediately fell asleep. My brother Luis had taught me that it was wrong to take advantage of people sexually, and that included messing with people that were asleep, so I resigned myself. I let him sleep for a little while and then, fearing that I would have to explain his presence to my family I woke him up and snuck him back out of the house. The next day I was

walking to the local liquor store on an errand for my mom and we passed each other on the street. He smiled, but I just walked quickly past him.

My first job apart from gardening was at a chain pizza restaurant in 1996 and, not having a car, I would have to wait after locking up the store for my sister Erika to pick me up from work. There were a lot of homeless people in that neighborhood and one older African-American guy would often approach me while I waited for my ride and inform me that he knew what I liked and he was going to give it to me. I had no idea what he was talking about, and one night I told him that. He said “I know you like big black dick, and I’m going to give you one.” This was not an offer I was amenable to and luckily my sister was there to pick me up soon after.

Sex felt like it was completely outside of my reality. I would go out dancing with a good friend of mine and though we always went to “straight” clubs one night in 2001 (while on ecstasy) I recognized a longing in the gaze of a cute guy across the room that matched my own. I made my way over to him and introduced myself. Something I would never have done sober or drunk on alcohol. We sat on a couch and talked. He was beautiful to me; he had a goofy dimpled smile and strong calloused hands. Our fingers intertwined and we looked at each other and smiled. Then it was last call and I could see my friends looking for me. I asked him if I could have a kiss and he said yes. We kissed. It was the first time I had ever kissed a man. I was 21 years old, and while I did get his phone number I never actually tried calling him, so I never saw him again.

Once I decided that I was serious about exploring Taoist philosophy and Buddhist thought around the year 1999 I stopped masturbating. I also decided that rather than

pursuing sex ad hoc (as if I had been) I would not allow myself to have sex unless I was in love. I followed through on this resolution and the first time I had sex it was with the first man I really loved. When it happened, two years later in 2001 when I was 23, I felt like my world exploded. He was only the second guy I had ever really kissed and probably thanks in part to the fact that I had stopped masturbating a full two years before I felt like every cell in my body woke up. We made out, went down on (had oral sex with) each other, and talked about (but decided against) having anal sex, because we didn't have condoms and (despite the fact that we were both essentially virgins), I had been taught never to have sex without condoms by years of public HIV education and the influence of my brother (who worked as an HIV Health Educator). While I don't remember my brother explicitly instructing me to use condoms when I had sex I did feel that I had a responsibility to stay HIV negative- because it would be embarrassing to contract HIV while having a brother that worked in HIV prevention.

Soon after (around the year 2002) I started going out to clubs again and I met the second guy I ever had sex with, and then the third, and then the fourth and so on and so on. I never made any connection to these men (aside from the sexual), and the most enjoyable part of these adventures was a type of emotional disconnect wherein I would focus on the sensations produced by my body while having sex and not think about what anything meant or if there was some deeper meaning to any of it.

One night (around 2003-2004) at a club in Hollywood I met a sad man who told me about a "club" where you could "rent a room and sleep or walk around and there was a DJ that played until 6:00am." He invited me to go with him and mostly because he was really sad I decided to go along. That was my first visit to a bathhouse. I had read about

such places but for some reason couldn't imagine that they were real. A bathhouse is a place where men can pay to have a safe space to interact with other men sexually. Most of them are equipped with some manner of work-out equipment (mostly weights) and steam-rooms, saunas, and even swimming pools.

After that first experience I started frequenting bathhouses semi-regularly. I would occasionally reward myself by calling in sick and going to a bathhouse instead of going to work. I loved bathhouses. I was still very awkward socially, so it was nice to be in a space where there was no pretense. People were there exclusively to have sex, and there was very little mystery related to whether or not someone would have sex with you.

In 2003 I also started to frequent websites where sex with men could be easily found on-line, Primarily Craigslist's Men for Men page. Through Craigslist, at Bathhouses, Bars and other cruising spots throughout the Valley I met and had sex with a lot of men, so many that an accurate count would be impossible for me to calculate. On my visits to bathhouses my goal was always to have sex with as many men as possible (I remember that my personal "best" was more than 10 in one visit). Whenever I went to a bar my primary goal was to find a guy, or a few guys, to have sex with, and on-line I would try to find at least one person to have sex with every other work day (because I only had access to the internet on the three days a week that I worked in an office).

At this point in my life I was having a lot of sex. I was really comfortable with my body and proud of it and felt really good about sharing it with all the men I was hooking up with. I was also having sex with a lot of different types of men. Wherever I went to meet men I would encounter a wide variety of age groups, body types, races, and ethnic

backgrounds, and I interacted sexually with them all. Anzaldua (1987) talks about how as queers we can reach out of our family/ community groups and find solidarity with other queers in other groups and, at least sexually, I can verify her assertion.

I was never one to exclude someone because I thought they were too old, or the “wrong” body shape or race. I thought it was important to be open to all the possibilities that sex could offer. There were definitely a learning process involved; the first time I went to what eventually became my favorite gay bar I ran away scared because I was the youngest and often only brown (which they saw as novel) person there, and I was uncomfortable with some of the aggressive sexual attention I got. Still I often frequented those bars instead of the local “Latino” targeted gay nights at the local club because to my mind clubs were about hanging out with friends and having fun and the bars I went to were about having sex with strangers (which is what I was looking for).

Ultimately these sexual escapades were unfulfilling because I had not learned how to interact with men when I wasn’t having sex with them. There were some men that I was interested in, but I had no idea how to develop relationships and the venues I was frequenting were not appropriate to that kind of relationship building. At some point my two favorite gay bars (and pick up spots) in North Hollywood closed within months of each other because of the gentrification that was taking place as a result of the creation of the NoHo Arts district. I felt a great loss, but I continued to frequent cruising spots and bathhouses. I never questioned why I felt the need to act out sexually the way I did.

One day in 2009 two of my good friends expressed concern about the amount of sex I was having. I had just started therapy and felt empowered by what I was learning about appropriate boundaries (in an attempt to keep my emotional self safe from the pain

that came from wanting to be in relationships with men who only wanted to have sex with me) and my therapist assertion that I had a right to do with my sex what I pleased, and to define it however I wanted. I had subsequently started being more open with my friends about my sexual exploits and they felt the need to reel me back in. We made a list of the men I had told them I had interacted sexually with in the previous three months and came up with a rough estimate of 30 (this was after I had stopped frequenting bathhouses because I was afraid of running into people from work at them). They thought this was an unhealthy amount of partners and expressed concern for me. I told them I would think about it. In my next therapy session I railed against what I called their judgmental, repressed, anti-sex attitudes. My therapist agreed with me that they did not have a right to judge my sex life and told me that no one but me could decide what was too much sex, to close the session he asked me a question; How is all this sex getting you closer to what you say is your ultimate goal (a committed monogamous relationship)?

This question threw a wrench in the gears of my sex life. I reflected on it and decided that I had to dedicate at least some of the time I was dedicating to finding people to have sex with to finding people that I could actually be in a relationship with, but I did not stop having sex. I had one short failed relationship and then continued looking for something more significant while still maintaining a few strictly sexual relationships. One day in 2009 I met a guy strictly for sex that I genuinely liked. He was in an “open relationship” so I put up what I thought were my healthy emotional boundaries, but continued having sex with him. A few months after we met he told me he was single and asked me if I thought our (until then) strictly sexual relationship could ever become something else.

I told him that I would have to think about it. It occurred to me that if we were interested in getting to know each other we might have to stop having sex for a while, and as the thought occurred to me I received a text from him saying essentially the same thing. We started dating and our bodies were effectively off limits to each other for about a month. I really liked him, and we discussed and decided to make our relationship sexual again. We've been in a committed relationship ever since (that was three and a half years from when I write this).

Being in a relationship has changed the way I think about sex and my body because it has allowed another person to be a continuous witness to all the changes and fluctuations that my (and his) body undergoes. All the work that I have done to learn acceptance of my body comes head to head occasionally with all the work that he has done to maintain and modify his body according to an ideal of health that sort of differs from mine, and the conversations that result from this are interesting and educative. Sex is complicated. Interacting sexually with my partner is satisfying, but I have learned that it is sometimes difficult to maneuver sexual realities with someone I know really intimately. Particularly because for most of my life I'd been having sex with people I didn't know at all. A friend once told me that at two and a half years relationships enter an intimacy crisis, and that was certainly true for us. We came really close to breaking up in 2012, but through couple's counseling and a lot of introspection, honest communication, and dedication we have realized that we want to be with each other and made the conscious decision to do that.

## **Why I'm HIV negative (Social Position 2)**

Looking over the part that sex has played in my life, particularly the promiscuous years in the middle of it, and the literature in the previous chapter on HIV the obvious question to me becomes how did I avoid becoming infected with HIV? Rather than ascribing it to dumb luck, I would direct readers to my previous section on History and social location. While I did certainly have a lot of sex I never had sex for any reason other than because I wanted to. I can't say that I never accepted gifts for sex (up to and including money), but I never had sex to get those gifts. I never forced myself to have sex with someone because they had something that I needed to survive and I have never been forced to have sex against my will.

This is a direct result of my privileged social position. While my family is not rich my parents have owned the house I grew up in since before I was born, and I have always understood that no matter what I had a home. I was encouraged from a young age to excel at school and to learn as much as I can about whatever topic interests me. While Sex Education in California is not ideal I was exposed (by virtue of my social position again) to rudimentary HIV prevention education because my family could afford cable and the first Gay Latinos I ever encountered were Pedro Zamora and other HIV+ men on talk shows, so the message of Gay Latinidad included a message of HIV awareness and prevention. It also cannot be overstated that my older brother, by virtue of his access to a university education, became interested in Public Health and took a job at a social service agency that was focused on HIV prevention. My brother never told me explicitly that I should or had to use condoms, but I did look up to him. Because I looked up to him and

this is what he did for a living I read up on it, and I internalized HIV prevention messages in an effort to live up to, what I assumed were, his expectations.

Perhaps because of all of this without knowing the word for it I was practicing a form of HIV prevention I later heard described as “strategic positioning” at a conference I attended in 2009. Basically; I would mostly have oral sex with the men I met, but when I did have anal sex I would usually use a condom as a top (mostly to keep my partners from contracting HPV which I acquired early on in my sexual exploits) and refused to bottom unless the guy I was with used a condom. In this way I avoided (for the most part) the riskiest sex behavior that I knew in terms of HIV infection (unprotected receptive anal intercourse). This is not to say that I never had unprotected anal intercourse, but for all of the partners I have had (including some that are/were HIV+) I can count on one hand the number of men I’ve had unprotected anal sex with (as a top or bottom), including my current partner (whom I do not use condoms with).

If I had to pinpoint one thing that has kept me safe more than anything else it is the supportive communities that I have been a part of. My family has never abandoned me, and my friends have contributed to my feeling that I am never alone and responsible to them for keeping myself safe. Based on my experience then HIV prevention would be composed of three vital components that underlie HIV infection but are not typically addressed in HIV literature; First, an end to sexual exploitation (which can only truly be achieved by addressing poverty); Second, the creation and maintenance of stable, healthy and supportive communities and safe spaces for all people (which would have to address issues related to racism and immigration status to name a few); and finally, access to comprehensive and affordable education (not just sex education) for all. While these

recommendations might seem broad they are merely an attempt to widen the scope of HIV prevention and make it more comprehensive in addressing the needs of people that exist at intersections of social positions that have to be addressed beyond the rhetoric of personal choice.

### **My Cures for *Susto***

Having detoured to talk about the body, sex, and HIV I return now to *susto* and hope to share what I have found to be effective tools for dealing with the consequences of it. First and foremost the best cure I have found for *susto* is the study and understanding of history, both personal and community (which is of course ultimately also personal). Without an understanding of my parent's history (in effect my pre-history) it would have been impossible to move beyond resenting and blaming them for my stalled development or low self-esteem. Without an understanding of Mesoamerican history I would walk away with the erroneous impression that queerness had no place here. If I didn't understand the history of Chicano Studies I would never have been able to realize why for so long it felt like I didn't belong here.

In terms of the adult relationships I have learned to build with my parents. Their past before I was born is vital. I have learned that any gripes I have against my father and his parenting have to be viewed in light of his upbringing. Knowing that my father's mother died before he could know her in any significant way has helped me put his life and our relationship in perspective. His history (which is part of mine), and my understanding of it, has played an important part in healing a relationship that as I will describe was problematic.

My particular path to find cures began at school. While school itself was a potential site of disenfranchisement extracurricular activities like future scholars and marching band were places where I was pushed to excel and express myself. They also helped me by allowing me to be part of communities that were supportive and consistent. When I felt like I couldn't or didn't want to go home, there was always a safe place for me to be either in the band room, or the classrooms of my teachers. I learned to develop relationships with adults that may have been shallow, but were nonetheless vital to my eventual understanding of myself. The cutting of after-school music and art programs is a great loss, and the exclusion of students from these programs at schools where they are still available denies students the opportunities that I was afforded to grow and recover in a safe space away from home and outside the sometimes rigid structure of the classroom.

The university is the most important place for me as far as learning about tools that I have been able to use effectively to help myself heal. As part of the Religious Studies undergraduate program I started reading Hindu, Buddhist, and Taoist philosophy. The idea of a whole person and the "ultimate truth," that I was exposed to by virtue of my Religious Studies degree, became very important to me. I stopped eating meat because Buddhism teachings suggested it and I couldn't think of a good reason to continue doing it. Personal choice was no longer limited to what I felt like doing or what had always been done and I started thinking about everything in a broader context.

Despite their often-negative connotation and presentation in popular culture some "illicit" substances were also a part of my recovery. I was part of a community of stoners (marijuana smokers) that was supportive and introduced me to some great people and ideas that allowed me to be myself and explore things that I never would (or could) have

on my own. When I was about 20 one of my friends told this group about something amazing she had tried that she wanted to share with us called Ecstasy. The first time I tried Ecstasy I took half of a “pink triangle.” We called taking Ecstasy “rolling,” because like waves, the drug’s effect would roll in and out pushing you higher and higher. For the first time I felt I was really alive. Everything was clear. Everything was good.

I would argue that my studies into Taoism and Buddhism and my initial experience with ecstasy was the first step I took on a journey of “soul recovery” caused by my father’s attempts to beat the good (queer) out of me and all the microaggressions, and shame I had learned to internalize. Everything I learned in the Eastern philosophy was made real by ecstasy. I was wide awake and fully in every moment. The life feeling that my initial taste of ecstasy had brought with it extended out to my life while sober. I started meditating a lot more and putting a lot of energy into intense spiritual practice. I tried to put into practice the things that I was reading about in an attempt to get closer to what the books called ultimate truth, Nirvana, the Tao, Being, or God.

This included work with my body, particularly Yoga (which I first became interested in in 2003), and I started to gain an understanding of my body wherein I realized that it was a vital part of me capable of providing me with a lot of spiritual joy, but I hadn’t really made a concrete connection between my body and spirit yet. Around this time my younger brother Carlos and I went to work with the guy who had taken over my dad’s gardening route to help him with his work and go swimming at a house where the owner had passed away. We stripped down to our underwear and went swimming. At one point Carlos got out of the pool, walked over to a sliding glass door and called me

over. He pointed at our reflections and said “Look at us. We have normal bodies.” This was probably the first time I was able to see my body without shame and as “normal.”

It wasn't until that moment that it occurred to me that my brother, straight and a year younger than me had the same body issues that I did. For some reason I had related my body issues to my queerness. I assumed that if I had been straight I would not have felt the need to keep myself fat to avoid questions of sexuality, but that day I realized that the body issues I had were as closely related to my upbringing and being called fat (and thereby somehow deficient) by family and people around me as it was to my being queer.

As intense as my experience with mushrooms was I believe it was a breakdown and breakthrough of my psyche. There's a Buddhist poem attributed to Masahide that says:

“Barns burnt down,

Now,

I can see the moon.”

It has been interpreted as representing the elimination of existing structures (and pretenses) and realization of ultimate truth represented by the moon. This episode represented an important realization of self, but at the time I was completely unprepared for it. After the mushroom incident I would get home from school or work, lay a blanket out, lie down on it and then do nothing until it was time to go to bed. One day my older brother asked me what was wrong. I told him that I felt empty and that nothing made me happy. I told him that I didn't understand what I was doing anymore.

He said, “If you feel unhappy and like there’s nothing for you here, why don’t you leave?” The idea had not occurred to me but once he said it, I knew it was what I had to do. I went home and put all that was left of my belongings in a backpack. I was on summer break from school and the next morning I quit my job and decided to head out to San Francisco, because it seemed as good a place as any, and it was sufficiently far to satisfy my need for distance.

The next morning I woke up as the bus arrived in San Francisco. I had with me a sleeping bag and a backpack with some clothes in it. I didn’t know what I was doing there, but I had a phone card with fifty dollars on it that my brother had bought me, some money in the bank and my last check on the way so I thought I would be OK. I spent a few days in San Francisco. It was cold, wet, and I was definitely lonely; but for the first time in a long time I felt okay. After being woken up by the cops for sleeping in Golden Gate Park one morning and being told that the ticket they gave me was a preliminary warning that my stay in the city would start to become increasingly uncomfortable, I decided that it was time to move on. I called a friend that I knew lived nearby and she invited me to her house in Antioch. I was in Antioch for a few days before my friend pulled me aside and told me that she had to talk to me. She said “We love you, and we love that you are here but I have to tell you, you have to try to get back to living your life because this isn’t you.” I told her that I understood and that I had been thinking about what I wanted to do too. She asked me if there was anyone I could think of that would help me think about what I wanted to do next. I closed my eyes and thought about it.

The only person I could think of was my sister-in-law’s brother. He had moved into our house when we were both about fifteen and we had developed a friendship. I had

always felt that there was something between us, but he had moved to Wisconsin and we had only talked a few times since he moved away. I called him. I told him about what happened and that I didn't know what to do. I told him that I was lost and that I thought maybe I was in love with him.

He told me that he had moved to Wisconsin, in part, to get away from the feelings he had for me. He told me that he thought maybe he loved me too. He told me to go to Wisconsin. The next day I was on a bus with a Tupperware container full of refried black beans and Salvadorian-style homemade tortillas my friend's mom made to sustain me. Two days later I was in Racine, Wisconsin.

In Racine I felt free. While he was at work I would walk to the library and hang out at the Great Lake nearby. I rested and collected myself. I felt really good. It felt good just to be around him. The conversation that we'd had about our feelings wasn't broached. I figured that I had to give it time and I really needed to center myself to figure out what was going on with me. One night we made plans to hang out, but he never came home. I called my sister and told her about what was happening. She told me that I was potentially wasting my time and that I had to ask him what was going on with us and be ready for his response, whatever that would be.

The next day I was hanging out with him at the bar and we were both pretty drunk. We walked home together and when we got to his house the two of us lay down on the floor in his living room. We were facing each other, looking into each other's eyes, no longer talking. I brought my self closer to him and I can remember the feeling of his chin against my chin, the feel of his stubble against my lips. I kissed him. If I ever felt

dead, unwanted, and pointless; this my first sexual experience brought me back to life, made me feel loved and worthy, and cemented in my mind my place in the universe. As great as that experience was it didn't last very long.

The day after we had sex went to the lake. It was dark. I waited for him to say something. The moon was bright and we saw a bird fly overhead. He pointed to it and said, "See, you're like that bird. You can do whatever you want. You're free." I tried to tell him that he was free too but he said, "No. I can't do whatever I want. I can't be gay." I disagreed with him, but I couldn't argue. He felt trapped in his own life and there was nothing I could do to help him get out of it. He made me an offer. We could be together, but he would still marry a girl and have children. I couldn't do that, so that was the end of the conversation for him.

A few days later I was in L.A. Nothing had really changed, but I felt completely different. Rather than a return it was as if a new person had come to L.A. for the first time. I was heartbroken, but I was glad to feel something. It was my first sexual experience and break-up, it was 2001, and I had just turned 23.

This part of my life is important because it brought me back to life. If I had not made this trip I can't imagine that I would have been able to keep myself alive. In the moment of our sexual union I felt accepted and full of joy. I felt loved in a way I didn't know was possible for me. I learned to love my body and allow others to love it too. Sex became an important part of my life, and I started to realize how powerful a force it could be. I was scheduled to start the last year of my Religious Studies degree so I went back to school. I had no idea what I was doing or why I was doing it, but I was reinvigorated. I

was in good spirits and I tried reaching out to him, but to no avail. At that time other people were not an option. But in 2002 I stopped trying to contact him.

Also in 2002 I heard about a dance club in Hollywood that a schoolmate said was a lot of fun, and I decided to check it out. I didn't have any gay friends or a car, so I took the bus out to Hollywood and made my way to Circus Disco. Admission was 5 dollars before 10, and came with a free drink ticket. I went upstairs, cashed my drink ticket and started dancing. There were three rooms there, and each featured a different kind of music and crowd. There were a lot of other guys there "like me" in that they were brown and queer, but unlike me in that they were there with their circle of friends, and did not seem to be dancing against impending depression.

Going to Circus Disco on Tuesday night and then spending the night on the streets of Hollywood while waiting for the first bus on Wednesday became part of my therapeutic routine. It was at Circus around 2003 that I first learned about the Walls Las Memorias Project, an HIV service organization that focuses primarily on Latinos in Los Angeles. I volunteered with them a few times conducting surveys at Circus in exchange for my admission, but because of my social awkwardness, and the fact that I still felt really fragile psychologically, I did not build any lasting relationships with the organization or other volunteers. Despite that I recognized the work they did as vital and thought that if I could get myself together I would want to be involved in the type of work they did.

I graduated in 2002 with a degree in Religious Studies, and I was still meditating, studying, praying and learning everything I could about Taoism and mystic traditions

(because they resonated with me). I decided that I would go and stay with my parents in Mexico (another thing made possible by the privileges I've acknowledged above) and I took the bus from Los Angeles to Jalpa, Zacatecas. While in Mexico I helped my father plant crops and cleaned his corrals and spent a lot of time walking in the *serros* (hillsides) and reciting the pilgrims prayer (a favorite of mine at the time) "Lord Jesus Christ (breath in), have mercy on me (breath out)" while keeping count on my Buddhist meditation beads.

I was 24 years old and I decided that it would be a good time to talk to my mom about my sexuality, so over the course of that time I engaged her in a number of conversations about it. I told her I was "gay" and she didn't say anything except that she was too busy to talk about it. Later she told me that she didn't understand what that meant. I explained that it meant I was only attracted to women as friends, and that if I ever established a committed long term relationship with anyone it would be a man. We left it there and started talking about something else.

My conversation with my mom about my sexuality continued two years after my initial coming out when she told me that she didn't think that I was really gay. When I asked her why she told me that I didn't "act" gay; that gay men were effeminate and wanted to be women, and I was not those things so I couldn't be gay. I explained to her that there were a lot of different types of gay men, and that while some certainly seemed more effeminate there were also gay men that were incredibly masculine, and that behavior was a bad indicator of sexuality. I assured her that despite my affect I was still only interested in relationships with men, and that was what made me Gay. She finally accepted this explanation.

I have never actually talked to my dad about me being queer (come out), but I don't think this is strange. I have also never talked to my dad about school, or what I do for a living, or much of anything related to my life. We don't have an intimate personal relationship, but he doesn't really seem to have that with any of his children. I do love and appreciate my dad, and I think he feels the same way about me, but we never really volunteer information about ourselves to each other. When I was single he told me that I needed to find someone and start a family because otherwise I would live and die "like a dog" (meaning alone). When I introduced him to my current boyfriend (in 2009) I made sure he knew he was my boyfriend. He has never asked me explicitly about my sexuality, but he does emphasize not being alone.

He knows that my partner and I live together in an apartment with one room and one bed, though sometimes he acts like he doesn't know this to get a rise out of me or my mom. We see my parents once or twice a week and do not hesitate to hold hands or kiss each other hello in front of my dad, and he has never commented on it. Sometimes he says things to mess with me about how I should have kids by now, but he also makes fun of me because I drive an old car so I can't take it too seriously. I imagine that if I asked him what he thought about queer sexuality he would have a negative opinion about it because he has a negative opinion of most things. To be perfectly honest his opinion about this (like his opinion about what kind of car I drive) is not really relevant to me. I don't feel that my dad has to accept my sexuality the way I felt my mom had to. And I still think we have a relatively good relationship.

Before my 27<sup>th</sup> birthday in 2005 I travelled back to my parent's home in Mexico; this time to help my brother move back there after he decided that it would be in the best

interest of his family. I stayed in Mexico for a month, but something had changed in me. I could not imagine living in Mexico anymore. When I returned to the United States, no longer believing that my stay would be temporary, I decided to get serious about what I spent my time doing. I reflected on the Buddhist teaching of Right Occupation and started looking for a job that I felt would contribute the greatest good. My brother told me about a health educator position for young Latino Men who have sex with men at the agency where he worked and I applied. I was not hired for that position because my interviewer felt I lacked experience in the field, but I was hired on as a clerk in 2006 and that soon turned into a job as a program evaluator.

That job changed my life. I felt like the work that I was doing was valuable to the community of queer/ gay men of color and it gave me purpose. I was also reintroduced to someone I had met years before who became one of my best friends. He introduced me to a different aspect of what it meant to be young, brown and gay because for the first time I felt like I had a Gay friend that I could really relate to and go out with. I learned to socialize with other queer men without having to have sex with them, although I was still having a considerable amount of sex.

At this job I also connected and reconnected with some people that I had met when I had spent those nights on the streets and in the bathhouses of Hollywood and North Hollywood. I found myself reflecting often on the lives of the people we served, and on my own life, and I started asking myself if there was anything I could do to make all of our lives a little better. My brother Carlos had started participating in, and inviting me to, Danza circles and Nahuatl classes and I began attending a Gay Latino Men's group at Bienestar and through them the Gay Latino Men's Conference. In the Men's

group and at the conference I reflected on queerness and Mesoamerica, and what a positive affirmation rooted in Mesoamerican thought could mean to us as Queer Chicanos.

I reconnected with my friend from Wisconsin in 2007, and after a quiet night together, which included taking ecstasy and allowing it to guide our conversation we were able to pack up our past, apologize and recognize each other as vital to the others life and process of self-acceptance. I was able finally to move on. I realized that I had a lot of personal healing to do. In my sexual adventures I had lost sight of myself and in evaluating a mental health services grant I met a therapist who suggested I start individual therapy to help me better understand client's process, and also to work on my own issues. I started therapy in 2008 and it was great for me because it provided me with a non-judgmental and open space to talk about my life and issues I needed to work on. The healing that took place in therapy and the support of my friends and family made possible my endeavor into higher learning.

Perhaps the most important and serendipitous connection, and one that I know still requires a lot of reflection and intense study, that I have made over the course of the graduate program is to Xochipilli. Early in my research I read a dissertation that made the claim that Xochipilli was associated with male homosexuality and prostitution (Taylor, 1978). I had hoped to make a connection between this concept and modern queer Chicanidad. There is a lot of work to be done as far as rediscovering and reclaiming the worship of Xochipilli. In order to do the research that is required I think it would be necessary to travel to Mexico (particularly Xochimilco). There is very little information that relates to him available from here. From conversations with professors and other

students I have learned that while the connection with male homosexuality may not be concrete there is no doubt that Xochipilli is associated with healing, and I continued the healing work that has been very beneficial to me and in all my relationships.

In conversation with Estela Roman in 2011, the Curandera and teacher that I had the honor of participating in a weekend workshop with, she pointed out to me that the idea that mind and body and men and women were not diametrically opposed in Mesoamerican thought. That as far as they were concerned the mind and body, and a lot of the other splits that European thought created simply did not exist here. I was reminded of a teaching on Yin and Yang that also challenged the notion that the concept was rooted in diametrical opposition. According to this lesson Yin and Yang represent the light and dark side of a mountain, as such they define each other but are not in opposition. I've begun to consider this in the context of Mesoamerican thought and Ometeotl (dual energy) which seems to be in symbolic representation a parallel thought to Yin and Yang. This has become an important realization as I consider my body and my relationship to it. To this point I had tended to think about my mind and body separately, and I realized that I would probably be a lot healthier if I could start to see my mind and body as one.

Right before I started graduate school in 2009 I met my current partner and thanks to the work I had done on healing myself I was able to establish a relationship with him. Being in a relationship requires a lot of attention, care and acceptance. I think that part of my struggle as a Queer Chicano has been to realize that I am worthwhile and deserve to be loved in a way that works for me. By the same token relationships are not static ideals; they are more like a constant process of getting to know and being aware of your partner,

and yourself. Some of the best advice I ever got on maintaining long-term relationship from a queer elder I had the virtue of meeting (that is probably applicable to all relationships) was this; Ask yourself if you accept your partner as they are, realize that you cannot “change” or “fix” them (just like they can’t “change” or “fix” you). Then, with full realization of who you both are; ask yourself if you still want to be in a relationship. If the answer is yes then you should stick around as long as there are no obvious red flags (abuse of any kind, etc).

Something I had to learn on my own; if you and your partner are in trouble it’s not a bad idea to get help (whatever that means to you), and don’t bad-mouth each other in front of or to anyone else. Seek help, and then decide honestly if you want to be together. My partner and I had a crisis recently, but we weren’t prepared to end our relationship, and seeking help (in the form of couple’s counseling at our local low-cost community center) was the best decision we ever made. Our counselor has helped us realize that above all our problem is one of understanding and communication. We are two complicated and complex human beings with our own struggles and in trying to make one of two there are bound to be growing pains, but in the end, if it is worthwhile, then the work you put in is rewarding.

My relationship has also changed how the straight community around me conceptualizes my queerness. My mom is happy that I am no longer alone and she no longer feels that she has to worry about me as much because I have someone to “take care of me.” It is almost as if being in a relationship has legitimized my being Gay because it is easier for straight people to think that being gay is like being straight except you’re with someone of your own sex. This has become a part of the struggle I

experience every day because I feel it is important to keep Queer queer (essentialist arguments aside), because it serves to create solidarity with other disenfranchised groups. Queer to me is not just about whether I have sex or love men. It is a radical social position that demands and works for change in patriarchal, sexist, racist, classist, heterosexist and other oppressive/ destructive systems. Queer to me is not about demanding a place at the table, to paraphrase other (better) writers, it is about questioning the need for a table and ultimately demanding that the table be removed so we can talk about the best way to serve all people not just those with chairs provided by privilege (to push the metaphor further).

The last aspect of healing that I want to address is related to race and identity. It has to be remembered that race is a social reality, not a biological one. To illustrate this point the story of my last name Salazar is important. One of my aunts invested in an “as-seen-on-T.V.” plaque that had “Salazar” engraved on it and underneath it is an explanation that the name originated in Iraq (or somewhere in the Middle East) and then made its way to Spain when the Moors occupied it. The occupation of Spain lasted 400 years and there is a lot of cultural residue of this occupation particularly in the language of Spain. This is important in consideration of Anzaldua’s (1987) *mestizaje* because it is another layer that we have to add to our understanding of our selves.

When I look at myself I never really see what I have been told are “indigenous features,” but I certainly don’t look “European” either. I remember looking at a photo-picture book called “People of the World” in the school library and wondering why, if the Mestizo myth tells me I am a mix of Indigenous Mexican and Spanish blood, my family seemed to look more like the people in the Middle East section of the book than the

people in the European or Native American sections. Anzaldua (1987) talks about this “mixture” in the context of the Vasconcelo’s (1979) “Cosmic Race” concept; As I now know the “Cosmic Race” idea is racist in that it was proposed as a way to “bring up” the indigenous populations of Mexico by “giving them” European blood and not a way of communicating parity between all the genetic contributors to Mexican reality. However; Anzaldua’s mestizaje does not, in my opinion, continue this racist tradition. Instead it makes an anti-essentialist claim that states simply; I refuse to put one aspect of my genetic makeup (explicitly that which makes up my body and spirit) above any other aspect of genetic makeup (myself).

As far as Anzaldua’s (1987) ideas I think that in thinking about healing, “nepantlah” is important. In *Borderlands* she describes nepantlah (Nahutal for middle) as an in-between place where a broadened perspective creates possibility. I have to remind myself that she is not presenting an essentialist argument, and that the middle is not a literal space. Nepantlah for me was the space I carried with me as a Mexican boy in an American school. Nepantlah is the place where I could see that Harvard was what I should say even though it was not a reality I could relate to. It was also, for example, the place where I felt it was important to disavow my being Queer/ Gay despite the fact that I knew I fit the definition. It was the place where I knew who all my friends said they found attractive so I could say I found them attractive too.

It is now 2013 and as I get older, and feel healthier, “nepantlah” takes on new aspects. It becomes, as Anzaldua describes, the place of unlimited potential. A scary, dangerous, and vital home from which I as a Queer Chicano can exist and make use of all

the aspects of myself to mediate polarities, communicate knowledge and attempt to effect change.

## **Conclusion**

Based on my interactions with professors and other students I have learned that despite my initial misgivings Chicano Studies was where I belonged, the decision to transfer from Interdisciplinary to Chicano Studies was long considered, but ultimately easy. I started focusing on queerness and Mesoamerica in earnest, and as chapter 2 illustrates this search was somewhat frustrating. The more I searched for queerness in Mesoamerica the more obvious it became that not only was there not a lot of work to examine, but it was difficult for new relevant work to be produced without concentrated studies in Mexico (and other places where Indigenous Mexican artifacts reside). I did find solace in the work I was able to find about North American indigenous understandings of queerness, and I gained a deeper understanding of the notion that the false borders imposed on “the Americas” were only relevant as far as Western cartography. There was no doubt a sharing and trading of goods and culture that reached far across this land. This gives me hope that with some study into understandings of queerness in Mesoamerican culture, conducted in Mexico with original source material, a workable model can be retrieved or created.

Resolving then that this work would have to wait, I became curious about what Chicano Studies could offer me as a queer man as far as models of queerness, and why for so long I felt disenfranchised by Chicano Studies. Chapter 3 is my attempt to explain my feelings of disenfranchisement and encouraged a broader inclusion of queer models/

issues/ perspectives in general Chicano Studies texts as a way to save other queer Chicanos from the disenfranchisement that I felt. Along with the question of what Chicano Studies has to say about queerness came a question of what the model of queer/ gay Latinos/ Chicanos that exists actually says about us. Chapter 4 is an attempt to paint a picture of what the reality of Gay Latinos is according to academic literature. As I reviewed this literature, so focused on HIV/ AIDS I found myself asking why or how it was that I had avoided becoming infected with HIV, and why there was no accounting in the literature for those of us who were queer/gay AND Chicano/Latinos that did not presuppose HIV infection.

This brings us to the here and now, and as I reflect on my auto-historia I realize that there's still a lot to do. I hope that I have illustrated how different aspects of my being intersect at different intervals to create a whole person whose experiences and understandings are unique. I hope also that the connection between my understanding of myself and my story has been helped along by an understanding of Anzaldua's work, and how this story is just one way to be a queer Chicano. Now that we have arrived at the present, and having reflected on the past, it is possible to consider the future. I have a lot of work to do. The struggle to integrate and realize the lessons I have learned and the experiences I have had is ongoing.

The struggle is manifold. On the Mesoamerican/ Chicano Studies front; I am looking to find ways to effectively communicate what I have found and challenge notions that exclude and/or delete queers from our History. I am with Anzaldua in my struggle as a potential "nepantlero" (one who resides in the middle) in trying to avoid rhetoric that is essentialist, based in hate, or interested primarily in creating and attacking enemies rather

than finding solutions to the critical problems faced by our people and communities. These include issues related primarily to access to resources and social justice.

What struck me the most as I wrote, and I realized made the majority of my story possible, are the privileges that I have had access to as a man and natural born citizen of the United States. This helps me to reinforce the knowledge that parity between the sexes and acquisition of rights for immigrants is also a vital part of my, and my community's, continuing struggle. Acceptance and understanding of Queerness is also part of the work that I am involved in, because that deficiency was a big part of my struggle to accept and realize myself as a child, in my adolescence and as an adult. There isn't much else to say. Rather than conclude in the present as the end; I think that that my autohistoria ends my thesis somewhere in the middle of everything (nepantlah) with a lot of work yet to do and a lot of lessons still to be learned and applied.

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