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# Mental Health, School Climate, and the Resilience of LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x Youth

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**MENTAL HEALTH, SCHOOL CLIMATE, AND THE  
RESILIENCE OF LGBTQIA+ MEXICAN/X YOUTH**

by

**DAMON R. CARBAJAL**

**B.A. SECONDARY EDUCATION, UNIVERSITY OF NEW  
MEXICO, 2019**

THESIS

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of

**Master of Arts  
Chicana and Chicano Studies**

The University of New Mexico  
Albuquerque, New Mexico

**May, 2021**

## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this Master of Arts thesis first to my family who have been by my side and have allowed me to have the opportunity to pursue a graduate degree. The first graduate degree for the Carbajal familia but will not be the last. Second, I dedicate this work to the queer, BIPOC, and queer BIPOC folxs whose shoulders that I stand on that allow me to live openly today as a gay, queer Chicax man, as well as having paved the way that allows me to do this work. Lastly, I dedicate this work to all queer Chicax youth, their resilience, and the brighter tomorrow that they pave by being their true and authentic selves.

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**MENTAL HEALTH, SCHOOL CLIMATE, AND THE RESILIENCE OF  
LGBTQIA+ MEXICAN/X YOUTH**

By

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**ABSTRACT**

Mental health and school climate are two critical components of youth experience and are cardinal components of creating and ensuring equitable education and spaces for youth. LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x youth are highly affected by these two entities as part of their lived realities, being multiply marginalized persons in the U.S. educational system. Thus, to best understand how these entities play into the LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x youth experience, this study utilizes a social sciences *testimonio* comprised of one-on-one semi-structured interviews, demographic surveys, and a focus group. Through this three-prong approach, I analyze the lived realities of LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x youth, the traumas of discrimination, and the personal and collective resiliencies in and out of schooling spaces that lead to the emergence of *Queer Intersectional Capital* (QIC). I define QIC as *assets an individual acquires through their lived experiences that aid in their navigation of society*. QIC produces liberating spaces that allow LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x youth to embrace their whole selves and thrive in hostile spaces that often lead to negative consequences, such as marginalization and suicide. Youth create

liberating spaces through the utilization of queered capital and strengthen the resilience of LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x youth, which can lead to a more joyful and fulfilling life.



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## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND THE RESEARCH PROBLEM**

### **Living at an Intersection**

I am a product of the New Mexico educational system and as a member who lives at the intersection of being gay and Chicax, I can attest to the lack of equity that is faced by this community. I am in higher education today because I had to work harder than the rest of both my White and non-LGBTQIA+ peers and that should not be the case, everyone should have equitable opportunities, thus, change is essential. This research project aims at starting a much-needed conversation about the lack of equity that marginalized students face within the New Mexico education system specifically from a mental health and school climate perspective. Two entities that are critical to positive development of youth but are being neglected overall in almost every schooling space.

My K-12 experience overall was challenging and rewarding, but specifically from a mental health and school climate point of view, was more challenging than rewarding. I had a fairly large group of racially and sexually diverse friends. I was involved in many activities, but I was verbally, physically, and cyberbullied because of my gay Mexican/x identity by my White and/or non-LGBTQIA+ peers. I knew I was gay since middle school, around age 11, but I struggled with coming out and into my sexuality throughout high school because of the lack of acceptance for the LGBTQIA+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersexual, asexual) community by the administration, my peers, my culture, and the school society as a whole. It was hard because people knew I was gay, but I had not officially made it known, thus I was bullied for acting

differently. I kept the bullying to myself as it occurred behind closed doors when no one around, notes were left or handed for me, comments were made that no one heard, and physical violence in the hall that no one saw. I appeared to be okay from an outsider's perspective but I was concealing immense pain. The high school I attended was very White with little sense of cultural awareness, thus I had little sense of my Mexican/x identity. It was not until I got to college where I became proud of who I am, both sexually and racially, and now nothing can change that. I struggled in K-12, but I believe that this made me the strong and resilient person I am today. This is another reason that my teaching, research, and activist philosophy deals with an equitable education because I do not want any student to have to deal with the bullying, hostility, and a lack of support systems that I endured when I attended K-12.

Looking back at my high school experience specifically, I realized that high school was enjoyable to me because of my teachers and friends who accepted me for my true self and did not attempt to change me to fit the White and heterosexual standard of society. These created spaces are akin to where I utilized *third space capital* or *queered resolana* (Montiel, 2009). *Third space capital* is created through finding safety in spaces that are often negative, one may argue that it is a form of *navigational capital* as defined by Yosso (2005). But *third space capital* pushes beyond *navigational capital* because there is the political act of creating something, a new space or a queered space of *resolana*. As an educator, scholar, activist, I want to ensure that all LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x students and youth can look back on their K-12 experience and have memories

of joy. I do not want them to have to shift through extreme good and the bad memories. When reflecting on my K-12 experiences, I often recall the trauma along. It is painful to relieve trauma especially if a young person never has access to a support system. I want youth to only have memories of events where they were celebrated for who they were, i.e. dances, performances, clubs, etc., and not have to focus on bullying and other traumas that are symptomatic of living as a marginalized youth in a schooling space. These fond memories are the types of memories I want all LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x students to have, but with the current system it can be hard to have these opportunities. I was fortunate to have some of these experiences above mixed in with the traumas and that was largely due to my conscious choice to neglect my Mexican, queer, and gay social locations. Thus, systems need to change so that students who are LGBTQIA+, BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color), and any other marginalized social location can be open to who they are and positively experience K-12. Education is not perfect, but all it takes are educators, researchers, youth, parents, and community members who are willing to create a more equitable learning and social environment, and this research project aims at creating a more accepting educational system for all to flourish (Carbajal, 2018).

### **Introduction**

This research project aims at creating a more equitable K-12 space through understanding mental health, school climate, and LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x resiliency in schoolings environments. The best way to do this is through the stories of the students and youth who are living and have lived in the



environment. This collection of *testimonios* looks at a marginalized population, those who identify as members of the LGBTQIA+ and Mexican/x communities. It is at this intersection of sexuality and race that students are often lost in the margins of the schooling system, which can result in negative school climate perceptions, negative mental health, and overall loss of oneself. As an educator, scholar, activist, and member of these communities, we need to create a more equitable environment because these students deserve a much better education. The next scholar, leader, or doctor may be at this intersection and we may never know if we do not help in allowing them to receive an equitable education. A key to creating this equity is through ensuring that the school climate is perceived as safe, their mental health is considered, and the schooling spaces honor their student's selves and social locations. This research project is fundamental to expanding the literature about these populations as well as starting a conversation about mental health and school climate as it relates to LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x students. Marginalized populations are the future and to create a stronger future we as scholars need to expand the knowledge of students at these intersections. This project aims at looking at the intersection of sexuality and race as it relates to mental health and school climate perceptions but there are many more intersections that need to be explored before our education system is truly equitable and not simply equal. My work begins conversations about drawing attention to LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x youth so that other projects and interventions by radical educators, scholar, and activists can expand the work to other marginalized populations.

## **Background of the Problem**

### **Hxstorical Perspective**

Hxstorically the lives of both LGBTQIA+ and Mexican/x populations have been filled with systemic oppression. (Aizenman, 2018; Bonnie, n.d.; Chappell, 2015; PBS, 2013). According to Charlton (1998):

oppression occurs when individuals are systematically subjected to political, economic, cultural, or social degradation because they belong to a social group...results from structures of domination and subordination and, correspondingly, ideologies of superiority and inferiority (p.154).

This oppression can be seen in education today by how the school district boundaries are drawn (Saiger, 2010), the school to prison pipeline (Seroczynski & Jobst, 2016), funding disparities (Adamson & Darling-Hammond, 2012), academic achievement (Aragon et al., 2014), and bullying (Abreu et al., 2016). These factors are based on hxstorical decisions that have reinforced systemic faults in the education system. The systemic faults are made apparent across marginalized populations of students as their marginalized status stems from these systemic faults. These marginalized populations include LGBTQIA+, Mexican/x, and those at the intersection of sexual orientation and race as well as many other marginalized populations of students (Judy, 2018).

### **Mexican/x Hxstory**

The Mexicano, Mexican-American, and Mexican/x population have been denied civil and human rights for decades within the United States. For the purposes of this research project, the terms Mexican/x will be used to describe

this population. The issues that Mexican/x students faced with education date back to the creation of the United States educational system, issues that many marginalized groups face at different points in history. *Mendez v. Westminster*, 1947, could be considered a landmark first time when legal action was taken against educational inequities experienced by Mexican/x students in U.S. *Hernandez v. The State of Texas*, 1954, was one of the first important cases in which the U.S. government recognized the injustices faced by Mexican/x peoples and, thus, it allowed for the Mexican/x population to start legally fighting for their rights. This case influenced the passage of Civil Rights Act of 1964, which included provisions to create more equality for all races. In California, Chicana and other Students of Color challenged educational inequalities in 1969 when students in several California high schools planned and executed walkouts or blowouts, spearheaded by teacher Sal Castro. Before this action and still today, Mexican/x students are viewed as second-rate students and not given the opportunities to succeed, opportunities made available to White students (Nicholas, 2017).

The East Los Angeles blow outs was one of the first major events highlighted by major public outlets that centered the educational activism of Mexican/x student's. While this was occurring, the Chicana/o/x Rights Movement was reaching its peak with leaders such as Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzales, Cesar Chavez, Dolores Huerta and many more. The Chicana/o/x Rights Movement made some strides in opening up educational opportunities for Mexican/x youth and adults, but it did not result in long lasting changes or lead to equitable

education. Those who benefitted the most were individuals who made advancements in the areas of electoral politics, education, and business. The majority of the working Mexican/x youth were in schools that continued to deny them the opportunities available to middle-class and White students.

Early efforts to widen educational opportunities to Mexican/x youth were curtailed in the 80s and 90s. In particular, immigrant youth and families became targeted by discriminatory legislation intent on denying them human and civil rights. In 2003, the Mexican/x population was named the largest population within the United States (PBS, 2013). The growth of this population produced anti-Mexican sentiment among elected leaders and legislators. In late 2017, the Trump Administration announced its plans to rescind DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals), a deportation relief program. Though the courts recently ordered Trump to fully restore DACA, the anti-immigrant rhetoric coupled with anti-immigrant policies have put many Mexican/x people at risk and may continue to do so. This is coupled with the Trump Administrations' zero-tolerance policy on immigration in early 2018 that led to the separation of immigrant families that were in custody by ICE (U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement). Many viewed this as inhumane as photos surfaced of the detention centers and their strain on the families, especially for the children. This outcry led to an executive order to reunite families (Executive Order, 13841, 2018). Families were then jailed together before deportation and the process of reuniting families proved problematic. This is the political climate that Mexican/x students are living in; a climate of fear and hostility (Aizenman, 2018). As the Trump era ended and we

begin the Biden Administration, there is a sense of renewed optimism, but there is still a lot of uncertainty as the terms have just begun and whether or not anti-Mexican, anti-immigrant sentiments will continue throughout the administration.

### **LGBTQIA+ Hxstory**

The LGBTQIA+ community has been *othered* by U.S. Society for many years and this is currently still the case in many regards, especially in education (Kosciw et al., 2020). The LGBTQIA+ community has been the target of mistreatment in the United States since its public emergence in the eighteenth century. There have been many horrendous events for the LGBTQIA+ community that include homosexuality being outlawed as well as other forms of violence and oppression. Many mark the watershed moment of the LGBTQIA+ rights movements with the Stonewall Riots that occurred in 1969 when LGBTQIA+ people and their allies fought back against the constant raids by the police, an event and watershed moment initiated by trans women of color. This was not the first pushback of queer resistance, i.e. the Compton's Cafeteria Riot (year?) but has been credited as the start to the modern queer rights movement. This came after the Civil Rights Act of 1964 that guaranteed freedom of race but did not discuss those who identify as LGBTQIA+. This was a push toward equity but more progress was needed in U.S. society. The LGBTQIA+ population is still at the mercy of society's homophobia, transphobia, and queerphobia as well as laws that prohibit free expression and practice of sexuality (Bonnie, n.d.). On June 26, 2015, in the case *Obergefell v. Hodges*, the United States Supreme Court ruled that same-sex marriage is legal in all 50 states. This, in turn, made

same-sex marriage legal in all fifty states for the first time since the founding of the United States. This was a landmark moment for the LGBTQIA+ community, but following this decision, there have been many bills passed by numerous states that inhibit equality for the LGBTQIA+ community (Chappell, 2015).

Lack of human and civil rights protections leaves the LGBTQIA+ community vulnerable to hate crimes. In June 2016, less than a year after *Obergefell v. Hodges*, the Pulse Nightclub Shooting occurred killing forty-nine people (Ray, 2018) This event points to a harsh reality of a lack of support for the LGBTQIA+ community in the United States. This event has been preceded and followed by numerous amounts of violence and aggression toward the LGBTQIA+ community yearly, many events that are not even noted because of the nature of who are the victim of such crimes (Langton, 2017). Under the Trump Administration, the rights of LGBTQIA+ individuals have been weakened by the implementation of a ban of transgender troops in the armed forces, withdrawing provisions of Title IX, and retracting the inclusion of LGBTQIA+ related questions on the 2020 Census (Human Rights Campaign, 2017). As noted above, the new Biden Presidential Administration appears to have more equal outlooks on LGBTQIA+ communities, but only time will tell. The Biden Administration signed an Executive Order on Preventing and Combatting Discrimination on the Basis of Gender Identity or Sexual Orientation on January 20, 2021 (Executive Order, 13988, 2021). This signals a shift from the Trump administration, but we still must be cautious as the new administration is very new in their position. This is the type of world that our LGBTQIA+ youth are

growing up in, and because of this history and policies, these students receive an inequitable education to their peers. There has been little to no large-scale reform for LGBTQIA+ students and educators even though they are highly marginalized in all school settings.

### **The Current Education System**

Equity is integral in the educational system and is what is needed to create a more effective tomorrow for all students. For the purpose of this study, research equity is defined under the ideas that:

Minority students may be disadvantaged by preexisting bias and prejudice in American society, with both conscious and unconscious discrimination surfacing in public schools in ways that adversely affect learning acquisition, academic achievement, educational aspirations, and post-graduation opportunities (Great Schools Partnership, 2016).

This is especially true in the state of New Mexico, whose education is ranked in the last or almost last every year when compared to the other fifty states in the United States (U.S. News, 2018). This low-ranking deals with a variety of factors but the most essential is the lack of equity among the educational system throughout the state. The state is made up of a variety of public school districts in conjunction with private institutions (U.S. Department of Education, 2018).

Because of the variety of schools and district types, it appears that school systems within the state work in dramatically different ways, thus, students in each district receive a different education. This is compounded by the lack of resources available to various districts throughout the state of New Mexico. New

Mexico has a high ratio of the low-income population, thus the number of resources available to be put into education is lacking and the resources that are put into education are placed on items such as standardized testing (United States Census Bureau, 2017). A more equitable distribution of funds would benefit marginalized populations of students but as it currently stands New Mexico ranks low in a measure of quality education.

### **Current Status of Mental Health**

Mental health and school are two entities that one may not associate together, but mental health plays a critical role not only in the lives of students but also in how they perceive their overall schooling experience. Mental health is still a taboo subject in both society and the schooling community, but it plays a formative role in student's lives; mental health is a critical component for all but is especially critical for students in the K-12 setting whose rapid development causes imbalances in their brain, which affects overall mental health as well as identity development. These imbalances can lead to dire circumstances that not only affect the specific student but the schooling community. The leading cause of death in New Mexico youth is suicide, and this has mental health implications on individuals and communities. Often taboos around suicide impede public discussion and policy development because of the negativity surrounding mental health (Hall, 2018, p. 277). You couple this with the experiences of marginalized students (i.e. LGBTQIA+, Mexican/x, etc.) and you end up with greater suicidality and substance abuse among these groups (Cochran et al., 2007, p. 790).



In addition to the highest rates of suicidality among marginalized communities, there is also more stigma in specific communities of people. For example, some in Mexican/x communities tend to be more anti-mental health as the stigma attached to not only acknowledging it but being open about it has some negative associations. (Avoid generalizing statements unless you have specific evidence that proves the generalization). This negativity toward mental health is due to a complex web of culture that has been conditioned for hundreds of years, but at the root lies notions that any deviation from the norm is seen as negative which can be attributed highly to colonization, religion, and the complexity of Mexican/x cultures. The same is true with the harsh feelings towards the LGBTQIA+ community across both the Mexican/x and non-Mexican/x communities which adds to multiple layers of oppression faced by these communities (Velez et al., 2015, p. 27). Mental Health is viewed as negative because it deviates from the norm because of existing notions of normativity that influences what it is to be a normal person living in a normal situation. Mental health needs to be discussed in and out of schools and this study aims to bring the LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x communities' experiences into the forefront, so we as a society of scholars, educators, and policymakers can ensure that individuals living along the margins of the margins are not surviving but thriving.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The educational experience of marginalized populations of students is drastically different from students in non-marginalized populations (Mueller et al,

2015). Through experience and observation, two populations that are especially vulnerable in the state of New Mexico's education system are Mexican/x and LGBTQIA+ students. Students who identify as either Mexican/x or LGBTQIA+ have their struggles, thus students who identify as both Mexican/x and LGBTQIA+ are more prone to an educational opportunity gap (Kosciw, 2020; Mueller et al., 2015; Robinson & Espelage, 2011; Sadowski, 2017; Toomey et al., 2012; White et al., 2018). I use *opportunity gap* as opposed to *achievement gap* because achievement gap insinuates that student performance is the issue rather than systemic inequalities. Not all students are afforded the same opportunities as their non-marginalized peers, thus there is simply a gap in opportunity. Currently little to no literature exists on students at this intersection, thus there is a disjuncture in the education system's commitment to these students. There are clear discrepancies for these students within the educational system, but there is little to no supporting literature to help create a more equitable education for them. New Mexico currently has the largest population of Mexican/x students in their schools than any other state (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). The state of New Mexico also has a population of roughly 15% of students who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or are not sure of their sexual orientation (Tomedi et al., 2017). Thus, these two populations make-up a majority of the New Mexico student population and they deserve an equitable education.

The research project stems from the problem that LGBTQIA+ and Mexican/x students' needs are not met within the New Mexico K-12 education system. This opportunity gap is demonstrated by a variety of factors including,

bullying, victimization, and school environment (White et al., 2018; Sadowski, 2017; Kosciw, 2020; Mueller et al., 2015; Robinson & Espelage, 2011; Toomey et al., 2012). In terms of academic performance, “On average, non-LGBTQ students reported earning between half A’s/B’s and mostly B’s in their classes), while LGBTQ students generally reported earning mostly B’s” (Aragon et al., 2014, p. 8). This is compounded by the fact that 57.6% of LGBTQ students felt unsafe at school because of their sexual orientation (Kosciw, 2020, p.12). It also raises the issue that scared students are not able to focus on their academics and thus their performance suffers. Negative school climate coupled with negative mental health leads to students who are oriented toward survival not quality learning (Kyung-Hee et al., 2013; Mereish & Poteat, 2015; Sandfort, et al., 2007; The Trevor Project, 2019; Velez, et al., 2015). The above issues are further compounded by racism and discrimination. Mexican/x students are more likely to be more aware of the discrimination that is occurring around them because of their racial status (Toomey, et al., 2012, p.193). So, LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x students are more prone to witness what is occurring around them and, in turn, focus on the negative elements within the school climate, affecting their mental health negatively. All these factors are decisive in the lack of equity experienced by our LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x youth in the current educational system.

This research project will help expand the field of research regarding LGBTQIA+ and Mexican/x students in education with a focus on mental health and school climate perceptions. Institutions should strive to create more

equitable learning because the leaders of tomorrow may be in this marginalized population and if we are not providing them an equitable education, we are failing these students and our society. There is also a clear issue when it comes to the types of research concerned with marginalized groups within education. There is a focus on quantitative measures that deal with numerical evidence but there is little that deals with the lived experiences and narratives of students in marginalized populations. The lived experiences of students are an integral source of evidence that is not being tapped into. The best way to learn about the struggles students face is to get the information directly from them because they are the ones facing the inequities on a daily basis. By utilizing student's lived experiences through *testimonios*, conversations can center informed perspectives about the inequities faced by LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x students. All students deserve an education that is equitable to their white and non-LGBTQIA+ peers, thus the current educational system needs to actively work on fostering equitable spaces. It is through the understanding that there is a lack of equity that policymakers, administrators, educators, and community members can change the tide and allow for higher quality education, which is essential for creating stronger and more adept leaders of tomorrow.

This study involves six LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x young adults who are reflecting on their K-12 experience to gain a better understanding of how these developmental years influenced their mental health and school climate perceptions. In this qualitative study, I collected the *testimonios* of the participants through one-on-one interviews, demographic surveys, and a focus

group. It is through these various interactions with participants that the findings of LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x story resilience can be best inform teacher preparation programs, policy arenas, and most importantly the classroom environment.

### **Purpose of the Study**

Two of the most vulnerable populations within the state of New Mexico's education system are Mexican/x and LGBTQIA+ students (New Mexico Public Education Department, 2018). In the 2015-2016 academic year, New Mexico had the highest percentage of Mexican/x students at 61.3% in the education system compared to other states in the nation (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). Thus, New Mexico needs to be focusing on creating a more equitable schooling experience because Mexican/x students are the majority of the student population. 15.1% of students in the state of New Mexico identified as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or not sure of their sexual orientation (Tomedi, et al., 2017). Again, this is a substantial number of students whom the New Mexico education system is placing on the margins that deserve an equitable education. These students are *double-marginalized* (Tam, 2010) or multiple marginalized (Annamma et al., 2018) and thus extra support is needed for them to have an equitable education to their White and non-LGBTQIA+ peers. Educational systems must address the intersectional experience identities and material backgrounds of students as they relate to school climate and mental health. Mental health is one of those taboo subjects that is often neglected in the K-12 curriculum because of the rhetoric that surrounds it, but it plagues our society and especially those on the margins of the margins. This study specifically

addresses the experience and needs of Mexican/x and LGBTQIA+ students. It is through these student's stories that a conversation can start about the challenges surrounding students living at the intersection of sexual orientation and race.

This research is noteworthy in that a better tomorrow starts with strengthening the quality of education and ensuring the wellbeing of youth. We must note the marginalized populations of students so that we can create a more equitable education and a key to equity is understanding the mental toll that occurs by being multiply-marginalized students. This equity can be created through students' stories of survival and resilience. It is not these commonalities that define our individual stories, it is the ways stories are interpreted to discern patterns and how we viewed the experience differently that truly makes each high school experience unique. This research is a means of helping fill the gap in research about Mexican/x and LGBTQIA+ students regarding their perceived school climate and mental health. This project aims at helping to create a more equitable learning environment for all students by affecting policy at the school, district, and state levels. This research project aims not only at equity but starting a much-needed conversation about the issues in our schooling system related to those with and without privilege especially about the often taboo subject of mental health.

### **Research Questions**

1. What are the lived realities of LGBTQIA+ Mexican/Mexican-American/Chicana/o (*Mexican/x*) young adults within the context of their K-16 schooling?

- a. What role did schooling play in their mental health?
  - b. In what ways do their experiences with mental health shape their relationship to schooling?
2. How do LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x young adults live out their intersectional identities and what role do these play within their mental health?
  3. What *Queer Intersectional Capital* do LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x young adults embody to survive and ultimately thrive in and out of the education system?

### **Definitions**

- *LGBTQIA+*: “An acronym for “lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer intersex, and asexual” (Human Rights Campaign, 2019).
- *Lesbian*: “A woman who is emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to other women” (Human Rights Campaign, 2019).
- *Gay*: “A person who is emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to members of the same gender” (Human Rights Campaign, 2019).
- *Bisexual*: “A person emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to more than one sex, gender or gender identity though not necessarily simultaneously, in the same way, or to the same degree” (Human Rights Campaign, 2019).
- *Transgender*: “An umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or expression is different from cultural expectations based on the sex they were assigned at birth. Being transgender does not imply any specific

sexual orientation. Therefore, transgender people may identify as straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, etc.” (Human Rights Campaign, 2019).

- *Queer*: “A term people often use to express fluid identities and orientations. Often used interchangeably with ‘LGBTQIA+’” (Human Rights Campaign, 2019).
- *Intersex*: “Intersex people are born with a variety of differences in their sex traits and reproductive anatomy. There is a wide variety of difference among intersex variations, including differences in genitalia, chromosomes, gonads, internal sex organs, hormone production, hormone response, and/or secondary sex traits” (Human Rights Campaign, 2019).
- *Asexual*: “The lack of a sexual attraction or desire for other people” (Human Rights Campaign, 2019).
- *Mental health*: “Mental health includes our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It affects how we think, feel, and act. It also helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others, and make choices” (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2019).
- *Mexican/x*: A person who self-identifies as of Chicana/o/x, Mexicana/o/x, Nueva/o/x Mexicana/o/x, indigenous, or mixed descent. The ‘x’ is used as a gender-neutral marker to the traditional masculine ‘o’ and the feminine ‘a’ as seen in Mexicana/o/x culture and the Spanish language.
- *School climate*: “School climate refers to the quality and character of school life. School climate is based on patterns of students', parents' and



school personnel's experience of school life and reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures” (National School Climate Center, n.d.).

### **Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations**

Every research project carries assumptions, limitations, and delimitations; in this research project, some of these include the potential sample size. In the population being sampled, there is a fair amount of diversity, but that does not mean that the entire spectrum of experience can be represented through a study involving six *testimonio* interviews and a focus group. Thus, we cannot make any assumptions that the experiences from the study are that of the general population of LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x young adults. There is an assumption that there is a difference in the high school experience of LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x students when compared to White and/or non-LGBTQIA+ students. This assumption is based upon the lack of equity in the literature for both Mexican/x and LGBTQIA+ students, but this may not be the case when it comes to the results of this study because there is currently no literature of LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x students. Even though this study has assumptions, limitations, and delimitations, the project is critical to add to the current literature about students who are Mexican/x, LGBTQIA+, and those at the intersection.

### **Theoretical Framework: Critical Queer Theory (QueerCrit)**

#### **Acknowledging QueerCrit's Roots.**

It is essential to note that QueerCrit and its applications existed among the people and within social movements before academia naming coined the term.

QueerCrit grew out of feminist of color critique with pioneers such as Patricia Hill Collins's *Black Feminist Thought* (1990), Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/ La Frontera* (1987), and Audre Lorde's *Sister Outsider* (1984). Each of these texts uses a form of QueerCrit without naming it as such. They are all feminist scholars, which shows the clear connection between Queer Theory and queer studies being born out of women of color feminism and women's studies. It is essential to note that this linkage reinforces what Queer Theory is as a theory examining the breaking of gender binaries, norms, and sexualities. It is not simply encompassed within LGBTQIA+ theory or LGBTQIA+ studies, and Queer Theory is often used to examine the heterosexual experience from a sexuality or gender perspective as much as it is used to examine the LGBTQIA+ experience (Sullivan, 2003). So, to understand Queer Theory, one must know about women of color feminism and women's studies' theories just as one to understand intersectionality must know Critical Race Theory. The knowledge is not exclusive, thus, examining the earlier scholars whose ideas influence both Queer Theory, Critical Race Theory, and the hybrid Queer Critical Theory is essential. Also, to break the system of academia co-opting ideas from the people and naming them for themselves, we must acknowledge where QueerCrit was seen, used, and modeled before entering the academy.

### **Critical Race Theory**

CRT (Critical Race Theory), CRT is a theoretical framework used by social scientists that examines how society and culture are shaped by the intersections of race, power, and law. CRT was born out of by BIPOC who noted how racism

undergirds many structures in all aspects of society. CRT has its roots in critical legal studies and has since expanded to influence almost every discipline in academia. At the core, CRT is a movement “a collection of activists and scholars engaged in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017, p. 3). Thus, CRT aims at dismantling systemic barriers to create more equity for BIPOC, and to do this is through understanding the connection between race and power.

One of the key ideas that emerged from Black feminism and that has shaped CRT is that of intersectionality. When a person lives with multiple marginalized identities, they are usually viewed as either-or, but they need to be viewed with all their identities in mind. According to Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), This notion came from unjust court cases that Black women faced that did not take into account their status as a woman and as a Black person, which proved to be problematic in many regards as they live in both identities. This multi-marginalization has been keyed intersectionality and is “rooted in Black feminism and Critical Race Theory, intersectionality is a method and a disposition, a heuristic and analytic tool” (Carbado et al., 2013, p. 303). So, whereas CRT looks solely at race as the driving entity, intersectionality allows for intersecting identities to be understood as they pertain to power and social relations. One is simply not a BIPOC, they are also gendered, have a specific socioeconomic status, have different dis/abilities, etc., thus intersectionality allows these intersections as well as race to be understood as it connects to power and privilege (Hill Collins & Bilge, 2016).

In addition to CRT and intersectionality, there are a variety of subsets of theories that originated from the CRT model; these include but are not limited to Tribal Critical Theory (TribalCrit), Asian Critical Theory (AsianCrit), and Chicana Critical Theory (LatCrit). Each of these subsets has roots and origins in CRT, but have different tenants, ideals, and uses that are specific to each as it aligns with the different communities that use them. For this example, we will be using tenets of CRT, intersectionality, and LatCrit to create an intersectional Mexican/x focused QueerCrit. This is done because my research focuses on Mexican/x students and educators, the use of LatCrit is more fitting than simply using the broader CRT that is often used when working with BIPOC. LatCrit is heavily influenced by CRT as LatCrit is simply one specific type of CRT. An important distinction between CRT and LatCrit is “LatCrit is a theory that elucidates Latinas/Latinos’ multidimensional identities and can address the intersectionality of racism, sexism, classism, and other forms of oppression” (Bernal, 2002, p.108). Whereas CRT utilizes a framework that is utilized to cover all types of oppression based on race, LatCrit takes into account the specific lived prejudices and biases that are specific to the Mexican/x community. LatCrit also provides a more in-depth foundation for intersectionality when working with Mexican/x participants.

### **Queer Theory**

Queer Theory was born in the 1990s out of the notion that “mainstream media and popular prejudice, the marginal sexual worlds are bleak and dangerous” (Rubin, 2012, p. 162). This sentiment is still true today and that is

one of the key issues why sexual minority people still struggle. Queer Theory was and is used as a means of dismantling the heteronormative systems that plague our society (Sullivan, 2003). Academia is a space that should be accepting of all people but due to the systemic barriers that are enacted, it can be a hostile space for many individuals. This is one of the key reasons Queer Theory was born, it was born to turn academia on its head and be used as a form of resistance from within the academy. With all this in mind, it should be noted that “the theory links gender stereotypes to the norms not a theory about gay and lesbian identity. Queer Theory is “queer” because it questions the assumptions that there is any “normal” expression of gender” (Mindy & Taylor, 2012, p. 88). It originated out of Feminist Theory, but instead of focusing solely on women, it focused on the variation in gender norms that are established by society. It is currently associated with the LGBTQIA+ population because they are a community that challenges gender binaries much more than the heterosexual community. So, the use of Queer Theory within this project is done to create equity and to frame specific students’ stories who identify as members of the LGBTQIA+ community. The combination of intersectionality and Queer Theory is essential for this project as it creates the foundation for the selected intersectional *testimonio* research design.

According to Teresa De Lauretis (1991), the function of Queer Theory is, “to recast or reinvent the terms of our sexualities, to construct another discursive horizon, another way of thinking the sexual” (p. iv). In other words, it helps to question sexuality as a continuum and breaks away from the binaries that plague

society. For Queer Theory this binary surrounds what it means to be male or female, masculine or feminine, a man or a woman. This is a loaded binary as no one acts on either end of the binary, everyone is somewhere in the masculine-feminine continuum. Thus, this notion of a continuum, as opposed to the binaries, is at the heart of Queer Theory (Gordon, 2005). For example, Queer Theory allows me as a researcher to analyze my sexuality as a gay and queer man. It gives me the language and tools to understand the privilege I do and do not have based on my deviation from what it means to be male, masculine, or a man. But what Queer Theory alone does not allow me to understand is how my gay and queer identity is affected by my Mexicano racial identity. This is where the importance of hybrid theories comes into play because without understanding my sexual or racial identity, the conclusions that would be drawn about my experience would most likely be incorrect because I am not just gay and queer or Mexicano, I am and will always be both and much more at the same time as long as I exist.

### **What is QueerCrit?**

Queer Critical Theory or QueerCrit is a fusion of the traditionally White Queer Theory and the single-issues Critical Race Theory and melds them into a single theory where Whiteness is removed from Queer Theory and Critical Race Theory is expanded to be more encompassing of other identities to create a hybrid theory where the lived experience of queer BIPOC can be best analyzed and understood. QueerCrit takes the various tenants of each theory that pertain to the queer BIPOC experience and puts them into a conversation to create a

unique theory that allows this unique experience to be understood more effectively than if only one of the theories was used for analysis. Also, QueerCrit allows for a counter-narrative about what it means to grow up at the intersection of being LGBTQIA+ and a BIPOC. As explored above, academia is lacking the authentic queer BIPOC experience. The limited experiences that are included often focused on a single social location and does not embody the queer and BIPOC experience. We often see work dealing with LGBTQIA+ peoples or BIPOC peoples, but very little at the intersection of both. Thus, the implications that are being drawn from the single social location work are not true to the lived realities. Thus, the hybrid theory allows for a counter-narrative to be added to the literature that has used queerness and race-based theories in exclusion and not in conversation with each other. Single social location work acts as an attempt that often misses the mark and can do more damage to the queer BIPOC perspective than if it would have been ignored as the implications of the work are often skewed only representing part of the experience and not the truth of reality for these communities. QueerCrit is not only a theory to understand the queer BIPOC lived experience, but it is also a tool that can be used within academia to dispel the myths that are being perpetuated by academia and community. It's critical to note that the majority of scholars that embarked on the single social work had best intentions to promote change, but ultimately missed the mark and we as current scholars need to work to aid in creating the truth of the queer BIPOC experience. QueerCrit is a theory, disposition, and tool to dismantle racism, sexism, homophobia, and queerphobia that penetrates academia.

## A Model for Visualizing Queer Critical Theory.

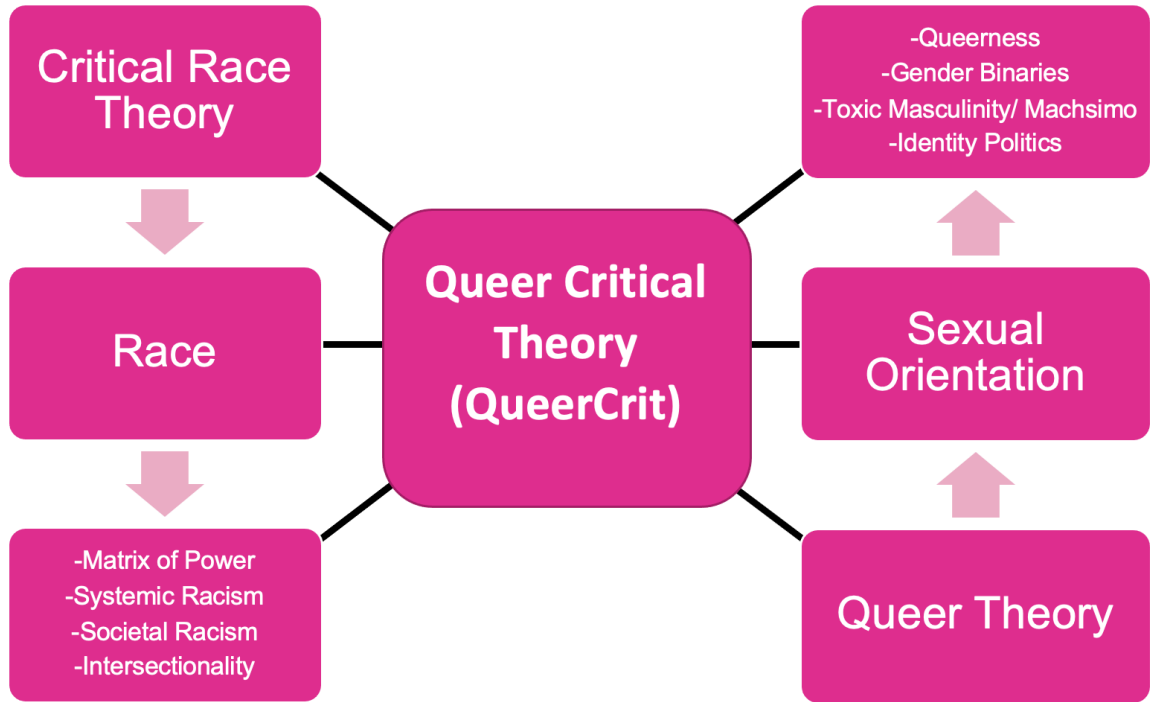


Figure 1. QueerCrit Model.

QueerCrit can best be understood by using a visual model (Figure 1.) as it allows for the abstract concept to be understood in practical terms. The model is based primarily on using visual and literal intersections. At the top of the right side of the model is the generalized Critical Race Theory, below that, is the main component taken from that theory that is used to create the Queer Critical Theory hybrid, which in this case is race. The bottom left box exhibits the main tenets that are being used from CRT and race studies for the hybrid model. The model may appear to be complex, but at its heart, it is a model based on intersectionality and understanding that each theory is essential to understand the data of LGBTQIA+ BIPOC. Queer Critical Theory takes the four tenets of each theory and the main elements of race and sexual orientation and puts them



in conversation with each other, which is shown in the model via the arrows and lines that intersect creating the hybrid theory. Like, their identities, the theories do not favor one part of their identity, thus everything must be equalized. This may not be the case for a participant, but for the hybrid theory to be inclusive of understanding the majority of LGBTQIA+ BIPOC, this equalization is essential.

### **Theories of Perception versus QueerCrit.**

The research questions for this study refer to how LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x students perceive their school climate and mental health; thus it is critical to acknowledge perception as defined in the discipline of psychology. Perception can best be defined as, “the sorting out, interpretation, analysis, and integration of stimuli by the sense organs and brain” (Feldman, 2013, p.97). The two primary schools of thought that come out of psychology are Direct Perception theories and Constructive Perception theories. In Direct Perception theories, there is a focus on the aspect of bottom-up processing where the perceived elements come from the environmental elements. These environmental stimuli are understood in their parts first and then cognitively put together for recognition to occur. This is contrasted to Constructive Perception theories where there is a top-down processing approach. This includes people constructing perceptions through the act of using information based on what they expect to occur. These two categories of perception work together to dictate how individuals view the world around them and react to specific stimuli. One type cannot work alone as the human brain is wired to do both simultaneously as a check and balance. Perception in the discipline of psychology is tied to the sense with a heightened

connection to sight, and thus, perception, as defined by psychology, does not work for this study as perception is being used more broadly to look at experiences holistically. The narrow definition as defined by psychology's theories of perception would limit the scope of the study and not allow for a holistic understanding of the *testimonios* to be understood. Also, it is a departure from the aim of the study as one of the primary goals is to understand how social justice and advocacy influence policy to create more equitable learning spaces for LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x students. Thus, perception here is more akin to the saying *perception is someone's reality*, meaning that even though we all perceive things differently, it does not mean that one's perception is wrong, it is just different. This is critical for the study as we are looking at the *testimonios* of a variety of people and how they perceive their lived experiences is essential because that is their reality. Because of this goal, QueerCrit is a more effective theoretical framework for this project in that it aids in creating a holistic understanding of the youth LGBTQ+ Mexican/x youth experience pertaining to school climate and mental health as well as offering an avenue where policy and social-justice are centered. Also, because theories of perception are bound heavily to psychology with little interdisciplinary connections, it limits the studies' interdisciplinary nature, which is one of the central foundations that are essential to explore the questions laid out in the study. This compares to QueerCrit and its foundational theories of Critical Race Theory and Queer Theory that expand across disciplines, including, but not limited to, education, sociology, race studies, queer studies, women's studies, cultural studies, ethnic studies, and

Mexican/x studies. Theories of perception are extremely helpful for some studies but are not fit for this intersectional study that aims at examining the LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x experience and perception of school climate and mental health.

### **Theorization: *Queer Intersectional Wealth***

Yosso's work outlines an approach of using CRT as a means of placing communities of color in a position where what they do is valued as opposed to devalued by society. Each individual no matter race, ethnicity, sexuality, gender, etc. determines every aspect of their life. Many systemic barriers are enacted daily and inhibit many people from achieving or accomplishing objectives or goals. This is especially true for communities of color, who because of systemic barriers are barred from doing many things. Yosso's *Community Cultural Wealth* model throws out the stereotypes and aims at using what communities of color bring into spaces as productive and giving credit where credit is due. This works well with education where the stereotypes often run rampant but the wealth that families and students bring to the table is contributing to the larger learning environment. The six capital Yosso discusses in their model are *linguistic*, *aspirational*, *familial*, *social*, *navigational*, and *resistant*. These six are all subsets of cultural capital. We then add *transgressive capital* (Pennell, 2015) as a seventh capital that is specific to LGBTQIA+ communities. For example, *linguistic capital* entails bilingualism as a positive skill and that schools should celebrate bilingualism and not simply focus on English instruction. So, it takes a historically negative component of schooling and flips it on its head to be a positive as opposed to a negative. This framework will be used to help understand how the

teachers may use non-traditional or “best practice” as a means of creating a classroom where true equity can thrive (Yosso, 2005).

Yosso’s *Cultural Wealth Model* (2005) was fitting for her context with a high percent of Latinx students but does not account for all social locations that students live. This study focuses on students at the intersection of being LGBTQIA+ and Mexican/x, thus utilizing the *Cultural Wealth* model ignores the LGBTQIA+ component of their identity, which is problematic, thus I propose *Queer Intersectional Wealth*. This is a queered version of *Cultural Wealth* that focuses on the student’s queer BIPOC social locations. I define Queer Intersectional Wealth (QIW) as:

*assets an individual acquires through their lived experiences that aid in their navigation of society. Capital includes, but is not limited to linguistic, aspirational, familial, social, navigational, and resistant capitals as defined in Yosso’s Cultural Wealth Model (2005), transgressive capital as added to the model by Pennell (2015), and transcending trauma capital and third space capital as introduced by the work in this study. Intersectional capital differs from cultural wealth as it highlights social locations that are non-grounded in the cultural wealth modeling, including sexuality, gender, and queerness whereas cultural wealth focuses on race as the focal entity.*

This is a working definition that will alter as more work is done with LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x communities. The hypothesis is that LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x communities, specifically LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x communities youth bring additional capital that is not encompassed in the *Cultural Wealth* model as

defined by Yosso and amended by Pennell. This queered version is similar to the work of Lindsay Pérez Huber that argues that spirituality is another form of capital used among undocumented Chicana college students to combat racist sentiments (2009a). Whereas Huber adds a spiritual lens to the Cultural Wealth Model, this study aims at queering the model as a means of understanding the intersectional social locations of LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x students. As noted below, with the literature, one of the biggest issues with understanding LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x students is the lack of an intersectional approach that forces student voice to be split as either being a BIPOC or a queer student.

Figure 2. exhibits the ways in which the *Queer Intersectional Wealth Model* has been theorized and conceived through the previous work using cultural wealth. We start the model with Yosso (2005) and their original conception of *Community Cultural Wealth* and the original seven forms of capital. We then move directly below this original model to Pennell (2015) that queered the model and added *transgressive capital*, i.e. *Queered Cultural Capital* and finally we have the *Queer Intersectional Wealth Model* that falls in the space between both on the left showing that the model borrows from each. Please note the direction of the arrows as the use of capital among the different models is not exclusive to one variation, they are used in different capacities as alluded to with the two-ended arrows. The same notion is also true regarding the ways in which the different forms of *Community Cultural Wealth* are used in different spaces, none are exclusive. The capital of each specific variation has a single-sided arrow to acknowledge where they originated from as well as providing a

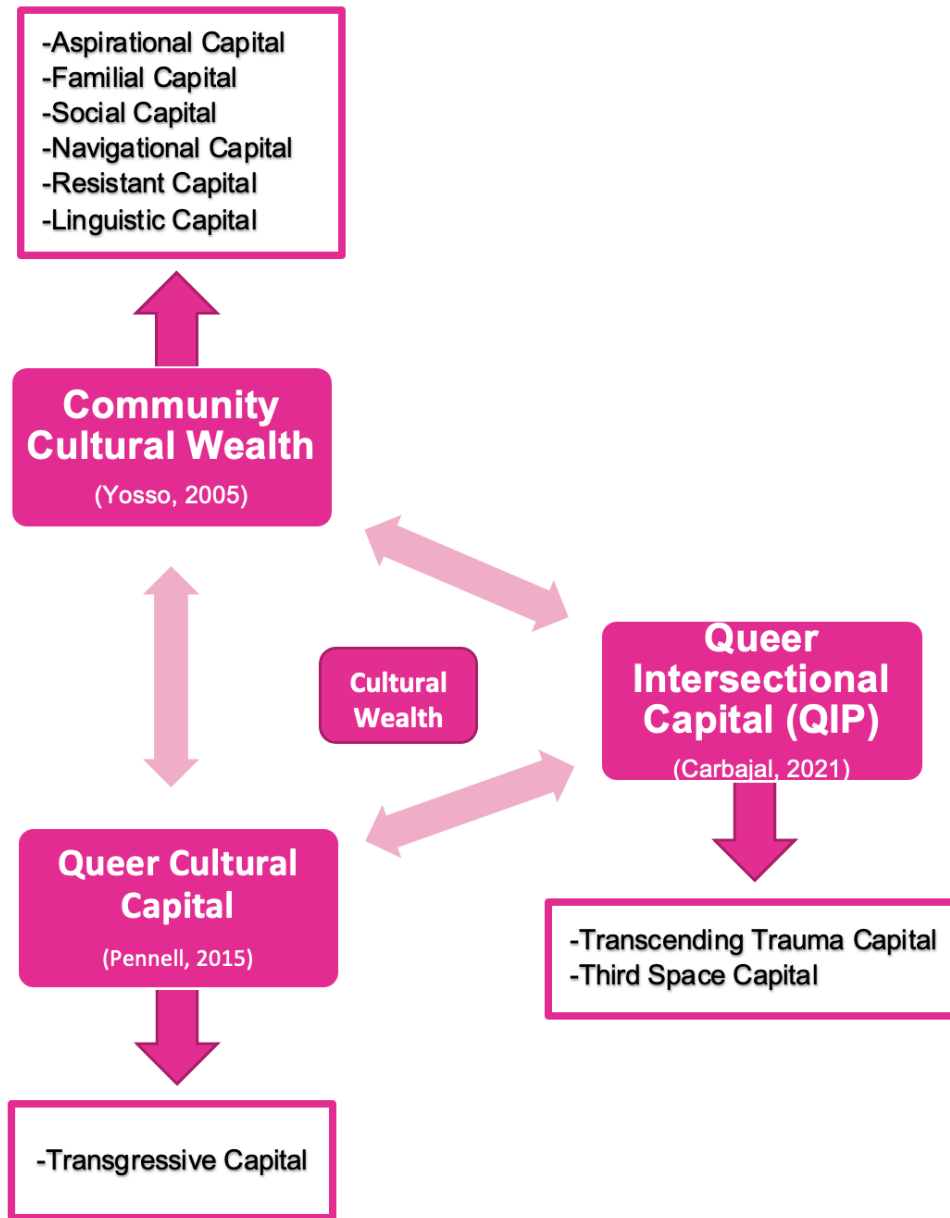


Figure 2. Queer Intersectional Wealth Model

connection for greater understanding. In the center of the entire figure, we have *Cultural Wealth* as this the large overarching entity that drives all of these models as well as the other variation of *the Community Cultural Wealth Model*. I argue that *Queer Intersectional Wealth Model* is more effective when working with LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x youth as opposed to Yosso's (2005) *Community Cultural*

*Wealth* and Pennell's (2015) *Queered Cultural Capital Model* because Yosso does not include the queered capital forms and Pennell's notion of *transgressive capital* is more adult situated. Due to a variety of factors, youth experience many limitations that inhibit transgressive actions to occur. Thus, these models are strong, but not as effective or applicable to the LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x population, thus I introduce *Queer Intersectional Wealth Model* to encompass the LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x experience more effectively.

### **Conclusion**

Students at the intersection of sexual orientation and race deserve an equitable education where their mental health is at the center and this research aims at making this a reality. It is through student's stories that a finer understanding can be created of the inequity that exists for these students daily. Stories hold an arsenal of knowledge and this knowledge can be used for a brighter tomorrow. The Mexican/x and LGBTQIA+ populations have had to deal with systemic and social inequity throughout the history of the United States of America and this should not be the case. A student should not have to fear for themselves when going to school. School should be a safe place, and as it currently stands, this is not true. Under the law, we are all guaranteed a right to an education, but the quality of education should not be at the mercy of one's racial, ethnic, sexual orientation, mental health, or any other factor. Nelson Mandela once stated, "education is the most powerful weapon we can use to change the world" and that is why equitable education is vital for all students. The next chapter focuses on the extant literature and *testimonios* of six LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x youth and

their journey through K-12. The analysis centers the tools and skills that LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x youth draw on that enhances their resilience, as well as their mental, physical, and emotional wellbeing.



## CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The lived realities of LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x may be harsh, but resilience is in our blood. Rafa's testimonio exemplifies his resilience in ways that extend well beyond his age:

I was a mess in high school. I was pretty alright through my freshman year, but then after that, it just kind of went down. It got worse. I didn't know how to be, I guess happy. Mostly, because, I don't know, it was it was really bad environment. I didn't succeed in schools and my parents would constantly tell me I would never succeed. And I was a disappointment and I failure. One, just those things, those things, it kind of hurt to hear, especially from like, you know, like, I would always remember, like my more prolific instances of like a breakdown be telling myself like my mom is supposed to love me and why doesn't she? And I mean, I noticed that she does in her own work away. But it hurt a lot back then. Not have clear support like yeah, I know that I was, I'm like, this is just me like coming to like realization like a little bit ago. So like, and like knowing more about what psychology is like if you knew that I was struggling, why did you pile on, why didn't you take a minute to think how he's like not doing good as good as he used to? What can I do to help instead of just saying, like, wow, you're doing terrible, you are terrible. I feel like me doing bad and like, kind of slashing out a little bit and not doing good in school was a cry for help. And I never, never got answered.

I had to I had to help myself out of it. I had to answer my own cry for help.  
I had to save myself (Rafa, 2020).

### **Introduction**

The intersectionality of students and youth is not a new concept, but it is a concept that has been neglected by academia in all spaces ranging from K-12 to K-16. This is especially true for students and youth who are at the intersection of being sexual and racial minorities, for example, queer BIPOC youth. Through school policies and unrepresentative curriculum, these youth are rendered lesser by the educational as well as other systems because of their racial and sexual identities. This should not be the case, as there should be no factor that inhibits a hardworking and driven student to receive an equitable and appropriate education in a space that is safe and free of bullying and other forms of harassment. Thus, we as an academic and social community must help students who are living at marginalized intersections to thrive and success in school and life.

One of the most effective ways to do this is through the use of academic research. With the current literature, there is information about LGBTQIA+ students and Mexican/x students, but there is little to none about students who live at the intersection of being LGBTQIA+ and Mexican/x. Of the research that is currently out there, most come from grey literature from national organizations that specialize in student equity and youth well-being, for example, GLSEN, The Trevor Project, etc. Thus, this source of research needs to become more embedded within academia for it to be effective in addressing equity issues for

LGBTQIA+ BIPOC students and youth. Research projects on LGBTQIA+ and Mexican/x students can offer visibility and representation as well as guide policy makers. In the review of the literature, one will also note that when discussing Mexican/x students, they are usually either underrepresented or placed within a broad category that includes a variety of students of color. This is problematic because even though BIPOC students and youth share similar struggles, their experiences are not the same. Ethnic, class, societal, and familial differences make the experience of each group unique and noteworthy, which influences the school climate. Regarding different problems, a large array of the literature about LGBTQIA+ students deals with a large White population; thus the current research does not capture that of LGBTQIA+ students of color and their experiences. These are some of large gaps in the literature and this project aims at adding to the current knowledge and helps to fill in some of informational and theoretical gaps in relation to LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x students.

### **Search Description**

Search descriptions utilized in the review of the literature was based on a systematic approach of University of New Mexico's Library databases as well as web-based searches. Web-based searches enhanced the materials from the library databases. I utilized reports from national organizations and they are noted in the bibliography below academic articles, books, and other pertinent data. The primary keywords utilized during the search fall into five main categories: ethnic/racial indicators, sexual orientation indicators, educational indicators, location indicators, and mental health indicators. The terms used in

the search were: ethnic/racial indicators, *Chicano/o*, *Mexican/x*, *Mexican/x*, *Latino/s*, *Hispanic*, *Mexican*, and *Mexican-American*; sexual orientation indicators, *LGBTQ+*, *LGBTQIA+*, *LGBT*, *queer*, and *gay*; educational indicators, *students*, *education*, *high school*, *K-12*, and *school*; location indicators, *New Mexico* and *Southwest*, and mental health indicators, *mental health*, *mental wellbeing*, *mental*, and various specific mental health factors, for example, *depression*, *suicide*, and *anxiety*. These key terms were used in a variety of orders and combinations to yield the literature discussed in the following section.

The most commonly used searches included a sexual orientation indicator in conjunction with an ethnic/racial indicator, educational indicator, and mental health indicator. For example, a search would be, “*LGBTQ+’ AND ‘Latino’ AND ‘students’ AND ‘mental health.’*” The parallelism covers the focus of this research, students at the intersection of race and sexual orientation. Even with this parallel search structure being used, there was little to no literature that addressed all the above intersections. Usually, it would consist of *LGBTQIA+* students or *Mexican/x* students, but there was almost no research about those at the intersection. The location indicators were used in varying conjunction with the other search term categories to create a better balance of education in the state of New Mexico. I approached the bibliographic search in this manner after attempting to search for all four indicators within a single search, which yielded no results. This made the gap in the literature even more apparent as this population of students has not been studied in the targeted geographic location. The resulting literature reflects two main categories of materials that examine the

experiences of LGBTQIA+ students or Mexican/x students and my work puts them into a broader conversation in order to shed light on the experiences of LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x students. . As there is minimal literature found in the search pertaining to the specific group being studied, it must be noted that that the review of the literature may be overlooking certain aspects of LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x students.

## **Review of the Literature**

### **Bullying and Suicide Ideation**

A key issue raised in the literature when investigating marginalized populations, especially Mexican/x and LGBTQIA+ populations is the high degree of bullying that impacts their lives. This bullying can lead to suicide ideation and plays a salient role in how the school climate is perceived by LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x students. When a student lives at a specific intersection the amount of bullying is more problematic. Students living at intersections of sexual orientation, gender, and race, experience greater amounts of bullying and suicide ideation. At the intersections, White and Hispanic students who identified as gay or bisexual are more likely than heterosexual identifying White male students to report bullying. (Muller et al., 2015). This shows a link between sexual orientation and race as factors that contribute to bullying within and outside of the school. When looking at indicators and reporting of suicide ideation, the rates were higher among sexual minorities than racial minorities regardless of gender. Muller et al. (2015) suggest that being bullied is harmful to all youth irrespective of race or sexual orientation. This is a broad statement that affirms there are differences in

who is bullied and who is more likely to deal with suicide ideation. LGB (lesbian, gay, and bisexual) youth are more likely to report suicide ideation when compared to their heterosexual counterparts, this divide does not matter based on race or gender. It is also important to note, "these findings suggest that regardless of race/ethnicity or gender, sexual minorities are more vulnerable to poor mental health outcomes than are sexual majorities" (Muller et al., 2015, p. 984). This is decisive because poor mental health could be a precursor to many other issues and increases the likelihood of suicide ideation.

It is also important to take into consideration students that are resilient and have taken measures for assistance, specifically LGBTQIA+ youth that sought out social services for mental health. A study concluded that individuals who seek out assistance from the social services were at a higher risk of suicide identification than studies that were epidemiologic (Walls et al., 2008). It is critical to note that similar trends were seen from previous literature with hopelessness, homelessness, in-school victimization, and the use of methamphetamine were associated with increased risks for students within the LGBTQIA+ population. These are all the factors that result from living at the intersections. Walls et al., also noted that there was a relationship seen with the presence of GSA's (Gender Sexuality Alliance) and a decreased amount of suicidality and suicide attempts (2008). This was seen in a single study and more research is needed to confirm this notion, but it is logical, in that, the presence of GSA helps booster a more positive school climate and as noted in previous literature, the school climate is critical to student's success. "In-school victimization was a significant

predictor of suicidality... [students who reported victimization] were 2.76 times as likely to report suicidality as those who did not” (Walls et al., 2008, p. 25). This is consistent with the previous literature that victimization is an important factor for LGBTQIA+ youth in terms of suicide ideation and attempts. The participants in this research were both high school and college students, thus, it shows that there is not much variation in LGBTQIA+ students in high school and those in college, they have faced similar issues, many of which stem from the school climate and societal factors.

Suicide is more common to LGBTQIA+ youth than for heterosexual students. Robinson and Espelage (2011) used survey-based research to examine greater risks of suicidal thoughts, suicide attempts, victimization by peers, and elevated levels of unexcused absences from the school regarding LGBTQIA+ students. In terms of these variables varied, straight-identified students were less likely to report thoughts of considering suicide, with heightened numbers for students who identified as either bisexual or questioning. Also, LGBTQIA+ students were more likely to report a suicide attempt within a year of taking the survey when compared to their straight peers. “As a group, LGBTQIA+ identified students are significantly more likely than straight-identified students to be the victims of cyber-bullying” (Robinson & Espelage, 2011, p. 320). There was some variation among the middle and high school populations with middle school students reporting more cyberbullying, but the overall trend is as noted above. A significant statistic to note is, the difference between LGBTQIA+ students (0.78) and straight students (0.30) was significant. “The

difference in means between LGBTQIA+ and straight-identified students is more than 17 times the difference between the means of middle and high school students" (Robinson & Espelage, 2011, p.17). This is alarming and confirms the many other pieces of literature that show the high levels of victimization experienced by LGBTQIA+ students in both middle and high school. There are also significant results showing that LGBTQIA+ students feel as they do not identify as much with the general school population, as well as a greater number of truancies overall (Robin & Espelage, 2011). This relays to the high amount of bullying because they are viewed as "other" by the general school population. This study is paramount as it helps to show the differences experienced by both LGBTQIA+ and straight students as well as the impact of transitions in the school setting.

Focusing more specifically on students in the state of New Mexico and their health and wellbeing, Tomedi et al. (2017) found that 15.1% of New Mexico high school students identified as LGB (gay, lesbian, bisexual), or unsure of their sexual orientation. This is a large percentage of students within the system that are falling behind due to the opportunity gap existing in New Mexico. Students also within the LGB or unsure (gay, lesbian, bisexual, and unsure of their sexual orientation) had significantly larger feelings of sadness or hopelessness because of their sexual orientation at 55.9% compared to 28.8% of their straight counterparts (Tomedi et al., 2017, p. 5). Aside from these negative health attributes, students who identified as LGB or unsure also reported higher rates of non-suicidal self-injury, as well as 26.1% attempted suicide within the past year



(Tomedi et al. 2017, p.5-6). These students were also bullied at a higher proportion than straight students with roughly 31% of students reporting that they were bullied on school property and 26.6% bullied electronically because of their sexual orientation (Tomedi et al., 2017, p. 12). The study had a large Mexican/x population when compared to other ethnic groups at 57.5%, which is fitting based on the ethnic makeup of the state of New Mexico (Tomedi et al., 2017, p.15). This data is important because it helps to shed light on the current lesbian, gay, and bisexual issues that currently reside in the state of New Mexico's youth. The mental health angle is critical because adolescence is a key time in development and this development plays an important role in the lives of LGBTQ students. The amount of bullying within the schooling system leads to a greater amount of victimization especially for students who live at intersections.

Overall, the literature states, as noted above that there is a greater amount of bullying which leads to greater levels of suicide ideation among marginalized populations of students (Muller et al., 2015; Robinson & Espelage, 2011; Tomedi et al., 2017; Walls et al., 2008; White et al., 2018). It is important to note that when dealing with both students of a sexual and racial minority, these two identities are intersecting and must be treated as such. Thus, one cannot say that it is just one's sexual orientation or race that accounts for greater amounts of bullying and suicide ideation as noted in the literature. This is explored more in-depth through the LGBTQIA+ population, but it is also seen in marginalized racial groups. This high degree of bullying is a critical component in the overarching school experience via how it affects the school climate (Kosciw et al., 2020). This

high degree of bullying and suicidal ideation is also one of the contributions to the high levels of victimizations that students at the intersection of sexual orientation and race face in their daily school lives.

### **Victimization**

Due to the high degree of bullying that is seen within the public high school spectrum among Mexican/x and LGBTQIA+ students, there is also a high level of coinciding victimization. A key study analyzed how school climate and sexual orientation affected each other. The sampled data came from a larger data sample that looked at a variety of aspects related to LGBT youth and their schooling experience. The data was collected via community organizations aimed at LGBT youth. The study examined the factors of victimization, educational indicators, types of school support, and psychological well-being. These factors were selected as they provide the baseline for academic outcomes of the LGBT youth based upon the school climate. The key points were consistent with the authors' hypothesis that "in-school victimization predicted decreased self-esteem and worse educational outcomes (lower GPA and more missed days of school)" (Kosciw et al., 2013, p. 54). Victimization derives from a wide variety of factors, including, but not limited to, being othered by peers, isolation, bullying, etc. The presence of a GSA's led to less victimization. Also, "Students' report of a comprehensive policy in their school was only predictive of self-esteem, such that the presence of such a policy was related to more positive feelings of self-esteem" (Kosciw et al., 2013, p. 55). This shows that when there are institutional policies in place, LGBT students can thrive more effectively

because they can be more secure in their identity. When more adults support LGBTIA+ students, the school climate becomes less strenuous and more accepting of LGBTIA+ students. Taken together, these factors point back to a basic understanding of education: a more accepting school climate results in greater academic performance by all students. When looking at victimization among students, many factors go into how it is perceived, thus the many ways in which it is perceived must be explored.

The educational system deals with varying perspectives, thus the LGBTQIA+ and the non-LGBTQIA+ perspectives on a variety of factors (LGBTQIA+ identity, truancy, academic grades, post-high school intentions, and victimization) within the schooling system should be explored. The datum shows that “LGBTQIA+ students were more than twice as likely to report skipping school than non-LGBTQIA+ students” (Aragon et al., 2014, p. 8). This is a conclusion done using odds ratios, and the overall trend of trancies over the data collection period was minimal. In terms of average grades, “On average, non-LGBTQIA+ students reported earning between half A’s/B’s and mostly B’s in their classes (M = 1.53, SD = 1.59), while LGBTQIA+ students generally reported earning mostly B’s (M = 2.24, SD = 1.92)” (Aragon et al., 2014, p. 8). LGBTQIA+ students earned lower grades, have higher amounts of truancy, and lower educational goals, which included, not completing high school, and attending a four-year college (Aragon et al., 2014). This conclusion links back to the high amount of victimization that is seen among LGBTQIA+ students. The findings help solidify this chief issue that is faced by LGBTQIA+ students that can be seen in much of

the literature. Some strategies listed to help create less victimization are that educators need to evaluate their attitudes about LGBTQIA+ students to ensure that their personal opinions are not causing issues for these students. Educators also need to examine the curriculum being taught, schools should consider starting GSA's, and implementing an anti-bullying program within the school. These steps are suggested to create a more effective school climate with less victimization of LGBTQIA+ students.

Aside from an overall perspective, lesbian, gay, and bisexual student's perspectives should be considered as well. This is especially critical for their perceptions of their high school environment and how this environment creates comfort or discomfort for these students. A key finding is the majority of LGB youth (60 percent) experienced victimization at their high school and the types of victimization that were experienced most frequently were verbal assaults and threats of violence. Of the 60 percent of students that reported victimization, 32 percent of students faced a majority of the youths (60 percent) experienced victimization in their school based on their sexual orientation, most commonly verbal insults or threats of violence, but 32 percent reported more serious victimization" (Elze, 2003,). Consequently, lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth are in danger due to a hostile school environment. There is a link between the comfort level of sexual identity and how students viewed the schooling environment. This calls into question, why is this? If some lesbian, gay, and bisexual students are having a more positive experience, why are there still excessive amounts of bullying and violence within a fraction of the population? Aside from this, Elze

(2003) highlights the importance of integration with heterosexual peers. Lesbian, gay, and bisexual students want to be viewed as equals to their straight peers and one of the most effective ways to do this is integration. Elze (2003) also confirms the high levels of victimization that occur among the lesbian, gay, and bisexual community of students. The amount of support provided within the schools (i.e. school counselors, health officials, etc.) is a key factor in the overall school environment felt by lesbian, gay, and bisexual students. Lesbian, gay, and bisexual students felt as though all of these factors contributed to their integration with their non-lesbian, gay, and bisexual peers and, in turn, their sense of belonging as part of the overall high school environment (Elze, 2003).

Victimization is one of the key indicators of a student's academic achievement and the high levels of victimization noted in the literature among Mexican/x and LGBTQIA+ students show that there is a gap in equity for these marginalized populations. This victimization is created by a variety of factors but some of the key factors are 1) the amount trancies and absences, 2) the level of violence that occurs within the school, 3) the amount of bullying that occurs, 4) the integration with non-minority peers, 5) self-confidence and assurance, and 6) the perceptions of LGBTQIA+ or Mexican/x students and their relationship to the education system (Aragon et al., 2014; Elze, 2003; Kosciw et al., 2013; Toomey et al., 2012). This may seem like a wide array of factors, but it is not when one looks at how Mexican/x and LGBTQIA+ students are viewed within the educational system. The above literature discusses how all these factors intersect to work against Mexican/x and LGBTQIA+ populations in the United

States schooling system. The above literature focuses on the multitude of factors related to victimization, many of which have a direct a relationship with the attitudes and/or ways minorities are viewed and treated across society.

### **Attitudes Toward Minorities**

Examining the societal and local attitudes toward minorities is crucial to creating a broader in-depth understanding of what LGBTQIA+ and Mexican/x students are currently facing within the educational system. At the societal and cultural level, the ATG (Attitudes Toward Gay Men) and ATL (Attitudes Toward Lesbians) scales provide data that indicates there is mixed acceptance for LG's (lesbian and gay) within the Mexican community (Herek & Gonzalez-Rivera, 2006). We use the term minority here as this is the term used by the literature, but this term is not encompassing as "minority communities" are often the majority, especially in New Mexico. This mixed acceptance indicates that the general population is still very much divided on the acceptance of sexual orientation. The ATG/L (Attitudes Toward Gay Men and Lesbians) were coupled with ethnic identity markers, such as Mexican and Chicano/a to gain a better understanding of how the participants ethnically identified. The study was consistent with previous findings related to the correlation seen with the Mexican/x population that deals with education, the number of children, religious service attendance, denomination membership, political views, contact with people who identify as either gay or lesbian, and their view of traditional gender attitudes (Herek & Gonzalez-Rivera, 2006). These findings point to the notion that views on sexuality within the Mexican-American community are a result of

various factors. The most robust of these measures were in cultural differences, especially those differences of individuals who identified as Mexican versus Chicano/a. Another key point is that “personal contact with gay people and religious attendance were significant predictors of attitudes among respondents whose language preference was English or both English and Spanish” (Herek & Gonzalez-Rivera, 2006, p. 132). So, when members of the Mexican/x community are exposed to individuals who identify as either gay or lesbian, they can view their existence in the factors noted above as opposed to simply through religious ideologies. Also, this reveals the complexity when working with the Mexican/x population as there are many entities of cultural wealth within the community that is often overlooked by academia, in the above example, we see *linguistic capital* (Yosso, 2005). This is important to note as these are two critical factors in how Mexican-American individuals view the gay and lesbian community. Examining a perspective of sexual minority youth, there is a variation that is seen among the adult and school-age populations.

Moving further into the personal attitudes of how people view sexual minorities. Another perspective to note is the ways gender and masculinity play a key role in the development and how LGBTQIA+ are perceived by their peers and society. Davidson (2009) utilized the narratives of three young men of color and dictates how their experiences of breaking the traditional gender norms set by a heteronormative society. JJ identifies as an openly gay Mexican American, Jackson identifies as a multiracial and bisexual student, and Bryce identifies as Hispanic and heterosexual (Davidson, 2009). All three men are university

students and live at varying intersections. The study found that three overarching themes emerged from the student's narratives: One, each participant was redefining manhood and embracing femininity. Two, each student crafted their version of spirituality. And three, the practice of renaming masculinity was done via a relational grounding (Davidson, 2009). All three boys felt as though they did not fit the traditional standards of what many would consider a masculine identity and that they were on "tight leashes" defined by society; for some their experiences can be viewed as feminine, even though they are not women (Davidson, 2009). So, this notion helps to show that when dealing with students at varying intersections, many factors play into how they view themselves which is different from how society views them. "While strict gender boundaries are often used to implement and reproduce social orders, these boys discover, strategies, create, expand and share spaces of safe expression for their synthesized, hybrid masculinity" (Davidson, 2009, p. 625). Through the creation of these unique spaces that these three young men have learned to thrive. They have created a "safe zone" within their intersection and it is at this safe place that they can be themselves without the threat of gender norms and society. This study is vital in establishing the societal norms and hierarchy related to masculinity. This is valuable to note as the LGBTQIA+ community challenges these norms and is othered by the larger society.

Aside from societal attitudes toward sexual and racial minorities, one must also consider what an educator views as they work with students day in and day out. Connell (2016) utilizes an intersectionality framework in conjunction with



queer of color critique to explore teacher's attitudes dealing with the intersection of race, gender, and sexuality. The ethnic makeup of the participants was 70% White, 30% people of color, nine of which identified as Latino, three as Black, two as Asian, and one as biracial. Only one of the teachers of color or group was female (Connell, 2016). The key finding was that there was saturation among the interviews of "racialized homophobia," which is formed through an in-depth analysis of race, gender, and sexuality inequities and their connection via homophobia (Connell, 2016). The study segregated the teachers into a White teacher and teachers of color groups as a way of being able to compare the experiences. Through this Connell (2016) noted that teachers of color articulated more experiences of racialized homophobia. A unique narrative in the study came from David, who identifies as a gay Hispanic man. David stated that he did not come out to students because of "Hispanic culture" and its ties with machismo. David's decision is based upon the relationship between machismo and its ties to homophobia. Teachers of color generally viewed racialized homophobia through a different relationship than White teachers because of their membership within communities of color. Whereas White teacher's racial superiority was reinforced as they viewed these experiences as a "moral high ground over the communities of color" (Connell, 2016, p. 614). There is a form of racialized homophobia among both communities of teachers, but its function is different depending on race and sexuality. This racialized homophobia is then transmitted from teacher to student and continues to create a cycle of

oppression. In addition to educators, the student's perspective is also critical to note.

Peers can either make or break one's schooling experience, and thus their attitudes toward sexual and racial minorities are paramount to consider when looking at students living at an intersection. Gastic's (2012) focus was to look at the implication of whether having a gay or lesbian friend would alter students' attitudes toward or about those identified as sexual minorities. The data came from the larger PELS (Philadelphia Educational Longitudinal Study) and the project was aimed at gaining a better understanding of students within the school system. Roughly 13.6% of the participants reported having a gay or lesbian friend; females are much more likely (17.4%) to have a friend who is gay or lesbian, compared to males at 9.7%. (Gastic, 2012, p. 48). There were also differences in race on whether a male would have a friend who was either gay or lesbian. The makeup of the school district was roughly 70% African American, 22% White, and 7% Latino. For example, "Specifically, White males are significantly more likely than Black males to have a gay or lesbian friend (16.5% versus 7.5%). There are no comparable differences by race for female students" (Gastic, 2012, p. 49). These racial categories were also maintained in the sample to create a more accurate portrayal of what would be seen within the district. There were moderate levels of support for the gay and lesbian community with the most support coming from those within the LGBTQIA+ community. More than half (55.8%) of students said they were comfortable around gay and lesbian students (Gastic, 2012). This is very telling of how marginalized populations are

viewed by peers and how there is variation in perceptions based upon gender, race, and sexual orientation.

About the attitudes toward minorities, the above literature states that there is still a level of fear and reluctance for members of marginalized populations to take pride in their marginalized identity. This is especially relevant for maturing adolescents but is seen in people of all ages. These attitudes toward sexual minorities are one of the driving factors of the school climate and how Mexican/x and LGBTQIA+ students view their educational experience (Davidson, 2009; Gastic, 2012; Connell, 2016). Also, it begs the question that how one can thrive when they are in an environment where their marginalized identity is viewed as undesirable? These attitudes toward minorities are seen in all aspects of the education system including peers, educators, and society. The societal and cultural views on sexuality become even more complicated when dealing with members of the Mexican/x populations as many are rooted heavily by religion and homosexuality is considered a deviant behavior (Herek & Gonzalez-Rivera, 2006). Thus, this foretells how students living at the intersection of being LGBTQIA+ and Mexican/x, are viewed as even more undesirable by many because of their double-marginalization (Tam, 2010) status. This double status, in turn, affects their perceptions of their school climate.

### **School Climate**

The school climate is an explanatory component of a youth's educational experience. As indicated above the school climate is a contributing factor to many items, including, the amount of bullying, suicide ideation, and victimization.

The National School Climate Survey is conducted via GLSEN a nonprofit organization that focuses on LGBTQIA+ students within the K-12 educational system. The survey is comprised of LGBTQIA+ students from around the United States with varying degrees of ethnic diversity. The study found that students of color are less likely to feel safe at school because of their sexual orientation (Kosciw et al., 2020). This solidifies the notion that students who live at the intersection of sexual orientation and race are more prone to a negative schooling experience. The majority of Latinx LGBTQ students (57.4%) also experienced anti-LGBTQ discriminatory school policies and practices. Latinx students were more likely than Black and AAPI students to experience this type of discrimination (Kosciw et al., 2020, p. 111). These values are greater than those of students who were White. This smaller population within the LGBTQIA+ student population is even more marginalized than the population. So, this fact helps to reinstall the importance of intersectionality and its importance within this research project. “Approximately two-fifths of Latinx LGBTQ students in our study (41.6%) experienced harassment or assault at school based on both their sexual orientation and race/ethnicity” (Zongrone et al., 2020, p.17,). Aside from students being at the intersection of sexual orientation and race, it is important to note the region in which students are living in. Specifically, the Southwest region is not included within the study, which is problematic for many reasons but based on the regions listed, New Mexico would in the West, which has a variety of hostile elements pertaining to school climate in this region. The New Mexico State Snapshot (GLSEN, 2021) echoes all the national trends pertaining to LGBTQ

youth as well as the trends that are defined in the larger West region from the 2019 National School Climate Survey. The GLSEN National School Climate Survey is a good benchmark for students who identify as LGBTQ but does little to account for students at the intersection of sexual orientation and being Mexican/x, thus these findings must be viewed. The school climate is made up of many factors that deal with a student's daily experience.

Like intersectionality, the various elements that make up the school climate are numerous, one of which is homophobia. Birkett, Espelage, and Koenig's (2009) aim of this study were to look at how the school environment, bullying, and homophobia contribute to negative outcomes among students who identify as lesbian, gay, and bisexual. Males were more likely to identify as a member of the lesbian, gay, and bisexual population at 13.8% compared to 9.5% of females. This trend is the same for adolescents who were questioning their sexuality with males at 5.8% and females at 4.5% (Birkett et al., 2009, p. 994). This study utilized a population of middle school students and concluded that the middle school climate is critical in informing ideas concerning gender and sexuality. The amount of homophobic teasing that occurs within the study shows that students who were questioning their sexuality were most likely to experience this form of bullying, followed by lesbian, gay, and bisexual, and then heterosexual students. The study supported previous literature that connected the school environment with being critical to a student's success, especially those students who identify as lesbian, gay, and bisexual or students who are questioning their sexuality. Thus, the study emphasizes the need to create a

positive school environment for all students and not just those who identify as lesbian, gay, and bisexual. This research is also worthy of attention because it discussed that students who were questioning their sexuality were more likely to partake in risky behaviors (i.e. alcohol and drugs) (Birkett et al., 2009). The study reported that “15.1% of a sample of nearly 7,000 students identified as either questioning their sexual orientation or lesbian, gay, and bisexual” (Birkett et al, 2009, p. 998). This is a substantial population and it shows that the education system needs to take this into account because this is a large population of students that are facing negative outcomes. The study also notes that there is little to no research on questioning students but that is an area that should be expanded because of their experiences regarding bullying and victimization. This leads the way to strong attitudes being formed that correspond to the school climate.

Regarding the school climate, there is a sense of negative and positive attitudes that it creates for the students within the school itself. Higa et al. (2014) focused on the positive and negative aspects in terms of the overall well-being of youth who identify as LGBTQIA+. The methodology was qualitative via a combination of focus groups and semi-structured interviews. The participants were LGBTQIA+ youth and allies. The allies made a small part of the overall study sample and were included not to exclude any participant. Through this analysis, the study found that “LGBTQIA+ youth tend to experience negative factors such as rejection and harassment in more heteronormative social environments (e.g., family, school, general community, religion) but that this is

less the case in environments that tend to be more LGTBQ-supportive (e.g., peer groups, and LGBTQIA+ community)” (Higa et al., 2014, p. 679). This is pivotal because previous literature states that school climate is one of the main indicators that either help LGBTQIA+ students flourish or fail (Kosciw et al., 2020). Another important finding to note is that students found their identity to be positive and flexible (Higa et al., 2014). This sense of a strong personal identity is both positive and negative. It is positive in that students are gaining a good sense of themselves and becoming authentic to their identity, it could be negative as it could isolate individuals from their heterosexual peers because they will be viewed as other or different from the majority sexuality (Higa et al., 2014). Overall, the study found that the number of negative factors was greater than the positive factors. At the root of these negative factors was the school experience (Higa et al., 2014). School attendance is mandatory for youth and the lack of a positive school environment is detrimental for students within this group because they cannot focus on getting an education, and they are more likely to participate in risky behaviors, which also impacts school performance. Another key negative factor that is important to note is that religion and religious organizations foster negativity for LGBTQIA+ youth. There is a wide variety in acceptance depending upon the religious group but overall, the study found to be these organizations viewed as a negative factor in LGBTQIA+ youth’s lives (Higa et al., 2014). While school climate is a complex entity it is an institution where many LGTBQIA students experience and therefore should be a focus of policymakers.

Aside from public policy as an area that can positively impact the experience of LGBTQIA+ and Mexican/x students, educators need to consider the role of pedagogy and curriculum in creating a high quality school climate. The pedagogy is a salient component to the school climate as well as the school experience for all students, but especially those students who identify as LGBTQIA+ and Mexican/x. Brockenbrough (2016) deals with evaluating how culturally responsive pedagogy has been used by a community center to help queer youth of color within an urban setting with culturally competent pedagogy. The data for this study comes from a larger study that looked at HIV/AIDS prevention within community centers. The Midtown AIDS Center was the area of data collection and their pedagogy is derived from their mission statement, “to improve health and wellness in communities of color through intervention and service with an emphasis on LGBT programming” (Brockenbrough, 2016, p.175). With this mission in mind, there is a strong emphasis on their pedagogy to address issues of race and racism. This focal point came out of the need to help queer youth of color, as many of the other organizations focused on civil rights advocacy and did not focus on the intersection of race and sexual orientation. Due to the nature of this study and where the data came from, the center focused on sex education as queer youth of color have greater rates of contracting various sexually transmitted diseases, especially HIV/AIDS. No matter the subject being taught the article emphasized, “culturally responsive pedagogy is grounded in a respect for students’ cultures that counters deficit perspectives on minority students, and it enhances their engagement by drawing upon their ways



of knowing and being in meaningful ways” (Brockenbrough, 2016, p. 182-3). This is relevant to note because this could be a contributing factor to creating a more welcoming high school environment for LGBTQIA+ students. This is used in combination with the creation of a “house ball culture,” (Brockenbrough, 2016, p.183) which allows for an even more open environment to persist allowing youth to feel empowered by their racial and sexual identity. Pedagogy is not the only measure that plays an essential role in the formation and maintaining of a school environment.

### **Intersectional Mental Health**

Mental health and the holistic wellbeing of students are often neglected, but when a student lives at the intersection of marginalized groups that come from trauma both historical and local, it plays a critical role in how they navigate their work environment. According to the 2019 National School Climate Survey, 92.7 % of LGBTQ youth do not plan on finishing high school because of mental health concerns (Kosciw, 2020, p. 47). This historical trauma is noted with the long-term effects among lesbian, gay, and bisexual adults with an emphasis on discrimination, social connectedness, socio-economic status, and perceived stress. Fredriksen-Goldsen et al. (2017) found that Mexican/x (Hispanic) individuals had a greater amount of mental health disparities among the Mexican/x community compared to the White populations. The findings, “demonstrate that lower SES, sexual identity–related lifetime discrimination, and lack of social connectedness are associated with poorer MHQOL [mental health and quality of life], through perceived stress, among Hispanic LGB midlife and

older adults compared to their non-Hispanic White counterparts” (2017, p. 1006-7). This stress comes from higher long-term discrimination, the importance of cultural connect, and socio-economic status. BIPOC experiences often experience these in opposite to their White counterparts (i.e. lower SES, more discrimination, and being more culturally conscious). These factors contribute to the racial factor being a key indicator of stress level. This study notes the importance of intersectionality as race was crucial in stress levels and not just being a sexual minority. If an all-White LGB sample was used then this finding of the Mexican/x population would be lost. Sexual and racial minority intersectionality is critical as each factor of one’s identity plays a critical role in their perceived experience and, as this study notes, in their mental health.

One of the keys to understanding intersectional mental health is through how mental health is related to stress and other externalizing factors. Lineback et al. (2015) focus on the stress and level of demands that differ for lesbian and gay teachers regarding their level of openness or “outness” within the school and different entities in the school. These entities include students and colleagues. Two groups that teachers interact with daily. Overall, the study found that lesbian and gay teachers had higher levels of stress because they were put into different situations that are more demanding than the typical teacher workplace expectations. This included being a voice for the LGBTQIA+ community (correcting a student when homophobic language was used), negative interactions with parents/community members, overt discrimination, heteronormativity, bullying, censoring, etc. (Lineback et al., 2015, p.599). These

are some of the struggles that compound stress that is outside of the normal daily stressors for teachers. This harks the question of how those with multiple marginalized identities navigate systems that work against them. The above literature focuses on the single social location of sexuality, thus if we imagine the true complex intersections that teachers live at, we will note that this work needs to be expanded to include other social locations as those teachers with multiple marginalized identities most likely face greater levels of stress overall. This study focused on teachers, but many of the same issues arise with LGBTQIA+ students as they are often forced to be the teacher when instances of queer topics come up. This tokenism occurs throughout the education system and occurs for all marginalized groups, thus those living at multiple margins and social locations force them into the teacher and/or tokenism role more frequently. This lack of research is also detrimental to the health of the individuals because the more marginalized identities one has, the more likely they will have greater stress because of the amount and severity of stressors. So, for the U.S.A. and especially New Mexico to have a good education system, we must ensure that we have both students and teachers who can focus on the educational process and are not focused solely on managing their stress.

Along with understanding mental health at the intersection, it is critical to note how mental health affects intersectional individuals. One of the key findings is the increased rate of suicide attempts by Mexican/x and Black lesbian, gay, and bisexual men and women. O'Donnell, Meyer, & Schwartz (2011) found that the Mexican/x population is at the highest rates of suicide attempts in their

lifetime, diagnosed with major depressive disorder, and substance abuse. This is noted throughout the entire lifetime with numbers being greater than the Black or White participants for ages younger than 24 and over 24. The data was collected via an online survey system and comes from a larger health study, the World Mental Health Survey version of the World Health Organization's Composite International Diagnostic Interview (version 19). Through this method, a random sample of New York residents was selected from 32 different zip codes. This study will aid in this project because it helps to establish the outside factors that LGB Mexican/x students may be dealing with that are different from their White Counterparts. It is also important to note that adolescence can be a time of great distress for LGBTQIA+ and/or Mexican/x students because that is when they are growing into who they are. This is also most of their K-12 experience; thus, it addresses the question of how LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x students manage to work within an environment and system that may have caused pain. Being in the space itself and being reminded of their K-12 experience could be a trigger of trauma, harking back into the historical trauma of education.

Cochran et al. (2007) found higher suicide attempts and thoughts about those at the intersection including both gay men and lesbian women, They explored mental health at the intersection of being Lesbian, gay, and bisexual and Latinx or Asian American and concluded, "lesbian and bisexually classified women were more likely than heterosexually classified women to evidence depressive disorder...and to have positive recent histories of drug use disorders. In contrast, gay/bisexual classified men were less likely than heterosexually

classified men to meet criteria for recent substance use dependency or abuse” (p. 790). This fact is important to the larger body of sexual and race intersectional literature because it dispels the myth of the queer community and communities of color run rampant with drug use. Dispelling this myth is essential as other literature examines mental health but does not consider the substance abuse elements, thus generalization is often drawn based on stereotypes. The study also is important because it notes that there is a lack of LGBTQIA+ BIPOC participation in larger studies, especially health studies where a lot of the information that is seen in intersectional literature comes from. So, it illuminates the gap and alludes to the skewed assessments that have been made throughout literature about sexual orientation, race, mental health, and substance abuse.

### **Literature at the Intersection**

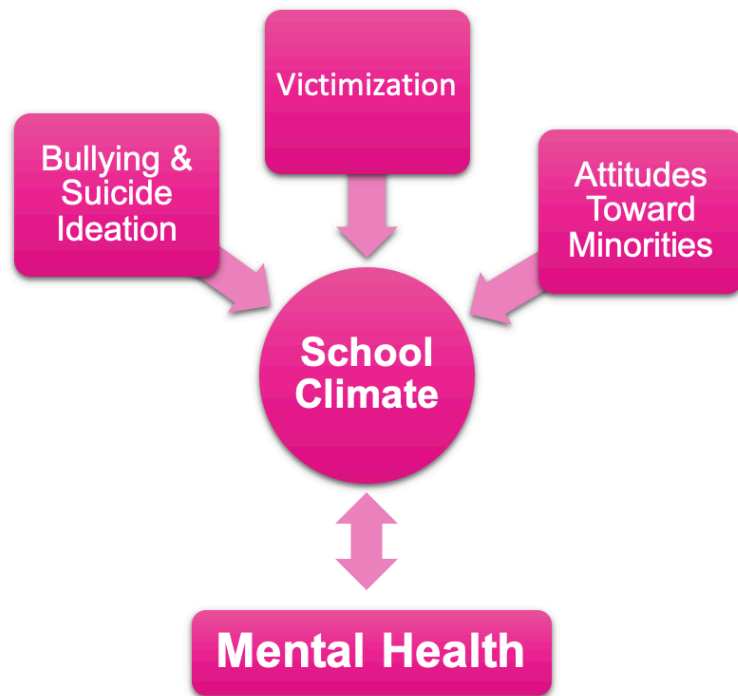
Throughout this review of the literature, many themes emerged that are interwoven and play a central role in the school climate. The school climate is one of the most important indicators of a student’s success and the school climate for LGBTQIA+ and Mexican/x students has been viewed as negative in a variety of facets. This includes, but is not limited to high rates of bullying, suicide ideation, victimization, attitudes toward minorities, pedagogy, school programs, as well as heteronormativity, and homophobia (Birkett et al, 2009; Brockenbrough, 2016; Higa et al., 2014; Kosciw et al., 2020; Sadowski, 2017). All these factors intersect and relay in terms of the school climate. So, there is not just one key issue for LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x students, there are many factors at

work when assessing their marginalized identity. The figure below (Figure 3) highlights the connection between these factors (bullying and suicide ideation, victimization, and attitudes toward minorities) but showing their connection to school climate. This relationship is shown via the single-sided arrows pointing into school climate as all the entities overlap to create a school climate that is both perceived and unperceived. This coupled with the two-sided arrow between school climate and mental health shows the two-way relationship between these two entities. It is critical to note that there are some two-way connections between bullying and suicide ideation, victimization, and attitudes toward minorities, but there are factors in between that accept the relationship and allow for changes within the larger school climate, for example, policies, procedures, etc. The current literature points out substantive issues but does not offer a solution as to why these occur. Also, most of the current literature comes from secondary data analysis that does not directly ask students about these issues. This research project seeks to address these issues and provide a framework for documenting the stories and lived experiences of LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x students in order to create affect a more positive school climate and increase educational outcomes for LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x students.

The relationship between bullying/suicide ideation, victimization, and attitudes toward minorities are all factors that contribute to the school climate. The school climate, in turn, is one of the factors that contributes to student perceptions of their mental health. The mental health and the school climate are

factors that contribute to academic success as they are highly influential for high school students.

The above discussion of literature frames the basics of the intersection of sexual orientation, Mexican/x populations, and the educational institution. As demonstrated, there is little to no research at strictly looking at LGBTQIA+



*Figure 3. Intersectional Literature.*

Mexican/x youth in the high school setting. This is a gap in the research that needs to be filled. Academics often ignore marginalized peoples and thus the double-marginalization (Tam, 2010) of LGBTQIA+ youth of color has become another important area of study that has been overlooked. The above literature must be expanded, and this gap filled because educational institutions need to adapt and create an environment where all students can thrive. This is not the

case currently. LGBTQIA+ and Mexican/x students are often forgotten in the grand scheme that is education. By researching the LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x education experience as it relates to mental health and school climate perceptions in the state of New Mexico, we, as an educational community can change the tide of the implications of what it means to be LGBTQIA+ and Mexican/x in an institution where being a marginalized person is usually ignored. This is a gap that needs to be filled because we have the responsibility to make education equitable for all and until we know where the issues lie, we cannot address them.

### **Summary of Literature**

This review of literature has highlighted the LGBTQIA+ and the Mexican/x student/youth experience. The overarching themes we have noted are 1) high rates of bullying and suicide ideation among LGBTQIA+ and Mexican/x youth in and out of schooling spaces, 2) high levels of victimization among LGBTQIA+ and Mexican/x youth due to their intersectional social locations as both sexual and racial minorities, 3) largely negative attitudes toward minorities specifically racial and sexual minorities within the K-12 system as well as the community at large, 4) perceived and lived school climate that is largely negative for LGBTQIA+ and Mexican/x youth overall, and 5) intersectional mental health and how being an LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x student/ youth affects mental health and mental wellbeing overall. These five themes portray the harsh reality for LGBTQIA+ and Mexican/x youth as a whole and highlight the critical nature of this work as well as work that examines marginalized youth populations overall.



## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The lived realities of LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x are complex; thus the methodological and study design is critical as we seek to honor the participants *testimonios* and not perpetuate cycles of oppression. Zayne's testimonio exemplifies why this is not only critical but essential:

I think that part of it, like, like LGBTQ identities have been like, *pathologized* a lot, like, in like, have, like, you know, you know, that, you know what I mean [laughs], but a lot of like, parts about like, LGBTQ community have been, like, treated like mental illnesses in the past. So I feel like that may have had an impact on how much people in the community like are willing to, like be able to talk about like mental illnesses and stuff. And then also like, with all the, like, experiences that come with being like LGBTQ, that creates like a lot of trauma that I feel like people are able to like, not necessarily bond over but it creates a sense of how we can talk about this because we're all experiencing it kind of thing (Zayne, 2020).

### Introduction

The following chapter dives into the methodological choices, the research design, and the ways in which these were manifested throughout the study. When working with marginalized communities, an equitable methodological approach is critical in order to honor the lived experiences of the participants and center their voices, rather than coopt them for the good of research and academia. Thus, working with the multiply marginalized LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x

youth population is necessary as this complex intersection needs to be analyzed respectfully and honestly instead of treating LGBTQIA+ and Mexican/x peoples as test subjects and not fellow human beings. To aid in creating a more collective and authentic study, a form of *testimonio* was utilized, i.e. a social sciences testimonio. The *testimonio* in the study was three-fold and each fold was critical for holistic understanding to be achieved, 1) demographic surveys, 2) one-on-one semi-structured interviews, and 3) a focus group interview. These three components allow for the lived experiences of each participant to be told authentically and in a way that centers their *testimonio* in the societal context of that moment. It is through this approach that the *testimonios* of six LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x youth and the research are explored to add depth and rewrite the skewed narrative that has been imposed on this community surrounding mental health and school climate. Due to the nature of this work hitting close to home as well as for more transparency and understanding, we start with my positionality as the researcher.

### **Researcher Positionality**

For true intersectional work to be understood, one must note the author's positionality and social locations as it influences their lens and their position within the specific work and the larger context. I am originally from Las Cruces, New Mexico where the majority of my family resides and has resided for many years. We are a family that the border crossed several times and where we ended up on the United States side of the U.S.-Mexico border. I am *mestiza* and define myself as a Mexicano mutt. My father is Mexican, and my mother is White.

This has led me to identify and be identified as a White Mexicano. A social location that grants me privilege as I am White passing, which I acknowledge and understand plays into how I am treated by others around me. In addition to my racial and ethnic social location, I am also a gay, queer cisgender male. This intersectional social location has been one of the primary stressors as I move through life. I am an effeminate man in looks, mannerisms, tone of voice, as well as other factors. This effeminately has shaped my understanding of the world as it puts me in a position where hegemonic masculinity and machismo have othered my being. Also, I am a heavy set, struggle with the invisible dis/abilities of anxiety and depression and come from a location where I experienced past trauma that involved physical and verbal bullying, sexual assault, and bias due to low socioeconomic status. These factors, as well as many other social locations, have heavily influenced my outlook and how I view the world, which is critical to note as it has shaped this research project.

### **Background**

Students and youth are the gateway to the future, but due to an inequitable educational experience, certain populations of students are falling behind the curve. One of the most vulnerable groups is students who live at the intersection of being Mexican/x and LGBTQIA+. These students are *double marginalized* (Tam, 2010) and thus the schooling system discounts their lives. This is compounded by the societal attitudes toward marginalized groups and how these societal ideas make their way into the schooling system. Students at the intersection of sexual orientation and race perform academically lower when

compared to their White and/or non-LGBTQIA+ peers. (Kosciw et al., 2020; Mueller et al., 2015; Robinson & Espelage, 2011; Sadowski, 2017; Toomey et al., 2012; White et al., 2018). This is an opportunity gap that needs to be remedied because all students deserve an equitable education and this community of students is not receiving the support they need to succeed.

The aim of this study is to work with students who identify as LGBTQIA+ and Mexican/x and to document their lived experiences in K-12 school. The participants told their stories to create *testimonios* that dive into their experiences, which can be used to reveal and illuminate what the day to day life is like for LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x students within a public school district in the state of New Mexico. The participants all self-identify as Mexican/x, LGBTQIA+, are between the ages of 18-24, and attended a school district in the state of New Mexico. Through the participants' stories, the study aims to explore the questions:

1. What are the lived realities of LGBTQIA+ Mexican/Mexican-American/Chicana/o (*Mexican/x*) young adults within the context of their K-16 schooling?
  - a. What role did schooling play in their mental health?
  - b. In what ways do their experiences with mental health shape their relationship to schooling?
2. How do LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x young adults live out their intersectional identities and what role do these play within their mental health?

3. What *Queer Intersectional Capital* do LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x young adults embody to survive and ultimately thrive in and out of the education system?

**Methodology: *Testimonios* as Narrative Research Design**

A social sciences *testimonio* qualitative methodology will be utilized for this research project. Using semi-structured interviews as well as demographic information, the research team tells the *testimonio* of each participant in a way that is true to who they are and how their experience is important. This is coupled with a focus group that allows the individual *testimonios* to be situated within the larger historical and societal context. The nature of this research project's methodology is best done with qualitative research that triangulates the data from various points because ethically it is hard for a researcher to tell someone's story without an in-depth understanding of the person and their experiences. Also, the focus of QueerCrit theory deals with the intersections of race, sexism, classism, and other forms of oppression (Gordan, 2005), thus qualitative research allows for a fuller understanding to be reached about each of the participant's experiences. This is coupled with the use of the theory in the flesh (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1981) to dive into the many complex intersections that occur with students that can only be explored through lived experiences. It is through the intersection of their lives and qualitative research that their stories can be told effectively and honestly.

*Testimonio* at its heart is an oral methodology and for it to be truly equitable, one needs to queer oral histories. We must examine oral history as a

method and acknowledge how there is no one way to oral hxstory, especially if it is a queer oral hxstory. Murphy, Pierce, and Ruiz, “What Makes Oral History Different” to delineate ways in which queer oral hxstories are unique. They state that queer oral hxstories are ever-changing, which is not unlike non-queer oral hxstories, but they note that they change at much more rapid rates because of the perceived safety that technology and social media platforms grant queer people a safe space. This could be true for all marginalized populations but with the permissive underground culture of the queer community, technology pushes changes even further. It is important to note that facets of modern queer oral hxstory align with Murphy, Pierce, and Ruiz’s idea, but it must acknowledge that the term and idea of queer are used in a much different context today than it was, thus, this accounts for some of the discrepancies with how the two align. This notion is essential as it aids in instilling the importance of using a three-prong *testimonio* approach to data collection with semi-structured interviews being supplemented with demographic information and general participant profile questions. Because queer oral hxstories are unique, they require this unique form of *testimonio* to capture the entire lived experience of the participant and their intersectional identities (Murphy et al., 2016). *Testimonio* as a methodology is complex, yet simple, just as our lived experiences. *Testimonio* grew out of oral tradition found in communities across the Americas but emerged in critical discourse through Latin American Studies (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012). Since its emergence as a discourse in academia, there is not a single definition, but that is where the power of *testimonio* as methodology comes from. In place of a

concrete definition, the methodology focuses on tenants that have exceptions throughout the work. An initial tenant is that *testimonio* is often used as a form of establishing a counternarrative for marginalized communities of people in and out of academia. A second tenant is that the methodology focuses on the lived experiences and stories of the participants' lives. Third, there is often a re-centering of the mainstream narrative where the participants' lived experiences are valued for their strengths and are not viewed from a deficit perspective. These are just some of the many tenants that make *testimonio* unique as it decenters traditional academic discourse. For this specific research project, we borrow from Lindsay Pérez Huber's (2009b) definition of *testimonio* but queer it. Our queered definition of *testimonio* is:

*a verbal journey of a witness who speaks to reveal the intersectional (i.e. race, sexuality, gender, class, etc.) injustices they have suffered as a means of healing, empowerment, and advocacy for a more humane present and future.*

This definition is influenced by QueerCrit and intersectionality as a model of empowerment and resilience for all participants involved. *Testimonio* is a methodology that works in opposition to traditional academia and society to highlight oppressions. Because of the nature of an emphasis on oppression, it must be used in a way that is empowering to the participants and works actively to dismantle the systems of oppression that currently reside in society and not in tandem. And a critical component is understanding that *testimonios* are more than simply narratives. Cruz (2012) states:

When stories you tell do not belong to you, *testimonio* begins to move a reader away from an epistemology of a first world narrative to another world narrative, where the 'I' of the speaker is not configured as a 'hero.' Instead, the speaker is configured as one of a community of people who have suffered great trauma. The 'I' of autobiography, of nation-building narratives, is not the intent of the testimonialist. The purpose of testifying is to talk back to these larger and often subsuming histories, to carefully craft truth-telling that is polyphonous in its voice and political in its intent (p. 461).

This departure from the "I" language is essential to creating true change because it highlights the importance of every person's contribution to the community. So, one cannot state that each *testimonio* is the experience of all a specific population, it heightens the importance that this is one experience of many that create the web of trauma and oppression. In the context of this study that examines LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x students mental health and school climate perceptions, we have to acknowledge that their experiences are unique, but they are all critical to the full narrative of not only those at this intersection, but also Mexican/x students/youth, LGBTQIA+ students/ youth, and students/youth in general. Therefore, *testimonio* was selected as the focal methodology. It allows for the participants' many social locations to be understood more fully by centering their experiences and adding to the collective *testimonio* of the LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x experience in and out of the school setting.



## **Research Design**

Due to the nature of the type of this study and its complexity in dealing with the human experience, qualitative methods were selected to gain a better understanding of the lived experiences of LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x students (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019a). This study will utilize one-on-one interviews, demographic surveys, and a focus group to create the testimonio. The testimonio design is drawn from narrative and social justice-oriented research designs. The *testimonio* is unique in that it focuses on the participants' stories or narratives but looks at these studies through a lens of themes and connections. So, whereas traditional narrative designs, "describe the lives of individuals, collect and tell stories about people's lives and write narratives of individual experiences" (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019b, p.513), this study focuses on the social justice participant-centered elements of resilience as the key component of the design. *Testimonio* by nature more participant-focused, but the variation for this study is focused on empowering the participant and illuminating their resilience as a form of survival through the *Queer Intersectional Wealth*. It is an untraditional research design, but it is a design that holds a lot of value as everyone's lived experiences are powerful.

## **Ethics Statement**

This is a research project based on lived experiences and because it is based on lived experiences, we as researchers have the task of making sure that we present the stories of our participants in a way that is true to their word. By this, it means that when conducting this research careful consideration is taken

so that the way the participants lived experiences are portrayed is not skewed by a certain agenda. This also deals with looking at and analyzing the data to ensure that patterns are not imposed on the data and that themes emerge from the data itself. All researchers have completed the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) through the University of New Mexico. The study was submitted to the University of New Mexico Office of Internal Review Board (UNM OIRB) (Appendix A) and the GLSEN Research Ethics Review Committee (GLSEN RERC) (Appendix B) and was approved by both review boards before the study commencing.

## **Methods and Procedures**

### **Participants.**

The participants in this study are young adults ages 18-24 who attended high school in the state of New Mexico. The inclusion/exclusion criteria are the participants must self-identify as LGBTQIA+, self-identify as Mexican/x (or a related identity marker, i.e. Mexican, Nuevo Mexicano/a/x, Mexican American, Hispanic, etc.), be between the ages of 18-24 (these ages are selected as they are the upper limit of youth as defined by the discipline of health), and have attended high school (at least 3 out of four years) in New Mexico. The population used is not defined as a vulnerable population according to CITI and/or UNM OIRB. But, because of the harsh realities, violence, and/or trauma LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x people may have faced, some precautions have been taken are, 1) a list of community resources will be provided to each participant should they need to consult them, 2) the interviews took place via the Zoom video conferencing

platform protected via a passcode and locked when all participants were present, and 3) double-blind pseudonyms are used to protect the identity of each participant. The sample size (n) for this study is six participants for the one-on-one interview and six participants for the focus group interview. The Student Investigator (Damon R. Carbajal) acted as participant researcher. For the purposes of this study the notion of participant researcher is being utilized to note my testimonio and lived experiences influenced the study overall, including, but not limited to study design, data analysis, and presentation of findings/ participants testimonios as well as my voice during the focus group interview. This is an acceptable sample size for the qualitative *testimonio* research design as the design does not assume that the participants represent an entire population of people. The following participant profiles are listed in the order that the one-on-one interviews were completed.

**Table 1. Participant Profiles**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Pronouns</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Sexuality</b>	<b>Desired Career</b>
<b>Rosa</b>	She/they	Non-binary; intersex	Bisexual	Psychologist
<b>Zayne</b>	She/they	Non-binary	Queer	Dancer
<b>Rafa</b>	He/him	Cisgender male	Gay	Nurse
<b>Daniel</b>	She/he/they	Gender fluid	Bisexual; pansexual	Photographer
<b>Antonio</b>	He/Him	Cisgender male	Gay	Brewer
<b>Maria</b>	She/her	Cisgender female	Lesbian	Optometrist

***Rosa (she/they)***

Rosa is a 24-year-old non-binary and intersex Hispanic/ Mexicana native New Mexican. She identifies as bisexual. She has just finished her undergraduate work at a large Southwestern University where she double-majored with a major focus on psychology and sign language interpreting. She comes from a low socio-economic background, being houseless for periods of her life, as well as not being able to find a job following graduation due to the COVID-19 pandemic. She was very involved in her undergraduate career and was a member of many organizations including, student government, Greek life, and ROTC. The career path she follows is one in psychology and aiding in helping people who have struggled and show them that they matter.

***Zayne (she/they)***

Zayne is a 21-year-old non-binary Latina/o/x, Mexicana/o/x, and Hispanic New Mexican. They identify as queer. Zayne is currently a student at a large Southwestern University studying dance and Gender and Sexuality Studies. They attended a primarily Latinx smaller high school in an urban portion of New Mexico. They come from a family of three siblings and are big into dance and gaming. They have a deep passion for dance and the arts as well as the act of creation as self and community.

***Rafa (he/him)***

Rafa is a 21-year-old cisgender, Latinx, Native American, and Philipiano male. He identified as gay and is currently a student at a community college in an

urban hub in New Mexico where he is studying nursing. He comes from a family of eight plus pets, he is the oldest of four siblings; one younger brother is started college in 2020 and two siblings are in elementary school. He has varied interests and enjoys being inside and outside and can generally go with the flow. He loves listening to music, playing video games with his siblings, and cooking.

***Daniel (she/he/they)***

Daniel is a 24-year-old gender-fluid individual who identifies as bisexual and pansexual. They are currently a student at a large Southwestern university where they double majoring in photography and painting sculpture. Daniel is very friend-oriented and loves animals, especially their ferret. They have lived in a variety of contexts including rural and urban New Mexico spaces. Photography and art is a huge pastime and is one of the many ways that Daniel is rewriting narratives that have been lost or skewed by society.

***Antonio (he/him)***

Antonio is a 23-year-old cisgender Latina/o/x and Hispanic male. He identifies as gay. He is currently attending a Southwestern community college studying brewing and beverage management. He is very family-oriented and comes from a family of various aged siblings and likes to spend time with them. In addition, he is very close to his boyfriend and enjoys spending his spare time with him. He has a deep love of beer and hopes to become a brewer at a local brewery in the near future.

***Maria (she/her)***

Maria is a 23-year-old cisgender Hispanic Nueva Mexicana. She identifies as Lesbian and currently resides in Chicago where she is in her second year as an optometry student. She graduated with her B.S. from a large Southwestern university in May of 2019. She likes to spend her spare time with her friends and family, likes to bake and watch Netflix. She has a fraternal twin brother and plans on entering the practice and become an optometrist when she finishes her schooling.

**Risks**

Risks that are associated with participating in the study were psychological harm. Participants were asked to discuss their high school experience of being LGBTQIA+ and Mexican/x as well as their past and present mental health. Because these are two vulnerable populations of individuals, the participants may have faced events within their high school experience that trigger emotional distress. The risks associated with participating in the study were the participant may have felt emotional or upset when answering some of the questions, the participant may have been uncomfortable with some of the questions and topics asked, and with all research, there is a chance that confidentiality of the information we collect about the participant could be breached. All of these risks were minimized by allowing participants to withdraw from the study at any time, allowing them to skip questions during the interview(s), and the collected data is locked and stored on a flash drive and/or a password-protected computer. The risk to benefit ratio is a balance in that the

participants may have faced temporary discomfort by the topics being discussed during the interview, but their stories have numerous positive implications on society and educational policy. The societal benefit outweighs the minor risks that the participants may have faced when partaking in the study. To help with any emotional distress that may have occurred a resource list was provided to each participant following each session.

### **Confidentiality**

To ensure as much confidentiality the day of the interview, all interviews (both the one-on-one interviews and the focus group) were conducted on a secure Zoom passcode-protected meeting that was locked when all participants were present. The interviews were recorded via Zoom and downloaded to a password-protected hard drive and only the Student Investigator had access to the original recordings of the data. The data was stored in a locked file cabinet. The digital data was stored on an encrypted hard drive and all hard copies were stored in sealed manila envelopes. Only, the Student Investigator had access to identifiable data. This is all coupled with the use of double-blinding pseudonyms as an added precaution for confidentiality.

### **Benefits**

There is no direct benefit to the participants that participate in the project. The benefits to society are that the information collected can help create a more equitable high school environment as well as provide insight into how mental health affects the school climate. This equity, in turn, allows for our youth that identify as LGBTQIA+ and Mexican/x to excel at greater rates than currently with

a healthier mental state. This research can also benefit society by helping to create changes in educational policy and practice.

## **Recruitment**

The above participants were recruited primarily through the community organization of GLSEN Albuquerque, a nonprofit organization in New Mexico that focuses on equity for LGBTQIA+ people in the K-12 setting. The recruitment occurred via the GLSEN Albuquerque email listservs in conjunction with their social media. In addition to this community partner, the recruitment materials were distributed through various UNM listservs, i.e. El Centro de la Raza, Chicana/o Studies, LGBTQIA+ Resource Center, College of Education, etc. The sample of six participants was recruited to participate in this manner. The Student Investigator was responsible for the recruiting of participants for the study as well as they coordinated the listserv/ social media posts with GLSEN Albuquerque and the UNM listservs. This recruitment period occurred over three months concurrently with interviews being conducted. Listserv announcements were sent out monthly. To aid in the efforts of sampling, network sampling (i.e. snowball sampling) methods were used to recruit participants (Robson, 2002, p. 265). When a potential participant initially reached out about the study via phone or email, eligibility was discussed with the Student Investigator and verified via a quick field screener (Appendix C). If a participant was deemed ineligible, they were told that they do not meet the criteria at this time and were thanked for their time. This will be done via the email/phone contact in the initial contact but could have occurred with the quick field screener or at the time of the interview.



## **Setting**

All data collection by interviews took place via the online video conferencing platform Zoom. The platform was selected as the safest option due to the COVID-19 pandemic as well as the security settings that the platform provided. All Zoom sessions were unique with passcodes protection and each Zoom meeting was locked when all parties were present. The Zoom meetings were named “DRC MA Thesis Interview” or “DRC MA Thesis Focus Group” to ensure that there was no identifying information of the content of the interview. All sessions were created using a University of New Mexico Zoom account with the Student Investigator as the owner. The Student Investigator also took part in training aimed at Zoom security and safety to ensure the digital space would be secured to the safest extent possible. Also, to ensure that the setting was secure, email addresses were verified with each participant to ensure there were the only one able to access the Zoom link.

## **Consent**

The informed consent process occurred once a participant was approved for the study via the quick field screener. The consent form (Appendix D) was sent to the participant 10-minutes prior to the interview session beginning using DocuSign. DocuSign is a secure online platform used to send and collect documents that require signatures. The participant had as much time as they needed to read it, comprehend it, and ask any questions. The consent process took place via Zoom with DocuSign the vehicle for the secure digital signature. The consent process was conducted by the Student Investigator/ interviewer.

There were two consent forms, one for the participants' record and a signed copy to be kept by the interviewer. DocuSign automatically sent the participant a copy and to ensure it was received, a blank copy was also emailed to the participant directly following the interview with the resource sheet for their records. Once all permissions are obtained, the interviews were conducted as noted in the interview schedule for the one-on-one interview session (Appendix E) and the focus group interview session (Appendix F). To ensure that the interview is not coercion, the participant had the option to stop the interview at any time and/or choose not to answer a question at any time without any fear of penalty. This was stressed during the consent, process, and throughout the interview procedures.

A similar procedure occurred during the focus group, where participants were sent a unique DocuSign consent form to be signed following a time to read, comprehend, and ask any questions. The consent for the focus groups occurred remotely and was sent ten minutes prior to the focus group interview, with instructions to contact the Student investigator with any personal questions before logging into the Zoom focus group. A second round of ensuring all knew what was outlined in the consent form by going over all the large principals and opening the floor for any questions when all participants were present on the Zoom call. No questions were asked at this point in the process, thus the focus group commenced as defined in the focus group schedule (Appendix F). The same mention that the participant will have the option to stop the focus group at any time and/or choose not to answer a question at any time without any fear of

penalty. This will be stressed during the consent, process, and throughout the focus group procedures.

## **Data Generation**

### ***Demographic Survey***

The first set of data collected was a 29 item survey that collected a variety of information ranging from basic demographics to mental health (Appendix G). The survey was divided into eight sections, 1) demographics, 2) race, 3) sexuality, 4) gender, 5) guardian/parent education level, 6) high school experience, 7) mental health, and 8) suicidality. The content for the survey was created through combining basic demographic information indicators in conjunction with adaptations from other surveys, i.e. Osman et al. (2001) for the suicidality indicator questions and Nancy López et al. (2017) for the street race, gender, and sexuality questions. Each section was selected as a means to one, provide the interviewer insight into past experiences as a way to ensure that the interviewer was protected and to be aware of topics that may be more sensitive, understand how the participant's *testimonio* fits in the larger societal and schooling context, and three to mental health understanding and perspectives. The survey was originally designed to be completed by the participant via pen and paper directly before the one-on-one interview session. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this process was adapted to be digital, where the survey was shared via screen sharing on Zoom by the interviewer and the participant answered the questions orally. This adaptation was made to best resemble the original intent while maintaining approved protocols. With this being

said, we must note that there may have been some changes in the ways the questions were answered, specifically the final question where the participants were asked to define mental health as the process of speaking versus writing a definition may end with different results as well as the sensitivity of the suicidality questions.

### ***One-on-one Interviews***

Following the demographic survey, the participants then take part in a one-on-one semi-structured interview that is ranged from thirty to seventy-five minutes. The interview session was a combination of recording and note-taking. The Student Investigator lead all six of the one-on-one semi-structured interview sessions. The interview asked questions relating to the participant's mental health, school life, and how this is influenced by their sexual and racial identity (Appendix H).

The data was collected via semi-structured interviews (Fylan, 2005). In the current qualitative testimonio, the interviews are the heart of the study as they make up the data for the study except for the demographic information that will be utilized to create a personal profile of the participants which will be used to effectively tell the participants story. The semi-structured interview questions' content is based on the lives of the participants concerning their mental health as LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x individuals and their connection to school settings. The interviews were one-on-one interviews conducted by the Student Investigator with each participant. This was done based on the scope of the project and will allow for the Student Investigator to gain a better understanding of each

participant as they will be responsible for the writing of any publications, posters, or conference presentations. This procedure is critical because with the *testimonio* design, the *testimonio* needs to be presented in a way that is as authentic as it when told to the researcher, and this is best done when the interview is done by the Student Investigator.

### ***Focus Group***

Following the consent procedures, the participants were given a general researcher introduction and orienting the participants. The focus group data were collected as a combination of recording and note-taking. The Student Investigator led the focus group. In addition to the questions that were asked orally, the participants were asked to bring an item that represents their journey with mental health and shared it during the interview. This was in conjunction with questions related to their mental health, school life, and how this is influenced by their sexual and racial identity (Appendix I).

The focus groups were facilitated by the Student Investigator. The student investigator had had previous contact with the participants through the one-on-one interview, thus giving them a sense of credibility with the participants making the focus group more comfortable for the participants. The focus group information was made available to the participants following the transcription and deidentification of the materials and could be requested at any time. With *testimonio* as the focal methodological approach, the data is the life experiences of each participant, thus they will co-owners of the data and can ask for their data as well as the deidentified focus group data at any point during or after the

research project. Also, the Student Investigator asked participants if they can do a follow-up following both the one-on-one interview and the focus group for any questions or items that need clarification. The Student Investigator followed-up with each willing participant to confirm the main themes ensuring accurate data and interpretation.

The questions that were created for both the one-on-one interviews and the focus groups are all original questions based on the research questions that have been informed by the current literature. The qualitative nature does not require a validated instrument as the project is focusing on the stories of participants and how they view their mental health and their perceptions of how it affected or affects their sense of school climate.

## **Data Analysis**

### ***Coding and Speech Cues***

For mean making to occur that extends beyond the singular *testimonios*, systematic coding was completed of all transcript data and comparative analysis was conducted via the demographic survey data. For the purposes of this study we define the coding process as:

a qualitative research process in which the researcher makes sense of text data, divides it into text or image segments, labels the segments, examines codes for overlap and redundancy, and collapses these codes into themes” (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019a, p. 243).

The data for this study was all text based and through the above systematic approach, we can note critical overlapping points of each *testimonio* that aid in

painting the true lived realities of LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x youth. The coding of the data was all hand coded using pen, paper, and color coding. The hands on nature of pen and paper coding allowed for the me as the Student Investigator to connect with and annotate the data in ways that would not be possible using digital means. In addition to the coding of the physical data, notes were taken with the ways in which specifics segments of speech were stated. For example, if there was a long pause, quick speech, nonverbal cues (hand movements, etc.), as well as other cues such as crying. These are key indicators as they flush out the words being stated and show the truth in the reality of what is being stated in the statement. The ways in which the speech was stated is only whole with these additional notes as one may be making an assertion may contradict the ways in which the speech was uttered, thus there inclusion is essential. For example, a participant stated that something was okay in their life followed by a long pause and then starts crying. Not making these noted ultimately skews the *testimonio* in ways that are not true to the lived realities. Thus, it's critical that the text and speech cues were noted in ways that aided in true data analysis to occur.

### ***Demographic Survey and Data Triangulation***

The demographic survey data was handled in a similar way as the textual coding. The data was put into a singular spreadsheet where all participant answers were illuminated and allowed for comparative analysis. The data from the demographic survey aided in situating the codes as the questions aided in situating the testimonios in the both the lived reality of the participants personal lives as well as society context overall. For example, if we note that the

participant stated on the survey that they have attempted suicide in their life multiple times, this influences understanding of trauma that has happened in a way that would not be possible without the demographic survey questions that are more cut and drier than the *testimonios*. One part of data (i.e. *testimonio*, survey) should not be viewed as more important; they are simply different. The differences in each allow for triangulation of the data that would not be possible if one was used exclusively. If one was used exclusively the study would not be as fruitful because without a more holistic understating, truth cannot be told in an authentic way. Thus, the data collection and all its components were essential for this study and true meaning to occur about the lived realities are for LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x youth.

### ***Condensing Coding and Themes Emerging***

The above coding process occurred several times, each time breaking down and condensing codes to be more specific. This was a lengthy process, but an essential process as the first round of coding led way to roughly fifty separate codes that were compassed across the one-on-one interview and the focus group interview. The codes were condensed by 1) noting similar codes and combining into one code, 2) scrutinizing current code and ensuring how is the correct code for the statement, and 3) eliminating codes that were exclusive to one participants *testimonio* or experience. The above process occurred through several passthroughs and eight codes: 1) people networks, 2) trauma, 3) curriculum, 4) capital/ wealth, 5) suicidality, 6) resources, 7) gendered, and 8) resolana/spaces. From these eight codes, the themes noted in chapter four



emerged and illuminated the truth of the *testimonios*. The systematic approach did not boil down the *testimonios* as water down their truth, the approach allowed for meaning to occur that highlights shared experiences and community themes of what it means to be an LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x youth.

### **Conclusion**

The above chapter has outlined the methodology used for this study, its purpose, and why it was selected as the vehicle to conduct this work.

*Testimonios* and other narrative research designs are the bread and butter of creating new insight and understandings but are often ignored as qualitative research is often viewed as research with a little “r.” I argue by the *testimonio* selection and the fruitful *testimonios* collected that a more traditional research design would not have allowed for the lived experiences of the participants to shine through in a way that is not only true to their lives but equitable in any regard. As a member of the LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x community, I am a firm believer that research should not only be true to lived experience, but center voices in an equitable manner. Thus, *testimonio* design and the careful study design choices were selected as a means of protecting each participant, providing a space for lost voices to be recentered, and allow those whom identify as youth LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x to tell their truths in a way that is uplifting and not reducing them down to a statistic or a set of data.

## CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x youth live complex intersectional lives. Schools and institutions have overlooked the need to develop school climate and adopt social and culturally relevant curricula. The findings of this project touch on many aspects of LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x youth diverse lived experiences and the need for equitable education. Rosa's testimonio highlights both the true hidden beauty of the community overall and the importance that educational climate plays in the wellbeing of LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x youth:

Growing up, being gender fluid being bi and constantly being picked on for being the new kid being different sexually and being very introverted. And once I came into university, I found my quote, "weird people." And I found a family that that really resonated with me and (the) university has honestly been like the best, since, like, I have a family that I actually care for now. (Rosa, 2020)

### Introduction

Below are the testimonios of six participants and one researcher-participant, each with a voice that has been neglected in many spaces, including K-12, educational research, and society overall. By centering LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x youth voices, researchers and policy makers can move closer towards equitable change. However, this can only occur when the voices of LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x youth voices are not only heard but listened to by educational and civic officials. The *testimonio*'s told below relate to the overarching themes that emerged from the collection of the *testimonios*. In addition to these themes, other

key findings are noted and aid in answering the research questions posed. All of these findings are critical to creating a fuller and more in-depth understanding of the LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x youth experience in New Mexico. In some research projects, one may not often include findings that extend beyond the original scope of the study, but that would be a disservice as all parts of ones' *testimonio* or lived experience is critical for a fuller understanding of each individuals and their social context. The exclusion of the extra findings would be unethical and neglect the unique experience of the participants' voices. Below, are the voices of these participants as a whole as well as specific lived experiences from each participant. The experience is described by each participant in detail and may feel harsh at moments, but this is the true reality for many LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x peoples. Assault, trauma, violence, and bullying are everyday occurrences for those in this community, their inclusion is not only essential for this work but to give holistic voice to a community that has been left voiceless for so long.

There are a variety of salient themes that perpetuate the data including the three overarching themes of *testimonios* and trauma of schooling, queer Mexican/x agency, and healing traumas. Each of these three larger themes is broken down as follows: under *testimonios* and trauma of schooling, we have machismo and gendered narratives, defining mental health, and words of wisdom. Moving into queer Mexican/x agency, we have needed: inclusive curriculum, found: cultural production, arts, and extracurriculars, and created chosen familia, spaces of queered resolana, and *third spaces capital*. For our last theme, healing traumas, we explore the subthemes of trauma,

parental/leadership roles, *transcending trauma capital*. Each of these themes and subthemes is prevalent in all participant's *testimonios*, align, with the current literature, and highlight the complex lives of the LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x youth population in the state of New Mexico. These themes as told via the *testimonios* are critical as they help create the counter story of how society views LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x youth when they are included in the conversation. Mainstream narratives are largely oversexualized caricatures of the "outcast." Which are highly inaccurate and aid in creating and maintaining the hostile spaces that are often seen in K-12 for LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x youth. These *testimonios* and findings are critical to break the cycle of oppressive stereotypes and allow the true and rich lived experience of the LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x youth community to shine in a way that highlights resilience, truth to self, and desire for a brighter tomorrow for younger and fellow LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x community members.

## **Findings**

### ***Testimonios and Trauma of Schooling***

#### ***Machismo and Gendered Narratives***

The lived realities of LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x youth in New Mexico align with national trends in terms of LGBTQIA+ and Mexican/x student research, but the lack of intersectional understanding overall has caused gaps in the literature. One that was exemplified with all participants in this study was how machismo/toxic masculinity plays a pivotal role in the daily experiences of LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x. For this analysis the untraditional Urban Dictionary's triggermansam. definition of machismo will be used as it exhibits the complex realities of

machismo and negative influences on LGBTQIA+ person in the Mexican/x community,

1. Having an unusually high or exaggerated sense of masculinity.

Including an attitude that aggression, strength, sexual prowess, power and control is the measure of someone's manliness. Also, a machismo man feels having these traits entitles him to respect and obedience from men and women around him.

2. The belief in the right to dominate and control, including, but not limited to, control over women [queer men, and non-conforming peoples] (2007).

Machismo impacts all the participant's lived experiences but with greater effects among traditionally masc-identified people. This study includes two-cisgender gay males, Antonio and Rafa, and one gender non-binary person who was born male, Zayne. Each of these participants noted that they were pressured not to show emotion in any capacity or instance. In society, emotions is/are constructed as feminine traits and mark "weakness.". This, in turn, created a sense of being at odds with dealing with traumas and experiences around them. When an individual is told to not show or talk about emotion, it forces the individual to bottle up their true thoughts, which is not healthy for mental health and identity development overall. From an intersectional point of view, this becomes even further complicated as each of these participants was dealing with coming to terms with their sexuality and/or gender. Aspects of oneself that involve exploration and growing into who one truly is requires emotion and feelings to be understood and since this was viewed as a negative aspect, they were forced to

seek outside help and/or dealt with it by themselves. These sentiments are exemplified vividly when Rafa said,

Um, mostly like the perpetual stereotypes that like, I am a Mexican boy. So I need to be like, I need to be tough. I need to play sports. I know. It's just like a whole. And this was really like drilled into me, especially by my dad, that I need to be lacking in emotions. And from for, I hate to say like it actually worked. And I do lack in a few emotions here and there or I'm a little bit insensitive to others. Because like that was just so instilled into me and that was worked into so heavily that like, men don't cry. Men don't show these emotions. So when I had them myself, I didn't know how to properly express them which led to some more of my self-destructive behaviors. didn't know what to do or who to go to because I was told that I'm not supposed to. I'm only supposed to feel happy and that's it (Rafa, 2020).

In the above account we see the ways in which machismo and patriarchal attitudes negatively affect all men, and especially LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x men because they are unable to show emotion without fear of repercussion. This heightened sense of repression is exacerbated by repression directed at sexuality.

Machismo also affected the femme-identified and/or those born female in a variety of ways as well. Growing up femme in a heteropatriarchal world has its own set of challenges but nothing changes from what has been normed for the femme body acts as a major stressor. For example, ideas of what it means to be

a woman in Mexican/x culture and going against the traditional norms acts in a similar manner as being forced to hide emotion as seen above with masculinized peoples. Gendered roles enact symbolic violence on women. This is exemplified with Rosa:

I don't believe but like, personally, like I was sexually harassed a lot in my office, specific people, were very just machismo and gross and like, they, like, we're always like sexually harassing me. And then like, even though I was there equals, like, having meetings and keeping me out of them and like taking credit for my ideas, and then like, they were always like, applauded and even given awards, like for like what they did, even though what they did was like take credit for my work and like, treat like they should have been fired not given an award. (Rosa, 2020).

So, in each case the participants were told that they could not do or be something, i.e. you cannot show emotion and i.e. you cannot do that because you are a girl or a boy. Each act inhibits the LGBTQIA+ social location to be explored in a way that aids in positive development from an identity and mental health perspective.

### ***Defining Mental Health***

Mental health is a concept that is viewed by many to be taboo. This makes it especially difficult for LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x youth when asked to describe and/or define mental health, but this understanding is essential for all youth, and especially LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x youth whose lack of understanding of mental health can have dire effects.

Definitions of Mental Health from the demographic survey:

- Antonio: “Lots of things, not sure, something like, having a stable mind set.” (uncertain with mindset)
- Daniel: “Mental Health , I guess, is how you see yourself as healthy, not physically, as healthy. Do you see yourself living your best life in 10-20 years? If not, see maybe 10 minutes out; defines your Mental Health.”
- Maria: “Being aware of yourself mentally, self-aware in terms of how you are doing.”
- Rafa: “Mental Health is a person’s overall emotional and overall being; a state determines how they are doing outside of physical boundaries.”
- Rosa: “Mental health happens when individuals own sense of wellness behaviors/ thought patterns can be beneficial or detrimental to their wellbeing.”
- Zayne: “Mental Health is defined as the ability to learn/ educator yourself and learn spiritually and emotionally not only be happy, but to be okay with existing.”

The six definitions above come from the participants who were asked to define mental health. Each definition covers various components of mental health, but each shows a lack of understanding of the abstract notion of mental health. This is one key indicator that we are not providing enough instruction in the classroom about mental health. Everyone should have a solid foundation of mental health and provide a concrete definition in some fashion and this is not the case. For example, most people know the definition of what a sentence is, a



concept they learn in K-12, thus we must question why the youth participants in this study cannot define mental health. Yes, we also must acknowledge the complexity of mental health as compared to a sentence, but if someone does not know what mental health is, they may not know that they need help and/or may discount their feels. Couple this lack of knowledge among LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x youth with their reflections on their school experiences and what results is an extreme repressive environment and the absence of strong mental health structures. Youth mental health is critical and if they cannot define and understand their own mental health then the system will keep pushing them and, in turn, we will continue to see the high rates of suicidality and untreated mental health ailments that plague not only LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x students but all students.

For the purposes of his study, mental health is defined as, “our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It affects how we think, feel, and act. It also helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others, and make choices” (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2019). Each of the above definitions touches on some portion, but none state the word *stress* explicitly and this is a critical component as stress, both positive and negative, affects mental wellbeing in a variety of ways. LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x youth experience a variety of stressors related to their intersectional identities due to home life, school life, and personal life. Items and stressors that are much different from others in K-12 and for the participants in this study, their K-16 experiences. A brown queer person in a space that is White and heteronormative experiences an inordinate amount of

negative stress that is put on the body both mentally and physically and plays a critical role in mental health as well as identity development. Each of the participants did not get to live out being their true selves in K-12 spaces, it was only after they left the K-12 space were they able to be their authentic LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x selves. This happened due to a variety of factors and varies from participant to participant. However, the challenge faced by LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x youth, at its root, is not understanding their mental health struggles and how societal expectations, school expectations, and cultural expectations causes negative stress, pushing their mental capacities into limits that are unfathomable to many of their peers.

***Words of Wisdom: Advice to Other LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x Youth***

Each participant showed a desire to use their current position to create a better tomorrow than they had during their K-12 experience. The words of wisdom below highlight this desire as well as highlight the true reality of living at the intersection of being Mexican/x and LGBTQIA+:

- Antonio: “I would have told myself that you don't love him. I was very stuck on this person, my senior year. And I feel like that kind of ruined my senior year.”
- Daniel: “don't trust somebody who's willing to give you the attention you so desperately want. Like romantically and sexually. Because it's going to hurt you in ways you would never imagine. And I wish it could kind of messed up. But I wish Yes, I had that advice. But at the same time, I don't, because if I had never met my ex, and if I had never been raped, I would

never be who I am today. I grew from that. So just be a little more cautious. Have your guard up a little bit more. You might be a little bit safer.”

- Maria “I think for me, it was it would just be telling myself to have confidence sooner .”
- Rosa: “I wish I was like, louder, sooner. Like, I'm kind of a really like, loud person when it comes to like, things I care about and things I believe, but like, I wish like when I was in high school I like cuz like, I didn't come out in high school.”
- Zayne: “so one thing I wish I would have been told was that it's okay to not be 100% certain, because it's constantly changing, right? Whether it be your sexuality, your gender, you know, anything, it can be constantly changing for some people, because that's how I am. Personally, you know, like, it's, it's constantly in flux, and that's okay. It's okay to not have a solid answer, right? It's okay to be like, Yeah, I don't, I don't know. Or I just don't care to put a label on this.”

Each of these above words of wisdom shows the resilient nature of the LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x youth I studied but can be applied to the population as a whole. They each are influenced by pain, trauma, and the negative stress associated with not be able to no be your authentic self during their K-12 experiences. There is a common theme of struggle and survival, which is what makes these *testimonios* bitter sweet, but critical to note as someone who is young should not have to go through the above struggles. Yet, there are the

realities of today, yesterday, and hopefully not of tomorrow. What that tomorrow looks like is still to be determined, but this highlights not only the importance of this study but why the time is now to make changes to our K-12 system.

This study ended up having participants who have all had some interaction with higher education whether that be at a community college or a four-year institution, this places them in a different intersection than those LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x youth who have not attended these spaces. Each interview illustrated a shift in the K-12 to the K-16 space that allowed for more self-exploration, community, and joy. Thus, we need to examine this information and advise LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x youth who did not go to the higher education spaces to consider higher education because it offers one space that aids in recasting schooling in ways that allow for healing to occur. By no means is this study implying that higher education is a perfect space that fixes everything for everyone. Thus, this limitation of the data is critical to note as this is not the lived experience of all LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x but offers a representation of what K-12 and higher education spaces have to offer students. Moreover, it demonstrates that aspects of the higher education environment offer LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x youth a space for empowered existence. Aspects such as student services, health services and social relevant curriculum may offer key possibilities for transforming K-12 education experiences for LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x youth. We need to make major changes to schooling spaces so that all students especially LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x can not only learn, but thrive, heal, and express their true authentic selves.

The above words of wisdom provide insight in areas where change is critical. The first being, we need to create spaces where students will feel safe to be out and true to their authentic selves. The amount of closeted LGBTQIA+ youth in K-12 and especially high school (Human Rights Campaign, 2018) is a major social challenge in multiple regards, but especially from a mental health and identity development point of view because one cannot grow into their true selves without being one with who they are. Secondly, we need to stop forcing labels on everyone, especially students. This is seen vividly through many practices but can show up in many ways, for example, clubs like GSA's (Gender Sexuality Alliance) are a great resource, but the labels attached to them can be more harmful than good in many cases. Students should be actively encouraged to express their true selves that break from the binary and one of the ways we can allow this if they know that there is not a binary. Third, norming marginalized social locations in ways that the task of educating is on the educator or another adult and not the students. Students should not be forced to *out* themselves to tell truths in any space, but especially a classroom space where they are there to learn and not teach. And lastly, fourth, we need to provide support when students are going through hard times. When a student goes through trauma or is dealing with relationship obstacles, we need to have professionals present that understand the LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x experience so that they can assist in ways that minimize the internal struggle and mental stress. All of these calls for action come straight from the wisdom of LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x youth as we see that the wisdom comes from spaces where stress and pain were caused, thus we need to

ensure that we listen to our youth and make change occur. The only way the schooling experience will get better for LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x youth is through drastic changes in policy and implementation.

### **Queer Mexican/x Agency (Needed, Found, and Created)**

#### ***Needed: Inclusive Curriculum***

Schooling played a major role in the ways in which the participants both perceived and lived their mental health. This is due to a variety of factors, but one of the most prevalent was the lack of representation in the curriculum and in schooling spaces overall. There was no LGBTQIA+ curriculum across the participant's experiences. One symbolic aspect of inclusivity was a safe zone poster in a variety of teachers' classrooms/doors. There was no mention of the classroom being an actual safe space, thus the participants did not know if this was a checkbox attempt at inclusivity or space where they could truly be themselves. This is paramount to note in that for one to be able to have positive identity development youth must be able to see themselves in spaces as well as feel safe in spaces. It also begs the question of why did the participants feel that the inclusion of the safe zone poster was a diversity check? This highlights key issues with school climate and how certain effigies can be seen as diversity checks. However, being diverse and inclusive must extend well beyond putting up a poster or celebrating heroes/holidays. This harkens back to sentiments that allies must be active and by being a bystander ally, you are, in fact, part of perpetuating cycles of oppression and violence.

A key example is seen above with sex education and the lack of it being inclusive of non-heterosexual relationships. Sex education is something that is highly critical as youth need to learn the skills to be sexually active in a safe way that aligns with their social locations. Each participant stated that their sex education was based on cisgender male and cisgender female development and sexual activity and the only inclusion of anything LGBTQIA+ would be the mention of same-sex relationships or transgender people. By not moving past the simple existence of same-sex relationships or queer people, the lack of curriculum is putting LGBTQIA+ students at risk. New Mexico youth overall is sexually active (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2019) and need to be taught skills to be safe. Rafa and Zayne stated that they learned all they know about same-sex intercourse from the internet and wish this had been included in the school curriculum.

We must note that school is a safe and secure environment whereas the internet is often not the best learning tool especially when it comes to learning about safe sex acts. For example Rafa said:

Um, knowing that there are more people like me and how to deal with challenges that we face like honestly, I didn't know anything about sex. I didn't know how to do any of that. I had to use the internet [laughs] to figure some stuff out. It's not the best teachers, especially when you know, you can't bend like that. [laughs] (Rafa, 2020)

Rafa joked that they, "cannot bend like that." Referring to pornographic videos online, but even as a joke this highlights why we must include not only same-sex

safe sex in the curriculum but across the board. If he joked about the positions, what else did he have to learn on his own that may not be as obvious? As someone in a similar situation who experienced no same-sex sex education, the use of condoms and contraception are taught from a point of view to not get someone pregnant and to a lesser extent to prevent STDs. Thus, this framing negates the importance of its use with same-sex partners. If two cisgender males have sex, 'I can't get the other pregnant, then why use a condom.' For a youth student, this logic may make full sense, but it negates the high rates of HIV and other STDs among men who have sex with men (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2019). A number that is inflated even further when analyzing BIPOC bodies. Again this is just one example of why we need inclusive curriculum across the board for all marginalized student populations, but especially LGBTQIA+ and Mexican/x populations. These students deserve to have the tools to help them be successful in life, whether that be information about how to have safe queer sex or other types of information, we need to honor their social locations and the only way to do this is through centering who they are.

***Found: Cultural Production, the Arts, and Extracurriculars***

The creation, use, and sharing of cultural production (i.e., poetry, music, art, etc.) is a key way that LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x Mexican/x youth live out their intersectional identities. Each participant was asked to bring any item to the focus group interview that embodied their mental health journey. This was all that was stated and there was no direction, just to bring something, and it ended up that all participants brought some aspect of cultural production as a way to embody



their mental health journey. The items brought were 1.) a drawing of a girl playing the violin in rave attire by Rosa, 2.) a camera to represent the photos that the participant takes by Daniel, 3.) the poster/film for the movie *Carol* by Maria, 4.) poetry by Antonio, and 5.) a collective dance piece/community by Zayne, and 6.) the musical *Dear Evan Hansen* by Damon (Table 2). Each of these items ties back into cultural production and the power of each inclusion is how the elements were all discussed and started a community space that, in turn, can be healing. Cultural production allows for healing on multiple levels, i.e. healing for the creator, healing for the reader/viewer, and healing for the community experiencing it together. For example, Rosa's drawing of the girl playing the violin in rave attire exhibits this well. The piece was created during a hard day for the artist, which in turn helped them heal from the traumas of the day. Then when all of the participants viewed the piece, there was a sense of new understanding and being able to be at ease as queer folk in how the piece was beautifully tragic,. Through the sharing of the journey of the piece and its symbolism community healing occurred. The dialogue went from feeling something about the piece to having a dialogue about the traumas of harassment and finally to the feeling mentally of being all on the sinking Titanic during many points in our lives and often daily.

Cultural production is a healing tool for mental health that is highly powerful in that one piece of cultural production can offer a profound resonance of self and community affirmation. Cultural artifacts can challenge the taboo and stigma associated with mental health within Latinx communities because of how

cultural production allows for healing to occur in the community without the fear of retribution. Thus, the act of creating is not viewed as healing traditionally, but it is one of the greatest and most effective healing strategies. This is due to the fact that it is a private space first where we can each recast our narratives, create new narratives, and ultimately decide what we want the world to know as us from

**Table 2. Cultural Production Items**

Name	Item
<b>Antonio</b>	poetry in general
<b>Damon</b>	musical <i>Dear Evan Hansen</i>
<b>Daniel</b>	camera representing photography
<b>Maria</b>	poster for the movie <i>Carol</i>
<b>Rosa</b>	pencil drawing of a girl playing the violin in rave clothing
<b>Zayne</b>	'Dance as release' performance art

us. There is also power in reclaiming trauma and pains through cultural production in that the truth can be told and you can own the truth in a way that can either be shared or kept private. A prime example of this is seen with sexual traumas as Daniel noted that until the narrative is told from the survivor's point of view, rape and rape culture will always be problematic and cultural production is a space where this can happen safely. Daniel stated:

I'm friends on Facebook with my piano teacher, and I'm friends on Instagram with my science teacher. And to this day, we still talk here and there and they made me see that matter and that no matter what happened, I can still grow from that and I should find a profession that will

help me advocate for those who have no voice, and that's what pushed me further into getting my photography degree. (Daniel, 2020).

This connection is twofold in that the use of photography as an entity of cultural production allows for the healing of past traumas and was used to highlight a member of Daniel's *chosen familia*.

***Created: Chosen Familia, Resolana, and Third Space Capital***

Besides the negative effects of lack of school climate and curriculum, there are benefits to learning spaces that are communally-based. Montiel, Atencio, & Mares (2009) examine the notion of *resolana* and its implications as a space of resistance, education, and organizing. *Resolana* is simply the back wall of a structure where the sun hits. In the Southwest, these spaces are traditionally part of the plaza. Plaza spaces are often co-opted by tourists and outsiders but were once spaces for the locals. These spaces are now co-opted most of the year with few days in between where the locals reclaim the space as their own. *Resolana* is a contested space but it is a space where community learning can occur. In northern New Mexico, it is a space where people find community through the understanding history and community formation. This concept was espoused by New Mexicans who were part of the Chicana and Chicano Movement of the 1970s. Today, resolanas are spaces where LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x youth find their chosen familia within the oppressive education system.

Chicana and Chicano Studies and Education theorists have emphasized that oppressed peoples find ways to survive and thrive in highly repressive circumstances. For LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x youth, finding chosen familia highlights

a form of capital that LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x youth utilize as a means of surviving in the often hostile K-12, *Third Space Capital*. At its heart *third space capital* is capital that is created through finding safety in spaces that are often negative, one may argue that it is a form of *navigational capital* as defined by Yosso (2005). But *third space capital* pushes beyond *navigational capital* because there is the political act of creating something, a new space or a queered space of *resolana*. The notion of *Third Space Capital* builds off the works of Kris Gutiérrez (2008) and their conceptualization of the act of creating a third space in various educational settings. I argue that *Third Space Capital* pushes the idea of the *Third Space* in dimensions that extend beyond the walls of education and are sites of political self-driven creation. By moving the idea from a *Third Space* to *Third Space Capital* it puts the power on the participant, i.e. the youth in that the act of creating a queered *resolana*, enacting *Third Space Capital*.

One of the key facets for LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x youth is people networks, i.e. the chosen familia as I have named it. Blood/ traditional family networks were often a stressor for the participants, thus the chosen familia is a special network that is more critical for the LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x than blood family. Chosen familia is a foundation when other basic social relations were not supportive. We see the act of creating chosen familias in a variety of community spaces through time including houses and ballroom culture as exemplified with Hector Xtravaganza, "Blood does not family make. Those are relatives. Family are those with whom you share your good, bad, and ugly, and still love one another in the end. Those are the ones you select." For the participants, the acts of creating

these familias was critical for survival in that home spaces are not often accepting just as schooling spaces are often hostile as well. Schooling was a space where these chosen familias could be created and used as a means of support without outside interference. In large, secondary school spaces provided a variety of opportunities for chosen familia to be created, maintained, and used for support. Chosen familia acted as spaces of queered resolana for the participants as it was a space political in nature where they could be their whole true selves. These spaces were created before and after school, passing periods, and one of the most important, lunch periods. In each of these spaces, students have the autonomy to be with their chosen familia and in a space where outside factors were less likely to inhibit the community from being created, i.e. family intervention. These are spaces that extended beyond the walls of the K-12 school spaces but had deep ties back to them. For example, participants mentioned band, culinary club, theatre, and, later in life, Greek organizations were identified as chosen familia. Each of these activities extended beyond the academic spaces and allowed for the community to be created in a way that was inclusive. Greek life for Rosa became a space in college and this is due to many factors including the lack of chosen familia in their K-12, thus they found this core support later in life.

Let's break down *band* as one of the critical spaces. For Maria and Antonio, one of these spaces was band, they were members of the marching band and concert band, thus this extended the opportunity to be with their chosen family. The extracurricular nature of being in band granted these students

a unique opportunity to find their chosen family as there were more spaces for creating, mingling and interaction. Maria highlight the importance of the band space from a holistic point of view and what it meant for her to be a part of that space with:

I would say neutral. There was like ups and downs there was definitely like, good things like some things we did a band is very fun like that's like highlight for sure. But then there was like ups and downs like with relationships with friends and like with myself (Maria, 2020).

Overall, these people networks are critical and extracurriculars were a way in for participants to find chosen familia. But we must also note that the complexity of being Mexican/x where the home responsibilities often inhibit the participation in extracurricular activities. Antonio notes the importance of the act of finding friend groups of chosen familia in the band space:

I'd say mostly my friend groups. Definitely being in band helped making friends in band helped. I also remember I'm not sure if she was one of the counselors, but she was definitely like emotional support as part of [High School in NM] faculty. She was always open to talking. She was actually one of the moms of one of the parents of the one of the band students. (Antonio, 2020).

Rafa is the oldest of the siblings, thus they took on a caretaker role from a young age, which inhibited their participation in such activities, thus they had to find their chosen familia during the traditional hours of the school day, which can be more difficult. Upon looking back on their K-12 experience Rafa wished they

could have taken part in more activities but knew they couldn't. Schools needs to acknowledge that not all can be part of extracurriculars and create third spaces for students throughout the school day. The idea of chosen familia is something that all students can benefit from no matter their social locations. Having peer support in and out of academic settings is critical as there will always be parts of growing that youth do not want their families involved in. But, chosen familia is essential for those students on the margins of the margins because that may be their only or main lifeline. For LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x youth, chosen familia become a support network that extends beyond K-12. We see this extension from K-12 to higher education and community with Rosa's involvement in Greek life in her undergraduate years:

But like one of the best things for me was Greek life. ... Um, and then also like, being in Greek life was really good because there were so many things that I didn't know about in college like I was a first generation student... And then like, like so anyway, being in the sorority was helpful because it taught me a lot about college because I was surrounded by a lot of people that were all doing the same thing. But they were also a lot of people that tend to have better resources and more like knowledge about how to navigate things than I was able to (Rosa, 2020).

By joining Greek life Rosa was able to use her peer networks, i.e. her chosen familia to grow and thrive which allowed her to complete her undergraduate career with a double major, this is not to say that being part of this space was a cure all, but it was a space that allowed for growth and healing from trauma.

## **Healing Traumas: Fruits of Healing for Themselves and Others'**

### ***Trauma***

Experiences with mental health shape the schooling environment in a variety of factors. One of the most notable is the links between traumas that occur at school and how one has to manage to exist in the same space. Youth are in school and/or school activities for a vast majority of their lives during their K-12 experience. Although the likelihood of trauma or events negatively affecting one's mental health happens in the K-12 space, the alienation and separation that LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x youth face can also be very difficult as they have to attend school and be retraumatized by re-entering the space. This is illustrated with the way in which Daniel noted that they kept dropping out of school and was ultimately successful when she moved schools. This individual was sexually assaulted at school and these traumas as well as many other factors were at play when she attended school, thus in a space that is supposed to feel safe, they never felt safe and/or that they belonged. So, because of the negative mental health that was triggered by entering the space, the schooling became a space of contention and a mental struggle and not a space of learning that was triggering each time an individual had to start again. For LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x you experiencing trauma in a space, also reshaped what schooling was for the individual. In Daniel's case, the act of moving schools from a rural New Mexico school to an urban high school was one of the only ways the schooling/ trauma/ sexual assault connection was broken. The trauma of schooling and schooling spaces is exemplified with:



I think, because I was not only sexually assaulted, but I was often seen as an outsider. Nobody really wanted to make friends with me. I was different. I presented myself differently. I was openly *-ish*. I guess you can say just the way I presented myself with my sexuality and it's just I hated being noticed you I couldn't help not being noticed (Daniel, 2020).

In addition to this experience, one must also note how the players in schooling are a major part of mental health and how their lived experience interacts with each other. Rosa is a survivor of assault by a fellow student and the student showed up to a theatre performance that they were in at school. Thus, the negative mental health associated with the assault was triggered with the student in attendance at the theatrical performance and due to schooling policies, the student attending was not told anything. Thus, this puts the survivor in a retraumatizing position and aids in linking schooling to reinforcing trauma out of the desire to be politically correct and not be threatened by a lawsuit. So, this begs the question of where the line is drawn in terms of student rights and how students that come from privileged backgrounds are often afforded more opportunities and rights than those students who come from marginalized communities. This double-standard extends beyond schooling process and can be seen in therapy spaces as seen with Antonio:

I went to therapy to try to resolve whatever it was those [relationship] issues...And the reason I left was because when I tried to bring those, when I tried to bring those questions [about sexuality] she wouldn't necessarily refuse to talk about them [but didn't answer them]... And it

caused me anxiety that I didn't really want to talk about those issues [life choices] because I didn't know what I wanted to do with my life. Um, and so I just felt uncomfortable and stopped going because I didn't want to talk about that. (Antonio, 2020)

We also see this dichotomy with who is punished in bullying situations where marginalized youth are punished at higher rates. (Abreu et al., 2016) I can attest to this notion first hand through lived experience, where the bully is not blamed due to the victim's social locations and how certain social locations are viewed in various spaces and systems.

### ***Parental/Leadership Roles***

Parent/ leadership roles are seen notably with the desire of all participants to take on a parental and/or leadership role from a young age in hopes to help those around them. This is seen vividly with younger siblings and the responsibilities that the participants took on out a desire to ensure that their sibling could thrive and be in a better position than they were/are currently in as seen with Rafa and Antonio. Rafa shows the double-edged nature that taking on this role with:

But [laughs] it was just mostly on the home front where things were a little bad parents which fight and I have to like, step in and be like, Okay, a little ones. We're gonna go into this room and I'm gonna turn the TV up really loud. We're gonna go outside and walk out. Go for a walk at two in the morning. [begins to cry] I'm gonna stick together. And we're gonna pretend that none of us heard any of that. We're gonna pretend that our parents

aren't gonna kill them kill each other. [laughs] But it was just like, Oh, it was just a lot of that. I had to kind of deal with myself and I don't mind taking care of other people. I've been doing it since I was like six. like second nature to me now (Rafa, 2020).

This sense of wanting to make changes for their siblings and, in some cases, younger peers also is a major influence of contributing to mental health. Largely these roles put added stress on youth and, in turn, were a major influence on their perceived mental health. This is one area where the intersectional mental of queer, Mexican/x, and a parental/leader position is something that is unique in the ways it influences both the lived experience and the mental toll. Nurturing communal spaces for other Mexicanx LGBTQIA+ youth results in these youth as providing more nurturing spaces for other youth. On one hand, the added stress contributed to negative mental health, but on another hand, the protection and peace of mind that taking on this role provided aided in some mental positive notes. This is best exemplified with Zayne's testimonio of starting a LGBTQIA+ club:

I have a bit of an overconfidence issue. [laughs]. So oftentimes if there was like, especially my senior year, right, which is what inspired the GSA, the freshman class actually had a few queer kids, and some trans kids as well. So I was like, You are all now my children, I am going to take care of you and you let me know if anything bothers you. So I had to keep myself informed, you know, like, I had to start, I had to start learning about the topics and issues. Because at that point, I was still going as a cis male,

and identified as gay. And it wasn't until I started talking to these other people like educating myself that I was like, Oh, I like I like these labels. I like your I like these pronouns. I like I like I just like this more (Zayne, 2020).

This is a great example of stress as both positive and negative and why we need to provide youth and all with skills to understand stress as an entity as its many facets and implications that can influence lifestyles. The roles and responsibilities taken up by some of the Mexicanx LGBTQIA+ were not selected out of an intrinsic desire but were taken on out of survival and fear of what would happen to those around them. This was especially heightened when it came to family and especially younger siblings. Thus, this role, although essential, caused each participant's mental health to decline as they were put in the model role as a leader that carried many responsibilities and emotions. This is akin to notions of the model child or the model student but one must also consider how taking on this ideal leader role in the eyes of their younger siblings/peers affected their relationships (family, friend, etc.), school/work life, and how they were situated in systems such as the family unit and the educational system. Because of the added responsibility, the school/work/home balance often caused things to slip through the cracks, i.e. I was not a model student or I was not the model child and because of this split responsibility, there was added stressors that can only be understood from an intersectional perspective. This is seen vividly with Maria, Antonio, and Rosa who each stated that they had no choice but to finish high school. Yes, the split responsibilities are common in BIPOC families, but we must

add the layer of sexuality and gender and how challenging it is to balance navigating these social locations even further. Rafa noted that they hid their gay social location from their family because they knew that they had to be present for their siblings and if their parents found out, they may never get to see them again. So, intersectional mental health is essential as the experience differs from the white queer or the brown heterosexual experience.

### ***Transcending Trauma Capital***

Queer Mexican/x youth use a wide variety of capital as outlined in Yosso's (2005) *Community Cultural Wealth* model and Pennell's (2015) queered *Community Cultural Wealth* model. The *Community Cultural Wealth* model has six basic forms so capital, *aspirational, familial, social, navigational, resistant,* and *linguistic*; Pennell builds off Yosso to add a seventh capital of *transgressive capital*. All of these capitals are explored through the participant's narratives with each participant using at least four and about half using all seven of the modes of capital. The use of the capitals aligns with the current research as Yosso's model is Mexican/x in conception and Pennell's *transgressive capital* was introduced as a means of queering the model. Thus, the lived experiences align, I argue that an intersectional queered community cultural wealth model, i.e. a *Queer Intersectional Model*, includes this seventh capital as well as two additional capital *Transcending Trauma Capital* and as noted above *Third Space Capital*. According to the American Psychological Association (n.d.), trauma is defined as, an emotional response to a terrible event like an accident, rape or natural disaster. Immediately after the event, shock and denial are typical. Longer

term reactions include unpredictable emotions, flashbacks, strained relationships and even physical symptoms like headaches or nausea.

While these feelings are normal, some people have difficulty moving on with their lives. Psychologists can help these individuals find constructive ways of managing their emotions.

*Transcending trauma capital* may sound like a deceit perspective capital, but among the participants they noted that in their lived experiences, trauma was the common and prevalent thread. It is not the fact that each experienced trauma, but how the trauma was re-casted and reinvented as a source of navigating systems, finding oneself, or leading community. Because of this, I define *transcending trauma capital* is best defined as:

*the skills that are learned from traumatic events and used to influence other forms of capital, siblings/family members, peers, communities, and society overall.*

*Transcending trauma capital* is intrinsically intersectional in that the more margins of social locations an individual lives, the more likely they are affected by trauma. This trauma can be personal, familial, historical, community-based, etc. Thus, when you take a Mexican/x queer person, one must examine what it means to be queer, Mexican/x, etc., and the trauma that comes with this complex intersectional social location. This is exemplified with all participants but especially Maria who had to work through her internalized homophobia:

Oh, no, I am gay. Like, what do I do with this information, which we all go through. It took a good chunk of time to like, come to terms with that

myself. And then a good chunk of time where I had to really, like think about how I was going to tell other people in my life or If I was going to, and then after that going into like dating and stuff like that was even like a bigger issue. So it was a lot of like, self-hatred, I would say because I didn't want to be this way. It was like three whole years where I was like, Am I gay? I don't know. And then all of a sudden, I was like, Yes. And then it was like, Oh, no. And then that's when like the self-hatred started and like, more mental issues started. (Maria)

For example, in New Mexico, we see high rates of suicidality among youth. All six participants noted that they had thoughts of suicide and each alluded to other aspects of their lives that aided in their overcoming the trauma associated with these thoughts. This included taking care of family members, pets, wanting to do great things to help others, and simply not cause any more pain than what they have already gone through.

In addition to suicide, sexual assault, and violence were noted in the *testimonios*, and each traumatic event that involved sexual assault and violence eventually led to the person to be stronger than they were before. This is best exemplified with Daniel and their decision to stop taking medicine for mental health that they were put on to help combat stressors associated to suicide, sexual assault, and violence:

Yes, I was on antidepressants. I was on anxiety medication and schizophrenia medication from the time of 16 till the time I was 18. My depression medication made it worse for me and the schizophrenia

medication wasn't helping at all. And I absolutely despise my parents for making me take my medication. And so as soon as I turned 18, I stopped taking all medications completely. And I decided to work on my mental health by myself with the resources that I can come up with, and I moved out of that toxic town and it's helped a lot (Daniel, 2020).

So, *transcending trauma capital* acts as a form of survival capital and then morphs into *transcending trauma capital* as the trauma becomes a source of power and eventually healing to continue to combat the world. These examples push beyond *Community Cultural Wealth* and are queer in that queerness as a social location is intersectional because one must emphasize gender and sexuality when putting queerness into conversation with other social locations, i.e. race, socioeconomic status, etc. Thus, the inclusion of *transcending trauma capital* aids in showing the true resilience of queer BIPOC as the uniqueness of their experiences largely shaped by trauma. This may be a harsh and sad reality when it is broken down, but it the reality of being queer and BIPOC.

### **Conclusion**

At its heart the above themes that emerged from the *testimonios* of each participant dealt with what it meant to be resilient and use past and present events to imagine a brighter tomorrow. A tomorrow that is rooted in acknowledging the importance of intersectional identities in a way that is celebrated and pushes against the systemic barriers that make living as LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x challenging. The above aligns with the current literature noting that K-12 and schooling spaces overall are not conducive spaces for



marginalized student populations especially LGBTQIA+ and Mexican/x. The trends described in the literature are prevalent across the lived experiences of the participants in this study. There are extra aspects of to being at the intersection of being LGBTQIA+ and Mexican/x that make these social locations and experiences more difficult than other BIPOC populations. Because the schooling spaces were not and are not conducive to the LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x body thriving, the participants had to exhibit radical agency. Each participant uniquely identified what they needed to succeed, found spaces that aided their survival, and created nurturing spaces where they didn't exist. All of these acts were done out of necessity and were created intentionally and unintentionally. Accidental spaces were also fruitful for growth and mental health stability because the stress and pressures of creating the space were intolerable. A space that moved beyond literal space and transcends into the metaphysical, mental, and emotional. All of which are critical to understanding mental health and holistic wellbeing. LGBTQIA+ and Mexican/x youth urgently need social locations where they can live, thrive, and breathe without fear of retribution, violence, or critique. A queered *resolana*, a space of truth, included acknowledging the harsh truths of many LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x youth who experience inordinate degrees of violence, bullying, and suicidality. *Resolanas* offered spaces to heal and grow and experience joy, hope, and most importantly love. This study theorized spaces where Mexican/x LGTBQIA+ youth employed *transcending trauma capital* and *third space capital* to combat oppression in and out of the many systems in which they exist. *Transcending trauma capital* acts as

an extension to the other forms of cultural wealth that each participant used but shows the truth in resilience and what it meant to act in a mode of survival and pursue a journey that offered hope and emancipation. *Third space capital* acts in a similar manner but allows for safety and a sense of belonging to occur in oppressive spaces, which is essential for the healing that allows for *transcending trauma capital* to occur. Each participant followed journeys through *transcending trauma capital* and *third space capital* that allowed for them to thrive and act as the leaders of today and tomorrow that we so desperately need in spaces that extend well beyond the walls of schooling spaces.

## CHAPTER 5: IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x youths' resiliency and desire for a brighter tomorrow is an inspiration to all and acts as a catalyst foster love and community growth. Rosa's testimonio exemplifiers one of the most important elements of change *hope*:

I find it really intriguing how we are the generation that's going to change everything like we are going to be, be the most progressive generation, and the generations that follow us are going to be as progressive. If not possibly, hopefully a bit more progressive. (Rosa, 2020)

### Introduction

This study was born out of the struggles I faced in my K-12 experience of alienation, suicidality, mental health struggles, and overall feelings of not belonging. I sought to use this experience as a foundation to allow others to share their *testimonios* of resilience. As I moved into the high education space, I learned that I was not alone in these struggles but began to realize that our voices and our narratives are lost or coopted in academic spaces, thus I made it part of my life's work to ensure that the LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x voice would no longer be diminished in academic and community spaces. This study created one space of *resolana* as each participant opened up letting their voice shine through all of which culminated at the end of the focus group where social media handles were exchanged. In those moments, the work gained meaning that extended beyond created safer spaces for youth to highlight and honor how each participant has thrived to be who they are today. With the knowledge of their past traumas and joys, I knew at that moment that the LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x

experience may be missing in academic spaces but it was not lost nor would it ever be lost as my fellow community members show passion, love, and strength.

This chapter takes this notion of a brighter tomorrow and puts the study in conversation with the key findings, the world outside of academia, and how we as scholars, educators, students, and community members can push for true change. To push for this change we examine the interconnections of trauma and how *transcending trauma capital* and *third space capital* allow for growth and healing in unconventional ways. We take a candid look at suicidality and mental health and why our youth in New Mexico struggle with these social dynamics by and large. We then transition into the ways in which resilience is a form of empowerment for LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x youth and how they use their resilience to combat systems through the queered *resolana*, the act and site of addressing needs, finding spaces, and creating what is missing for them. We then move into implications for policy and education. I argue that this is the most important part of this work as we each need to work toward enacting change. The following section offers tangible ways to enact change today. We close the chapter with reflections and conclusions.

### **Summary of Key Findings**

The above study explored the *testimonios* of six LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x participants as it related to their mental health and perceptions of school climate. Two entities that are critical to put into conversation with each other as they influence each other in a variety of ways. The intersectional mental health experience among LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x youth is not only an important area to

study but is an area that is either life or death as mental health plays a large role in identity development and overall growth. As explored above, understanding this intersectional experience is critical as LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x youth face a large array of traumas both historical and personal. These traumas occur in a variety of spaces, i.e. home, school, and community, but school traumas are especially critical as the required nature of schooling and the inequitable policies and practices often act to retraumatize students daily. Thus, this calls for the LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x youth agency to take on a threefold approach of noting what is needed to thrive, finding the spaces for thriving, and when those spaces do not exist, creating these spaces. This threefold approach is critical as it aids in healing to occur within the systems that perpetuate cycles of oppression and show the true power of action as a form of empowerment. It can be discouraging for many youth to move through cycle of needing, founding, and creating safe spaces because as a marginalized community member it is often challenging to leverage agency for oneself. Thus, we must acknowledge the healing traumas that allow for this cycle to occur in a way that energizes and acts as a source of healing and not as acts of re-traumatization for the individual. These healing capitals are derived out of a desire to shape brighter futures for the youth of tomorrow as well as write a counternarrative to the skewed mainstream narratives of the LGBTQIA+, Mexicana/o/x, and LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x experiences. These healing capitals are shaped by a desire to prevail and learn from trauma. The recapturing of the trauma into means that are fruitful is coined *transcending trauma capital*, and the creation of spaces within often hostile

spaces is *third space capital*. *Transcending trauma capital* is the act of taking pain and loss from trauma and refocusing the energy into the means of producing a brighter tomorrow and acts to aid in the healing process for the individual, and, by extension communities. For the participants in this study, the traumas were varied, but the result was a strong, resilient, and justice-oriented individual who want to make the world a better place for those following behind them.

### **Implications**

Below we will explore the main connections between the study and the world that extends beyond the walls of academic spaces. To explore these connections we will look at the connectedness of trauma/ transcending capital, suicide and mental health, resilience as empowerment, and queered resolana/ third space capital among New Mexico youth.

### **Connectedness of Trauma**

One of the most gut-wrenching parts of the *testimonios* of the participants was the sheer amount of assault and violence that was inflicted on each person and the summative impact of trauma on the collective. This ranges from mental violence to sexual assault and rape. All things that society has told us to not discuss because it makes one look vulnerable or weak, but something that needs to be talked about. In this discussion session, I argue that we need to break the silence around assault in all forms because the long-lasting effects of assault, especially mental one are some that cannot and will not go away. Thus, we need to provide survivors a space to not only be open about their past (when they want

to be) but provide spaces where healing can occur. I make this point so as to show that trauma is only one aspect of the *testimonios* of the participants. Yet, it plays a substantial role in the lived experiences of each participant, especially as it relates to school climate and mental health. Thus, understanding the importance of both creating and maintaining space for healing to occur is essential as trauma, like all aspects of lived experiences, does not live in a bubble. Traumas are interconnected with each other as well as interconnected with systems, rituals, and daily activities. Thus, we need to push this understanding of interconnection as it is a critical component for many youth who live at complex intersections, i.e. LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x.

### **Suicidality, Mental Health, and New Mexico Youth**

At the heart of this project is a deep desire to make educators, community members, and other scholars aware of the true realities of mental health and suicidality that is experienced among LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x youth. Due to the taboo nature of the topics of suicide and mental health, they are largely left to be explored by those of us that are directly and disproportionately impacted by them. However, the severity and complexity of these topics is essential for the survival of many youth. As scholars, educators, researchers, and community members we need to use the spaces we have to prompt conversation, the days of silencing mental health and suicide stigma need to end. Because no one wants to talk about these topics, it often leaves many youth feeling alone as if no one understands them, which heightens the adverse feelings and can lead to more drastic negative mental health activities.

The diversity of New Mexico youth as well as the complex social locations that these students live in, contributes heavily to the need for mental health to be acknowledged, taught, and mainstreamed in the classroom setting. New Mexico is a racial minority-majority state with large amounts of indigenous, Mexican/x, Mexican/a/x, and mixed-race peoples, thus living as a BIPOC, there are a variety of historical traumas that plague existence today that are often neglected (Gokee et al., 2020; Schmitz & Charak, 2020). These traumas need to be acknowledged as these play a critical role in mental health and the extra stress of systemic racism in schooling spaces that can contribute to suicidality. You couple the BIPOC social location with other marginalized social locations, i.e. LGBTQIA+ and that stress level is even greater. Thus, the importance of understanding and teaching intersectional mental health is essential. I argue that simply teaching about mental health is not enough because unless it is intersectional, it is perpetuating the systems of oppression that are at the root of violence associated with racism, homophobia transphobia, and many other oppressions New Mexico youth are forced to deal with on a daily basis. Intersectional mental health can be best achieved through teaching mental health where queered BIPOC experiences are centered. By centering those who are often most marginalized, it allows for more holistic understanding to be gained in a way that is equitable and allows the most growth and healing for all students. This intersectional-centered curriculum is critical and serves the best for all students as it allows windows and mirrors (Bishop, 1990). By exploring this dichotomy it allows for healing to occur in a space of understanding as a



common ground of the diverse lives and what it means to come from different background. This ties back into mental health in that a community of understanding allows for more openness, which, in turn, can affect ones' perception of school climate. This holds positive potential for a more equitable school climate and reduce stresses so that youth focus on healing, growth, and becoming oneself.

### **Resilience as a Form of Empowerment**

Being resilient and using resilience as forms of empowerment are two strategies used by LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x youth community to survive and thrive in oppressive situations. They have taken what it means to be resilient and used their resilience to help create a safer and better world for the youth of tomorrow. Threshold moments occurred when LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x youth moved from enacting resilience as noun to a verb, the use of resilience to improve their and others' surroundings. This is seen vividly in a variety of ways but is illuminated with the choices made that center other queer and/or Mexican/x people around them. The shifting of the center is critical as it allows for more people to grow and thrive and does so in a way where positive LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x are established and normed as part of all social institutions. The act of being able to go to an LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x optometrist, nurse, or teacher is critical as it aids in breaking down what it means to be each of these things. Both of these positions are filled with a wide array of usage of incorrect stereotypes. By breaking barriers, LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x youth of today and tomorrow will be provided those role models and feel vindicated in their identities when they see queer,

Mexican/x doctors, professors, nurses, or teachers. Thus, the norming is critical for true equity to prevail. These choices all tie back into moving resiliency to a verb. By showing resiliency in untraditional spaces, LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x youth scribe counter-stories to the largely skewed mainstream narratives that guide policy and educational institutions.

The counter-story is not only important but essential to survival for many youth. Each participant noted the lack of LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x role models during their youth and this does a major disservice to all youth. Each of the participants in this study is taking on and filling the gap of LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x role models in various spaces that demonstrates resilience at its core. The vast majority of careers and/or industries have deeply entrenched systemic barriers for those who live at marginalized social locations, thus the act of breaking the system by creating space in the system is critical. For example, take the role of a teacher in a K-12 setting. This career has generally been dominated by cisgender White female-dominated. Outside of this social location there is often push back with few exceptions as to what subjects are more meant for masc versus femme identified people. Thus, the idea of a gay/queer, cisgender male, Mexican/x teacher throws the system and what it means to be a teacher off-kilter. There is a lot of pushback that is often not seen by others but is felt greatly by the gay Mexican/x teacher. Thus, taking on this role is a move of both empowerment as it positions them in a space to aid in creating change and breaking down systemic barriers while being in the system. Their social location also puts them in a precarious place as their sole existence is not welcomed thus they must be

very resilient. The resilient factor is essential because even being in the most progressive of schools, there is a lot on the line in being a multiply marginalized teacher. These teachers encounter microaggressions as well as other causes of stress. Other careers and professions show similar trends that reveal the double-edged dialectic of empowerment versus stress and how resiliency is one of the most effective tools to deconstruct the system.

### **Theories for Change: Queering and Intersecting**

#### ***Transcending Trauma Capital as Survival***

The act of pairing something as negative as trauma with something positive as the capital as used in *Community Cultural Wealth* (Yosso, 2005) may seem out of place and even wrong in many ways but it an act to reclaim and reframe trauma. No LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x person lives without trauma, thus instead of hiding the skills that are learned and used because of it, we need to highlight those skills as they are one of the many reasons that we, as survivors, are still here today. Existing in spaces where our innate being is seen as a reason for violence and murder does not come easily, thus the skills and knowledge acquired through healing capital needs to be acknowledged. For LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x youth there are not many things harder than learning to love yourself and what has happened to you. Importantly, one must note that I am not interested in promoting a Trauma Olympics. Traumas manifest differently and different types of trauma affect individuals differently, but there are levels of trauma, and no matter what level one is at they still acquire the skills from their growth processes. Let's take for example the trauma of rape and break this

down. When looking back at the experience Daniel said that they would not change this or any part of their past because it made them who they are today. This is a bold statement that can only be stated when one has not only healed but grown from the past events and this is where the power of *transcending trauma capital* comes into play. Trauma capital allowed for greater navigation of the world as well as acted as an inspiration to push for true change that can aid in creating more positive lives for people who have gone through similar struggles. Rape is a harsh trauma, but this growth is also applicable to less severe forms of trauma as well, for example, the trauma inflicted via internalized homophobia. Maria discussed how important the norming of cultural production is and how seeing queer people in media was something that has helped them heal. Thus, this norming by exploring new media forms and looking for same-sex couples was a skill acquired through the trauma that came with living as a person who 'hated themselves' and just wanted to be like everyone else. So, the severity of trauma does not impact the capital gained, it just provides different types of capital gained.

So, why is *transcending trauma capital* queer and not just an idea that can be applied to all? The root of *transcending trauma capital* is intersectionality where the deeper one is oppressed via social locations, the more trauma one will experience. This is a sad, but true fact for queer BIPOC folks. Looking at the Mexican/x queer experience, these are two socially-constructed contrasting social locations combatting against each other, one of the reasons why this population is so prone to trauma. From one side the Mexican/x side, your brown

and targeted, and this comes with its own set of societal standards, but standards that are even harsher when looking at the queer community (with an emphasis on the masc-queer community). On the flip side, the queer side is viewed harshly by society overall, but especially Mexican/x points of view that are deeply shaped by colonial and religious ideologies where queerness' are viewed as sinful. Thus, this complex intersection is one where trauma happens at high rates. In order for the LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x community to move past the constant state of survival and thrive, we as a community must grow from the trauma and use it to reclaim and reframe lives and our communities for ourselves. So, *transcending trauma capital* as a capital of resilience and survival should be celebrated because the individual moves past the trauma and heals in a way that provides meaning to their work. *Transcending trauma capital* is an essential part of the healing process and is inherently intersectional because, without understanding ones' multiplicity of social locations, the capital cannot be used as a more wholistic form of growth.

### **Needed-Found-Created: Queered Resolana and *Third Space Capital***

K-12 spaces are riddled with systemic barriers for LGBTQIA+, BIPOC, and other marginalized student communities, thus these intersectional identities often need to create space within space. This space within a space is keyed a queered resolana. Resolana is a counter space that occurs amongst community and not a physical space. We see resolana across social movements and even into today. Some examples include when the places that were turned into spaces to plan the Chicana/o/x Movimiento or the ways in which the Stonewall Inn and other queer

bars became underground spaces to combat oppressive societal systems. The root of resolana is political and how the participants created resolana is one of a political nature as it is taking educational spaces that were not created for them and using them to empower their smaller communities within the larger schooling systems. The process for which these spaces are created varies from space to space but the participants followed a similar trajectory to find and create spaces of resolana. Queered resolana extends beyond the traditional ideas of resolana and pushes into *third space capital*. *Third space capital* can best be understood as a liminal borderlands place of growth and thriving in the midst of a burned forest. What appears to be barren and lifeless on the surface reveals rich soil of new opportunity below the surface. This rich soil that is anew due to the fire is the space of *third space capital*, i.e. queered resolana.

The first common thread is the noting of what is needed and missing from the K-12 space for the LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x community. As noted in chapter four, we see the lack of inclusive curriculum specifically sex education but a lack of inclusive curriculum across the board. We also note the lack of LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x educators, as well as open spaces for dialogue for the healing of mental health and past trauma. All of which spaces are needed, but currently missing from the K-12 experiences of the participants. Thus, this need for true inclusion forces and allows simultaneously each individual to seek what they are needing and finally to succeeding in hostile spaces. A journey begins that starts as being singular but by the end of it ends with community, chosen familia, and queered resolana. Thus, the participants needed to feel seen, heard, and find

those who were like them. One of the easiest ways to do this is through joining clubs and extracurriculars where people share similar interests. For example, we see students entering extracurricular activities such as band and theatre as well as a variety of clubs and organizations such as Queer Eye (a queer student club for optometry students) and Greek life. As noted by this example, we extend from K-12 into K-16, which is critical because the journey for finding oneself and your people does not end in K-12. Breaking this down even more from a personal example, the finding of spaces for me as a student in all schooling spaces has supported my journey through my master's program. I jumped into ethnic studies, and specifically Chicana/o/x Studies, a space that I was largely unaware of until college and learned about it late in my undergraduate experience. Thus, I have found a new space in the K-12 world where my intersectional self is more understood, not fully understood, but more understood. In addition to the finding of these spaces, we saw the common thread of finding cultural production and the arts. As noted above the arts do double duty as extracurriculars as well as provide other outlets to wellbeing and expression. All of the participants are involved in some form of visual or performance art and often multiple forms. Thus, we take the extracurricular status that allows for this expression to occur and it extends into different aspects of life, i.e. band rehearsal ends and friend groups remain with spaces and expand beyond the rehearsal walls. Some of my dearest friends from my K-12 experience that are still with me today came from spaces of the arts/cultural production. Thus, as noted above, I call for other inclusion of arts and cultural production across the studies because not every

student can participate in such activities for a variety of reasons. Thus, we need to ensure that students have access even if they cannot be involved in the extracurricular space. Education is caught up in meeting rogue standards that are arbitrary and forget about the importance of connection that occurs when shared arts and production occur. So, these spaces of cultural production and the arts may have been found, but they also extend into created spaces.

The act of creating a space is where *resolana* truly becomes formed in a way that allows for holistic growth and healing. These are spaces that are created as a counter to the K-12 and K-16 spaces that do not provide the necessary tools for the LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x to succeed. These spaces are often comprised of small groups of individuals that have found each other through the exploration of finding themselves and have grouped together as a chosen familia because they accept each other. In order for their true selves to emerge, a safe space is needed and created, where they truly feel like they can live out their intersectional identities, even in part. These chosen familia spaces should not be viewed as perfect, cure all spaces. Like all familias, there will be arguing, fighting, and even fracturing of chosen familias as people grow into more of their true selves. These should not be viewed as negative as we all need different things to thrive and that chosen familia may not be the most advantageous spaces for that. This is alluded to with the participants, specifically Maria and Antonio, noting that they were members of friend groups that constantly shifted. This shifting was everchanging and led to the chosen familia dynamics changing as each person grows and heals. For example, if we think



about friends groups through the years we have all had, we will note that there is a core of friends who have been with you for most likely years and some that were friends for a small amount of time, and these variations are okay. Your true chosen familia is that core group of friends (and family members). As I reflect on this work and my transitions between K-12, K-16, and now as I conclude my master of arts program, there is a core group that I always go back to and it doesn't matter if we haven't seen each other in a year, we are able to pick up where we left off. Why chosen familia is so important in the K-12 and K-16 spaces deal with the fact these chosen familias are often the only ones who know ones' true selves in full and not in part. LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x youth may not be open about their gender or sexuality at home; thus this space allows for exploration, growth, and healing of past and present traumas as the chosen familia is a space of political safety, Political safety offers LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x youth a space for authentic self and those who come from marginalized backgrounds often have a social location that has been politicized in some capacity. For the purposes of this study, the findings apply to the LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x intersectional identity but may extend and include other marginalized communities, i.e. BIPOC, femme-identified people, etc. Thus, this is where the true power of queered *resolana* and *third space capital* comes into play as there are very few spaces where politicized social locations are celebrated and for LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x youth, thus chosen familias are essential for survival.

## Policy Implications

### Mental Health Resources Needed

K-12 educational spaces can be key to creating and maintaining newfound equity, but until a hard look is taken at the system this will not happen. Budgets for education are tight but what does and does not get funded often becomes a game of politics. Mental health should be an area where funding is poured into because mental health is key to survival but that is currently not the case. Participants noted their confusion for the roles of school counselors and whether they were *really* counselors or simply there to aid in various processes, i.e. scheduling. So, we need to ensure that students know the roles of counselors and other support staff that can help them succeed in working on their mental health. Aside from this, we need more mental health support in schools that is free and accessible. Therapy is very costly and when one comes from multiple marginalized intersections accessing care is a challenge. Thus, we need to provide these resources in the schooling spaces that are free and readily available. In addition to the more direct support, we need to create a culture of change where all educators and those working with youth in both schooling and community spaces have the skills to aid in ensuring that student's mental health needs are met. One may note that this is not a teacher's purpose, but for a teacher or an educator to be effective they need to be aware of their students. In addition, teachers need to understand how classroom practices and policies affect students on a mental level, as well as provide front-line support when LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x youth face bullying, harassment and violence.

## **Inclusive Curriculum on the Books**

Inclusive curriculum requires teaching about the LGBTQIA+ and BIPOC experience. Incorporating the lived experiences of these communities is essential to all classroom spaces and thus we need to have laws that require their inclusion in the classroom. Each participant noted a lack of sex education that was anything from the standard male/female couple and sexual experience. This is just one of the many instances where the lack of inclusion not only created an inequitable space but left students in a position where they did not have the tools to act safely. In addition to this example, I didn't know that ethnic studies or queer studies existed until I was in college. This problematic because these spaces assist BIPOC students to succeed in higher education.. Thus, we need to ensure that all students have access to ethnic, queer, and other areas of study that are not taught in traditional K-12 spaces. One of the key ways to do this is through enacting laws that require them to be taught. Education is a big business, and unless ethnic and queer studies are required the likelihood of courses that focus on ethnic, sexual, or other minorities is likely to be discouraged or minimized.

### **Representation Matters: Where are the BIPOC and queer educators?**

The above question is one of the many symptoms of an educational system that has adapted and changed very little at its core since its inception many years ago. Walk into a staff meeting at a high school, where there are likely many teachers depending on the size of the school and you will see many White female teachers. There is nothing wrong with being a White female teacher, but we need to have teachers who are like us and different from us. If we only have

teachers who are not like us, it can be hard to connect and have positive diverse representations available to students. These positive role models are critical for positive identity development. This is as much a call for policy in K-12 as it is for teacher preparation programs, what are teacher preparation programs doing to recruit BIPOC and queer educators? Teacher preparation programs hold a lot of power in who is able to become a teacher and policies that are anti-BIPOC and anti-queer are key factors to the shortage of BIPOC, queer, and other teachers from marginalized backgrounds. To invest in the students of tomorrow, we need to invest in the teachers of today and that is currently not happening. To highlight this from a theory in the flesh perspective (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1981), I had four teachers of color in my K-12 experience and no openly LGBTQIA+ educators out of nearly fifty teachers. It was hard for me as a queer Mexican/x person to see that I could be a teacher because there was no one like me. Thus, I ask the question again, where are the BIPOC and queer educators and what can you do in your position to ensure future students do not have to ask the same question?

### **Classroom and Educator Implications**

#### **Chosen Familia and the Classroom**

Teachers should provide and support space for chosen familia to be found and explored during class time. We must note that those who live at multiple marginalized intersections often have commitments that extend beyond that of their age. Thus, we as educators should provide the space for them to find their chosen familia in the classroom. This can be done in a variety of ways and can be easily integrated into all classes through group work and providing

opportunities where students can express who they are and their interests. By creating spaces for social relationality in the classroom, students have an opportunity to connect with peers that may become a critical part of their support network. This type of networking often occurs much more in extracurricular spaces that not all students have the opportunity to take part in due to a variety of factors including commitments outside of school, i.e. working and taking care of siblings. We also need to acknowledge the fact that many Latinx communities are more collective than what is used in K-12 spaces, which is largely individualistic and honors the individual and not the community effort. Providing spaces for communal work not only allows for chosen familia to found but also creates classroom spaces that are more culturally responsive to our students that come from communities where the whole is celebrated more than the parts. A word of caution that group work does not make classroom space culturally responsive or advantageous for chosen familia exploration, how the group work and group space is created must be intentional. This intention goes back to a wide variety of factors but one of the most critical is how groups are created and what is task is to be completed. As educators, we have to ensure these are safe spaces that allow for growth and do not force the outing of students or the telling of past trauma for the sake of other group members. Thus, I urge for space to be created for chosen familia exploration but it must be intentional and thought out to be equitable in its conception and execution.

## **Enacting Intersectional Curriculum**

Enacting and using inclusive curriculum beyond a diversity checklist is essential for BIPOC students. This is a question that is rarely being asked if ever by educators, teacher preparation programs, K-12 staff, and by companies that make curriculum, but it is a question that is essential for true equity to be imagined and practiced in schooling spaces. We as educators know that enacting intersectional curriculum will not come from higher-ups or curriculum companies, thus it is our responsibility to ensure we are intersectional educators and enacting intersectionality in our classrooms. Students and all people live at a vast array of intersections and this is what we should be teaching in the classroom. And, no, I am not saying that we need just to teach about marginalized intersections, instead we need to be teaching all intersections. As a student and educator, we should be able to see ourselves in the curriculum, i.e. a mirror, as well as the lived experiences of others, i.e. the window (Bishop, 1990). In order to ensure that this happens for the many different students we have, we need to practice the act of centering intersectionality that allows for the exploration of self and others to be more in line with the reality of experiences in the world. There is an urgent need to ensure that BIPOCness and queerness are centered, explored, and celebrated.

## **Trauma-Informed Pedagogy**

In addition to the centering of intersectional experiences, as educators, we need to utilize trauma-informed pedagogical choices to ensure we are honoring our students in ways that do not perpetuate systems of oppression and instead

promote healing practices. I use trauma-informed pedagogy as opposed to trauma-responsive pedagogy because I want to extend the idea of the educator outside of the classroom space. In reality, some spaces are more conducive to trauma-informed practices due to various limitations. Trauma-responsive practices and pedagogy should be used in all spaces where it can occur in an effective way. At its most basic level, “trauma-informed pedagogy is pedagogical practice that keeps trauma, its prevalence, and how it affects an individual, in mind” (UCI Division of Teaching Excellence, and Innovation, n.d.). This needs to occur in all educational spaces and is not limited to K-12. We do not know all the lived experiences of our students and thus we need to honor and create spaces where trauma is not resurfaced in the classroom. This includes a myriad of things and does not mean we should shy away from the hard topics because discussing them is critical for healing. However, we need to be aware of what we are teaching, how we are teaching, and what supports may be needed for the learning to be healing. An example from my practice is I teach the musical *Dear Evan Hansen* which is about a teenager who struggles with mental health ailments (specifically anxiety and depression), suicidality, and growing up as a single child of divorced parents. All things that hit close to home for many students and how I approach the unit is one that does not shy away from talking about all the traumas. I combine the musical with dialogue encourages students to draw on pockets of self-exploration that hopefully allow for healing to occur. In this unit, this is done via writing and discussion but can be done in a variety of ways. Thus, I challenge educators to closely examine their teaching practices

and to organize their classroom to be a space that is not just about learning a subject but about safely learning about oneself through trauma-informed practices.

### **Future Research**

The above study provides numerous areas and opportunities where the need for future research is illuminated. One of the most prevalent shortcomings is the lack of literature on LGBTQIA+ communities in K-12 settings. Higher education spaces often portray a different side of schooling in many regards including the integration of gender, sexuality, and ethnic studies, as well as a broader array of degrees and programs. Thus, this inclusion of students' social locations in the classroom can aid in shaping a revamped idea of schooling. Institutions of higher education may also have a greater diversity of staff and faculty that also shapes schooling experiences differently for college students. Thus, future research should be conducted that looks at LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x youth that do not have exposure to higher education to understand the resiliency of the community from a more holistic point of view. As we have seen across social movements and marginalized communities, the act of creating spaces of resiliency and resilience occurs, and there is a need for true community building to understand where these spaces occur for LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x youth that do not attend higher education spaces. Thus, how one views schooling and where these spaces are created is not only critical to understanding but is essential to acknowledging the LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x youth community more fully regarding the subjects of mental health, schooling, and resilience.



The second area of future research is a curriculum analysis of mental health being taught in schools and what mental health resources are available to students in the K-12 settings. One of the most prevalent themes was the lack of mental health knowledge and instruction while in the K-12 space and this begs the question of what is being taught in schools and what is being said about mental health. In New Mexico a variety of bills have died on the legislative floor regarding requiring mental health instruction including HB 511: Mental, Social & Emotional Learning Act (New Mexico Legislature, 2019). Some of these bills require that New Mexico teachers teach about mental health, social health, and emotional health. All aspects are critical to reshaping society and breaking the stigma surrounding these aspects of health. Thus, to be able to push this through legislation, research needs to be done to verify its lack of inclusion in schools. We know that mental health resources are essential for New Mexico youth based on the high rates of suicidality and other mental ailments (Tomedi et al., 2017). Thus, we need to connect the dots between these lived experiences and the lack of school supports both from a curriculum standpoint as well as the resources available for Mexican/x LGBTQIA+ students. Half of the participants noted that they were unaware of the function of their high school counselors and if they were counselors or simply there for schedule changes. This shows a lack of understanding of both resources as well as how the resources are being utilized in K-12 spaces. Thus, a study or studies is critical to note the connection and lack of connections that exist in K-12 and why funding and bills like HB 511 are essential not only for LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x students but all students.

## Researcher Reflection

Reflecting on the study and the experience of conducting the study as a whole, I feel both inspired, empowered, and mentally exhausted. The resilience and truth that each participant explored through their *testimonios* are truly inspiring in that they chose to be vulnerable and tell their truth as a means of rewriting a counter-story. Their ability to rewrite their life stories and the landscapes they inhabit aids in their healing process as well as creating a brighter future tomorrow for the LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x youth community. Thus, their words now live as truth and aid in dismantling the white heteronormative mainstream narrative that has been written about LGBTQIA+, Mexican/x, and LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x peoples. It took a lot of courage for the participants to tell their truths, especially when these truths are riddled with accounts of trauma. However, what is most inspiring is how each person took their past pains and turned them into a fire to inspire their work, their friends, and their communities. Their fire pushed me throughout the process even when I felt my own flame was waning. Their words re-ignited my promise to ensure that their *testimonios* would be explored and told in a way that was not only true to who they are but that honored their lives. Research and academia often get caught up in the data aspect and forgets that interviews come from lived experiences, experiences that are close to home, and in some cases experiences that are hard to utter out loud. Thus, to honor those voices was always at the forefront of my mind. I kept thinking of the words of Father Roger Smith Schmit from *The Laramie Project*, “And I will speak with you, I will trust if you write a play [thesis] of this, that you

will say it right. You need to do your best to say it correct” (Kaufman et al., 2001, p.88). I have done everything in my power to say it correctly and yet there is still more that I can say, but I have stopped with what is here to ensure honor is given. As a gay, queer Mexican/x person myself, I know getting it correct is essential and I am honored to share the *testimonios* of the participants as our collective and individual experiences are powerful. I am proud to be a member of the LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x community and that is something I would have not said while in my K-12 experience.

### **Conclusion**

The study has explored what it means to be LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x in New Mexico from a mental health and school climate perspective. Two social dynamics that are critical when talking about *testimonios* that come from a community that is multiply marginalized. We need to center these voices as well as the many other complex intersectional voices that are not only missing from academic spaces but who are persecuted for simply existing. This persecution is as old as time itself and is so deeply entrenched in the educational system that the only way for it to be expelled is through community efforts by all parties. There is power in the people and, thus, if we mobilize as educators, researchers, students, parents, and community members true change can occur. Daniel stated, “I didn’t find out until I tried killing myself that there was mental health issues in the family.” This statement has haunted me since the day the words came out of their mouth. It made me question what we as a society are doing and why we are scared to talk about mental health, abuse, stress, sexuality,

gender, BIPOC, etc. We need to honor our youth by providing them the tools to succeed and what this means at its core is to allow them to be their true selves and provide them the tools to thrive. These tools are complex and yes, we need to acknowledge social dynamics that may be viewed as scary or taboo because the only way to dismantle broken systems is through having the tools to create new systems. Mental health knowledge should not be reserved for medical professionals, it needs to be taught in and out of our schools. This thesis acts to honor the lived experiences of the LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x youth who are with us to tell their *testimonios* today but even more importantly those LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x youth who are not with us today because they were persecuted for their social locations. These youth faced internal mental health struggle that they had to fight alone. I conclude by asking, in honor of those who no longer live and those who fight the battle of survival daily, what can you do to ensure our LGBTQIA+ Mexican/x not only live but thrive?

# APPENDICES

## Appendix A. UNM OIRB Approval Letter



DATE: April 29, 2020

IRB #: 06820

IRBNet ID & TITLE: [1566447-2] Mental Health and School Climate Perceptions Among LGBTQ+ Chicanx Students

PI OF RECORD: Irene Vasquez, Ph.D.

SUBMISSION TYPE: Response/Follow-Up

BOARD DECISION: APPROVED

EFFECTIVE DATE: April 29, 2020

EXPIRATION DATE: N/A

RISK LEVEL: MINIMAL RISK

PROJECT STATUS: ACTIVE

- DOCUMENTS:
- Advertisement - Phone (UPDATED: 04/23/2020)
  - Advertisement - Post (UPDATED: 04/23/2020)
  - Advertisement - Flyer (UPDATED: 04/23/2020)
  - Advertisement - Email (UPDATED: 04/23/2020)
  - Consent Form - Consent Form 04232020 (UPDATED: 04/23/2020)
  - Data Collection - Interview Outline (UPDATED: 04/23/2020)
  - Letter - Modifications Letter (UPDATED: 04/23/2020)
  - Protocol - Protocol 04232020 (UPDATED: 04/23/2020)
  - Protocol - Focus Group Outline (UPDATED: 04/23/2020)

Thank you for your Response/Follow-Up submission. The UNM IRB has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an acceptable risk/benefit ratio and a project design wherein the risks to participants have been minimized. **This project is not covered by UNM's Federalwide Assurance (FWA) and will not receive federal funding.**

The IRB has determined the following:

- Informed consent must be obtained and documentation is required for this project. To obtain and document consent, use only approved consent document(s).

This determination applies only to the activities described in the submission and does not apply should any changes be made to this research. If changes are being considered, it is the responsibility of the Principal Investigator to submit an amendment to this project and receive IRB approval prior to implementing the changes. A change in the research may disqualify this research from the current review category. **If federal funding will be sought for this project, an amendment must be submitted so that the project can be reviewed under relevant federal regulations.**

All reportable events must be promptly reported to the UNM IRB, including: UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to participants or others, SERIOUS or UNEXPECTED adverse events, NONCOMPLIANCE issues, and participant COMPLAINTS.

If an expiration date is noted above, a continuing review or closure submission is due no later than 30 days before the expiration date. **It is the responsibility of the Principal Investigator to apply for continuing review or closure and receive approval for the duration of this project.** If the IRB approval for this project expires, all research related activities must stop and further action will be required by the IRB.

Please use the appropriate reporting forms and procedures to request amendments, continuing review, closure, and reporting of events for this project. Refer to the OIRB website for forms and guidance on submissions.

**Please note that all IRB records must be retained for a minimum of three years after the closure of this project.**

The Office of the IRB can be contacted through: mail at MSC02 1665, 1 University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, NM 87131-0001; phone at 505.277.2644; email at [irbmaincampus@unm.edu](mailto:irbmaincampus@unm.edu); or in-person at 1805 Sigma Chi Rd. NE, Albuquerque, NM 87106. You can also visit the OIRB website at [irb.unm.edu](http://irb.unm.edu).

## Appendix B. GLSEN RERC Approval Letter



May 27, 2020

Mr. Damon Carbajal  
University of New Mexico  
1501 Indian School Rd. NE  
Albuquerque, NM 87102

*Transmitted via electronic mail: dcarbajal@unm.edu*

Dear Mr. Damon Carbajal,

I write in reference to the study entitled “Mental Health and School Climate Perceptions Among LGBTQ+ Chicanx Students” for which you serve as the principal investigator. After careful consideration of the revised and updated research materials, the study has been approved by the Research Ethics Review Committee. This approval is limited to the activities and specific conditions, including participant consent, as described in the application. In accordance with this approval, all researchers affiliated with the study are responsible for compliance with any applicable federal, state, local, and GLSEN policies. The principal investigator is ultimately responsible for maintaining accurate study records as well as ensuring that all study team members review and adhere to applicable policies related to safeguarding human subjects.

If significant change in the investigative procedures involving human subjects is called for during the period of activity covered by this application, the principal investigator shall seek prior approval for such change from the RERC and agree to follow the advice of the RERC. Such changes may include those made to study procedures, research instruments, number or type of participants, recruitment materials, or personnel, etc.

Note that RERC approval for the GSA Study project begins on May 27, 2020 and expires on May 26, 2021. Projects can be renewed annually for up to a total of three years from the original project begin date. The principal investigator may request renewal by using the RERC extension request form; please submit the form within *30 days before* the project end date to ensure there is no lapse in RERC approval. Please also submit annual (as needed, if extension is granted) and terminus reports to the Research Ethics Review Committee for this project.

Sincerely,

Madelaine Adelman, Ph.D.  
Chair, GLSEN Research Ethics Review Committee  
Professor, School of Social Transformation, Arizona State University

## Appendix C. Quick Field Screener

MENTAL HEALTH & SCHOOL CLIMATE PERCEPTIONS AMONG LGBTQ+ CHICANX STUDENTS

IRB Study Number: 06820

*Confidential*

### QUICK FIELD SCREENER

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Code \_\_\_\_\_

[Say] “Thank you for showing interest in the study titled, “Mental Health and School Climate Perceptions Among LGBTQ+ Chicanx Students.” I am going to ask you some questions to make sure that you are eligible to participate in the study, it will only take a couple of minutes. Are you ready for the questions?”

[Wait for participant response. If yes, ask questions. If no, ask if they have any questions.]

[Say]

**Question 1:** Do you identify as a member of the LGBTQ+ community?

YES NO

**Question 2:** What best describes your sexuality: gay, bisexual, queer, lesbian, other?

GAY BISEXUAL QUEER LESBIAN OTHER

**Question 3:** What best describes your gender?

CISGENDER TRANSGENDER GENDER NON-BINARY OTHER

**Question 4:** Did you attend high school in the state of NM?

YES NO

[If answer to question 3 is *yes*, ask question 4. If the answer is *no*, move to question 5]

**Question 5:** How many years did you attend high school in NM?

1 2 3 4 5 6

**Questions 6:** How old are you?

18 19 20 21 22 23 24 OTHER

**Question 7:** Are you fluent in English?



MENTAL HEALTH & SCHOOL CLIMATE PERCEPTIONS AMONG LGBTQ+ CHICANX STUDENTS

YES NO

**Question 8:** Do you self-identify as Latinx, Latin@, Chicanx, Chican@, Mexican, Mexican@, Mexican-American, or Hispanic?

YES NO OTHER

**Question 9:** What are your pronouns? (Select all that apply.)

HE/HIM/HIS SHE/HER/HERS THEY/THEM/THEIRS OTHER

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If participant meets all criteria to participate in the study (LGBTQ+, Chicanx, Past NM High School Students, and be between the ages of 18 and 24)

[Say] *“Thank you for answering the above questions, your participation is appreciated. You are eligible for the study and we can move forward with the consent before the interview starts.”*

If the participant does not meet the criteria for the study.

[Say] *“Thank you for your time and participation for answering the above questions. You are not eligible for the study. Thank you again for your time and I hope you have a great day.”*

---

Name of Research Member Completing Screener

---

Signature of Research Member

---

Date

## Appendix D. Consent Form



### Mental Health and School Climate Perceptions Among LGBTQ+ Chicanx Students

IRB Study Number: 06820

Consent to Participate in Research

May 22, 2020

**Purpose of the research:** You are being asked to participate in a research project that is being done by Irene Vasquez (PI) and Damon R. Carbajal (Student Investigator from the department of Chicana/o Studies). The purpose of this research is better understanding the LGBTQ+ Chicanx student experience as it relates to mental health and school climate perceptions. You are being asked to join because you have noted that you self-identify as Chicanx (or a related identity), self-identify as LGBTQ+, are between the ages of 18 and 24, and attended a high school in the state of New Mexico for at least three years.

This consent form contains important information about this project and what to expect if you decide to participate. Please consider the information carefully. Feel free to ask questions before making your decision whether or not to participate. Your participation in this research is voluntary.

**What you will do in the project:** Participation in this study involves one-on-one interview/demographic collection session and/or a focus group. The questions for the one-on-one interview will focus on your high school experience, mental health, and how you perceived school climate. The focus-group that will include around six participants discussing general attitudes toward mental health, schoolings experiences as whole, and what aspects of your identities do you think influenced your school climate and mental health the most. The one-on-one interview will last about 90 minutes and the focus group will last about 120 minutes. You will have the option to conduct the interviews in one of two locations, a private space at UNM-Main Campus (study room or private office), or, in a private space at NAPPR, Inc., a local nonprofit. An alternative option for conducting the interview(s) remotely is through the online platform of Zoom. This alternative option is being offered based on the current health climate surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic. You may skip any question in the demographic information survey or in the interview sessions that makes you uncomfortable and you may stop the interview sessions at any time without any repercussions.

**Risks:** There are risks of stress, emotional distress, inconvenience and possible loss of privacy and confidentiality associated with participating in a research project. This may include psychological stress as the questions pertain to the sensitive topic surrounding mental health as well as past experiences that may bring up traumatic memories for you.

**Benefits:** There will be no benefit to you from participating in this research. However, it is hoped that information gained will help aid in influencing policy decisions aiding in creating a more equitable school environment for all LGBTQ+ Chicanx students and educators.

**Confidentiality of your information:** The one-on-one interviews and focus group interview will be recorded either via an audio recorder for in person interviews and via Zoom for remote interviews. The recordings will be transcribed into text documents without any identifiable information (name, email, etc.) and be used for analysis. Once the text transcripts are created the audio recordings will be deleted/digitally destroyed. To ensure confidentiality of the data collected, all data will be stored in a locked file cabinet and your personal identifiers (name, email address, and phone number) will be stored separately from other data on a password protected computer. We will take measures to protect the security of all your personal information, but we cannot guarantee confidentiality of all research

data. The University of New Mexico Institutional Review Board (IRB) that oversees human research may be permitted to access your records. Your name will not be used in any published reports about this project.

You should understand that the researcher is not prevented from taking steps, including reporting to authorities, to prevent serious harm of yourself or others.

**Use of your information for future research:** All identifiable information (e.g., your name, email address, and phone number) will be removed from the information collected in this project. After we remove all identifiers, the information may be used for future research or shared with other researchers without your additional informed consent.

**Request of data collected:** The data collection during your interview(s) will be made available to you upon request. Should you like to request a copy of your one-on-one interview and/or the focus group please contact the student investigator, Damon R. Carbajal, via email or phone. All identifiable information (e.g., your name, email address, and phone number) will be removed from the data before it is given to you.

**Payment:** You will not be paid for participating in this project. In return for your time and the inconvenience of participating in this project, you will be given a \$15.00 gift card for each interview (one-on-one interview; focus group interview), for a possible total of \$30.00 in gift cards. If you do not take part in both interviews (one-on-one interview; focus group interview), you will be given the \$15.00 gift card for the interview you took part in. If you participate via Zoom, the gift card(s) will be mailed to the address of your choice within 48 hours following the scheduled interview time.

**Right to withdraw from the research:** Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You have the right to choose not to participate or to withdraw your participation at any time without penalty. Any data (recorded audio, demographic information, transcripts) collected from the study will be destroyed and not used for the research project within twenty-four hours of the participant notifying their withdrawal from the study. The only data that cannot be destroyed is any audio from the focus group or focus group transcripts as this data comes from multiple participants. The researcher has the right to withdraw a participant from the study should it be noted that they do not meet the inclusion/ exclusion criteria noted above or noncompliance with research procedures. If a participant is withdrawn by a researcher, the same process of destroying data will occur as noted above. Participants who withdraw during the interview session or are withdrawn from the study will receive the same gift card incentive as noted above in "Payment."

If you have any questions, concerns, or complaints about the research, please contact:

**Student Investigator:** Damon R. Carbajal, Chicana/o Studies, 1829 Sigma Chi Rd NE, Albuquerque, NM 87131 MSC02 1680, (505) 508-7675, [dcarbajal@unm.edu](mailto:dcarbajal@unm.edu)

**Principal Investigator:** Irene Vasquez, Chicana/o Studies, 1829 Sigma Chi Rd NE, Albuquerque, NM 87131 MSC02 1680, (505) 277-641, [ivasquez@unm.edu](mailto:ivasquez@unm.edu)

If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, or about what you should do in case of any research-related harm to you, or if you want to obtain information or offer input, please contact the IRB. The IRB is a group of people from UNM and the community who provide independent oversight of safety and ethical issues related to research involving people:

UNM Office of the IRB, (505) 277-2644, irbmaincampus@unm.edu. Website: <http://irb.unm.edu/>

**CONSENT**

You are making a decision whether to participate in this research. Your signature below indicates that you have read this form (or the form was read to you) and that all questions have been answered to your satisfaction. By signing this consent form, you are not waiving any of your legal rights as a research participant. A copy of this consent form will be provided to you.

I agree to participate in this research.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Adult Participant                      Signature of Adult Participant                      Date

**CONSENT TO QUOTE FROM INTERVIEW**

I may wish to quote from the interview either in the presentations or articles resulting from this work. A pseudonym (fake name) will be used in order to protect your identity.

**Initial one of the following to indicate your choice:**

- \_\_\_\_\_ (initial) I agree to be quoted in presentations or articles under a pseudonym.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (initial) I do not agree to be quoted in presentations or articles under a pseudonym.

**CONSENT TO AUDIO-RECORD INTERVIEW**

**Initial one of the following to indicate your choice:**

- \_\_\_\_\_ (initial) I agree to be audio-recorded.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (initial) I do not agree to be audio-recorded.

**Researcher Signature** (to be completed at time of informed consent)

I have explained the research to the participant and answered all of their questions. I believe that they understand the information described in this consent form and freely consents to participate.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Research Team Member                      Signature of Research Team Member                      Date

## Appendix E. One-On-One Interview Protocol

MENTAL HEALTH & SCHOOL CLIMATE PERCEPTIONS AMONG LGBTQ+ CHICANX STUDENTS

IRB Study Number: 06820

### ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

[Say] *“Hello, my name is Damon Carbajal and I am a master’s student at the University of New Mexico where I am studying Chicana/o/x Studies. Thank you for showing interest in the study entitled, “Mental Health and School Climate Perceptions Among LGBTQ+ Chicax Students.”*

[Say] *“Before we start the interview, I also need to get your permission to participate in the study and we must go over the consent documentation.”*

[Read through the Consent Form with the participant]

[Say] *“Do you have any questions about what we just read through?”*

[If there are questions answer them.]

[If there are no questions, say] *“Please go ahead and sign and date at the bottom of the Consent Form”*

[Say] *“Thank you very much. Do you have a preferred pseudonym [a fake name] for the interview?”*

[If no] *How about we use the name [Suggest a pseudonym.]*

[If yes, say] *“You said [pseudonym here]. Is that correct?”*

[Say] *“I want you to know that if you use other real names of people or places or your institution during the interview I will also change these when we transcribe the interview, and I will only report the data in ways that cannot be linked back to you or your institution. Before we start the interview, please fill out this demographic form to the best of your abilities. If you have any questions as you fill out the form, please ask.”*

[Let participant fill out the demographic form.]

[Say] *“Thank you again for participating in this study, it is very important, and your contribution will help immensely. Remember that you may ask to stop the interview at any time, and you may skip a question. You will still receive the \$15.00 gift card.*

*Are you ready to start the interview?”*

[Begin asking questions]

## MENTAL HEALTH & SCHOOL CLIMATE PERCEPTIONS AMONG LGBTQ+ CHICANX STUDENTS

### NEIGHBORHOOD

1. Tell me about yourself? (Probe: What are your hobbies, things you do in your spare time, what you do with your family, etc.?) Where do you live? Have you always lived there? What other neighborhoods have you lived in?

### SCHOOL CLIMATE

2. What was your high school experience like? (Probe: Was it negative, positive, a mixture of both?)
3. Would you consider your school a safe space? If not, where do you find support? (Probe: Do you find support among friends, family, community groups, etc.?)
4. What challenges did you face as a Chicax LGBTQ+ student? (Probe: Do you experience bullying, do you have access to LGBTQ+ materials in the classroom, etc.?)
5. How have you overcome these challenges?
6. Where do you find support in overcoming these challenges?
7. When you were in high school, did you think you were going to graduate? Why or why not?
8. What would make high school more supportive for you as a LGBTQ+ Chicax student?

### MENTAL HEALTH

9. Overall, how would you rate your mental health, excellent, very good, good, fair, or poor? Please explain why you selected your choice?
10. How knowledgeable about mental health are you?
11. Is there a history of mental disorder in your family?
  - a. If yes, who?
12. Have you been diagnosed with any mental health disorder?
13. Have you ever been committed? (Probe: can you tell me more about it?)
14. Are you currently taking any medication for a mental health disorder?
15. Do you think you have undiagnosed mental health disorder?
16. Have you ever attended therapy?
17. If yes, how was this experience for you? When did you attend? What made you attend?
  - a. If no, would you attend? Why or why not?

### INTERSECTIONAL CAPITAL

18. What resources have helped you get to where you are today? (i.e. people, materials resources, etc.)

### OTHER

19. Is there anything in regard to your LGBTQ+ Chicax identity, high school experience, or mental health that you would like to discuss or any other topics you feel would be pertinent to the research project?
20. Do you have any questions for me?

MENTAL HEALTH & SCHOOL CLIMATE PERCEPTIONS AMONG LGBTQ+ CHICANX STUDENTS

[Say] *“That completes the questions for the interview today. After I review and transcribe your comments, is it okay if I contact you if I need clarification on anything? Thank you again for your time and participation.”*

[Say] *“Thank you again, here is an informational sheet with LGBTQ+ and mental health resources as well as the gift card for your time.”*

[Hand materials to participant, get signature for compensation]

[Say] *“Thank you for your time. I look forward to possibly having you at the focus group on [INSERT DATE]. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me. I hope you a great day.”*

## Appendix F. Focus Group Interview Protocol

MENTAL HEALTH & SCHOOL CLIMATE PERCEPTIONS AMONG LGBTQ+ CHICANX STUDENTS

IRB Study Number: 06820

### FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

#### SECTION I

---

[Conduct below with each participant. When complete move to Section II.]

[Say] *“Hello, my name is Damon Carbajal and I am a master’s student at the University of New Mexico where I am studying Chicana/o/x Studies. Thank you for showing interest in the study entitled, “Mental Health and School Climate Perceptions Among LGBTQ+ Chicax Students.”*

[Say] *“Before we start the focus group, I also need to get your permission to participate in the study and we must go over the consent documentation.”*

[Read through the Consent Form with the participant]

[Say] *“Do you have any questions about what we just read through?”*

[If there are questions answer them.]

[If there are no questions, say] *“Please go ahead and sign and date at the bottom of the Consent Form”*

[Say] *“Thank you very much.”*

[Say] *“I want you to know that if you use other real names of people or places or your institution during the focus group. I will also change these when we transcribe the interview, and I will only report the data in ways that cannot be linked back to you or your institution.*

[Say] *“Thank you again for participating in this study, it is very important, and your contribution will help immensely. Remember that you do not have to answer every question asked. You will still receive the \$15.00 gift card.*

[Say] *“Thank you for your time, please go ahead and get some food and we will begin the focus group soon.”*

#### SECTION II

---

[Say] *“Thank you again for your time and commitment, let’s go ahead and began the focus group. Remember you do not have to answer all questions.”*

[Begin asking questions]



MENTAL HEALTH & SCHOOL CLIMATE PERCEPTIONS AMONG LGBTQ+ CHICANX STUDENTS

ICE BREAKER

1. Why did you decide to join the focus group today?
2. What was your high school experience like?

MENTAL HEALTH PERCEPTIONS

3. How is mental health viewed by mainstream society?
4. How is mental health viewed by Chicanx society?
5. How is mental health view by LGBTQ+ society?

CHICANX PERCEPTIONS

6. How are Chicanx peoples viewed by mainstream society?
7. How are Chicanx peoples viewed in LGBTQ+ society?

LGBTQ+ PERCEPTIONS

8. How are LGBTQ+ peoples viewed by mainstream society?
9. How are LGBTQ+ peoples viewed in Chicanx society?

MENTAL HEALTH REPRESENTATIONS

10. What item did you bring that represents your mental health?
11. Why this item? How does it embody your mental health as a LGBTQ+ Chicanx person?

INTERSECTIONAL CAPITAL

12. Where did you find support to help your mental health?
13. What is something you wish you knew before entering high school as an LGBTQ+ Chicanx person?

OTHER

14. Is there anything in regard to your LGBTQ Chicanx identity, high school experience, or mental health that you would like to discuss or any other topics you feel would be pertinent to the research project?
15. Do you have any questions for me?

[Say] *“That completes the focus group questions for today. After I review and transcribe your comments, is it okay if I contact you if I need clarification on anything?”*

[Let participants reply. Note participants who do not want to be contacted].

[Say] *“Thank you again for your time and participation.”*

[Hand materials to participant, get signature for compensation]

[Say] *“Thank you for your time. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me. I hope you a great day.”*

# Appendix G. Demographic Form

MENTAL HEALTH & SCHOOL CLIMATE PERCEPTIONS AMONG LGBTQ+ CHICANX STUDENTS

IRB Study Number: 06820

*Confidential*

## DEMOGRAPHIC FORM

Pseudonym Name \_\_\_\_\_

High School \_\_\_\_\_

Year of Birth \_\_\_\_\_

High School Location \_\_\_\_\_

**1. To which gender do you identify most with?**

- Male
- Female
- Transgender Male
- Transgender Female
- Gender Non-conforming
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**2. What are your pronouns?**

- He/Him/His
- She/Her/Hers
- They/Their/Theres
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**3. STREET GENDER: If you were walking down the street, how would other people who do not know you personally identify your gender based on what you look like? Would you say:**

- Man
- Woman
- Transgender Man
- Transgender Woman
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**4. Do you consider yourself to be? (Check as many as applicable)**

- Heterosexual or Straight
- Lesbian
- Gay
- Bisexual
- Queer
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**5. STREET SEXUALITY: If you were walking down the street, how would other people who do not know you personally identify your sexual orientation? (Check as many as applicable)**

- Lesbian
- Gay
- Bisexual
- Queer
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**6. Do you consider yourself to be: (Check all that are applicable)?**

- Latinx/a/o
- Mexican/a/o
- Spanish
- Nueva/o Mexicana/o
- Hispanic
- None
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**7. SKIN COLOR: We are interested in how you would describe your appearance. How would you describe your skin color?**

- Very light
- Light
- Medium
- Dark
- Very dark
- Not Sure

**8. STREET RACE: If you were walking down the street, how would other people who do not know you personally identify your race based on what you look like? Would you say:**

- Latinx/ Chicanx
- White
- Black
- Native American/ American Indian
- Asian
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander

**9. Are you a child of immigrant parents/guardians?**

- No
- Yes

**10. What is the highest level of schooling guardian/ parent one has completed?**

- Completed grade school (elementary/ middle school) or less
- Some high school
- Completed high school
- Some college
- Completed college
- Graduate or professional school
- Not sure

**11. What do you call guardian/ parent one?**

- Mother
- Father
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**12. What is the highest level of schooling your guardian/parent two has completed? (If applicable)**

- Completed grade school (elementary/middle school) or less
- Some high school
- Completed high school
- Some college
- Completed college
- Graduate or professional school
- Not sure

**13. What do you call guardian/parent two? (If applicable)**

- Mother
- Father
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**14. Please list any other parents/ guardians and their highest level of schooling? (If applicable)**

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**15. How many years did you attend high school in New Mexico?**

- Less than 1 year
- 1 year
- 2 years
- 3 years
- 4 years
- 5 years
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**16. How would you define your high school location?**

- Rural
- Suburban
- Urban
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**17. Did you feel safe in your high school?**

- No
- Yes

**18. Did you learn about mental health in high school?**

- No
- Yes

**19. Overall, how would you rate your mental health while in high school?**

- Excellent
- Very good

MENTAL HEALTH & SCHOOL CLIMATE PERCEPTIONS AMONG LGBTQ+ CHICANX STUDENTS

- Good
- Fair
- Poor

**20. Are you currently in therapy or counseling?**

- No
- Yes

**21. Were you in therapy or counseling in high school?**

- No
- Yes

**22. Is there a history of mental disorder in your family?**

- No
- Yes (If yes, which one(s): \_\_\_\_\_)

**23. Have you ever been diagnosed with a mental illness?**

- No
- Yes (If yes, which one(s): \_\_\_\_\_)

**24. Have you ever thought about killing yourself?1**

- Never
- It was just a brief passing thought
- Once or twice
- Constant thought

**25. Did you ever think about killing yourself while in high school?1**

- Never
- It was just a brief passing thought
- Once or twice
- Constant thought

**26. When was the last thought about killing yourself?1**

- Never
- Within the past 24 hours
- Within the past week.
- Within the past month
- Within the past six months
- Within the past year
- Greater than a year

**27. Have you ever attempted to kill yourself?1**

- Never
- I had a plan at least once to kill myself but did not try to do it
- I had a plan at least once to kill myself and really wanted to die
- I have attempted to kill myself, but did not want to die
- I have attempted to kill myself, and really hoped to die

**28. Did you ever attempt to kill yourself in high school?1**

- Never
- I had a plan at least once to kill myself but did not try to do it
- I had a plan at least once to kill myself and really wanted to die
- I had attempted to kill myself, but did not want to die
- I had attempted to kill myself, and really hoped to die

**29. How would you define mental health?**

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*Questions 24-28 modified from Osman A., Bagge C.L., Guitierrez P.M., Kooper B.A., & Barrios F.X. (2001) The Suicidal Behaviors Questionnaire-Revised (SBQ-R): Validation from clinical and nonclinical samples, Assessment (5)443-454,*

## Appendix H. One-On-One Interview Questions

### MENTAL HEALTH & SCHOOL CLIMATE PERCEPTIONS AMONG LGBTQ+ CHICANX STUDENTS

IRB Study Number: 06820

#### ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

##### NEIGHBORHOOD

1. Tell me about yourself? (Probe: What are your hobbies, things you do in your spare time, what you do with your family, etc.?) Where do you live? Have you always lived there? What other neighborhoods have you lived in?

##### SCHOOL CLIMATE

2. What was your high school experience like? (Probe: Was it negative, positive, a mixture of both?)
3. Would you consider your school a safe space? If not, where do you find support? (Probe: Do you find support among friends, family, community groups, etc.?)
4. What challenges did you face as a Chicana LGBTQ+ student? (Probe: Do you experience bullying, do you have access to LGBTQ+ materials in the classroom, etc.?)
5. How have you overcome these challenges?
6. Where do you find support in overcoming these challenges?
7. When you were in high school, did you think you were going to graduate? Why or why not?
8. What would make high school more supportive for you as a LGBTQ+ Chicana student?

##### MENTAL HEALTH

9. Overall, how would you rate your mental health, excellent, very good, good, fair, or poor? Please explain why you selected your choice?
10. How knowledgeable about mental health are you?
11. Is there a history of mental disorder in your family?
  - a. If yes, who?
12. Have you been diagnosed with any mental health disorder?
13. Have you ever been committed? (Probe: can you tell me more about it?)
14. Are you currently taking any medication for a mental health disorder?
15. Do you think you have undiagnosed mental health disorder?
16. Have you ever attended therapy?
17. If yes, how was this experience for you? When did you attend? What made you attend?
  - a. If no, would you attend? Why or why not?

##### INTERSECTIONAL CAPITAL

18. What resources have helped you get to where you are today? (i.e. people, materials resources, etc.)

##### OTHER

19. Is there anything in regard to your LGBTQ+ Chicana identity, high school experience, or mental health that you would like to discuss or any other topics you feel would be pertinent to the research project?
20. Do you have any questions for me?

## Appendix I. Focus Group Questions

MENTAL HEALTH & SCHOOL CLIMATE PERCEPTIONS AMONG LGBTQ+ CHICANX STUDENTS

IRB Study Number: 06820

### FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

#### ICE BREAKER

1. Why did you decide to join the focus group today?
2. What was your high school experience like?

#### MENTAL HEALTH PERCEPTIONS

3. How is mental health viewed by mainstream society?
4. How is mental health viewed by Chicanx society?
5. How is mental health view by LGBTQ+ society?

#### CHICANX PERCEPTIONS

6. How are Chicanx peoples viewed by mainstream society?
7. How are Chicanx peoples viewed in LGBTQ+ society?

#### LGBTQ+ PERCEPTIONS

8. How are LGBTQ+ peoples viewed by mainstream society?
9. How are LGBTQ+ peoples viewed in Chicanx society?

#### MENTAL HEALTH REPRESENTATIONS

10. What item did you bring that represents your mental health?
11. Why this item? How does it embody your mental health as a LGBTQ+ Chicanx person?

#### INTERSECTIONAL CAPITAL

12. Where did you find support to help your mental health?
13. What is something you wish you knew before entering high school as an LGBTQ+ Chicanx person?

#### OTHER

14. Is there anything in regard to your LGBTQ Chicanx identity, high school experience, or mental health that you would like to discuss or any other topics you feel would be pertinent to the research project?
15. Do you have any questions for me?



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