

University of New Mexico

UNM Digital Repository

Communication ETDs

Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Spring 4-15-2022

MELANCOLÍA X A PROJECTION OF QUEER OF COLOR AMBIVALENCE IN THE 21ST CENTURY NEW MEXICO

Anthony Rosendo Zarinana
University of New Mexico

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/cj_etds



Part of the [Journalism Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Zarinana, Anthony Rosendo. "MELANCOLÍA X A PROJECTION OF QUEER OF COLOR AMBIVALENCE IN THE 21ST CENTURY NEW MEXICO." (2022). https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/cj_etds/139

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Electronic Theses and Dissertations at UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Communication ETDs by an authorized administrator of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact disc@unm.edu.

Anthony Rosendo Zariñana

Candidate

Communication & Journalism

Department

This dissertation is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication:

Approved by the Dissertation Committee:

Dr. Shinsuke Eguchi, Chairperson

Dr. Jaelyn DeMaria

Dr. David Weiss

Dr. Bernadette Marie Calafell, External member, Gonzaga University

Dr. Myra Washington, External member, University of Utah

**MELANCOLÍA
X
A PROJECTION OF QUEER OF COLOR AMBIVALENCE
IN THE 21ST CENTURY NEW MEXICO**

by

ANTHONY ROSENDO ZARIÑANA

B.S., Speech Communication, Southern Illinois University, 2014
M.A., Communication Studies, Southern Illinois University, 2016

DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
COMMUNICATION**

The University of New Mexico
Albuquerque, New Mexico

May 2022

DEDICATION

Especially, for Katie.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Ineffable gratitude! Tears! Love! Great memories! Endlessly making myself look like a fool throughout this academic journey! Over the last few years I have been under the tender care of- and wish to thank, Drs. Myra Washington, Jaelyn DeMaria, David Weiss, and Bernadette Marie Calafell. You are remarkable scholars. I am profoundly grateful our paths were able to cross. From the bottom of my heart, thank you for everything. In addition, I would not have made it here without the following people: Drs. Loretta LeMaster, Satoshi Toyosaki, Elyse Pineau, Sandy Pensoneau-Conway, Nathan Stucky, Meggie Mapes, Craig Gingrich-Philbrook, Steve Farias, Miriam Sobre-Denton, Natasha Zaretsky, and Joe Shapiro. You all truly inspired me and are each a foundational pedagogic source of joy and support. You have my pure and true gratitude. And to the late Drs. Suzanne Daughton and Ruth Trinidad Galván, who like everyone above forever changed the trajectory of my life.

I want to especially thank my primary advisor and chair of this Doctoral and dissertation pursuit, Dr. Shinsuke Eguchi. I am thoroughly sorry for being a mess. Thank you for your endless patience and space, encouraging and enabling my growth as a scholar and person in the world. There are not enough words in the world to express my thanks. But maybe the 100,000 included here can capture something close. I am sure they can.

It proves odd to cleave academic kinships and friends but think of it as focusing too on the enduring bonds formed well before and at the beginning of this decade-long endeavor. Katie, above all else and forever; thank you for your endless love and support, and for reminding me of the benevolent abundance and order of the universe in the hardest moments of my life. Loretta, I love you; held, always held, near/far, collapsing grammar, exploding time together- I am alive, with air in my lungs because of your support, love, guidance, and

friendship. KD, thank you for letting me eat all your snacks, for the anatomically correct stuffed plush pink rectum, and for driving us around for the better part of our very long and enduring friendship. The most wonderful Albuquerque family comprised of Ashley, teaching how to live in the way of grace in this life- Mark, always sharing food, kindness, and humor- Lilly, for the little fish I keep on my keychain from St. Kitts, and all three of you for being guiding lights of love, joy, and hominess. Because of you all, I got to do this work alongside my inner child. You will always have our love and gratitude. Amanda and Dum, the ladder for helping with the surprises and the former for being someone worthy of joy and surprises. To Jessica and Mike, for inadvertently offering a source I used in this project which proved to be a needed gift of levity in this process. Karen, Justin, Heidi, and Marlee, for being the best neighbors ever and for putting up with me only playing games when I know that I will win. Sophie, for the sweetest friendship from a distance, and gayest, tackiest, worst, and most cursed memes. Sam too, for similar yet very different, and maybe even worse reasons than Sophie. Also, Josh, who magically appeared in my life during the final and most intensive part of this process with baked goods, vital friendship, and the literal pencil I used for all of the edits in this entire body of research.

I would be remiss for failing to mention Bruce, who has proven to be a doting familiar, the truly most perfect dog in all incarnations of reality, across all time and space. My family too, especially my parents and cousins for making this work possible and for all your encouragement. To the next generation: I eagerly look forward to the day where I might be able to write you the best letter of recommendation for your academic journey. Lastly, but most importantly, this entire project was only possible because of Nick's love and companionship; I love you, I love you, I love you, I love you, I love you, I love you.

**MELANCOLÍA
X
A PROJECTION OF QUEER OF COLOR AMBIVALENCE
IN THE 21ST CENTURY NEW MEXICO**

by

ANTHONY ROSENDO ZARIÑANA

B.S. Speech Communication, Southern Illinois University, 2014

M.A. Communication Studies, Southern Illinois University, 2016

Ph.D. Communication, University of New Mexico, 2022

ABSTRACT

This dissertation seeks to elucidate a form of investigation, derived from Jose Esteban Muñoz's (2006) considerations of brown feelings. By triangulating a base across Queer of Color embodied critiques, I locate a research site in the field of Queer Intercultural Communication to ground the capacity of this project. In this, I work with Queer of Color men in New Mexico, focusing on their feelings about identity and desire as it relates to relational thresholds. By mapping an analytical structure across my own experiences and theirs, I determine to craft a more complicated vantage across our experiences, outlining the socio-cultural pressures affecting such subjects who tilt precariously on an assimilationist precipice within the U.S. The larger effort of this study is premised upon an anti-normative bedrock, rejecting the compulsion to articulate and suture a "fulfilled" individual. This project concludes in a queerly organized delineation of such prospects.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES	xii
LIST OF TABLES	xiii
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	1
Problem Statement	8
Rationale	10
Research Questions and Goals	13
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	16
Queer Theory	16
Queer of Color Critique	19
Anzaldúa	19
Ferguson.....	24
Muñoz	27
Queer Intercultural Communication	36
Desire	40
Latina/o Vernacular Discourse	42
Ethnorace	47
New Mexico.....	53
Terminology.....	60
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY.....	65
Automethodology	65
Queer of Color Critiques.....	67
Quaring, Kuaering, Transing, Crippin.	67

Queer Intercultural Communication	68
Auto/ethnography	69
Data Collection	85
Interpretation and Analysis	74
Interviews.....	77
Roger.....	77
Isaac	79
Thomas.....	81
CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS	84
Table 1	84
Part One: Making a Self.....	86
Roger.....	86
Isaac	92
Thomas.....	99
Analyzing Making a Self	118
Institutional Identity Productions.....	118
Ancestry	121
The Social Other	125
Latino refutations	127
Navigation Strategies.....	133
Part Two: Relational Thresholds	139
Thomas.....	139
Isaac	160

Roger.....	171
Analyzing Relational Thresholds.....	177
The Ladder of Desire	178
Sadness.....	200
Sadness.....	206
Connections.....	211
Strategies.....	217
Concluding Considerations	220
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION.....	226
Theoretical Implications	236
Theory in the Flesh	236
Latina/o Vernacular Discourse	238
Queer Intercultural Communication	239
Methodological Considerations	242
Procedural Challenges.	242
Analytical Challenges	243
Limitations and Future Directions	246
Queerness.....	246
English language.....	247
White-Hispanic	247
Intra-relations	249
Compositional Style.....	249
Self	250

Conclusion	251
Table 2	252
CHAPTER 6: POSTSCRIPT.....	256
Resuscitation / // Incantations	256
MELANCOLÍA	257
Act One, Scene 1	258
Figure 1	263
Act One, Scene 2.....	273
Temporal Blossom.....	290
Act Two, Scene 1	293
Act Two, Scene 2	304
Act Two, Scene 3	315
Appendix A Script Justification	319
The Stage	320
Queer Material	323
Queering Identity Stories.	327
The anti-resolution of my brown feelings.....	329
Figure 2	332
The Coatlicue State.	332
Script Design.....	335
Goals and Assessment.....	335
Audience(s)	336
Responsibilities to the Research Participants	336

Responsibilities to the Audience(s)	336
Responsibilities to the Research-Artistic Team	337
Research Design.....	337
Aesthetic and Theatrical Design	338
Pedagogical Design.....	339
Honoring and negotiating multiple commitments to research, aesthetic, and pedagogy	339
Appendix B IRB Approval.....	342
Appendix C Email Recruitment	344
Appendix D Interview Guide	345
Appendix E Images	347
REFERENCES.....	350

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1	263
Figure 2	332
Figure 3	338

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1	84
Table 2	252

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

A Theory in the Flesh means one where the physical realities of our lives- our skin color, the land or concrete we grew up on, our sexual longings- all fuse to create a politic born out of necessity. (Moraga, 1983, p. 23)

As an act of inquiry, the queering of intercultural communication will require ideological, methodological, and theoretical shifts. This is the only way diasporic, transnational, queer, feminist, and decolonizing scholars can write theoretically about their experiences in the form of stories. After all, this is the only method with which I can make sense of my own queer intercultural translations and slippages. (Atay, 2020, p. 154)

Thus, forefronting queerness is a strategy to destabilize the normative knowledge production of intercultural communication. This field of inquiry is to seek alternative ways of knowing, being, and acting that counter the majoritarian belongings in and across local, national, and global contexts. (Eguchi & Calafell, 2020, p. 3)

Reparation is part of the depressive position; it signals a certain kind of hope. The depressive position is a tolerance of the loss and guilt that underlies the subject's sense of self—which is to say that it does not avoid or wish away loss and guilt. It is a position in which the subject negotiates reality. (Muñoz, 2006, p. 687)

A BRIEF POETIC ENTERPRISE, STAGED

<i>Standing</i>	<i>Standing</i>
I am the ever- perceptive faggot	and I am covering myself
clenched jaw defenses drawn	the wounds I have
all learned wounds	by removing people from their bodies too
At each pause there is an image projected of a single bone	Projector display goes blue
<i>Warping into a collapsed pose</i>	and this is not the coyolxauhqui imperative
and these (<i>pause</i>) absent parts (<i>pause</i>) of my flesh (<i>pause</i>)	because the epistemology of the faggot
A blanket is thrown over and now only Anthony's head is visible	Projector displays saturated green light
<i>Still, under the blanket</i>	and
teach me how to tear into others weaker than I	the pedagogy of the oppressor
those straying	these are one
further from the fold	in the same

In locating melancholia, I find a set of roots. This melancholia I speak of is similar to what Muñoz named in his pivotal work “Feeling Brown, Feeling Down,” as an “affective site...that transmits and is structured through a depressive stance, a kind of feeling down” (2006, p. 676). These roots though are so tightly coiled around my sense of self that a proper investigation into their sociocultural origins, through a Queer of Color lens is called for. My desire for ascertaining these roots’ form, as well as their rhizomatic spread across self and other is the intellectually and politically operating force behind the project. I consequently recognize and map my own sense of ethnic queer abjection as located within a sexualized/racialization matrix of the U.S. heterocolonialist, imperialist nation-state that organizes who I am along varying strata of difference, marginalization, access, and privilege. María Lugones, in developing a decolonial feminism, names the cleaving of a sense of self as a hegemonic production and tool. Named as the fractured locus, Lugones elaborates the multiplicative sense of self women of color experience as a hegemonic consequence. She explained the fractured locus “makes vivid the injunction to see and live only in white terms, erasing resistant subjectivities and relations within the dominant hegemonic mainstream” (2017, p. 70). While the entirety of my identity situatedness might not be fully aligned along the immediate focus of her work, in naming the current systemic hegemonic instantiations- what she terms the colonial matrix of domination, a pressing salience becomes clear.

For within the colonial matrix of domination, categorization serves as a technology obfuscating the unnamed onus creating such separation, but that equally so, the self will often experience a psychic awareness of such separation organized along social frontiers. Such position of thought is far from novel or under-theorized. Like Du Bois (1903) naming the

double consciousness in *The Souls of Black Folk*, to specific ventures exploring the confusion, frustration, and exhausting anxiety of this disjointed subjecthood across minoritized vectors of difference (e.g., Calafell, 2005, 2007; Eguchi 2014, 2015; LeMaster, 2014; Washington, 2017). On this interest, Muñoz contended that “The epistemological core of what race is has become less and less accessible during these tumultuous times” and for that reason, “It is therefore expedient to consider *what race does* [emphasis added]” (2006, p. 679). In this, he named one possible emotional confluence across experiences of differential racialization as brown feelings. They are thought of as a social-emotional “site...that transmits and is structured through a depressive stance, a kind of feeling down.” (p. 676). The shifting conceptualizations of differences that form my subjecthood, colliding against sensations of separateness, queerly incongruent across each vector, and plainly, super sad.

This iteration of feeling, as I will explain later, lives as an antinormative theoretical formation. That is, in exploring unique subjectivities and sites of knowledges, an equally capable theoretical consideration is necessary. For as Muñoz elaborated, melancholia as a minoritarian production of emotion is “partially illegible in relation to the normative affect performed by normative citizen subjects” (p. 679). In this work, melancholia, as an antinormative feeling, is the foundation for exploring the larger web of relations between queer desire, self and society, as well as an interior sense of self, which I explore in the next chapter. These roots, not fully mine, do not fully nor singularly constitute me down to the atomic level.

Importantly, when considering the subaltern, and the way the roots enveloped to encourage the machination of my throat in form and voice, the way I first learned to speak of this pain was by making others feel what I did, as LeMaster (2017) has pointed out, that

violence is also inside us. These projections of difference upon the subject, the epistemological conditions of the faggot, in my case work too as the pedagogy of the oppressor; how we were hurt becomes the very way we can hurt others within our minoritized groups. In the earlier half of my life, I existed without this realization. The moment only happened after an introduction to critical method and research in my final semester of community college, where I then transferred to a four-year university to evolve this awareness. In a lecture hall occupied by 80 students, I walked in on the first day and as I sat down, I looked up into the wide, horrified eyes of someone thirty feet away from me. The bewildered look though was not aimed at me, only caused by my seemingly distanced presence. In high school I relentlessly bullied him. In high school I was relentlessly bullied. But I was so much worse to him. He was quiet and consistently unfrontational which made him an easy target then. He was wholly undeserving of any of the public mocking, antagonisms, and cruelties I threw at him. And by chance, we were learning in the same classroom again, and while I was high and mighty with critical awareness, it took me weeks to remember who he was.

It took me even longer to understand his expression, to categorize it as something worth thinking about. As I have come to know for myself, the epistemology of the faggot and the pedagogy of the oppressor are collaborating and suffocating each other into a torrent of unquestioned violence, existence, and survival. Such perpetuation...*all learned wounds. These absent parts of my flesh teach me how to tear into others weaker than I. And I am covering myself, the wounds I have, by removing people from their bodies too.* Sadness is to never excuse this. My point here is an origin of sadness in my life went unexamined and allowed for the perpetuation of cruelty and violence. I want to now turn to recognize a

similar working instance of the sadness I did not feel until early adulthood, pinpointed at the nexus of racialization and sexual minoritarian subjecthood.

ANOTHER BRIEF POETIC ENTERPRISE, NOT STAGED

*I am a first generation faggot
and I prop up pasty normalcy by
wanting yuppie stardom*

*the Chicago brunches with self-
identified “creative types,” sipping
mimosas, talking about their trust
funds but also somehow not talking
about their trust funds*

*draped in cable knit sweaters and
paying with cash*

*“destroy parts of yourself to fit in
or we will do it for you” is what I
hear between the lines, the sheets*

and as much as I want to belong

*I was never going to, nor able to in
the first place*

*I am
part of the periphery*

*made so by my own cheap
defense mechanisms*

*but I just
can’t*

afford

to be normal

*good thing I’m dumb enough
to keep trying though*

When I was 19, my first boyfriend, a White cis Gay USAmerican firmly endorsed that the gay community was inherently where I belonged. It was mine and equally so his culture, without question. My saturated involvement with Critical Studies eventually complicated his position and articulated the discomfort I initially felt with his claim. It was certainly more his and felt beyond mine. As a first-generation Mexican-American who happens to be gay, I frequently confronted the confusion of where I could belong. Raised in a more comfortable working-class situation, I found trouble fitting in with the middle-class metropolitan gays of Chicago that found

me desirable; brunches, department stores, downtown apartments afforded by some job at a creative agency, all with degrees from the “best” (most expensive) schools in the state. My acceptance into a graduate program reorganized my life, and I have since lived out of the area for almost a decade now.

Out of this though, I recognize a deepening urge to connect with others like myself, those maybe considered on a margin of the margins by seemingly rejecting the marginalized mainstream. Are they unable to ever be a part of it or simply uninterested in participating? And what of their refusal to integrate the periphery by rejecting their communities of interpellation? What are the choices occurring here? Are they even choices? Means maybe, but for what?

When I first arrived in New Mexico to begin my doctoral program, I hoped to find romantic pursuits with other people like me. With a millennial-derived effort, disinterested in venturing beyond convenience, I quickly learned adjacent racializations did not guarantee inherent support, attraction, or kin political optics. I was reminded in various interactions of the possibilities of hegemonic affiliation by gay men including but not limited to: internalized and projected fatphobia, substance abuse, misogyny, sexism, disableism, colonialism, enactments of White Supremacy, cis sexism, transphobia, xenophobia, classism, and much, much more. I also learned there were many more ways to hate others and an equal abundance of means to hate myself beyond the racialized abjections I primarily experienced. “My” community, “my” kin, proved to be a place where I felt further alienated from everyone and myself.

I allowed hope for an affirming cross-minoritarian relationship to obfuscate my internalized reification of homogenizing heterocolonialist logic. That is, believing ethnic and racial cultural groups simply *prefer* to be around each other which acts as an individualized logic disguising the real effects of discriminatory institutional policy often forcing minoritized people

to rely on community as a survival strategy. This confrontation with my internalized assumption, that I might be inherently connected to someone in some ethnic racialized materiality proved to be exhausting, frustrating, occasionally pleasurable, and in the end an exceptionally isolating, lonely, and foolish endeavor.

This project is therefore largely generated via an impetus of loneliness, in order to explore loneliness, to maybe feel less alone, all while in the middle of a profoundly lonely season of my life. But arriving here, my critical vantage implores a move towards healing. With all this, how can I move forward? How can I feel less alone but in a way that reveals coalitional gestures and acts? How can I articulate all these things I feel in a research framework? What theory and larger academic constellations could guide my pursuits? How can I move into another kind of place beyond myself and join with others who maybe share similar experiences? Where might we go? These personal and deeply felt questions thusly guide the intellectual and political direction of this project. To produce such research, I conduct three interviews with three participants, while implementing an auto/ethnographic framework to suture larger connections across our converging and cleaving experiences.

Problem Statement

While I now move away from my initial colonial fetishization and homogenous logic assuming ethnic and raced sexual minoritarian subjects might naturally cohere in a romantic capacity, I do understand that sexual minoritarian subjects of color experience and relate to the U.S.-heterocolonialist, imperialist nation-state in unique ways. As Puar (2007) has suggested, homonationalism is a U.S. settler colonial project positioning gay and lesbian White cisgender ablebodied folk as newly incorporated full subjects of the nation-state, worthy of protection. This

primarily occurs when the nation seeks a justification against extranational assemblies via liberalist appeals, positioning such group exteriority as threatening and antiquated against the democratic, U.S. empire. Similarly, this logic is steeped in the ideological mythos of manifest destiny, an early justification of policy affirming colonial expansion of North America as a divine right. The enduring instantiations of settler colonialism occur now in the forms of land occupation, territorial claims, as well as epistemological assaults and the material destruction and debilitation of peoples, nations, and cultural systems (Chávez, 2013b; Mignolo. 2011; Puar, 2017). More precise research looking at the way Latin folk relate to homonationalism contends that Latin LGBTQ (lesbian-gay-bisexual-transgender-queer) migrant subjects who are racialized, gendered, and classed by the configuration of the White supremacist cisheteropatriarchal state are uniquely and especially deemed undesirable for citizenship (Chávez, 2013b; Soto Vega & Chávez, 2018). The sexual minoritarian Latin subject then poses a unique assimilative problem at a sexual minoritarian and racialized identity nexus, especially as both identity configurations undergo contemporary pressures by the state.

The specific theoretical position above calls for a critically-oriented, historicized, and culturally-specific research framework to account for such a group. The uniqueness of this framework is premised on a vantage recognizing both the racialized dimension occurring concurrently with heterosexual deviation, that is, the Queer of Color subject, contextualized across international sites and flows of meaning. This is also accomplished by historicizing the institutional legacies producing and affecting such groups, and, in what I briefly outline next, positions the minoritarian subject as especially knowledgeable regarding hegemonic societal conditions, propulsions, and compulsions.

Rationale

As a contemporary diasporic subject myself, everything always starts with Anzaldúa. As a Third World feminist, Anzaldúa offered her crucial work on embodiment, liminality, and queerness. Working across a theoretical and cosmological poetic, she named this particular research example of hers *Theory in the Flesh* (1987). This scholarship understands one's body as knowledgeable, and a point in which to generate theory about the social fabric uniquely affecting those on the margins of the margins. This radical theoretical departure sought to move away from Eurocentric positions on subject formation that privileged White corporeality as the theoretical base of all knowledge regarding subjectivity. *Theory in the Flesh* also offered heightened attention to the way social hegemonic orders shape a subject's relationship to, and awareness of, themselves.

A Latina/o Vernacular Discourse (LVD) theoretical premise directly extended this baseline within a specified Communication trajectory. Holling and Calafell (2011) extended Ono and Sloop (1995) into a premise recognizing Latina/o folk within their own terms by examining how they interact with and produce discourse about and for themselves. Largely, LVD conceptualizes Latin subjects as making strategic performative choices in relationship to their identity (e.g., Calafell, 2007, 2012, 2013; Calafell & Moreman, 2009). Three primary characteristics shape the direction of LVD: first, an emphasis on the tensions of identity at the juncture of the collective and unique differences, second, Decolonialism serves as a vital process guiding such inquiry, and third, the need to problematize the role of the critic. LVD's analytical framework holds an analytical capacity allowing for examinations of identities across a nexus of sexuality, gender, race, class, ethnicity and different geographic locations and histories. LVD also presents coalitional linkages amongst other marginalized groups (Carrillo Rowe, 2005).

Similarly, it contends for a distinctive stance on the organization of pan-ethnic conglomerates as potentially homogenizing. Establishing a need though for important coalitional-imaginaries and realities, Rivera-Servera uses Queer Latinidad as a tool “that might bring diverse groups together under a shared, if partial, ethnic imaginary” (2012, p. 17). Queer Latinidad as a coalitional prospect prioritizes performative episteme on the ground to ascertain novel Queer Latin relationalities. LVD thus serves as a theoretical framework allowing the examination of multiplicative realities and configurations of Latin identity.

Importantly, within the U.S. institution of law, ethnicity is assigned as a culturally bound set of behaviors and practices, and race is projected onto the body as some sort of inherent, pseudo-biologically derived quality (Mora, 2011). As the organized conglomerate of Latin is only recognized as a unique ethnic group and racially White, Martín-Alcoff (2011) asserts that Latin-American people in the U.S. are socially conflated as both an ethnic and racialized minority, or as an *ethnorace*. The conceptual elucidation here serves as a technology to explain the crude and common applications and beliefs about race in relation to xenophobic projects of national thought and policy. Pérez (2015) in a similar vein simply employs “brown” as an intentionally suggestive and ambiguous mapping of such *ethnoracial* configurations. The totality of this field of research thus privileges an examination of how people under these identity configurations experience and utilize such markers in their everyday experiences.

A research field, emergent with the above scholarship gesturing towards especially queer possibilities, rests firmly within Queer Intercultural Communication (QIC). As a distinctive area of study responding to gaps within Critical Intercultural Communication, QIC centers queerness as “a strategy to destabilize the normative knowledge production of Intercultural communication” and to seek “alternative ways of knowing, being, and acting that counter the

majoritarian belongings in and across local, national, and global contexts” (Eguchi & Calafell, 2020, p. 3). Queer, in its many forms, articulates here coalition, social transgression, and identities forging alternative possibilities beyond the current heteronormative societal configurations (Anzaldúa, 1987; Muñoz, 1999; Ferguson, 2003; Johnson, 2001).

Accordingly, Eguchi deploys queer “as verb or practice” (2021, p. 275) in order to organize the dynamic nature of queerness itself. Specifically, the larger phenomenon of queerness “disrupts the historically normalized boundaries of ideologies that govern such relational structures, such as dating, sex, marriage, family, and kinship, so that alternative modes of living may be articulated” (Eguchi & Calafell, 2020, p. 4). In this, queerness becomes an organizing schema for exploring Queer of Color experience to identify the practices and means of joy, survival, and coalition in the present. Eguchi and Calafell reaffirm the pressing importance of queers identifying such gaps in the present to name, share, and further develop everyday survival practices for such subjects. A great deal of this research turns to queer relationality to explore and name the way queer people of Color intervene, resist, and reconfigure meaning and means of relating in the face of heteronormativity.

Consequently, this project centers desire as an avenue for isolating and considering queerness. Desire for QIC operates as a mundane technology to perpetuate, intervene, and resist ideological systems (e.g., Abdi, 2014, 2020; Calafell, 2009; Chávez, 2009, 2010, 2013a, 2013b; Eguchi, 2015, 2017, 2019a, 2019b, 2020; Eguchi, Files-Thompson, & Calafell, 2018; Gutierrez-Perez, 2017a, 2017b; Johnson, 2014; LeMaster, 2014, 2017). Accordingly, desire moves as a constitutive means of forging relations. I rely on this body of work to bolster a capable and culturally situated epistemology to explore Queer of Color desire. The theoretical trajectory, as I will assert, can then investigate and theoretically account for the current socio-cultural

environment informing and structuring the larger schema of relations for one example group within a seemingly Latinized locale I wish to conduct research in. This will lead to my specific interest in Queer of Color desire which I elaborate in the next sections more thoroughly.

Research Questions and Goals

This impetus for this research project begins at Queer of Color melancholia. Many scholars have long established that queer people of Color experience sadness, loneliness, and nihilism in the face of current heteronormative social configurations at and beyond the nexus of race and sexuality (e.g., Abdi, 2014; Calafell, 2005, 2007, 2012, 2015; Chávez, 2010; Eguchi, 2020; LeMaster, 2013; Muñoz, 2006, 2009). My experience as a queer millennial Mexican-American is exactly so. I often feel alone, sad, and isolated from kin racial and sexual identity communities. The purpose of this project is to investigate experiences of sadness by New Mexicans sexual minoritarian men about such subject positions through the lens of Jose Esteban Munoz's notions on brown feelings. I conduct interviews and utilize the personal as a central referencing point to develop my interest in understanding how other men who occupy a similarly raced and sexual minoritarian subjectivity living in New Mexico also experience, adapt, resist, and exist under such current heteronormative social configurations.

Ethnoracialized and masc identity serves as a primary coherence among participants. The cohering logic here is not to reinscribe into any concreteness a hierarchy or salience of such identity referents when driven into communicative environments, but rather to untangle relevant analytical terrain through feelings of sadness co-constituting cross subject experience. I consider these more as intermediate theoretical points of departure between similarly interpellated subjects, rather than demanding material fidelity across subjectivities.

To do so, I propose my research questions that guide this dissertation project as follows:

First, how do New Mexican sexual minoritarian men understand their ethnoracial identity?

Second, how do New Mexican sexual minoritarian men experience melancholia?

Third, how do New Mexican sexual minoritarian men feel about their chosen kinships?

Three specific research goals are as follows: (1) Explicate experiences of New Mexican Queer of Color relationalities, (2) Interrogate the utility and function of the ethnoracial identity matrix as it affects the latinized panethnic imaginary, (3) demonstrate a peculiar format of a Queer Intercultural Communication examination of melancholia.

Conclusion

Melancholia, as I explore and articulate, works as a connective, affective tissue across similar configurations of ethnoracial identity to articulate an awareness of something not quite right, not quite here, a being of imprecision. This is rendered as a potential of imaginary and fleeting conglomeration around sadness, a pseudo-cohesion that may elaborate and name queer ruptures, gaps, and wanting. I move forward to elaborate this research project's theoretical base, genesis, and inextricable bonds to the larger organization of Queer Intercultural Communication.

In the next chapter, I recall its larger inception and scholarly trajectory. I also more explicitly outline the studied local terminology and local New Mexican configurations of unique Hispanic identity. I then attend to questions of potential coherences possibly organizing such a unique group, and too appropriately allowing for the accurate capacity of analysis for the minoritarian subject. In this, I examine feelings and desire as a way to question larger social pressures relating to webs of social bonds. These feelings thus secure my interest in and mapping of the project.

In Chapter Three I outline the unique auto/ethnographic and queer embodied critique framework in its methodological form. The rubric is demonstrated from a selection of research within Queer Intercultural Communication. This path enables a means of complicated, and queering, scholarly narrative telling and analysis. I advocate for a queerly complicated means of considerations and analysis across myself and the co-researchers within the project. I bring the chapter to a close by introducing the participants.

Chapter Four attends to the densely rich interview content. Creating a unique telling to unveil larger social forces at play, I work with the co-researchers to elaborate experiences of sadness, identity, ambivalence, and gay social expectations. To develop a more telling form of thought and experience, I suture and emphasize the points of connection, tangles, and separations across our experiences. The style of analysis in this chapter seeks to interrogate such telling experiences in a close-textual analysis.

Chapter Five then pieces together the larger questions, answers, and futures of this work. I focus on the totality of the project and its theoretical consequences and utilities. Included here is a discussion on the methodological and research limitations. I then bring the project into a quasi-foreclosure in the form of Chapter Six. This final queer gesture and propulsion unites and disaggregates the entirety of this body of work as a production of emotion. In doing so, I advocate for a queering of research potentials in the mode of structure, as a way to more queerly tell of, shape, and reformulate the experiences recalled here.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter tackles the origin, elucidation, and extension of the baseline theories relevant to this research. The genealogy of Queer of Color Critique will be introduced first, charting the foundational texts mapping its theoretical cosmos. Next, I will outline operationalizations of Queer of Color Critique, held within the specific field of Queer Intercultural Communication. By invoking examples of its research and theoretical capacity, I explain its vital contribution and grounding for this work. I allocate more attention to its methodological implementation elsewhere, in Chapter Three. I then explore the colonial and territorial history of New Mexico, offering an assessment of the role of ethnic and racial identity terminology of such citizen subjects within the area. I close the chapter touching upon the notion of brown feelings as a theoretical bolstering and path of focus for such subjects, moving away from homogenizing identity coherences, and instead providing an alternative gravitational structure of feeling to theoretically map and organizing such folk. I now attend to the first section of Chapter Two in which I identify the nature and need for a Queer of Color Critique.

Queer Theory

As stated in Chapter One, the conceptual force of Queer brings identity, coalition, and social transgression all together. Queer, according to the project's situated field of thought, labors towards imagining alternative possibilities of life, as well as resignifying hegemonic limitations of meaning (Anzaldúa, 1987; Ferguson, 2003; Johnson, 2001; Muñoz, 1999). For example, Eguchi (2020) employs "queer" as an action, traversing potentials of being under current social regimes that might limit modes of thought, relations, and material realities and access. Specifically, the larger phenomenon of queerness "disrupts the historically normalized boundaries of ideologies that govern such relational structures, such as dating, sex, marriage,

family, and kinship, so that alternative modes of living may be articulated” (Eguchi & Calafell, 2020, p. 4). Chambers-Letson (2018) explains too the pressing need for sexual minoritarian subjects to collaborate and identify mundane practices of survival.

Primary theorizations of queerness though have been historically dominated by and accomplished from an unquestioned locus of White cis male subjectivity. Calafell, Pérez, and Johnson outline personal social and theoretical consequences stemming from attempting to name race as an underassessed dimension within Queer Theory and Communication Studies itself. Calafell (2013) explained one particularly telling experience when outlining an imperative for critical interrogations of Whiteness within Autoethnography. At such suggestion during the academic conference, she was met with qualms by the audience that focused on unfairness, again relegating such critical consideration instead as irrelevant unless such project was directly exploring race as the central topic of inquiry. This dissonance recalled may potentially have been derived across grounded cultural subjectivities and from a lack of shared coherence on reflexivity. Another occurrence at an academic conference was recalled by Pérez, who “As a panelist on the closing roundtable...protested the unacknowledged centering of white gay male experience that pervaded conceptualizations of gay shame as well as a spectacularization of racial difference that have worked violently” (2015, p. 97). Accordingly, Johnson outlined that “Queer theory has often failed to address the material realities of gays and lesbians of color” (2001, p. 5). This structuration of Queer theory too, often sidestepped the material realities affecting people of color uniquely, evacuating the histories and legacies of race, class, and gender as interfaces of difference. The three explained that by raising such concern, they became regarded as anti-queer, anti-pleasure, anti-erotic, manipulative, and so on.

These events though are not singular occurrences. For Calafell, Pérez, and Johnson, they are emblematic of Queer Theory and Communication Studies' lack of and hostility to a prospect of accounting for race as an axis of difference. As Pérez explains "the restriction of brown bodies from queer theory's institutional spaces shares ideological underpinnings with the expulsion of brown bodies from the nation-state" (2015, p. 101). The animosity and xenophobic attitudes towards queer folks of color thus operates at many levels and sites, and is thusly reflected in the attitudes and production of Queer Theory scholarship.

As Johnson expands, the strained inclusion of queer folks of Color in the field and as progenitors of theory "...illuminates the ways in which many queer theorists, in their quest to move beyond the body, ground their critique in the discursive rather than the corporeal" (2001, p. 7). In the small space of ten years between Johnson and Pérez's experience, the ladder contends that in such instances, "brown bodies were allowed 'access' – if it can be called that- only as spectacle for the consumption of gay cosmopolitanism" as the present audience of scholars (p. 101). So, Queer of Color theorists thus faced an uphill battle of inclusion as subjects and scholars within a field that asserts such prospects as threatening. And if included, it was at a corporeal aesthetic value and consumption by the White cis-gay Queer Theory mainstream.

Given the exhausting antagonisms endured and experienced by even daring to mention axes of difference as important points of theoretical consideration, Queer of Color Critique became a research project responding to these limited theorizations. Its iteration of thought promotes and offers a means of articulating anti-normative scholarship across vectors of difference, including sexual orientation, gender, race, disability, size, class, and citizen-subject status in relation to place and nations. I next attend to examples of germinal scholarship in this

area, where I then determine its foundational theoretical elements that inform the direction and research of this project.

Queer of Color Critique

In what follows, my goal in recalling Anzaldúa (1987), Ferguson (2003), and Muñoz (1999, 2006) is to triangulate a theoretical base and spiritual essence of this project. I plot the dimensions of these works in respect to the project's pulse. I close the section with a particular interest in Muñoz's work on brown feelings. This specific focus determines the projects means of coherence across subjects as made possible through a focus on feelings and desire in the wake of melancholia.

Anzaldúa. Gloria Anzaldúa's 1987 work *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* crafted a vital constellation on Queer of Color embodiment and liminality. In my theory and practice, I consider her Polaris, the guiding and ancestral bonds with which I link into the spiritual realm. As a guiding star, Anzaldúa articulated an animate concept of Theory in the Flesh through a vacillating Spanish and English poetic. Theory in the Flesh conceptualizes the body, and specifically the hyper-minoritized subject, as a valid and knowledgeable site, acting as a departure from eurologocentric theoretical projects of a dualist mind-body split. On this, Anzaldúa explained "In trying to become 'objective,' Western culture made 'objects' of things and people when it distanced itself from them, thereby losing 'touch' with them. This dichotomy is the root of all violence" (1987, p. 59). That is, a rooting of theory made separate from and exterior to the self, is an illogical project only further making a rift between subject and object. This colonial pursuit, of coming to know the world by regarding, treating, and creating everything- including the self, as an object is the violence she speaks of.

The differentializing logic, conceptualized through the notion of the border/a border/borders/ and borderlands serves as a way for Anzaldúa to name the literal places, metaphorical arenas, psychic realms, and social bonds and environments informing the reality in which the Queer of Color subject survives. On the composition of a border, she says:

Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish *us* from *them*. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 25)

Her use of the border also described the environment of her everyday life in which a sense of and relation to self was mapped. On the desire for her writing, she tells, “Living in a state of psychic unrest, in a Borderland, is what makes poets write and artists create” (p. 95). The feat of determining the origin and end of the oribis is less the focus of her work. Her attention is more so gathered around the knowledge gained from living within such conditions and the ways of telling, “That’s what writing is for me, an endless cycle of making it worse, making it better, but always making meaning out of experience, whatever it may be” (p. 95). The psychic anchor of this research project is held by such belief.

A principal demonstration of this perspective was conceived of as the Mestiza consciousness. Mestiza describes people of Indigenous and Spanish ancestry in and around the Americas. This work identified not only the site of emergent consciousness of the writer, but also desired to articulate the psychological underpinning from such experiences on the borders. For Anzaldúa, Mestiza as a consciousness described her life growing up within these divisionary logics in Texas, on the border of Mexico and the U.S., also as a lesbian of color and as a person of a cosmological origin. The Mestiza consciousness explained these differences as thresholds,

whereby “the work of *mestiza* consciousness is to break down the subject-object duality that keeps her a prisoner and to show in the flesh and through images in her work how duality is then transcended” (p. 102). That is, as the sense and experience of abjection reigns in social conditions, it too dwells within the Mestiza psyche, in this case compelling an emancipatory and transformation potential.

As minoritarian difference and being become unintelligible within colonial logics of division, making compounding identity elements as contradictory, breaking down the violence of this duality is an internal and external project- a way of coping, retooling, and communicating survival. One way Anzaldúa mapped such experiences referred to folkloric yet mundane shapeshifters. Calafell’s (2012) exploration of Monstrous femininity and women of Color experience in the academy elicited such research. Theorizing through the body, she performatively enunciated narratives on the endurances of sexism and racism in the academy, precisely as her “body and my emotional affect mark me as a monstrous Other in the sanitized world of the White academy” (2012, p. 112). This labor goes on to unveil the constant negotiations demanded throughout everyday academic environments while also expressing survival tactics against such restrictive constructs through a unique vernacular and cultural archetypal figure.

I return to describe the key facet of a Mestiza consciousness which maintains a queer cosmic dimension. In the act of questioning and problematizing her transgressive understandings and experiences, Anzaldúa tells of doing so through this psychic-cosmological tethering:

Soy un amasamiento, I am an act of kneading, of uniting and joining that not only has produced both a creature of darkness and a creature of light, but also a creature that questions the definitions of light and dark and gives them new meanings. We are the

people who leap in the dark, we are the people on the knees of the gods. (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 103)

Efflorescent queer and indigenous cosmological infusions are a strongly compelling and affecting way to demonstrate what a Theory in the Flesh is capable of articulating. Anzaldúa's infusion here though of intuition- a means of understanding the world beyond immediate language sense-making, grown from the senses garnered by existing in society as a minoritarian subject, is joined to a divineness. The way of decentering the overdependency on the singular, individual self has important relevance. My own perspective recognizes this aim as Anzaldúa's anchor against the dangers of an egoic primacy, which I have witnessed be explained as a cautionary self-centeredness of autoethnographic type methodologies. The higher power of the Nahua cosmological order is the means of accomplishing this task, by also distinctly affirming objectified Indigenous cosmologies.

Anzaldúa expands the aptitude of this Mestiza consciousness in what she calls La Facultad, which:

is the capacity to see in surface phenomena the meaning of deeper realities, to see the deep structure below the surface. It is an instant 'sensing,' a quick perception arrived at without conscious reasoning. It is an acute awareness mediated by the part of the psyche that does not speak, that communicates in images and symbols which are the faces of feelings, that is, behind which feelings reside/hide. The one possessing this sensitivity is excruciatingly alive to the world. (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 60)

Anzaldúa identified these traits for those on the margins of the margins who strongly experience the border itself. She continued:

Those who are pushed out of the tribe for being different are likely to become more sensitized (when not brutalized into insensitivity). Those who do not feel psychologically or physically safe in the world are more apt to develop this sense. Those who are pounced on the most have it the strongest-the females, the homosexuals of all races, the darkskinned, the outcast, the persecuted, the marginalized, the foreign. (p. 60)

This intuition, derived from the psychic cosmic tethering, is a survival tactic. It is one in which the people “caught between the worlds, unknowingly cultivate. It is latent in all of us” (p. 61). This analytical root is an imperative tenet of Queer of Color critique and theory, thereupon delineating one demonstration of what knowledges from the periphery can garner.

Anzaldúa and Moraga more largely explain that “a Theory in the Flesh means one where the physical realities of our lives - our skin color, the land or concrete we grew up on- our sexual longings - all fuse to create a politic born out of necessity” (Moraga and Anzaldúa, 1981, p. 21). Moraga thought directly cautions about the treatment and ranking of differences within such a conceptualization:

In this country, lesbianism is a poverty - as is being brown, as is being a woman, as is being just plain poor. *The danger lies in ranking the specificity of the oppressions. The danger lies in failing to acknowledge the specificity of oppression.* The danger lies in attempting to deal with oppression purely from a theoretical base. (Moraga, 1981, p. 26)

Any division between the elements and form of knowledge- theory and the body, simply go on to sustain the very forces activating the ontological decimation of such lived experiences, which too remains indecipherable in the face of such separation. That is, a Theory in the Flesh is inextricably bound with “flesh and blood experiences to concretize a vision that can begin to heal our ‘wounded knee’” (p. 21). The faculty to mediate such danger, according to Moraga, requires

an “emotional, heartfelt grappling with the source of our own oppression” and that “without naming the enemy within ourselves and outside of us, no authentic, non-hierarchical connection among oppressed groups can take place” (p. 21). A coalitional desire and potential are hence too a major component of a Theory in the Flesh. To make such research about one singular subject is a symptom of the very violence of the colonialist subject and object division that separates us from ourselves and from one another.

Madison (1993), referring to Collins (1988), offers a translation of this body of work, saying “Theories of the flesh means that the cultural, geopolitical, and economic circumstances of our lives engender particular experiences and epistemologies that provide philosophies about reality different from those available to other groups” (1993, p. 113-114). Powerfully, these formations elaborate and more importantly, “makes accessible the knowledge and collective philosophy of Black women, but it also creates new epistemologies and creates new dimensions for describing experiences and for liberation” (Collins, 1998, p. 302). Such research, as Madison outlines, requires a carefully reflexive awareness for developing within academic terrain.

From this, a Theory in the Flesh is one that illuminates the minoritized body as it moves through the world and relates to others and the self. A Theory in the Flesh enables a means to examine, understand, and promote coalition amongst queered, raced, disabled, trans and indigenous kin. Anzaldúa and Moraga’s erudition remain an essential recognition of the minoritarian knowledge. In more words, Anzaldúa and Moraga recognized the peripheral marginalized self as a knowledgeable, agentic, and affecting capacity of transgression.

Ferguson. Congruent with the spirit of this work, the inception of Queer of Color Critique (QOCC) more precisely came way from Roderick A. Ferguson’s 2003 *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique*. In this work, Ferguson specifically traced the U.S.

White Supremacist regime's reconfiguration of Black folk and their social networks as a moral and legal abjection, accomplished by the technologies of the federal departments of education, social services, and the Institution of law. Taking to task sociology's larger construction, as well as liberal capitalism's treatment of the Black family within American society, his treatise contended that "American sociology, like historical materialism, has proffered heteronormativity as the scene of order and rationality and nonheteronormativity as the scene of abandonment and dysfunction" (2003, p. 18). Specifically, Ferguson traced sociological history through the New Deal policy and the 1930-1940 era in the United States, whereby "social policy worked to arrange men and women within heteropatriarchal family structures" (p. 37). Ferguson positions the New Deal era as centrally shifting the nation's structuration of difference, identifying "culture rather than biology as the locus of African American racial difference" (p. 37). As a fourth of Black households were headed by women, "Blacks were regarded as outside the moral ideals of New Deal social reformers and were often excluded from New Deal policies on this basis" (p. 37). The nation and states either outright banned, or were encouraged to make difficult access to social resources. Black mothers specifically were considered an enigmatic problem, presenting a threat to the White heteronormative state, whereby the Black family was thusly regarded as deviant and unassimilable.

In another example of Black populations undergoing a shift in being configured as threatening to the nation and its heteronormative familial enterprise, Ferguson recalled the way the city of Chicago and a group of sociological scholars collaborated to accomplish such a feat. Specifically, Ferguson looked at the city of Chicago and its relationship with the Chicago School which was a group of scholars critiquing institutional apparatuses that affected and formed

nation. Chicago, to Ferguson, was another location of state-enacted violence at the threshold of race and heterosexuality. In multi-ethnic vice districts, Chicago police actively raided and:

worked to restrict vice to African American neighborhoods, concentrating nonheteronormative subjects in black neighborhoods, safe from the hallowed domain of white residents...Hence, vice worked in tandem with residential segregation and thereby established a formal relationship between racial exclusion and sexual regulation. (p. 41)

The institutional ramifications, largely underacknowledged by sociology, were made by the very field of research itself. And the role of the Chicago School's perspective on these communities informed and "underwrote municipal government's regulations" (p. 41). Ferguson's larger point is that sociology too served as a technology of the state, promoting the subjugation of African American people along the axes of white cisheteropatriarchy. More specifically, Ferguson asserts at length, "Sociology made the production of racial knowledge about African Americans into a political economy of sexual knowledge in which blacks could be used to justify the extension and support of normative presumptions about American citizenship. (p. 81)

This schema, an intuitionally and materially structured division, sought to render Black citizens as wholly abject. In this, Ferguson explained that:

Marking African Americans as such was a way of disenfranchising them politically and economically. In sum, the material and discursive production of African American nonheteronormativity provided the interface between the gendered and eroticized properties of African American racial formation and the material practices of state and civil society. (p. 21)

A QOCC therefore seeks to examine the way sexuality and gender inform racialized structuration, and concurrently, their material effects.

QOCC too holds astute interest in examining the ways minoritarian folk, along racialized, gender, and sexual axes, are incorporated into nation-making. As Ferguson explained, “queer of color critique approaches culture as one site that compels identifications with and antagonisms to the normative ideals promoted by state and capital” and positions culture “as a site of material struggle” (2003, p. 3). QOCC regards a focus on the body as primary in its aims, for “as an epistemological intervention, Queer of Color analysis denotes an interest in materiality” (2003, p. 3). As such a theoretical project became emergent from a U.S. Black queer subjecthood, this effort aggregated a technique accounting for the way queer people of Color are produced within domestic U.S. imperialism. And like a Theory in the Flesh, coalition too remains a fixture of its goals. As Ferguson explains “Queer of color analysis must examine how culture as a site of identification produces such odd bedfellows and how it- as the location of antagonisms- fosters unimagined alliances” (p. 3). A QOCC reveals the contours of nationalist practices recruiting Queer of Color subjects in the pursuit of heteronormativity in the name of national progress and nation building. His structuration demonstrated a means to more fully account for the institutionally produced conditions affecting queer minoritarian folk of Color, always holding a capable analytical form of research across such terrains of difference.

Muñoz. Before explaining the inclusion of Muñoz’s research as the final connection in the triangulated base, I look at a set of examples examining the uniqueness of men, sadness, body-image, and self-esteem. I will tease out the way a more nuanced analytical capacity is required for assessing this project’s interest in queer racialized feelings as brown feelings, which strengthen the study’s account for the sexual and racial sociocultural experiences by the participants in this study.

Scholarship exploring gay men feelings of dissatisfaction self frequently looks at the relationship across body, self-image, and self-esteem. Self-image refers to one's perception of self that is also shaped by the social other, whereas self-esteem identifies one's personal sense of value and worth. In general, men experience pronounced dissatisfaction with their body and self-image. As dissatisfaction with body image puts men at greater risk for psychological strain than well-adjusted peers, (Allensworth-Davies et al., 2008) one significant thread across men's discontents was a desire for gaining mass in the form of muscle. This particular issue has since become associated with a slew of health risks such as dysmorphia, disordered eating habits, poor self-esteem, and depression (Olivardia, 2001; Olivardia et al., 2004, Parent & Moradi, 2011; Pope et al., 2000). Additionally, men who yearn for more muscular bodies more frequently report using steroids as a way to achieve such physical form (Bolding et al., 2002).

This desire uniquely affects gay men and in several studies are reported to experience greater bodily stress and dissatisfaction compared to straight men (Beren et al., 1996; Chaney, 2008; McArdle & Hill, 2009; Tiggemann et al., 2007). Recent research directly explores the consequences of steroid use as a response to such bodily dissatisfaction by gay men, where one study found that amongst surveyed men, one in seven gay gym attendees had used steroids in the last twelve months (Bolding et al., 2002). Steroid use by gay men has been linked with worsening feelings of loneliness and suicidal thoughts (Bolding et al., 2001). Steroid use by gay men is also tied to increased risky sexual behavior, drug use, and an increased risk of contracting HIV, low self-esteem, and poor self-image (Bancroft et al., 2003; Bolding et al., 2002; Griffiths et al., 2017; Halkitis et al., 2008, Perkins et. al., 1993; Rosario et al., 1996; Vasquez et al., 2011).

A significant issue here is that all the above studies generated their findings by a majority white men participant sample. Given that "the experience of being a member of a sexual

minority group may increase stress, lower self-esteem, and lead to depression” (Zea et al., 1999, p. 372), gay men of Color are confronted with issues of body image directly tied to factors such as race, ethnicity, and class further increase depressive symptoms and lowers self-esteem (Mereish et al., 2022). The value in accounting for such elements is an ability to tease out more relevant, unique, and culturally situated knowledges that interrogate relevant factors shaping their everyday social reality.

While the above texts help understand that gay men are especially affected by body discontentment, increasing poor self-image and self-esteem, putting them too at greater risk for depression, these studies are designed for clinical health practitioners to better predict sexual health risks leading to the HIV infection pipeline (Zamboni & Crawford, 2007; Ibañez et al, 2009). As my project is primarily interested in speaking with sexual minoritarian new Mexican men, I seek a base of scholarship that can accurately account for such unique experiences of marginalization, to center feelings of sadness against such pathologizing tendencies. In this project, I rely upon Muñoz’s thoughts on brown feelings, which provide a mapping for this research endeavor and is able to account for such a unique marginalized group. Importantly, as I will outline, my heightened interest in Muñoz’s work is his focus on community as in relational to melancholy.

The final linkages in this theoretical triangulation include a pair of José Esteban Muñoz’s works, first on disidentification and then brown feelings. Broadly speaking, disidentification refers to queer instantiations that trouble the seemingly finite parameters of hegemonic meaning. In this specific framework, such endeavors are uniquely deployed by minoritarian subjects. Throughout these various examples, Muñoz comes to delineate the unique possibility and importance of Queer of Color disidentificatory projects. Disidentification, an akin pursuit of

QOCC interrogates the location and experience of Queer of Color subjecthood in relation to larger formations of meaning, beliefs, and values sustaining the justification of heteronormative social configurations and policy that reduce and limit queer subjects' capacity to exist and live within such conditions.

Importantly, disidentification principally describes an antiassimilationist Queer of Color project. Muñoz explains the uniqueness of this premise by first recalling Althusser (1971), who explained that “ideology is an inescapable realm in which subjects are called into being or ‘hailed,’ a process [called] interpellation” (Muñoz, 1999, p. 11). That is, subjects face assimilationist pressures to acquiesce into such social forceful, compulsory demands. Such demands occur “within an *apparatus* and its practice or practices, such as the state apparatus” (p. 11). The focus here, the way Queer of Color subjects traverse and queer such larger social experiences is the focus of disidentification.

Two examples of disidentification by minoritarian subjects occur as a means to revise identities and objects rendered as deviant or as antagonistic to the public sphere. When imaging alternatives to hegemonic mourning for queer raced subjects, Isaac Julien’s film *Looking for Langston* (1989) and James VanDerZee’s portrait photography of New York City Harlem Renaissance each construct in their own respective forms “an insertion of contemporary ‘self’ into a fiction of the past,” (p. 68) establishing an immediate and relevant presence of queerness across its historic erasure. Time, conceptually and corporeally, functions as a point of recurrent interest for disidentification work. That is, in this instance disidentification moves as a survival strategy against current temporal conditions and pressures limiting the lives and value of racialized queer folk. Disidentification shifts and recodes assemblages of meaning. As a practice, disidentification is neither wholly resistant, nor entirely agentic, but instead may become an

ephemeral locale of queer survival and world-making. As “disidentification resists the interpellating call of ideology that fixes a subject within the state power apparatus,” (p. 97) it helps outline and reveal an alternative mode of interaction with dominant ideology, “one that neither opts to assimilate within such a structure nor strictly opposes it; rather, disidentification is a strategy that works on and against dominant ideology” (p. 11). As a practice, disidentification is neither wholly resistant, nor entirely agentic, but instead becomes a valuable and ephemeral emergence of queer survival and world-making against hegemonic meaning and modes of relating.

The second thread in this point focuses on Muñoz’s work about Melancholia. In his initial conceptual construction of disidentification he provisionally included a consideration of Melancholia explaining it as “brought about by the subject’s inability to immediately work out the problems or contradictions” in response to some kind of lost object, and the ensuing wake of its loss (p. 70). The inability to cease mourning is when melancholia is thought to become a pathological dilemma. Pushing back against such insistence, Muñoz affirmed that “for blacks, queers, or any queers of color, [melancholia] is not a pathology but an integral part of everyday lives.” (p. 74). While his particular contemplation on melancholia is built from a specific example of Queer of Color subjects’ relationship with mourning and loss of other Queer of Color folk, he explained that rather than viewing melancholia as a kind of “pathology or as a self-absorbed mood that inhibits activism...it is a mechanism that helps us (re)construct identity” (p. 74). Potently, the relationship between disidentification and melancholia is that a disidentifying subject, “like a melancholic subject holding on to a lost object...works to hold on to this [lost] object and invest it with new life” (p. 12). For Muñoz, disidentification is thus not a way out of

melancholia, nor a demand for such move, but rather insists to labor against dominant ideology by reconfiguring meanings towards queer ends.

In another development of this focus, Muñoz explored melancholia and feelings as a way to interact and organize queer relational potentials. He relied on the notion of “brown feelings,” which to him refers to social linkages stemming from a depressive position. In this, brown feelings describe a “minoritarian aesthetic and political practice” where “a certain ethics of the self is utilized and deployed by people of color and other minoritarian subjects who don’t feel quite right within the protocols of normative affect and comportment” (2006, p. 676). Normative affect and comportment rely on a critical perspective to describe standardized conditions of dominant social emotional order. Brown feelings thereby describe “the ways in which minoritarian affect is always, no matter what its register, partially illegible in relation to the normative affect performed by normative citizen subjects” (p. 679). Brownness, in this way, becomes a theoretical vessel against the dominant “cultural logic that prescribes and regulates nation feeling and comportment” (p. 680). Muñoz explains that the conception of brown feelings serves as a particular “modality recognizing the racial performativity generated by an affective particularity that is coded to historical subjects who can provisionally be recognized by the term Latina” (p. 679). Brown feelings therefore succinctly denote the unique relationship between social standards of emotionality and people hailed into a Latin conglomerate.

The focus does not only remain on such individual subjects’ thought. As such, two items are consequently essential to brown feelings. First, that “brown feelings are not individualized affective particularity” (p. 679). Brown feelings are not a project or hermeneutics of isolation but function as “a collective mapping of self and other” (p. 679). The second item explains that the aesthetic performances and practices generated by these feelings “offers a particular lens to

understand the ways in which different circuits of belonging connect, which is to say that recognition flickers between minoritarian subjects” (p. 679). That is, for Muñoz, aesthetic emergences of these feelings, performances, and practices can be recognized by others, and that this may too allow for recognition between the subjects themselves to occur. Brown feelings are not bound to an exclusive examination of the individual, they instead offer a way to engage a unique social coherence among the self and other, whereby such feelings might be recognized across and by other minoritarian subjects. Brown feelings are precisely and keenly astute of the relationship between self and other, to compliment larger understandings and knowledges from and across the position of feeling.

Muñoz explains his effort seek to understand “an ethics of brownness, one that attempts to incorporate understandings of the psychic in the service of understanding the social” (p. 681). To do so he works with Viego (2003), who explains that traditional Occidental general, and U.S. specific, psychology strives to forge a distinct kind of therapeutic effect on Latina folk “as to achieve a gradually realized whole and well-adjusted self” (Muñoz, 2006, p. 680). This type of egoic therapy is built around the mythos of the American dream, whereby such pursuits require, encourage, and compel one to bolster a sense of self in the form of egoistic patchwork. That is, as we are wounded through life, the injury of such psychic ailments seemingly become arrested once the ego is reconceived of as whole element object, concluding in a fulfilled and happy subject. On this conceptual thread, Muñoz explains that “any social theory that posits happiness as its goal is a flawed theory” and that a desire for a wholly formed, healed, and bolstered ego “would be an escape from the social” (Muñoz, 2006, p. 680). The primary and popular path to healing enforced is only possible by the individual subject and any attention to social paths become moot, contradictory mirages.

Muñoz leans on Viegó's work to move away from this and to "imagine a mode of brown politics not invested in the narrative of a whole or well-adjusted subject" (Muñoz, 2006, p. 680). These issue here for Muñoz and Viegó is that such hegemonic determinations evacuate the importance of considering social webs of relation for minoritarian folk. Muñoz does not argue for an entire disposal of the prospect of a unified and whole self, recognizing that the "fiction of feelings of wholeness is crucial for survival within the social" (2006, p. 681). But relying on Viegó, he specifically offers a small glimpse of the way that a psychoanalytical perspective for minoritarian folk could compel us towards an "understanding of one's alienation and alterity in and through language [which] could become the basis for a kind of 'care of the self'" (Viegó, 2003, p. 335). The path to this, Viegó says, entails "a sustained practice of analysis that addresses social alienation and subjugation, as the result of certain social inequities, but also as a practice that addresses more properly the effects of speech on the subject" (p. 335). This serves not as a description of his prescriptive offerings on psychoanalysis, but more about how such normative efforts become incongruent to the feelings he is describing here, which cannot be resolved in the goal of a whole stable ego, for doing so negates the consequences and effects of current hegemonic social material conditions.

Muñoz pulls Klein (1986) into orbit to continue working against propulsions towards a more whole ego. In this, the depressive stance he conceptualizes might instead work "not as a stage that must be moved beyond," (Munoz, 2006, p. 681) but can be a point of potential. He says that "taking up the depressive position is one way in which, as subjects, we resist a despair within the social that would lead a breakdown in one's ability to see and know the other" (p. 681-682). For Muñoz, this maintains an awareness of the need and ability to craft an account of intra-group interactions as relevant, informative, and conflicting too. As Muñoz says, this

enables “a mode of intramural depressive positionality that gives us the ability to know and experience the other who shares a particular affect of emotional valence with us” (p. 682). These bonds and tethers, forged from a depressive position can be fleetingly impermanent echoes of the past brought into the now, or conditions that spark too an ephemeral barometer registering feeling that is working against the goal of a whole ego formation assembled in a vacuum. This allows us to recognize the depressive position of feeling down in that “the depressive position is not a linear or task oriented sense of development closure. It is instead a position that we live in, and it describes the way in which we attempt to enter psychic reality” (p. 681). And from this, it can stir within us the desire to reconstruct our interlacing of kin.

In summary, the formative points of his effort rely on feelings, like sadness, and the emotional-psychic realm of self in service of mapping the conditions and relational potentials within the social. The stability of the brown self is not built upon a determination or accomplishment of an egoically whole subject. Brown feelings are not a stage to move past, but rather a position that might elucidate aesthetics or behaviors that sew recognition across minoritarian subjects. Brown feelings resists the urge of “cleansing negativity” and to instead, like Klein (1986) advocated for, “promote the desire that the subject has in the wake of the negative to reconstruct a relational field” (Muñoz, 2006, p. 683). From this sensation, of yearning to reconstruct a net of kin is where I find myself within the depressive position of feeling brown, feeling down. This project therefore recognizes that “the depressive position is a site of potentiality and not simply a breakdown of the self or the social fabric” (p. 687). And we can clearly garner that the project certainly does not revolve around the end goal of uniting and finding a fractured ego whole. The turn to brown feelings too, “signals a certain kind of hope” (p. 688). That hope- this hope, before you now- is the fuel to the fire I forge.

This project hence maintains two formative assertions. First, sadness and brown feelings are the cohering variable around which I orient this project's interest. Second, which I will explore later, is desire as a point of interest in this study.

The next section identifies itself within the specific field of Queer Intercultural Communication to accomplish and clarify these interests. Specifically, after I map the features of the area of research, I explain how its interest in desire and feelings are specifically conceptualized. I then outline how feelings are the primary organizing gravity between subjects, rather than potentially reductive and problematic homogenizing assumptions of brown subjects. I accomplish this by relying on Latino Vernacular Discourse. Then, in accordance with its research calls, I close the chapter contextualizing the local historical terminological identity mappings of Hispanic subjects in New Mexico.

Queer Intercultural Communication

Following the above theoretical triangulation, I now work to situate such foundation under a constellation of Queer Intercultural Communication (QIC). As I will outline, QIC is a pronouncedly apt field of study capable of addressing the material realities and historic conditions especially affecting minoritized queer folk. This focus too extends a QOCC aim in coalitional propulsions, both seeking to affirm, strategize, and demystify relations across the margins. By presuming a unique epistemological vantage, QIC is an avenue to imagine and identify alternative means of relations and meaning operating within and against the pressures of White cis Heteropatriarchal society.

Eguchi and Calafell (2020) remind us the first naming and advancement of QIC formed from Chávez's scholarly implorations (2013), responding to the underprivileged foci of queerness within *The Handbook of Critical Intercultural Communication* (Halualani &

Nakayama, 2010). Another significant advocacy for such scholarship came way by Eguchi and Asante (2016), who recommended a need to center and produce such minoritized knowledges within the larger field of Critical Intercultural Communication. As Eguchi and Asante pointedly offered, “the U.S. American capitalistic heteronormative circulations of power recurrently patrol and protect the boundaries of intercultural communication theory” (p. 171). Like research assessing the relationship between Queer Theory, Heteronormativity, and Critical responses to Whiteness and White Supremacy (Calvente, Calafell, & Chávez, 2020; Yep, 2003, 2014), QIC, formulated by Eguchi and Calafell, affirms the commitments in accounting for such queer productions of knowledge.

As a distinctive field of research responding to gaps within Critical Intercultural Communication, QIC centers queerness as “a strategy to destabilize the normative knowledge production of intercultural communication” (Eguchi & Calafell, 2020, p. 3). Normative knowledge production refers to White Cisheteronormative scholarship, within which queerness presents a conceptual conundrum. Therefore, one of QIC’s primary tenets is to “analyze intersections among sexuality and gender, queer politics of identity, and globalization” (Eguchi, 2019a, p. 84). Equally so, QIC as a realm of inquiry seeks “alternative ways of knowing, being, and acting that counter the majoritarian belongings in and across local, national, and global contexts” (Eguchi & Calafell, 2020, p. 3). QIC consequently produces a specific mode to critique, resist, and intervene within normative formations of gender and sexuality as they cohere across identity matrices.

One example by Abdi structures an autoethnographic personal narrative as a queer Iranian American Woman. She moves QIC to write across queer timelines, speaking with her 2014 piece, to generate a “queer Iranian diasporic potentiality” (2020, p. 50). Performatively

composed, she unites intersectionality and QOCC to recall the communicative negotiations of speaking herself with others, especially her family and Mother. In writing a personal narrative that meditates on the possibility across queer national identity, she frames QIC as a way to explore the relational possibilities across such difference while also working to problematize notions of cultural belonging. In another example, McIntosh (2020) reminds us that QIC centers the body as an investigative site which also works to problematize the role of researcher. For McIntosh, this means theoretically considering her own identities as a straight White cisgender woman in relation to the queer research site. By bridging her critical performance ethnography, she unveils the connective tenets and entry points that queerly disturb the typical constructs defining impermeable boundaries between this/that, queer/straight, and insider/outsider (2020, p. 121). By producing a richly intriguing study recalling a gathering of the International Gay Rodeo she problematizes imperialist and hegemonic constructions of gender. Here, the story of Dannie, a Black lesbian cowboy who in moments challenges the White colonial cowboy/cowgirl dynamics in a quare disidentification, troubles what has been framed as the popular cowboy subject and image.

These two examples home in on a general base of QIC's research capacity which I am drawn to. I now describe six characteristics of a QIC mapping. First, QIC maintains an ease and interest in composing performatively engaging text, richly capturing the sites of inquiry. According to the triangulated base, such compositional formats can strongly entice and engage readers, crafting a broader picture of experience of knowledges from and on the margins. Second, QIC then illuminate the negotiations, limits, and possibilities of being across varying intersections of difference. By recognizing that hegemonic and material conditions impact our mundane lives, the communicative interactions thereby shaped by such forces are a powerful and

telling pinpoint of knowledge. Third, QIC affirms the importance of the body as an investigative site in which one comes to know the world. That is, the social hegemonic pressures and limits of meaning interact against one's body in a flurry of social sites and scenes. Rather than concretizing race and ethnicity down to some atomic level, QIC allows for the experiences within such marked bodies to be telling of the mundane, problematic, and transgressive experiences.

Fourth, QIC writes in relationship with others across interactions, recognizing how social webs of reality are communicatively construed and produced relationally. Like Muñoz reminded, "queerness, too has the capacity to flatten difference in the name of coalition" (1999, p. 78), coalition to QIC maintains attention to cross-minoritarian bonds and modes of relating across differences. Fifth, QIC anchors an international scope to better highlight local and global productions, collisions, and circulations of difference and meaning, beyond a singular location of investigation. Lastly, QIC seeks to humanize folk across minoritarian spectrums of identities for liberatory and abolitionist aims. Muñoz explained, "to perform queerness is to constantly disidentify, to constantly find oneself thriving on sites where meaning does not properly 'line up'" (Muñoz, 1999, p. 78). In sum, QIC thusly positions queerness as a way to propel further such knowledges in those misaligned places. This account of QIC's aims therefore informs my larger project as a kin infusion with the previous triangulation of Anzaldúa (1987), Ferguson (2003), and Muñoz (1999, 2006).

After identifying the triangulated base of assumptions in the first section of this chapter, this next section more clearly explains desire as a second theoretical coherence of this project. I now shift to a brief survey of work to consider desire along sexual and racialized formations. In this, I discuss concurrent thoughts on the potential of desire as a focus of research. I then rely on

Latin/o Vernacular Discourse to interrogate the particularities of this ethnic-racial group of analysis. I then heed its call for utilizing precise research tools by relying on a concept of ethnorace to better situate this group of study. My goal here is to outline a path forward that cautions against precarious homogenizing simplicity when it comes to organizing what a group necessarily is. That is, I want to look less at delineating a concreteness to ethnic and racial identity and instead look to the way such hegemonic concepts, conditions, and realities affect such hailed subjects.

Desire. I begin with Pérez's assertions that modernity and cosmopolitanism were co-constitutive forces structuring gay mens' desire, which reciprocally sustained one another. To term "gay cosmopolitan," Pérez utilities QOCC to more precisely align a relationship across nation-state formations. Importantly, in this he describes that a "gay cosmopolitan....designate[s] a subject position beginning with (but not limited to) a White, urban, leisure-class gay male whose desire becomes globalized at the close of the nineteenth century" (2015, p. 27). Cosmopolitan describes the middle-class White mainstream gay subject who, via consumer capitalism, can afford most any commodified entity, especially bodies of Color. That is, for Pérez the relationship between "elite gays and criminalized migrant bodies" is a central formation of gay male modernity (p. 15) which ultimately position the "homosexual as a modern agent of neocolonial expansion" (p. 28). Through a queer reading of *Billy Budd*, this particular optic is importantly telling, highlighting how White colonialist propulsions of desire became intrinsic to a gay cosmopolitan modernity. His assertion positions the White gay subject as a long active participant shaping the current regime of global White supremacy and colonialism.

Thus, "the modern gay male identity, often traced to sexology's late Victorian constructions of 'invert' and 'homosexual' occupies not the periphery of the nation but rather a

cosmopolitan locus instrumental to colonial and neocolonial expansion” (p. 27). To Pérez, modernity has long been obsessed with consuming the brown body, especially made possible by a White gay onus of desire, compelling and constructing colonialisms reach. I now move to discuss an example that used an intracultural framework to see how minoritized subjects relate to each other despite categorizing interpretations by a White heteronormative institutional gaze.

My next example focuses on McCune’s work about Black Masculinities and the “down low,” or the social practice term that describes men who have sex with men and identify as straight. McCune’s specifically “situate[s] the DL and black men’s private sexual practices within a larger historical and cultural framework, while also attending to the labor of Black masculinity as an organizing structure for how these communities are constituted” (2014, p. 5). In his ethnographic study situated across Chicago Black queer dance scenes, McCune maps an architecture of the DL and sexual practices as queer worldmaking. Importantly, he details that “the appeal and necessity of the DL as positionality is the access it provides to a ‘freedom’ that is unavailable within the dominant cultural framing of Black manhood and traditional understandings of the ‘closet’” (p. 12). Like a disidentificatory feat though it might not be entirely resistant, nor fully agentic, as the crowd of men chanting lyrics, marked as heterosexist and homophobic, signal to McCune this contradictory nature, for “while Black men can identify and perform their queer desire (resist/subvert), they can still participate in the rituals of patriarchy (reinforce/accept)” (p. 89). This simultaneity is a signature of a critical work on desire which attends to the ways minoritarian subjects live in relation to subverting and upholding normative social forces shaping the intelligibility of such formations. Through a critical approach, McCune outlines the DL as a site and form of relating that both produces and limits

possibilities for queer Black masculinity, against pathologized gazes at a collision of race, gender, and sexuality.

Another work examining minoritarian intracultural connections and knowledges is Nguyen's (2014) inquiry of Asian masculinity and sexual representation. With a specific attention to the notion of the Asian gay subject, always already assumed to be a bottom, which as a contemporary gay-sexual jargon denotes the receptive partner in sexual interaction, and in this context anal especially. The popular understanding of Asian bottomhood within the gay community becomes imbued by Nguyen with a similar logic of McCune's (2014) work; that bottomhood for Asian men in his analysis enables and constrains the possibility of performing desire. This research examining racial formations across sexual minoritarian subjects is fruitful in my own cultivation of a framework for several reasons. First, for maintaining the analytical tenet recognizing minoritarian subjects as capable of reconfiguring signs into affirming transgressive capacities, while also determining more precisely the everyday shape and dimensions of restrictive social structures limiting their livelihood. Second, for keeping attention to the physical and social sites that make way for such potential. Lastly, for emphasizing regionally specific policy producing the social codification of certain groups, while also revealing larger national anxieties legally producing their inclusion and separateness.

I next explore this third theoretical tenet which requires a greater analytical scope through a contextualization of how such groups come to be made and regarded by institutionalized policy. To realize this goal, I turn to Latina/o Vernacular Discourse in order to more precisely account for such my unique group of focus.

Latina/o Vernacular Discourse. As a theoretical project, Latina/o Vernacular Discourse (LVD) recognizes Latina/o folk within their own situatedness by examining how they produce

discourse about and for themselves. Developed by Calafell and Holling (2011), LVD is “an encompassing, though not subsuming, metatheory for critically examining the everyday sites in which Latin@s struggle over, produce, engage, enact and/or perform culture, identities and community formation” (p. 22). They outline identity, decoloniality, and the role of the critic/al as the three characteristics at the center of LVD. On identity, they detail that “recognizing difference must be attentive to cultural nuances, specific histories, metaphors of belonging, community, racial difference, citizenship and legal status, sexualities, and class, while still being able to offer the possibility of collectivizing” (p. 21). This distinctive optic becomes less interested in the construction of these racial and ethnic markers, and more so focused on the way agents within such categories might utilize particular identity markers across varying contextual locales for different reasons. In other words, ethnicity and race become less of a concrete fixture and more so a categorizing logic of empire, and in turn, such research instead recognizes these Latina/o subjects as social agents capable of resisting, resignifying, and moving through such institutional identity bounds.

At the same time, in line with a critical research proclivity, such subjects are equally capable of reinforcing the hegemonic qualities of the very structures that they may seek to change. Holling’s examination of an email listserv CHICLE, as “academic-activist vernacular community” focused on Chicano art and scholarship, came together to reject statewide discriminatory policy. In her examination of their digital discourse, she illuminates how challenging it is to get outside of the majoritarian modes of thought (2011, p. 218). More largely, we also witness thresholds of limits for resistance which in turn might buttress the very logics of creating a concreteness of race and ethnicity.

I now work with such thought to question and consider the implications behind my terminological organization of this work. I do this for, while I look to such specific groups to discuss feelings and desire as a way to highlight colliding and disconnecting potential antihegemonic knowledges, the project still necessitates a more precise contextualization of the participants. Rivera-Servera, in his attention to the uniqueness of Queer Latin performativity offers one way to conceptualize such groups. He does this by establishing his project as a model focusing upon “on-the-ground quotidian manifestations of Latinidad [which] highlight the ways in which social category is emergent and lived in local contexts” (2012, p. 17). By exploring multiple sites to name mundane instantiations of Queer Latinidad, the concept operates less as a place homogenous ethnic or racial logic, and instead as a potential multiconvergent group. Thusly, “this work resists and [pushes] back against the larger homogenization of [a] Latina/o public, while simultaneously engendering the potentiality of Queer Latinidad as an intersectional category that might bring diverse groups together under a shared, if partial, ethnic imaginary” (p. 17). This widely echoed sentiment runs as a theoretical undercurrent for this project.

As Calafell and Holling note, they too question an encompassing grouping, elaborating “perhaps some of the most latent pressures regarding identity within Latin@ vernacular discourse are the often blurry relationships between the individual and the collective and heterogeneity versus homogeneity” (2011, p. 21). In response, they advocate an awareness of the shifting parameters categorizing such populations, especially when using specific terminologies. They do so in an effort to not obscure local configurations in favor of an unquestioned panethnic conglomeration. Similarly here, Rivera-Servera recalled Muñoz (2006) to explain that “What unites and consolidates oppositional groups is not simply the fact of identity but the way in which they perform affect, especially in relation to an official ‘national affect’ that is aligned

with a hegemonic class” (2012, p. 68). My goal in focusing on feeling and desire is a way to potentially elucidate such quasi-coherences.

Importantly, Rivera-Servera explains “Latinidad is presented less as a programmatic political articulation and more as a performative modality that counteracts the negative marking of Latina/o cultural practice as outside the realm of the nation” (2012, p. 20). His focus produces a notion of Queer Latinidad, which in one example recognizes queer emergences of class and reggaetón in the Cancún club scene, which produce seeming contradictions across global terrain but alternatively encounter one another as a “friction” that “spans a vast terrain with an equally diverse catalog of histories, identities, and affects” (p. 201). This friction occurs in the case of bodies moving against each other to the complex and cross local music and rhythms. This performative dimension highlights the way “Live acts in public spaces determine the legibility of queer latinidad” (p. 193). As a way to unveil complicated and equally contradictory ties, Queer Latinidad also congeals “as a practiced orientation to the world and an optic from which to understand it” in order to “productively trouble how we have come to either celebrate or dismiss pan-ethnic queer affiliations.” (p. 201). Similarly, research on a discursive and performative foci of such liminal potentialities shaped by brown queer bodies have examined in similar effect (e.g., Calafell, 2017; Gutierrez-Perez, 2017a, 2017b, 2020; Gutierrez-Perez & Andrade, 2018). Queer Latinidad for Rivera-Servera becomes less a term of group coherence and rather an ephemeral sense of affinity in places, across hailing global and local meaning.

I want to highlight his caution against reinscribing the immediacy and primacy of identity, as an engendering or cohering apparatus for people(s) to instead “...consider how affect compels social actors to specific practices or desires *without requiring absolutely fidelity to an anchoring script* (2012, p. 20; emphasis added). That is, locating social currents of feeling

around individuals and towards certain acts might be a way to unite rather than a prioritization of linkage from race and ethnicity. Instead, he points to something he terms “affective economy of Latinidad” which looks to “how different types of engagement or participation may enable a social actor an ephemera of queer Latinidad at the level of feelings without landing in the narrative of identity” (p. 20). Such consideration thus presents a way to speak of group coherences without binding or concretizing the finite assembly of a fixed identity category or referent always harkening back to identity. Succinctly, Rivera-Servera tells “Queerness and Latinidad evade ossification or fixity,” (p. 21) as the forms of queerness and Latinidad are constantly shifting and evolving under social conditions.

For myself and this body of work, I do not seek to present this group with any undercurrent of rigid identificatory referent. I am not interested in making totalizing claims about all sorts of groups everywhere. I am instead interested in archiving and collecting the feelings of those rendered under certain ethnic and racial kinships to myself, who also might not feel a sense of fitting in, nor understand themselves in the current architecture of the group in the way it has been constructed, both in images, media, and capital- and on the ground between social individuals. This though, requires an attention to the way such groups have experienced institutionally hailed organization.

Before proceeding further, I make a brief note. The concept of Intersectionality has paved way for greater nuanced examination of the colliding systemic forces of oppression upon specific groups. Kimberlee Crenshaw (1989) conceived of this notion to precisely recognize the unique treatment of Black women under the law at the two-factor nexus of the legal category of gender; woman, and the category of race; Black. In order to bring attention to the under-examined experience and treatment of this group by the U.S. legal system, also centered and elaborate

knowledges from Black Women in the everyday mundane with other kin theory (Griffin, 2010, 2014). The underlying assumptions of this project recognize the simultaneous factors of juridically constructed identity not just at the level of law, but also the discursive and material every day. In this way, I experience access and privileges within the U.S. for embodying and perpetuating ideal normative citizen subjecthood as a man and categorized as racially White, but at the same time, experience systemic disadvantages and lack of access because of minoritized sexual orientation and unique ethnic category. Identity thus is not conceptualized as separate social productions, but it instead understands and explores the way these are all cohabitated in my body and communicated in daily social interactions at both the personal social level as well as within larger systems of meanings.

This project is principally indebted to the scholarly project of intersectionality and theories from radical Women of Color. Because of their work, I am able to conduct my research within a paradigm that affirms such perspectives. In this project's orientation, I employ intersectionality as the underlying theoretical position concerning the polyvalence of identity in the ordinary every day. I do so by theoretical bolstering its framework with QOCC and QIC which principally call for such critical accounts and vantages concerning the nature of structured marginalization in relation to and across other social positions. I chart this in the next section, only after first clearing up what exactly this group's relation to race and ethnicity is according to the U.S. institution of law.

Ethnorace. In the U.S., Latin origin and/or Spanish culture is delimited under the racial category White, but marked as a specific ethnic-other, subsumed beneath the grouping misnomer of "Hispanic." In this, ethnicity is discursively produced in U.S. law as a distinctive cultural affiliation tethered to nation of origin and ascribed to a sociocultural dimension of self (Allen,

2011, p. 67). Race though, has been written and regarded in U.S. law as a kind of physical distinction, projected into phenotypical markers that are generalized onto populations, often from specific areas of the globe (Martín Alcoff, 2012). But as Ferguson (2003) explained, social institutions also play a role in constructing material consequences in its attempts to legitimize racial difference.

The determination of such federal categorization is the 1954 Supreme Court case *Hernandez v. Texas*. Hernandez was indicted of murder in 1951 by an all-White jury. Hernandez appealed the decision, where his legal representation claimed this was discriminatory as no town citizens of Mexican or Latina American descent had served on the jury for 25 years and the state therefore engaged in willful, deliberate, and systematic exclusion of Mexican people on the jury, thus violating his 14th Amendment rights of procedural due process (“Hernandez v. State,” n.d.). The state as well as Hernandez’s defense similarly recognized “there is no person of Mexican or other Latina American descent or blood” (Hernandez v. State, 1952) who had served as Jury members. Denied for a rehearing in 1952, the Texas court of Criminal Appeals stated that Mexicans were in fact classified as within the White race. To defend and affirm their position, they referred to an earlier case, *Sanchez v. Texas*, 1951, where they rejected a similar appeal that Sanchez, convicted of murder, was also discriminated against on the basis of race. In this case, the court clarified that Mexican people were “not a separate race but are White people of Spanish descent” (“Hernandez v. State,” n.d.). This too was framed as a 14th Amendment violation, that a citizen of the federal nation is protected from a state infringing upon ones’ rights or privileges, ensuring equal protection under the law. Subsequently, the appeals court more precisely reaffirmed the position within Texas that:

Mexicans are therefore members of and within the classification of the white race, as distinguished from members of the Negro race. In so far as we are advised, no member of the Mexican nationality challenges that statement. [Hernandez] does not here do so.

(Hernandez v. State, 1952)

They reestablished that it is not a civil protection to require someone of a shared racial origin to thusly be a member of one's jury.

Once at the federal level, the Supreme Court ruled in favor of Hernandez, citing the multiple physical and spatial forms of discrimination throughout the town, including the courthouse itself, which did in fact show proof of discrimination specifically affecting Mexican people by preventing jurors of Mexican "ancestry of national origin" (guides.loc.gov) from serving. As the U.S. sustains a legally rendered two class system of the White and Black race, the Supreme Court went on to rule and recognize that Mexicans were a distinct group warranting protection under the 14th Amendment's equal protection clause, thus, now a unique ethnic group. The U.S. still maintains this category of specific ethnic other, though now subsumed under the formula "Hispanic" which includes kin from other countries of Latin origin, including "any person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race" (census.gov).

Martín Alcoff responds to this discussion with urgency, affecting a reconsideration of the simultaneous ways this ethnic group experiences racialization on a three-axis front of colorism, physical appearance, cultural racism, and nativism. Like Ferguson (2003), Martín Alcoff explains that newer dimensions on the technologies making difference shifting racial biological differences into cultural issues. In a push to offer more heightened nuances to examine and broaden social analyses, she advocates the use of "ethnoracial" as:

pertaining to groups of people who have both ethnic and racialized characteristics, who are a historical people with customs and conventions developed out of collective agency, but who are also identified and identifiable by bodily morphology that allows for both group affinity and group exclusion. (Martín Alcoff, 2012, p. 121)

Martín Alcoff thusly positions race and ethnicity as socially conflated concepts.

I am drawn to the notion of *ethnorace* as a way to contemplate national circuits of meaning arranging Hispanic and Latin identity iterations in the U.S. Derived from Goldberg's (1993) conceptualization, Martín Alcoff continues a critical examination of current semblances and confusions of racial and ethnic identity uniquely affecting Latinized folk in the U.S. Responding to predominant and problematic colonial schemas of identity, Martín Alcoff recognizes its inaccurate formula of Latin-based identity in the U.S. This conceptual tool complicates the multivariate construction of this group, eliciting richer analytical depth to examine more complex factors structuring and contributing to the colonial paradigm of identity. Importantly, as she explains "an *ethnoracial* group should not be seen as a biologically based natural kind, but as a form of identity that has evolved over time with elements of both bodily and cultural attributes (p. 121). Like the above works explained, oversimplifying this group can reduce and homogenize complicated histories of peoples across the world, supporting national assimilationist and flattening proclivities. Her work keenly proposed the need to disaggregate the general whole simplified unit of the group, and in this, *Ethnorace* becomes a technology to map such uniqueness.

The colonial paradigm of identity is sutured from Mignolo (2012) and Lugones (2012). Here, Lugones charted a model for a decolonial feminism, explaining a fragmentation of self under colonial regimes is lived as the double consciousness. Echoing Du Bois (1903), Lugones's

colonial paradigm of identity is another means to examine the hyper-dispersal of an ontological sense of self. Specifically, her work elaborates the void and moot category of “woman of Color” under a colonial paradigm of domination. She explains that the colonizing mission was not to make men and women of society from colonial subjects, but to shift such subject from a subhuman state, into human. The purpose was never to assimilate into colonial civil society. The category of woman for her then has always already, only ever exclusively been, attached to White social womanhood, and in this, women of Color is an empty category. Mignolo recalls that colonialism and modernity are kin entities as a response to the historical treatment of the two phenomenon as separate conditions; to him, they are part of and dependent on each other. European modernity never exclusively pertained to the continent, but rather was built on and alongside the colonial enterprise of expansion and domination across the world.

I bring up this colonial paradigm of identity to explain a potential origin of divisionist technologies. As the colonizing apparatus formed itself by only defining exteriority, the central construction of difference is what Mignolo refers to as “coloniality.” That is, identity as a logic making category relies on a terrain of shifting scientific foundations for claiming and asserting difference; medical models that insisted Black folk in the U.S. were a subhuman species of *homo sapiens* that were abjectly inferior, current medical models that assign genital organs as purely biological difference, exclusively making gender as genitals, with a primary purpose of reproduction, and as well as categories derived in notions of blood quantum, per the states tactics to qualify and support a materialization of difference. Identity, as an ongoing product of coloniality, was and is a discursive and im/material tool with consequences, enacted through discriminatory practices within the law and social institutions. The colonial paradigm of identity is then a state of defining itself through the negation and construction of the other, along a

continuum of gender, race, sexual orientation, disability, nationality, and ethnicity in order to guarantee a protection of itself. The direction of naming here matters, as abject treatments of identity are named from the locus of control and not derived from the group itself. This mode of knowing, naming, and categorizing the world is the nature of coloniality Mignolo (2012) is describing.

This view does not negate a mapping of collective agency from affiliation, or the value or importance such identity dominion may purport today. Instead, it instills an even greater importance of questioning identity and its logic, like the above works seek to do. I use this perspective to define and align with the function and role of identity understood here, as fractured, and importantly in the examining the feelings and experiences of it as a way to contemplate potential queer affinities. This too is important given the colonial imposition that regards the multiple identity roles as incongruent and incompatible with each other. Moving forward, the doing of identity and possibilities of it are important to me.

A dilemma here then becomes how to term and examine such collisions without reinscribing the rigidity of these categories simultaneously recognizing the value of potential affinities. Washington's (2017) examination of Blasian celebrity and the current parameters around the construction of race emphasizes an interest in decentering the circular logic of race making itself, by talking itself into ontological perpetuity. Simultaneously keeping attention on the material consequences and effects of race, in recalling the conceptual ploy of "Racecraft" from Karen and Barbara Fields (2012), Washington affirms that such analyses are valuable, "because analyzing race is impossible without examining how beliefs about race and consequently racial differences confer meanings and properties to bodies differently and

inequitably” (Washington, 2017, p. 84). Once again, I am disinterested in reinscribing the concreteness and absolute allegiance of these groups and categorical constructions.

I shift away from rewriting these in a legitimizing form to rather similarly explore the consequences and effects as they occur beyond the simple ethnic-other locus that reduces the complexity of the racializations also taking place. I secure this concept within the larger lens of this project to look at the ways that this Latin imaginary is interpellated in order to examine the confusing logics occurring. At the same time, this does not reconcile the possibility of just issuing the same colonial racial logic simply under a different teleology; that *ethnorace* is just another term deployed in the same way. To do so, I rely upon a critical locus to assess the unique factors along racial approximations and ethnic conglomerates of people in Albuquerque who identify along the terrain of this ethnic racial criteria, similar to myself as a way to enable similarly nuanced organizational optics like “*ethnoracial*.” Once more, what I am interested in is both the spirit of QOCC and the doing and possibilities of identity.

New Mexico

Indigenous North-American people have long occupied the space of what now is regarded by its current colonialist occupational force of the U.S. as New Mexico. The colonial archival detailed here roughly begins at the start of the Pueblo Revolt Era in 1680. While early explorers and Catholic priests stepped foot into the pueblo territorial locale of the area, these were, as Liebmann notes, “members of exploratory parties that did not intend to settle among the Pueblos permanently” (Liebmann, 2012, p. 30). Most popularly, the claim and “discovery” of New Mexico are most often attributed to Juan De Oñate who, on official expedition, claimed a permanent colonial outpost in 1598 (Barrett, 2012; Liebmann, 2012). On April 20, 1598, he made a proclamation, claiming all the territory of New Mexico, which included current-day

Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, California, and Colorado, for the ruling king of Spain (Hammond and Rey, 1953; Hordes, 2005). This is the colonial moment of designation that remains a historical spectre of terror and violence guised in the benevolence of making the “new world.”

I explain now the path of New Mexico becoming a state, which is indicative of its larger relationship to race, ethnicity, and nation in the last century. New Mexico was a remote “neglected colonial outpost of northern New Spain” (Nieto-Phillips, 1999, p. 52). Mora reminds readers that the population at this point, in 1840, included a wide array of groups from “Pueblo Indians, Diné Indians, Apache Indians, mestizos, españoles, Euro-Americans, and various other combinations” (2011, p. 5). At the time, they were all technically Mexican. On February 2, 1848, The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo was signed, formally ending the Mexican-American War. The U.S. then assumed claim and control of New Mexico, as well as the vast majority of the present-day Southwest. A promise of the treaty was that Mexican subjects, within the now reconfigured land, would become U.S. citizens within one year as long as they did not “declare a desire to retain their Mexican citizenship” (p. 53). As the U.S. failed to honor the terms of the treaty, early New Mexican citizens needed to prove their Americanness to obtain the rights they were promised. Under these conditions, ethnoracial identity in New Mexico became “contingent on ideological processes” (Mora, 2011, p. 13) and served as a tool to (1) establish a colonial superiority to eastern U.S. settlers, (2) justify American incorporation, (3) maintain their long-time sovereign governmental reign over the area, and (4) a way to also assert allegiance to Mexico.

At the same time, apparent tension between the U.S. North and South antagonized this prospect, where Southerners in the nation’s capital were outwardly opposing New Mexico’s sublimation into the federal apparatus. An initial state constitution, drafted in Santa Fe, declared the state to “forever remain free of slavery,” only exacerbating the acceptance of the state in the nation. At the time, the area comprised

“fifty thousand Mexicans and about ten thousand Native Americans” (p. 53). Technically, the state was only recognized as a federally “incorporated U.S. territory” (Nieto-Phillips, 1999, p. 51) in the Compromise of 1850, which saw California access statehood.

The general disinterest and antagonism against New Mexico joining the nation encountered another iteration, where in a joint-statehood bill endorsed by Theodore Roosevelt in 1905, New Mexico would have been sublimated into Arizona. This bill passed but required a majority of residential approval from both areas. In New Mexico, it passed by a vote of 26,195 to 14,735 (Nieto-Phillips, 1999) where any kind of statehood was better than no statehood. Arizona, though, firmly and loudly resented and rejected the plan, with a finally vote count of 16,265 to 3,141, thusly nullifying the bill (Larson, 1969; Nieto-Phillips, 1999, p. 57). Congress ultimately rejected some twenty-plus statehood bills from New Mexico until 1912, when statehood was eventually granted.

Two factors formed the anxiety about statehood, first, the larger racial population and second, its linguistic practices. Concerning the group identification, the state was largely understood as mostly Indigenous and Mexican. The former, like in Oklahoma, were not considered citizens but wards, while of the latter:

“Mexican” evolved into a social category unto itself, at once racial and political in nature. Although, by law, Mexicans were held to be U.S. citizens, they were more often deemed by self-identified “Anglo-Saxons” to be not just different in racial and national origins, but inferior in both regards. (Nieto-Phillips, 1999, p. 53)

Issues centering around language largely focused on education, for within the state, out of “342 public schools, 143 of which taught exclusively in the English language, 106 in the Spanish language, and 93 in both languages” (Nieto-Phillips, p. 55). Uniquely, it also remains the only

state to have two languages, Spanish and English, recognized in its constitution. Identification of New Mexicans then underwent a transformation beneath this pressure, where:

During the nineteenth century, New Mexico's 'Mexicans' variously referred to themselves as *vecinos*, *mexicanos*, *neomexicanos*, *nuevomexicanos*, or *hispanoamericanos*. By the twentieth century, however, those who had received an English-language education began to refer to themselves in English as Spanish Americans. (Nieto-Phillips, 2008, p. 55)

This linguistic shift from Spanish into English “marked a broader transformation in the way Anglo-Americans viewed *nuevomexicanos* and the way *nuevomexicanos* viewed themselves or wished to be viewed” (p. 55). The uncertainty of what the people were to become lingered as “U.S. citizenship did not apply equally to men and women; rather, there existed a range of intersecting subordinate forms. “Full” citizenship-which involved an array of political rights and obligations to the state-accrued primarily to White men” (Nieto-Phillips, 1999, p. 52). As questions of citizenship were based on the asserted immutability of the New Mexican race, the nation too recognized a single unit of anything other than “White blood” would render a citizen abject subordinate racial other.

I now explain important junctures of queer history in New Mexico. By doing so, I outline the unique and shifting connections of queerness with art, secrecy, landscape, and community. To begin, in the 1920s-1940s, the northern New Mexican town, Taos and capital city, Santa Fe became novel spaces for queer folk. In this time “whereas homosexuals in New York, San Francisco, and Los Angeles carved out gay neighborhoods for socialization within certain districts of the city, Santa Fe and Taos lesbians and gay men were sewn into the landscape’s fabric. (Biro, 2015, p. 60). Communities of queer artists began cultivating a distinct social

landscape throughout this time. The enclaves that formed in Northern New Mexico included were local citizens and transplants from larger metropolitan cities. These communities held Bohemian qualities of freedom and artistic exploration and expression, which embraced social experimentation and nonconformity.

Taos and Santa Fe were especially appealing to queer folk as they could privately and publicly “engage in queer marriages and explore homoerotic feelings,” (p. 40) while freely expressing unique cultural qualities within events and festivities for the general public. Other social spaces not necessarily designed for queer folk, such as bookstores served as a welcoming center for queer community life. Additionally, the amount of queer folk and movement through public spaces allowed for frequent gay casual sex encounters in well-known public spaces, enticing a mix of social classes to come together and interact.

These early art colonies though were transformed leading up to WWII, the McCarthy Era, and the federal government’s presence in the state due to emerging nuclear science projects. The once open and flourishing artistic enclaves began to suffer from the demand of privacy, shaped by the national security concealment of atomic science located in Los Alamos. This was worsened by the Lavender Scare, brought about by U.S. senator Joseph McCarthy which persecuted and expelled queer folk from government by methods of heightened surveillance, screening, and public questioning. As the security state delimited the capacity for privacy in both New Mexico and the nation, the secrecy needed of the Manhattan project and the paranoid screening of queer folk in government both lead to increased policing of public spaces. Formerly inclusive public social locales were now unsafe. Thusly, Biro explains “Given the Santa Fe art community’s stagnation during the war, which narrowed a safe space for homosexuals to carve out an open existence, these transitions eroded local practices and acceptance of homosexuality”

(Biro, 2015, p. 65). Local and regional news media repeated national attitudes on queerness as perverse and immoral, constructing queer folk as deviant criminals. In the immediate wake of such terror by the nation and state especially, many queer folks fled to large coastal cities.

Throughout the 1960s, New Mexico applied contradicting viewpoints in criminalizing queerness. The state legislature was the first in the nation to decriminalize sodomy, reflective of its prior beliefs and acceptance of queer communities and culture (Biro, 2015). In 1953, the state reversed such effort, instead worsening legal repercussions by widening the definition of queer criminal sex acts. The law was eventually loosened in 1961, due to persisting arguments around the inability to legally prosecute cases of sodomy between two mutually consenting adults (Biro, 2015). Even in the face of queer decriminalization, the fallout of such radical social law persisted beyond the end of WWII. Biro detailed:

The small-town queer atmosphere eroded with the introduction of war and subsequent Cold War ideologies. Gay cultural formation shifted to the city of Albuquerque and underground bars. At the same time, a shift toward bar culture enabled a larger number of gay men and women to participate in the gay life especially working-class queers, Nuevomexicanos, and Native Americans. (p. 105)

The need for secrecy was ideological terror requiring navigational tactics for queer folk living in New Mexico, while at the same time producing unexpected bedfellows.

A more pronounced public occupation of queerness would arrive in the 1970s through waves of counterculture. As national Women's rights and queer activist organizations gained visibility in their pursuit for civil rights, queer folk who had fled New Mexico slowly began returning to the state.

As some New Mexican queer folk focused their attention on transforming more densely populated spaces to “nurture gayness and transform the larger world and make it safe for greater expression of gender and sexual variance,” (Biro, p. 195) rural settings also became spaces of queer transformation. Subsequently, artistic pursuits of this time blurred the dichotomous vision of the state populations as divided in a strict rural/urban distinction, whereby various print magazines and publications were used to connect queer folk throughout the state. These texts also promoted grassroots calls to action and political organization.

These arts-based cross-state queer community endeavors were especially important for building linkages across rural lesbian community sites. As Biro explained:

The social movement of lesbian land— made up of loosely connected individuals, networks, and associations— advocated for sexual freedom in private, rural spaces. The desire of lesbians, who largely congregated in the northern part of the state, to select and build a life closely attached to sexual identity broadened the scope of open same-sex couples beyond an urban context and paved the way for closeted rural gay men and lesbians to come out. Even when women no longer lived on lesbian land, they continued to identify with the country. (p. 185)

The larger trend of this decade also sought to borrow strategies and tactics across minoritarian political action groups and artistic forms of expression to foster and strengthen queer community bonds and ease the loneliness they experienced. The endurance of an endless oscillation from secrecy to openness showcases a kind of queerness with a relationship to art, land, and community in New Mexico, across subcultural minority groups and national, regional, and local spaces. In both radical forms of expression and political advancement, queer folk and culture in New Mexican proves an enigmatic site of investigation.

Terminology. A more recent examination argued “Nuevomexicanos” served not as a claim to Spanish ancestry but rather represented “a defensive strategy to enact dissociation from stigmatized Mexican immigrants” (Salgado, 2020, p. 179). This perspective misses, and fails to recognize, the agency and dynamic nature of race. While the citation of New Mexico’s Spanish colonial past was relied upon to upgrade “their racial and social status” (Mora, 2011, p. 240) at the same time such appeals:

granted native New Mexicans a claim to govern the territory because of their historical lineages. Native New Mexicans considered their ancestors’ presence in the territory hundreds of years before the founding of the United States as sufficient rebuttal to Euro-Americans’ claim to the same territory. (p. 240)

While shifting identity markers were relied upon to differentiate from others within the state, outside the state, it primarily served as a means to demand and qualify self-governance within U.S. jurisdiction.

Trujillo’s (2010) exploratory work on Northern New Mexico highlights the multiple identity markers used in the area including “Mexican American,” “Hispano,” “Nuevomexicano,” and “Chicano” (Gonzales, 2007). Some scholars also deploy “Indo-Hispano” to identify the contemporary relations forged via colonialism as it affects Indigenous and Hispanic communities (Gandert, 2000). Trujillo succinctly asserts, “in both popular and academic usage there is no single proper popular term of this population’s racial/ethnic assignment and identity” (2010, p. 11). I turn to some guiding interventions across QIC to help make some determinations of a path forward.

In one instance, Pérez (2015) simply employs “brown” as an intentionally crude and ambiguous conglomerate mapping ethnoracial configurations. River-Servera (2012) offered a

take on Queer Latinidad as an idea cohering a pan-ethnic imaginary to relate Latinness across locations. Anzaldúa, notes at length her own shifts in terms:

When not copping out, when we know we are more than nothing, we call ourselves Mexican, referring to race and ancestry; *mestizo* when affirming both our Indian and Spanish (but we hardly ever own our Black ancestry); Chicano when referring to a politically aware people born and/or raised in the U.S.; *Raza* when referring to Chicanos; *tejanos* when we are Chicanos from Texas. (1987, p. 85)

Calafell explains similarly in her experience growing up in Arizona, then attending graduate school in North Carolina, and moving back to the region in Colorado that:

I moved between Mexican, Hispanic, Mexican American, Chicana, and Latina as I sought to make connections and negotiate my sense of self in various spaces. Each of those identities meant something unique, with varying ideologies and, for me, identifications that changed over time. In the choices permitted by these labels I was in a sense performing affiliation, accommodation, assimilation, and resistance. (Calafell, 2007, p. 1)

Calafell more largely examined her experiences of movement throughout North America and her shifting performative choices. The optic here becomes less interested in the construction of these racial and ethnic markers, and more focused on the way agents within such categories choose to utilize language by employing particular identity markers across varying contextual locales. In this, ethnicity and race become less of a concrete fixture and more so a categorizing logic of empire (modernity and coloniality) in which social agents might be capable of resisting, resignifying, and moving through and away from, in possible queer configurations.

A more local and recent project asserted that “‘Nuevomexicanos’ conceptions of ethnicity are about how they view themselves with regard to their long and complex history in

the United States and how they think others perceive them under certain circumstances” (Salgado, 2020, p. 180). While the majority of participants in the study identify as “Hispanic,” Salgado instead utilizes “‘Nuevomexican’ because ‘Hispanic’ is one of the many referents used by participants to describe in-group members” (p. 180-181).

In the wake of this ambiguity, confusion, and uncertainty, I shift away from a top-down defining apparatus. This project is instead interested in interviewing sexual minoritarian men of Color from and currently living in New Mexico to examine their mundane experiences in relation to sadness and desire. I rely on “Queer of Color” to map current instantiations constructing minoritarian subjects in relation to a nationalist reductive mapping. I am less interested in locking this group under one particular identity-marker and instead invested in seeing how such terms may enable or dissuade coalitional possibilities amongst the queer people of color who use them, myself included. New Mexico thus offers an exceedingly unique site to also question the stability and utility of concrete ethnoracial identity. This project thus generates sadness as a means for me to explore and forge connection and meaning with other similarly Ethnoraced people who do not quite fully fit in to normative registers of feeling and being. In this, the project therefore is interested in what can be learned from such a such.

Conclusion

After first naming queer and queerness, this chapter then attended to the foundational scholars (Anzaldúa, 1987; Ferguson, 2003; Muñoz, 1999, 2006) in which most proliferations of current kin research take root. I thusly organized a Queer of Color Critique theoretical propensity of this project. I closed this first section by offering a focus on the nature of brown feelings as a way to organize this project. I subsequently extrapolated the unique contributions of QIC and its iterations of Autoethnography, as this formation of research allows for a unique and grounded

telling of everyday experience in order to illuminate anti-hegemonic and anti-assimilationist potentials. I then looked to mappings of desire to organize the interest of this project and considered variables for coherence.

I next worked with LVD to identify how scholars have written identity as both a shifting schema, way of knowing the world, and cohering potentiality. In the final area of the Chapter, I worked to describe ethnorace as a way to organize the group of study. Penultimately, I provided an overview of the unique and complex colonial history of New Mexico and the legal codifications of identity it brought to the United States. Lastly, I identified the guiding terminology for the project as it was informed by the local geographic and linguistic cartography, which at this point relies on New Mexico, and thus, New Mexican, as the context to define such folk.

From this, the research questions and goals are as follows. First, how do New Mexican sexual minoritarian men understand their ethnoracial identity? Second, how do New Mexican sexual minoritarian men experience melancholia? Third, how do New Mexican sexual minoritarian men feel about their chosen kinships? Three specific research goals are as follows: (1) Explicate experiences of New Mexican Queer of Color relationalities, (2) Interrogate the utility and function of the ethnoracial identity matrix as it affects the latinized panethnic imaginary, (3) demonstrate a peculiar format of a Queer Intercultural Communication examination of melancholia. In the next Chapter, I will explain how these questions guide the project's methodological design, brought out of and made possible from the theoretical overview I have provided above.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I outline the methodological features of this project. I first attend to auto/ethnography in general. I then refer to QOCC and its varying iterations, relying on QIC as a place to hold such mapping. In this, I look to Queer Intercultural Communication's operationalization of auto/ethnography and its many prescribed uses. By doing so, I determine such methodological venture an apt vehicle for this project's analysis. I follow by outlining its relationship to narrative analysis as a way to decipher the project's larger goals through a more grounded application. The goal of this chapter is then to outline the QIC's auto/ethnographic dimensions guiding this project's study. I then bring the chapter to a close by preliminarily introducing the participants in short vignettes. These glimpses lead into a preview of the analytical themes to be found in fuller contemplation within the next chapter.

Automethodology

I begin this section by describing the project's unique implementation of autoethnographic methodologies. Auto/ethnography, in its more general base, is a methodological framework for researchers to situate themselves as a knowledgeable subject within varying cultural sites. Expanding auto/ethnographic work from Ellis, Adams, and Bochner (2011), Boylorn explained it as a method of study to "examine my lived experiences through a cultural lens, using creative writing techniques and research methods to interrogate my experiences while making sense of cultural phenomena" (2014, p. 74). In this vantage, auto/ethnography helps affirm and position critically-oriented experiences as a fully valid and viable way to account for, intervene within, and critique sociocultural reality and systems of meaning.

Adams, Ellis, and Jones describe the specific compound priorities of auto/ethnographically reliant scholarship. This first serves as a way to speak back to normative scripts and messages, especially disciplining particular bodies and performances. The second role of auto/ethnography is to “articulate insider knowledge of cultural experience” (Adams, Ellis, & Jones, 2017, p. 2). A third goal of auto/ethnography is to implicate the role of the researcher within their work, for notions of an entirely neutral researcher role are instead rejected in favor of recognizing a researcher always has an informing grasp and pull on any study. Thus, achieving an entirely neutral and unaffected researcher position is an impossible feat. A fourth goal of auto/ethnographic scholarship endeavors to craft a more uniquely proximate telling of the ephemeral social mundane in ways that other modes may be unable to offer (Adams, Ellis, & Jones, 2017). With an emphasis on more performative compositional forms, auto/ethnographic work seeks to elucidate feeling more greatly through a richly engaging composition. The final charge of auto/ethnographic work is producing research that is accessible to groups outside of academic realms.

A communicative dimension of this mode becomes less about the individual researcher’s account, but instead serves to generate meaning within and across intra and extra relation. The emphasis of the forward slash bridging “auto/ethnography” illuminates the way I operationalize the method to explain an ethnographic project of inquiry from a guiding locus of self. The “/” too signals my desire in elucidating a focus on border-thought, by affirming the specific knowledges garnered from living in such physical-social sites, as well as its psychic binds. Such performative enunciation of auto/ethnography serve in the work to describe a means of critique through the grounding of the knowledgeable, culturally-situated self, both as a coalitional praxis and method to identify, intervene, and resist normative hegemonic pressures. To bolster my critical

performative methodological path, I draw primarily from the foundational labor of QOCC outlined earlier. And as in many auto/ethnographic works (e.g., Abdi, 2014, 2020; Calafell, 2005, 2007, 2015; Eguchi, 2014, 2015, 2017, 2019a, 2019b, 2020; Eguchi, Files-Thompson & Calafell, 2018; Johnson, 2014; Gutierrez-Perez, 2017a, 2017b), I next explain my linkage to culturally specific knowledges and theory in order to strengthen my auto/ethnographic minoritarian position of analysis. I do this under the rubric of QIC which allows for such unique mapping. I begin though with earlier kin instantiations of such research.

Queer of Color Critiques

Quaring, Kuaering, Transing, Crippin. Beginning with the exemplary work by E. Patrick Johnson (2001), a queer embodied critique can be thought of as a way to account for racialized queer subjects, as traditional queer theory had been unable to. Whereby Johnson's term "Quare" explained such based knowledges, it shifted "queer" into a local vernacular, of his grandmother's southern pronunciation of "queer." Quare works as a framework enunciating, elucidating, and attending to the material conditions impacting racialized queer folk. It established such minoritarian subjects as uniquely knowledgeable of social currents like racism, sexism, and queerphobia.

This important work, elocuted through Black queer subjectivity, sutured a schema for other minoritized and theoretically underaccounted-for subject positions. Wenshu Lee (2003) crafted her own take of Johnson's Quare by bridging Michael Awkward's (2009) autocritography to establish Kuaering. Like Quare, Lee infused Kuaering to ascertain a transnationalist race-conscious womanist perspective, demonstrating an articulation of liminal subjects' transgressions across international sites and flows of meaning. McRuer's (2006) *crippin'* offered an interpretation of the way disability and access can trouble systems of

knowledge and meaning. McRuer's later work (2018), like that of Puar (2017) and Kafer (2013), engaged disabled subject's transgressive knowledges specifically in relation to neoliberal times and social austerity measures. Transing responded to calls from Johnson (2013) to interrogate and take into account the trans body as capable of troubling systems of cisheteropatriarchy (Halberstam, 2018; LeMaster, 2015; Yep, Russo, & Allen, 2015). As critical interventions, such projects sought to affirm the importance of minoritized knowledges as a way to tell of social forces and hegemonic pressures. In particular, such projects investigate subjectivities and their relationship to, and construction within, particular nation-states. While the above works take place across varying fields of study, I now attend to a particular area of research with a capacity to tether such projects together. By employing such theoretical conceptions and analytical tools, the scholarly community of Queer Intercultural Communication serves as the path moving onward that helps envision interventionist and coalitional modes of inquiry via marginalized positions and knowledges.

Queer Intercultural Communication

By charting the above trajectories and extensions of QOCC, I wished to reaffirm the methodological base for this research study as within Queer Intercultural Communication (QIC). Eguchi recognizes that QIC focuses on counternormative aspects of sexuality and gender as an epistemological lens to destabilize and denaturalize the socially acceptable sets of values, beliefs, and relations" (2019a, p. 84). In this, QIC offers a specific means to critique, resist, and intervene within the hegemonic social conditions affecting queer folk across axes of difference. Importantly, the focus on queerness develops a research program that seeks to elucidate possibilities for "alternative knowing, being, and acting toward the future where queerness is no longer a problem, can then be considered" (p. 84). This is to say that the sites of possibility in

everyday life and interaction become queer strongholds; fleeting and transgressive moments. In this, “Queerness is a brief moment of sexual and gender transgression in and across times, spaces, and contexts” (Eguchi, 2019, p. 84). Such ephemeral potentials identify too coalitional glimpses across endless formations of difference. This base also works as an anti-hegemonic tool to speak back to social standards restricting minoritized subject’s capacity for living within such normative regimes.

As a methodological venture, QIC is not interested in sedimenting the concreteness of race or other identities. Rather, it offers to recognize them as a social production informing one’s experience of coming to know and navigate the world. These social and institutional constructions of difference can influence one’s experiences and knowledge of the world. These differences simultaneously can shape one’s sense of self, and how others interact and experience them. The analytical pursuit here then promotes a distinct vantage on encountering the world and the unique insights garnered from understanding the real effects of a society constructing subordinate difference on varying axes.

I will next explain how QIC forges a heuristic centering the development of meaning and knowledges from specific culturally-located minoritized subjects. To do this, I thematically cleave QIC perspectives on auto/ethnography between individually composed scholarship and collaborative works.

Auto/ethnography. Among solo pieces, Queer Intercultural Communication Auto/ethnography (QICA) co-engages embodied critique. This understands that from our own experiences and knowledges within cultural sites, we can make sense of particular hegemonic machinations. Secondly, we can generate critiques from such vantages (Griffin, 2012). Some of these works specifically seek to unveiled contours of mundane White Supremacy (Calafell,

2012), while some explore a transnational queer relationality to critique U.S. White Imperialism (Eguchi, 2014, 2015, 2019b). These intracultural critiques emphasize QICA as a utility not only to critique the White U.S. heterocolonialist, imperialist nation-state, but also to produce alternative knowledges from the subjects of these peripheral sites.

Extending this intracultural emphasis, exploring beliefs around desire within queer communities serves as another exemplar of QICA. One example of work specifically interested in Queer of Color intra-connections and desires problematizes, names, and critiques the possibilities of gay Asian-Black connections (Eguchi, 2015). In another example, Eguchi explores the concept of sissophobia around gay Asian cultural identity, as well as Japanese male-queer femininity (2017). As a method of embodied critique, QICA crafts methodological potential for identifying and problematizing desire. Desire, as outlined in Chapter Two, is an important concept to QIC given its potential to operate as a hegemonic technological that can perpetuate, intervene into, and resist ideological systems.

A third feature of QIC is a queering of narrative structure itself. Abdi (2014), for instance, applies narrative-as-trespass to intervene in practices rendering her unintelligible as a Lesbian Iranian-American Woman. LeMaster (2014), in a similar vein, employs autoethnography in order to resist and imagine alternative possibilities to rigid western dichotomies of masculinity. Similarly, Johnson (2014) utilizes Autocritography to trouble the stability of narrative coherence and identity telling itself. QICA is an apt avenue used to problematize narrative rigidity, and forge space for idiosyncratically telling of marginalized queer identity. Lastly, QICA articulates praxis-oriented means of reflexively radical intervention within the mundane (Alexander, 2015; Calafell, 2013; Toyosaki, 2012). More specifically, scholars like Calafell (2005) and Gutierrez-Perez (2017a, 2017b) performatively produce their

praxiological efforts within a matrix of Latin identity in order to imagine and offer glimpses of queer world making. QICA is then a means to operationalize and imagine alternative modes of being via its interventionist and culturally-specific theoretical features.

Collaborative ventures of QICA demonstrative its queer coalitional efforts of research and thought. Some examples of this effort focus on Latin performative possibility (e.g., Holling & Calafell, 2007; Calafell & Moreman, 2009). Another set of work grapples with coalitional politics and feminist solidarities (Eguchi & Spieldenner, 2015; Eguchi & Collier, 2018; Ghabra & Calafell, 2018; Jones & Calafell, 2012; Spieldenner & Eguchi, 2020). Some specifically center and affirm the possibilities and failures of queer femme relationality (Eguchi & Long, 2019; McIntosh & Hobson, 2013). Some works lodge their coalitional efforts into disidentificatory labor and queer world making from within Queer of Color connections (Andrade & Gutierrez-Perez, 2017; Eguchi & Asante, 2016).

QICA in the above examples of construction becomes an ideal and hopeful venture where researchers can interrogate and enunciate their own engagement with cultural belonging across locations, while especially mindful of what Muñoz (2009) reminded, that Queerness is always a relational endeavor. This series of collaborative QICA asserts queerness as an inherently relational and collective process. At the same time, they maintain a particular recognition of the mundane as the locale of vital radical intervention. In this fashion, QICA becomes a methodological stronghold for queer marginalized folk. As Eguchi and Calafell (2020) argue, QIC allows an analysis for particular peripheral identities, with a specific attention to the U.S. White heterocolonialist, imperialist nation-state. QICA enables researchers' articulations of critique from their own cultural locales while also emphasizing the vitality of Queer of Color

coalition across varying queerness. I will demonstrate the unique opportunity this research framework makes possible in the following section.

Participants. In this project, I conducted interviews with New Mexican sexual minoritarian men to investigate their feelings around identity especially as it relates to experiences of melancholy. I therefore focused on a target population for participants of men from New Mexico who engage in romantic and sexual relations with men. The primary identification for this study was for men to self-identify as from New Mexico, and as interested in romantic and sexual bonds with other men. I did not set a durational requirement for years lived in New Mexico to qualify. Another requirement for the project were subjects with a proficiency in English. The original age range was 21-60, but the actual age of participants was from 24-40. Research participation was also voluntary.

To gather participants, I utilized my immediate and personal network of friends to solicit participants. I relied on this especially as the topic criteria could be personal and sensitive. At the recruitment phase, I explained that the interview was about gay New Mexican men and their thoughts about relationships. The email recruitment is included in Appendix C and described that “the purpose of this research study is to explore why gay New Mexican men are disinterested in gay mainstream participation and, instead, what kinds of relationships they value and benefit from.” I cautioned that the only point of risk could be a discomfort given the projects interest in feelings of sadness and discontent as it relates to self-identity. At the time of interview, I shared both items once more, and received verbal consent to participate and begin, while also noting that the interview could be stopped at any point, for whatever reason.

The interviews took place from March-September 2020, under varying degrees of statewide lockdown amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. The participants included three men:

Roger, Isaac, and Thomas. The three of them were raised in New Mexico and lived in the Albuquerque area for the majority of their adulthood. Roger and Isaac were living in Albuquerque at the time of conversation, and Thomas in the past year had moved to California. At the time of discussion, Roger and Thomas were 40 years old, Isaac was 25, and I was 28. Roger and Isaac were single, and Thomas was married. All three had previous dating history with men. Roger and Thomas identified as gay, and Isaac as pansexual.

The interviews lasted on average 90 minutes. I spoke with Roger face-to-face, and Isaac and Thomas via an online video conferencing platform. During the interview, I employed an organic direction of conversation that guided my set of prepared questions. The flow of discussion at times moved organically, and at other times required gentle guidance back to the interview guide format. The full array of questions that shaped the interview process are listed in Appendix D. The interviews adhered to three areas of inquiry: Identification, sexuality and desire, and coalition.

The first section focused on a personal cultural understanding of self. I asked questions such as “How do you identify culturally?” and “Has anyone ever questioned your use of an identity term?” in order to gather their feelings and experience of making identity in a variety of contexts. One question, “Do you ever feel like any term is not enough?” was designed and incorporated in order to assess their awareness of, and affinities to potential identity terminologies.

The second section grappled with sexual orientation examining experiences of racialized sexuality. Participants contemplated past relationships and personal desires. I asked questions such as “What is your ideal relationship? When do you feel desired?” and “What do you look for in a romantic partner?” as a path to identify their experiences of sadness and discontent. I also

asked questions understandings along the lines of “When with other gay men, what do you call yourself? What do they call you?” in order to assess gay social experience as it relates to identity. This section also examined their relationship with gay social standards and expectations of embodiment. This section also generated more indirect considerations of sadness revealed in experiences with past relationships.

The final section sought to identify their beliefs about the importance of queer bonds and their existing affirming kinships by relying on questions such as “What relationships matter most to you and why?” and “What kinds of friends matter to you?” This area of discussion investigated their existing relationship, and possible desires for queer communities and friendship.

Interpretation and Analysis. Given the number of participants, I determined to account for the way they shared their thoughts, including vocal delivery detail and a close-textual analysis to secure an appropriate level of depth and research rigor. Importantly, I rely on the utility of narrative analysis as a way to aid in the mapping of the auto/ethnographic research gathered. In this, I explored the gathered interview materials through a form of narrative collection given that communication-based perspectives on narrative take the position that storytelling is essential to human experience. Fisher (1984), for instance posited that humans are storytelling animals who understand the world through stories. A critical interrogation of narrative then understands the personal narrative as a communication act that can give voice to “marginalized and muted experiences” as well as to “the mundane communication practices of ordinary people” (Langellier, 1999, p. 126). Such a position bolsters my position that narrating quotidian communication practices and experiences can simultaneously proffer an articulation of larger systemic forces at play. Narrative, as a type of conversational response, is thus a practical

conduit in connecting and locating the seemingly obtuse abstract answers I seek out. Or as Fisher explained, “the materials of the narrative paradigm are symbols, signs of consubstantiation, and...the communicative expressions of social reality” (1984, p. 8). Thus, my focus and conversation sought to elucidate the invitation of stories as a way to practically guide the material of analysis.

Implicit within these interpretations of storytelling is a performance element. Performance lends itself well to narrative. The context and substance between the words in the narrative too are regarded as a cultural production. In this study, personal narrative is understood as produced within systems of discourse that articulate the ephemeral and corporeal subject experience, situated within cultural sites (Langellier, 1999). In this research I locate narrative inquiry as a kind of qualitative interviewing.

This study’s interviewing model’s objective “is to learn from the participants in a setting or process the way *they* experience it, the meaning they put on it, and how they interpret what they experience” (Miller & Glassner, 2004, pp. 27-28). To build a definition of narrative I draw from Chase’s (2005) five narrative analytical lenses. The first tenet asserts narrative is “a distinct form of discourse,” and as a retrospective activity, narrative is capable of articulating “emotions, thoughts, and interpretations” (p. 656). Narrative is then a useful method for capturing the uniqueness of human experience. Second, narrative is understood as a verbal act that is “doing or accomplishing something” (p. 656). This process-based orientation can recognize telling as a medium of active creation. In other words, by emphasizing attention to voice, one is then able to take into consideration how experience is communicated as well as what is communicated and from where. This combination enables telling as a unique means to understand how a subject is making sense of their experience rather than being preoccupied by a precise factual nature of

their narrative. The emphasis on where the telling is being articulated understands narrative “as both enabled and constrained by a range of social resources and circumstances” (p. 657) in specific times and locations. This assertion allows narrative analysis the ability to recognize larger social forces and attitudes as shaping experience and narrative.

The fourth lens problematizes the researcher’s role in constructing the telling. The research process renders some areas of the narrative as useful and other moments as not. As Chase said, “a narrative is a joint production of narrator and listener” (p. 657). The final lens contends narrative researchers “view *themselves* as narrators as they develop interpretations and find ways in which to present or publish their ideas about the narratives they studied” (p. 657). I am drawn to this articulation for several reasons. First, reflexivity operates as a fundamental process throughout the entirety of the research process. Collier, Lawless, & Ringera defined reflexivity as “reflections about the complex relationship between processes of knowledge production, contexts of such processes, and involvement of producers” (2016, p. 640). Narrative reflexivity has an astute awareness of the collaborative meaning making process and can encourage researchers to be mindful of what is left out, what is included, and what are the implications from both.

In my project, I deviate from this exact form by placing myself in dialogue with the interview material. To place myself in conversation with their content, I originally structured Chapter Six first as a way to intellectually affect an emotional conduit of interaction, where my feelings about their words and experiences organized the framework. This was how I engaged participants’ narratives and larger themes through my own lens and experiences. The goal in this was not to recognize or validate their experiences only through the litmus-test of holding a mirror to my own experiences, but rather to speak with and through their experiences as it relates

with mine and becomes a more telling zone of investigation regarding mundane hegemonic pressures. In exploring sadness and desire, I am interested in elucidating the queerly unique threads of experience, forming bonds across seemingly disparate experience. By using my own experience and voice as a bonding junction, I aim to illuminate the similar feelings of these unique ethnoracial-sexual subject positions.

Interviews

I next revisit the context in which the interviews took place, as well how I first met the participants for this study. I do this in a performative venture to richly recall the felt sense of experience and relating. To me, the encounters punctate the landscape and are inextricable part of my time in Albuquerque over the last six years. The larger theme explored in what follows includes the way my body came to engage the terrain.

Roger. I first met Roger in the summer of 2015, a year before I moved to Albuquerque. The heat of the high desert was novel to me, yet akin to a pleasant broiler even as it approached triple digits. My short stay would only have me in town for a few days to help a friend move and settle in. As the days were limited, we had little time for touristy jaunts. Despite this, my roaming proclivities encouraged me to check the local scene on a proximity-based gay smartphone application. The exact kinds of meetings that can happen are anything from friendship, long-term relations, online chatting, picture sharing, drug use, casual sex, and more. I would usually opt for the first and penultimate options.

This app opened to reveal a grid of cubes, where within each cube was a picture - some with faces, torsos, and some blank. Roger's picture was somewhere in between, an image conveying the length of his body in a sleeveless shirt, surrounded by gym equipment. Despite the information in the picture, the actual image stopped just below his eyes, revealing some sort of

discretion. My own profile cube was equally vague, only revealing my age, height, and weight. We chatted briefly and pleasantly, toying with the idea of meeting. Inside our direct messages, we shared a few more pictures that happened to reveal our faces.

I was immensely surprised to be having a conversation with Roger at this point. I admired a softness against the precision of his face, especially his eyes held in the frame of a strictly articulated haircut. As his profile did not include information beyond the image, I gathered that he was somewhere around 40 years of age. All of this though only happened after I realized he was a bodybuilder. While being an avid user of the app for many years up to this point, I discovered these kinds of men rarely engaged or returned any conversation. I might reach out and message first a simple greeting and would receive an abundance of silence. I was struck by confusion during our short exchanges. He was polite, pleasant, and funny. And throughout my short time in town he offered several suggestions of sights to see and food to eat, all of which were thoroughly enjoyable.

Ultimately though, we did not actually meet face to face that summer. In my memory, I chalk this up to scheduling mishaps as again, my stay in Albuquerque was brief. While true, I did find the time to meet in person- with someone else, a bookish college-type guy around my age. My hesitation in not following through with Roger was about my own discomfort in my body, and how I did not believe he was necessarily real. But more important, I believed he was in an upper echelon of hot. I finally met him in the summer of 2016, when I eventually moved to Albuquerque myself, and into the same residential area. We reconnected over the same app through which we had first chatted. At some point we followed each other on our social media profiles and found easy conversation once again. My schedule was the most complicated barrier

this time to our meeting. As we spoke more, our conversations became more natural. I was grateful to get along with someone so effortlessly in my new home.

My relief at reconnecting successfully was much needed, for as much fun and positive connections I was able to make on the app throughout the years, there was an infinite amount of bizarre unpleasantness. We finally discovered a time we could meet and he invited me to his home. I went on to spend a brief amount of time with Roger throughout my first few months in Albuquerque. His quick wit, humorous, and intelligent disposition was only more fun in person. We talked about simple things like work or the unique oddities of raising the same breed of dogs. One of the first occasions Roger and I spent together was at a national-chain restaurant, followed by a movie afterwards. Sitting in the bar area, he casually observed the size of two people on the other side of the room. He pointed my eyes to their swollen ankles, making note of how fat they that were, claiming their size was preventing blood from flowing properly. He made his comment of disgust in a stunningly simple form, neither raising his tone or volume, instead just tightly chewing the words while just barely pinching his face. It was a flippant and pointed kind of disgust. The next time we saw each other was when he agreed to participate in the project.

Isaac. Meeting Isaac was a far less complicated story. In the spring of 2019, I was teaching a public speaking course. For an early semester assignment, I asked the students to share three physical objects in front of the class and speak about them in a structured but causal format. Show and tell might appear to be excruciatingly simple, but students always brought in the weirdest things that ultimately helped to make a calmer speaking environment. So, when one student proceeded to show a mold of his tarantula, which to the common eye looks like the real thing, and then a breast implant, I was thoroughly taken aback. This is how I first remember

Isaac. He excelled as a student and was incredibly intelligent and disciplined. He was a skilled artist, who often had the coolest wardrobe in the room.

When I think of Isaac now, three moments come together. The first was when I saw him, and I was dressed outside of my more professional teaching garb, in my real human-people clothes. Walking out of a small local grocery store on a Sunday morning, it was technically subpar real human-people clothes. It was more accurately what I wore immediately after crawling out of bed to get food on a weekend that I intended to see no one during. I was wearing sweatpants that were somehow caught around my calves, in a shirt with no sleeves and shoes that had collapsed backs. My hair was jammed under a hat. Walking across the parking lot to my car, I heard someone call my name. As I turned around, I first saw a perfectly preserved 1980s Mercedes drop-top coupe. I squinted against the bright morning light to see someone with sunglasses at the wheel. Once I realized it was Isaac, I quickly muttered to myself “oh my god” for the twofold horror of being seen in the light of day by a student in my real-human-people clothes. I had luckily managed to open my car door before he called out and tried my best to hide behind. Making a sandwich of myself, I shouted across the parking lot, asking what he was doing on this side of town. He shouted back that he had just gone to the pet store around the corner. I hailed farewell and politely got into the hidden darkness of my car. Somehow, this was my first and only time running into a student of mine in Albuquerque.

The second moment was during the demonstration speech assignment when he showed the class how to easily paint a flower. The simple flower, contrasted against a black canvas, was arresting. The tone of the room changed as people vocally expressing their awe. At the end of the class, he gave me the painting. I was too taken aback to refuse. Perhaps it was a consolation gift for the horror of that one morning. The third moment was not actually a moment, but a dream. At

the time, I was in a relationship. The dream began as I was waking up in my bed. I was heartbroken and found myself texting my boyfriend. Before I knew what was happening, I was confessing to him that I had cheated on him with Isaac. The specifics were unclear, but in the dream, as I searched my mind and the context for answers, the only evidence I could find pointed to a sustained intimate and romantic affair. When I actually woke up, I was deeply sad and distraught. In the dream, I remember being so upset with myself because I knew how hurt my boyfriend would be at this betrayal if something like it happened in real life. At the same time, I viscerally encountered my confusing feelings about Isaac. The next time we met was over a videoconference system in the middle of a pandemic.

Thomas. Thomas was my third participant. He had been referred to me by a colleague. We first met on a computer screen, using a videoconference application in an ongoing pandemic. Meeting him over my laptop was less than ideal and somehow blinding. Because of where my desk was in the room, I needed a direct light on my face. Otherwise I would not show up on the digital image. I was excited and nervous. When the camera of our devices connected I was struck by how beautiful he was. His skin was luminous, his cheekbones were gorgeous, and the wall behind him had matching lamps and a mirror that only complemented the whole visual image. As I lay in bed later that night, it occurred to me that I may have first encountered him on another kind of social media app, like the one I met Roger on, only far less vulgar. I am not fully certain, and my memory may be leading me to confuse people, but either way as I fell into sleep, I could not help but think - was that him?

The sparsity of my construction across these three sections seeks to tentatively punctuate the various settings in which I met Roger, Isaac, and Thomas. In the next Chapter, I create a larger scene of our interview experience, as well as the interviews themselves. While I make

connections and disconnections across a variety of themes across Roger, Isaac, Thomas, and myself, it is my intention to create a small amount of space around their uniqueness and that of our relationships. I next provide a short glimpse of the breakdown the following chapter's analytical themes.

The first section coheres around Roger, Isaac, and Thomas's understanding of identity, which primarily describe an ethnoracial conceptualization. In this, the first theme explores specific experiences of intuitionally forged identity questions. The second theme looks at their explanations of ancestry as a way to bolster their identity understanding of self. The third theme looks to the way they are understanding their identity in experiences with others in certain social settings. The fourth focus then examines a negation of, as well as problems with Latinized identity. The final theme of this first section examines resistant strategies against these varying social interactions with identity by focusing on their sentiments of ambivalence as the vehicle making such feats possible.

The second half of the next chapter explores relations and examinations of what gay might detail. My decision in structuring it as such was to break up the immense density across discussions. But also, in the course of research, ethnic and racial locations came to be thought as an identity, whereas gay was primarily charted as a set of social expectations and relational structures. The first theme in the section of the chapter examines what I term "The Ladder of Desire," as a cis gay hyper-aesthetic compulsory structure. The next section attends to sadness as an orienting feeling within specific gay social scenes. The third section looks to their strategies of navigating such terrain, as well as their thoughts and practices on affirmatory bonds and kinships. The final analytic then outlines an affinity for a state of consideration that leaves such

experiences as achingly open, in the rejection of a hegemonic desire for a happy ending. In such zestful spirit, I will now bring this chapter to a close.

Conclusion

This chapter opened by providing a review of Auto/ethnography. I then examined QOCC its extensions of scholarship. These compelling investigative frameworks were formulated within a QIC design. Then, I specifically attended to QICA to bolster the specific goals of this work to its theoretical kin. I next noted the data collection particularities and detailed the utility of a narrative analysis for organizing the participant material. I then offered a brief introduction to Roger, Isaac, and Thomas, which will be further formulated in the next Chapter. Then, in the final section of the chapter I explained my structural choices for the analytical themes, which I concisely previewed. The next Chapter examines the narrative propulsion behind such themes across Roger, Isaac, Thomas, and me.

CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS

In this chapter, I rearticulate my collaboration with Roger, Isaac, and Thomas concerning sadness and desire. I start with the words we shared in our time together, where I then collapse the congruent themes into the analytical portion of the chapter which is structured into two parts. My decision to structure the chapter in two sections, Making a Self and Relational Thresholds, is to provide a enliven comprehension, in order to promote a clearer focus of their layered contemplations. In doing so, I parse each discussion into separate sections in order to coalesce into larger bridged themes at the end. The first section considers their visions of making a self, mediums of encounter, and conceptualizations of ethnoracial identity of origin. I close the first section by assessing how their notions of identity are constructed and ordered in relation to the other, as well as their strategies of navigating identity. The second section then mediates and reflects upon their beliefs and dictations on relationality, grounded in sites with gay men in New Mexico. I then tie in this section to their thoughts on sadness, analyzing the coherence of their experiences around gay aesthetics of desire, social protocols, and specific origins of sadness. I conclude the chapter with their methods of navigation and the importance of social bonds. I have included a table to reference the chapter organization

Table 1

Themes of Analysis

Part One: Making a Self	
1	Institutional Identity Productions
2	Ancestry
3	The Social Other
4	“Latino” Refutations

5	Navigation Strategies
Part Two: Relational Thresholds	
1	The Ladder of Desire
2	Sadness
3	Strategies
4	Connections

Throughout the recollection of their discussions, at the close of their individual subsections I weave in the strand of my relations to their thoughts. I do this to better elucidate and illuminate their points as they relate across our experiences. This bridging works to bolster, complement, and interrogate my own understandings of the project's Research Questions and goals. To review them once more:

First, how do New Mexican sexual minoritarian men understand their ethnoracial identity? Second, how do New Mexican sexual minoritarian men experience melancholia? Third, how do New Mexican sexual minoritarian men feel about their chosen kinships? Three specific research goals are as follows: (1) Explicate experiences of New Mexican Queer of Color relationalities, (2) Interrogate the utility and function of the ethnoracial identity matrix as it affects the latinized panethnic imaginary, (3) demonstrate a peculiar format of a Queer Intercultural Communication examination of melancholia. Now I begin showing the critical performative, Auto/ethnographic approaches I speak with Roger, Isaac, and Thomas, starting with my conversation with Roger.

Part One: Making a Self

Roger. If the pandemic were a marathon without a finish line, I met with Roger when the shot rang out and we in New Mexico lurched forward into a sprint. By accident, I ended up in a grocery store the morning the governor announced the stay-at-home order. I had been planning for weeks to make my favorite pasta sauce. I wandered through the grocery store overwhelmed and perplexed, seeing empty shelves where paper towels and toilet paper had been. I marveled at the sudden demand for potatoes, leaving in its wake a scattered produce section. I stood in line for half an hour, clutching my ingredients and a couple bars of dark chocolate. The cashier was wide-eyed after scanning the cart before me which cluttered the grocery belt with cans of everything and plastic bottles of water. I walked up to her at my turn, deliberately calm, offering “I just came in to get stuff to make pasta,” looking around and taking in the terse chaos.

In March 2020, with a relatively low number of positive cases in New Mexico, I met with Roger when the entire situation still looked promising, and the idea of reopening the state was somehow all in our mind’s eye, optimistically just a few weeks away. At the time we met, I was taking care of my recently injured dog, Bruce, who was so sedated that his tongue hung outside of his face. The zest of steroid, muscle relaxer, and sedative made him functionally useless, but thoroughly enjoying the path of healing. He required constant supervision, needing to stay still in order to allow his back to heal. As much as the looming concern of the virus and disease lingered in the air, the despair of my dog never regaining use of his back legs held my mind the most. Roger had several dogs of the same breed, which for whatever reason provided some comfort that he would be sympathetic, gentle, and understanding. I also knew he would be cool with me bringing Bruce along for our meeting.

Once together, Roger slowly and gently pet Bruce without any hesitation. After checking in and chatting for a bit, I look at Roger and ask him how he understands his cultural identity. This is my soft entry into discussing identity. At my question, he looks at his hands. Turning them over, he returns with “I just say White.” Surprised, I ask “are you?” I had no idea he ever thought that about himself. He elaborates his statement with “no, I’m Hispanic, but when you go buy a gun or something they ask you to fill in this thing.” He then begins paraphrasing what the form asks, “So are you- are you African-American, Asian, or White?” The second thing I learned about Roger in this moment is that he owns guns.

I wonder if he might draw a straight line to Hispanic if it were an available option on such forms. To do this, I turn identity to a different place and adjust the conversation, asking him to consider what happens when other people ask him directly, rather than him interacting with a form. He is quick and neat in his response - “Latino.” I try presenting a scenario, imaginatively mustering up that, “if someone comes up to you at a bar in Albuquerque and asks, ‘what are you?’ what would you say?” He looks at me and in a lighter tone supplants his prior responses with the novel identification: “I’m a Daddy.” His speech is a light and cutesy little jaunt. I sense his playful jest and just to be sure, ask him if he is serious. His response is threefold, “No, absolutely not.” When I ask if he ever uses the term he doubles down, “Never, I hate that term,” adding “makes me feel old.”

We talk a little bit about the label and why people might want a Daddy type. He offers: Some people like older guys. I think just being decent looking and then kind of muscular is what they like, ya’ know what I mean? And then olders, always, well- not as many games and shit - know what I mean?

I circle back once more, asking what he answers when people inquire, perhaps with a sexual kind of romp in their minds' eye and on an online application for gay connections. "Yeah, I dunno, just Latino usually." I wonder out loud if they ever ask for clarification or follow-up. Roger explains, "Yeah, a few... They don't really ask too many questions." Paraphrasing again, to describe the dialogue in this situation, he continues, "'Send me a dick pic and let's get it on.'" In the way he is describing, it seems that ethnoracial identity is not so much a thing people are necessarily interested in here when striving to achieve a sexually intimate exchange; rather it becomes a checklist in a series of items to inquire about when attempting some kind of sexual encounter.

He returns to a general vantage on this type of social encounter as it relates to race and desire, but not exactly in that order:

Albuquerque doesn't have people who are smart enough to even think about stuff like that, to tell you the truth, they just go by your looks. If you look decent, they wanna see what you look like. And then they ask for, a- a dirty picture and then if its big enough, then you can go- know what I mean? Yeah- these people, they have no common sense to even look, like, into that.

Another item on this list is then cock and its size. And to Roger, the people holding such a list in their mind's eye are a bunch of dummies.

I try peeking behind the identity curtain, asking him how he feels about this and his sense of self and identity. Tightly issued, he gifts four words- "Neither here nor there." To gather more of his thoughts, I offer an anecdote of frequent occurrences where people often denied or refused the prospect of sexual contact with me in an explicit verbal denial based on my ethnoracial position. I want to check if he has ever had this specific kind of encounter that all too often

peppered my own experience of gay sexual contexts. Roger concisely responded “No, never.” And then mentions perplexedly, “I thought you were like, um, like uh, Italian- aren’t you?”

Roger’s awareness of the ways the gay social membrane interprets his body serves as a cornerstone of how he organized a sense of self. Even if only in jest, he is cognizant of how others recognize him, and primarily relies on such organization to satiate my questions. If I am what they say I am, in the way Roger recalls, I am Italian. In accordance with Roger’s means of consideration, aware and informed by what the other recognizes, my own answers would switch across time. In my mid-twenties, I would say, “I’m a Daddy.” In my early twenties, I would generate this answer from my time on applications proffering gay social connections: “I’m fat” or “I’m Latino.” In High School, I would have answered this question by what I faced daily in person and online, from teachers and peers, endlessly inundated by the knowledge that- “I am a spic, beaner, dirty Mexican, wetback, gay, and faggot.”

In my youth, my identity in social settings was always a joke or subject of violent racialized vitriol. Friends casually used such epithets, along with people who were quite the opposite of friends. Teachers would hear such remarks or make them too. I never learned of my ethnoracial identity in any positive or affirmative capacity for the formative 15 years of my early life. I did, though, learn of ways to get away from it.

To escape and decentralize the hyperfocus of my identity I would spend a great deal of time on early social media. I return to the 2000s Internet era as the second site eliciting my considerations of identity. The first occasion I remember being confronted with identity on a form, like Roger’s gun acquisition project, was on the early social media website MySpace. In 2005 I was in the eighth grade and far too young to join. The future of Facebook as tyrannical technological behemoth was still a few years away and it operated then as an exclusive digital

venue for college students. Simply, MySpace was a social media platform built around global connections that was a hybridized model of a personalized webpage, blog, and profile. The more appealing aspect of this seemingly novel medium was the ability to endlessly configure your profile page through its open and accessible HTML code. This language form is the building blocks of what makes an internet webpage appear in a more interactive and palatable format. With some simple skill you could display images, change color schemes, set up new fonts, or completely abandon the recommended shell of the profile sections to make your page look like nothing else before. I found all this unrestrained possibility immeasurably fascinating. I would spend hours testing out designs to convey not only what I was feeling, but also how I wanted to come across to viewers of my page.

Some of the questions on the profile page's standard template concerned demographic types of criteria. I was confronted with this before I learned how to manipulate my profile page's layout. Sitting at a desk in a basement, I remember trying to map out what I was. These demographic types of inquiry though were truly the first time I interacted with the idea of labeling myself, which first required me to know myself in some clearer way. Straight, gay, bi? White, Hispanic, and whatever else? For the brief time I had this area of my page visible, it said "straight" and "Latino." I had no idea if either of those two were wholly accurate. I really only ever knew of myself as Mexican. And I had only begun considering sexual orientation a year prior, when hearing myself think about how cute I found another boy in class.

Throughout adolescence I would see my friends striving to fit these various categories on their page as social roles: smoker, smart, dancer, weirdo, etc. While these were certainly not new tropes, the public occupation of such labels through the internet appeared roughly novel. Above all else, I would mostly go on to attach myself to the identification "emo," short for "emotional,"

joining a legion of teenagers identifying with their sadness, ennui, loneliness, resignation, and dramatic disdain for the way things were, despite living in cushy suburban enclaves. Again, nothing new. These labels far more accurately describe the aesthetic designation which my personal profile embodied. But on the identity criterion of race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation, rather than dealing with any of these items on a public stage, I opted to obscure them. It was an active choice to distance myself from such thought, in an attempt to make it less the focus of who I was.

I relied upon this decision across time to distance myself from what others made of me, to make it less the focus of who I was. But, sort of like Roger, I felt neither here nor there; I just wanted to stop being made to feel bad. Or perhaps too, I was never given the space or messages to feel good about my identity, nor at the very least indifferent. The only capacity I had to deny this issuance of identity was on the internet, a digital mode of negation. And once in my 20s I would never display any identification criteria on apps for gay causal sexual encounters other than my age, height, and weight, and rarely included a picture of myself. I tried denying the ethnic and racial labels, but still, in the way Roger did, implicitly acknowledged body standards as a formative criterion for making connection. These were my unexamined fixtures of resistance.

So, if Roger thinks of his identity as neither here nor there, something that was fleetingly mundane- an institutional inquiry which demanded a response as part of a process- in the space of such disinterest he shifted into prioritizing gay sexual terminology instantiated through social engagement within spaces of other gay men. In Isaac's recollections too, this thread of identity indifference would weave as a present compositional element of self. And like Roger, Isaac would rely on indifference to deprioritize the effects on such institutionalized accounts for

identity. Interestingly though, the grasp of intuitional identity questions would be affectingly construed in the present moment of our discussion. And once again, as Roger had, Isaac would go on to locate identity's emergence elsewhere beyond formal documentation, also elucidated by the other within particular social sites. I will now shift into recalling Isaac's contemplations.

Isaac. I'm sitting in my bed, tall above hardwood floor. A small window opens southwest and the early evening light peering in is restrained by a pair of curtains clinging to the wall, waving from the air vent beneath. This room is dark grey and moody. The bed, draped in white, seems bigger than it actually is. On it, I perch, shouldered by a pair of lamps. I sit at the back of the bed with the headboard behind me and a large piece of art in warm tones depicting a simple village held among rolling hills. Since meeting with Roger, I have moved a thousand miles away. It was a two-day trip by car and gloriously uneventful. It was also traversed incredibly flat earth, seared for days into my head as it unraveled before me for hundreds of miles. Before me on the bed now is a stack of pillows precariously supporting my laptop. Over the last couple of months, I have sat with my face opposite this screen, peering into its darkened mirror as it brightens and plugs me into society. This is tiring and throughout the weeks has made me weary and lethargic. In my more honest moments, I am both grateful for the ability to meet like this and left feeling deeply alone while staring at my reflection, feigning company or kinship.

A sliver of joy and optimism though has arrived by the prospect of this meeting and discussion. And before this throne of pillows as a makeshift desk, I am now looking forward to something for the first time in months. In the privacy of the room, Isaac appears on the screen. We chew through some pleasant exchanges and standard check-ins, updates. He sits in a chair on a deck, flooded with the lingering light of the end of summer. I haven't seen Isaac since a distant Spring semester a year or so before, where he was a student in one of my courses. He was smart,

efficient, and achingly artistic. We got along swimmingly then. And our conversation now happens just as easily.

As I am about to begin my leap into interview questions, he cautions that his laptop is low on power and nearing the precipice of death. I proceed onward with this in mind and I try to quell my sense of urgency with a deep breath. I make a mental note to keep a good and steady inquisitive pace, while also managing the direction so as to preserve relevant and insightful tangents. I wipe sweat from my brow and the room feels increasingly warm. The same question with Roger marks of the start of our formal conversation, “how do you understand your cultural identity?”

Isaac considers the question of his face first, just barely holding his eyes upward, and before furrowing his brow returns my question with “I guess I would say I’m Hispanic, however, most of my heritage- my parents are all from New Mexico on both sides of the family and then before that they came from Spain, Germany, or Ireland.” Hearing about Germany, I remember that he did a student exchange program there for a semester. Seeing another possible entry point on the topic, I ask if his answer ever changes depending on where he is when such questions arise. He chews over the idea for a second in the space between his eyebrows and returns:

I guess it changes depending on the options they give me. So, like, sometimes they give you really general options and sometimes they get really specific options. Like, I would say- if there’s Hispanic, but if there isn’t- wasn’t a good Hispanic option, then I would pick White.

His fluttering across tenses aptly illustrates the bizarreness of trying to name what I am asking. It is both parts here and not, and simultaneously more than those things too. And as Roger did,

Isaac touches upon forms too but less specifically so and not in tandem with some desired outcome.

Thinking about his citation of both his parents being from New Mexico, I ask if he ever defaults to calling himself New Mexican. “Yeah, I’ll do New Mexican, yeah.” In the same breath, he moves onto a different thought, “Like, I don’t know what- the difference between Latino and Hispanic- so either one. Sometimes I pick one or the other. If there are two options, I’ll just guess.” He punctuates his statement with some easy laughter. Intrigued, I ask him what he thinks the difference is, “Ok, I think Latino is more Latin? So I don’t know.” His tone trudges up a slight hill at the end of his thoughts. “I guess it could be anywhere in South America? I don’t- I’m not really sure where- but Hispanic sounds like it’s basically the same? So...I don’t know...” He does not appear or sound confused in his attempt to understand Latin identity configuration on a global site. Even the best attempts can be like grasping at straws. To most, they often appear as the same thing. The act of differentiating the two is trying, especially under the complex colonial histories across centuries, lands, and peoples.

After I briefly attempt a personal and scholarly explanation, he reaffirms “Um, yeah- yeah, I’ll say, I’ll say from Spain and Germany mostly. Yeah, I usually don’t label it just as Latino or whatever but I usually will say most of my family are from Spain or Germany.” I readjust his face on the laptop upon the pillows, as he is now sliding slowly to the right. Simultaneously, I ask if he has ever experienced people making assumptions about him and these kinds of identifications:

Um, yes. In, I remember when I was in high school I- we would talk about it, or someone would refer to me as maybe White and then someone will be like, “not really” and I’d be like, “yeah I don’t really know” but I feel like if they were darker kids they would refer to

me as always White and they would never refer to me as Latino or anything like that but if it was like, White kids, then I would feel like they would call me Latino? I don't know.

Being a different thing to different people can understandably lead one to complicated uncertainty. Oddly, I would share such experience when talking with other Mexican people. I always thought of myself as not Mexican enough. This would happen when they would inevitably ask where I am from. Knowing more about my dad's side, I would usually invoke where he grew up. Having visited there only three times in my life, I could not offer any more useful information. At the same time, I strongly doubt they had specific local knowledge within and across all Mexican territory. They would still sense my internal distance and uncertainty. In this, I felt like I was conning people, failing to meet their narrow fittings of identity, perhaps giving them too much authority over my sense of self.

I ask if he has ever experienced people questioning the legitimacy of the identity terms he uses that he had just recalled. He speaks again of this earlier experience:

Probably like the time I just told you in high school like, maybe- yeah- I would be more like, White towards the darker kids and darker towards the White kids even though there weren't really a lot of White kids. So I wasn't really dark or more Hispanic necessarily, maybe just a tiny tiny bit.

I press with a two-for-one special, "why do you think people would assign you like, Hispanic or White? Did that ever make you feel a certain way?" He is quick to answer, abandoning his earlier outward contemplative face. He looks across the distance of what I imagine as a yard before him, "I'm probably- because my features is- maybe my dark eyes? Like hair? My skin isn't that dark compared to some people. I guess I'm a little bit darker- yeah."

My question, “how did that make you feel?” leaves my mouth and crashes into the computer screen. In less than an instant, my words process into some digital signal and eject out towards Isaac who sits on a porch a thousand miles away. Just as quickly as this process happens, he comes back with, “I just shrug it off. I see the kind of- Hispanic but kind of White looking- so it doesn't really bother me.” I think to myself that maybe the prospect of acknowledging both can extrude the panacea I am after. I confirm he was raised in the Albuquerque area and lived there his entire life. I extend the point I made with Roger, trying to get at how he feels about this aspect his identity in clearer words. His answers roll out in a steady stream “Um, I never really thought about it. However, I don't really feel one way or the other. That's just how I was raised and I always didn't have any thoughts about it.” My mind leaps back to Roger, who echoed a similar sentiment in less words. I love this kind of cool indifference. I appreciate his openness about it too. In my shallower moments, I find hurt and envy though, that some people are encouraged and permitted to feel such a way about these ethnoracializations. The ability to hide such precise instantiations of my identity online and in-person wavered, despite my earlier attempts at masking, which was not a strongly reliable or convince tactic.

After a year of living in Albuquerque, I was visiting with family back in Illinois. In my Aunt and Uncle's backyard, the neighbor, who would likely be considered a baby boomer, came across the lawn. My aunt introduced us and led with the update that I would be going to New Mexico for my master's degree. The neighbor then asked me if the cartels were “really that bad.” Out of confusion, I offered a response clarifying that among my friends there were rumors the area was populated with remnants of the witness protection programs. The neighbor asked again as if she did not hear what I said. “But are the cartels that bad?” “That”; news reports, the things the then President would yell and shout about, western movies and TV shows, especially the

ones about well-meaning White folk getting mixed up with the nasty cartels. She caught my confusion and asked again, “Are they bad out there in Mexico?” I responded with a “What? No. New Mexico.” She would stare back blankly. I filled the air with “New Mexico? It’s a state. The state? Santa Fe? That’s New Mexico.” My aunt would cut into the silence with a proud “he’s doing his Master’s!” After this time, I started saying “Albuquerque” when answering questions of where I lived.

Another occasion a couple years after this backyard exchange, I was out for breakfast with my family the morning before I was to flying back to Albuquerque. We ran into our old next-door neighbor. We grew up playing in the front yard and riding out bikes to school together. We exchanged hugs and I shared I was working on completing my PhD in New Mexico. My sister briefly said what she was doing, and then summarizing, the neighbor gestured between the two of us, to me first, “so school in Mexico,” and to my sister “working as a guidance counselor- got it.” I would correct her with “New Mexico.” She knew I was born and raised in the house next to hers. I never spoke Spanish in front of her and only went to Mexico once when she lived next to me. But there, the border on my body standing in front of a diner with my family we had been going to for years and I was only ever, will only ever be Mexican to her, neighbors, and still yet very far apart.

Learning of a refuge from this bullshit when speaking with Isaac leaves me perplexed, mostly out on a confluence of emotions- joy, jealousy, hurt, frustration, confusion, isolation, and loneliness. I resent these experiences, and the need- the part of me wanting to do this work. I am bitter. Bitter and enraged in response to the tremendous hurt I strive to work through in my adult life, where I am now talking to people who feel indifferent, and maybe even good about their identity. I am simply not there. Regurgitating and purging these real sentiments causes a kind of

depressive exhaustion, putting me into a unique kind of inertia. And through all this, I feel pangs in the back of my mind- an awareness across lobes, moving forward in my mind's eye and into the back once more- a throbbing miserable ache; the pendulous realization that this is not a great place to be when trying to conduct research.

When Isaac began his contemplations, the easiest way of explaining identity regarding ethnic and racial formations was in saying "Hispanic." For him, Hispanic articulated a life born and raised in New Mexico like the immediately preceding familial generations, who before arriving in New Mexico were from a few European nations. Isaac too- almost exactly like Roger did- referred to interactions with formal documents asking about identity as a cornerstone informing how he came to recognize himself under such ethnoracial configurations. In his ranking, he preferred to pick Hispanic but would occasionally select White. As the difference between Latino and Hispanic to him were unclear, when met with both as possible options for selection, he simply guesses. He was mildly dissuaded from personally considering himself as Latino, confused about it at first, then recognizing it as something of the global south, contradictory to his European ancestry. The space of his cool choices generates a blasé propensity of recognition. Isaac once more expressed this lighthearted apathy in response to his peers questioning his ethnoracial identity, where to the "Darker kids" he was White, and to the White kids he was darker. He recognized the validity of these fluctuating interpretations, offering he can see both, and easily shrugged it off, saying it did not bother him. So, if Hispanic, Latino, and New Mexican identity is constructed with the other as a general hodgepodge, Isaac and Roger recognize this development as legitimate, but returning to feelings of indifference when thinking about this process. In the next section, Thomas will shift away from these, outlining

more explicit hostilities facing a New Mexican identity directly tied to Mexican origin, extending Isaac's initial vantage of colorist logics.

Thomas. Meeting with Thomas was a breath of fresh air found in the ebbs and flows of conversation. I spoke with him at my newly assembled desk stretching along the width of the living room, with a low grey couch and aging green armchair sitting at the other end of the space. Early in the afternoon, I closed the window's drapes behind me to keep out the light, sinking the room into an unpleasant darkness. Weeks sitting at this desk taught me such simple acts were required to appear more clearly to people on the other end of a video call. Without the light, the day felt like it slipped away from me, and the emptiness of night would suddenly fall against my back as soon as the day started.

A year ago, I never had to concern myself with such matters. I could leave the window open all day. I bitterly cross back into the dark end of the room, a trail of shadows falling behind me. Sitting at the desk, I nested my computer upon a series of stacked academic textbooks, which in sum cost more than the laptop they supported. I used a small orange spotlight lamp with adjustable arms to manipulate cool light directly at my face, limiting full use of my visual field. This was the only adjustment I could make to support a clear image from the shoddy front camera of my aging laptop. Everything on the desk before me was trying its best to accomplish a different task far from its intended design. I was a fixture all the same. Before I resigned myself to the misery of the form that had become my life against my strongest wishes, I was reminded of the two comforts sitting behind me. Curled in their slow and steady rise and fall of breath, letting clues to their dreams in woofs and sighs smaller than their paws, the two sleeping dogs rested, gently twitching well into their slumberous visions upon their upholstered thrones. I felt grateful for how their silly company and affections soothed the veiled sadness behind my misery

and fatigue. But for now, I just gazed upon them at the other end of the room as they rested well into the day.

When Thomas arrived in the video conference for our discussion, he was nestled between two tall lamps on either side of him, helped to their height by the wooden sideboard beneath them. Just behind his head is a circular mirror bursting out like a star with gold metallic ends protruding outward at varying length. When he sits just right, it looks as if he is held in the cradle of a halo. We politely exchange introductions and greetings, and I thank him for sharing a piece of time with me. I think if I were able to amend the room I sat in to my style of taste, it would be what I was looking at on my computer monitor. I quell the emanating thoughts of my interior design fantasies to move forward with our conversation. I take note that Thomas is around the same age as Roger, but he is about to describe has a more unique upbringing which informs his complex contemplations.

I start off with the same question as I did with Roger and Isaac about his cultural identity. He begins:

I consider myself Mexican and only because the fact that both my parents are from Mexico. I was born in the U.S., but both my parents are from Mexico. I always use the metaphor “if my parents had me in China I wouldn't be Chinese.” I mean, maybe by citizenship but not necessarily by race or ethnicity.

His answers are deep and layered. I offer them as they were and after will more closely tend to each utterance to tease out the intricacies of thought within his words. Wrapped around these points are my simple and more immediate contemplations from my notes and audio recording of our collaboration.

Back in this moment, I find some resolve and peace at his consideration. For a long time, I almost felt like an identity grifter for claiming Mexican while I was born and raised in the U.S. Under Thomas's outlook I am Mexican too, given both my parents are from there. In this, I cautiously reject an oversimplified allegiance of "American" as merely citizenship, though; the scholar in me knows better than this. I cannot as neatly elide accesses and resources I have via citizenship into the nation. Still, his tidy version of identity, for better or worse provides a moment to stop overthinking everything.

Still in the same motion of thought, Thomas continues describing his exasperation at local New Mexican formations of identity on ethnoracial junctions:

So, a lot of it- especially in New Mexico speaking- people there are so "I'm not Mexican, I'm New Mexican!" Like, they invented this whole other race, that, like, I'm just super baffled by. So they're always like- and I've had arguments with people- they're like "I'm not Mexican!"

Thomas starts paraphrasing the conversations he is retelling, explaining "I'm like, 'so if you tell me your great-great-grandmother, when she lived here- cause she lived here her whole life- she was Mexican, yet you're not?'" He switches back to our conversation now, saying to me, "and I try to ask them what the difference is genetically, like, what do you think we're made of?" His logic takes into account a history of colonization, where if people are claiming "New Mexican" as a kind of heritage over the centuries, then at one point, it was indeed considered Mexico.

He begins more finely teasing out the ideas that generate his frustration about the root of the groups informing his ideas of what counts as Mexican:

It's that, like, Spanish people and Native people, if anything we're just different tribes but we all come from Spain. So you know, growing up for a long time, the whole colorism

and all that was kind of embedded in me so I would try to lean more toward a European aspect of it.

At first, I find myself in agreement, though perhaps not with the order in which he lists, or the way this might be a larger appeal to making Mexican identity as primarily of European origin.

Thomas senses the issue with this though and in his share of conversation says next:

But getting educated and understanding the aspect of it- the value that representation had- I really started identifying myself as a- just Mexican. And I don't give any explanations. I don't give any caveats. I just say, "I'm Mexican," which on its own just took me a long time to kind of come to terms with that, especially in New Mexico.

Thomas amended his statement by explaining that he was born in Albuquerque and raised there until early elementary school, where for the remainder of his elementary education he lived in Mexico. After, he would then return to stay in Albuquerque. In this account, he followed up with, "so I think my perception is a little bit different than most of them- people who were completely raised in New Mexico." I do not have to ask him to sort out the difference, as organically his next immediate thoughts include:

'Cause when you're outside New Mexico and you try to explain to other people what New Mexicans think, they're like "that doesn't make any sense" and I'm like "I don't know!" It's like colonialism 101. I don't know- separate but equal- but it's crazy!

This conversational style is a sort of home to me and something I have missed interacting with. In the middle of it all, I can recognize the seemingly disparate and dense elements unraveling in his pauses. It is here now, in recalling with you, that my attempt to parse everything out in a way that mediates his dictation- to congeal into this formal style of documentation- causes some commotion.

After arranging my thoughts around his, I decide to ask him what he claims when approached by someone in an intimacy-seeking encounter. Thomas pauses for an instant just before offering, “I tried to say Hispanic because I feel like Hispanic is more of a broad term- because I feel like, in dating apps for example, when you have to put ‘Latino,’ I feel like they’re...” In an instant, he pivots from his introspection into another sentence to better explain “If someone is filtering that out” meaning specifically searching for such people, “they want like, the typical like, dark, handsome like- know what I mean? Like the telenovela, like the typical Latin lover situation.” There are two parts to this ideation.

In the moment, I surmise Thomas does not feel a particularly strong affinity to Latino, and that to him such a label moves as an imparted and charged fetishized object of desire. This observation is made adjacent to the way gay-interaction facilitating internet applications help make “Latino” into a tendril of gay fetishized desire, which can be affected through the app which allows people to identify as, as well as organize and search by such markers.

Just a few minutes into our talk, I am being harangued by a mosquito that is apparently drawn to the glow of the computer monitor. As Thomas takes some time to explain more accurately what he means by the gay Latino conundrum, I listen through the pest’s piercing sound of flight, swatting away, missing with each off-screen flick of my wrist. Thomas untangles:

So I would always just kind of either put “White” or if it had “Hispanic” I would put “Hispanic.” But I try to stay away from the term “Latino” because I felt like it was false advertising to the- ‘cause you know the gay community- it’s a fetish, they’re fetishizing it. If they’re searching by race they’re fetishizing it and since I didn’t fit into that type I just kind of steer away or sometimes I just wouldn’t put anything to be honest.

I interject, to prompt and ask about what terms he does use. He divulges:

I mean, I think there has been times where I just say “I’m White,” um, for the simple purpose of just making it easier. I don’t think I use it a lot. It would have to be a situation where I feel unsafe, like it’s not a safe space for me to kind of be who I am or it’s just someone I don’t want to bother with and I know where the conversation is going and I’d rather not have that argument.

I think back to a guy who ruined my sheets once. He asked me several times, mid-romp, if I was Latino. I ignored the question and worked to occupy one another into silence, but the inquiry nevertheless persisted. I refused an answer and at the end he proudly found a way to ruin my sheets and then suggested we should meet up again. I was less than convinced and after seeing him out, ripped apart my bed. Having just washed the sheets, I shoved them back into the machine, cranked the dial and pushed in, eager for the machine to work out the specters of his presence scattered over the entire duvet. I wondered if there was a machine that would do the same to the memory that was already locking into my brain.

Easier for me, then, was not filling any ethnic or racial marker in the options provided and when the question came up I would do my best to avoid it. And similarly, if it was not a safe space, which to me means I will encounter some ignorant hostility, I named everything but “Mexican.” Like Roger and Isaac, Thomas uses White too, but does so to remedy prying identity questions and prevent potentially ensuing abrasive conflict. Sensing my soft surprise, he deduces:

So, ‘cause if you- technically speaking, racially, I am White. Like I do have, I could present White, so I usually do say Hispanic or I’ll usually say White if it’s not a safe

space. I would probably have to say, like, maybe 5% of the time in the world. Definitely not in the gay world I think.

His pace of speech stays the same while he balances deep-seated contemplations. Specifically, his immediate previous thought about “definitely” not saying White in the gay world is held in conflict with what he works through next. He pivots, “Well, no- actually, you know what”:

I- so here's the thing- going on a tangent again- like, growing up in New Mexico I never felt like I was a minority. I always felt like everyone is exactly like me, for the most part.

And when there was White people, it was like, one or two.

I adore what he calls tangents; we are somehow serendipitously on the same wavelength.

Specific items I want to raise bubble to the surface naturally as he charts his grasp on precise concepts.

What Thomas is speaking of has generated my research interest in the area, as the local regional majority is comprised of people who, in most other places of the U.S., are the minority. And despite his clash with the way most people seemingly deny their Mexican roots in favor of crafting “a whole other race,” he still finds himself reflected in others. What he says next is in the same rolling stream of consciousness he assembled just above, which was in the same breath as the one before too. But here, he offers the way he gained such awareness once living outside of the state:

And so getting out of New Mexico now, because I now live in San Francisco, it's a bit- I never thought it would be culture shock because I have traveled the world and I have been everywhere, I'm super open-minded. But it's like, we go to restaurants and we're sitting outside and I look around and I see it is all White people. Like, all of them. Like, every single person. And the only people who are Hispanic are the people who are

working or the chefs or the cooks and those kinds of situations, I do notice- I hate to admit it- but I do notice myself trying to be more White just because.

To Thomas, a majority of White people in an environment are not purely scenic objects. White people in the majority inform his behavior in connection to the lack and social relegation of presumed Hispanic people into the back of house. Culture shock, as he calls it, then occurs when aware of the grating predominantly White environment also mitigating the presence of people kin to his ethnoracial distinction.

While he has only lived in central California for a little over a year at this point, this move was not his first time living outside New Mexico, nor his first time having such realizations. On this, he explains:

I lived in L.A. for a bit and one thing about L.A. is like- all of the groups are separate. Like, Hispanics were in the East Los Angeles and Compton. Gays were in West Hollywood. I remember there I did have some issues kinda coming to terms with saying I'm Mexican because being Mexican in L.A. was like, a whole other thing than being Mexican in New Mexico. So I think I wanted to fit in. All my friends were White, blonde- so I never- I never said I wasn't Mexican but I didn't actively say I was the way I do in other situations. Does that make sense?

I fully understand the desire to fit in when confronted by such ethnoracial relegation and derision of Mexican identity. Like Thomas, I have also never said I was not Mexican, but I certainly would not lead with it in certain scenarios.

I share a story with him, where after living in New Mexico for a few years I traveled to Los Angeles. In the shuttle bus to the airport terminal, I was surrounded by only White people for the first time in a while. They were also all staring at me. I do not know exactly why I share

this, maybe for the way New Mexico was a place of belonging in ways I had not entirely examined. Or maybe I just wanted to talk on our shared confusion over Los Angeles as Mexican people. Thomas has some thoughts about where our perspectives derive and the bigger picture, given that we are both considered light skin Mexican:

And what's crazy is like, you don't look at me and say "oh, that guy's from Mexico" like, and even I have felt uncomfortable. So I can just imagine you know, when you think of privilege and when you think of the struggle other people have- that they can't hide who they are- it's so crazy how we're completely unaware, even when we are "woke" and we think we understand, we don't understand.

Thomas seems to be talking about "we" in general, not necessarily just the two of us. Either way, he is right. We do have some advantages even as minoritized Mexican folk, that we can, in our respective ways, manage how we are perceived, and that such an ability is premised on our skin tone. Thomas continues, "because if I feel uncomfortable in a room full of White people" speaking as someone who is not usually assumed to be Mexican, "like, that- like, I can't even imagine how other people must feel." We have it rough, but people have it rougher, and while we can both empathize we will never precisely know how it feels to move in such a rough social terrain day after day.

He returns his thoughts to New Mexico, and why this was such a jarring experience given how he was raised:

Again, I think because I grew up in New Mexico and like, in a very confident, like, I- when I say that I was afraid to be myself, I don't mean like "oh my God I was terrified!" but I think I was very lucky in the fact that I have never been embarrassed or never had any kind of doubt in my [identity] terms. They have always been like, very...

His sentence continues as he touches on this more solid base of identity terms as they inform his place in gender:

They have always been like, very- even in gender- I was always a male. No matter if I dress up in Drag for one Halloween or whatever. And, and I struggled being from Mexico- I struggled with the whole, you know- now I understand it, but I always struggled with the whole trans, with non-binary. I don't get it, but I respect it.

His struggle is with the idea that gender and sex are permanent bonds, where if he were to dress in drag that would, informed by how he was raised in Mexico, mean that he identifies as a woman. He historicizes his struggle in the past tense, “I always struggled...” but finishes his point in present tense that, “I don’t get it” carefully leaving “but I respect it,” as a footnote.

In the next moment he ties this friction around how he had been raised to understand certain identity elements like gender and U.S. based iterations of Latin ethnoracial lexicon:

Same thing with the “Latinx.” I personally don't like that term, but I know that a lot of people are really, really passionate about it. So I'm not going to be an asshole and, not- it's just not that important to me to say “Latinx” or “Latino” so, [I] just go along with whatever someone else is passionate about, but I wouldn't call myself “Latinx.”

In this instance he’s more forward with saying outright that he personally does not like the term “Latinx.” And he holds that regard in tandem with the reality he does not want to be a jerk about it and argue or dismiss someone who may hold that term in close regard. But like Latino too, Latinx is held at a distance. I curiously ask him to explain further his perspective on Latin. He shares:

I think the terms that we have are sufficient but again, I come from a very, like- I understand other people, because I come from a very privileged background, and so many terms that, it's like, I don't want to be that person who's like- because-

He is softly gesturing towards people who might be less receptive and more vocal about their issues with Latinx.

He provides a scenario with his friends to better illustrate who and how “that person” may be like. “I have friends that are like ‘Latinx? That's so stupid!’” Thomas explains the linguistic and cultural grounds where such terminology might become an issue, “Spanish is a- you know- a gendered language and stuff like that. They’re anglicizing that!” By “that” he might mean both “Latinx” and the Spanish language in general. He empathizes with his friends that may be a little more suspicious about “Latinx”:

So I get what they're saying, but- I get both sides but, I don't personally call myself “Latinx” and I think there are sufficient terms to describe yourself, but I am also very much open to people adding more terms to it because it doesn't take away from it, you know? I know some people are like “oh my God, another term, here we go!” but it's not that deep for me.

His tag “it’s not that deep for me” gets into my cranium. I ask him to further elaborate his vantage. He clarifies how he comes to see it this way:

Because I lived in Mexico. I had a lot of friends, family, that are in Mexico and [Latinx is] not even a saying. Like they don't even think of it, talk about it. It doesn't- and I'm just speaking on my own small perspective- I'm not saying that everyone in Mexico doesn't believe in Latinx but from what I've seen it's not a conversation.

I appreciate his disinterest in not making sweeping generalizations and to still confidently assert he does know what he is talking about given his lived experience in the Southwestern U.S. and Mexico. Personally, I have never heard my family talk about Latinx either. I suspect some of my first cousins who grew up in the U.S. might be more aware of it, but for the most part, we all think of ourselves as Mexican.

Latinx, to Thomas is:

Like, it's so an American thing that I don't even think Mexicans bother with trying to defend it or deny it. It's always Hispanic people or Latin people in the United States trying to make it or find it. So again, it's a- U.S. trying to, or the English language colonizing of another language.

My own personal use of Latinx always felt affirming, something to name my sense of dis-belonging in the U.S. on ethnoracial vectors, and a way to affirm my Mexicanness specifically as an affiliation to other similarly ethnoracialized folk in general. The predicament is, Thomas is not wrong in his perception of how language is working in this way. He returns to thought:

It's- that's kind of my interpretation of it. I'm not going to- I'm not going to let the English language filter into my perception of Latin people. Do you know what I mean? I feel like that's another form of colonization.

Less vital here is his attention to the way “Latinx” might work for the people using it, but more important for him is to name the way such linguistic and colonial ideation may seep into his view of Latin people. In this way, the form of colonization is accomplished through the anglicization of the Spanish language by people in the U.S. which exerts a cognitive effect upon his perception of Latin people.

His qualms here then become more precisely about the seemingly neutral function of Spanish as a gendered language. He uses an example to make his point, “We don't call it- we call it ‘Mexico,’” strongly emphasizing the masculine ending “O” in the word:

Like, a truck is a female term, like it's not- doesn't mean that it's feminine or it's weak- it's just what it is. I don't know. We could say, like, we could say “Ellos,” like we could use “they” pronouns in Spanish, like we don't have to say- but then again it's “Ellos” not “Ellas” so, I don't know. It's weird.

He aptly summarizes that the language may indeed be weird given that the general “they,” used like “folks,” in this case “Ellos” is technically also a masculine term. He seems to sense here that the relegation of “Ellas,” while formed as a way to refer to a group of people as a plural noun, remains a distinct term, solely demarcating a group of women and is not used in a way to present a group of people that might be women and men; folks, they. He rests on the junction that Latinx is an exclusively American thing and from this, secures an assertion of it as a problematic term for mapping other people in the world. Thomas shares:

I think it's an American thing is my ultimate kind of- that's why I don't care about it because it's only an issue in America or in the United States- not necessarily in Latin speaking countries, er, Spanish speaking countries.

The point about him seeing it as an exclusively U.S. specific projection given the lack of discussion in Mexico and among other Spanish folk is important and clearly informs his assessment of the value of Latinx. But when mapped like gender possibilities, he recognizes it as important to some people, just not him, though- and this self-rooted understanding leaves him aware of its potential value to others. And above else, he does not want to “be an asshole”: someone who would challenge or dismiss its possible affirmatory function.

After he finishes the bundle of speech, he pauses for second before reaffirming his earlier point about how the Anglicization is incompatible with Spanish:

And even the “x,” like, we don't say “ex.” In Spanish it's pronounced like a “j” or “equis.” So it's not “Latin-equis.” It's like when someone goes to Cabo and says “I only go to- Mexico's amazing! We had shots on the balcony!” I'm like, “that's not Mexico!”

This colonial application through language is illustrated in his metaphor of tourists in Mexico, who claim to know it but are only offered a carefully characterized and highly edited glimpse into one space of the nation. To him, Latinx and the touristy illusions in Cabo are feigning legitimacy, but also an English application of a Spanish word.

I want to know if this is all garnered from a slightly removed position. I ask him if he knows or has any close friends that use “Latinx.” He is about to touch on “Chicana” as a similar kind of formation:

No definitely. I think a lot of them- it mostly comes, again, from the very Chicano people that I know that are very much like “Chicano power!” Mostly women, who are like, hippies. They live in Colorado and they are all about “the struggle” and stuff. So I think for them it's a very powerful statement, it's, they're women too, so I think that's why it might be more powerful to them?

Chicano, to Thomas, seems a womanist project to carve out an affirmatory space for self. He introspects more, arriving at an awareness of why he may be less inclined to personally resonate with such terms, their utility, and value inside a system of meaning he finds perfectly sufficient:

Um, but yeah, I definitely, I- I've learned to live in a kind of a world where I've come to the realization that I'm a lot more, I don't want to say “conservative” because I don't want to be associated with that kind of- but I'm more traditional in a lot of senses than most of

my friends and so I find that I surround myself with people who are like, way more liberal and more like “Latinx! No gender! Blah blah blah” and so I do think that when it comes to people who are more like that, it's always like the Chicano. Which is a whole other conversation like Chicano vs. Mexican like-

Traditional, then, seems held in tension with novel dimensions of identity as it relates across gender, race, ethnicity, and nationality. The hippie Chicano activist who is about “the struggle” is then the figure who is more into these kinds of things, per his opinion.

He pauses again, before sharing more of his feelings around Chicano vs. Mexican identity and teases out the way that to him, they are at odds with one another. Thomas starts “I was talking to my cousin. Like, we kind of get offended when people call us Chicanos, just because like, for me a Chicano, like, is like, very much” he is working around naming an exact figure- he comes back with:

Like a, like a stereotype of that like, East L.A. kind of like, lowrider Julio César Chávez.

Like to me, that's like they don't- I hate to say this 'cause it sounds fucked up, but like, like, you don't have a culture. Like, you have a style, or like, a subculture, but you don't like- do you actually think you're like, Mexican?

I did not know anything about Chicanos until encountering a brief chapter in an Intercultural Communication volume. I know it was political and I felt a strong affiliation with it, and more crudely was like, “this is me!” before finding Latinx. In New Mexico, I would gain a clearer picture of Chicano and its roots as an activist movement, affirming and working against capitalist and nationalist exploitation of Mexican and Mexican-American laborers.

Thomas explores a relevant thread that grounded in his lived experience, that relies upon extensions of the stereotypes he invoked above:

Because I think that's another way of differentiating themselves from Mexican-Americans by calling themselves "Chicanos" because like. For me, I just, like- most of my experiences in the Chicano community in Albuquerque was like, you know cholos, gangbangers, stuff like that. 'Cause in Mexico we don't get tattoos, we don't join gangs, we don't do drugs. Like, our parents will beat the hell out of us.

I have felt the tension between these ideas between generations across the U.S. and Mexico.

When my sister was in early high school, she wanted to get her ears double pierced like my aunt had. My sister would have to cite this because for years our father would deny her pleas, constantly exclaiming in absolute sincerity that he didn't want her to "look like a gangbanger."

Thomas more neatly explains such friction:

So, coming to the United States when I did, like in first grade and seeing the whole term "Chicano" kind of had a really bad connotation for me. But now that I see the broader sense of a Chicano or Chicana, like you know— I do respect it and I do think it's awesome that they have a cultural identity with like, this subculture of American Mexicans, um, but I noticed that it's more with them that you get that situation, not necessarily with Mexicans.

"That situation" here refers to people more open to expressing a Latinx sense of self. As with Latinx and trans identities, he wraps them both with respect and awareness of their uses for certain people but carefully aligns himself within more traditional notions of identity which come from where and how he was raised.

As we near the end of our attention to this topic of Latinx identity, he meanders around an awareness of generational differences, asserting that:

I never understood why you needed to put another layer. Like for me it's like, you're Mexican- and that's enough. So to put another layer between like, White people and Mexicans just didn't make sense and so- and then I think now with the younger generation that they kind of, what I'm seeing now in the younger generation is that they're kind of trying to reclaim [Chicano] and make it more like, more like an activism background, more like "I'm down with people, I'm fighting for rights!" - like, so I think it's- the word "Chicano" has shifted from like a fashion or a, a lifestyle, to more of like, a badge of honor.

This understanding is what I was first taught about Chicano. Thomas addresses why people might be compelled to use Chicano rather than other options:

Maybe it's- you know what? This is fair- because I think a lot of people feel uncomfortable saying they're Mexican because they can't really relate to Mexico, so they say they're Chicanos as a way to kind of show solidarity. Um, so it's, maybe it's not changing but I just perceive it as a word that has like, evolved to like, something more of like a pride, like someone is being proud of saying they're Chicanos. And most of those people are usually very active politically, very like, liberal, very like, about civil rights and women's rights and gay rights. So I think- I think that it's kind of shifting toward that in my opinion.

He is holding two things: that it may very well be a way to negate easily claiming Mexican, but that some people might be compelled to use it because they feel they lack a straight and present line to Mexico. So Chicano, as he offers, might be a political kinship across minoritized groups, but also a way to yearn for Mexico and its roots, even as one may perceive themselves as too far removed from being able to claim such identification.

Through all this, the mosquito is still assaulting me. I wonder to myself if it knows it's being homophobic and racist in attacking me. I apologize to Thomas for the way I am now obscuring myself from the camera, behind my waving hands, striving in vain to strike the wretched things. He does not mind and starts telling me that he has conversations with his husband about people doubting Thomas as Mexican, revolving around ideas of conflicting race, ethnicity, culture, and citizenship. He tells me that the doubt he is confronted with is ironic, and questions why anyone would doubt him in his outright claim of "Mexican," given that Mexican identity seems to be at the bottom of the barrel of the Latin populace:

So I think what happens when you tell someone you're Mexican, like, they're not going to argue with you because you just admitted to being like, the lowest of the land/population, because everyone looks on Mexico- no one like- Everyone gets offended when I call them Mexican, like I think the only people who might not is like, Honduras and El Salvador, and that's 'cause we're all like, kind of in the same like, system of like, being the worst. Because you call a Puerto Rican "Mexican," they get super offended, you call a Colombian "Mexican," they get super offended. So, I think once you say you're Mexican no one's going to argue with you because they're like "oh shit, you just admitted it," so just best to leave it alone.

As he mentioned, the strong declaration of himself as "Mexican" with no caveats is all the more an assertion against xenophobic sensibilities and forces within the Latin community too.

A final touchstone of the conversation on identification surrounds Thomas's native ancestry. He brings up the topic when talking about conversations he sees on social media applications. On here he remembers:

I see darker skin Mexicans, like kind of arguing that lighter skin Mexicans don't have the same struggle, so we don't really understand. So like, if I get questioned, not directly, it's mostly from people in the community of other Mexicans who are darker skin that kind of question [me]. Like, for example, I will never tell anyone that I'm 34% Native American or I will never claim to be Native American, not because I'm ashamed of it, just because I'm not Elizabeth Warren. I'm not going to take that heat and 34% is a significant amount of like, my genetic composition, but there's no way I'm going to say that is something, because I know I'm going to get so much backlash from the people from that group. So I just kind of like, mmm, I'm not- I'll just say I'm mixed Native with Spanish or European, but I'm never going to say that- I'm never going to try to claim to be Native American even though I am and I wish I could. I'm afraid to do that just because of the like, our community, my own community kind of attack me on that front.

The assumptions about ancestry he is talking about therefore call him into question as skin lightness is the central factor informing these doubts. As people refuse and question his being Mexican, he says here that his ancestry is also Native-American, mixed with Spanish and European, which is reflective of a significant group presence in New Mexico. His hesitation is the way Native identity has been co-opted by White folk and that his proximity to whiter skin enables a similar ability despite his genetic composition and desire to claim it. He importantly clarifies he is not embarrassed by it and desires to accurately claim an identity affiliation, but fears backlash from others within his community. I now shift into making clearer sense and connections from his points across the earlier threads of discussion.

Analyzing Making a Self

In summary of this first section, there are several points of connection amongst Roger, Isaac, and Thomas. I bridge here the summation of their converging and contradictory considerations. They offer their understanding of ethnoracial identity as an institutionally mediated encounter, a belief around ancestry, and something read and displaced by the other. I then attend to their navigation strategies when affronted by this projection, as well as its consequences and implications.

Institutional Identity Productions. The first analytical theme I attend to is the formation of ethnoracial identity which occurs through the citation and abstracted recall of formal institutional documentation. These items that begged identity questions were a primary citation enabling the collaborators' conception of self. For Roger, his foremost account of identity would rely upon documents he had filled out in the past. In his case, it was a goal-oriented process of buying a gun that required his compliance in selecting an answer. Roger did not cite his birthplace, rely on nations of ancestry, or citizenship. He would frame himself in accordance with the options given while also mentioning that his answer changes depending on what possibilities are offered, vacillating between White or Hispanic. When speaking with me, his tightly wound thoughts about selecting White registered as a relatively inconsequential task which has not demanded much contemplation. Even when exhaling to me that he sometimes selects White, he would reestablish that he was not. His experiences with these forms were easy and straightforward cornerstones for naming his identity, yet at the same time do not always accurately reflect how he understands himself.

Isaac spoke of a similar experience drawing from the options granted by forms and documents but did not name a precise type of goal affiliated with such documentation like

Roger's gun-purchasing endeavors. Similarly, Isaac, like Roger, stated he prefers to pick Hispanic when it is offered, but would then pick White if there "wasn't a good Hispanic option." His experience traversing these requirements indicates he has seen either shortened lists of options or ones with generous specificity. Importantly, even while the options are limited, he does express affiliation with what options are provided.

And when recalling the process with me, his grammatical shifts in tense move from present to past. This switch provides an illumination of the way that even while retrospectively voicing the experiences surrounding the forms, he speaks as if he was before such documentation in the very moment of recall. The urgency and demand of these forms, even within the specific goal of institutional navigation like to purchase a gun, requires one to adhere to its questions. He shifts into present tense to describe the constraint of options. The present tense leads with an impression of the identity limitations but imbue a pressing urgency in selecting one of the possible options. Isaac does not primarily identify himself as White but in the lack of options and limits is frequently swayed to select White.

These more formal types of records require compliance with the arranged ethnoracial options. Roger would select the best available and accurate option. If one were to look at all his records over time, he would show up as an array of ethnoracial identities. Like Isaac too, in a switch across potentials, would prefer Hispanic but still select White. Yet beyond the compulsion of having to answer within the limits of the documentation, the process results into a warped mode of presence in the way Isaac spoke across grammatically rendered time references.

As Latina/o Vernacular Discourse looks to mundane negotiations of identity in relationship to power (Calafell & Holling, 2011), for Roger and Isaac, the discursive membrane of ethnoracial identity formed at the time they were begged to answer identity questions

demanding at an institutional level, which for Roger specifically included State and Federal requirements. And while forced into an answer, their sense of the pronouncement of such occurrences were left as fleeting events, where Isaac might pick an option on a whim, as would Roger. In line with Rivera-Servera's (2012) claim that explorations of Queer Latinidad might focus on unique coherences of feelings, Roger's and Isaac's blasé temperaments ground their interactions and contributions to one mundane discursive production of identity. As Trujillo noted that "there is no single proper popular term of this population's racial ethnic assignment and identity," (2010, p. 11) they straddle more than one single entity, moving on an axis of uncertainty, where importantly they are not essentially wed to the markers and decisions of identification, resisting any concretizing.

Such records are both a mechanism shaping how they understand their identity within a process-driven experience, as well as a medium enabling their awareness, understanding, and propulsion of affiliation towards certain ethnoracial kinships. As Roger and Isaac share how they understand this ethnoracial aspect of their identity, they return to these moments where when recalling an abstraction of authority pulls them into its requisite demands of identity questions and answers. As Calafell and Moreman maintain, "Our cultural identity is a successful achievement per the correct performance of the discursive practice by which we are called forth. As we repetitively answer discursive calls, our racial identity becomes naturalized for ourselves and for others" (2010, p. 9). This authoritative discursive dominion of identity documents thus asserts an influence upon Roger and Isaac to satisfy its questions within its limited options. Holding a mirror up to myself and thinking about how I might answer in this way is odd. How do my questions also draw from such compulsory identity categories? Are their rote utterances offered within an octave of indifference that I can hear and feel? And while trying to get out of

this very web, I sense I am still very much acting within my own capacity to weave strands supporting the structure of identity itself.

Ancestry. The second theme is ancestry as a central component forging their sense of identity. Isaac relied upon ancestry to explain himself as Hispanic. His inclusion of his parents within his sensemaking isolates the bonds and adherences to family, specifically in the making of self in his mention of both parents as from New Mexico. Before that, his family was from “Spain, Germany, or Ireland.” “*Before that*” is an unspecific extent of time. “Before” his parents may signal his grandparents, which would make him second generation, but the inclusion “my parents are all from New Mexico *on both sides of the family*,” might move away from this explanation and go back further. When hearing this, I would surmise that his family has been in New Mexico for a few generations. Speaking with him later would go on to confirm this.

Such vague space and time specificities are durational metrics informing his identification as Hispanic from New Mexico. While his mention of family serves as a simpler way to name himself as Hispanic here and now, it is undergirded by a generalized migratory history that does not account for nationalist territorial occupation. In this, a making of self is bonded to familial and ancestral lines that collapsed into nation of origin from prior generations. Isaac’s understanding of how he came to be New Mexican is a patchwork of his parents, as both from New Mexico and then, before them, from European countries. This compilation of such elements in his making of self rely on the authoritatively acknowledged and legitimized social assembly of family across place and time. In bringing this up I am not necessarily eliciting an abandonment of the project of family, but rather want to isolate a working of identity that dissuades alternative forms of kinship as a primary weaving in the threads of self, aside from the project of nation.

Thomas would craft a similar disposition of ancestry. He first explained that he was “Mexican...only because the fact that both my parents are from Mexico,” even though he was born in the U.S. To work around this conflict, he shared the illustration he uses often, that if he had been born in China, he would not be Chinese except “maybe by citizenship, but not necessarily by race or ethnicity.” As the default optic for organizing his sense of belonging and identity within a global terrain, nation serves here as a present framework used for placing oneself in the world. The unquestioned legitimacy of territorial claims upon land implicitly endures in his utterances, where nation of origin appears to become more explicitly bonded to genetics, race, and ethnicity.

Thomas also firmly established himself in response to what he recognizes as a popular negation of Mexican ancestry by New Mexican folk. To him, New Mexicans invented “a whole other race.” When organizing confusion and frustration about this novel Mexican decoherence, he relies upon maternal generational lines to problematize such claims, elaborating if someone’s “great-great-grandmother...lived [in Mexico] her whole life, she was Mexican, yet [someone from New Mexico is] not?” But in Thomas’s hypothetical illustration, he utilizes nation to simplify and implicitly embed race and ethnicity, like his example where being born in China would not make him Chinese, if only perhaps by citizenship. The question of when one might become Chinese though remains unanswered; at what point might one be permitted an affiliation beyond citizenship and into another anchor of connection?

As a reminder, “New Mexican” as a distinct identity term gained popularity following the failure of the U.S. to meet its terms of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which would have made Mexican citizens, now living in the U.S. territory, citizens of the nation (Mora, 2011). The shift away from Mexican identity was not just premised upon differences “in racial and national

origins, but inferior[ity] in both regards” (Nieto-Phillips, 1999, p. 53). A more recent examination argued the notion and contemporary terminological identification with “Nuevomexicanos” represented “a defensive strategy to enact dissociation from stigmatized Mexican immigrants” (Salgado, 2020, p. 179). Thomas is not alone in his perspective of the negations of Mexican identity. But this process of decades-long rejection of Mexican identity is importantly connected to the demands of the U.S. in order to qualify into statehood, which again, was something that was already agreed to in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. But also, plainly, under all this history and effort, New Mexican citizens are not Mexican. And the disassociation from the stigmatized Mexican immigrant figure might be beyond the individual capacity of any one New Mexican citizen, as the U.S. colonial terror forces people to negate themselves in order to garner the position of U.S. citizen and subject, ultimately securing the need of “New Mexican” as an identificatory referent.

But within Thomas’s understanding, the process of being Mexican into becoming New Mexican, might only occur after generational reproduction within the national conglomerate occupying such space. In this, the question of time arises once more like it did with Isaac. Thomas’s formation of ancestry is thus seemingly built in accordance with a model binding the formation of progeny to nation of origin, race, and body. And in this perseverance of this mode of citation, a dimension of heterocolonialist formations come into focus.

This core of Thomas’s formation of ancestral identity is also resilient upon the attribution of familial structuration, managing the web of global relations and self. That is, Thomas and Isaac employ and rely upon on the production of family by Mother and Father to help align themselves to an ethnoracial origin of ancestry, bonded with nation. In this, one’s present self is made and rendered intelligible through appeals of familial bonds in making sense of identity

under the conditions of global nation-state configurations. An analytical implementation of notions of Queer Latinidad here enable a capacity to name the normative regimes affecting sexual and ethnic minoritarian folks and how the appeals of inclusion into White citizen subject identity is qualified through a heteronormative familial structuration.

But I take a step back again to recall the historical features of identity in New Mexico. As Mora shared, ethnoracial identity in and of New Mexico became a process under hegemonic pressure and “ideological processes” (2011, p. 13) to justify American incorporation through colonial superiority to the East coast and to bolster the justification of maintaining their sovereign governance of the region. Thomas and Isaac’s ancestral linkages then to Spain are used to establish a New Mexican identity in relation to the apparatus of U.S. nation. Identity for Thomas and Isaac, harkening back to Spain, relies upon the historically mandatory appeals to Spanish identity to justify New Mexican inclusion into the federal apparatus of government, and thus to qualify as proper citizens. Today, for Thomas and Isaac, this citation is accomplished through the discursive reliance upon the structuration of family, which simultaneously becomes inextricable from nation and relies upon such group formation to secure the project of nation itself.

I am not trying to offer an argument for cosmopolitanism or necessarily the destruction of the familial unit. Nor am I claiming appeals to Spain are incorrect. My elucidation is that the sociocultural structure of the familial unit for Thomas and Isaac is a vehicle proffering their set of relations to the world and themselves. It allows for access into Spanish and European identity which has been a mechanism enabling the access and claims to U.S. citizenship too. Ancestry therefore becomes a primary means of accounting for oneself, where familial nation of origin is

apart from citizenship, and instead used to collapse ethnorace and leave occupation and duration unquestioned, colonialism and heteronormativity intact.

The Social Other. The third focus looks at identity constructed in relation with the other. This theme will more clearly establish Thomas and Isaac's ideations about Latino. In this, I look to the way Latino ethnoracial identity is collaboratively constructed, contested, and mitigated. Speaking with Isaac and Thomas, they each explained the way "Latino" becomes projected onto their bodies by the other in varying social contexts. I then work to solve the riddle of their implicit construction of what constitutes a "Latino." As Eguchi and Calafell (2020) organized Queer Intercultural Communication, a particular vantage of intersectionality emerged, drawing from Yep's (2010) notion of thick intersectionalities to elaborate it into "A methodology of identifying with and critiquing the complex particularities of tensions between macro structural and systemic forces and micro acts and processes of identity performance" (Eguchi and Calafell, 2020, p. 9). The convergences of these factors are complex, but additionally are clearly dependent on the role of the other. Across the making of identity for Thomas and Isaac, the social currents of meaning work as a unique determination capitulated by the other, infused into a spectrum of indifference, while importantly grounded in a recognition of the other's vantage of their identity. To commit to an intersectional recognition allows me to affirm the nature that these things are crafted, elaborated, envisioned, imagined, projected, and created by the other in varying social environments. Plainly, the information supplied by the other matters for them in the making of their identifications.

Starting with Isaac, he had detailed his perception of self coming into conflict when Latino was displaced onto him from his White peers in High School. To his peers who had darker skin, he was only ever considered White. He shared that there was not a sizable number of

White kids, resulting in him standing out. Isaac said that the confusion might be derived from his darker features like his eyes and hair, but that his skin was not “dark compared to some people” and that he is “a little bit darker, yeah.” Invoking his peers’ perspective, Isaac was prompted to arrange race onto the body through a colorist logic, where White becomes the primary tenet organizing all subsequent racialized embodiments. When I asked Isaac how these interactions made him feel, he said that he just shrugged it off. He noted that he could see each group’s points, and in this mutual recognition he affirmed “so it doesn’t really bother me.” Asking him, then, in more general terms how he feels about his identity when it is formed in such a way, he indicated a position of indifference: “Um, I never really thought about it, however, I don’t really feel one way or the other. That’s just how I was raised and I always didn’t have any thoughts about it.” So while feeling no particular way, the only time he recognized himself as Latino was in acknowledging the colorist logic application by his peers.

In such a moment, the plethora of assumptions made by the other come from a very different web of access. As Soto explained “race, sexuality, and gender are much too complex, unsettled, porous...mutually constitutive, unpredictable, incommensurable, and dynamic, certainly too spatially and temporally contingency, *ever* (even if only for an instant) to travel independently of one another” (2010, p. 6). Thick descriptions might get us to a better place of understanding, but Soto, on the notions of intense confluences of meaning like gender, race, and sexuality, recognizes they “would have to be” rent apart “so in order to be conceived of as intersection, as eventually meeting one another here and there, crossing, colliding, passing, yielding, or merging” (p. 6). In this, I resolve to focus on the way that clearly there are determinations being made by the other that consistently cleave the subjects I focus on. As Soto (2010) suggests, while there are “confounding manifold ways that our bodies, our work, our

desires are relentlessly interpellated by unequivocal social processes” (Soto, 2010, p. 6), we ought to be “*wordy* and contingent that we do not look for a shorthand for naming or understanding or footnoting” such analyses. More plainly, the other in micro instantiations of communication too relies on dividing logics of difference, consistently and comfortably allowing themselves to determine what Thomas and Isaac are.

Latino refutations. The fourth focus shifts to account for the way they relied upon notions of ancestral lines to delimit affinities with Latino origins. Within this, I will hold in greater attention to Thomas’s contemplations of the term Latinx. When Isaac was outlying a kinship with the label “New Mexican,” he reached into the confusing web of Latino and Hispanic to bolster his hesitancy, crafting a distinct and separate vision of Latino from Hispanic. Latino in his explanation was some sort of derivative of Latin, which he assigned to the conglomerate of South American while reassuring his uncertainty inside his very proclamation, saying “I think Latino is more Latin? So I don’t know. I guess it could be anywhere in South America? I don’t- I’m not really sure where but Hispanic sounds like it’s basically the same? So- I don’t know.” Isaac then moved to define Hispanic, but neatly surmised that it “sounds like it’s basically the same.” He reestablished that he relies upon his familial ancestry that includes both his parents’ families from Spain and Germany. Isaac thus explained himself as from a European origin, which to him coalesces more precisely towards Hispanic than Latino. He affirms both parents’ familial lines support this choice and understanding. His differentiation from Latino seemingly stems from an onus of confusion but ends in the result that while Hispanic and Latino sound the same to him, the latter refers to South America, of which he has no connection to.

I spend a bit of time focusing on Thomas’s thoughts, first on the reasons he avoids Latino, then in the way he constructs Mexican identity, I then focus on his concerns about

Latinx. Thomas first explained that if someone were to ask about his ethnoracial identity in a gay sexual-focused interaction, they are likely also using screening options on popular apps for gay encounters in order to find such specific folk. To Thomas, this is accomplished from a fetishizing locus of desire. Thomas said “Latino,” when used in such a way, as a projection rooted in a specific image of “the typical like, dark, handsome like- know what I mean? Like the telenovela, like the typical Latin lover situation.” On this predicament, he reasoned that he “would always just kind of either put ‘White.’ Or if it had ‘Hispanic’ I would put ‘Hispanic’...” or additionally, “sometimes I just wouldn’t put anything, to be honest.” This tactic though was established in his understanding that he tried to “stay away from the term ‘Latino’ because I felt like it was false advertising.” In the next section he offers a moment of clarity in this conceptualization, reiterating that he struggles with being “super hairy” which to him goes back “to race things- because I don’t look like a Latin guy.” So while Latino is a dark, hairy, sexualized Latin lover, he avoids using it given the fetishizing gaze, but also, simply does not understand himself as Latino given this image. To Thomas, Latino is forged and regulated by the gay social-sexual gaze; social as it occurs, sexual in purpose and outlook.

As Thomas accounts for himself as firmly rooted Mexican, he does so by also placing a significant footing of the identification into a Spanish and Europe ancestry. In this, he works to labor a construction of Mexican formed as a non-Latin entity. When he affirms a working against a sense of abjection towards Mexican identity, typically evidenced through the negation of Mexican affiliation by New Mexican folk, he is able to do so by setting a White, European foundation of affiliation. When facing people explicitly denying Mexican origins in favor for claiming “New Mexican,” he characterizes such process as creating a “whole other race.” For him, simply naming a Mexican ancestry and heritage is accurate and sufficient. And also,

claiming “New Mexican” is illogical, using the example that if a New Mexican’s “great-great-grandmother...lived [in Mexico] her whole life, she was Mexican, yet [they’re] not?” Thomas believes claims of New Mexican identity are clear and obvious ties to Mexican, as the now U.S. state was previously a former territory of Mexico.

Under this, though, his perspective on the population of this area, composed of “Spanish people and Native people,” where “if anything, we’re just different tribes but we all come from Spain.” He attributes this logic to his experience growing up in Mexico, as “the whole colorism and all that was kind of embedded in me, so I would try to lean more toward a European aspect of it.” Thomas sensed the issue of growing up with and accepting notions around fair skin as better, where then:

Getting educated and understanding...the value that representation had- I really started identifying myself as a- just Mexican. And I don't give any explanations. I don't give any caveats. I just say, ‘I'm Mexican,’ which on its own just took me a long time to kind of come to terms with that, especially in New Mexico.

So while his assertion that New Mexicans were Mexican, his sense of this is more largely grounded in a tactic to appeal to and recognize that Mexican people are from Spain first, and Indigenous groups affiliations come second. In this for Thomas, Mexican is not a Latino entity, but rather built up from a European pedigree.

The third avenue of forging Latino is found in his pronounced refusal and frustration with the term “Latinx.” Just before arriving at this topic, Thomas briefly mentioned a personal difficulty in understanding trans-identities. This became a sort of defensive measure when citing the reasons he has difficulty in being open to newer identity ideas. His more immediate refusals more accurately occur six times in total, four from his own personal disposition, and two by

invoking others' similar opinion. His own refutations are built around a personal dislike and not wanting to be an asshole by telling others not to identify as such. Latinx is not of particular importance to him and he thinks "the terms we have are sufficient."

He began his concern of Latinx first around its relationship to the Spanish language as a gendered one. In beginning to tease out the riddle of Spanish as a gender-neutral language, Thomas pointed to "Mexico" itself as ending in the masculine "O." Thomas then touched on the example "truck" which in Spanish ends in the feminine, explaining "a truck is a female term, like it's not- doesn't mean that it's feminine or it's weak- it's just what it is." Thomas then brought up a similar function to "they," which in Spanish is "Ellos." Ending in the masculine, "Ellos" can also refer to a group of men, similar to more contemporary usages of "guys," in English- as both for a group of people in general and a group of men specifically. He then recognized that this masculine ending only works in this way, saying "but then again it's 'Ellos' not 'Ellas'" as "Ellas" solely refers to a group of Women and is not popularly used to describe a larger group of people like "folks" in English. In the face of this, he rested his case with "So, I don't know. It's weird," taking in the contradicting tension of his assertion and example. At the end, though, Latinx to him is an anglicization of such neutrality.

His second concern with Latinx was tempered by presenting his views in contrast to others' options on the matter. After stating that "I know that a lot of people are really, really passionate about "Latinx," he added "I have friends that are like 'Latinx! That's so stupid!'" Working back to his understanding, he then established "So I'm not going to be an asshole...it's just not that important to me to say 'Latinx' or 'Latino.' ...I wouldn't call myself 'Latinx.'" In this instance he is forward, saying outright that he personally does not like the term "Latinx." He does though hold such regard in tandem with the reality he does not want to be a jerk about it and

argue or dismiss someone who may hold Latinx in close regard. And again, bolstering his openness compared to others, where “I am also very much open to people adding more terms...because it doesn’t take away from [the existing ones],” he again cites other’s options, as “I know some people are like ‘oh my God, another term, here we go!’ but it’s not that deep for me.” So while he outlined personal issues with the term up to this point, he then signaled a kind of resolution of indifference.

Another final source of concern for Latinx was that, in his experience, it is only an item of conversation in the U.S. Thomas explained that in Mexico, “‘Latinx’ is not a term, nor topic of conversation. In his own experience, he shared that Latinx is also not in Mexican people’s awareness. From this, Latinx to him is a more precisely “American thing,” that leaves Mexicans not even bothering “trying to defend it or deny it.” Thomas detailed that it is “always Hispanic people or Latin people in the United States” trying to call Latinx into existence “or find it.” His concern with the direction of deployment and root of development is compelling. In Thomas’s cognizance, whoever is using the label Latinx to define themselves in the U.S. has access to rely upon and reform the English language as a colonial and categorizing logic, rendered through the U.S.’ categorizing gaze upon the rest of the world.

As Thomas grapples with a paradoxical consideration of both a personal disinterest about the term but also an interest in not denying the utility of more affiliations and markers to perpetuate limits of belonging, he makes intensely important points on Latinx. As Eguchi and Calafell explain, “a sense of belonging is a historical, structural, and ideological production of inclusion (and exclusivity) that certain privileged subjects are allowed to feel in and across certain times, spaces, and contexts” (2020, p. 9). Thomas outlines the vectors of this experience regarding race, gender, nation, and language when confronted with the term Latinx. Importantly,

he precisely explains the capacity for the English language to act as a discursive parameter making the confines of what is included and belongs within a global Latin population. In this, language becomes a force within the apparatus of U.S. Hegemonic English to set the very potential of access to connection and affinities via the English language itself.

As Tsuda explained “The English Hegemony threatens other languages and discriminates against the non-English-speaking people and causes the English Divide where the English speakers have more power and resources while the non-English speaking people are disadvantaged in many ways” (2008, p. 47). And given Eguchi and Calafell’s position on Intersectionality within a Queer Intercultural Communication theoretical ideation as accounting for “directions of power’ and “tensions across privilege and oppression” (2020, p. 8), the ability of English speaking self-identified Latinx folk to name themselves is accomplished in relation to a few forces. First, their capacity to formulate Latinx relies upon their access to English Hegemony as a naming mechanism for and of other groups. Accomplished through the direction of flow, that is, English used to name other groups in other environments, moves as a colonialist propensity of the U.S., and in turn its subjects. Additionally, their interest in disrupting a Spanish gender-binary is done so from an English-centric vantage, where, to Thomas, the gendered dimensions of the Spanish language are neutral features. That is, the very notion that Spanish is a gendered language in a negative capacity is brought into focus through a perspective of/by the English language itself. That is, the gesture of moving away from gender is done through U.S. subjects employing the English language and its gaze. This, though, is held in tension with the possibility that Latinx identity may very well be an affirmatory potential, of more precisely recognizing oneself. But as Thomas explained, when assigned onto the other and all else, this functions as a colonial enterprise and logic.

Thomas comes to understand Chicano as a way for people who struggle with a connection to Mexico to name themselves into some sort of alliance, but Latinx is not extended the same consideration. To him, Latinx is not just a term that he removes from himself, it also points to an abstract and undefined U.S. based populace whose access to the colonial propulsion of the English language is the leading identificatory element, eclipsing ethnoracial, national, or ancestral selfhood. To Thomas, though, this does not occur in a vacuum. The consequences he named are that Latinx can be a colonial tactic of, and enacted through, the English language. This centrally threatens to affect his “perception of Latin people.” His refusal of Latinx is therefore a project of actively refuting the logic of English and U.S. framings of Latin folk impacting his outlook of this population of such people outside of the U.S.

Latino, in Isaac’s and Thomas’s experience, is something the other imposes upon them. Latino became a label, charged and placed through a fetishized optic, which is established, mediated, and made possible to enact such pursuits of desire through gay interactive apps too. This activity becomes crafted through in-person social environments and digital applications. This self within such sites becomes an unstable social product, shifting between fetishized/object. The negation of Latino might be to reject fetishized encounters for safety purposes, while possibly leaving the fetishized object of Latin lover intact. Latino more clearly operates as a projection that they seek to distance themselves from in accordance with their perceived origin and alliances to European ancestry. Latino in this way is of non-European terra and considered something of the global south. And U.S. based iterations of a Latin identity move as a colonial force through the English language.

Navigation Strategies. The fifth theme focuses more clearly on my respondents’ navigation strategies, consequences, and implications. Roger employed Hispanic and Latino

interchangeably. Within the sites of my specific imagined inquiry of a bar in Albuquerque, the environment is comprised of the Hispanic national ethnic minority which in this environment is a local majority. The difference and switch for Roger again between Latino and Hispanic is less an item of his own designation and a sort of agreement at the other's request to move forward for the goal of sexual interactions.

In the way Roger explained his experience with these types of interactions, ethnoracial identity is less a considered or felt sense of relevance. It is not principally located or rooted in the self but becomes an identification displaced and projected onto him from another for the goal of achieving a sexual interaction or appeasing institutional access like buying a gun in his earlier example. In his lighthearted recollections he does not identify with these labels outright, only arriving at various referent shifts with little outward examination. This seeming indifference is reaffirmed in the way he lightheartedly positions identity as an inconsequential personal identification and equally socially irrelevant concern.

At the same time, Roger is a visibly muscular, polite, funny, interesting, and handsome guy who is ethnoracially kin to most people in town. These features are relevant too, permitting and enabling pronounced ease in gay social interactions. He exists an ideal aesthetic apex type. In conversation, his answers were the verbal delivery equivalent of a playful shrug. Based on his identification of "Daddy," Roger appears to know how other people see him. His default answers are organized and made possible by how they recognize and interact with him. To him, ethnoracial terminology all seems rather unimportant on a personal level. Perhaps this too is a luxury of being within peak aesthetic markers of gay normative desire; that other identificatory items become less than relevant. Ethnoracial referents become deprioritized given how his body appears and is viewed by others.

Thomas attested to the way he outright claims Mexican, but at times use White or Hispanic to better navigate potentially hostile environment. Thomas recalled how he can pass for White. His decision to name himself as White is concurrent with the way he recognizes that he passes as White. It is both a way to feel safer, and ease social interactions when he senses tension or possible conflict at the base of identity. Thomas uses White as a tool to move away from being an object of fetishization. The movement through appears to be undergirded by a tacit and deliberate denial of Latino. To restate, Latino to Thomas is configured and fetishized under a White gaze that is mediated through the options offered in apps fostering interactions for queer folk, and mostly cis gay men. For Thomas, Latino moves as an item representing an object of fetishization and is enacted through a racially charged sexual desire.

The ambiguity which Thomas occupies ethnoracially is akin to the way Anzaldúa explained, “The new mestiza copes by developing a tolerance for contradictions,” called “divergent thinking,” a program of thought that moves “away from set patterns and goals and toward a more whole perspective, one that includes rather than excludes” (1987, p. 101). And while Thomas’s rejection of Latino is twofold, against fetishization but also his aesthetic goals denying dark skin, it is within a web of contradictions, fraught internalized beliefs. There is no final, perfect, or complete way of being the new mestiza. Or perhaps it is here too, in some weird place of space and time, that a collaborative dimension may arise- is arising. When learning of these options, though, of his negotiations and negations, my bitterness fused into judgement aligned with a rigid perspective of division. This belief and sensation are indicative of the very logics a mestiza consciousness labors against and outside of, whereas the seeming incompatibility between race and ethnicity supports the very nature of colonialist dualist division.

An additional site of Thomas shifting away from Mexican was when he lived in Los Angeles. As he recalled, growing up in New Mexico meant that, for the most part, in any given social environment he was part of the majority and “felt like everyone is exactly like me, for the most part.” He shared his initial shock upon moving to California at the majority White population and how the town was explicitly organized into hubs of separate cultural affiliations by region. His negations of Mexican identity though at this time were explained as simply being less inclined to name himself as Mexican and he does not outright deny if someone were to ask. As he now lives in central California, he admitted the only people he sees that looked like him are chefs, cooks, and employees working in the back of house. From this, he admitted through hurt “I hate to admit but I do notice myself trying to be more White” in these environments.

So while at the start of our discussion he explained that he has worked hard to be able to simply and confidently name himself as “Mexican,” he spends a great deal of time examining all the workings that have made that a great challenge. Claiming Mexican identity for Thomas works as an affirmatory enterprise in some spaces, while simultaneously being a challenge and socially mitigating deterrent, causing him to sense he is unsafe. There is not an end process or finish line for his project of affirming self, as different social situations and environments cultivate anti-Mexican sensibilities.

He then managed to tease out an awareness of the effects held in his Eurocentric tempered perspectives on identity which are rooted in colorism. In his venture of getting people to recognize their own Mexican sense of self, Thomas may be more open to such a feat given he assumes a principal allegiance and alignment with European Spain as the ultimate referent of national and genetic identity. Nation of origin and genetic ancestry then are constructed as ways to affirm what he recognized as abject Mexican identity while, simultaneously, such a leap is

predicated upon its reaffirmed bonds to White European origins. This is an interesting avenue to affirm Mexican identity which to some degree negated other emergences of Mexican identity in favor of White European colonial ties and origin.

Isaac occupied a middle ground between Roger's seeming disinterest of his feelings about his ethnoracial identity leaving him feeling "Neither here nor there," and Thomas's deliberate practices around ethnoracial identity construction. When I asked Isaac how he felt in response to his peers questioning his identity in respect to ethnoracial formation, constantly on either end of a colorist spectrum, he told "I just shrug it off. I see the kind of- Hispanic but kind of White looking- so it doesn't really bother me." I prompted him to consider how he feels about his identity, where he explained "Um, I never really thought about it. However, I don't really feel one way or the other. That's just how I was raised and I always didn't have any thoughts about it."

As a Queer of Color Hispanic subject, Isaac might always already be insufficiently rendered in accordance with hegemonic propulsions of logics of U.S. subject identity via perceived ambiguity of his ethnoracialized body. Whereas Thomas had decried this, as for him it is bound to an experience of cis gay White fetishization for Latino men, Isaac simply rests on the mutual recognition that both perspectives of him as White or Latino, depending on the ethnoracial social environment, might very well be correct. Their experiences delimit a potentiality of the politics of belonging for the Queer of Color subject. But importantly, they will never necessarily belong given the socially legitimized implausibility of belonging. As Eguchi and Calafell state, the politics of belonging argue "an ideological structure historically produces and continues a feeling of exclusion for minoritarian subjects" and that it "always already implicates often invisible power relations, such as heteronormativity, cisgenderism, patriarchy,

whiteness, and capitalism” (2020, p. 9). Given that “The U.S. nation-state always already sustains the power, privilege, and supremacy of White, cisgender, male, heterosexual, able-bodied, and affluent as the sign and affirmation of normative citizenship” (Eguchi, Files-Thompson, & Calafell, 2018), Thomas and Isaac experience a social corporealization of the hegemonic logics of race and ethnicity, enacted by the other in moments of identity determinations.

Their ambivalence too is important. And I wonder if it might be rooted and made possible by the way they form a Eurocentric ancestral alignment which corresponds to what they believe about themselves. For them, Eurocentric allegiance operates as the baseline. Returning to Eurocentric affiliation allows them to ground Hispanic through its project of colonial new world expansion. If their ethnoracial place is ever strained through questions, a European Hispanic affiliation is the point enabling the return. Their perception and belief of self allows the strains to remain taunt at worst; centrifugal emergences.

Or perhaps I cannot see past myself. This may be the dilemma in the need to restructure a relational field in the wake of negativity, of the depressed position (Muñoz, 2006, p. 683). The critical scholar in me might obscure the potentials in the usages of signs, messages, and meanings. This is not an unproblematic ambivalence, but it is what it is, and essentially “not only does [the new Mestiza] sustain contradictions, she turns the ambivalence into something else” (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 101). Ambivalence is thus a tool rooting away from identity determinism, and in this “the new mestiza copes by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity” (p. 101). What could be wrong with telling people I am White? Is it a cover for safety afforded to me under a colonial colorist paradigm of race? What fidelity am I subscribing myself to? Is that wrong? Is it a strategy? Or more importantly, in a room full of other people, would

they ever believe me? Are the limits of ambivalence on the body? Or does this reinscribe the very boundaries of race and ethnicity? Or do these divisions encourage me to keep setting traps for myself? Will holding all of this break me?

Or is the liberation the capacity to watch it all, observe, and know how it moves, not as something I hold, but something grasped through hollow hands?. My judgment then takes on a new tonality, and the bitterness of my consciousness recognizing their shifts ruptured under such strain of potential. I think of what Muñoz explained in his visioning for melancholia was one in which “Individual subjects and different communities in crisis can use to map the ambivalences of identification and the conditions of (im)possibility that shape the minority identities under consideration here” (1999, p. 74). This next section will interrogate potentials within the mapping of sadness from the wake of such ambivalences.

Part Two: Relational Thresholds

I now shift into the second half of the chapter to focus on sadness and answer how Thomas, Isaac, and Roger construct queerness expressed as gay identity. I then summarize their ideations around protocols shaped by desire, including what is considered the ladder of cis gay desire. I then attend to the way it informs their capacities of inhabiting such aesthetic but also in constructing social bonds. I then look on relationality to pinpoint their relational thresholds on gay kinship, and their affirming and important bonds and values around friendship. I conclude with the sad of it all, assessing the way their sadness pushes them into certain compulsory activities. I conclude the chapter with their strategies of navigating sadness.

Thomas. When I asked Thomas if he had ever experienced any kind of sadness around the identity front we had just spoken about, he told me of one specific experience when dating a boyfriend some years ago. Thomas described him as a particular kind of White guy, sharing:

When I turned 21, I was dating a guy named Brad and he was like, the Whitest White guy ever. And his friends were all White; one Hispanic friend but she was Whitewashed as all hell. [He] drove a Mustang. That should have been my first warning, but I feel like he just, his life was just so White and so privileged because his dad owned a construction company and had a beautiful house and like-

The conditions he recalls here exacerbate a pronouncement of difference, whereby his ex was White and communicated so through the material and social conditions around and afforded to him. Thomas is unknowingly describing every other friend I had in high school and most of my previous boyfriends too. The confluence of these markers of “Whitest White” as he is about to share made navigating the relationship challenging:

I just never felt comfortable with him and even when he, when I met his brother, his mom, it is, never felt, like- it never felt comfortable and I always felt like I was very aware of the fact that I wasn't White with them. But I think that's the only relationship that I felt that way. I think others were similar but I think that was the worst one- 'cause even though my family had money, like, we didn't have *that* kind of money.

He pinpoints here the way money factored into his sense of discomfort and discontent- and that in that face of such wealth, Thomas experienced strain regarding the viability of the relationship.

He said that the prospect of making it work seemed daunting and internally he had to consider the following thoughts:

Like, I can do it a little bit, but can I do this every Thanksgiving? You know, like, with these people every single Thanksgiving? And watch what I say, watch what I eat, watch how I talk?

The exact interactions enabling him to garner an awareness of the social parameters of White wealth were not identified exactly in his words just now, but appear deeply rooted in his own self-awareness, like his mentioning earlier “I was very aware of the fact that I wasn’t White with them.” When speaking, it appears that from a realm of inward cognition before such external pressures, he was compelled to self-monitor and manage himself in these social scenarios. The idea of doing this in a long-term capacity deterred him from trying to make it work, fully aware of the labor required in the form of self-regulated communication.

The social effect of this kind of White wealth was palpable for Thomas. He then went on to name it as:

It was- I think social-economic and also racial-ethnic. He ended up marrying somebody who was literally his White brother, so like, it made- I feel like what I felt was very much true, like I wasn't making it up.

Thomas makes a subtle point here about romantic relational compatibility gravitating around a base of social familiarity, which in this instance can only be accessed and achieved when both White and familiar with a higher level of wealth. My own romantic relationships with White men lasted the longest when grounded from a similar social location of wealth that I was accustomed to interacting with. Bitterly, I do not like thinking about them.

Luckily, Thomas next touches upon the lingering considerations of self in the wake of the relationship as it deteriorated in this social-economic and racial-ethnic regard:

What's funny about that relationship is it was a really weird situation for me because I felt I was so Americanized. This was before I came to terms of being Mexican and being proud of who I was. It was- I was still struggling with wanting to be more, like, you know? Growing up in Mexico ruins, like— ‘oh you’re lighter skinned, you’re better.’ I

already had all that drama and then I'm dating this White guy- I'm trying to be so- I thought I had done such a good job like, becoming a White person.

Thomas works across different directions of explanation to better express the background of such efforts, "Then to be confronted with that" meaning the circumstances around dating Brad, "was so shocking because- this is weird!' He expands upon the nature of this weirdness:

Because like, I don't come from a very- I don't come from a poor family and I'm not like, dark. Everything that I thought was bad and I'm still not, like... That's when I realized like- you're never going to be that- like, stop. Stop trying to be that because you're never- you're just not going to get it like- no matter how perfect you think you are, no matter how hard you work, it's not about hard work. Like, stop thinking that if you work hard enough you're going to be a White person in America.

Thomas point-blank refers to economic ascension as depending upon a bodily morphology of race, which when codified in such a way becomes an impossible feat. As he widens his explanation of this social-economic and racial-ethnic strife, he reaffirms that while he believed he was situated in a more ideal social level of ethnoracial identity and wealth, it was inconsequential to and incompatible with White American wealth. And that after being perceived as better in these two ways, his sense of self became challenged as it came into conflict with Brad and his socio-economic place.

Accordingly, he has since worked through this. Thomas punctuated his recollection with the observation:

I think that's where a lot of like, Hispanic people, just- they insist on internalized hatred. And that's why there's Latinos for Trump because, like, what it's- because they think that if you work hard enough you will eventually become like, part of White Society.

This perspective holds two factors in hand, first, that there are Hispanic folk with internalized hatred but also that the gravity of the goal of socio-economic ascension in America is directly bound to the ultimate project of making oneself White. This feat, as he is describing, seems wrapped in many layers of sadness too.

To try to sort through the lingering sadness we are both touching upon, I segue into an affirming dimension of kinship this project is interested in understanding. I directly ask Thomas what are some spaces and relations where he feels desired in a positive manner. His answer is expectedly specific:

Like if you acknowledge the fact that I am- that my efforts to be perfect are working, then I feel wanted. So conversely from that I think that, you know- I've had a nose job. I've had lip fillers. I have botox. I have- there's so many things that I've done to kind of fit that ideal, what I think is the ideal gay.

The course of conversation importantly shifts trajectory into what will become a clearer tangent of the above on gay ideal embodiment, as well as sadness. Roger will talk about the same sense of gay on the body later, but Thomas's descriptions here remain unique.

He then more clearly expands how he relates to the requisite criteria:

For example, I'm super hairy and I hate that. Like, I hate that because I don't like that. I know that there is a group of- that look for that- but I don't like that on myself because I feel, again, I think this does- going to race things- because I don't look like a Latin guy.

I think briefly how he is talking about the gay subgroup referred to as Bears, or Cubs, or Otters, all a subset of terms explaining a desire coherence around mass and hair, as well as expectant forms and sexual modes of physical intimacy. Thomas pauses, chewing on the short contemplative silence before interrogating the possible root of his bodily aesthetic yearnings:

I want to look as good for a light-skin White male. So that what does that entail for me? Growing up in the nineties, that's being thinner, that's being hairless, that's being lighter hair and tan skin... So yeah- I think it's been very difficult in that- term of like, being desired sexually. Because I feel like I'm fighting against like, everything that I am to be something like the Abercrombie looking guy- you know what I mean?

I do get it- even though it is more accurate to say I grew up at the start of the new millennium, I am no stranger to the long enduring posters and ads of men, pale in their protruding and bulging muscularity.

In the blink of an eye, I register that I naturally have little-to-no hair on my body as he is about to recall in more specificity the hierarchy of gay bodily desire. In what he offers next, I find myself located closer to the target he is outlining:

Not...not super-thin, but thin and tall, and hairless- you know? Just those features; strong jawline. So a lot of those things I put a lot of effort in. So what I feel what that's created for me is I tend to- I tended to gravitate towards older men because I felt like they were grateful or like, thankful to have someone like me. And I think it's why I felt really insecure with White guys because they were what I wanted to be.

I note the tense shift and find a deep resonance in what he has shared. When I began initiating more carnal kinds of interactions, I gravitated towards similar crowds because they often agreed to meet without much reservation. A voice inside settles just behind both my ears, telling me that for the greater part of my 20s I somewhat naturally embodied these traits. I quiet it more easily than I did the mosquito, making more room to listen as Thomas continues. Despite all his efforts, he offers there is only so much one can do:

And so I think even if you shave your entire body, you still have five-o'clock shadow or whatever, so it doesn't make you feel like hairless 90s Abercrombie guy. So, yeah.

That's- that's a very deep question. I think it's hard to kind of understand that anyway, because you have to have a really deep understanding of yourself to kind of really know what you're talking about when you're answering that.

Thomas speaks most about experiencing the greatest resistance to who he is. These kinds of experiences have led to a uniquely heightened scale of introspection. Such a dance of knowing and reconciling the self in the face of disenfranchising meanings is never a finished project.

Thomas then returns to the intensity of this feeling and standard for gay men:

I think it just comes from the stereotypical "this is what you're supposed to look like as a gay guy"- you know? Like, women definitely have to deal with that, but you know- God!- can you- guys have to deal with that on a whole other level. And the thing that happens with gay guys I have seen is either they just don't care about those stereotypes and they love themselves and that's awesome, or like, you're obsessed with that. It's just, I don't know.

Regardless of the two paths towards self-value and affirmation, both are aware of the very stereotypes, and one's proximity towards its fulfillment. I think both places have a deep-rooted awareness of the schema informing how they ought to be and look in the gay world. I am probably somewhere in the middle at this point myself. Thomas thinks on this, and voices the ensuing difficulty, exhaustion, and futility of such endeavors and standards:

It's hard to be confronted with these, like, ideals over and over and over. And even married- like, my husband loves me as I am, he doesn't care- he thinks everything I do is ridiculous.

The “everything I do” refers to the procedures and cosmetic adjustments he undergoes electively. He continues on:

But like, for me I'm still chasing that and as I get older it's been worse because now other things that were good are like, getting- you know what I mean? Now you're fighting a clock too. Not ideal, so just kind of crazy. And do you know, with working out- now that I'm 37, I'm almost going to be 40, I'm like- “should I be a daddy now?” Do I need to like, bulk up, get steroids?

His attempts never stop and in their own way only open new boxes of expectations as time goes on. Age then is also a roadblock eliciting another dimension to work around on, and against.

Thomas pieces together the effects of such awareness and his lingering interest in bodily augmentations. Going into greater detail, he explains:

I literally don't think about the health part of it, you know? When I get plastic surgery or whatever I don't think about what can go wrong, I just- I'm so focused on looking a certain way. And something was steroids. Like my friends [said] “No. Absolutely not” - to inject steroids- “You’re crazy! You're going to ruin your body or your genes, or whatever!” But all I'm thinking about is like, “but I will look a certain way!” So I think that's kind of a dangerous thing for me, just ‘cause, I- I just don't think of the consequences. I think of the appearance.

The legitimate dangers and cautions do not stop or deter him from moving forward. The desire of adhering to the normalized protocols of gay body standards compel him to continue modification regardless of the consequences. Thomas digs deeper into the overarching social pressures:

So I think the number one important thing for the gay community, to be like, acceptable, is like, you have to be fit. You have to have a good body. You have to have abs. You

have to have big arms because if you don't- yeah. I think that's just- if you don't have that you're already, like, at a huge disadvantage.

In more words, he points out some conflicting elements in the ladder of desire, that ultimately further bolster a particular expectation of physical embodiment. He carves out:

Because you can be butt-ugly in the face but if you have a nice body it doesn't matter; that- or a big penis. Like a big penis and a hard body, like- it just doesn't matter who- doesn't matter who you ask, people are going to gravitate towards that, you know what I mean?

I have seen this centripetal force at several different gay clubs. Patrons stopped in their track and the middle of their sentences to fawn and gape with their eyes at the nearly nude go-go dancers stand in the spotlight with a glossy and gyrating muscularity. The second these bodies step out on stage everything stops. I just want to tell everyone to calm down, but their feet remain pointed forward, captured in the satellites of ideality orbiting loyally around, up, and over, from waist to shoulder- just like everyone's eyes.

Thomas details his frustration around this too:

And I personally- I've gotten kind of anti-that. So whenever I meet someone that has like, a really nice body and like super V-cut, like for example, strippers- I do not like strippers, because I just resent everything that I'm not going to be. So just, it bothers me that we glorify it so much. So I think that, definitely body is super important- penis size is super important in the gay community.

Are all these men under some spell? Is my weariness and frustration adjacent to Thomas's from a puritanical lens? Or is it the way most other bodies are recognized and compared to this standard

which subsequently informs how people interact with and treat one another? It is perhaps all of these things? Thomas circles around back to the ordered importance of face:

I think second would be the face. I think- you know- strong jaw, pretty teeth, pretty eyes.

Tall- you have to be tall. So these are all things that I don't have. That's kind of super frustrating and that was just my opinion; what I think people are looking for. But I think when you think about like personality, it really comes down to like, everything comes down to- people hook up with other people that I cannot stand, but they're hot. You have to be tall, so these are all things that I don't have. So it's super frustrating and that was just my opinion.

Thomas is painting a very different picture from the perspective I had of gay spaces, a picture where gay is not so much an identity label, but a complex, tiring, endless, and expensive form of acquiescing body into a very narrow set of likeness. He describes this though compared to his lack of embodying these traits. Perhaps gay is an ideality for him.

According to Thomas, this might be exacerbated in certain spaces that he does elect to place himself inside of:

Obviously those are kind of the situation that I put myself in, you know what I mean? I go to circuit parties, I go to all these places where this is a big thing for this, male perception. You know what- like, I don't I know. My husband is not like- Before we met he would never go to circuit party- would never go to situation with a bunch of certain of people because this is not his vibe. So I'm- I'm well aware of the fact that I'm putting myself in situations where these are the stereotype- the things that are valuable.

Thomas provides another example of his assertions of body as most important for gay social mobility above all other factors:

I don't know about you but I- I had so many friends who used to be so not attractive at all. Then they did steroids and all of a sudden they are like, the hottest person in the world. And like- it's the same face! It's the same personality! I think when you think about like, personality- it really comes down to like, people who look at other people that I cannot stand but they're hot. And that only happens in the gay community.

I smile hearing this. I find it hilarious, but also a good point. The use of steroids for gay body aesthetic is worthy of its own dissertation focus. This picture of gay spaces recalled from a sense of discontentment though continues to sound thoroughly unappealing.

Thomas continues belaboring the contradictions between paths of gay bodily modifications:

We all know it's steroids! And what's crazy about that is people talk so much shit about plastic surgery because I did get lipo too and people were like- I'm not someone who's secretive about stuff- I'm like all "yeah I got this, this, and that" but you know, when people get other stuff- when people do steroids- it's like no one says anything! But some of its like, "with her"- like all "well, she bought that body"- It's like, so did they! It's so, we are- the different standards of-

He trails off from the conflicting pieces here, shaking his head. Thomas does not present any of this in a neat or finished capacity. The way he works through this is done while directly implicating himself in all this. He proceeds forward in this exact fashion:

Here's the thing with me- I'll never be a super masculine man. So I think I play to the feminine parts of me [which] turn off most people because they don't want a feminine gay guy, they want a straight acting even if they don't say it. Like, it's kind of the rule because how often do you see two drag queens dating? Like, it happens but not really. I

think people usually get with the most masculine that they can based on their ability to attract a masculine man so- that's just my personal opinion.

His point on drag queens makes me chuckle once more. In the moment, I find his illustration is about the way femininity is not held as ideal in gay social arenas, so much so that femme-femme bonds are silly to even think about. Thomas resumes his disinterest in sweeping generalizations by downplaying his thoughts as just his personal opinion. And according to his outlined logic, the co-presence of a masculinized member is demanded to counterbalance feminine individuals in a partnership.

Returning to how he embodies a personal sense of femininity, he explains the affirmatory potential of doing so as a place-based enterprise. He begins more finely teasing out how things have changed across age and location:

So I think a lot of the times, especially when I started with the [facial] fillers, I was really trying to play up the feminine side of me. But just based on my age, I'm now 37, I live in San Francisco where people do not put up with that shit. Like, everyone here is super granola. There's no glam, there's none of that. So I think it's- feel in New Mexico, that you could show up at the club with a full face like, high cheekbones and like, a glitter outfit, and be- be like "yes Queen!" Here, it's not- they're not into that.

As explained before, this zone of predominantly White folk includes less people of Color, but in that, "granola" refers to a collection of people as a bit less friendly regarding personal expressions of gender. He recalls how in New Mexico he felt much more comfortable in these expressions, as well as the reasoning behind such choices:

In my twenties I would wear the most ridiculous things, again very much playing into a feminine side because I thought that was a stronger side. Like, it's easier for me to play

with my feminine side because it's what works- than me play with the masculine side because it doesn't work because I'm 5'-5." It's not going to work. I'm not going to look like a manly man ever. It's ridiculous.

For Thomas, his determination of playing into his feminine side as a strength also rests upon a recognition that a masculinized form of embodiment is never going to work, as a limiting factor also includes his height. For Thomas, ideal masculinity is characterized and made possibly through a taller stature, something that he does not have.

He touches more on certain ways he played into a feminine side, but with the retrospective sight that such acts are a thing of the past:

So I have a bunch of old outfits and I'm like what- what? You need to get rid of this!

You're never going to wear like, bedazzled Liberace white suit, like, just get rid of it!

You're never going to have special San Francisco.

Age is then a mitigating factor for Thomas, which is heightened by his new home place preventing such possibility of more typical personal expression. Thomas more specifically makes such a recollection next about his relationship to San Francisco and friendship:

You know what's funny? I think if I was still in New Mexico I wouldn't feel that way because I have my group of friends. So going out with a couple friends that I feel comfortable with, I don't care what I look. I don't care what I look [like] because I got my crew. But in here, in San Francisco because, first of all people don't do that and second, I don't have a group- so just me and my husband and I'm dressed like a peacock? Like it doesn't make sense.

His image of "dressing like a peacock," is vivid and on the cusp of funny, but here he is speaking of it as something he has been and is without in his new home. In his unfolding ideas, he relies

upon humorous points to mediate some sadness he experiences with his inadequacies for moving comfortably in social spaces and traverse the space between what he desires to be and what he is. Friendship for Thomas is a proven affirming and vital social resource for navigating his capacity to be himself, especially as such desire to do so becomes strained in social environments he does not feel comfortable in.

I can sense how important friendship is to Thomas. I ask him to share more about the topic and he kindly obliges:

I think always in my friend group I'm- all my friends, like, they're all very- well this is kind of not the best thing you could say but- they're all very much like me. They're all kind of Hispanic but- so, I do notice that like most of my friends are the Hispanics [that] don't speak Spanish- are not from Mexico if they are Hispanic. So that's where I feel the most comfortable I think because I don't feel I have to prove myself. I get their way.

They're kind of usually- sounds weird to say- but all my friends are very much- look like me. They all have the same skin tone, same kind of- so I don't feel like I have to ever prove myself, if that makes sense.

I have moved away from friends too, but have been fortunate to have a good group of friends over the years who have let me be myself in the face of different places and people continually depleting such possibility. For me though, I have never held or encountered a core group of friends that were reflective of my ethnoracial placements; the closest I got were White people who did not make fun of me for being Mexican.

Keenly, I ask Thomas for more details of how his friends identify. He elaborates in greater detail about their positions:

In New Mexico, my really good friend is- are Hispanics that have been there for generations. So they were- their parents' parents taught them not to speak Spanish, so they're like, loyal to that whole side of them but they're also not- "I'm not going to say I'm New Mexican," like they're kind of open to the fact that they are- So they don't identify as Mexican or Spanish or New Mexican, they just say they're Hispanic and kind of like me. They don't really go into the whole, like "what are you?" kind of situation, so I feel very safe there.

Thomas outlines an intriguing description of Hispanic here, though it might also more precisely include a flurrying array of migration and language history, where it is more neatly punctuated in "Hispanic." For Thomas, after outlining his trouble about the way citations of New Mexican heritage might also function as a denial of Mexican roots, Hispanic here works as an affirming contour for oneself and the other, where the complexity of such terminological embodiment and affiliation enables one another to be more aware and welcoming.

Thomas goes on to describe their group identifications on gender terrain:

Most of them are either girls or gay guys and yeah- I think that's where I feel safe. It's like, I feel like that's where I can dress however I want. I can make the jokes that I want. I can speak however I want. I feel respected and validated, you know what I mean? So I think that's probably the only place that's like- with a group of friends and like, it has to be at someone- at one of our houses where it feels like- just, you know?

In this, words might not fully express the feeling of these place and whether his tags of clarity at the end may or may not be inviting my own direct interpretation, I do fortunately know what it is like, and it can indeed be a sense that is hard to describe. Perhaps the difficulty in explaining this

is in the sense of distance between his recollections with me now and when they were more frequent occurrences.

I ask him if he has been able to access or craft any realms like the ones in New Mexico during his time living in San Francisco. His response then opens a new realm of thought concerning his recognition of apotheosized gay aesthetics in relation to gay friendship. He begins recalling:

I definitely want to have a good, like, network of gay people. Right now, like, my closest, closest friends are either girls or straight guys or like, couples that are straight. I do have groups here and there [that] are gay friends but I don't feel like I have that- like- I don't know. Maybe it's that Instagram life we are used to- all these gay guys on, going on trips together, and like- well, I wish I had that. I'm- I don't really have that per se but I do have like, groups of gay friends here and there. But it's important to me and I am trying to build up more a closer group of gay guy friends because I feel like it would be beneficial for me to have that, kind of like, camaraderie- like, sisterhood. I find it hard to kind of connect with gay people to be honest. In terms of, in terms of friendship- because I feel- I don't know. Because I started them later in life? I'm not really sure.

At this point in our time together, I am starting to feel bad and empathetic of the pursuit of the earlier mosquito. Maybe I am exhausting too, endlessly working for more information from each of his responses. Am I trying to dig into his skin- puncture and discover some ethnographic satiety? My theft of the mosquito's pursuit hits hard next.

Recalling the lack of gay kinship, he pinpoints his own behavior as the primary reason of failing to secure friendships with gay men:

Honestly, I think I'm a big part of that. I'm a big problem as to why I'm [not] having friends. I think when you first meet me in like, a social context, I come across a little bit- I'm conceited or arrogant? Or I think I'm better than people? Like, that's always a thing people told me, like, I seem nice but then I seem fake? So it's just really difficult for me to kind of let people in. So I think it is my own fault. And I think gay guys are more- so critical of that. Like, if you're not authentic or open right away, they kind of write you off.

I wish Thomas was more forgiving of himself. Thomas's introspections here all place him as the cause of this duress. And while it may be a legitimate and healthy concern- trying to understand yourself in relation to the other and how they perceive you, to forge friendships- his focus on trying to be more socially movable rests solely on him. At the pressure of such desires, he focuses on everything that he considers to be wrong with him.

This pressure becomes a burden that demands the individual make such augmentations. I have biases here too in my own struggle being considered arrogant. At times I feel that there is little space for brown people to be confident, much less act on it with any outwardness. He shares more of the root of his dilemmas around his communications in social sites:

Like I said, growing up with my mom we were not like the- loud ones or the- I will get to that point! I will become like, the center, like, sometimes when you hang out with me it's like an open mic night. Like, it's like I have a whole schtick comedy routine and am very personable. But from the beginning when you first meet me it's very difficult to gauge me because I'm like my mom- I'm very quiet and I come across judgmental. I come across like I'm looking at people the wrong way or I'm judging you for being loud or whatever.

So I think it's always been a struggle for me to kind of like, be- how do you say- down to earth? Or come across down-to-earth? Just because of that situation.

For Thomas, his propensity of being quiet or more reserved in social situations causes significant strain in forming friendships within gay sites. I try to get out of my own head, thinking about how I was often the one in the corner taking in the scene too, but often from a place of anxiety.

I work out of my own brain because I do not want to leave Thomas with an itching memory of his discomfort. I feel like I have only been a giant pest thus far. Not wanting to ruminate too much over discontentment, I next strive towards some kind of resolve for now and in that, he shares how he is happy with who he is:

I think I'm very- that's the one thing I'm happy with, I think- I'm who I am. It's not like, something that causes me any kind of sadness or makes me want to change. Like, I wouldn't have changed my ethnicity, I wouldn't change the fact that I'm gay. I wouldn't change the fact that where I come from. So I think- but that it took me awhile to get there. So if I had one thing to brag about, I think [it] would be that the fact that I was able to really come to terms of who I am, and like, understand who I am. And be grateful for who I am. And not want to change anything.

A wave of relief comes over me, blue like the screen he speaks with me through. Our penultimate focus on sadness felt very much here and now, something he was still caught in. It might be a little bit of both though, but in this neater summary, he offers he has moved more into an accepting and affirming realm of thoughts about himself.

I welcome the continual relief of his final thoughts:

So you know, growing up Hispanic, I think about- you- several times like, you are kind of taught that Whiter is better. So you kind of assimilate to that. You are also taught that

being straight is better. So I could not picture myself as a straight man. Like, it actually makes me, like- I would be so uncomfortable as a straight man. And you know I, I would have to say that, I'd be uncomfortable as a White man but I think, I- but I think I'm very happy with everything. So my identity as it is- as I have to find it- has taken me a long time to put it into- it's taken me a long time to find my identity. And I'm very happy with it. Like my role in identity- sexually, racially- everything. And I'm really happy with it.

The mosquito's hum, outside of and in my head all at once dulls briefly, a glorious and fleeting moment. And I consider too, that I might find myself in such a place one day as Thomas has just explained- maybe; hopefully. Or perhaps I am forcing resolution to temper my emptiness of fulfillment, of content, trying to remedy an annihilation of peace. A lot of pretty ways and words to avoid naming the jealousy I feel as our conversation closes and as I turn off the monitor and lamp, my thoughts turn dark just the same.

In the shadow of our conversation, my thoughts oddly ruminate on his recollections of dating Brad, his White boyfriend. It takes hold as a new kind of pest, findings its way into my ear, and just as soon, my thoughts. The first boyfriend I dated like this lived in the Chicago and was not "out." At the time I was attending school six hours south and things just naturally fizzled out. I held onto the image of him for years as the one that got away. He was a specter in my life. I attended parties with my roommate, a third-year law student, and would see his brother often. I received Tarot card readings and he would come up. My friends still asked about him. I kept tabs on his social media. I learned that it was, indeed, a small world one day when out of the blue he walked into the bar of the small college town where I was living. We were both excited to see each other, the spark lit again and we would take up correspondence until he found a new beau. He embodied everything I wanted, he had an apartment in the city, he had the fashionable

clothes, he had money, he was achingly artistic too. He was the first time I felt a hard body Thomas spoke of, too.

He was how, and with whom, I wanted to experience my twenties. I wrapped around the mental image of him the possibility and ideal of being together, of finding a way, maybe going to a school in the city. I met him in the holiday season, we held hands in the dead of winter, traversing the snow beneath our feet on the sidewalk. His apartment held the aroma of a green, seasonal candle, bursting out the olfactory construction of home. The two months out of the year encountering this smell brings visions of the glow of string lights in his apartment; him. It was short lived. He told me point-blank I was the one who got away. Whether he meant it or not, I still feel the same way. I still hold him in such regard.

Then there was Mitch, who was my Brad. Two issues plagued this relationship, first my own understanding of Critical Race Theory and the way we began having sex when he was in a putatively monogamous relationship with another person. I recognized a lot of his activity and disposition in alignment with the way Critical Race Theory conceptualized mundane instantiations of White Supremacy. He could at times be dismissive and callous, which were all acts and behavior I cognitively assigned to his experiences being socialized as a White wealthy man in America. We got into arguments, and depending on the timbre of his response, I would pointedly name it as indicative of his Whiteness. He never had been pushed to consider the reality of this possibility and was not capable of hearing my concerns through my own yelling and hurt.

We held one another at a distance for the first few months. We rarely saw each other. He did not live in town. When I found myself socializing, which was a rare occurrence, I was always hopeful he would be there. Now though, I cannot recall the first time we met or shared

conversation. All I remember is finally crossing paths and we hit it off from there. We were both intrigued, but again, from another distance, that of his putatively monogamous relationship with his boyfriend. We stayed out late, surrounded by his friends to perhaps justify and shield ourselves from the way we wanted one another. One night, we found ourselves in my bedroom, where even in the throes of attraction we struggled crossing the threshold of a physical distance. In the dark of night, we finally did and I realized I was profoundly in love with him, in the wake of our quiet and felt resolve. We shared a time together treading the shadows, until his boyfriend discovered our affair and ended their relationship. We were not exactly “in a relationship,” but perhaps, more accurately, dating and sort of together.

In the wake of his split, he moved into town. His parents helped him move in, and he conceded to do so from a place of honesty, open about the reason why. That weekend, we had a couple of days together around his parents. They were kind and friendly. His Father and I collaborated on a fruitful mission to get the couch into the narrow door frame of the new apartment. His Mother and I made easy talk about how her fitness tracker died before we spent an hour going up and down the stairs with all the furniture. Mitch told me that, at dinner, his mother upon meeting me quietly leaned over to his friend and shared her first opinion about me: “he’s gorgeous.”

In the dark of Saturday night between just the two of us, he told me how his mom cried looking out the car window as they drove into town. She lamented his move into such an area. For almost a year he had only commuted here for work during the week and returned home. This more rural area of Southern Illinois had its charms and perks, but I had seen people from larger cities struggle to feel comfortable. It was not a strongly wealthy area and a midwestern friendly working-class disposition charged the town. The next morning, we awoke to meet his parents for

a farewell breakfast. Pleasant conversation easily flowed across the table amongst the chatter filling the diner. The table was set by the landing of four cups and saucers, which were then filled with coffee beneath our sentences.

I sat looking at him next to me, to his parents across from us and then back down to my coffee. I stirred in sugar, then creamer; a treat I reserved exclusively for when eating breakfast at a restaurant. We talked, lifting the mugs up, pausing the sounds from our lips to sip. I drank to mask my nerves.

I left the spoon in my mug. This was something I never thought about. I settled on this strategy years ago, finding it gross and unsanitary to set it on the bare table. But sitting with everyone, resting my eyes on the table to again calm my nerves and worries of holding eye contact in the silence between our words, I realized they did not have their spoons in their cups. Their spoons sat on their saucers. My awareness had lapsed and I bore witness to the first instantiation marking our difference.

Like Thomas said of Brad, if I had ever thought of myself as inside some kind of circle, the spoons began my descent from such thought. The reflection of the spoon, lifted before my face tore apart the remaining sense of comfort I felt at the table. Its cold surface rending something I could not entirely name, think of, nor capture at that time. The relationship imploded a few months afterwards and then I moved out of town. In such departure, I put away the spoons in my mind, and now move to the second half of my conversation with Isaac.

Isaac. With Isaac, we broach this topic of sadness through matters of sexual orientation first. I ask if he thinks identity is of importance when considering a possible romantic partner. He harkens back to his first boyfriend, who he dated in high school to better explain his thoughts:

No, not like super important, but a small amount I guess. I guess for me in the relationship, maybe there was a tiny bit of jealousy for these girls that my boyfriend was telling me he had been with- things like that. Not a lot- just a little bit. And then on the other side I think it was difficult for my boyfriend at the time because I wasn't out to my family at the particular time of the relationship. So pretty much it was hard for him because it was kind of a secret for a while which is difficult and you don't feel valued 'cause it's kind of a secret.

For Isaac, identity does not matter as much in the prospect of a romantic other, the only item on this vector for him causing some friction was his boyfriend having dated before. But to him, he recognizes a mutual sort of trouble around the social dimensions of sexual orientation. If his boyfriend was speaking with me, it seems like Isaac suspects he might answer the question about desiring someone who was able to openly date another man.

In the face of Isaac's ideas, I ask if he was compelled to disclose the relationship. He unthreads:

The more serious we got, the more I wanted to post, the more I felt guilty about not sharing him. So yeah, I'd want to post about him because everything was being more public and I didn't want to- something to come back to my parents through the grapevine, you know- my family. I wanted to be the person to share that myself, so that's the most honest way, genuine way.

Social media to Isaac was an important aspect of dating, where making the relationship public occurs through such mediums. And in this, risk is involved in the way news may have gotten back to his parents and family. Trying to find resolve between his desire to share the relationship

publicly and be directly honest with his parents, he shares about the aftermath of the disclosure, and the feelings he held:

Definitely relief, because I felt like if something slipped- I don't know. They told me that I shouldn't post things about my boyfriend on Instagram or social media- friends, stuff like that. So I still didn't really [post things] but I was a little bit more lenient about things. I feel like [in] the long-term, it helps the relationship because of built trust with my parents. But I feel like it also maybe makes my parents worry more because they're so against it. At first it was hard but I think over time it's gotten easier, we don't really talk about it much or- yeah.

His openness shifts here and his shoulders come inward towards each other just slightly. He seems less inclined to speak openly about this compared to other moments we have just shared. I try to nudge forward gently, remembering the pain and shame I felt, and very much still experience in the fallout of my own disclosure to my family.

With tenderness, I ask Isaac how they responded to it then and how it is now. He looks at me, a thousand miles away on a screen and reaches his gaze out before him:

Then? It- I wrote it all in a letter and then I think my Mom read it in front of my Dad and me. And at first it was pretty difficult for them to take but they were just, more sad, like- because I was very vulnerable about all these things and how they've been treating me before. And why I was feeling so like- almost condemned? So they were feeling kind of guilty about that. They were feeling sad about that. So they told me that they love me.

Except that now, now we don't really talk about it at all. We just don't bring it up.

I steer him to consider his feelings about it all now. In some larger space of retrospect, he answers:

I'm totally fine with it because it's kind of awkward conversation sometimes. I'd rather not bring it up to be honest with my parents. Sometimes it's easier just to not bring things up. Otherwise it's going to go through some long bunny trails and places I would rather not go.

The prospect of talking about it with his parents requires opening old wounds or bracing for impact of novel items to feel bad about. For the better part of ten years, I have felt the exact same way. In many ways I still do, preferring my tremendous sadness and exclusion from the family over the threat of naming my hurt about it all, knowing deep down it will only ever be a futile and pathetic attempt to active some kind of change towards me, or at the very least apology and recognition of the sorrow they have caused. I ask what might be some obstacles that are preventing them from being open minded and outward about his sexual orientation. Without hesitation, Isaac outlines, "I would say, just- their blatant Christianity. Religion is mostly the main thing- just the Bible says that being gay is wrong, so, yeah."

I press once more, seeking how this aspect of Christianity has had an effect. In the back of my head, I question if my parents' dilemma is homophobia adjacent to Christianity. I think they just find it all gross. Isaac starts speaking and I bail from my inner thoughts:

I used to think it was a sin, like in early High School. And then it was just something that you had to cope with, you know? Like any other sin. However, I don't believe it anymore. Yeah, I just, point-blank can't believe it's a sin. So, yeah- I don't know.

This hits close to home, both in the moment and retrospective analytical process returning me to his ideas from during our time together. I fight against remembering how I coped and accepted my own annihilation in the face of a structure that interpreted my actions as unholy and a perversion of God's designs and intention. And once more, I am the mosquito buzzing around

the screen. Or better yet, a leech, a tick. I feel uneasy trying to reveal the undercurrents of Isaac's sadness here. No one told me research feels like this. Maybe it is not supposed to. I think I am in the deep end now and there is current of movement, commensurate to both of our sadness. I feel myself slipping into it, an upturn of force swirling against my chest and getting caught in my eyes. I try to take one step forward and find my footing.

Building from our direction of conversation, I ask directly if he had ever experienced any feelings of discontentment regarding this particular facet of identity. He points back to his time in high school once more:

When I was in high school and I was, like, Christian and thinking that being gay was a sin. And I was really trying to be, like, straight. But I was not masculine. I had a lot of feminine qualities about me and I was pretty insecure about it so- I don't know. I just never really tried with anyone because it's kind of insecure and so that made me feel- I don't know, not really unwanted, but I guess kind of?

His tone lifts at the end of his sentence, illuminating a pensive consideration. Putting into words the friction caused by frameworks teaching that queer folk are moral abjections is understandably difficult. I would not know where to start either. But here, the confluence of thinking being gay was a sin and attempting to be straight while not very masculine raises unique frictions. He continues on the way this led to him not pursuing romantic relations:

And then I didn't try with guys. And, like, guys I feel are easier for some reason for me. So, I guess it just felt like no one wanted me. Yeah, I felt asexual for a while. I was like, maybe I'm asexual?

His pitch climbs again as he assembles his thoughts. When I was the age he is describing I lacked the language and awareness to know about asexuality. He offers first how he felt that in

absence of any recognizable overt desire towards him, he believed no one wanted him, which he then organized into a now-available categorization of sexual orientation, i.e., asexuality. Was his turn to asexuality a way to find identification outside of heteronormative paradigms of relations? Is naming alternatives still within the grasp of its very logic?

His floating head on a throne of pillows shares some newer perspective:

I would say that most of my life- I would say I was bisexual but now recently I guess I have been more introduced to the term Pan? So I guess I would be Pan. But I would usually identify as bi. I understand it like bisexual- boys, girls and trans people, and I think that's mostly it. Just kind of like, all inclusive. And people that don't identify- yeah. People that don't identify in general would be included.

I ask if there was a time when he started feeling good, or at least better about himself in this regard. His face turns away from the screen. I work towards some important levity after all this feeling-sad talk. He turns forward and opens:

Probably once I came out it was like a relief- yeah. Yeah- I didn't have to feel like I was hiding or being secretive anymore- just kind of like a guilty feeling. And I felt like my boyfriend at the time appreciated me coming out because you know, it was difficult for me to [come out to] my parents and- yeah.

I notice this is the first time he relies on the phrase “came out.” Relief from guilt might be there in his recollection but not as some accomplished form of finality with his parents. Outside of this though, he did find some feeling of relief with his boyfriend who appreciated his effort.

I shift the conversation to ask where and with whom these kinds of feelings of relief might be generated now. He mulls over this for a fleeting second, then responds:

Maybe with, like- my girlfriends. My friends are girls, obviously. I don't know. They're not judgmental. They kind of- I feel like I've known them all for a while, so they know me pretty well. I'd say friends for the most part.

Isaac fills in some more gaps about his groups of friends, where “half of my friends are straight and half of my friends are probably gay or bi- less are bi, more are gay. All my friends are Hispanic or White.” This all resonates in harmony with Thomas’s words on the importance of friendship where duration is an important factor but also a shared grounding of social identity.

I ask him to speak more about his group of friends and he obliges, telling:

I have many small groups of friends or a couple groups of friends and then, like, individual groups of friends that don't know each other. Sometimes, yeah, little groups will hang out. Sometimes we'll get together for a big party but not in a while- a long time unfortunately. Yeah, yeah- I don't know. They're all really nice. They're pretty encouraging.

Thomas described something like this too. A core group of friends but also a few different ones. But there is no mention of yearning for the more normative, mainstream gay factions like Thomas recalled.

I ask Isaac what might be some actions that make someone a good friend to him and leave him feeling valued. His cadence lifts and I think we may have arrived at a more positive topic:

Okay honestly, um- like loyal- being a good responder, text back and actually hang out with me. Some people just don't text back- leave me on read- which is not cool. Not cool at all. So, no- my friends don't do that. They do not. But- what else? I guess someone who is like, excited- someone who like, pushes me to do fun things.

So loyalty, fun, enthusiasm, and dependability are all important traits. Action matters and becomes indicative of a friendship of substance. He details more items of value regarding friendship:

I guess like, just having a good vibe to be honest. If you have a negative vibe I don't want to be around you. If you have a positive vibe that's really important to me. And like, if we can communicate clearly and have the same humor.

He does not expand on what negative means, content to leave it in his subjective sense. But I imagine “positive vibe” largely captures the sensibilities he mentioned before of fun, enthusiastic, and loyal.

His thoughts so far have focused upon the existing friendships which are largely with women. He has yet to mention his ideas on the significance and value of friendship with gay men. I speak directly of this interest and he shares his thoughts on the matter:

I like variation in my friends, people who I hang out with and do things with. So I really appreciate different thought processes from a different personality/friends. So I really appreciate everyone's- I don't know- just appreciate the way they live their life. And I think that's like, a good thing. I don't know how to answer that. I don't know. You can learn something from everyone, so- yeah, totally. Like, straight people?- cool.

So while queer friends are important, an array of diversity is too. For him, this includes straight people. Affirming queer bonds is important, but not a singular or exclusive goal of his. Isaac is open to all people, which I find a refreshing attitude. He sutures these thoughts on desired friendships to a current sense of lack:

I feel like I need to open myself up a little more because I feel like I click well with gay people but I don't click as well as with straight people, especially guys. So I'm trying to

look for more friends that are straight, mostly guys- but I don't know. It's kind of difficult for me. I don't know why but- I don't know. Really thinking about it now, maybe there's like some [issues of] comfort to it for me? I don't know why but maybe it's just, with new straight friends? I don't know? Maybe because I've had judgment in the past- but I don't know.

For most of my life, my close friends were all women. I did not start making platonic friendships with straight men until my late 20s. I once did an undergraduate project about my discomfort forming friendships with all men, regardless of sexual orientation. I am not sure how to measure its success. I still sweat when trying to have conversation with men, especially when they demonstrate an interest in me. I am not sure if I exactly yearn for a relationship with straight men, but I understand Isaac's feelings here about comfort, and especially as he values diversity in friendship, it makes sense that he wants to fill in the gaps of these goals.

I lean into his points on comfort and ask him if there are places that affirm his identity or make him feel all warm and cozy inside. He pushes back, saying:

I don't think it's really important to me. I feel pretty comfortable everywhere I go. I think maybe the most comfortable I would be, with- I don't know. One of my girlfriend's house is like, super comfortable.

So, as he feels comfortable everywhere he goes, seeking out affirmatory spaces are not on the forefront of his mind or acting desires. I try to sift out the gayness once again in his inclusive spirit and sentiments, questioning if he has been a part of the Albuquerque gay scene. Isaac first notes the lack of gay spaces in town. "Well in Albuquerque we don't have good ones. We don't have clean modern ones- I'll say that. They're like, dilapidated. Super dilapidated and sketchy looking." I laugh and name one that easily comes to mind, and to my surprise he shares that they

have recently renovated and have a whole new vibe. In my mind, I picture white walls and red plastic furniture, as if Ikea had a campy sub-brand.

Asking about his involvement in or kinship to the Albuquerque gay scene, he says “I wouldn't call myself or say that about myself. However, I would say some of my friends, like some of them do.” He tells me that the closest he gets to this is partying with them on a few occasions. I ask what these nights look like and he casually unravels, “usually happens at night with a lot of dancing, a lot of music.” He hesitates just barely before issuing, “maybe some drugs. Maybe- maybe like a big pool party or something like that?” He punctuates the end of his thought, “With a lot of men in jockstraps- and drugs to be honest.” I have never been to anything like this but it sure sounds like a party.

He shares more about how it was a good time and touches on the best way of interacting that enabled the fun he had:

Yeah. I had a- yeah- I had a blast. Like a really fun time. Everyone was nice. If you are shy they won't be nice; not necessarily [not] being nice, but it's like, talkative or just including in conversation- what I think is nice. And you have to really be, I don't know, upfront about introducing yourself and things like that. So you don't do that, it's not going to be a good time. People are probably going to look at you weird or like “who's that?” But if you just introduce yourself to everyone that- I had a blast- because I feel like I knew everyone. I was comfortable and all my friends were there and just dancing. It was a good time, yeah.

My mind takes a couple steps back to when I spoke with Thomas and the roadblocks he experienced in making gay friends. The issues become clear and align neatly with Isaac's story. According to Isaac's successful navigation of these spaces, the best way to enter and engage is

directly and openly. I have more the Thomas style of interaction. Isaac recalled that he was not always able to freely socialize, and how he got himself to start being more open:

I was pretty shy most of my life until about mid-college. Then I kind of forced myself to introduce myself to other people and meet new people and I started to enjoy it. Yeah- I'm pretty good in any environment that requires talking a lot, so I feel like I communicate and I'm a good listener.

Perhaps such skills do not come easily and need to be worked at in order to garner success. Such feats sound possible and attainable, but definitely require some discomfort upfront.

I ask Isaac about his sense of fidelity to these gay groups, if he feels more aligned as himself when with them, or if he feels at home in any sort of way. At this point in our conversation, he becomes the most animated, approaching the question wide-eyed:

No. No. Because it was kind of extreme, like, at some points there were like, people doing- just in jockstraps- you know, doing things. And I'm like, "okay that's a little much," you know? So I wouldn't say that I'm like, "yeah! This is who I'm meant to be with!"

I imagine he is alluding to some variation of public sex acts at the parties, which seem to hinder his identification with these specific groups. Perhaps this is where his enjoyment of diversity ends. I think if I went to some event with just an evening party in mind, I would have similar feelings of confusion at what the evening turned out to be. Perhaps with some planning I could be down for such festivities. My point is that I do not think Isaac is being prudish, just understandably miffed.

At this juncture, I hear a loud sound suppress his voice and he tells me his battery is nearly dead. I take our remaining time together to tie up some loose ends but as the evening light

settles he is harder to see on the screen. Dusk has set in on my end of the conversation too. I thank him for sharing some time with me, especially for the tail end of our conversation about coming out, his experience in social scenes, friendships of importance, and his general value on diversity of groups. I take a second to apologize for not being able to offer him any money for his participation in the research. He laughs and tells me it's fine, and we settle on sharing a playlist as friends. We end the call, and my mind lingers on some possible songs as the room turns dark.

Roger. In many ways, I begin this project where it ended, with Roger as a bookend of my time in Albuquerque, one of the first friends I made, interviewed, and thusly organized as such in this section. And like our first bonding threads were ultimately about the breed of our dogs, he sits across from me, absentmindedly petting my dog, Bruce. We have been speaking for a while now, after our updates and some initial points of investigation. At this point too, I have found the ability to match his conversational caliber. In it, I asked a bit crudely if he ever hung out with “a bunch of Albuquerque gays,” hypothesizing such a group concretely exists like some velvet mafia. I want to get into his feelings about friendship. He explains he did one time, and when I asked how it was, he just put out: “Drama.” He paused a moment, then add, “and drugs,” and then “and liquor.” Curious now to check if I had truly been missing out on a good time, I asked him what kinds of drugs. Roger told me cocaine, “yeah, ton of cocaine. A lot of cocaine.” He then thought for a moment and added, “Ecstasy. Ketamine.” If this was in fact the space I had been dreaming about gaining access to, I imagine I would not have lasted the night. I always err on the side of caution and, lacking a general familiarity with “party” drugs, am honestly too anxious to have ever tried anything unless in a trustworthy and comfortable environment.

I hold this in my head as he elaborates that the “one time” he spent with this group was over the course of one summer. I asked him how it was and with a measure of keenness he said:

Party every night. It would be like- they knocked that club down- it wasn't Pulse- but it was on Thursday night. I forgot the name of that place. And it was packed. And then Friday would be The Pulse.

I ask why he stopped hanging out with everyone. He pauses to recall “mmmm, why did I?” before remembering, “Oh. I kept calling in to work every Friday for like, six months.” I start laughing and he continues “‘cause it's hard to party and work out. I had another friend, group of friends in Santa Fe that were like, hardcore lifters and you can't be doing cocaine and all kinds of other shit.” I had a couple of years when going out every night became difficult, especially with a routine that had me awake just before five A.M. to then complete an hour-long excruciating exercise program. There were a couple times I went hungover, and it was as awful as one would expect. My body then had to struggle to recover from two exhausting events.

The Roger I know mostly keeps to himself. Besides work, working out, and spending times with close friends, he is not a regular in any of the bar scenes, gay or straight. Subsequently, I ask him how he met the Albuquerque gays. “Two guys from Albuquerque moved to Santa Fe and they started going to the gym that I went to, and I got to know them.” This experience then seems more happenstance than the result of some deliberate course of action. He fills in more details: “I had moved to a different gym at that time and then I saw that dude there and talked to him one time.” After that, according to Roger, is when they would become friends. Talking about that one dude, he shared more detail:

[That dude] had moved down with his boyfriend, and then- It's weird. It's weird 'cause we were there drinking one night, and then uh, I laid on Mark's bed and Mark tried to

kiss me, so then I got up and I went to Peter's bed and told him what happened, and then, yeah- it just happened.

I am unsure if he met Mark or Peter first. Either way, he became friends with both of them and then in the course of their friendship have a threesome. Roger revealed that Mark and Peter had moved to Santa Fe to try and repair their relationship. Getting out of Albuquerque was their idea of how to make the relationship work. Besides Mark and Peter, and the summer of the gays, Roger says that's all there is on gay friends.

I pause, then ask him plainly if having gay friends is of importance to him. He returns my question with an observation that in its own way is an answer, "I don't really have any gay friends. One I think, two; you." I pry out one reason from him, "They're just too much drama. And I'm kind of a homebody. I don't want to be out doing stuff- know what I mean? It's hard when you have four dogs." As I mentioned before, we share the same breed of dog. I have just one who requires a profound amount of attention, so I fully resonate with the reasoning for his homebody proclivities.

The dilemma of a gay group of friends was also challenging for him because "Being out and about, I dunno- it's hard to be out at the club. And it's expensive. And I don't like being up 'til 2 in the morning." I ask him more about the drama and he begins, "Uh, I don't know- just- I just stay away from drama. I just don't like people's problems and if you're gonna harp on it, and- 'I hate my job, I hate my life' shit like that." He dwells on this idea for a little longer, answering my question about whether friendship with gay people is important to him:

I just, I don't really care. I just don't like nagging- negativity. Just um- be positive and have a good time. I hate- I had a friend that was gay and he would just brown cloud all the time. And I finally just quit fucking talking to him.

Negative in this way, something I usually think of as an internal thing, rings like what Isaac spoke of as a kind of palpable social pollutant. For Roger, drama in a social terrain signals not just interior conflict, but pours out, negatively impacting the social space as a recognized, unwelcome register of feeling.

Talking about his one former friend who exhibited this, Roger recalls more about that one specific individual:

And then, like, he had no speaking skills whatsoever. He would just look at you with his mouth open. Like, dude- you started talking to this guy and now you're just there looking at him with your fucking mouth open. It's like- say something! So then I have to go in there and then- they're just stupid.

This ascription to lack of intelligence is a salient theme when speaking with Roger about gay people in Albuquerque. Most of his experience fizzles on such grounds. In another moment, he spoke of this impression. "The gays here, they just- think they're smart. They want to party every weekend and um, buy expensive Louis Vuitton shit to make themselves look wealthy- know what I mean?" So while his return to attributions of intelligence can be around one instance of one person lacking proficient social speaking skills, I think his other point here might be about falling into shallow and consumerist habits, and that this facade is a common exercise. Roger resolves on punctuating his thoughts with "Yeah- they're stupid. They have- who are you trying to impress? Know what I mean?" The point about trying to shape other people's impressions here is important and gestures toward his perspective on the stupidity of relying on material goods to bolster one's place and role in the gay scene social realm.

I wonder if money was a roadblock to my ease of entry into gay friendships as much as my anxiety issues have been. As much as I have been able to access and enjoy certain

materialistic items, I have for the better part of ten years been very poor. I press once again about his feelings around gay groups of friends, and he says:

Um, I'm kind of selective, I guess. I don't like to be around like, really queeny gay guys.

Er, they have this little dainty voice, or just the way they dress and talk and- I'm not a fan of that- know what I mean?

I ask him plainly "how come?" and he speaks as if he is stating the obvious, "I dunno, because I'm attracted to men because I like men- know what I mean? I don't want you to be, like, part girl." His desire for men who act within a normative regime of behavior and embodiment bleeds into who he also prefers to be around.

He went on to tell me that he once got close to someone who was "kind of fem. He was just, uh, then he'd hang out with, um, this feminine feminine uh, native guy, and then two lesbos." Only in this group of friends for a brief time, he offers "that dude wanted to date me, and then he took me around his friends, and he'd make food and stuff, ya know what I mean? But I just wasn't- I didn't get into him like that." I asked about other reasons why he might have been less interested, to which he responded, "Um. I didn't like his build" and "well, he had a really weird nose and then his teeth were like, jacked." He speaks more about the teeth thing, which reminds me again of something Thomas mentioned; a good face is the second highest aspect in the gay order of aesthetic desire. "Yeah. Teeth are my- the- one of the first things I look at actually. And then um, he had a lot of estrogen build up. Like, um, his ass was real big and his thighs and stuff." Roger the bodybuilder speaks from a particular vantage point about bodies, but I have to say I had never heard of such specific attributions of femininity as a hormone of the body that everyone has. To him, though, it has a recognizable, visible effect. Roger expands upon this, telling me "as you get older, like, especially if you have that much estrogen/fat- you're

never gonna lose that shit.” Femininity on the body for Roger is directly linked to the hormone estrogen.

In a quick transition to the topic of sadness is Roger replies that he had felt such feelings, “sometimes, maybe ten years ago.” When I asked what he remembers and how he moved through it, he concisely lays out “I didn’t do anything different I don’t think, just...He pauses for a few seconds. I carefully interjected, “it just passed?” He agreed, “yeah, just passed.” When I asked what it was like to move through, he returned to general uncertainty, “I don’t really change up, I’ll just- gym- know what I mean? Go to the gym, come home, make food.” This is the most I can tease out of his laconic conversational disposition. His discomfort and unwillingness to discuss it further, despite my prompts, encourages me to change the topic of conversation. Even in the collaborative space of our speaking, the insistent attribution of this kind of experience and feeling to the past is interesting and like Isaac in the way that it becomes isolated as separate from now; I briefly consider when I might get to such a place to consider my own sadness. I am not there. I am unsure if I ever will be.

I ask Roger to talk a little bit more about why he likes going to the gym so much. He easily interjects, “If not I’d probably weigh 500 pounds. Plus, I’ve been chubby, so I don’t want to be fat again- know what I mean?” Roger’s question is complicated. Whether he was aware that I spent much of my life under the category of “obese,” and would fluctuate across eating disorders in their full swing of intensive gain and loss, I came to realize he was only speaking rhetorically. When I met him I had been in a relatively stable state of body for a year or so. As I sat next to him during our conversation, I was at my smallest frame. I ask what dating was like when he was bigger and I learn, “Shit, I didn’t date ‘till I was 28,” only after he shifted from his bigger frame.

Shifting to close our conversation, he would become wholly frustrated at my attempts to ask him about identity throughout the interview. He looked at me, explaining in a frustration only demonstrated through the quality of his voice that my questions “aren’t applicable here [in Albuquerque].” I look at his, perplexed, and he exclaims:

Because no one’s smart enough to answer them! I mean, you’re looking for, like, questions on people like “hey, are you Latino?” and stuff like that but here no one cares, you have to do [the research] with- where people are a little bit more educated and have goals and shit.

I find it ironic that his most verbose moment is when telling me that the research focus is not relevant. Roger explains his lament in more constructive detail, which better illuminates where he thinks intelligence would be happening: “These are questions for like a big city type, uh- like someone from New York or Seattle or where there’s like, a huge gay scene, like even Denver. The gay scene here is pathetic- know what I mean?” I do, but I don’t, which is sort of the reason for this entire project. I laugh mostly to assuage the thought that I may have really fucked up this project.

Analyzing Relational Thresholds

To recap, the first section of this chapter revolved around Isaac’s, Roger’s, and Thomas’s considerations of identity around cultural and ancestral foci. Notions of gay identity did not arise during their contemplations about identity. The participants did not express a precise cultural affinity with the term as a label or marker of identity. Gay was less expressed in identity terrain and instead worked to name a social mode of interaction among gay men. Gay here became arranged and defined in relationship to the aesthetic standards governing certain social interactions around desire, additionally providing a mapping of idealized forms of masculinized

embodiment. I refer to this as the ladder of cis gay desire. Additionally, discussion with Isaac and Thomas also outlined paths for successful plutonic social bonds in communities of gay men. I then attended to the way both items inform their social relational organizing logic, as well as beliefs of companionship with gay men. At the end, I turned to sadness as it was expressed and negotiated by Thomas, Isaac, and Roger. The first part of this section considers the feelings generated around the standards of gay hyper-aesthetics and their unique relationship to such propulsions of desire. The second half of this section then explored sadness as emergent of experience outside the registers of gay normative desire. The final portion of this section then recalled my respondents' strategies for negotiating their feelings of sadness and the queerness in such unforeclosed ruminations as a project of anti-normative feeling

The Ladder of Desire. I pull the following conversation into this section in order to chart the ladder of desire, a structuration of hegemonic masculinity on the body, and determining a social web and access into sites of gay men. The first time Roger outlined the interactive template of the ladder, he did so implicitly in recalling the order of qualities sought after in sexually oriented interactions. Initially, on the topic of order regarding ethnoracial identifications, Roger conveyed that such occurrences do not happen given a lack of intelligence, as “Albuquerque doesn’t have people who are smart enough to even think about stuff like that to tell you the truth. Yeah- these people, they have no common sense to even look, like, into that.” In a later moment he once again expressed frustration at the irrelevance of my ordering of ethnoracial item at the top of the list of inventory items, saying “No one’s smart enough to answer [the interview questions]! I mean, you’re looking for, like, questions on people like ‘hey, are you Latino?’ and stuff like that but here no one cares, you have to do [the research] with- where people are a little bit more educated and have goals and shit.” Once again, towards the end

of our conversation, Roger better explained his lament, “These are questions for like a big city type, uh- like someone from New York or Seattle or where there’s like, a huge gay scene, like even Denver. The gay scene here is pathetic- know what I mean? His reasoning as to why the gay scene is pathetic revolves around the lack of gay spaces, “because how do you have this huge gay following, but yet you only have two or three gay bars here in the whole town?” For Roger, identity questions are not wholly irrelevant, but instantiate in larger populated and diverse cities.

As Roger established that ethnoracialized distinctions do not matter, he made clear that for him a certain type of question is more relevant. Emblematic of this ordering happened when I asked how he would identify in a scenario where someone is interested in him for a sexual encounter and ask what he is. Roger offered he would answer “Latino,” then joke, saying he would use “Daddy.” He went on to and tell me that when approached by people for possible sexual exchange, they “don’t really ask too many questions,” where he would then paraphrase the requests that do occur are often transmitted crudely online as, “Send me a dick pic and let’s get it on.” Roger corrected me even further on the standard protocol of such exchanges, where again, ethnoracial pieces are not the principal token of inquiry. He better expands the idiosyncrasies of such brazen requests as the first step when being solicited for sexual interactions is that “If you look decent, they wanna see what you look like.” The second step is more precisely being asked “for, a- a dirty picture.” The third step in this arrangement revolves around cock and size, specifically noting next, “and then if it’s big enough, then you can [proceed forward and meet]- know what I mean?” Bridging his more coded points, where he originally stated, “and then if *it’s* big enough, you can *go*,” “It’s” as “it is” refers to cock size and “*go*” indicates moving forward and meeting where sex acts would then occur. Whereas Roger

only touched vaguely on the significance of body in his ordering, he covertly described such importance through the value of “look[ing] decent,” enacted and proved by then asking for a dirty picture; all of these are gatekeeping tactics to screen out the people who do not fit into the structure and order of ideality, where again “looking decent” and cock size are the first steppingstones.

Throughout our conversation, Roger consistently tagged his sentences with “know what I mean?,” seemingly attempting to speak to our assumed shared experience. His use of these confirmatory tags might also indicate a desire to confirm that he is not speaking in a vacuum, which directly involves and implicates me in conversation as a way to better affirm and substantiate his ideas. And truthfully, what he described is almost exactly how we met, which only happened after step one of exchanging non-revealing pictures to one another. The foundation of our companionship was premised on these protocols and our awareness of their requirements for navigation.

Thomas detailed in richer clarity the criteria and fundamental desire of a specific kind of bodily appearance, where he pointedly said, “I think the number one important thing for the gay community, to be like, acceptable, is like, you have to be fit. You have to have a good body.” For Thomas, having a “good body” is necessary beyond just sexual exchanges, in this case a needed item to be acceptable in mainstream sectors of the gay community. He described the particularities of “good body” even further as he said “You have to have abs. You have to have big arms because if you don't- yeah. I think that's just- if you don't have that you're already, like, at a huge disadvantage.” This scope of detail expanded Roger's statement on what counts as “look[ing] decent.”

Thomas went on to emphasize just how much bodily form matters compared to other features. Chronicling the next rung of the ladder, Thomas said, “You can be butt-ugly in the face but if you have a nice body it doesn't matter; that or a big penis. Like a big penis and a hard body.” He went on to cite the popularity of the shared sentiment by gay men, “Like, it just doesn't matter who- doesn't matter who you ask. People are going to gravitate towards that, you know what I mean?” Voicing his frustration, beliefs, and behaviors of avoiding people who inhabit such peak ideals, he reconfirms “So I think that, definitely body is super important, penis size is super important in the gay community.” And again, the initial prompt of aesthetic yearning lodges the muscularity above other features of one’s body, where Thomas pointed out “you can be butt-ugly in the face, but if you have a nice body it doesn’t matter.” Thomas explained the next sequential piece in detail, “I think second would be the face. I think- you know- strong jaw, pretty teeth, pretty eyes. Tall- you have to be tall.” Roger had confirmed this too on a personal note when he explained “Yeah. Teeth are my- the- one of the first things I look at actually.”

The generalizations here are seemingly simple- “nice body,” “pretty teeth,” and “looking decent,” but are thoroughly dense organized trajectories of desire as an aesthetic bodily compulsion for both consuming and embodying. The “butt-ugly face” thus becomes further permissible in the presence of a large genital organ. Specifically, as Roger reflected on “if it’s big enough,” Thomas added in concert with Roger’s thoughts that a butt-ugly face is inconsequential in the presence of “a big penis and a hard body.” The divorce of good body/butt-ugly moves as a contrasting description of the elements which are arranged as a competing grid projected onto the body. That is, elements are not necessarily understood as in harmony with each other, only in gross competition to the assigned incongruences of the aesthetic field of value

rendered upon corporeal features. The aesthetic descriptors at this point have been purely left at visual impression but obtained a new contour of description as a hard body. “A hard body” becomes to a degree premised on interactive experience with these kinds of bodies, yielding a description relying on the tactile, felt sense of experience. While the descriptor may be held as an abstract awareness, pointing to imagined instantiation of physical touch, these are no longer plainly visual physical characteristics but maneuver towards a touching kind of feeling beyond the ocular field of recognition.

Before finishing his list, Thomas placed himself in relation to these values, expressed through, “So these are all things that I don't have.” His next statement finishing the list came out in seemingly fragmented bits, mediated through experience and feeling, “But I think when you think about like, personality, it really comes down to like, everything comes down to- people hook up with other people that I cannot stand, but they're hot.” He again pieces together “you have to be tall,” then positioning himself once more in relation to these features from a place of lack, noting the feelings emitted from such place, “so these are all things that I don't have. So it's super frustrating.” He neatly described this entire aesthetic project as the “Abercrombie looking guy” who is “Not, not super-thin, but thin and tall, and hairless- you know? Just those features; strong jawline.” He uses this image to collapse and ground in one figure through the sum of its parts. And the recognized totality of the criteria is not an observed and distanced awareness but held in tension with his direct ability to cross the threshold of object into a realized, personal zone of occupation. The list detailed by Thomas and Roger is quite extensive and involves a pronounced number of criteria and a detailed awareness of gay social protocols and expectations. Thomas determined that such inhabitations of these idealized bodily features might thus signal a corporealized inhabitation constituting what is regarded as masculine embodiment itself. While

being physically couth was valued greatly, femininity though, beyond not being tall was not exactly named.

The parameters of femininity were only spoken of when contrasted to what masculinity is, spoken in a sense of lack:

I'll never be a super masculine man. So I think I play to the feminine parts of me [which] turn off most people because they don't want a feminine gay guy. They want a straight acting [gay guy] even if they don't say it.

The ladder of cis gay desire, turning on a masculinized axis, then ascribes no value to feminine characteristics or qualities and thus masculinemen are more desirable and become the exemplar of what counts as masculine. Thomas used an example to better demonstrate his point of straight-acting gay men as most desirable:

...like, it's kind of the rule because how often do you see two drag queens dating? Like, it happens, but not really. I think people usually get with the most masculine that they can based on their ability to attract a masculine man so- that's just my personal opinion.

So where feminine qualities are the bottom of the ladder, such value ideation becomes emergent in the way gay men desire to render themselves in an attempt to garner the most masculine man they can, but also allows them to openly express hostility towards queer femininities (e.g., Eguchi, 2009). In this, ideal ladder masculinity is not just a goal of personal fulfillment, but then becomes mapped in relation to one's projection and project of desire. Per Thomas's perspective, masculinity is not just the goal of aesthetic being, but the field players need to occupy for the match to ever commence, and is less forged through behavior but left largely upon dimensions of corporeal aesthetic.

Roger outlined a similar disposition of desire which relied upon openly disparaging feminine men. When speaking of what he looks for in a partner he shared:

Um, I'm kind of selective, I guess. I don't like to be around, like, really queeny gay guys.

Er, they have this little dainty voice, or just the way they dress and talk and... I'm not a fan of that, know what I mean?

This stands as a principle of what Thomas outlined as the general stance on desire for masculine gay men. Roger's descriptors are more thorough than what Thomas outlined, isolating voice, dress, and manners of speech as indicators of what qualifies as feminine kinds of gay men, or as Roger notes, "Queeny." Roger then expanded to justify his position on such sentiments of desire at my inquiry as to why he feels the way he does, working beyond personal selectivity into an assumed common threshold- "I dunno, because I'm attracted to men because I like men- know what I mean? I don't want you to be, like, part girl." Femininity becomes bonded to a rigid gender binary, read on and through the body. Femininity then too became determined as a different mode of incarnation, less of having features, and more so as traits of conduct. If masculine ideality is described in a state of action for acquisition of a precise aesthetic -- i.e., an accomplishment of having -- then femininity is viewed as a characterization vis-à-vis one's behavioral activity.

Roger, though, was not very shy when determining the physical attributions of feminine characterizations when remembering a previous friend who wanted to be with him in a romantic capacity. In a fuller description, Roger cited one example of hanging around, "this feminine-feminine native guy," but Roger "just wasn't- I didn't get into him like that." Roger isolated many features on the body, saying first, "I didn't like his build," before jumping to describe his face as having "a really weird nose and then his teeth were like- jacked." He would note that

“teeth are my, the- one of the first things I look at actually,” before launching into one of his most specific opinions of femininity on the body, “then um, he had a lot of estrogen build up like, um, his ass was real big and his thighs and stuff. As you get older, like, especially- if you have that much estrogen, fat- you’re never gonna lose that shit.” He supported his assertion visually during his recollection of “like, his thighs were *like that*,” holding his hands more than a foot apart to emphasize his point of estrogen on the body, charting the designation of this person as feminine. He surmised again, “like a girl- know what I mean?” His confirmatory attempt in this instance might again be a twofold project, to affirm that his description made sense when retelling the information of his experience, and also striving to confirm his perspective of feminine men as undesirable upon a shared ground of logic between the two of us as fellow gay men. The ladder would then become an assumed shared standard, and loyal position of thought within the prohibitive limits of cis gay desire.

Isaac touched on his experience general, yet not specifically as occurring within gay realms:

When I was in high school and I was like, Christian and thinking that being gay was a sin. And I was really trying to be like- straight, but I was not masculine. I had a lot of feminine qualities about me and I was pretty insecure about it so- I don't know.

He became flushed in this moment, before explaining that his feelings of insecurity became joined to questions of his sexuality:

...I just never really tried with anyone because it's kind of insecure and so that made me feel- I don't know, not really unwanted, but I guess kind of? And then I didn't try with guys. And like, guys I feel are easier for some reason for me. So, I guess it just felt like no one wanted me. Yeah, I felt asexual for a while. I was like, maybe I'm asexual?

In the absence of experiences of being desired, such feelings were pronounced enough to propel Isaac into considerations of himself as asexual. This experience again is not necessarily solely rooted in just gay sites but works too as a general logic and belief about men and masculinity, but has more complicated levels in gay sites.

Thomas believed the ladder structuring of desire was widely shared and derived "...from the stereotypical 'this is what you're supposed to look like as a gay guy' - you know?" And he went on to explain how it is a unique spell of its own, "Like, women definitely have to deal with that, but you know- God!- can you- guys have to deal with that on a whole other level." And in the end, there were only two possible paths according to Thomas "...either they just don't care about those stereotypes and they love themselves and that's awesome, or like, you're obsessed with that." While I never considered organizing myself as asexual like Isaac, I lived with a great deal of insecurity in my early life as the fat, funny, and decidedly gay kid in school. I became a very easy target for hostility. I struggled tremendously in the face of homophobic violence, terror, and aggression for nearly ten years from peers and teachers, all compounded by horrific racism. But once into my early twenties, a confluence of experiences that completely reorganized the trajectory of my experiences and relationship with the ladder.

After high school I had a well-paying job that allowed me to afford and dress myself in more elevated fashions. At this job, I worked with an older population of folk in a rehabilitative and long-term care facility. The trick to speaking with such great array of people who were experiencing hearing loss was to speak in a lower, clearer register rather than raising the volume of one's voice. I had been trained vocally for years before to sing in a higher register, the highest a men's section would commonly go; the need for higher men's voices took priority despite my deeply ranged lower register. Working in the nursing home, though, I began normalizing the use

of the lowest registers of my bravado. This habit then followed me into my social life for the better part of my twenties. I had no gay friends at this time and did not learn, acknowledge, or access my feminine qualities or expressions either.

Working all the time helped me mask my disordered habits of eating too. A year before, I managed to lose around 70 pounds in a few months of summer, choking in cigarette smoke and drowning in my own bile. I learned how to reduce my intake to about 400 calories a day and after having gained weight in the year after this experience, used that information to lose it all again. When I then transferred to a four-year university from community college, I used the opportunity of distance and isolation from my friends and family to once again begin this habit and reduce to one of the thinnest moments of my life, losing nearly another 40 pounds within a few months. I then began an intensive exercise program for about a year that saw immediate results of the gained muscle mass on my thinner framed body.

I thus entered my early twenties with a lower voice, little outward feminine expressions, and more physically accentuating luxury clothing on my naturally hairless, thin, or muscular body. In my intriguing ethnically ambitious body, the ability to achieve sexual interactions grew tenfold, and I was unknowingly at the top of the ladder. In such time, I was very rarely turned down for a sexual fling, able to access non-reciprocal exchanges too where my participation was frequently limited to just lying there, the focus of both of our attention.

Even at my smallest and most visibly muscular, though, I never had protruding and obvious abs. Regardless, strangers in bars on multiple occasions would beg me to lift my shirt and show them, or they would simply reach under my shirt and do it themselves. Someone once witnessed one such interaction and joked about it later, sarcastically noting “it must be so hard to be attractive.” These desires for gay aesthetic ideality are a compulsion I have interacted with

and benefited from, also driving people to act like insatiable lunatics when the prospect of visible abdominal muscles might be before them. These kinds of interactions, while bizarre and intrusive, were experiences I had the ability to access and navigate. To most, I have little to no room, rhyme, or reason to complain about the effects of being on the upper rungs of the ladder. And maybe they are right. In such a body, people were outright nervous attempting to speak to me. I never had to pay for a drink or dinner. In my time more wholly embodying the upper ladder elements, I also began my master's degree program of study, and then, simultaneously began making connections with men of an upper-level wealth status: Doctors of Medicine, Doctors of Law, Professors of Law, Doctors of Philosophy, Directors of Congressional Initiatives, Chicago Creatives, Saint Louis business men. People once unavailable to me then began finding me interesting once I accessed terrain that reflected and signified my intellectual capacity. I became pretty and smart.

My experiencing of such desire was fairly novel to me as much as it was fleeting. As my body fluctuated in size greatly, I spent a great deal of time in a larger frame too. In that time, I was treated as a disgusting thing that ought to be ashamed of itself. I was called too big by muscle jocks and was pinched and prodded by gay men trying to figure out a rough approximation of my body mass index. I was turned down for sexual interactions due to my size just often as I was for my ethnoracialized identity. So from what Roger said, I do understand his point of having "been chubby, so I don't want to be fat again- know what I mean?" I wholly understand what Thomas mentioned too about gravitating towards older men from a place of insecurity too. While for myself, such a move was about feelings and beliefs of my larger size, different from Thomas's face value of insecurity with "White guys because they were what I wanted to be," I learned to stop approaching gay mainstream places of sexual interactions,

feeling more comfortable with older men because they proved a greater chance of securing connection.

The objects and directions of my own desire, in relation to the ladder, were anyone and everyone. While my insecurity was not exactly around trying to get with White guys, it was more in alignment with Thomas's image of the Abercrombie guy, the peak of the ladder, which would also be White men. This figure, while recalled by Thomas as the Abercrombie guy, has in fact held a position of ideality in gay scenes for decades. I first learned of the ladder through the typological markers structuring gay sexual logics of interaction, which in my memory, are best explained in two comedy television programs. The first arrived from a friend, who once sent me a decontextualized excerpt from the show *It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia* (McElhenney, Howerton & Day, 2012), in which two characters are sitting in a bar talking, ignoring the third who sits with them. In the episode "The Gang Recycles Their Trash," Deandra, played by Kaitlin Olson, explains to her stepfather Frank, played by Danny DeVito, what the labels in gay world mean, as she assumes the third friend is going through an identity crisis having shifted labels. The joke begins around her explaining a "twunk" as a combination between a twink and a hunk, i.e., a twink with muscles but that both are hairless. Twink is embodied in a youthful, hairless, and less muscular frame. Deandra flippantly mentions otters and bears- and at Frank's confusion promptly explains that "otter is a subsection of bear and still hairy," where the difference between the two is "where a bear generates his power through sheer mass alone, the otter generates his power through extraordinary quickness, cunning, and skill." The playful joke here mixes traits that would define the animal and applies them to the gay type. These behavioral types of descriptions are not used in contemporary definitions. Importantly, bear does not just

refer to a type of bodily frame, but refers to a specific kind of erotic sexual standards of interaction, often around the size and mass of one's body and touch.

Some gay figures become synonymous with the space in which it produced such subjects. The Chelsea neighborhood of Manhattan in the late 1990s became gay domain with gyms, shops, and bars. Hartman (2000) charted the particularities of the Chelsea boy. He detailed the figures stereotypical form:

Goes to the gym, eats and shops on Eighth Avenue, works out and achieves a desirable body; parties in large crowds at circuit parties, uses cocaine, ecstasy, special K; has sexual adventures one after the next with other beautiful Chelsea Boys. (p. 176)

To Hartman, the Chelsea boy was beyond a singular mode of embodiment and instead regarded as more accurately made possible within the neighborhood space itself, for, "whether being a Chelsea boy provides allows a person to emerge as a distinct personality or to blend without distinction depends, largely, on the person's relative ability (and desire) to individuate from reified gayness" (p. 175). Specifically, "the Chelsea boy experience is a form of membership in the urban gay cosmos and a highly subjective experience..." and represents a desire "to relate to other gay men in a characteristic way" (p. 174). For the Chelsea boy experience drug use is also very much expected and accepted (Halkitis, 2008). This figure explains a type of gay man who relies on this similarity to gain access into shared experiences with gay men in the "gay playground." Despite the demand of an expected physical embodied, Hartman sees minoritarian subjects who participate in the Chelsea space as looking for "recognition, not erasure, of the other that is sought" (p. 175), despite the objectifying and flattening of difference in favor and pursuit of identical physical forms. And to get onto the playground, is also in which drug use is also very much expected and accepted in this social

scene (Halkitis, 2008) Filiault and Drummond (2007) explain the history of such kinds of social expectations by recalling flourishing gay enclaves post-Stonewall. The more abundant social sites included an extensive array of bookstores, clubs, dance venues, cafes, and bars, which were in sum named “The Circuit” (2007, p. 178). The Circuit referred to a collective of gay settings which were shared on a “need to know circuit.” Mickey Weem in an interview (Weinstein, 2017, Vice online) explained that these areas do not exactly meet the contemporary definition of Circuit parties, which are gay events across the globe, where being shirtless, sweaty, and dancing is the standard protocol amidst a specter of heavy drug use and uninhibited sexual practices. Weem clarifies that the original experience of what would become circuit parties was born in hot Manhattan lofts where hundreds of gay men packed in close together, dancing to music, played and mixed live by a DJ. In the heat of the room, they removed their shirts. As the sites were used for social bonding and gathering, they were also sites of access to enable gay sexual interactions. Therefore, failing to adhere to the desired physicality became grounds for being denied access to circuit parties.

Alongside the Chelsea Boy, another Adonis figure emerged linked within the popular images of clothing retailer Abercrombie and Fitch’s (A&F) advertisements. As Bergling (2013) explained, A&F advertisements were indeed not the first iteration of such images. Similar to the Clone, these men were depicted as a contemporary Adonis: chiseled but toned muscularly emphasized by clothing that was just a little too big for their slim waistline. The retail store experience extended this eroticization featuring models in the front of the store standing before enormous images and spectacle of White muscularity. But uniquely, beyond their popular images on billboards and the shopping bags themselves, the clothing retailer also published *Quarterly*, a catalog and magazine hybrid emphasizing the erotic dimensions of men’s bodies even further.

For Bergling, the images of men alone were alluring, but the magazines depictions of bonding were of particular interest given the varying degrees of nudity and touching.

Speaking with several men, Bergling identified a general sense of intrigue, but also distaste for a youthful representation of Adonis as too perfect, too boyish, and too unrealistic. At the same time, the men begrudgingly admitted to experiencing sexual arousal, some describing easily masturbating to such images. These kinds of responses also detailed a growing shame and poor self-image made through comparisons of self and image, seeing the A&F physical form as something they will never be. These men too chalked up such fascination as an issue of gay mainstream culture. The contemporary images of Adonis can be seen in popular social media options variable exacerbating poor body image, stress, and greater bodily dissatisfaction among gay men especially on image focused platforms.

The second show speaking of these types helps name the aching dilemmas of such types. I focus on the episode “Patches” from the show *Difficult People*, a half-hour original comedy aired exclusively on Hulu (Klausner, Poehler, Posch, Becky, Hernandez, Walker & King, 2016). Importantly, my words fail to adequately capture the comedic genius of its writer, creator, and star, Julie Klausner. I do my best here in three moments within the episode that make important and relevant points. The first is when the second lead character Billy, played by Billy Eichner, is waiting in line to get into a gay bar in New York City. Once he makes it to the door, the bouncers tell him they already have enough Bears in the bar and refuse him entry. Billy teases “I’m way too fit to be a bear,” where the bouncer tells “you’re too old to be a cub.” In his 30s, Billy responds, “Well then I’m Kissyfur. I’m the teen bear,” referencing the late 80’s children’s animated television show of the same name (Chalopin & Hayward, 1986-1988). The bouncers guffaw at his joke, telling him that he is not a wolf, but if he were he would be let into the bar.

The other guy at the front door chimes in “We’re also always looking for otters and jackals.” Billy stands surprised, saying “Jackals are a thing now?” The novel joke here is in the bouncer’s explanation of Jackals, which is not an actually used gay-world term, “Yeah, they’re blonde wolves with a tan and a good laugh.” Billy, frustrated and confused, begs asks, “Well then, what am I?” The bouncer looks at him, “I mean, sort of nothing.” While the second confirms from the other side of the door, “Yeah, nothing.”

Later in the episode they explain how these logics are organized exclusively around White Cisgender gay men. Billy is joined by two co-workers, Matthew and Lola, in the café they work at. As they talk amongst themselves, they explain the gay terms to their curious manager, Nate. He asks first, “So, what’s a bear?” Billy tells “A bear [is] like a big, fat, hairy gay guy. And then an otter’s like a thin, hairy gay guy.” Matthew chimes in, “Yeah, and a wolf is like a tall, muscular bear who just has to fuck all the time, like me.” The fucking all the time might be true, but the underlying jest is fact that the character Matthew, under this definition, would likely not be a Wolf. Nate, still intrigued asks the three of them, “Okay, so what would I be?” In chorus, they tell him “Black.” Confused at the reductive framework, Nate wonders “Are you serious? Everyone gets a fun animal. That seems racist.” Lola reacts neatly, “Only ‘cause it is.” Billy quells the room with, “Well, gay or straight, you know, everybody sucks.” Bright eyed Mathew begins laughing, nearly manic after delivering the final dialogue in their interaction, “That’s what she said.” Billy does not fit neatly into gay community labels. There is little gray area afforded here. Nate, on the other hand, cannot fit into the social-sexual gay archetypal structure, as implicitly the markers only refer to White people and the presence of an ethnoracial assignment flattens and reduces any bodily typology.

The direction of the episode for Billy takes him to the home of Marilyn, who is his best-friend's mother. The brief stay turns into a refuge with Marilyn from the community where he does not fit in. Billy explains this to Marilyn as he uses his phone to access a popular dating app for gay ends. Frustrated by it, he tells her "It's all about what group you fit into. Just, bears and otters"- he does not finish his thought as Marilyn fills in "And jackals, oh my." She assures him "You don't have to fit in with anyone, because you have me," where she tries to lighten the mood by eagerly suggesting they go watch old videotapes of a 90s talk show where they can "laugh at [the host's] hair and dumb questions." At the end of the show, the two friends Julie and Billy summarize that "maybe the lesson in all of this is that we can't wait for someone to label us....Because the moment they do, they'll assume you're....nothing at all."

I bring up this example at length for several reasons; above all else to mirror and bolster the origin and concerns of the participants more accurately. Then, to note the anti-black, anti-fat idealities undergirding such organizing. Third, to reaffirm that the slippages of such terminology are complicated and capricious, and fourth, to note that they require strategies to navigate. And fifth, to contend with the above texts that an apparatus of masculinity, enabling its pinnacle formations of desire across the physical embodiment of the Clone and the disposition, attitude, and frame of the Bear renders an apparatus organizing, enabling, and legitimizing the capacities of embodiment for gay men, where effeminacy is marginalized too, and deemed less desirable. Sixth, they are, by design, unable to fully grapple with ethnoracial contingencies.

These labels shape a landscape of gay social sexual linkages in the ways Roger and Thomas discussed. Equally, ethnoracial identity becomes less important and more of an outwardly expressed inventory item when assessing the viability in ones' sexual pursuits, where these types appear to matter more. And even if not outwardly named through a type, physical

aesthetic occupation according to Roger and Thomas is key to activating sexual pursuits of anti-black, anti-fat, anti-trans gay desire. And centrally to the study, body type and cock matter more alongside White identity, where any other ethnoracial identity matters less. As the ladder exhausted the formation of gay sexual desire into a violent mode and projection upon the body, gay identity in this way moves as an inherited social standard that had been made aware to Roger, Thomas, and Isaac. This too moves in alignment to hegemonic standards of masculinity, premised on the devaluation of femininity in general and on the body in actions to the individual disposition or character. So, we know that the body is the all-important vehicle for gay social mobility, but now I turn to recognize the way Thomas directly interacted with this in a more complicated manner between self and other, elucidating ultimately the forces of White national wealth compelling a means of coming to know identity.

When detailing the ladder's criteria, Thomas captured a complexity between the other as object of desire as well as the desire of its very occupation by the self on vectors of ethnorace. Earlier, Thomas revealed that he was propelled to date older White men "because I felt like they were grateful or, like, thankful to have someone like me and I think it's why I felt really insecure with White guys because they were what I wanted to be," unraveling a perplexing dimension of desiring and being. This topic arose when he was speaking of his relationship with Brad, which ended after Thomas was confronted with the understanding that his social position was incompatible with ascension into White American wealth. Underlying the predicament is that Thomas sees his aspirations of being a "White person in America" as an impossible feat, which he came to understand when interacting with Brad and Brad's family.

After recalling his discomfort around Brad's family and their pronounced wealth, he then outlined how he had, up until that point, thought of himself as Americanized, financially

comfortable, and of lighter skin. These beliefs then became strained in the relationship, as Thomas explained:

That's when I realized like...you're never going to be [a White person] like, stop. Stop trying to be that because you're never- you're just not going to get it like- no matter how perfect you think you are, no matter how hard you work, it's not about hard work. Like, stop thinking that if you work hard enough you're going to be a White person in America.

He identified the measures of wealth unique to Brad's White American family, recanting "his life was just so White and so privileged because his dad owned a construction company and had a beautiful house and like"- and while this was not his first relationship with a White man, he described "I think that was the worst one- cause even though my family had money, we didn't have that kind of money." "That" for Thomas describes the confluence of these elements.

The sadness here seems less about the loss of the relationship and more about the loss of the beliefs he held and the shame within; the injury they caused when he realized he was not in a kin social stratum with Brad as he had believed he was. The sadness too released as he understood his attempts to be what he desired, a "White person in America," was impossible and something he once held onto.

On the tremendous weight of shame and its recursive exploration in our moment together, I am reminded of Soto (2010) recalling how Sedgwick (2002) named shame as the emotion which seems to now popularly structure the realm in which a feeling of self might come around, which for Soto is not necessarily "where identity is most securely attached to essences, but rather that it's the place where the *question* of identity arises more originally and most relationally" (2010, p. 37). So as Thomas outlines his experiences with Brad where it came into stark clarity of the impossible, it arranged the unique hegemonic dimensions of U.S. citizenship subjectivity

on specific vectors of wealth, generational bonds, and privately held company, and a social saturation within such realms. Within this too, as Soto recalled in Moraga's work (1983), "the contradictions, shame, aporias, and even self-loathing that underwrite her narrative of outsidership and homecoming bring into sharper relief the very illogic of racialization and racism" (Soto, 2010, p. 37). This very experience had been met upon his body.

As Thomas said, his aspiration was born of his social status gained from living in Mexico with the ultimately detrimental sentiment "“oh you're lighter skinned, you're better.”" The sadness then comes in two parts, first from the realization that despite one's best effort and location in other social sites that would hold him as an apex of lighter skin and fiscal ideality will not be the same- nor garner entry into White American selfhood. The second part is the deep sadness of realizing that one would try for this and believe it. White American identity as Thomas constructs it is not necessarily something just anybody can achieve or possess. The feeling and beliefs about wanting to be a White Person in America for Thomas were already strained and moved as a place of insecurity. And being with a/being a White guy were two converging aspirations informing and shaping his experience of desire.

Importantly, Thomas never referred to his relationship dilemmas with Brad as a conundrum of Whiteness. For that reason, I will avoid such characterization too. But I know what it is to feel tremendous sadness in this way at this romantic instantiation of our desire. Mitch, like Brad, was everything I wanted. I loved him in a way that shook me. And now, I still think of the spoons. Was it my paranoia? My anxiety? My displacement of understanding social contours of my own difference? Had I been waiting for this kind of confirmation or had I simply been given the lens to recognize it fully?

Years later, I think of the breakup, and the spoons as maybe its first omen, with a different degree of clarity. I was not a stranger to wealth. I had dated White men from a full range of middle-class families before. They held a kind of wealth like most of my friends' families I grew up with. I think what was more confusing, perhaps for both Thomas and me, was the prospect of accessing generational wealth, as this may have been the first time either of us were truly in a tangible position of inheriting White American generational wealth- a pronounced amount of capital likely forever unavailable to us.

Importantly, some scholars problematizing reductive conceptualizations of gay wealth. The “myth of gay affluence” coined by Badgat (1998) refers to a belief that queer folk experience greater financial advantage. This image, constructed in popular consumerist culture and film, more specifically centers gay men as the figure and embodiment of gay affluence, two working men with no children. Such popular image thus informs a now popularly held belief that queer people in general only experience financial wealth. Its development has allowed for a queer political advancement that thus largely ignores factors such as class and race affecting its members (Bettinsoli, et al., 2021). As queer people face unique economic precarity, poor sexual and gender minoritarian folk face increasing hardship and vulnerability largely unrecognized by their own communities (Hollibaugh & Weiss, 2015). Along these vectors of difference, I begin to see my experience of melancholia and loneliness in a much different light.

This prospect of being folded into White American generational wealth through queer bonds was perhaps the periphery in my vision of spoons, showcasing the rift in wealth, wholly inaccessible for people like Thomas and me, and only accessible through the avenue of legal, recently institutionalized marriage for us. The structure of coming to know our respective White boyfriends was organized and overwhelmed by the confrontation of heteronormative paradigms

ensuring the means of consolidation of privately held, generational wealth, only accessible through familial membership or via marriage. Our sense of security in the relationship collapsed under the weight of the fuller cis gay paradigm of desire demarcating the ladder. As close as we both could get to inhabit it, our marking ourselves as desirable and worthy candidates, our distance from wealth would never allow it. Cis gay aesthetic ideality, governing self and other's images of pinnacle masculinized corporeal inhabitation, is not actually attainable, or something just anyone can realize; it is an impossible feat, exclusively available to those with access to White American generational wealth.

In this, the nature of assimilation of citizen subjects into the U.S. nation- state is a complicated and enticing regime. That is, the front-facing avenue of assimilation rests on White ideality, the American dream, or more precisely what Thomas mentioned as the vision of becoming a White Person in American. The complexity of White ideality as a desirable potential of being and accessing works as the potential conduit of assimilation of such peripheral subjects. Desire, in this dimension, becomes a densely layered force, an avenue for assimilation to happen. However, for the Queer of Color, the social incommensurability of such potential revolves around exclusionary sociocultural knowledge of environments among White generational wealth. Thomas's awareness of this, of the difference between himself and Brad, reads back in his projection as legitimate, as tangible, upon and across the dinner table during a holiday gathering.

This desire might showcase the magnetic drama enticing peripheral subjects to sublimate into normative dimensions of citizen subjecthood. In this process though, the illogical bravado of race, of wealth- the confluence of it all being too much to bear- is held in tension by Thomas in his recollection. Perhaps the queerness is the capacity to hold all these truths simultaneously and not die under their weight. Maybe the queerness lies in the non-identity of the subject when

confronted with the limits of what they are granted the possibility of being. Or perhaps, the most radical negation tactic is to be able to consider this all and come to the realization, through a cadence of sadness, to know that it's simply not worth it, and say to its rose-tinted face "I don't want this. I don't want to try to be you anymore," while the precipice of assimilation crumbled beneath his feet. Not fully resistance or resignification, but a pull away from the cliff's edge and the decision and ability to not have to go through with it.

Sadness. I now more precisely reflect on their experiences, relations, and understandings of sadness. I then focus on their strategies of navigation. The first theme concerns sadness and the body. Transparently, the enterprise of organizing this section proved a daunting and layered trial. Like other sections, there are disparate elements situated here given their direct linkages with sadness. Roger briefly touched on his experiences feeling sad as they related to his body. He described his reasoning for frequently exercising as, "If not I'd probably weigh 500 pounds. Plus, I've been chubby, so I don't want to be fat again- know what I mean?" And when I asked if he dated during this time and what it was like, he confessed, "Shit, I didn't date 'til I was 28." As he described his experience with sadness earlier in our conversation as having happened some ten years ago, this would place him roughly around that age. If his aspirations around body might be lodged in proximity to sadness, bodybuilding provided a means to work away from and mitigate the induction of sadness.

Thomas linked his feelings of sadness to aspirations for a kind of physicality. The springboard for this desire appears as a pronounced sense of devaluation of the current form of his body, compared to peak gay aesthetic ideality. He described this in one such example:

For example, I'm super hairy and I hate that. Like, I hate that because I don't like that. I know that there is a group of- that look for that- but I don't like that on myself because I feel, again, I think this does- going to race things- because I don't look like a Latin guy. The possibility though of achieving such a position is premised upon his proximity to White appearance via his lighter skin. He carefully detailed that he does not like hair on himself, while attributing this to his mental image of what constitutes a "Latin guy."

There is a sense of devaluation around the image of the "Latin guy" for Thomas, thus generating frustration with his goals of physicality. Despite his proximity to this aesthetic ideality on vectors of skin tone, this seems to generate a sense of sadness, as there are elements of his body that he codes as indicative of a Latino man, which is precisely what he does not want to look like. The Latin guy is antithetical to his project of ideal physicality, as he clarified exactly "I want to look as good for a light-skin White male." He told me that the basis of that was growing up in the nineties, which created the image of a light-skin White man as:

...being thinner, that's being hairless, that's being lighter hair and tan skin- kind of, so yeah. I think it's been very difficult in that- term of like, being desired sexually. Because I feel like I'm fighting against like, everything that I am. To be something like the Abercrombie looking guy- you know what I mean?

Thomas explained that he actively strives to embody such traits. In naming the root of such expectations as the 90s Abercrombie guy, he joins this with ideas of normative gay embodiment:

I think it just comes from the stereotypical "this is what you're supposed to look like as a gay guy" - you know?....And the thing that happens with gay guys I have seen is either they just don't care about those stereotypes and they love themselves and that's awesome, or like, you're obsessed with that.

The aesthetic project is not solely generated within Thomas's psyche, it is an inherited position shaped by images, meaning, and marketing campaigns that are also the means of social entry and access into gay spaces to "be acceptable," as he explained before that "you have to have a good body." Thomas recognizes that he will never be a White person in America despite his best attempts, and his social position of light skin is inconsequential in the nation for wealth ascension. And the power of this would be expressed in his futility of even trying, where the augmentations like shaving were useless as the hair would indeed grow back, leaving him to recognize too that such attempts were "fighting against like, everything I am." For Thomas there is no middle ground between obsession or self-acceptance in the face of such images of desirability.

The possibility though of achieving such a social position is again premised upon his proximity to White appearance via his lighter skin. He shared about the complicated nature and directions of this desire:

I tended to gravitate towards older men because I felt like they were grateful or like, thankful to have someone like me and I think it's why I felt really insecure with White guys because they were what I wanted to be.

And as explored before, this became an impossible feat in the face of White American generational wealth. The futility of this vision of ideality crashed when dating his White boyfriend Brad, where the friction led him to realize it was an exercise in futility. Sadness, as expressed through the ineffectiveness of his ventures of aesthetic embodiment and White American wealth is crushing, but nevertheless propels him into action of adjusting, making, and crafting his body into a certain appearance in accordance with the set of expectations and experiences he holds.

In this sadness I believe is a measure of complex shame both in the lack of embodying his desired idealized aesthetic form, but also in the confrontation of such belief. Whereas his experience with Brad was focused on socio currents of White American wealth ascension, this appears to be much more focused on the body. On corporeal shame, Soto expressed in regards to a Theory in the Flesh, as described by Moraga (1983) that a “propensity for confession and for the shame left in its wake does not, as we might expect, lead to a weakening” or debilitation (Soto, 2010, p. 36). Rather, a Theory in the Flesh enables a portrayal of shame not as “dysfunction- as something that must be overcome or healed” (p. 36), but as a potential for recuperation and empowerment. And for Muñoz the nature of imaging a “body of brown politics” is one “not invested in the narrative of a whole or well-adjusted subject” (2008, p. 680), as brown feelings describe “the ways in which minoritarian affect is always, no matter what its register, partially illegible in relation to the normative affect performed by normative citizen subjects” (p. 679). At least now, for Thomas, in the wake of such understanding, the pursuit of this corporeal fulfillment of these wishes is no longer a viable option, ability, or desire.

In such a place Thomas and Isaac make sense of non-desire. That is, the second coherence of their sentiments on sadness were spoken regarding feminine qualities of self in the face of normative formations of gay masculine aesthetics of desirability, which had them dwell outside the normative registers of desire regarding the ladder’s structuration. As for Thomas, he additionally realized too that most gay men do not seek or desire a feminine partner. In this, he processed that despite his attempts, he will never fully fit the occupation of ideal masculinity:

I’ll never be a super masculine man. So I think I play to the feminine parts of me [which] turn off most people because they don’t want a feminine gay guy, they want a straight

acting [man] even if they don't say it. Like, it's kind of the rule because how often do you see two drag queens dating? Like, it happens but not really.

He explained that from this:

Like, it's easier for me to play with my feminine side because it's what works- than me play with the masculine side because it doesn't work because I'm 5'-5." It's not going to work. I'm not going to look like a manly man ever. It's ridiculous.

As much as Thomas strives to fit a masculine ideal to adhere to such normative regimen of cis gay desire, he understands that his height and demeanor prevent him from realizing such pursuits. And in this, he instead works to affirm his feminine side.

At this juncture in the project, it is clear from Thomas, Isaac, and Roger that femininity is outside the normative register and ladder of cis gay desire. Thomas's personal practices of physical embodiment are grounded in his perspective that feminine gay men are not desired in the community. This awareness propels him to move forward, causing friction between what he thinks he should become and what he feels more comfortable as. Isaac spoke about the way his sense of self as more feminine would lead him to considerations of asexuality in the lack of experiences of being desired. In conversation describing his time in high school, he believed:

...that being gay was a sin. And I was really trying to be like- straight, but I was not masculine. I had a lot of feminine qualities about me and I was pretty insecure about it so- I don't know. I just never really tried with anyone because it's kind of insecure and so that made me feel- I don't know, not really unwanted, but I guess kind of? And then I didn't try with guys. And like, guys I feel are easier for some reason for me. So, I guess it just felt like no one wanted me. Yeah, I felt asexual for a while. I was like, maybe I'm asexual?

Here, Isaac crafts an explicit linkage between his sense of self as on more feminine vectors, leading him to feel insecure where in such a place, he was unwanted as well. His explanation of feeling asexual was thus grounded in his experiences of feeling an absence of desire expressed toward him. His lived experience outside the register of normative parameters of desire was achingly pronounced. Falling outside these registers for Thomas and Isaac compels and requires heavy augmentation on their parts in order to elucidate a resonance inside such standards.

As Eguchi and Calafell contend regarding the importance of belonging, “the sexually dissident and gender nonconforming subjects who are racialized, classed, and gendered remain marginalized from obtaining a full sense of belonging in and across local, national, and global contexts” (2020, p. 10). They punctuate their point with the conclusion that “accordingly, difference matters” (p. 10). Within this, the vectors of hegemonic masculinity as a quality and corporeality impact their sensations, beliefs, thoughts, and feelings about belonging.

Roger may very well feel comfort with being a loner as he moves onto the upper registers of the ladder. Isaac, too, struggled beneath the weight of religious organizations condemning who he is and what he does that involves a desire for other men, which all propelled him into the belief that he was also asexual, facing an absence of desire for being too feminine. And Thomas for a significant time of his life strived to fit such standards, struggling against his form to tailor it according to such regimes of desire.

The exhausting enterprise of this is that gay aesthetics are violently placed upon the body, and the most centralized subjects are those appearing to fit the hyper-idealized aesthetic corpus. Gay on the body becomes less identity, and more a structuration of privileged aesthetic components fractured onto the body that mimic the hegemonic apparatus of masculinity. And as Roger had failed too, being chubby and avoiding dating until nearly 30 years of age, the realm of

coming to know themselves is within a complex threshold of body being a means of navigating gay social circuits and interactions leaving them to all experience sadness.

Sadness. In the next portion, I survey my respondents' various strategies in navigating their experiences of sadness regarding the hegemonic pressures outlined above. The clearest strategy that Roger offered in navigating his sadness was maintaining his regular fitness regimen, as he explained, "I didn't do anything different I don't think. Go to the gym, come home, make food." When pressed about the nature of his experience of sadness, he succinctly said the whole thing "just passed." Roger would only name it as something of the past to a distance of "maybe ten years ago." At the time of our conversation, Roger did not want to speak clearly or in depth about the experience. While seemingly having moved past it, returning to such experience in detail was not something Roger was willing to do. Relegating experiences of sadness to the past in the face of its retrospection was thus a strategy used for navigation too.

Isaac spoke of his experiences with sadness in a similar fashion, where for him, actively avoiding discussions of him dating men with his parents was a tactic. His sadness initially extended into feelings of guilt around his first relationship with a man, as he wanted to share more publicly on social media but was concerned news would get back to his parents. To this point he said, "I wanted to be the person to share [the news of the relationship] myself, so that's the most honest way, genuine way." As he detailed his sadness around disclosing the relationship, he shared his parents' feelings too. He told me he wrote everything in a letter, which his mother read in front of him and his father:

And at first it was pretty difficult for them to take but they were just, more sad, like- because I was very vulnerable about all these things and how they've been treating me before. And why I was feeling so like- almost condemned? Certain ways...so they were

feeling kind of guilty about that. They were feeling sad about that. So they told me that they love me.

After he made the disclosure, he felt an immediate sense of relief concerning his desire to share news of the relationship on social media. At the same time, his parents cautioned him to not post things online. This tempered the initial relief he felt, but he still did not share too much, only becoming “a little bit more lenient” in this regard.

Despite this sadness, he did share that he believed:

I feel like the long-term, it helps the relationship because of built trust with my parents.

But I feel like it also maybe makes my parents worry more because they're so against it.

At first it was hard but I think over time it's gotten easier, we don't really talk about it much or- yeah.

He punctuates again, that in his current relationship with his parents, “...now, now we don't really talk about it at all. We just don't bring it up.” In this regard, he shared that this enabled a sense of comfort, where:

I'm totally fine with it because it's kind of awkward conversation sometimes. I'd rather not bring it up to be honest- with my parents. Sometimes it's easier just to not bring things up. Otherwise it's going to go through some long bunny trails and places I would rather not go.

His strategy of traversing this sadness is to actively avoid the topic with his parents, given the looming threat of where the conversation might go. He linked this threat specifically to his parents and “their blatant Christianity.” He explained that for his parents, “Religion is mostly the main thing” preventing an ease or comfort in their relationship as it affects his sexual orientated

and life, as "...the Bible says that being gay is wrong, so...yeah." He used to align himself with such a perspective too, leading to tremendous struggles around his sexual orientation:

I used to think it was a sin, like in early High School. And then it was just something that you had to cope with, you know? Like any other sin. However, I don't believe it anymore. Yeah, I just, point-blank can't believe it's a sin.

Recognizing that being gay is not a sin works against this instantiation of sadness. From this, his negotiations of his feelings of sadness around his sexual orientation is also bolstered by directly avoiding the topic with his parents. His reassertion of using silence is a site of safety. Maybe not fulfillment or affirmation, but regardless it is a needed tool to keep relations with his parents manageable and possible.

On Thomas's sadness, he chronicled the frustrating nature of his attempts to be achieve an idealized gay masculine physical embodiment. Whereas he outlined earlier strategies of playing into his stronger feminine side despite its lowly position on the ladder of desire via cosmetic procedures and clothing, this strategy mostly served him in his 20s but not more recently. As he explained "So I think a lot of the times, especially when I started with the [facial] fillers, I was really trying to play up the feminine side of me but just based on my age." Now living in San Francisco and approaching his 40s, he feels a strain making more social, public inhabitations of his feminine side difficult ventures, especially now without his core group of friends. In his new home, everyone "is super granola. There's no glam, there's none of that." While he compared this to his time in New Mexico, he realized:

So I think it's- feel in New Mexico, that you could show up at the club with a full face like, high cheekbones and like, a glitter outfit, and be- be like 'yes Queen!' Here, it's not- they're not into that.

His negations of the sadness about his bodily occupation compared to his ideal aesthetic form become somewhat of a moving target given his age and current social standing. He told me that he was still chasing the ideal aesthetic in some ways and that:

....as I get older it's been worse because now other things that were good are like, getting...you know what I mean? Now you're fighting a clock too. Not ideal, so just kind of crazy. And do you know, with working out- now that I'm 37, I'm almost going to be 40, I'm like 'should I be a daddy now?' 'Do I need to like, bulk up, get steroids?'

In his strategies of negotiating frictions to achieving his desire for ideal gay aesthetic embodiment, he is pushed to shift his trajectory and the means of becoming this very form. Consequently, he shares he does not concern himself with the legitimate health risks, instead only “focus[ing] on looking a certain way” so much so that the use of steroids crossed his mind as he approaches his 40s. On the potential use of steroids, he shared that even despite his friends cautioning him against such practice, calling him crazy and explaining the potential health risks to his body, he only focuses on the end goal:

But all I'm thinking about is like, 'but I will look a certain way!' So I think that's kind of a dangerous thing for me, just 'cause, I- I just don't think of the consequences. I think of the appearance.

Again, this is not solely created by Thomas's belief system, as he described the social pressures of “the number one important thing for the gay community, to be like, acceptable, is like, you have to be fit.” Thus, his strategies for managing sadness in this regard include cosmetic procedures and augmentation, now for pursuits of a cis gay masculinized physique. His use of augmentation to deal with these social pressures are done to either play into the stronger feminine parts of himself, or to align himself with the desirable gay cis man aesthetic projects of

masculinity. A final mode of affirming what once caused sadness is around his Mexican identity, which could have been touched on during this portion of our conversation but was analyzed prior regarding its logic around identity and ancestry.

There is no correct process for experiencing sadness. There is no one way the process looks. I am aware that there is a large stigma around mental health, seeking help, naming a problem, a lack of education to making sense of issues, as well as the understanding of oneself to even yield useful processing (Allensworth-Davies et al., 2008; De Santis et al., 2008; Gilman et al., 2002; Mereish et al., 2021, Zea et al., 1999). There are a lot of roadblocks to considering this topic. So, in this, perhaps the denial of the sadness when expressed in the now is a strategy of resistance. Rather than retreading old ground- the ground of the injury- my respondents think of sadness as something behind them, or something that can be avoided through personal action of augmentation. I don't blame them; I can't. Why would anyone want to return to such things and pry them open, especially when the root of the issue is cast firmly by themselves as only upon their very shoulders?

That is, their sadness is firmly placed within their own sphere of self, and equally, the means of escaping it too, of managing it becomes only their responsibility; a feat only they can make possible. Thus, Thomas, Roger, and Isaac lack the ability or inclination to envision a remediating change at the social level. While they can name various larger forms at play, they are rigid and things they are resigned to living in and living with. And in their explanation, my heart breaks. And for myself, I cannot describe how I feel any more accurately than the next three words: lost in it. It feels as if I have been standing at the meeting of ocean and earth, sand beneath my feet, with the urging gravity of some queer feeling; a pendulum in my chest, back and forth- back and forth. And as I look up towards the sky, I quickly realize I am standing in the

immeasurable depths of the ocean. It is pooling around my feet with no foreseeable bottom, only the weight of sand heavy on top of my feet, keeping me here, in such feeling.

But importantly too, Anzaldúa would speak of a similar place of regeneration in the wake of material discombobulating experience like that of Thomas's recollections. Anzaldúa calls this as The Coatlicue State, which she describes as "a figurative and sometimes literal space betwixt and between two or more oppressive forces." In such a site "knowledge, ways of being in the world, and relationships between people, are undone and remade" (1987, p. 70). Importantly too, as "not always a desired location" it "has the capacity to generate creativity by harnessing power within the liminal space." (p. 70). Congruently, Moraga's points (1983), detailed by Soto (2010), open a pathway to sustaining "a rich source of queer material for imagining" as a "healing practice [that] would challenge the repressive hypothesis so central to self-help and therapeutic discourses" (Soto, p. 36). In the at-times unintelligible flurry of myriad forces and effects upon the body, sometimes there simply remains what was before; that is, this might not have a happy ending and such demand is principle of the need to refute the acts of egoic wholeness, completion, an alternative to some rote healing practices. It is in this very place I move forward from into the next and final section.

Connections. If the above just spent time capturing the alluring nature of the normative regimes of being and subjecthood, I shift into outlining predicaments among bonds with other queer people of Color. I look to their experience of navigating social protocols of interaction in these sites and experiences, their feelings about traversing through them, and the value they place in their existent kinships. Whereas the ladder has until now referred to overtly physical attributions and goals for self and other, speaking with Thomas and Isaac illuminated social protocols of interaction and ideal disposition in spaces of gay male companionship. I touch upon

the established social protocols for navigating sites comprised primarily by gay men. The topic arose when speaking with Thomas about his wish to have a closer group of gay friends.

Introspecting, he informed me that his troubles in making such bonds might be around only having gained such ties later in life. He then said that he himself is likely the root of the disconnection he feels in his attempts for friendship:

I think when you first meet me in like, a social context, I come across a little bit- I'm conceited or arrogant? Or I think I'm better than people? Like, that's always a thing people told me, like, I seem nice but then I seem fake? So it's just really difficult for me to kind of let people in. So I think it is my own fault. And I think gay guys are more- so critical of that. Like, if you're not authentic or open right away, they kind of write you off.

To Thomas, a legitimate or perceived position of arrogance and phoniness reads as lacking an outward openness, which becomes a social deterrent. Thomas talked more about coming across as judgmental in his quiet temperament, which he recognized as a learned behavior from his mother:

When you first meet me it's very difficult to gauge me because I'm like my Mom- I'm very quiet and I come across judgmental. I come across like I'm looking at people the wrong way or I'm judging you for being loud or whatever. So I think it's always been a struggle for me to kind of like, be, how do you say- down to earth? Or come across down-to-earth?

To Thomas, being more “down to earth” would lead to greater social ease and connection, but he is simply a quiet and more reserved person in social settings.

Isaac spoke about this topic and how he managed to have successful interactions, despite being shy for most of his life. He recalled that one night at a party he had “a really fun time. Everyone was nice.” He then outlined the preferred sort of personal disposition when entering such sites:

If you are shy they won't be nice. Not necessarily being nice, but it's like- talkative or just including in conversation; what I think is nice. And you have to really be, I don't know, upfront about introducing yourself and things like that. So you don't do that, it's not going to be a good time. People are probably going to look at you weird or like “who's that?”

But if you just introduce yourself to everyone...

Thomas is not well suited at succeeding under such social protocols described by Isaac. We can clearly see the misalignment between how Thomas comes across, and how it is read negatively in these sites. Personally, I see myself closer to Thomas in this regard than Isaac. And unfortunately, my disposition has shifted in the last ten years and only gotten worse, where I tend to be the person avoiding conversation, standing in the corner of the room surveying the scene out of concern, and by default, read as smug and elitist.

But ultimately, if failing to meet the standards of social protocols, there are negative isolating social consequences pushing one away from and out of gay social realms. These roadblocks to easily navigating and accessing gay sites point to an ethic of exclusivity even within these apparent functions. Holding a gay identity card is insufficient for entry, but closely adhering to public socially expressive and outward communication is the primary form of access, which is not a standard mode of personality according to Thomas and Isaac.

Roger and Isaac described in more detail what such occasions would look like. Isaac described the evening events in the Albuquerque gay scene during a house party, which:

Usually happens at night with a lot of dancing, a lot of music. Maybe some drugs.

Maybe- maybe like a big pool party or something like that? With a lot of men in jockstraps- and drugs- to be honest.

Roger offered a similar characterization of his time in the Albuquerque gay scene. Succinctly recalled as “Drama. And drugs. And liquor,” with specifically “Ton of cocaine. A lot of Cocaine. Ecstasy. Ketamine.” Recounting a particular summer, he explained that there was a “pevery night,” and regular grander evenings on Thursday and Friday at different nightclubs. More specifically, Roger did this for nearly half a year, and was calling into work every Friday.

His reasons for disinterest in gay social connections were around this experience and the strain it took on his life. Roger unraveled “it’s hard to be out at the club. And it’s expensive. And I don’t like being up ‘til 2 in the morning.” Trying to keep up with his other group of friends then became a messy enterprise for they were “hardcore lifters” and in order to keep up with them “you can’t be doing cocaine and all kinds of other shit.” Socializing in this way then came at a real monetary cost and at the expense of his routine and his health, where he chose the second option once he realized the two were incompatible.

Roger then spoke of his earlier point about drama: “I just stay away from drama. I just don’t like people’s problems and if you’re gonna harp on it, and- ‘I hate my job, I hate my life’ shit like that.” He reaffirmed in his next thought that “I just don’t like nagging- negativity. Just um- be positive and have a good time. In his experience, gay men were emblematic of this personality type, “They’re just too much drama. And I’m kind of a homebody. I don’t want to be out doing stuff- know what I mean? It’s hard when you have four dogs.” So while the kinds of social gatherings revolving around drugs and alcohol may have been fun, the additional layer of

drama makes gay companionship not worth it in the long run, especially in the face of his personal responsibilities.

Roger next voiced contempt for feminine men beyond romantic sexual pursuits to also the company he prefers to keep. When talking about friends, he shared that he was more selective, and uninterested in specific characteristics. When I asked him to expand, he offered the following as if he was stating something that was exceedingly obvious, “Because I’m attracted to men because I like men- know what I mean? I don’t want you to be like, part girl.” Roger therefore keeps a very small circle of gay friends, as they are too much drama, difficult to financially keep up with, but also run the risk of embodying a kind of femininity Roger dislikes and sees as incommensurate with his desire for men. For all these reasons, he expressed “I don’t really have any gay friends. One I think, two; you.” We share this in common, albeit for different reasons.

Isaac went on to explain that he did not feel a strong affinity with groups of gay men he had socialized with. Despite his experiences and having a good time, he shared that he does not consider himself a member of the Albuquerque gay scene: “I wouldn’t call myself or say that about myself. However, I would say some of my friends, like some of them do.” And while he recalled having a fun time, he said that he did not feel a strong connection or grounding in such groups as the nights became raunchy. On this, Isaac spelled out “So I wouldn’t say that I’m like, ‘yeah! This is who I’m meant to be with!’” Isaac described those gay friendships as important to him, but not in an exclusive capacity. Rather, a diverse array of friendships was most valuable.

And when he responded to my question about the importance of gay connections, he noted he likes “variation in my friends- people who I hang out with and do things with. So, I really appreciate different thought processes from a different personality.” He did echo what

Roger mentioned about having a dislike for negativity, explaining that if a prospective friend has “a negative vibe, I don’t want to be around [them]. If you have a positive vibe that’s really important to me.” But most centrally, his idea of exclusively gay social formations of kinship is out of sync with his larger belief that “You can learn something from everyone, so- yeah, totally. Like, straight people? – cool.” When talking about the discomfort that he feels trying to make friendships with straight men, he placed the brunt of the blame squarely on his shoulders:

I feel like I need to open myself up a little more because I feel like I click well with gay people but I don't click as well as with straight people, especially guys. So I'm trying to look for more friends that are straight, mostly guys- but I don't know. It's kind of difficult for me.

Diversity of people, specifically his value of diversity of thought is a driving force shaping the relationships he seeks and sews. But in the lack of realizing such desire, he only regards himself as the issue.

Thomas was the only one to express a desire in having more gay friends, but said that it also comes from a place of lack. At the time of our discussion, he explained that most of his friends are “either girls or straight guys like, couples that are straight.” While he did offer that he does “have groups here and there [that] are gay friends,” he still recognizes the importance of, and yearns for, having “a good, like, network of gay people.” He then likened this vision more precisely to “that Instagram-life we are used to- all these gay guys on, going on trips together, and like- well, I wish I had that.” In this, he believed such kinships “would be beneficial for me to have that, kind of like, camaraderie- like sisterhood.” For Thomas, having a group of gay friends operates around an ideality too, from a pseudo-image and collection of consciously

constructed representations on the social media networks he describes, curating a very specific image of gay friendship and camaraderie.

For Thomas, gay friendship is something he desires but struggles in stringing together, as he recalled in the section about gay social protocols. Thomas very much assigned himself the responsibility for a lack of these connections, returning to his words on how he comes across in most social environments. In this, he expressed “So it's just really difficult for me to kind of let people in.” And repeating his belief of his own fault for this, he said “So I think it is my own fault. And I think gay guys are more- so critical of that. Like, if you're not authentic or open right away, they kind of write you off.” Part of the issue may very well be Thomas, but the other part is, if one is not open immediately, the ease of social entry and interaction is made even more difficult and unlikely, where then one might be marked as conceited or arrogant. These negative kinds of interactions with certain folk, teasing out feelings of judgment by gay men for Thomas and straight men for Isaac, nevertheless still leaves them inclined toward and interested in forming bonds with such groups.

For Roger, he rather avoids gay domains of friendship and keeps to himself, although the decision is also developed upon a disavowal for feminine men in any web of relation, social, sexual, romantic, or plutonic. Isaac works against such propensities by valuing a larger web of social groups, specifically hoping to remedy the lack of straight connections. Thomas desires to be included, and sees his own focus entirely on himself as the barrier to such achievement, given his quieter disposition which fails to adhere to the required social type in environment of gay men and reads poorly. And once more, Isaac and Thomas are unable to imagine a remedy on the social level, only interpreting these issues as their own fault.

Strategies.

I now move to detail the important abilities of their existent friendships. As the gay Latino subject might not be fully held within the assembly of family, in an assessment of Latino gay men, Guarnero explained how “family and community negatively impacted the lives of Latino gay men,” pointedly contending that “living in the periphery of the family and community...contributed to a poor sense of self (2007, p. 17). The importance of queer formations of kinship operates “as a temporal and preset mode of relation and political resistance” (Eguchi & Long, 2019, p. 15). Importantly, queer kinship might work as an intervention within structural constraints affecting queerness, where coalitional instantiations might then be enabled.

As the U.S. nation-state always already sustains the Queer of Color figure outside the domain of normative citizenship, a Politics of Belonging explains and recognizes the importance for minoritarian subjects to hold “an affective affinity for a space/place and situation” especially as the U.S. and its confluence of “ideological structure[s] historically produces and constitutes a feeling of exclusion for minoritarian subjects” (Eguchi, Files-Thompson, & Calafell, 2018, p. 9). Equally, as much as the U.S. structures “feelings of exclusion for minoritarian subjects,” the nation-state simultaneously propels a “structural pressure to assimilate certain kinds of gays and lesbians” into its fold as a means to sustain the system (p. 9). A critical eye upon gay people’s bonds is therefore intensely vital.

On the affirmatory bonds they do share in, Isaac said “I feel pretty comfortable everywhere I go,” but that specifically “I think maybe the most comfortable I would be, with- I don't know- one of my girlfriend's house is like, super comfortable.” He explained “they're not judgmental. They kind of- I feel like I've known them all for a while, so they know me pretty

well. I'd say friends for the most part.” For Isaac non-judgment and openness are an important threads weaving a strong group of friends.

Thomas described having friendships in New Mexico that allowed him to “play up the feminine side of me.” He shared that when he lived in New Mexico he “could show up at the club with a full face [of makeup] like, high cheekbones and like, a glitter outfit, and be- be like “yes Queen!” [In San Francisco] it's not- they're not into that.” Friendship for Thomas affirmed his play into more feminine qualities and garb. He said that in Albuquerque he used to “wear the most ridiculous things, again very much playing into a feminine side because I thought that was a stronger side.” Now that he has moved out of the area he explained:

I have a bunch of old outfits and I'm like what- what? You need to get rid of this! You're never going to wear like, bedazzled Liberace white suit, like, just get rid of it! You're never going to have special San Francisco.

While part of his reasoning for moving away from this kind of dress was his approaching 40, he directly reflected on the realization:

I think if I was still in New Mexico I wouldn't feel that way because I have my group of friends, so going out with a couple friends that I feel comfortable with, I don't care what I look, I don't care what I look [like] because I got my crew. But in here, in San Francisco because, first of all people don't do that and second, I don't have a group, so just me and my husband and I'm dressed like a peacock? Like it doesn't make sense.

Friendship for Thomas means an affirming capacity that encourages him to be his most authentic self.

On the composition of his group of friends, he said “they're all very much like me,” in the manner that they embody a kind of Hispanic with connections to Mexico, but are generationally

removed a bit from Mexico and speaking Spanish. He stated that his core group allowed him to “[not] feel like I have to ever prove myself.” He explained in more clarity that:

They don't really go into the whole, like “what are you?” kind of situation, so I feel very safe there. Most of them are either girls or gay guys and yeah. I think that's where I feel safe. It's like, I feel like that's where I can dress however I want. I can make the jokes that I want. I can speak however I want. I feel respected and validated, you know what I mean? So I think that's probably the only place that's like, with a group of friends and like, it has to be at someone- at one of our houses where it feels like- just, you know?

Friendship for Thomas is then based on affirming vectors of his feminine embodiment and shared ethnoracial linguistic understanding. Thomas described his group of friends in a similar way that Isaac would his girlfriends as an affirmatory site of relationality, often passing time in someone’s private house. Openness and non-judgment then are important instantiations of positive and affirming friendship.

To summarize, my respondents’ bonds with women prove the most vital source of personal freedom and spaces of openness and non-judgment. Before moving back and forth across the U.S., I too had come to rely upon such sites and relationships. Especially in high school, my closet and most supportive friends were women. And today, my greatest and longest relationships are with women. The connection between Women and queer men, such as that explored by Eguchi and Long (2019), is worth further thorough examination

Concluding Considerations

After speaking with Roger, Isaac, and Thomas, breaking this chapter into two separate sections proved useful in various ways given the depth and layered concurrent themes throughout. My reasonings for cleaving it as such revolved around the natural flow of

conversation and their recognition of identity as an ethnoracial entity, and gay as a social mode of coherence with a set of rigid expectations and consequences.

In Part One, I focused on Making a Self through identity to better examine four themes. The first theme focused on the rendering of ethnoracial identity through interactions with and citations of formal documents. The discursive negotiations within their explanations, specifically from Roger and Isaac, cohered into a Blasé temperament, allowing them to move freely and on a whim on their selections.

The second theme of the first section examined their ancestral citations as a means of forging and explaining their ethnoracial identities. I touched too on the way that the historical formation of New Mexican Identity was accomplished through direct appeals of Spanish origin to engender a fold into the nation as a state. My focus here became less upon their individual dilemmas, and wove a thread to explain the way such historical determinations occurred under the pressure of the U.S. hegemonic colonialist identity regimes demanding negation and denial of Mexican affiliation to become citizen-subject.

The third theme looked at the way identity becomes contested through interactions with the Other. In particular, I affirmed the importance of the social web of communication and identity construction, but also to push back against the impossibility of being able to fully name, account for, and parse out all relevant and present threads in such interactions with an Other. In this, my focus became less on this emergence of interaction and more so the belief behind their shifting intelligibility.

The fourth theme of this first section then focused on the way Isaac and Thomas more explicitly sutured their ethnoracial place through a specific shift away from Latino origins. Isaac simplified this as having bonds to no counties within the conglomerate he recognizes as of the

Global South;, i.e., Latin. Thomas rejected Latino as an indicator of fetishized desire, but also as antithetical to his idealized physical embodied of a light-skin Hispanic White man. I shifted to detail Thomas's specific refutations of Latinx, whereby the paradoxical disinterest in using it himself is held in tension with his recognition of its utility but nevertheless problematic dissemination. Specifically, Latinx is employed from subjects within the U.S. who rely upon the hegemonic colonialist potential of the English language to name people in the world. In this, Latinx as an affinity rests precisely upon access to and understanding of the English language. The final theme of the first section focused on my respondents' resistance strategies. Ultimately, their choices are made possible via a general ambivalence, a capacity for holding contradictions and using them to navigate the world and potentially hostile social environments. Their unintelligibly within the U.S. becomes a locus of potential of social navigation for a system of identity hyper-fixated and projected upon the body.

In the second part of the present chapter, I focused on the general conversations about Relational Thresholds. This first included a section on the Ladder of Desire, detailing its values of a hyper-masculinized corporeal form as the conduit for sexual and social gay connections. I detailed the historic formations of gay typologies which undergirded such ladder structuration, specifically detailing the racist and classist undercurrents of these terms. In this, I described the allure of embodying and accessing such forms both of the aesthetic corporeal shape and also as social sites of wealth. I then pointed out the location in which the bridge of assimilation might unveil itself, and the ensuing implausibility of ever accessing such being.

The second theme of the second section focused on sadness. Speaking of the possibility of shame, I resisted hegemonic compulsions to craft happy endings and whole subjects and chose to instead remain in a site of discombobulation and dissolution as the very site of potential. The

brown feelings here illuminate the exhaustion of navigating normative regimes of hyper-masculinity standards in gay spaces. I then looked to my respondents' strategies of navigation, as Isaac would avoid uncomfortable topics with his family, Roger would focus on his bodybuilding, and Thomas would favor bodily augmentations and surgeries to affirm his femininity. At the same time, their sadness became emergent from their lack of connections into social spaces. That is, Isaac and Thomas blamed themselves rather than considered the social lacks.

The final portion looked to their affirmatory bonds as a vital resource in the face of mainstream exclusion. Additionally, I focused on Roger's and Isaac's disinterest and difficulty in managing and affiliating with gay social sites in Albuquerque. Isaac held a rich array of diverse groups of friends, and Roger simply could not manage the party scene and keep working. Thomas was the only one who named a desire to enter into more mainstream groups of gay men, which align with more alluring embodiments of White Americanness. Ultimately, spaces with women, in private homes, proved to be the most open, non-judgmental, and affirming.

In totality, I myself am resolved to dwell in a Coatlicue state, which will be further explored in response to the raw material of our discussions and thoughts. What I gather now is that the Queer of Color Hispanic subject is at times an unintelligible and socially unstable position that is also on the continual precipice of assimilation. The queer Hispanic, in such assertions of meaning and assumption, is moved by an undercurrent of ambivalence through this all. Such ambivalence seems to signal a form of introspection and extrospection. That is, I reason "melancolía" is a project of Queer of Color Hispanic ambivalence. *melancolía* is an resolvable sadness, not in resignation, but one that serves as a propulsion of connection for people who strain the structures of organization. Not neatly foreclosed or achieved in a negation, but a framework that attempts to hold the contradictions of one self, always in relation to and with the

other. Melancolía as a precipice too, of full citizen subjectivity in the U.S., provides a unique vantage point for viewing the way that the idealized aesthetic corporeal form of the gay world reinscribes hyper-masculinity as an alluring condition enabling, encouraging, and enticing their assimilation into nationalist normativity. And importantly, it allows for an examination into the feelings and effects from such unattainable desires.

I too try carrying Melancolía as acts of research and analysis that bonds, ruptures, confuses, and elucidates connections between myself and the co-researchers, across times, to forge thresholds of experience that paint a larger picture of social experience and sites of coming to know oneself. From this sensory propulsion, I move into the penultimate chapter of this work, exploring the knowledge generated from such arenas and the use of such potential toward queer ends, in matters and places of dissolution and destruction of meaning, beliefs, potentials, and desires.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

In this research project, I have sought to look at how Queer of Color men in New Mexico feel about their identities, desires, and sadness. I begin this final chapter to reflect what I have studied by reviewing those that precede it, and recalling again the interest fueling this project, its theoretical function, and methodological utility. I will then explain this study's contributions to its guiding theoretical foci. The chapter then elaborates the limits and future directions of the project, as well as outlining certain challenges. I provide a soft concluding gesture in the interest and form of queer ends, in what I am tentatively titling "Chapter VI."

I now return to Chapter One of this project, in which I outlined the origins of this work centrally revolving around brown feelings (Muñoz, 2006). These brown queer sensations are affirmed as a unique coherence of feeling and also as a social plane, unintelligible to hegemonic configurations of majoritarian feeling and emotional wellbeing. In the wake of experiencing such feeling for a significant time of my life, I wanted to analyze and seek to reconstruct my own relational web through this theoretical base. Like an expansion of breath into my chest, brown feelings provided a framework to critically investigate my own feelings but were always joined to an exhale in which bonds with the other becomes a vital force sustaining life.

I attempted to distill this urgency, hurt, and array of feeling through a brief poetic guise, where I reached into project's structuration around the assumption that a Queer of Color psyche is informed from colonialist logics of division (e.g., Calafell, 2005, 2007; Du Bois, 1903; Eguchi 2014, 2015; Lugones, 2012; Washington, 2017). I then outlined studies further assessing social configurations dis/allowing the folding of queer folks into full citizenship in order to consistently maintain and construct a violent extra-national threat in service of bolstering nationalist xenophobic enterprises. Puar (2007) conceptualized this totality as homonationalism, examining

how queer peripheral social members of the U.S. become incorporated into the project of nation by being codified as full citizen-subjects. Therefore, looking at peripheral citizen-subjects' inclusion within and exclusion from the nation is importantly telling of the way the U.S. constructs itself with certain members of its populace in relation to the global site. Working towards specificity, I drew from scholarship detailing how Latin subjects experience and relate to the U.S. nation-state in enigmatic ways, posing an assimilationist dilemma across shifting planes of difference, including gender, race, class, ability, sexual orientation, health status, and marriage status (Chavez, 2013; Puar, 2017; Soto Vega & Chávez, 2018). Equally, theorizations of queerness have often been accomplished through a locus of White cis male subjectivity. Pérez's experientially based postulation explained "the restriction of brown bodies from queer theory's institutional spaces shares ideological underpinnings with the expulsion of brown bodies from the nation-state" (2015, p. 101).

Such particularities required and benefitted from a congruent capacity of theory and analysis. To accomplish his task, I triangulated a research base around exemplary and germinal scholarship regarding knowledges from peripheral Queer of Color subjects. I briefly previewed and distilled initial themes from Anzaldúa (1987), Johnson (2001), and Muñoz (1999, 2006). I then concisely identified the utility of Latino Vernacular Discourse from Holling and Calafell (2011) as a clearer framework and guiding methodological form. By glancing into the theoretical structure of this project, I sought to outline its guiding ethos and interest, where in Chapter Two and Three, I provided a more thorough detail of such research.

My interest in these works gravitated around their considerations of the Queer of Color subject, and queerness in general. According to this scholarship, queer functions as a multidimensional articulation, concept, and coalitional form of meaning. These identifications of

queer cohere as an inquiry into anti-hegemonic potentials within social and institutional configurations of race, gender, class, ability, and more. This corpus of scholarly work is interested in the way Queer of Color subjects find ways of surviving within limited discursive and institutional realities. Queer of Color scholarship importantly allows an account of the material realities facing such groups in a way traditional queer theory fails to do and is unable to offer.

I closed Chapter One by presenting the guiding research questions and goals, whereby, after affirming the value of peripheral perspectives and briefly recalling the theory capable of fully grasping such reality, I expressed that this project is focused upon Queer of Color experiences across sadness and desire, utilizing a personal auto/methodological axis of inquiry. First, how do New Mexican sexual minoritarian men understand their ethnoracial identity? Second, how do New Mexican sexual minoritarian men experience melancholia? Third, how do New Mexican sexual minoritarian men feel about their chosen kinships? Three specific research goals are as follows: (1) Explicate experiences of New Mexican Queer of Color relationalities, (2) Interrogate the utility and function of the ethnoracial identity matrix as it affects the latinized panethnic imaginary, (3) demonstrate a peculiar format of a Queer Intercultural Communication examination of melancholia. I closed the chapter by naming Melancholia as a conceptual modality to locate the marrow of Queer of Color feelings across participants and myself.

In Chapter Two, I more thoroughly attended to my earlier cited theoretical threads which suture this research project into an orderly design. I returned to my triangulated research base across Anzaldúa (1987), Ferguson (2003), and Muñoz (1999, 2006). I developed the significance of Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* to this project with a theoretical affiliation to Theory in the Flesh. To Anzaldúa, Theory in the Flesh articulates the

physical body as a vital progenitor of knowledge, whereas such assertion deliberately shifted away from a colonialist Cartesian dualism in which the mind has been traditionally privileged as the locus of knowledge and comprehension, leaving the body a thing requiring discipline, separate from and inferior to the mind. Anzaldúa crafted this inquiry more largely on the nature of divisive logics itself, and especially its effects upon those in the periphery of the peripheries.

Thought of as borders, both literal places and social logics are also rendered as a cognitive psychic site. The knowledge of the body then becomes the threshold within which the Queer of Color subject thinks, acts, lives, traverses, and transgresses. This became what Anzaldúa called the Mestiza consciousness; a potential way of communication through body, words, and images unfolding “how duality is transcended” (1987, p. 102). Such subjects of this consciousness carry a unique capacity, *La Facultad*, “to see in surface phenomena the meaning of deeper realities, to see the deep structure below the surface. It is an instant ‘sensing,’ a quick perception arrived at without conscious reasoning” (p. 60). The body thus becomes thought of as an affected, knowledgeable membrane, a form connecting us to the social world and within which one forms an understanding of how to navigate across its potential safeties and dangers.

I then detailed the next point of this foundation, Roderick A. Ferguson’s *Queer of Color Critique*. I explained how a Queer of Color critique expressed “an epistemological intervention...interest[ed] in materiality” (Ferguson, 2003, p. 3), in the face of popular queer theorizing unable to account for the positions of minoritized subjectivities and knowledges. The materiality here, too, connects to culture, where the final point of the triangulated base is José Esteban Muñoz’s work. Muñoz looked to cultural realms making identity that might produce and elicit “unimagined alliances” (1999, p. 3). My reasoning for gravitating towards this research is due to its ability and interest in communication toward queer ends, and the

importance of life sustaining practices from minoritized subjects who in his example of disidentification, resignify meaning within a hegemonic and limited system of meaning.

I then tied in Muñoz's position of thought on feeling brown, feeling down as a way to map Queer of Color feelings, that are understood as partially incongruent to normative citizen subject feelings (2006, p. 676). Brown feelings define a more unique relationship of the Queer of Color subject, whereby such experience of feeling in the "depressive position is a site of potentiality and not simply a breakdown of the self or the social fabric" (p. 687). This for Muñoz also "signals a certain kind of hope" (p. 688) where in the wake of such feeling and position, one might yearn to restructure their field of relations.

By recalling this base, I sought to determine the spiritual and scholarly ethos of the specific area of Queer Intercultural Communication (QIC) as the place to work across such totalities. In this theoretical appeal, queerness is regarded as "a strategy to destabilize the normative knowledge production of intercultural communication" striving to unveil and prioritize "alternative ways of knowing, being, and acting that counter the majoritarian belongings in and across local, national, and global contexts" (Eguchi & Calafell, 2020, p. 3), peripheral subjects' knowledges are thus vital to its primary goal. I then detailed its delineation of the notion of Queer in a clearer formulation, where it can be thought of as both a verb and noun, representing the capacity to reformulate seemingly finite hegemonic systems of meaning. That is, as a larger phenomenological ephemeral instantiation, queerness "disrupts the historically normalized boundaries of ideologies that govern such relational structures, such as dating, sex, marriage, family, and kinship, so that alternative modes of living may be articulated" (Eguchi, 2020, p. 4). I concluded that this intellectual focus thus enabled a fruitful ground upon which to locate this project. I then turned my attention to a set of examples on the unique scholarly contributions

fronting inquiries into racialized desire by McCune (2014), Nyugen (2014), and Mack (2017), whereby again, race and sexuality might become regarded as of anti-hegemonic potential. I relied on this to justify my interest in and focus on desire as an analytical point of this project to map queer glimpses of survival.

I then elaborated more specifically the guiding structure of Latino Vernacular Discourse (LVD). As a metatheory for quotidian locales, LVD offers a mode of examination “....in which Latin@s struggle over, produce, engage, enact and/or perform culture, identities, and community formation” (Calafell & Holling, 2011, p. 22). I explained my affinity with LVD for this project as it encouraged complex theoretical structure for such groups across ordinary cultural terrain. My project alongside LVD thus encouraged a distinct understanding of Latin subjects within the U.S. that also attends to the complex formation of such a group, and to also question the utility of potentially homogenizing terminologies. Rivera-Servera, too, (2012) explained a direction away from such tendencies, offering a consideration of feeling as an element of affinity rather than tethers purely of identity. Distilled as Queer Latinidad, this becomes an anti-hegemonic theoretical pursuit. These two streams of scholarly thought thus became a guiding apparatus of my project, examining the feelings around and across Hispanic subjects as a potential uniting thread that would elucidate unique knowledges toward queer ends.

By aligning with their work, I noted the importance of historicizing currents of intuitional meaning around ethnoracialized projects as it affected queer subjects within local sites of focus. I responded to this need by charting New Mexico’s colonial history and initial relationship with Spain and Mexico, where I then recalled the method of appeals for statehood within the U.S. I next worked from Martín Alcoff (2011) to make clearer sense of the utility and function of U.S. conceptualizations of race and ethnicity affecting Latin folk. Accordingly, Martín Alcoff

conceptualized Latin folk in the U.S. as experiencing racialization as an ethnic group, even while technically legally recognized as White. She termed this distinct experience of social conflation *ethnorace*. Closing the chapter, I then provided a historicization of the uniqueness of identity in New Mexico across ethnoracial characterizations. Given the lack of consensus of identity terminology for the area's majority populace (Trujillo, 2010), I resolved early on to avoid any larger identification of the state population, instead looking to grounded and emergent understandings.

In Chapter Three, I concentrated on the guiding methodologies. I declared a methodological orientation across an auto/ethnographic foci, queer embodied critique, and narrative analysis, tied together under a QIC rubric. I detailed this methodological design as a more critically disposed Auto/ethnographic turn, investigating not just at the site of self, but within social contexts and oriented towards coalitional potentials and meaning for Queer of Color subjects. Aligned more precisely to a queer embodied critique, I defined the importance and theoretical value of modes of analysis for the peripheral members of marginalized communities. In this, the utility of a correspondingly apt framework of analysis, capable of accounting squarely for the material concerns and realities facing such groups lived social experiences and psychic realms of belief became essential.

I thereafter outlined examples of this research within the field of QIC. As the area of investigation works to determine and unveil sites of possibility towards queer ends in the everyday sites of life, it importantly has counter-normative research goals. By aligning with research in the area (e.g., Abdi, 2014; Eguchi, 2011, 2015, 2017; Johnson, 2014; LeMaster, 2014) I too described an interest in queering narrative form itself, not only as an aesthetic project of design and articulation but to better arrange and consider dimensions of research in novel and

affectingly composed strands. That is, I clarified that QIC emphasizes an importance in troubling standardized narrative form, especially when existing within hegemonic coding of Queer of Color experience, feeling, and thought as frequently unintelligible. This base allowed me to justify my own differential structuration of this project from more standard models of research. Doing so also allowed me to focus on emotions, verbal acts, and close textual focus, congruent with narrative analysis. QIC also promoted a way to problematize and reflexively grapple with my own participation and assembly of the project.

In Chapter Four, I broke up the density of thought by formatting the discussion according to its thematic flows. From this, “Making a Self” was the first section which more specifically accounted for ethnoracial dimensions of self in social and institutionally organized interactions. The first research question, “How do New Mexican sexual minoritarian men understand their ethnoracial identity?” was attended to within this section. In this portion of the chapter, I uncovered a sense of ambivalence allowing the co-researchers to move across institutional demands for identity answers without an anchor to any one identitarian label, freely moving across White, Hispanic, and Latino. I then paired this with an examination of the historical use of establishing a Spanish ancestry and its endurance now in naming the uniqueness of New Mexican identity. The third theme then established the shifting social nature of what and how the self is constituted via communicative interactions with the other. The sense of ambivalence outlined earlier, secured here a potential of understanding and endurance within such dynamic occupation in the other’s imaginary. That is, the way others perceived them across a plethora of ethnoracial assumptions did not intensely negatively affect them, and they in fact lent understanding to the perspectives of the other.

The final focus of this section elaborated a more rigid disinterest by Thomas and Isaac about their beliefs on personal usage and affiliation with Latin/Latino/Latinx identifications. For Thomas, it was antithetical to his desires of aesthetic embodiment which revolved around a White bodily ideality. And for Isaac, he explained that he lacked ties to Latino, for his conceptualization of Latino was married to South American locales, of which he had no known ancestral linkages. This section additionally attended to Thomas's perspectives on the novel term "Latinx." For him, it stood as a figure and force of English and U.S. American Hegemony. These two above themes provided satisfaction of the second research goal which sought to interrogate the utility and function of the ethnoracial identity matrix as it affects the Latin panethnic imaginary.

The second half of the chapter, *Relational Thresholds*, then explored gay less as an identitarian position and more a set of social expectations and consequences. This segment worked to explore the second research question, "how do New Mexican sexual minoritarian men experience melancholia?" For the co-researchers, "gay" described a limiting and hyper-specific criteria of masculinity embodied through a physically aestheticized form. These standards were an expectation governing the social membrane amongst gay men. The first analytical point in this section hence explicitly outlined the Ladder of Desire, where I then contextualized historic points of contemporary origination and current arrangement as an exclusionary tactic around race, ability, and wealth.

I then attended to my co-researchers' experiences of sadness in relation to ethnoracialization and gender sexual orientation. I elucidated the notion of brown feelings to clarify the nature of their tactics and strategies that resist the hegemonic pressure of such experiences towards the neatly closed project of a happy, whole subject. Roger explained

focusing on his bodily form and committing to a routine and exercise regimen for his wellbeing. Isaac actively avoided the topic of gay romantic partnerships with his parents to avoid discomfort among their potential enduring projections of shame. Thomas explained various strategies to affirm the parts of himself socially made as less desirable, such as femininity on the body, affirmed through his use of cosmetic procedures and augmentations. The third focus looked to their personal thoughts and values about strategies, particularly around relationships, which worked to answer the second research question “How do New Mexican sexual minoritarian men feel about their chosen kinships?” On the affirmatory bonds they keep, Isaac spoke of valuing a rich array of diverse kinships, Thomas yearned for more normative idealized connections with large groups of gay men, and Roger would instead prefer keeping a small circle of friends, equally born out of a disinterest in platonic and romantic bonds with feminine gay men. Additionally, Isaac and Thomas shared that their most affirming bonds were with women in private spaces, such as someone’s home.

I closed Chapter Four by preliminarily explaining what *Melancolía* might express. To do so, I established a connection to the Coatlicue state alongside the lens of Roger, Thomas, and Isaac’s ambivalence. In this, I explained a relational project, like Muñoz’s work on Brown Feelings require intro/extrospection. *Melancolía*, as a project of Queer of Color Hispanic ambivalence, signals with the prefix “ambi” this very nature, and the organizing of the subject as both an inward psychic and outward social symbiotic relationship, as Anzaldúa (1987) had established. The particularity of a project of *Melancolía* is to more accurately describe peripheral subjects perhaps next in line for, or closely on the precipice of, full U.S. citizen-subjecthood, if not somehow slipping into such status already. A study on *Melancolía* also expresses the psychic

threshold in which a subject is aware of this and the static caused in the dissonant harmonies of being one thing to the self and another to the other like Anzaldúa's mestiza consciousness.

I ended the chapter momentarily explaining that Melancolía also functions as a deliberate act of research and analytical incoherence, blurring the more rigid split between myself and the co-researchers, for instance. In doing so, I worked to satisfy the third research goal seeking to demonstrate a peculiar format of a Queer Intercultural Communication examination of melancholia. Melancolía, in this manifestation, was a project to structure an even larger vision of social ephemeral experiences in which a Queer of Color subject may come to know oneself. I believe this labor of seeking utopia might itself also have a utopic potential.

Theoretical Implications

I will next detail the project's larger relationship to its theoretical grounding, conceptual elements, and methodological pursuits. I then attend to the project's limitations and future directions. I close the chapter by further determining the nature of a study of Melancolía, settling into the tide of Chapter Six.

Theory in the Flesh. Early on I referred to the project's soul as a triangulated base which extended across Anzaldúa (1987), Ferguson (2003), and Muñoz (1999, 2006). I also worked with the scholarship of Johnson (2001) to be able to determine a means of accounting for Queer of Color knowledges. This project relied upon a Theory in the Flesh that explicitly featured the uniqueness of brown feelings as a point of coming to know reality and social expectations across cultural locates. This weaved base offered a means of encouraging potential transgressions. In the first half of the analysis, I accordingly explored the first theme on the seemingly blasé, ambivalent feelings about ethnoracial identity. Working alongside the Anzaldúan concept of the Mestiza consciousness, I emphasized the way that a Queer of Color Hispanic subject in New

Mexico, as accounted for here, maintains an awareness of the shifting ethnoracial interpretations project upon them by the other. This ambivalence, a sort of brown feeling, was a way to generate a capacity to, first, recognize a validity to their interpretations and to then dwell in a place that does not take it all to heart and find a sort of freedom in the potential of terms and assumptions. The Mestiza consciousness, a means of transcending and living across dualist constructions, in this case identifies the way their connection to ambivalence makes such a feat possible.

The Mestiza consciousness offered another means of mapping how the self comes to such awareness within a social push and pull with the other. As explored in the third theme, the social other, I reaffirmed the vitality that notes the social dynamics marking identity, where it is always tied with the other. That is, as Thomas, Isaac, and Roger explained, they acknowledged varying interpretations of their ethnoracialness, and recognized the potential validity in the perception of the other. This perspective is essential to a mestiza consciousness and another emblematic point of the way such Queer of Color subjects experience and dwell on thresholds of being, shifting across contexts and social environments.

My goal in this was to emphasize the ethnographic integrity of this project's autoethnographical disposition, through an embodied Queer of Color critique. The autoethnographical disposition of this focus enabled a queerly oriented means of research assembly, whereby connecting threads across co-researchers' experience and my own ordered together a greater vantage point from which to explore these themes. By doing this, it allowed a unique charting of the feelings and experiences within the analysis and the research process itself to articulate something unique in a correspondingly accurate and appropriate form.

This was accomplished by relying upon culturally forged understandings of the uniqueness of this group, thus establishing a precisely appropriate conceptual lens of analysis.

Doing this research was a way to remedy a deep concern in Pérez's postulation that "the restriction of brown bodies from queer theory's institutional spaces shares ideological underpinnings with the expulsion of brown bodies from the nation-state" (2015, p. 101). I joined with scholars (Chavez, 2013; Puar, 2017; Soto Vega and Chávez, 2018) determining the unique way such subjects relate to the U.S. nation-state as potentially precarious pseudo-members, on the precipice of assimilation, often held at bay due to a confluence of factors including race, gender, health, sexual-orientation, wealth, ability, nation-of-origin, and more. This focus on the Queer of Color subject's position within the U.S. nation state culminated in the shared experience of dating, and the potential of acquiescing into White American generational wealth. Such a prospect was immensely overwhelming, but also failed to ameliorate the already materialized and psychic differentiations across social communication. As with my view of the spoons at breakfast and Thomas's idea of the dining table, both signify the exhausting prospect of acquiescing to the social expectations of such groups. Such experience unveiled the discontentment at the overwhelmingly novel prospect of potentially marrying into such channels. This embellishment and allure for the Queer of Color subject to access White generational wealth was dependent upon proximity to White wealth social standards too, but ultimately rejected.

Latina/o Vernacular Discourse. I gravitated towards the use of Latino Vernacular Discourse (LVD) for a series of reasons. First, for establishing the uniqueness of this group, LVD became a technology to precisely determine not only anti-hegemonic discursive potentials but also mundane resistant instantiations. Another reason for relying upon LVD was its ability to grapple with the complicated ideations around terminology, as well as working against potentially homogenizing tendencies to bolster an assumed pan-ethnic coherence. As Martín

Alcoff spoke of the idiosyncratic experience conflating race and ethnicity, *ethnorace* was used to better explore the co-researchers' experiences. I therefore worked alongside these perspectives calling for heightened contextualizing of the local area of inquiry. In particular, I historicized the uniqueness, emergence, and function of ethnoracial vectors of identity in New Mexico through the 21st century.

I brought in Rivera-Servera's (2012) notion of Queer Latinidad to explain a different direction for this grouping, where considering feeling provided the threads of affinity rather than tethers made purely of identity. The direction of this theoretical companionship allowed me to consider feeling as a potential affinity across individuals. This inclusion too went on to assist in organizing the utility and guiding hand of brown feelings in this project. Brown feelings served as a thread across the co-researchers, as Muñoz explained the way feelings from such groups are often incoherent within the socially hegemonic base of appropriate feelings. I therefore incorporated brown feelings into this work to gather the unique coherence of feeling as a way to potentially unite Queer of Color Hispanic subjects. That is, I did not precisely seek to work with such group for a homogenizing formation of identity, but rather worked to unveil the feelings around such social experiences that might be telling and informative of Queer of Color resistant potentials.

Queer Intercultural Communication. I worked from the field of QIC as a mesh of the earlier outlined projects of thought and fields of development. This footing emphasized an interest in identifying queer anti-hegemonic potential. As the project of thought and labor moved to realize peripheral counter-majoritarian knowledges across a scope of contexts (Eguchi & Calafell, 2020, p. 3), I used this focus to tease out the importance of inquiring into desire from Queer of Color subjects. Across *Theory in the Flesh* and QIC, I worked to question desire as it

affects Queer of Color subjects' webs and structurations of relationships. Similar to McCune (2014), Nyugen (2014), and Mack (2017), I focused on the directions of desire as towards and away from the self. Importantly, this focus asserts that personal beliefs of desire are informed by hegemonic messages, meanings, and interactions. Such theoretical pursuits of focusing on peripheral subjects illuminated how marginalized groups might still aspire to and maintain a desire to appear and configure themselves according to a social standard of masculinity and racialized embodiments.

In the second theme of identity, I looked at how the co-researchers understood their ancestral ties, contextualized within a history of New Mexico denying ties to Mexico in order to appeal for statehood into the U.S. On building into a larger global situatedness, Thomas and Isaac spoke of a personal disinterest in associating or identifying with Latino. In the fourth theme on identity, I explained the way they sought to make themselves away from Latino. Within this vantage, I examined Thomas's thoughts about Latinx as an English-language, academic colonial project from within the U.S., projected outward and naming such groups around the world. Isaac personally explained he simply did not know about his own specific ancestral origins and would not rely on them as mundane personal identifiers even if he did. Thomas held more complex considerations, where his specific disinterest in personal terminological affiliation with Latino was also due to experiencing fetishized projections of desire. The uniqueness of desire for such subject position explored the role of Queer of Color subjects who at times pass as White and other times do not, who are also on varying places of masculinity and work to affect their bodies in ways to meet such standards.

These standards and expectations of physical form, personality traits, and behaviors prohibit or delimit social ease and entry, and therefore require certain forms of being that act as a

conduit -making bonds. The former (physical form) was outlined in the first theme of part two, known as the ladder of desire. In it, I examined how Thomas's negation of Latino was driven by a desire to fit into an aesthetic standard, derived from White cis ideality rooted in 90s consumerist images of bodily fashion while also outlining the origin of its exclusionary roots. To him, Latino therefore was regarded as a fetishized sexual formation.

Thusly, Queer of Color Hispanic might also designate an identitarian position with a hyper-focus on the body as a point of access into mainstream realms. As ethnorace is highly projected onto the body, gay and its hyper-aestheticized corporeal expectations became mapped and read onto the body. Whereas gay might delimit an orientation and treatment by the social and institutional fabric of reality, gay also dwells upon bodily form. In the discovery of the project, I do not mean to claim there is one inherent way a gay body might look, but that rather the gay social mainstream pressures, embodied and exaggerating pursuits of hyper-masculinity require a heightened, exhausting preoccupation with ones' body that in this instance crashed into the vector of ethnorace. Failing to meet such expectations denies entry into mainstream social circles, bonds, and connections. And the demand is made more extreme when ethnoracialized folk interact with these forces, whereas one might be able to acquire the capital means and time of changing their body, but might never be read above all else as White. In this, this specific area of examination strongly benefited from a focus on the body's role in generating social potentials of connections, as well as a focus on the role of fatphobia as a pronounced force within such groups.

I again used notions of desire to map the important kinships the co-researchers keep. In the third theme of the second half of analysis, I specifically described the different feelings and beliefs around the groups they keep, as well as their desires for additional social webs of

relationships. In doing so, I determined that Thomas and Isaac hold certain unattainable bonds as desirable. Isaac, in wanting to build a diverse array of friendships, did not have significant bonds with straight men and struggled to forge them. Thomas explained his struggles in forming his desired kinships with the popularized image of large groups of gay men as witnessed on social media posts. In this vein, I also outlined the factors limiting other social ties, which included proximity to feminine attributes, and a reserved personal disposition, which failed to meet expectations of bonds-making.

The totality of these theoretical perspectives is highly interested in queerness and resistant counter-hegemonic acts and potentials. The project then worked to elicit my co-researchers' tactics against such grating experience, including affirming feminine features through bodily augmentation, which at the same time requires money. It also included the demand to deliberately adjust the self in social realms in order to align with social expectations of interaction, thereby achieving successful bonds. To answer my first boyfriend's point about being an inherent member of and belonging within gay culture, the answer is not so simple. Immediate group coherence is not afforded equally to everyone within such marginalized groupings. My focus in this was to explain the factors disabling bonds and interrupting flows of achieving desire for certain kinships. In this, QIC is useful as it allows for an interrogation of the conduits making bonds and informing feelings, attitudes, and beliefs about queer companionship.

Methodological Considerations

Procedural Challenges. This project was developed over the course of nearly four years from inception, to early theoretical and methodological development, then onto procedural approval, narrative collection, analysis and construction. The entirety of the document was

compiled and completed in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic still occurring at the time of this writing (March 2022). Beyond this, there were a series of challenges that I will now discuss.

In March 2020, a week after I received approval from the Institutional Review Board to conduct the interviews, the entire state went into a lockdown order to combat the spread of SARS-Cov-2. While people were heeding such orders, the looming threat of its spread informed a sense of compressed time. That is, the interviews were held in a seemingly post-haste, limited window. Each interview was more concise than originally envisioned. Perhaps counterintuitively, the lockdown measures produced at the same time a hesitant means of engagement, even remotely. I found myself yearning for connection but equally uncomfortable trying to find a way to move forward. The looming paranoia also led to several failed attempts at increasing participants. At the point of recruitment and sending informed consent, many potential co-researchers declined to participate, communicated only through their enduring silence. I believe providing financial compensation would have potentially encouraged greater participation. Working with Roger, Isaac, and Thomas in proved important and ultimately an opportunity to recall in much greater depth the thoughts, attitudes, modes of telling, and experiences for each of them and myself. For this more intimate and auto/ethnographic formation of research, the participant size lent itself well to a rigorously appropriate level of insight.

Analytical Challenges. At times, there was a discomfort and disinterest on the part of my co-researchers in speaking about their feelings. I believe another path of this research could potentially be a mix of group and individual interviews, with counseling on hand to provide relief and understanding in the face of emotional recall. While this discomfort and disinterest was illuminating and considered in analysis, I do wonder what would have emerged if able to achieve greater participant comfort.

On the interest of more open expression, I think back to when Thomas determined that one of my points of inquiry required a deep sense of self understanding, saying the following:

I think it's hard to kind of understand [deep questions] anyway, because you have to have a really deep understanding of yourself to kind of really know what you're talking about when you're answering that.

While knowledge about and desire for kinship across ages is important, I believe a focus on older participants might have illuminated more of these dimensions just from greater time of life experience. On average, Isaac would use “I don’t know” in nearly every one of his thoughts, averaging about two such utterances per speaking point. This may signal a variety things - perhaps doubts, uncertainties, or just a personal speech style. I recognize as a central concern its frequency in use as indicating a limited occurrence of contemplation. As with his parents, he explained that he was perfectly content with not bringing up discussions of sexuality or romantic partners, for:

It's kind of awkward conversation sometimes. I'd rather not bring it up to be honest with my parents. Sometimes it's easier just to not bring things up. Otherwise it's going to go through some long bunny trails and places I would rather not go.

I do not mean to suggest that limited consideration is Isaac’s fault, or something he freely chooses to do, for in discussions of ethnorace he held important experiential understandings. But just as sadness was difficult for him to speak about, so were occasions on which he experienced shame. At the same time, as he prefers to hold many different kinships, the specific experiences within gay spaces might be limited and less desirable to him, thereby reducing such possible experiences for contemplation about them.

This was true at times for Roger as well. As he said to me, “here no one cares, you have to do [the research] with- where people are a little bit more educated and have goals and shit.” His predicament, I believe, indicates that such research focus may have been more ideally situated for a bigger metropolitan locale, which to him would produce more experiences which would promote the knowledges I was seeking. For Roger, gay local scenes may be insufficient exploratory sites. Here, my questions could have benefitted from a greater in-group specificity. As my questions were general, I could not necessarily access in-group meanings which could have helped ground my interest in a stronger clarity for Roger, Isaac, and Thomas.

A greater obstacle in the analytical path was my own experience of melancholia and brown feelings. Specifically, I do not want to hold up a pathologizing gaze which would maintain the problematic White articulation of normative feelings. That is, I bear great strain in trying to recognize sadness as a liberatory site of potential, while at the same time recognizing the experience has contributed to “disordered” patterns of thought and behaviors. I do recognize that I, in paths of defense and protection against racist, homophobic, classist, and ableist antagonisms, abuse, and violence, now have a thought process that is disordered and detrimentally affecting the experience of my life.

The pathologizing state of the medicalization model places the onus of responsibility on the individual to overcome this, as well as the very subject as the point of failure. But in this, how the hell does anyone bear all this sadness from a system designed to eradicate them on a structural level? My sad feelings might occur on a specific, looping level I am unable to control or maintain, and thus lacked clarity in its translation into a research project. Specifically, my points of interest and questions may have been too specific in light of this cognitive experience of reality. As a researcher, I believe an simpler focus, created under less personal cognitive strain

would have generated a better understanding of the questions and interest from Roger, Isaac, and Thomas.

Limitations and Future Directions

I will now explain the conceptual strains to this work and in the same vein express future directions this research may venture towards. This works across queerness first, explaining the queer visions perhaps not fully identified here. I then attend to the role of the English language and its relationship to the fullness of understanding in the project. I then briefly note the final focus on White Hispanic subjects and the need for greater coalitional potentials. I then admit to and reconcile with the dense linguistic construction of this work. I then grapple with my own personal concerns across the development of this entire project. Finally, I bring this chapter to a close, explaining more wholly Melancolía, and how it may come into greater illumination in Chapter Six.

Queerness. Roger shared two points of mild contention with my questions and the project in general. Largely expressed around as the illogical application of the research to Albuquerque as site of inquiry, his first point was about the small size of the gay scene. First, according to him, “no one’s smart enough to answer” my questions. He then further explained that “These are questions for like a big city type, uh- like someone from...where there’s like, a huge gay scene...The gay scene here is pathetic- know what I mean?” His tags at the end of his thoughts punctuated the space around his claims. In this, he was explaining that the gay scene was too condensed to frequently produce the interactions I was interested in discovering. His second point about my interest in fetishized racialized desire, and that “here no one cares,” suggested to remedy such issue I ought to conduct the present research project “where people are a little bit more educated and have goals and shit.” While stated in his own words, perhaps a bit crudely, I

think his point was focused on the benefits of conducting this research in a place with richer diversity that would foster more of the interactions I was seeking.

Subsequently, there arose a specific issue around the identification of queerness as an emerging and relationally constructed, risked, fleeting potential and enacted reality. Truthfully, I am unsure if looking to a more populated area of Queer of Color folk would necessarily unveil such potential. Perhaps the issue could be remedied by looking to spaces and scenes like queer clubs, groups, and more intentional communities like the Albuquerque Drag Pageant community, or equally, folks who politically align with a queer activist identity. That is, locating a shared and specific social event could have strengthened what I was seeking as a queerly informed analytical determination.

English language. The project was conducted in the English language. A fuller view of my research interests could have been assembled with a perspective crafted via the Spanish language. The thoughts assembled in the Spanish language would have unveiled a richer consideration of these points, in a different discursive level of material depth. Additionally, another research project on Hispanic populations in English has a dangerous capacity to take a colonist research form. The assumptions, claims, and naming are all backed by the hegemonic capacity of the English language and U.S. nation-state. From this, I have worked to reflexively and analytically produce this body of work with such awareness in mind, and in practice. At the same time, I lack a proficiency in speaking and writing Spanish. A co-researcher for such project with a better language proficiency would be a great addition to a future vision of this project.

White-Hispanic. Similar to the issue of site and diversity, this project focused on cisgender men who identified principally as White Hispanic. While promoting the unique considerations from such perspective and social experience, it did not detail any other raced

vectors of difference. Once more, while the project was focused on the conflation of race and ethnicity, and established the confusing and socially shifting identity assumptions projected upon such folk, the White Hispanic men here described actively being considered White. This project would have benefited from a more complex web of participants to destabilize the relation to White racialized embodiments.

To be clear, I, within the eyes of the U.S. institution of government, am White. At the same time, growing up, if I were ever in a room full of White people, I was not White. I was always aware of this. This designation of ethnorace helps explained the bizarreness of such experiences, as does the Mestiza consciousness. At the same time, whereas a Mestiza consciousness affirms Indigeneity along specific interest in Hispanic/Latino anti-Blackness, I think of Thomas's propulsion towards White European origins. While he wants to affirm such Indigenous ancestry, he was cautious and aware of the way people might read him, in such ethnoracial embodiment, as a fake.

Access into ambivalence seems to be made from White access, which in such architecture, remains an anti-Black, anti-Indigenous design. The closeness and access to White identity comes at the cost of negating and dismissing a potential in Black, Indigenous connections. As Thomas explained regarding encountering people who refuse to claim Mexicanness, "I'm like, 'so if you tell me your great-great-grandmother when she lived here, 'cause she lived here her whole life, she was Mexican, yet you're not?'" the web of mapping the self ends where Mexico starts, which to him signals Spanish arrival as making and comprising of Mexico's populace.

Thomas does not expand his explanation to include what was before Mexico, the people, and the land. And as his Mexican directions of origin point to Spain, the very technologies of

race, nation, citizenship, progeny, and colonialism continue to separate, at every junction, Indigeneity and Blackness. That is, the apparatus of nation and our affiliations to it, are structured to erase and dehumanize Black and Indigenous subjects (e.g., Byrd, 2012; Ferguson, 2004; Puar, 2017). The constructions of self that Thomas and Isaac assembled relied on the solidification of nations as the entities in which their tether to the world began. Nation is the point of origin. These bonds are not liberatory here. Perhaps another project can address this issue. My point is that their ambivalence might be tied to White proximity, which is built by the nation upon the ontological marginalization and destruction of other ethnoracial groups. Access to White identity is enticing, and when acquiesced into might be a way to minimize such pressure from the state and social reality.

Intra-relations. The outlined kinships of choice very much resembled their own personal identifications, as, for example, when Thomas explained that all his friends “....are very much-look like me. They all have the same skin tone...” While this project was focused upon intra-Queer of Color bonds, it would have additionally benefited from a more specific outlining of relationships across these groups. While the reality is that in this case, they may only hold close kinships with similar folks to themselves and not across an ethnoracial array, I maintain this finding was important, but nevertheless a limitation regarding the potential and interest in bolstering more kinships with a specific interest in ethnoracial diversity. A future extension of this project could, according to Roger’s point be better suited “for like a big city type.” Or, perhaps my research might be better suited to a more densely populated site with greater array of diversity.

Compositional Style. A tremendous concern I have sought to alleviate is the verbose and academically-forged language choices. Two things guided me in my composition. First, variety,

as I used an array of synonyms throughout in order to create a more compelling tone, and to break up the academically required repetition. At the same time, this makes a more exclusive type of readership. Combined with the research vernacular too, it escalates the degrees of this issue. A future project, with a more published and distribution trajectory of product, would benefit strongly from a grounded and more approachable choice of language, as well as explanation of theory, method, and discussion. I seek to alleviate this concern in the work of Chapter Six.

Self. This entire research process was nearly foreclosed by a litany of health issues, exacerbating one another, and negatively affected from the non-successful prescribed remedies that further coalesced into a debilitated proximate breakdown. I suffered a deterioration of my cognitive capacity for almost a year, as well as strain and exhaustion from being powerless to remedy this quickly. It was not until the end of this project that I was able to find a glimpse of relief. In this state, I have experienced a near collapse and complete shift of my relational field and web of kinship support. I become distanced and isolated even further from people who were once a core set of support. I have also been living in poverty for a year, unable to maintain housing or reliable access to food by my own means. Also, I have survived living in a pandemic under such conditions.

I am currently working to resolve and implement the best practices I can to remain healthy and alive. I am equally reminded though of the way disability, race, and sexual orientation prohibit a shared understanding of reality between myself and my health practitioners. That is, to Muñoz's point, the feelings, thoughts, and experience of my life are very much unintelligible to health practitioners engaging in traditional patterns of western pathologizing medical thought. That is, the reason I want to do this research is the very reason

this research is hard to do, and the reason why healing from the process is impossible because the process could only ever be remedied by stopping entirely. As much as this has been a labor of love, this has entirely been a terrorizing process of pain, exacerbated by external events, and inward expectations through a disordered capacity of thought. I am aware this is not a good place to be when conducting research. But at the same time, as a Queer of Color subject with a series of health issues, categorized and socially configured as disabilities, I am now just reaching a space where I am happy, grateful, and okay with the prospect of being alive.

Conclusion

Melancolía as a project of research can be thought of as an implementation of José Esteban Muñoz thoughts on *Feeling Down, Feeling Brown*. Melancolía works as a form of sadness, unresolvable not in a timbre of resignation, but enabling a propensity for connection across people who seek to structure their field of relations. This desire undergirded the project, turning into a focus on how these bonds might come to be. This determination thus implemented the first research goal of explicating experiences of New Mexican Queer of Color relationality. The title of the project comes to speak of and reflect the conglomerate of its research based for such a vision.

I better capture this essence in the title of the research body itself, as more accurately: “Melancolia: A Project/ion of Queer of Color Ambi/valence.” I first wish to acknowledge that there are a number of ways to read the title. The totality of the varying potentials of meaning are parsed below. I begin with the varying possibility of its interpreted grammatical organization in the sentence, starting with “project/ion” as projection, project, and ion. In these three divisions, I then include the semantic possibilities within the potential meanings of those three words. This includes “projection” as two different nouns, “project” as a noun and verb form, and ion treated

as a word despite its function as a suffix. Typically, a prefix or suffix is not isolated in such a way, but joined with the performatively utilized forward slash “/” might delimit it as a unique entity within the sentence construction. I therefore include it as well. As the breakdown leads with the potentials from projection, projection, and ion, I then join the possibilities out of “ambi/valence,” where “ambi” as a prefix root word and “valence” come into potential clarity of meaning. While “ambi” does not technically make much sense, it is nevertheless included in the mapping of meaning of the title.

Table 2

Title Configurations and Potentials

	Word	Potential configurations	Definition
	Project, noun: An estimation or forecast		
	“A project of Queer of Color...”		
1		Ambivalence	<i>Uncertainty</i>
2		Valence	<i>Capacity for bonding</i>
3		Valence	<i>Screening framework</i>
4		Ambi-	<i>Both/around</i>
	Projection, noun: An image displaced upon a surface plane		
	“A projection of Queer of Color...”		
5		Ambivalence	<i>Uncertainty</i>
6		Valence	<i>Capacity for bonding</i>
7		Valence	<i>Screening framework</i>
8		Ambi-	<i>Both/around</i>
	Project, noun: A development or enterprise		
	“A project of Queer of Color...”		
9		Ambivalence	<i>Uncertainty</i>
10		Valence	<i>Capacity for bonding</i>
11		Valence	<i>Screening framework</i>
12		Ambi-	<i>Both/around</i>
	Project, verb: Outward extension		
	“A project of Queer of Color...”		
13		Ambivalence	<i>Uncertainty</i>
14		Valence	<i>Capacity for bonding</i>
15		Valence	<i>Screening framework</i>
16		Ambi-	<i>Both/around</i>
	Ion, noun: A molecule of an atom		
	“A[n] ion of Queer of Color...”		

17	Ambivalence	<i>Uncertainty</i>
18	Valence	<i>Capacity for bonding</i>
19	Valence	<i>Screening framework</i>
20	Ambi-	<i>Both/around</i>
-Ion, (prefix): An element used to modify a word from a noun into a verbal action		
“A[n]-ion of Queer of Color...”		
21	Ambivalence	<i>Uncertainty</i>
22	Valence	<i>Capacity for bonding</i>
23	Valence	<i>Screening framework</i>
24	Ambi-	<i>Both/around</i>

I want to now describe my intention of meaning. The two possibilities I intend in its structure of Melancholía is “a project and projection of Queer of Color ambivalence,” and a “an ion of Queer of Color valence.” The arrangement of “Project/ion” refers to the development of this dissertation as a body of research, and the ethos behind the desire to craft such analysis and understanding. The projection of “Project/ion” refers to ways our Queer of Color knowledges are projected outwards, a veil made from our experiential knowledge, and potentially informing how we take in new knowledges and arrange our thoughts in relation to what we already know, and importantly how this affects our mappings of the social relational spheres. This understanding is held too in the play on “ion” which serves as a clearer synthesis with “ambi/valence,” which, like the atomic particle, can be charged negatively or positively, enabling or prohibiting a propensity to attract or repel others. The totality of this smallest form of material in known existence coheres to form the material of our reality, and plays to explain the role of desire in the collision of our psychic and physical reality. Candidly, I considered adding physic/al to the title (A Project/ion of Physic/al Queer of Color Ambi/valence) potentially immolating and exhausting all meaning all at once.

Within Ambi/valence, the prefix gestures and details a capacity for multiple things, and the psychic threshold Anzaldúa (1987) detailed as a Mestiza consciousness. Valence can be a

screen of perspective, and returning to atomic structure it also works as a way to conceptualize the cohering totality of separateness into some form. Valence refers to the number of atoms required for combining with other atomic elements. So if ions are what makes atoms, and atoms are the foundation of ontological elements coming into form, “A project/ion of Queer of Color ambi/valence” takes what we learn about ourselves and applies that to how we might be propelled to form socially material bonds outside of ourselves.

My usage of “/” is affected as a dialectical mediation of queerly brown propensities, not seeking to delimit meaning, but aiming to identify and hold the unique elements of myriad potentials of meaning that envelope something greater than the sum of its parts. “A Project/ion of Queer of Color Ambi/valence” thus examines the structure of feelings and thoughts that compel us to unite and bond, or cleave apart from one another. The way I have done this is via an epistemological focus through the lens of Theory in the Flesh. In examining the structure of the feelings or thoughts that compel us to unite and bond, or cleave apart from one another, the critical impetus allows a capacity of naming and illuminating the hegemonic capitulations and circulations of meaning that inform the web of consideration.

Melancolía, as A Project/ion of Queer of Color Ambi/valence, is an extension and research implementation of brown feelings. It might serve as an additional research apparatus for Queer of Color folk, encouraging both the inward examination of the psyche - thoughts and feelings, and outwardly-informed consideration of the social - a place of coming to know oneself and of organizing kinship, that compel us to unite or cleave apart from one another. Such focus on the individual plane is accomplished through a critical QIC perspective that works as a technological capacity for accounting for the relationship across larger social discursive webs of meaning and institutional policy on a global terrain. That is, the focus on self is always in

relation to others. And the final subheading details this focus on unique ethnoracial identity for sexually dissident subjects occurring in 21st century New Mexico in the United States of America, Planet Earth, The Solar System, Milky Way Galaxy, Virgo Supercluster, Laniakea Supercluster, The Universe.

I also place within this effort a larger queer disposition rejecting the hegemonic propensity to end this, or make this a neat and reconciled happy final product of self. To extend the *Melancholía* and *Coatlicue* vision, this project does not end here. There was something else this process gave form to and I include it here to paint a greater image of what this project yielded. I name it Chapter Six, where I labor to emerge queer ends and forms, making a queer production of thought to better generate the feeling, shape, and relational ties across myself, Roger, Thomas, Isaac, and the other.

CHAPTER 6: POSTSCRIPT

Resuscitation / // Incantations

I had a dream

A coffin

on stage

and out of its open gesture

flowers, mosses, vines

pouring / flowing

From here, expanding

breathing

green hues vibrant, delightfully verdant,

saturated,

Bursts of pink and orange and blues and some reds

Is this where I die?

Is this where I explain

That for years on end

I have felt like I am dying?

Some part of me.

gone

What parts do I keep, dismember or destroy

binge in, to steep in the dark of my trembling guts

churn up and purge onto a stage,

still green like the mosses from

what

I am soon to learn

is my corpse

in that matchbox

on s(t)age

MELANCOLÍA

ACT I

- Scene 1: Identity?
 Scene 2: Identity, in bed!
 : Temporal Blossom (In the future ruins)

ACT II

- Scene 1: Sad shit/shit pedagogy, or, everything I learned from my asshole
 Scene 2: Am I the only one that hates myself?
 Scene 3: One big happy fucking ending

Cast of Characters

In order of Appearance

The Nine of Swords

Roger

Thomas

The Hermit

Isaac

Anthony

The Masked; Figure I, II, III

The Veiled Figure

Someone

Act One, Scene 1

Identity?

A bed, dressed in white sheets sits in the middle of the stage, on top of an earthy green area rug. Behind the bed, almost like a headboard is a projection screen on a stand. Closer to the audience, on stage left is a simple wall with a piece of art hung squarely center. Two wing back chairs with a small table between them nest against the wall. Behind them a simple floor lamp stands. On the opposite side of the stage, stage right, is another simple wall, decorated too with a hung and centered piece of art. Near the wall is a rolling desk chair, sitting in front of a desk, which both face the audience.

Lights up.

The projection screen shows a window, illuminated from the outside. The Nine of Swords stirs in the bed and sits up, speaking to the audience.

NINE OF SWORDS

I sat with Roger in the springtime of coronavirus. I felt most comfortable speaking with him first, because like me, he kept a minimal social circle. I also knew he would not hesitate to take up my offer to participate. I could speak freely and plainly, telling him it would really help me out.

NINE OF SWORDS

Everything in New Mexico was closed except essential services. We were not able to meet in a café, I probably would have picked one close to the part of town we lived in. Roger was in a neighborhood just a few minutes from my apartment, but had not been over since I moved in about three years ago.

NINE OF SWORDS

Sitting next to one another, we would begin talking with this project's purpose where he would immediately pause conversation to ask, "what is that?"

NINE OF SWORDS

He voice did not rise at the end of the question, plainly and directly stating his question more than asking. He did not point either, so in my confusion I replied “what?” A shining metallic gum-ball scone caught his eye. It was off, but still provided enough sheen for him to ask.

Rising into a crouch

NINE OF SWORDS

After my reply, I look at him, and ask how he understands his cultural heritage. This is my soft entry into discussing identity in general, and more specifically his. He is absentmindedly looking at his hands, not nervously, but just checking them out. He flips his hands, “I just say White.”

NINE OF SWORDS

I flatly return his statement with “are you?.” I genuinely did not know he ever thought that about himself. He starts to tease out “no, I’m Hispanic, but when you go buy a gun or something they ask you to fill in this thing” he starts his next sentence paraphrasing the questions of identity these forms ask, “ ‘So are you- are you African American, Asian, or White?’ ” The second thing I learn about Roger in this moment is that he owns guns.

Stands, crosses downstage right.

NINE OF SWORDS

He is describing the way identity can be seen in confrontations with formal documents. These forms require an answer to its questions, which in this case allows for access to firearms. The categorical confrontation with the current institutional terrain of identity is hardly new to me too. In this case, Roger too

returns to these kinds of moments as a primary scheme mapping identity too.
Should we go to mine?

The sound of a hot and humid midwestern summer is just on the other side of the window, less bright this time, saturated by the shadow of greens trees overhead. Some generic emo song from the early 2000s plays overhead. Anthony stands next to the desk.

Tries talking over loud emo music.

NINE OF SWORDS

You know what, I should have started a different way. Welcome, I am The Nine of Swords, the high dauphin of pain, despair, misery, anguish, etc. I'm a teenager, and in a few months my hair is going to start falling out. I'm not fully gay yet, only as gay as masturbating constantly to men on the internet would put me in such a register. The OTHER important use value of the internet to me then was MySpace.

NINE OF SWORDS

The first time I remember being confronted with identity questions was in the early 2000s era of social media. To be fair, this may not have been the first time I was ever forced to answer such inquiries; maybe in some standardized test. Up until middle school, most standardized tests I took were in elementary, and the only thing I remember from then was filling out my name through bubbles with a no. 2 lead pencil.

NINE OF SWORDS

It was not until looking at identity questions on a screen did I engage with questions of identity in a considered measure.

Crosses center stage

NINE OF SWORDS

I'm getting ahead of myself. It's summer of 2005. I'm 13 years old. I used to be the one person in my class who didn't have home internet access. Usually I would have to go to the library or be given extra time in the computer lab to complete school assignments.

Crosses to the desk, downstage right.

NINE OF SWORDS

So when we got that DSL hookup, I wasted no time. In 2005, MySpace was the shit. I was too young to join, but I did not let that stop me. Nor did I let my Father's pointed and expressed banning of my access to this website deter me.

Sits at the desk, facing the audience. There is an early 2000s monitor, chunky and thick. The Nine of Swords begins typing without thinking much about it, not looking at the audience.

NINE OF SWORDS

In 2005, the future of Facebook as tyrannical technological behemoth was a few years away. At the time, it was still operating as an exclusive social media site for college students. MySpace was for anyone.

Directly addressing the audience now.

NINE OF SWORDS

The more appealing aspect of this seemingly novel medium was the ability to highly configure your website profile through access to your page's HTML code. HTML is basically the language used to build the websites you interact with. Think of them as bricks to make your house, but with the right tools, you can change your brick's color, shape, dimensions, and maybe even hide them all together.

Resumes typing and ignores the audience.

NINE OF SWORDS

With some simple skill you could display images, change color schemes, set up new fonts, or just completely abandon the recommended shell of profile sections to make your page look like nothing else before. I found this super appealing and would spend hours testing out designs to convey what I was feeling, but also how I wanted to come across to people viewing my page. I don't have a picture of my first profile...

With enthusiasm

NINE OF SWORDS

But I do have a picture of what it looked like when I was 15!

Blackout. The sound of keyboard mashing briefly fills the space.

NINE OF SWORDS

Let me pull it up real quick- alright, nearly downloaded!

Lights up! The Nine of Swords is in a sequins jumpsuit with an attached cape. The following image is project and he gestures to the corresponding locations he describes, but with grace, like Vanna White on Wheel of Fortune.

With bravado

NINE OF SWORDS

Behold! The terrifying and glorious remnants of my teenage digital social media presence. What you see before you is a cautionary tale. That image is from a staged production of Waiting for Godot. The eye is my best-friend. And my profile picture is a black and white image of me standing at the edge of a trail in a marsh. I have a scarf on. It was probably like, 60 degrees in that image. Gay!

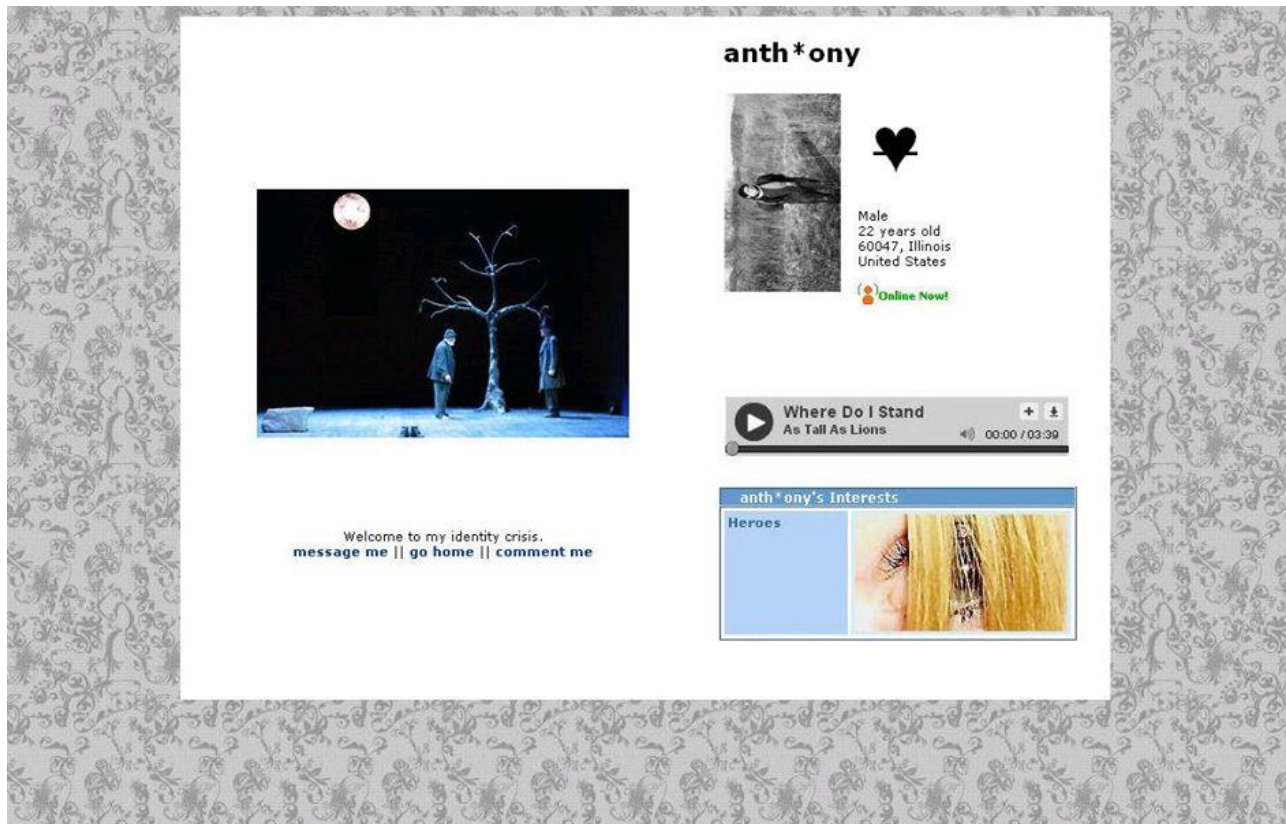


Figure 1

Walks towards the audience.

NINE OF SWORDS

Unlike what you see now, the standard template would mirror this layout on a left-margin orientation. It would go from the top down: Profile name, Image, Location, Online Status, Music Player. Just underneath that was a section asking about your heroes, favorite quotes, movies and TV shows. Below that was a small section with demographic-type of questions asking how you define yourself; relationship status, ethnicity, religion, zodiac sign, children, smoke/drink, education, and income. Eventually, like what you see here, I would hide that section entirely, but early on, I let it remain.

Image disappears. The jumpsuit stays on.

Moves to sit in the desk chair on wheels, wheeled to peek out behind the desk.

NINE OF SWORDS

I remember trying to map out what I was. I also remember how, throughout adolescence, it was common to strive to fit these categories as social roles. Close friends would rely on their identification in this way as a nucleus for their social identity; smoker, smart, dancer, weirdo, etc. While these were certainly not new tropes, the digital public occupation of such labels was roughly novel. Above all else, I would mostly go on to attach myself to the identification “emo,” short for emotional, joining a legion of teenagers identifying with their sadness, ennui, loneliness, resignation, and disdain for the way things were.

Wheels upstage in desk

NINE OF SWORDS

These demographic types of inquiry though were truly the first time I interacted with the idea of labeling myself, which first required me to know myself in some clearer way. Straight, gay, bi? White, Hispanic, and whatever else? For the brief time I had this area of my page visible, it said “straight” and “Latino.” I had no idea if either of those two were wholly accurate. I really only ever knew of myself as Mexican. And honestly, I had only begun considering sexual orientation a year prior, when hearing myself think about how cute Max was in class.

NINE OF SWORDS

It was easier to hide it all than understand. And I would just obscure the section and forget about it.

Crosses downstage left to two wingback chairs angled toward each-other, with a little table in between. There is a now mannequin on one of the chairs.

NINE OF SWORDS

Sitting next to Roger, some ten years later, I try to move the conversation into the places of identity.

Gesturing toward Roger-mannequin.

NINE OF SWORDS

So, he just described when identity is confronted in the shape of formal documents. I ask him what happens when people ask you point blank. He's quick to answer-

Spotlight on Roger-mannequin. His voice comes through the theater's speakers.

ROGER

Latino. Yeah, I dunno, just Latino usually.

Spotlight to The Nine of Swords

NINE OF SWORDS

I do my best impression of Barbara Walters and focus. "What happens when someone who is interested in more than just being friends asks?"

Spotlight back on Roger-mannequin

ROGER

They don't really ask too many questions.

Yelling out of the spotlight

NINE OF SWORDS

He's paraphrasing how the scene usually plays out.

ROGER

“Send me a dick pic and let’s get it on”

A flaccid phallus, made of wood rolls out upstage right. There is a leash, fixed in place as if the phallus is a dog on a walk, pulling the walker along. The Nine of Swords continues not acknowledging it.

Gets up out of seat, begins slowly crossing to the phallus.

NINE OF SWORDS

This is where the similarity of of our experiences would end. In the midwest, northern Illinois around Chicago and south in the same state, I would regularly encounter questions around ethnoracial identity that would demand an answer. Sometimes it would be a simple and crude remark of “what r u?” Then sometimes they were pointed enough to ask if I was Latino, Hispanic or Mexican. When responded to, it would either lead to the immediate cessation of conversation. This effect was increased ten fold when I was feeling brave enough to answer with “Yes, I am Mexican.” To be honest, it was all I knew for years.

Pats the head, and gestures towards the phallus

NINE OF SWORDS

Is this what they wanted? Is this what desire does? Is the leash a metaphor for fetishization? Who leads the leash? Or haven’t we talked dick to death by now.

Begins walking the phallus back to the chair, pausing briefly along the way.

NINE OF SWORDS

Most of the men I would speak with were sifting out ethnic characters. The other common response was a mixed bag of cool indifference or sometimes problematic

heightened erotic lust. As an object of abjection and fetishization, the idea of these types of direct questions in gay sexual contexts still leave a bad taste in my mouth that has developed into the academic inquiry before you now.

Sits in the chair, keeps phallus to the side like an obedient dog at rest.

NINE OF SWORDS

I try presenting this scenario, and imaginatively muster “if someone comes up to you at the bar and asks, ‘what are you’ what would you say?” He looks at me, and in a lighter tone supplants his prior response, answering-

On the screen, “ ‘I’m a Daddy’ ” is projected, as a gif moving image. Red and pink hearts surround, glow, and pulse around the text in a playful way. The spotlight beams on Roger Mannequin concurrently when the text displays on on the screen.

NINE OF SWORDS

I can tell he is joking, but nevertheless ask him if he is serious. He provides three responses.

Each response is projected as separate slides on the screen, all in capital letters. As each slide is displayed, the stage goes dark and the spotlight turns on upon the Roger-mannequin, punctuating each slide transition. “NO.” / “I HATE IT.” / “IT MAKES ME FEEL OLD.”

The computer desk and chair disappear and a thin white blanket divider descends onto the stage, just barely pooling onto the floor. The Nine of Swords goes behind the veil as a light illuminates his body as a shadow before the audience. Behind is where he begins changing out of the jumpsuit.

NINE OF SWORDS

I was 24 the first time someone called me Daddy in a gay sexual capacity. I have no idea when the threshold of becoming Daddy sets, but Roger would say that this

kind of desire is more so about “being decent looking and then kind of muscular” and that with older men there are not as many games clouding casual interactions.

The Nine of Swords peaks out at to the audience from behind the curtains, naked, looking at the Roger-mannequin.

NINE OF SWORDS

In retrospect, it seems that he has not really been pressed on too many occasions to require more thorough consideration of his answer. He is a visibly muscular, polite, funny, interesting, handsome guy, who ethnoracially is kin to the majority of people in the scene. These features permit a deliberate ease in gay social interactions and acts as a form of currency shaping these sorts of interactions.

The stage goes red. The Nine of Sword’s shadow slowly gets on its back, legs up.

NINE OF SWORDS

I wonder about the ethnoracial undercurrents in what qualifies as daddy. Honestly, I think the answer is there is an entire generation of young gays who were raised on too much Lana Del Rey. No shade, I like her music too, but you can only make so many albums about wanting a Daddy before it gets boring.

The Nine of Swords shifts onto all fours slowly.

NINE OF SWORDS

Maybe daddy comes down to money. The guys who were younger than me and wanted a Daddy were satisfied and fulfilled when they would perform bottomhood by letting me take over and lead. One of them told me I was still the best. He specifically remembered one time where I put my foot on his head and fucked him? The semester I met him I had upwards of 20 sexual partners. I lost the fine details of things, and denied ever doing something like that, but he insisted, saying it was the best fuck he ever had.

Thrusting dramatically.

NINE OF SWORDS

So maybe a brown daddy is one who fucks like the colonized brute he is. The sensual latin lover. Who doesn't love a sensual fuck? But what does that have to do with my brown body. Who knew identity could be made when I put myself into someone's ass. Or is it a mouth thing? Hand? When they cry out "papi!" ?

The veil falls on The Nine of Sword's body, totally covering him.

NINE OF SWORDS

So, if this is the primary optics enabling my sexual points of contact, what am I? How do I get out of this? Find relief? Or is it something more?

The Nine of Swords gets up still under the sheet.

NINE OF SWORDS

Thomas would share this experience more. You haven't met him yet, but you'll like him.

The Nine of Swords takes off the blanket to reveal a plain brown jumpsuit. He takes out a pair of sunglasses that say "THOMAS" and puts them on the mannequin. Digital Thomas is present through a voice over. The Nine of Swords sits in the wingback chair.

NINE OF SWORDS

I ask him the same question about identity as I did Roger. What do you say?

This next flow of dialogue happens like it did with Roger. Spotlight on Thomas-Mannequin as his voice fills the space.

THOMAS

I try to say Hispanic because I feel like Hispanic is more of a broad term, because I feel like in dating apps, for example, when you have to put Latino I feel like there- if someone's filtering that out they want like the typical, like, dark handsome, like know what I mean? Like the telenovela, like- the typical Latin lover situation. So I would always just kind of either put White or if it has been a guy would put Hispanic but I try to stay away from the term Latino because I felt like it was false advertising to the- cause you know the gay community it's a fetish. They're fetishizing it. If they're searching by race they're fetishizing, and since I didn't fit into that type I just kind of steer [away] or sometimes I just wouldn't put anything to be honest.

The computer desk rolls out again. The Nine of Swords crosses to sit at the desk.

NINE OF SWORDS

What I didn't mention earlier was that MySpace also taught me more than just hide my identity and avoiding it. You could search people according to these identity markers, filter them out.

Wheels out behind the desk downstage center.

NINE OF SWORDS

To think of people in this way, as bodies for consumption is easy, like shopping. Part of this is the more fun open sexual interactions produced and encouraged in queer spaces, not all, but the more regular type of this exists. The ease of such discriminatory behavior certainly does not help these conversations, but in this way, race becomes polluted by the ease and manipulation of these practices, and in this, becomes inconsequently and so abstracted from the material consequences of the world. Maybe this is why it is equally difficult eliciting meaningful conversations around race.

The lights dim, and a light under The Nine of Swords shines, creating a moody and uneasy sense.

NINE OF SWORDS

Gay sexual interactions can be liberating and fun. I can't say I didn't enjoy myself in the role of Daddy, appeasing my own inner complex functioning within Patriarchal aspirations. At the same time, these can be capable of reproducing consumption based frameworks of interaction. I don't blame the internet for this- the point is the internet is also a site where these types of perspectives are reproduced and rendered in this virtual terrain. Like with filtering items on an online store, maybe categories like size, color, price, you can do the same with people.

Stands up off the chair. Lights go back to normal.

NINE OF SWORDS

And ideally, this would venture into affirming groups, like recent big social media advertising would want you to believe, but in reality, can also produce more insulated groups on exclusionary foundations.

NINE OF SWORDS

So if identity is a screen here, a doubled veil of the internet, and its unique optics producing the means to act on desires. What control do I have over my own identity? Is it fully on my body, the recognizable contours of my face conceptualized as a marker of what? Race? National origin?

The Nine of Swords sets up the flashlight on a little stand, and quickly reassembles the veil. The lights go dark, and he starts making obscure shadow figures against the veil.

NINE OF SWORDS

Capitalism ain't new, the internet was just another place for capitalism to imprint itself onto. This regulation of sexual interaction has been around.

The Nine of Swords makes a tree, then splays his hands out, looking at them and their shadowed amplification.

NINE OF SWORDS

Filter, preferences, I think I would have been a bigger slut if people weren't so racist. White cloth, white veil, white optics. Blank screen.

He turns the flashlight off.

NINE OF SWORDS

I'm a blank canvas, make me what you want. I don't even know myself. If I am what they make me, I'll never have a home. The internet taught me how to fuck and it taught me, that before anything else though, I was brown.

Blackout.

Act One, Scene 2

Identity, in bed!

The stage appears as it did at the start of Scene 1. A figure stirs, then sits up in the bed, facing the audience, with a laptop on a stack of pillows.

Lights up.

Loud, abrupt, jarring, and sort of inconsiderately rude.

THE HERMIT

Goooooooood morning, you fucks! This is The Hermit, coming at you live from my safe space!

Rolls and writhes in the sheets, occasionally moaning and gyrating.

THE HERMIT

I'm in bed since identity loves getting turned around in this sheets.

Increasingly porny in speech.

THE HERMIT

It is in such wonderful comfort we return to identity, oh yeah!

Abruptly sits up, shakes it out, and gets serious. Starts speaking more directly to the audience.

NINE OF SWORDS

Alright. While Roger was more succinct in these discussions, Isaac was more open and contemplative considering the way he embodies certain traits and characteristics. With Isaac too, I bring up identity early in conversation. I talk to him through a screen, which is surprisingly pleasant. After the digital static of my

echoing question of how he understands his cultural identity finishes speaking too, he looks away and begins.

Isaac's responses are flat, only characterized by The Hermit's narration of the tone and quality. They are carried through the digital static as if coming through the laptop.

DIGITAL ISAAC

"I guess I would say I'm Hispanic, however most of my heritage... My parents are all from New Mexico on both sides of the family and then before that they came from Spain, Germany, or Ireland."

THE HERMIT

His response seems to be speaking generally, but the insertion of his family is different from how Roger spoke about the topic. This mention of his parents, a genetic citation...hmmm. Is this where identity is made? Between the sheets?

THE HERMIT

Like with Roger, I ask Isaac if his answer ever changes. He chews over the idea for a second and returns-

DIGITAL ISAAC

"I guess it changes depending on the options they give me. So, like, sometimes they give you really general options and sometimes they get really specific options. Like, I would say if there's Hispanic, but if there isn't- wasn't a good Hispanic option, then I would pick White."

THE HERMIT

His fluttering across tenses aptly illustrates the bizarreness of trying to name what I am asking. His response is like Rogers too, the options matter to both of them and influence their identity choice.

The Hermit gets off the bed, clearly pensive. He wraps himself in the blanket, and sits in the desk chair, rolling himself out from behind the desk.

THE HERMIT

I'm still thinking about his earlier citation of his parents both being from New Mexico. I ask, curious, if he ever defaults to calling himself New Mexican.

LAPTOP ISAAC

"Yeah, I'll do New Mexican, yeah."

The Hermit throws off the blanket and stands, revealing he is wearing basketball shorts below his white button down and tie. He walks to the screen and smacks it with a teaching wand. It displays "NEW MEXICAN."

THE HERMIT

"New Mexican" initially entered local and national discourse as an attempt to qualify and continue its own governance following the Mexican-American War. Once their appeals began, to be included as a state into the federal apparatus, rather than a territory. To do this, they would begin relying on their linkages to Spain, calling themselves Spanish. In Santa Fe, the capital, they sought to justify their own territorial claim and governance over the area, as they had established long before Plymouth Rock was a thing.

Pacing like an authoritarian teacher.

THE HERMIT

The assertion of a New Mexican identity was an attempt at differentiating themselves from Mexicans and Mexican, as the federal government would routinely deny their petitions for statehood on the grounds of the racially different Mexican, Spanish speaking population, and Indigenous groups within the area. Even though Mexico didn't think or name of itself on a racial basis, but from the gaze of the U.S.

THE HERMIT

So New Mexican was a way to differentiate from Mexican, which back then was a national and racial formation, but this New Mexican would be its own unique local regional identity, born from a territory, but New Mexican was also an attempt and making one as capable for inclusion into the United States.

THE HERMIT

Heritage, Place, Ancestry, Nation, Race, so many things tied up into New Mexican. So, fast forward a couple hundred years and now, what is it now? And why are they so many fucking terms?

The Hermit crawls back into bed, and speaks towards the laptop.

THE HERMIT

Isaac was just talking about calling himself New Mexican. In the same breath, he moves onto a different thought.

DIGITAL ISAAC

“Like, I don’t know what the difference between Latino and Hispanic, so either one. Sometimes I pick one or the other, if there are two options I’ll just guess.”

THE HERMIT

He punctuates his statement with some easy laughter. Curious, I ask him what he thinks the difference is.

LAPTOP ISAAC

“Ok, I think Latino is more Latin so I don’t know. I guess it could be anywhere in South America?”

THE HERMIT

His tone goes up a small hill.

LAPTOP ISAAC

“I don’t know, I guess it could be anywhere in South American? I don’t, I’m not really sure where but, Hispanic sounds like it’s basically the same? So, I don’t know...”

THE HERMIT

He does not appear confused in his attempt to understand Latin identity configuration on a global scale. Most attempts feel like grasping at straws. They often appear as the same thing, and the act of parsing terms apart can be trying, but are importantly especially under the punishing colonial forces across centuries, lands, peoples, and decades.

The Hermit produces a ball of yarn, and begins walking across the stage, anchoring it behind the lamp, the picture frames, the desk, and chair, and so on. He does not connect to the bed.

THE HERMIT

So if identity is self, and ethnicity is a cultural origin and kin, and heritage is the behaviors and practices we keep with, ancestry is the corporeal bonds explaining how we go there, and nationality is the site of citizenship and place where these things happens, and race is attributed as a a thing tied to the body, also made through blood, like quantum, then gender is how I feel and interact with the social membrane, and sexual orientation is the focus and direction of my desire, and ability refers to the way my body fits into categories of capacity for doing, then, so, what, how, what, where- what the fuck am I? Which one do I use first to describe myself?

THE HERMIT

And what does the luxury of my complaints teach me about this?

He pauses, looks up briefly, and a slow shower of confetti falls on him, the colors are subdued and sort of somber.

THE HERMIT

How do I throw myself an identity reveal party? Like some gender reveal shit. Honestly, if I ever get invited to one of those I'm gonna ask them for the make and model of the mattress or fucking bathroom floor they fucked on, like, why isn't that important? That seems like a lucrative market for mattress companies, like, get in on that.

Gets on his knees and begins collecting pieces of confetti.

THE HERMIT

I get an invitation to my email address, titled: "CONSUMPTION AND BREEDING REVEAL PARTY, THE THEME IS FOAM SPRING HYBRID" and they throw a mattress from the roof and it crashes into the ground and everyone can see the brand and kind of mattress it is, or like, the back seats from a 2011 Jetta, like, what is us, and where do we cite it, and why does it matter? If there was an institution that demanded such a specific answer, would that be us too?

He throws the scooped up confetti across the bed. He crosses the stage, returning to the wingback chairs, contorting and maneuvering his body under the threads.

Pissed, in an appropriately whiny cadence.

THE HERMIT

A collision of systems, regulatory, that are also uncertain of what or how to categorize people. And when do I get to stop thinking about this because Christ almighty is it exhausting.

The Hermit walks off stage, covered in a blanket, and comes out with the mannequin. He sets it down in a wingback chair and puts the “THOMAS” sunglasses on it.

THE HERMIT

Thomas has a bit of a clearer perspective on this. When I asked him out he identifies he would have this to say.

The Hermit sits in the other wingback chair, and reaches over to Thomas-mannequin with a microphone in hand, just as the a voice fills the space.

THOMAS

“I consider myself Mexican and only because the fact that both my parents are from Mexico. I was born in the U.S. but both my parents are from Mexico. I always use the metaphor- if my parents had me in China I wouldn't be Chinese. I mean, maybe by citizenship but, not necessarily by race or ethnicity.”

THE HERMIT

So, self as nation of origin, but also ancestry, but also, ancestry is prioritized over place, which is based on duration? So, in this, I can also call myself Mexican, because both my parents are from Mexico, even despite my being born in the U.S. and that citizenship is inconsequential? In terms of what to claim for my identity, even if it greases the wheels of my global access and privileges? But I can not identify with it?

THE HERMIT

Thomas brings us back to place.

The Hermit juts out the microphone in front of Thomas-mannequin.

THOMAS

“So, a lot of it, especially in New Mexico speaking, people there are so ‘I’m not Mexican, I’m New Mexican!’ Like, they invented this whole other race, that, like, I’m just super baffled by. So they’re always like, and I’ve had arguments with people, they’re like ‘I’m not Mexican!’”

THE HERMIT

Alright, so now that we know what we know, I still recognize his sentiments. A lot of the time people negate any kinship or ties to Mexico to bolster their configuration and qualification of New Mexican. While we know it was not necessarily tied to xenophobia back then, of their own free and 100% organic agentic choice, I think a lot of people see it under such a light now (Salgado, 2020). Thomas, now paraphrasing the frustrating conversations he is retelling, explains

THOMAS

“I’m like, ‘so if you tell me your great-great-grandmother when she lived here, ‘cause she lived here her whole life, she was Mexican, yet you’re not?’ And I try to ask them what the difference is genetically, like, what do you think we’re made of? It’s that, like, Spanish people and Native people, if anything, were just different tribes but we all come from Spain, so you know, growing up for a long time, the whole colorism and all that was kind of embedded in me so I would try to lean more toward a European aspect of it.”

THE HERMIT

His citation and allegiance to Spain, can also sort of be the same logic people can have when claiming “New Mexican.” So here, New Mexican, and Mexican too in the way Thomas is describing construct a binary, and work as a negation of any native or Indigenous origins. And if that affiliation happens, it is secondary to Spanish ties.

The Hermit stands and begins weaving more webs of thread, between the ones in place now.

THE HERMIT

Before my own research into the historical complexity of the local area and the original goal of claiming a New Mexican identity as an appeal to maintain sovereign governance while garnering statehood, I would also only see this version of using “New Mexican” identity in the way Thomas is explaining.

THE HERMIT

Even if this was a goal of legitimizing sovereign governance over a territorial occupation sustained longer than the colonial violence on the eastern coast of the same continent, how is it being used now, given the original goal has long been accomplished?

THE HERMIT

Importantly, its not just him deciding all this, he points out colorism growing up as affecting this citation. In this, a global scheme of White Supremacy reigns, but manifests itself differently across the globe, and in Mexico, that manifests as rejecting dark features, attributed such feature to indigenous groups, and instead aligning oneself with European origins. No place for the mestizo here. The bastardized of the New World.

The Hermit pauses.

THE HERMIT

His point about genetics though is perplexing to me. His tether to Mexican identity as made through blood, “genetics,” the things that made us, that made the ones before us, the super messy collision of bodies

He begins wrapping himself in thread, going around, up, and under his legs, around his back, neck, and head.

THE HERMIT

Colonialism relies on the continued expansion of territorial claim. It relies on the destruction of knowledges, where the history of the world starts with Spain getting into “the new world,” and nothing before then is important or matters.

THE HERMIT

Colonialism too, relies on producing citizen subjects to occupy, and lay claim with, and now identity within those sites, which rely upon the negation and displacement of those there before.

Slides display on the projector screen a brief summary of and concurrent with the dialogue.

THE HERMIT

Heteronormativity is the structuration of a system of value that bolsters these interest, by making meaning, behaviors, acts, and rituals around the importance of securing and producing progeny.

THE HERMIT

The gender reveal party, a symbol of national strength and complete fulfillment of citizen-subjecthood, making more things to hold the nation together, but also passing on that generational money while Uncle Sam gets a cut.

THE HERMIT

I am made and rendered intelligible under the conditions of colonial globe that relies on formations of family as the singular connective bonds in making sense of identity. Family is inextricable from nation, and nation is reliant on the production of family to sustain itself.

THE HERMIT

Be advised, this is not an argument for cosmopolitanism, or La Raza Cosmica, or even necessarily for the destruction of the familial unit. The point is that, whether

we like it or not, the sociocultural structuration of the familial unit is the essential vehicle proffering our set of relations to the world and ourselves. Assumed fidelity to the familial structure is the operative normative state.

The Hermit freezes, exhausted from the prohibitive zealous binding.

THE HERMIT

So while Thomas and Isaac would make themselves under such a perspective, what is the role of identity outside the role of familial enterprise? I think I'd just be a brown faggot. Maybe someday the happy brown faggot. For now, doing all this work, holding all these understandings tougher- I am a sad brown faggot.

The Hermit, tired, slowly gets himself to the bed and throws himself down on it.

THE HERMIT

Honestly, fuck me if I'm supposed to tell you what it all means, or what the right answer is about all these identity questions. I'm more lost now, and the only real answer I have is who am I to assert there is a right or wrong answer?

He begins trying to undo the threads.

THE HERMIT

Ten years ago? I would have first told you that Latino referred to people who live within what is known as the conglomerate of Latin America which includes the southern and northern American continent. For some reason, under this understanding, Spain was outside of this, as people did not consider it of Latin origin, but rather European. My early understanding of this position would obscure AfroLatin conglomerates. Hispanic seemed to signal either countries of Spanish origin or countries with a primary Spanish language speaking population.

THE HERMIT

Under this, Spain itself could therefore be included as Hispanic, and Portugal, Brazil and the other colonial entities that speak Portuguese would not constitute the Hispanic imaginary. Another definition I would typically avoid but hear quite often was that Hispanic came to define the parts of the world that had experienced Spanish colonization and would therefore identify as such via dominion of prior colonial nation. The contemporary anglicization of “Hispano.”

The Hermit sits up and speaks directly to the audience, pausing from his struggle.

THE HERMIT

Seven years ago, I remember learning in my early graduate course work that the term Hispanic was first deployed by the U.S. government at large in the 1980 census to describe a large population that had once just been flatly considered Mexican.

Jump stands in the bed, like Tom Cruise on Oprah’s couch.

THE HERMIT

In that moment my heart and head went “AHA! I knew it! This is why it felt weird to say!” If anyone were to ask me then what should be used I would have just told them that historically and politically the use of Hispanic as a term was invented by the White U.S. nation state to reductively refer to a group of people, that was also not generated from a collective sense of meaning or understanding.

Sort of gives up, and falls over on the bed.

THE HERMIT

But then that doesn’t mean you should correct or judge someone who uses Hispanic either. Clearly these terms vary in places, and the histories of the area matter.

Yells from his position flat on the bed, not directly facing the audience.

THE HERMIT

Toward the later end of my graduate course work, five years ago, I began encountering the term Latinx in more popular usage. It was frequently explained to me that the term was employed in order to name feelings of incongruences across ethnic, racial, and national identity and belonging. The “x” had two plays, one, as a way to signal and affirm the former Indigenous name used to describe the land that is currently regarded as Mexico. “X” itself calls attention to the Indigenous languages pronunciation. The “x” though, in most contexts seemingly serves as an English and anglicized interjection into the term. Plainly, it was a new generations form of describing growing up between places in more inclusive regard.

He rolls over to face the audience. Each term he described is projected on the screen.

THE HERMIT

The second play was that the “x” was employed as a way to negate conjugation of the popular term “Latinos” which ends in the masculine general “os.” While linguistically, this masculine ending serves as a way to speak to a general group, similar to “folks,” but more precisely, came to be recognized like “guys” is now. This ending did not sit well with those who would recognize the masculine ending as such. Before, there were many different kinds of tactics to shift away from the masculine “agender” general. Latino/a has been in favor, but once again bolsters the masculine ending first. Then, Latin@ would also be a favorite as it offered a symbolic form of describing the “o” and “a” while visually the “o” would contain the “a.” The appeal of “x” for Latinx is to also avoid the issue of generating gendered, patriarchal links within the descriptor itself.

The Hermit finally frees an arm, and gestures towards the lonely Thomas-mannequin.

THE HERMIT

Thomas was the only one familiar with Latinx and he would go on to say

A spotlight shines on Thomas-mannequin. Throughout this next dialogue, The Hermit manages to free himself fully of the threads.

THOMAS

“I personally don't like that term but I know that a lot of people are really really passionate about it so I'm not going to be an asshole...just not that important to me to say Latinx or Latino so just, I wouldn't call myself ‘Latinx.’”

THOMAS

“I think the terms that we have are sufficient but again, I come from a very like, very privileged background and [there are] so many terms, that it's like, I don't want to be that person-.”

The Hermit sits in bed, and takes in Thomas's words.

THOMAS

“I have friends that are like ‘Latinx, that's so stupid.’ Spanish is a, you know, a gendered language and stuff, like that they're anglicizing that...”

THOMAS

“So I get what they're saying but I get both sides, but I don't personally call myself Latinx and I think there are sufficient terms to describe yourself, but I also am very much open to people adding more terms to it because it doesn't take away from it, you know? I know some people are like, ‘oh my God, another term? Here we go!’ but it's not that deep for me.”

The Hermit eagerly gets out of bed again, standing, struck.

THE HERMIT

Wait, can you say that part again, that last bit?

THOMAS

“Adding more terms doesn’t take away from it, you know? I know some people are like, ‘oh my God, another term? Here we go!’ but it’s not that deep for me.”

THE HERMIT

THAT.

He starts working his way to Thomas-mannequin.

THE HERMIT

I get that keeping track of the terms can be a lot, but the simple answer for the dilemma of what to name these groups of people is to call people what they call themselves if it’s like, chill, and to avoid unwanted ascriptions based on phenotypical markers. No top-down naming. While this simply imagines that such a conversation would be easy, all these move me further away from a neat answer which is probably the point.

The Hermit attaches a string to Thomas-mannequin, and carefully holds it in his hand.

THE HERMIT

Like I said before, for a while, I was intensely against Hispanic until I really began this project. Now, all this, stuff in my head...I, it sometimes feel like I can’t contain it all, all this energy behind it.

Slows down, breathe deeply, pensively,

THE HERMIT

And...did any of this knowledge make me feel less alone? Isn't that all I've been after? Feeling, in touch, connected? Not alone? Mestizo? Ruptured constantly, inside myself?

He looks down at the string.

THE HERMIT

Thomas is still in the same stream of thought. He goes on,

A soft light directly above Thomas-mannequin makes him glow.

THOMAS

“But getting educated and understanding the aspect of it, the value that representation had, I really started identifying myself as a, just Mexican. And I don't give any explanations. I don't give any caveats. I just say, ‘I'm Mexican,’ which on its own just took me a long time to kind of come to terms with that, especially in New Mexico.”

The Hermit plays with the string between his fingers.

THE HERMIT

In another moment later, he would go on to explain more sentiments around his perspective on Mexican identity.

THOMAS

“So I think what happens when you tell someone you're Mexican, like, they're not going to argue with you because you just admitted to being like, the lowest of the land/population, because everyone looks on Mexico, no one like... Everyone gets offended when I call them Mexican, like I think the only people who might not is like, Honduras and El Salvador, and that's 'cause we're all like, kind of in the same like, system of like, being the worst. Because you call a Puerto Rican

Mexican they get super offended, you call a Colombian Mexican they get super offended. So, I think once you say you're Mexican no one's going to argue with you because they're like 'oh shit,' you just admitted it, so just best to leave it alone."

The Hermit begins crying.

THE HERMIT

I'm not there yet. I learned to hide it. Work around, not name. It kept people from me for years. I'm not there yet.

The Hermit drops the string.

THE HERMIT

Maybe the ultimate non-identification is the happy brown faggot? Identity outside the familial and role of nation. Right now, if you were to ask me, the only thing I really am, in this moment, is really fucking sad. Am I to feel like this forever? I can't bear it. It's suffocating.

The Hermit gets to the desk, pulling out a pair of scissors. Looks around.

THE HERMIT

What's the fucking point of all of this. To build a web to hold my loneliness? To know I'm nothing, with nowhere to go, or be, no home? I tried making one here, I thought, if I asked the, questions, could, we could arrive to a place together. Make new worlds...

THE HERMIT

But instead, I have no certainty. Only diminishing capacity. The light inside my chest is, is being extinguished, from the floods of distance I feel.

A storm starts, or rather, mirrors his internal dilemma at facing himself in an affirming capacity. Trying to know what he is in a perspective that doesn't register everything he is as bad, anti-normative. He's not though, not in totality. He is a cis man, who is legally White. He embodies traditional physical embodiments of masculinity. He's not ready to face this.

The turn in his disposition is jarring. He's not ready to face whatever speaking with Thomas brought up in him. He takes it out on the strings, cutting and hacking into them, as if his desperate plea for respite or repose can be found in its severing.

He crawls back into bed, sobbing. The lights dim, as the sound of the storm continues.

Temporal Blossom

(In the Future Ruins)

The scenic design appears the same at first glance, but in the place of many set pieces it's something in its likeness, but as it earth has grown over it, consumed it, and to some degree, obscures its form. The painting on both walls have the same visual organizations, but the color in the art is instead an eruption of flowers in its place. The frame is a brown moss. A scrim divides and obscures the front and the back of the stage. What we can see of the back is the bed,

now covered in daisies, and the rug is a decadent and verdant drab olive. The chairs are replaced with wooden vines in a similar structure. The screen remains as it was.

Three masked entities walk out onto stage. One lingers on the bed, the other at the desk, and the other at the wingback chairs. They move contrary to one another, a gross mirror, reflective and repetitive, but unique again like the set to what it was. One leads, and the others seem to congeal against that movement into their own. An elbow up, the other juts it into another direction, another tries putting it in its mouth. Dissonant and discordant music peppers the scene.

Lights up. Anthony enters.

ANTHONY

Three times I dreamt of my death. First, the house was picked up by a storm, and tumbled over itself, as I hid in a closet with my parents, waiting it out. Everything went black as “I love you” slipped out of my mouth. Across the screen in my head I saw the words

“DECIDUOUS MUSHROOMS” appears on the projection screen.

ANTHONY

I woke up in my bed, straining to keep my eyes open and see. The light was pouring in from the outside, peering in just behind the curtains on my window. I then, would at least, force myself into a choking breath, waking up in my real bed, the same bed I just did, but this time, alive and out of the collapse of these dreams.

The masked still move in the same way, and Anthony crosses slowly to examine them, but avoids getting too close. They do not seem to notice him.

ANTHONY

The second time, I was falling, and hit the floor as my life ended. I woke up crying.

ANTHONY

The third time, I was trampled under the force of a stampede trying to escape the hail of gunfire ringing out in the stadium. Someone carried me out, and before I went, I managed to thank him in the space of fear crushing my ribs.

ANTHONY

I have dreamt of the wake of my death only once.

The masked begin moving closer in sync. Still off, but more coherent. The scrim lifts, and in the place of the bed is a coffin, erupting with daisies.

ANTHONY

The room is empty. And sitting in the middle of it, is this.

The masked being moving in near total synchronization. The action registers to Anthony, and he cowers briefly. Anthony pulls out a keyboard from the inside of the coffin. He presses a preset button, and a track begins, where he carefully leans into the keys and begins singing, “B” by IAMAMIWHOAMI.

ANTHONY

“There it was, the land of decay, we should pack our things and run away. Rest in the quicksand, shoulder to shoulder, hand in hand. Sink slowly, not take flight, let the silence take us at daylight. Take a deep breath as we go, as we go.”

His voice shifts into its higher register, and the Masked slowly surround him.

ANTHONY

“Wanting higher, wanting higher up, wanting higher. Till the morning forces us to climb back down, I’d rather stay, I’d rather let us drown.”

Anthony stops, and is arrested quickly by deep gutturals cough in his body. Out of his mouth, and pouring out of his open hands are daises. One of the masked reaches out and takes it.

Blackout.

Act Two, Scene 1

Sad shit/shit pedagogy, or everything I learned from my asshole.

The scenic design returns to normal here, the set as it was at the beginning of Act One. The only exception is a bouquet of daises on the bed, and the art by the desk is in its mutated, uncanny form. No one takes notice at first of the setting.

The Nine of Swords stirs awake in the bed as the lights come up, sitting up with a deep and intense breath. The window on the projection screen is dark outside

NINE OF SWORDS

Just so we're all on the same page, I don't know how to relate to people who feel good about themselves. I'm really good at leaning into the social forces and meanings that encourage people to hate themselves.

NINE OF SWORDS

So here is the hard part, teasing out these threads, which to me, matter. They can teach us a lot about how we might learn about queer im/possibilities. Let's start with Isaac this time.

A figure appears behind the veil, miming as if speaking. The voice of Isaac permeates the space as a digital voice.

ISAAC

When I was in high school and I was like, Christian and thinking that being gay was a sin and I was really trying to be like, straight, but I was not masculine. I had a lot of feminine qualities about me and I was pretty insecure about it so, I don't know. I just never really tried with anyone because it's kind of insecure and so that made me feel, I don't know, not really unwanted, but I guess kind of.

The lights behind the veil dims, and the figure disappears

Speaking to the audience

.

NINE OF SWORDS

I like the way his tone lifts at the end of his sentence. He seems to still be thinking about it. Putting into words the friction caused by trying to live against the forces and frameworks making queer folks as moral abjection is...a lot. In the same breathe, he continue, his pitch climbing as he works to assemble his thoughts...

The figure appears again, this time illuminated by a glowing soft blue.

ISAAC

And then I didn't try with guys And like, guys I feel are easier for some reason for me. So, I guess it just felt like no one wanted me. Yeah, I felt asexual for a while. I was like, maybe I'm asexual?

The light beings fading, while the figure behind somehow grows in size, and stretches out with open arms before disappearing.

NINE OF SWORDS

When I was a lonely little gay in high school, I never had the language to frame it as possibly being asexual. But even so, I did experience people being attracted to me, namely some women, openly. I knew this realm of desire existed, and I know I was unable to reciprocate in an emotional capacity.

NINE OF SWORDS

But if Isaac is explaining, what he recognized as the absence of any recognizable desire, and his generation of youth readily having access to such ideas, the jump in such a way makes sense.

NINE OF SWORDS

To be honest, this was sort of new to me. I am more familiar with the trope of gay men first identifying as bi, which continues to stigmatize and delegitimize bisexuality. Is asexuality a breath of fresh air in this scenario, a way to find identification outside of heteronormative paradigms of relation?

NINE OF SWORDS

Even if he went to on find resolve in other terms of desire, is this a glimpse of novel schemes of relation?

An orb, sitting in the side table at the wingback chairs, brights up and remains lit.

NINE OF SWORDS

When I asked Roger if he ever had any experiences with sadness, he would reply
in much more condenses capacity

Behind the veil, a different figure appears, this time, illuminated by a reddish glow and appearing
as the the digital disembodied voice of Roger fills the space.

ROGER

“Sometimes, maybe ten years ago.”

Nine of Swords looks around puzzled, waiting for more information.

NINE OF SWORDS

When I pressed, asking what he remembers and how he moved through it, he
succinctly resumed,

The figure behind the veil appears again,

ROGER

“I didn’t do anything different I don’t think, just...”

The figure pauses.

NINE OF SWORDS

He paused for a few seconds. I carefully interjected, “it just passed?” He agreed,

The figure shrugs.

ROGER

“yeah, just passed...”

NINE OF SWORDS

When I asked again what it was like, he returned to general uncertainty

ROGER

“I don’t really change up, I’ll just, gym, know what I mean, go to the gym, come home, make food.”

The figure simply walks out of frame of the veil.

NINE OF SWORDS

His discomfort and unwillingness to discuss it further encourages me to change the topic of conversation. The insistent attribution to the past of this kind of experience and feeling is similar to Thomas in the way that it is isolated as separate from now, a negation. In the formative standard frame, sadness is a thing to work through and move past from.

The orb dims and extinguishes its light.

NINE OF SWORDS

For Thomas, he would bridge this kind of sadness to his time with an ex-boyfriend

Another figure stands behind the veil, this time held in a peachy glow of light.

THOMAS

When I turned 21 I was dating a guy named Brad, and he was like the Whitest White guy ever, and his friends were all White; one Hispanic friend but she was Whitewashed as all hell. [He] drove a Mustang. That should have been my first warning, but I feel like he, just, his life was just so White and so privileged because his dad owned a construction company and had a beautiful house and like, I just never felt comfortable with him and even when he, when I met his brother, his mom, it is, never felt like- it never felt comfortable and I always felt like I was very aware of the fact that I wasn't White with them but I think that's

the only relationship that I felt that way. I think others were similar, but I think that was the worst one 'cause even though my family had money, like, we didn't have that kind of money. It was, I think social economic and also racial-ethnic. He ended up marrying somebody who was literally his White brother so like, it made, I feel like what I felt was very much true like I wasn't making it up.

NINE OF SWORDS

Has something you ever wanted turned out to make you sad? The dreamboat, Brad, for Thomas. My dreamboat was Mitch.

The figure sits, and remains illuminated in a profile seated posture to the audience. The Nine of Swords pauses as one Masked figure enters stage left, holding a cup of coffee and pancakes. It takes a seat on one of the wingback chairs.

Continues on, not taking notice.

NINE OF SWORDS

He spent the night, we got along easy. Sleeping in my bed one night, I got my back and he lowered himself onto and into me. We started fucking constantly after that. On the couch watching a movie, in the bathroom, on the counter, in our office, on the back porch on all fours. We were ready to go whenever and I kept myself immaculately clean down there to have it all the time.

Crosses to sit at the available wingback chair.

NINE OF SWORDS

And he would go back to his boyfriend, in their house, on the weekends. It didn't bother me. I had what I wanted.

Takes a sip from the cup.

NINE OF SWORDS

Well, it certainly wasn't what his boyfriend wanted. They split. And not because of this, but certainly in its wake, I fell more in love with him, more than anyone I have ever been with in my entire life.

Pauses, and takes brief notice of the uncanny picture.

NINE OF SWORDS

He would then properly move into town. This is when I met his parents. On their last morning in town, we would get breakfast. All things considered, everything was great and we were at the morning before his parents were to return home, a few hours east. I'm good at small talk and pretty to look at. Things were good.

Physically addressing this next bout of dialogue in the masked figures direction, but not specifically speaking to it.

NINE OF SWORDS

As we sat at the table, I remember staring at our cups of coffee, and in the way Thomas explained, felt entirely different along vectors of class and race. With everything that had happened, there was probably a very real and active part of me focused on such differences, but I remember feeling it deeply then and there, in my bones, affirmation and confirmation of our difference.

The figure behind the veil stands, and emphatically gestures, pantomiming Thomas's dialogue. As the figure speaks, The Nine of Swords tears at, and slowly eats one of the pancakes dry.

NINE OF SWORDS

Thomas, in the same flow of thought, continued

THOMAS

...what's funny about that relationship is it was a really weird situation for me because I felt I was so Americanized. This was before I came to terms of being Mexican and being proud of who I was. It was, I was still struggling with wanting to be more, like, you know? Growing up in Mexico ruins, like, 'oh you're lighter skinned you're better.' I already had all that drama and then I'm dating this White guy. I'm trying to be so... I thought I had done such a good job like, becoming a White person. Then to be confronted with that was so shocking because this is weird! Because like, I don't come from a very, I don't come from a poor family and I'm not like, dark. Everything that I thought was bad and I'm still not, like, they're like, that's when I realized like, you're never going to be that like. Stop. Stop trying to be that because you're never, you're just not going to get it like, no matter how perfect you think you are, no matter how hard you work, it's not about hard work like, stop thinking that if you work hard enough you're going to be a White person in America.

NINE OF SWORDS

As I sat drinking coffee that morning, I looked down to my cup, and noticed I was the only one who kept my spoon in while sipping. As a habit, out at restaurants, I did not feel comfortable putting my used spoon down on the table. My napkin was on my lap. This place didn't give me a saucer, so alas, my spoon kept inside the mug.

NINE OF SWORDS

But as I thought I had made it, been inside some kind of circle, outside of my grasp, the spoons – those fucking spoons –

NINE OF SWORDS

Even if I was here, his little spoon, I was here because of my asshole. Opened up, took him, took his loads, met his parents. Pussy that good.

NINE OF SWORDS

But those goddamn spoons were the only things I could see. Was I trying to be White? Was I trying to be a good spoon? Support the weight of the load, the burden, a palatable vessel for what? His loads?

The Nine of Swords takes the spoon carefully into his hands, examines it. He slides it into his mouth and talks over it.

NINE OF SWORDS

Why, how, did this make me so fucking sad? What happens when I took him into me. Sublimate? Acquiesce into his embrace? Everything I wanted, and the burden of this fucking spoon on my memory.

The Nine of Swords begins choking himself on the spoon. He starts gagging heavily. He doubles over on the floor, and for a minute explores the back of his throat with the spoon. His eyes well up, as he looks to the audience.

NINE OF SWORDS

Whiteness doesn't make me sad. It's the way that it has been the grounds of knowing myself and relating to others on. I will never be enough under this.

The Nine of Swords rips off the veil as he struggles to lift himself from the floor.

NINE OF SWORDS

I'm asking them questions from this place, from under the weight of this. I can't see myself from this, it only distorts, reduces, simplifies-

NINE OF SWORDS

The sadness Roger, Isaac, and Thomas named their sadness as something that passed, something in that face of institutional structures, and an affect from something he desired. My sadness-

The masked figure walks over to the Nine of Swords, and from behind him, pulls him into an embrace that becomes tight.

NINE OF SWORDS

My sadness too, all of those things. What happens when I let myself be drawn into its kiln, rest my head on its shoulders, laurels, wholly dwelled upon.

The masked figure wraps its arms around The Nine of Swords chest, slowly working to pull against his throat.

Scared

NINE OF SWORDS

Just please let me go. I can't go on like this.

NINE OF SWORDS

It wasn't always like this. But what happened? When did I start feeling like a stain? I was always careful to be clean. Not stain, leave a mark, leave a reminder.

The masked figure grabs the Nine of Sword's face, and forces him to look at the bed.

NINE OF SWORDS

I feel in love with him there, with everyone, I could look up at them, watch them bury themselves into me, take in their eyes too, I fucked myself into glee. I loved him there.

The masked figure drags him to it and throws him into the sheets.

NINE OF SWORDS

That was the same bed I would deny my ex in. When he wouldn't take no for an answer, the only thing that would stop him was telling him I hadn't showered.

When I got too drunk in that bed, and had people with me, too gone to say I didn't want to go further, it was my last line of defense.

The masked figure restrains The Nine of Swords, and starts hog tying him.

NINE OF SWORDS

I could keep them this way, they would stay, I would open up and they would stay and when they left I was alone. I had nothing but myself and that was no one.

NINE OF SWORDS

Where is my sadness, is it here now, or made from here? Give me the spoon back, take it back, I'll force it out the other end myself. I'll never fucking use it again, sew it shut for all I fucking care. Please, I can't go on like this. Please.

The masked figure starts gagging The Nine of Swords until he vomits on himself. The bed is consumed in flames.

Blackout.

Act Two, Scene 2**Am I the only one that hates myself?**

The stage is as it was, except now the bed has become its uncanny form, and the art by the wingback chairs now too is in its mutated forks. There is a small pool in place of the desk.

The hermit speaks, off stage.

THE HERMIT

When I was at my smaller frames, every single person I approached for sex, took me up on my offer. Literally I could just sit there and let them do all the work. This is how I spent a summer of my life. Then my boyfriend would come home and I'd make him lunch between his shifts. It wasn't a bad gig, but damn was I bold back then.

THE HERMIT

If my asshole locked things down, my size helped lubricate the situation.

The Hermit walks onto stage, in a bathing suit and tank top, pausing to take in the scenic morph.

THE HERMIT

Well...this is different. Fairy forest?

The Hermit slowly lowers himself into the bath.

THE HERMIT

I met Roger when I was at one of these smaller sizes. Actually, I met him a year before I moved to Albuquerque. I was helping a friend move in and get settled, but also thoroughly eager for some fun.

The Hermit produces a loofa and lounges.

THE HERMIT

Roger is jacked. Like. Bodybuilder, super hard, bulging muscles, classic Schwarzeneggerian aesthetic. Roger was the first guy who looked like this that I reached out to and heard back from. During our conversation, I asked Roger to talk a little bit more about why he liked going to the gym so much. He would easily interject-

Roger does not appear on stage anywhere. His voice instead comes over the speakers, in sync with moving audio wave of his speech on the projection screen.

ROGER

“If not I’d probably weigh 500 pounds. Plus, I’ve been chubby, so I don’t want to be fat again, know what I mean?”

THE HERMIT

Duh! Why do you think I’m wearing a shirt in this pool. At some point, at the age of four I had the awareness that I was chubby. But I also had the awareness this was something to be ashamed by. In photo albums I’m usually wearing a shirt at a pool. Being considered fat in mainstream gay world starts at not having visible abs.

The sound of an impending storm fills the stage, with a crackle of lightning sounding in the distance.

THE HERMIT

When I was in bigger frames, I would have gym rats tell me I was too big to hold on a dance floor, and have men literally pinch parts of my body trying to determine my body fat percentage.

The Hermit gets out of the pool and walks offstage to dry off, still speaking.

THE HERMIT

The most important people in my lives are the ones who love me through all these shifts. I had plenty of people sincerely love me and fuck me in my bigger sizes. Reminding me, I am usually at my strongest and most vulnerable in this size.

THE HERMIT

But yeah. I get it. In the same way we might refuse sad, we refuse fat, and treat it also as a thing to overcome. Man, I was so self conscious I didn't even wear a T-Shirt until I was 21 when I withered away at the end of a month long eating disorder spiral.

The Hermit walks back on stage in a White robe over to the wingback chairs and reclines.

THE HERMIT

At the end of our discussions, Roger would tell me what I was asking ultimately wasn't applicable in Albuquerque. I asked why, sort of aggressively and he offered, "because no one's smart enough to answer them! I mean, you're looking for, like, questions on people like, 'hey are you a latino?'" and stuff like that but here no one cares, you have to do it with- where people are little bit more educated and they actually have goals and shit."

The Hermit, instead of producing a Roger mannequin, just moves over to the chair the Roger-mannequin had previously been sat in.

THE HERMIT

Roger would go on to tell me “Albuquerque doesn’t have people who are smart enough to even think about stuff like that to tell you the truth, they just go by, your looks. If you look decent, they wanna see what you look like, and then they ask for, a dirty picture, and then if its big enough, then you can go. Know what I mean?”

He switches back into his seat.

THE HERMIT

I get it. Sometimes people are dumb and place matters. I think the latter is a little more accurate in identifying the conundrum he’s explaining here

The projection screen shows a video of a car driving, from the vantage of the driver, looking out into the dessert landscape. The Hermit gets up and paces.

THE HERMIT

Driving in Albuquerque was a nightmare. There were usually multiple accidents in the traffic caused by another accident a few hundred feet forward. Moving here I could look over and see someone scrolling through their phone, not even looking at the road. You could usually find me yelling “WHY CAN’T ANYONE DRIVE.” Shaking me fist like an angry old curmudgeon.

THE HERMIT

To make sense of the situation, I would usually blame imagined drivers for being dumb, and chalk up the issue to the education system. I knew that wasn’t exactly right but it was a quick conclusion to reach.

THE HERMIT

The move I drove, the more I grew aware of the driving conditions: near-constant sun, occasional wind, fleeting showers in the spring and summer. I grew up driving with heavy rains, bad winds, blizzards, snowfall of a few feet, icy roads, crumbling streets, and mania inducing speed even in dense traffic.

The Hermit sits on a wingback chair.

THE HERMIT

In Albuquerque, driving was chill. With no serious environmental hazards, it was easy. So of course people drove accordingly and maybe had different awareness while driving. At some point, towards the end, I would learn to stop giving a shit and just relax and breathe easy.

THE HERMIT

No wonder my conversations with my co-researchers lacked immediate and clear relevance. I would push back on Roger's attribution to intelligence here, but in the same way I assumed the driving issue was because people were in some equal stage of lack, I find more accurate value in recognizing the conditions and context informing the social environment.

THE HERMIT

And the environment in this specific region of the southwest, held what is the minority Hispanic population in most other places in the U.S. as the majority here in Albuquerque. The kinds of questions I was asking were built from a base and locus of White informed identity, that is, how I leaned about myself in predominantly White Spaces.

THE HERMIT

So the questions I was asking about fetishization were not, as accurate as they could or should have been, and confusing in the face of their life experience in the region. To Roger, the short answer is gay men are shallow. I used the tools of my misery to actually, feel more alone. The master's tools would not get me out of this labyrinth of suffering. I was trying to find a way to connect with people, but could not even imagine an alternative base. Sadness was the closest I would try to get.

THE HERMIT

This project in general was then born out of an attempt to scholarly enable and propel these kinds of ties, and more largely examine the why not; the missed possibilities after only ever knowing that what I am is a vile, disgusting, abjection that is threatening the nation as well as its moral fabric on vectors of race, sexual orientation, and disability. So, while it is nice meeting people of Color who were not taught to hate themselves by their environment growing up, I only mostly have envy when confronting this, that for some, identity can become a minor, more peripheral mundane awareness. Is this melancolía? Or more accurately, is it the difficulty I have of seeing outside of myself, and my resentment of the colonial schema that propel such results?

A rumble of thunder booms in the distance.

THE HERMIT

Thomas talks about these pressures of body expectations in the gay mainstream, whereas Roger went the bodybuilder route, Thomas would go in another direction.

Thomas appears in the same way Roger did before, as a sound wave on the projection screen, his voice puncturing the space.

THOMAS

“I’ve had a nose job, I’ve had lip fillers, I have botox, I have, there’s so many things that I’ve done to kind of fit that ideal, what I think is the ideal gay. I don’t know...”

THE HERMIT

He pauses briefly before continuing.

The Hermit lets out a sigh, and sinks into the chair, putting a towel over his face.

THOMAS

“For example, I’m super hairy and I hate that, like I hate that because I don’t like that. I know that there is a group that look for that”

The Hermit contorts the towel so his mouth is exposed. As Thomas talks, The Hermit recites the lines of speech.

THE HERMIT

He’s talking about bears, a group of gays who like, are really into sheer mass and blankets of fur as the crux of their sexual desire. While I was chubby, I was never quite big or hairy enough to be one, or White enough.

THOMAS

“But I don’t like that on myself because I feel, again, I think this [goes] to race things because I don’t look like a Latin guy. I want to look as good for a light skin White male. So what does that entail for me growing up in the nineties? That’s being thinner. That’s being hairless. That’s being lighter hair and tan skin.”

The Hermit sighs again and sits up in the chair, leaning forward to speak to the audience directly.

THE HERMIT

Shit, alright, honestly, let's be honest, you want to get to the honesty, I was all of those things at my smallest in my 20s. So as much as me being a slut that summer was my size, it was also all of these things. Some of it was intentional, and some of it is just naturally me. I didn't mean to cut Thomas off, he's still in the same breath, getting a little more specific,

The Hermit sits back and sulks.

THOMAS

"So yeah, I think it's been very difficult in term of like, being desired sexually, because I feel like I'm fighting against, like everything that I am, to be something like the Abercrombie looking guy, you know what I mean?"

THE HERMIT

There are two aesthetics between Roger and Thomas, the former, the beefcake jock, heavy with muscle mass, and the latter, the chiseled Adonis. I have always been on a sliding scale anywhere between these two, but never perfectly. I could only get so close.

THOMAS

"I tended to gravitate towards older men because I felt like they were grateful or like, thankful to have someone like me and I think it's why I felt really insecure with White guys because they were what I wanted to be."

It starts raining. The Hermit produces an umbrella.

THE HERMIT

No.

The rain intensifies. The Hermit gets up and paces, walking up beneath the umbrella.

THOMAS

“In my twenties I would wear the most ridiculous things, again very much playing into a feminine side because I thought that was a stronger side, like it’s easier for me to play with my feminine side because it's what works, than me play with the masculine side because it doesn't work because I'm 5’-5”- it’s not going to work. I’m not going to look like a manly man ever. It's ridiculous. So I have a bunch of old outfits, and I'm like what? what? You need to get rid of this! you're never going to wear like, bedazzled Liberace white suit, like, just get rid of it! You're never going to have special San Francisco. You know what's funny? I think if I was still in New Mexico I wouldn't feel that way because I have my group of friends, so going out with a couple friends that I feel comfortable with, I don't care what I look, I don't care what I look [like] because I got my crew. But in here, in San Francisco because, first of all people don't do that and second, I don't have a group, so just me and my husband and I'm dressed like a peacock? Like it doesn't make sense.”

A masked figure slowly comes out from under the bed. The Hermit freezes watching it slowly emerge.

THOMAS

“I'll never be a super masculine man, so I think I play to the feminine parts of me [which] turn off most people because they don’t want a feminine gay guy. They want a straight-acting [guy] even if they don't say it. Like, it's kind of the rule because how often do you see two drag queens dating? Like it happens but, not really. I think people usually get with the most masculine that they can based on their ability to attract a masculine man. That's just my personal opinion.

The Masked Figure stand, as if learning to walk and stand, settling somewhere in the middle. Another figure, under a white cloth dragging on the floor, saunters out from behind the wall of the wingback chairs. The Hermit backs up, stumbling and tripping into the pool. He stares, wide eyed.

THOMAS

“I think a lot of the time, especially when I started with the [facial] fillers, I was really trying to play up the feminine side of me but just based on my age. I'm now 37, I live in San Francisco where people do not put up with that shit. Like, everyone here is super granola. There's no glam, there's none of that. So I think it's- I feel in New Mexico that you could show up at the club with a full face like, high cheekbones and like, a glitter outfit, be like “yes Queen!” Here, it's not, they're not into that.”

The Veiled figure kneels before The Hermit, and the Hermit cowers hiding his face. The Veiled figure touches The Hermit's shoulders forcing his hands apart. The Masked figure joins.

The Veiled Figure produces a camera, that projects its point of view onto the projection screen. The Masked figure takes the camera. Slowly pivoting, slowly showing The Hermit's face on a rotation of 180 degrees. The Masked figure tries getting The Hermit to look at the reflection, in the screen, to try and see himself. It gets behind The Hermit, prying his eyes open, just for The Hermit to resist.

There is a stillness in the storm. The Veiled Figure touches the Hermit's shoulder. It then forces him headfirst into the pool. They struggle, as the camera mirrors the intensity of their strain. The Hermit occasionally succeeds in a few heaving breaths.

The stage lights dim, except for one directly above the pool. Their struggle is seen and heard, as the water splashes, The Hermit pleads. Their struggle ensues as The Masked Figure forces us to watch.

There is something here he cannot face either, this time too, himself. But even more so, a dilemma. Confronted with the reality of engaging with the simultaneity of being in a place of affirming self, through social bonds, and being in a place that does not endorse such projects. He would sooner drown under the weight of his own mental anguish than face the significance that he may never be fully or wholly happy, and that life and joy, may be fleeting.

The light above now dims too. The pool and video feed fades into dark obscurity. The struggle stops and The Hermit goes limp in the pool. Lightning crackles.

Blackout.

Act Two, Scene 3
One Big Happy Fucking Ending

The stage is covered in mossy green foliage, spreading out across the floor, and crawling up on the one wall, where the wingback chairs once were. A bloom of daises sits where the pool did. The lights are dim. Someone is on stage, crawling in the darkness. The storm is still rumbling, a little further away, but still overhead. This is a shelter.

This someone, as the lights come up, looks around bewildered, trembling. They collapse into a sitting posture on stage. They begin crying quietly.

The masked figure appears a close up shot of their face projected on screen. They rest in three positions, directly facing forward, turned profile to the left, and turned profile to the right. The image switches between these poses. They begin shifting and congealing, blurring and transparent on top of one another.

Someone starts screaming out, tense in their body. They look around and begin taking fistfuls of moss apart. The frenetic energy propels them across the floor.

Tired, they sit, exhausted, fists still full of moss. They slowly start forcing it into their mouth. They eat heaps of it.

Someone, insatiable, crawls toward the daises, falling into it. With their buried face, they eat too, and once their head comes up, they are still chewing, crying.

One by one, each masked figure takes off the mask, revealing The Hermit and The Nine of Swords underneath.

“RUINS OF MY DESIRE” displays on the screen.

Someone starts exploring their mouth with their fingers, one hand at a time, carefully getting both inside. They reach further back, into the machinery of their throat. With each propulsion into their gaping mouth, they gag.

Someone buckles over, gagging, they vomit, expelling all the moss and daises. They sob. They reach back into their orifice. They vomit. This goes on for several minutes.

SOMEONE

Death is a lie. The lie is death.

SOMEONE

The Nine of Swords burned. He sacrificed sorrow and misery, shame, when he burned he came, but produced nothing, a toroidal collision reaching out to the ends of the universe for bonds. He made me a home in this shelter.

SOMEONE

The Hermit went, unable to be with himself any longer. Frozen by what he could not bear to recognize, the other in himself. The fate of happiness as a glimpse, not as an enduring place.

SOMEONE

And I go now, separating myself. Unable to recognize the way my body would have made a resolve of all this earth.

SOMEONE

Nullify the utility of my cunt. Remake.

SOMEONE

I'm not the only one that hates myself. Is that what I wanted to hear. To know others suffer as much as I do.

SOMEONE

As I allowed myself to destroy the only threads of connection I had into such a place. Everything I learned from my hole. What a luxury to whine and posture, oh woe is me, wah wah wah fucking wah.

SOMEONE

Four days before I turned 28, the stage opened up and ate me. Spat me out. Deteriorated form, collapse.

SOMEONE

If the fabric of my social interaction, sex with strangers online, my dick in a hole cut into cloth, in a doorway of some guy's house, or under someone in a stairwell in my best suit, this is how I relate to people

SOMEONE

If you checked my blood quantum, you would only find an ocean, pouring out from, the bay of my eyes. Salt, purging from my orifices. The oceans I have consumed.

SOMEONE

If I were to assume the form of my blood, what makes me, I wouldn't be Mexican, I wouldn't be a faggot-

SOMEONE

It would be a happy ending, worked to completion, whole, satiated, satisfied, worked over.

SOMETHING

I can't build a shelter from denying, negating, the bonds I sought out so desperately. What if I take in, the raw form of my denial, the residue of what burned, what drowned. Where can that take me, now that I've taken them in, churned them about, spit out anew. Heaved.

SOMETHING

What can I do in here?

A tree rises and made of light begins unfurling

Here, here I am. In the fake out, - wake

Smoke fills the space, choking. Somewhere, hard lines of green light splay, spread, decohere
And then acquiesce into the shape

Frame of a tree /Limbs, reaching //Rigid, illusive Staunchly fleeting

The light escapes, seethes across the floor, back up into its lightning tree form

Before rupturing across and outward,

Terra Nova

Bursting material

Into the audience,

Over their heads,

Settling someplaces, inside what part of them

Might be open to understanding

With their skin,

Soft palate,

Intimate, teasing, a finger wrapped around their hair

The best of my attempts are nameless but
can, might be grasped, still.

Appendix A Script Justification

My goal is to envision a project that seeks to elucidate such feeling in tandem with an analytic eye. There is no proper order to this, it goes in all sorts of directions. In Chapter Six, a central goal of mine was to evocatively convey the emergent themes generated from discussions with my co-researchers. I rearticulated discussions then and elsewhere in the form of a short play. In this way I sought to express and isolate the feelings, stories, senses, encounters, and experiences that bind and disjoint us. By voicing my inner considerations, my focus here is to performatively suture a sense of cohesion against the logic rendering the experiences and sites of ethnoracialized knowledges as separate, far apart, and nearly irreconcilable. With stage direction, cues, and notes on vocal delivery, I reimagined bonds across experience and feeling as a way to speak back to queer brown loneliness. I also aimed to stage my own kind of awareness, interaction, and responses to and with my co-researcher's perspective and sentiments. As a retrospective gesture of remediation, for the denials and impossibilities of the here and now, this labor highlights the cleave between subjects in an attempt to join such seeming individual experiences. My attempt here was to construct Chapter Six through co-researcher discussion, as they collide against and through my own experiences.

This allowed me to articulate in a more complex iteration through the play of a play. In order to grapple with the complexity of my feelings, experience, and critical vantage, I reconstructed a vision of Chapter Four into the format of a script for an imagined staged production. Before I get to the assembly framework and formation of the work, I return always to a Queer of Color scholarly base. I then isolate and recognize literature within such scholarly field that encourages, explains, and justifies the decision on compositional form.

The Stage

Part of my determination in choosing to locate and advocate this project within the scholarly landscape of QOCC and QIC is its relationship with the importance of performance work, on the stage. While my sense and understanding of performativity is conceptualized from a base of Queer of Color radical scholars, I still turn to the stage as a site of possibility, as recognized by other Queer of Color scholars inside such conceptual landscapes. For instance, Pritchard (2020) in an interview with performer director/scholar Roger Q. Mason, a queer artist of scholar, discuss the role of Queer of Color worlds and artistry on stage, and in particular the unique possibilities they may form. Mason discusses at length the goals of his work, which focus on Queer of Color storytelling and reconfigurations and interjections of that self and other into historical fiction.

Akin to Calafell (2005) who in her own work recognizes that a turn to the past is vital and can be important queer world making tools for certain minoritarian subjects. Specifically, she states in her work:

Pilgrimage and the desire to reimagine history and national memory are actions for those postcolonial subjects to embody history. Affect created through performances of queer temporality calls preexisting subjects into spaces of identification where lived experience is altered and potentialities are opened as identity continues to be in the making.

(Calafell, 2006, p. 54).

Mason comes into the picture here then calling for similar efforts on stage. The importance, like to Calafell, is a way to open new potentialities of identity as a process in the making. About this, he talks of the nature of queering on stage too, but uniquely its relationship to storytelling form and queer content itself as possible through staging;

My purpose is not just sociological, my purpose is aesthetic. And one of the aspects of my work that I don't get to talk about as much is how I think we need to queer form, storytelling form, just as much as we need to queer content. So, for me, part of the work is telling the stories of these queer lives, but the other part of it is finding the unique and rigorous way of pushing form, which still exists within the decision-making systems of a white, male, privileged patriarchy. (Pritchard, 2020, p. 71)

In a similar function of Muñoz's work on brown feelings, Mason here affirms too the importance of crafting forms outside of the primary schema of what he calls "decision-making systems" from a locus of control within too, spaces of performance and theatre work. In this, the compelling to push into a mode of form that is needed, given its illegible nature to contemporary privileges forms of normative feeling, like Muñoz described, is the unique opportunity afforded and needed from Queer of Color perspectives and acts.

One of the most unique things for Mason in theatre is the unparalleled opportunity to provide the ground for such endeavors. In this, he tells:

The mediums of theatre is so vast in its ability to channel the most sublime regions of the human imagination, Why would you tie it to just objects and compressed time and realism like that? Why can't we shoot to the moon, sometimes? (Pritchard, 2020, p. 72)

Why can't we indeed. It is here I worked to take up the call to cohere the complex tethers occurring through my work in the form of a staged play. Here, I wanted to focus on his attention to imagination. While this script does not have the immediate goal of realizing itself as a staged production, the value and utility resides therefore in what the script tries to do- that is something typically exterior to the organization of a traditionally social-scientific document. Here, the role of imagination is not just a plea of calling those queer worlds into the now, or touching and

feeling such possibility, but it is also with you, reader- between us. The colorful field of the imaginary is powerful, necessary, and worth interacting with. And to me, the imagined staging of this work is important, as a way to affect a more complicated organization of feelings within this work that does not labor toward the goal of a united, happy subject. To me, this specifically means this staging does not advocate for a neat kind of resolution. To do so would betray the orientation of brown feelings. The material world does not typically offer a mapping to happiness and fulfillment for minoritarian subject, the social world will continue to not encourage this, despite the loud pleas and appeals that we all might find some American dream.

In fact, I say here and now, I do not have a neat resolution and reject the imperative to name one. Rather than continue lying to myself and trying to appease the rigid structural constraints demanding allegiance to happy endings required in the goal of a normative full and whole self, I work in this towards a non-resolution, instead privileging the deterioration of self in the way that, like queer world making instead uses such raw material to imagine alternative ways of being, relating, and feeling in the world, contrary to normative assemblies, that also turn in towards the intra-other as a way to move towards such horizons.

I now turn to some examples of this kind of queer theatre work as it affects Queer/of Color staging. Even within this minoritarian subgroup, there can be standard forms of storytelling that privilege heteronormative appeals to life and livelihood. First, Mason's call for queering storytelling form can be recognized in Pearlman's staging of his various performance work. The effort here is enacted in that this trans performing artist tells about works moving away from solely reinscribing identity as on/the body.

In my stage work I am using the material *but not the identity of my body* [emphasis added] to test and challenge the expectations of autobiographical performance and manufacture pockets of resistance to this disciplinary power. (Pearlman, 2015, p. 89)

The kinds of autobiographical performance he is working away from are White Queer confessional texts, or coming-out stories that follow a simple and rote trajectory of confessing and ultimately liberating the self through the disclosure and affirmation of ones' identity. In another work I will explore shortly, a trans performer similarly centralizes the focus onto the materials attributed to gender identity as a way to rewrite the form of self that is not absolutely adhered to the body. But here, we see an opportunity to conceive of identity in its projected materials rather than rewriting the sedimented relationship between such identities of gender and race as permanently tied in the material and genetic composition of the body.

Queer Material

More clearly, Pearlman's effort is twofold. First, in striving to form a body of work that is not necessarily about identity by utilizing the body, instead uses materials ascribed to the body as a way of getting out of identity scripts. In this, he writes and asks us to consider "What else might our bodies bring to the theatre beyond an explanation of ourselves and our circumstances? To subvert both the audience/societal 'need' to experience 'confession...' and the performer's conditioned desire to enact it" (Pearlman, 2015, p. 89). From this, Pearlman recognizes the issue as both the over-adherence of identity to the body as a disciplinary enactments of power, but also that the narrative trajectory of autobiography often contour to fit this very expectation.

I work intimately next with Bertrand, recalling at length the specific performance examples she cites in order to more clearly bolster her position on queer staging. Similarly, like Pearlman, Bertrand assesses queer performance tactics through what she refers to "transfer

mechanisms” (2020, p. 216). This notion signals “the way identity is projected onto something exterior to the body and expresses itself through it” (p. 216). In her specific examination of several performances she offers that “it can be a material object, e.g. a puppet, or the global scenic environment that envelops and duplicates the performer” (p. 216). Cautiously, and speaking against normative queer theatre, she notes “not every duplication on stage is queer” (p. 216) but moves as a frequent means of expressing such queer identities today. Bertrand turns to Anzaldúa (1987) to think about this type of duplication as a type of transfer which may lead “to a form of hybridity and expresses a creative power to redefine the self that can be considered as odd or queer” (Bertrand, 2020, p. 216). This way of performing and placing identity, typically from the body, rather onto something else, does not serve as a form of negation of the self, but as a way to call attention to and explore the exhausting nature and social reality that constantly ties identity to the physical body. This duplication is a way to think differently, more oddly, and make new material to express such queerness.

I want to turn to a lengthy description and example of what Bertrand is describing here to give credence and a clearer picture of the kind of performance I assembled in fashion with. I recall her retelling at length in order to paint a picture in the richest detail in the way she sees it. This performance by Phia Ménard (2008) “P.P.P.” sees the stage appears simply decorated, with “chair made of ice and various modular refrigerators” in which Ménard “juggles through the show with ice balls weakly suspended from the ceiling that falls randomly and are caught by the performer or explore on the floor” (p. 220). As the element of water shifts through the show, from liquid and solid, for Bertrand it “becomes the ideal material to express the fluidity of gender identity” (p. 220). These balls of suspended ice fall throughout the duration of the show,

creating a wet and slippery stage elucidating an another environment of terror, danger, and for Ménard, gender.

I recall at length the description of the climatic collision between the performer, elements and objects. Bertrand tells us:

Before drawing a spiral in the melting ice, Phia Ménard plunges into a basin of hot water a dress that had previously remained on stage, frozen. As she goes around in circles, she goes out to retrieve the unfrozen dress and puts it on. This last dress, representative of her identity, turns against her when the performer breaks the circle, exhausted, to sit on a block of ice that clings to the dress. The ice trapping the dress forces Ménard to wrestle with herself in an attempt to detach herself from the block. The struggle lasts until the performer gives up and has to take off her dress to be free. She finds herself exposed, in the slippery snow, out of breath. She then removes her bra and removes the silicone prostheses that were placed on her chest. This final scene of great emotional intensity transfers the performer's inner struggle for acceptance of her gender identity to an external struggle. (Bertrand, 2020, p. 221).

Here we can visualize an affecting and arresting collision of the elements, objects, and performers onstage in a way narrative description would be an ill fitting medium for naming such sentiments, but that importantly, are working through and reconfigured as raw materials instead. Such use of the elements points and emphasizes the possibility and use of raw materials for queer ends. Or, as Bertrand explains "The power of matter in transformation, this intermediate state of change that is explored on stage, becomes representative of a body that emerges from dominant dualisms" (p. 222). Equally, this to Bertrand serves as an example of the

way that this displacement and transfer “of identity in elements external to the body extend it and propose representations of bodily identity that cannot be contained behind a label” (p. 222). The goal is not getting out of the body, or identity necessarily, but rendering alternative tools and materials to think about it that gets it away from simple and limiting descriptions of self.

The queerness here, is the use of materials and elements to think differently about the sites and mediums of making identity; if limiting, what is the way these elements can be recycled and adapted to make something new entirely? In this is what I refer to as “raw materials.” Bertrand sees this also as a way to do what Pearlman advocates for of destabilizing a normative and linear narrative. By privilege this form of representation in performance work, we can queer the location of the subject/self emerging not from a normative timeline storytelling or toward a place of happy resolution, but rather places oneself within a unique tension. In this end, Bertrand asserts that for Ménard:

Linear text is no longer the predominant element to which all other staging elements are subordinated. This “dis-hierarchy” underlies a breakdown of character-performer, or body-text relationship. *The subject can then emerge within the dynamics of flow, metamorphoses, and reversals, and positions itself on the very border* [Emphasis added] (Bertrand, 2020, p. 222).

This emphasis allows the queer physical body on stage in this moment to be no “longer reduced to its physical aspect but expresses itself in its relationship to the context in which it appears. Language, irony, and strategies of multiple duplications help it redefine it outside dualism” (p. 222). I would add here, this duplication and displacement of identity things in the use of elements counts here too. Like Pearlman, Bertrand here works to trouble the nature of the performer and character, and in this, like Muñoz’s focus on the social distinction and order

affecting minoritarian folk, can be expressed itself through the contextual landscape, or, what I outline next to Pearlman, in lying, as another way of troubling normative linear expectations of Queer autobiographic work.

Queering Identity Stories. Returning to Pearlman, his use of such strategies is tied to a larger goal of the forming a whole picture that resists. He tells of this in that “in my practice I offer ‘autobiographies’ that continually lie as an act of this resistance” (p. 89). These suffocating loop of what narrowly focused works on identity may incur- is the issue here, where the cost of reinscribing a concreteness of identity itself onto corporeal forms, rather than promoting an attention to the social conditions that become projected and displaced onto one, compelling us to unite ourself within the available definitions of self, that lying can that work against such rigid expectations. He conceptualizes this as “dissemblage theory,” which to him, act as a counter power in enacting and developing narrative structure, that by “collating together series of dissembling (lying) acts might work to queer the machinery of confession in LGBTQQIA autobiographical performances” (p. 89). For Pearlman, this requires more than just one moment, issue, or type of lying. Just one of these gestures fails in that it cannot connect to a larger whole and is simply left as a “fleeting subversive effect” (p. 90). This act of dissemblage is predicated upon “the capacities of each section [to] simplify and combine into the whole” (p. 90). His work, in one example propels the shows narrative trajectory around the materials of identity, such as clothes. In a way to continually reveal himself and disclose his trans identity, he instead continually lies, and relocates his identity before a new standard and stability of his identity may take form to the audience. This allows him to continually trouble and overturn normative expectations of trans identity narratives. In discussing the whole picture of the show, the continual reliance upon lying serves as a trap, in that:

The spring of each singular trap refuses both solidification and expectation; the repeated and explosive reveal of multiple traps rejects the desire for answers and the possibility of a stable narrative in which an identity ‘problem’ is solved. (p. 90)

This project of identity as solved within the confessional format has become, for Pearlman, a marker of standard queer autobiographical formats, that, like Muñoz, become about resolving a self that is united, whole, and happy. The way Pearlman actively works against such constraining expectations is through these tactics of continual lying to distrust the seeming stability of self and identity forged throughout the show’s duration. Dissemblage theory as a resistance strategy against “the pressure of confession culture on queer autobiographic theory” works to “explore what might be accompanied by the theatre makers of queer identities in addition to and beyond ‘telling our stories’ (p. 91). This way, the over-focus on the body and identity can become something else worth offering and exploring in relation to the social, and perhaps, can foreground an attention to and with the materials ascribing to identity, which in this instance can also be a way out of reinscribing the locus of identity on the body. The materials can be a way for piecing together queer ends in the utopic sense.

My attention to Pearlman though is to recognize this tactic in this genre of theatrical performance work, but also I take a great interest in his dissemblage theory for the reason that, the cohering whole of the lying elements, through resistance and upturning acts throughout, have “ideally, the effect at the close of the performance is that a space without solidity emerges, without the need for ‘understanding’ or confession” (p. 90). While I will next outline a similar and more resonant take on writing the self in such staged works, I do appreciate the focus on leaving things unresolved as an act of resistance. But he is not the first to employ lying as a strategy of illuminate social conditions crashing upon certain minoritarian bodies, and lying as an

anti-normative project, queering confessional texts (e.g. Johnson, 2014). This to me, works closer to Muñoz's take on the queer horizon, and the glance toward reparation through brown feelings. My attention though is like in what Bertrand offered, to labor and craft a piece that leaves things unsolved, but in a queer brown way, simultaneously imbued with hope, born out of the materials of identity.

The anti-resolution of my brown feelings

At the latter end of my Master's degree work, I took a Performance Studies class. The course was designed to focus on the development and performance of one piece, performed twice during the semester. The first performance would be an opportunity to collaborate with peers. Working on brown feelings of abjection within sites of institutional terror, I took the feedback from some White peers with a grain of salt, and instead focused on how they were receiving the messages I sought to imbue in the work.

In the first performance, I offered some poetic incantations at the beginning, citing the violence of White terror in my early academic environments. Oddly, some peers responsible for this behavior were in the very class. I wanted to develop an endurance style performance, so after this poetic recitation, lit only by red light- which to some crafted a sinister and shadowy environment, felt terse. The majority of the performance was allowing myself to be pierced with needles by the audience. My original vision was, after a content note, to invite audience members to sit in a chair, where I would then blindfold them, sit on top of them, and slowly grind and moan against them, culminating in taking one of their hands on top of mine as I pierced my legs with a tattoo gun, leaving permanent traces of fleeting manufactured erotic interaction.

Instead, the first piece would again, involved a poetic recitation at the beginnings, where I would then ask them to leave the room. Upon their reentry, they would find me shirtless on a

table, face down, with my arms fully spread out, perpendicular to my body, hovering off the ends of the table. My partner at that time would then facilitate the piercing of my skin, specifically on my back by the audience. This took upwards of 10 minutes, and toward the end my arms began failing. So as they were piercing me, my back was spasming, and my arms lethargically shaking.

My sentiments here were to interrogate participation in White academic terror against my body, which at the time, was constructing a space too inviting of it and speechless against it. In this form, I would reconstruct my messages to them in the face of this, with the feeling I wanted to impart upon them at the close of the performance. At the 15 minute mark, everyone had pierced my skin, through one unsuccessful as I was sweating at that point. They were then guided out of the room before my partner picked each needle out of my body and helped me dress.

People were uneasy. The most pronounced and helpful response I got as feedback was the discomfort they faced, and the specter of *something vaguely sinister* to them as they exited the classroom, turning back to see me in the same posture, my whole frame quivering as my body and arms visibility struggled staying in their open pose. That is exactly I wanted! To forge a confrontation with the way they were encouraged to act upon ethnoracialized bodies and to recognize the pain and exhaustion in enduring such people, and the very acts they continued to perform. They didn't get that. But at the end, I found resolve that the very goal of the image I wanted to leave them with sat, even if they failed to recognize that was the point, and instead use their discomfort to require me to reform my piece the second time around. I would like to think that if there were more people of Color in the class, they would have seen too what I was getting at. I did not want a neat resolution. To me there was and is no neat resolution for the terror. My goal though is still in question to me, was I actively trying to tease out feelings of discomfort? I

do not think so, but I wanted to again, impart a powerful image of Queer of Color suffering at the hands of White folk.

My second performance then, in working with the feedback, had to have a happy resolve. So I made it some cheesy but sincerely meta-work on the affirming bonds I had with my White partner at that point, and instead worked toward the resolve of threading together the performance on the basis of interrogating the utility of epistemic formations of knowledge only built around what can be seen. I wanted to gesture towards the world of the psychic and metaphysical as a way to know the world too. At the end, I was successful in conveying this image, and still inviting a piercing activity, albeit under a different and totally pleasant membrane. The second work was then called “light with no heat.” I cannot recall the name of the first, perhaps it was the same, but through the reconstruction in alignment to the feedback, the lasting impression of its performance does not endure in my memory of “light with no heat.” I am no stranger to resisting happy endings. I was not happy then. I am not happy now. But, I do understand the difference now between a Queer of Color world making effort, versus a Queer of Color’s expression, as being imbued with hope. I am a different person now though and this is what I wished to construct in my staged analysis that can resist the neat and happy ending.



Figure 2

From the end of the second performance. The needles are capped in red plastic.

The Coatlicue State. Dissemblage theory then to me can serve as a tool for realizing such a goal. Chávez though offers an different example of similar ends, under different theoretical goals of gaining new material in the ruins. Chávez describes the Queer of Color theatre production “Tortilla Curtain” by San Diego Repertory’s Theatre. Chávez goes on to describe a performance that begins with a standard narrative trajectory, that throughout works to carefully craft dichotomies between its characters along vectors of rich and poor, man and woman, displaced onto physical settings to illuminating this difference even more so as settings and locations across poor and wealthy neighborhoods.

The careful construction of difference from characters explodes in the end, as a catastrophic flooding physically erodes all these differences, leaving the characters with nothing but the roof they share for shelter above the waters below. In this, “the dichotomies of language, color, class, gender, and nationality are shown for what they are-social constructions-in this total destruction” (2013, p. 188). I bridge this here, as another method of exploding material, but specifically for the way Chávez cites Anzaldúa here, in a similar but unique mode of dishierarchy from Bertrand and Dissemblage from Bertrand strives to name. Chávez, telling of The Coatlicue State from Gloria Anzaldúa (1987, p. 70) tells us this:

Refers to a figurative and sometimes literal space betwixt and between two or more oppressive forces. Though not always a desired location, Coatlicue, however, has the capacity to generate creativity by harnessing power within the liminal space. Knowledge, ways of being in the world, and relationships between people, are undone and remade. Coatlicue is a place of destruction and rebirth that coincides with and draws its energy from the marginality of the borderlands. (Chávez, 2013, p. 185)

In the script I composed, I worked to generate a piece that dwells in this space, to recall and explore systems of relations through a queerly narrative disposition, meditating on brown feelings across relationship and discussion with my co-researchers.

I return to Muñoz once more, as he offers a glimpse into what I would recognize as this state too. He recalls the performance piece *Neopolitan* (2003) by Nao Bustamante. A TV is perched on a stand. Both are enveloped in a homely stitched piece of needlework fabric. On the TV, a person cries, watching a tape of *Fresa y chocolate*, “a film set in the 1970s in Cuba and focused on a difficult and fragile friendship between a proper revolutionary subject and a gay bohemian” (Muñoz, 2006, p. 677). The glow of the screen the person is watching is projected

back on their face- the flickering glow tells us the movie is happening. They rewind the tape, put it back in, and the loop continues of this watching and crying. For Muñoz “the videos on the loop and the performance of sobbing, rewinding, and sobbing again is a performance of repetition. Repetition is the piece’s most obvious depressive quality” (2006, p. 684). This repetition is not something one necessarily needs to get out of, but that repetition can be a state of possibility itself. Like in the play Chávez described that carefully worked to built dichotomies only to then disassemble them fully, gestures towards the relationship between mourning, grief, loss, and depression. While this example does not explicitly seek to form a healed subject, the dwelling and lingering within such spaces are glimpses into queer worlds, where in this instance, non normative feelings- brown feelings- are carefully held and forged as a site in time and space. Calafell talks of this state in her own pilgrimage effort, in locating herself and affirming the abject other. She tells:

All along I had been mourning the loss of my voice, culture, and story not realizing that in this process, in this space of anticipation and finally in this space of reclamation and reconciliation through the traversing of my past, present, and future I have created a space of new possibilities. (Calafell, 2006, p. 52)

This space of new possibilities is where I worked from and towards to create a the scripted performance venture, and imagined staging with you, the reader. There is no one way to do this, but many different formats for making possibilities from the raw materials of meaning. This script was not designed around the theoretical contemplation of its the technical construction or scripting elements, but was more so about differently affirming and collaging relational threads amongst the co-researchers, and also naming brown feelings that might be in a state of ruins, specifically in an attempt to recognize and make raw materials towards queer ends.

Script Design

To begin its composition, I worked alongside Goldstein, Gray, Salisbury & Snell (2014) in their focused work on the formation of staged qualitative research and performed ethnography. They offered a guided series of questions consider and interact with when building projects. The questions I work with do not take into account the actual staging part of development, as for now I am primarily interested in developing the script to encourage imagination at this time- to piece together the analytical goals I have just named. While their work focuses a bit more on the performing *of the other* through data materials, I am less inclined in such ventures as I do not stage beyond interview material the role of the co-researchers, instead favoring prioritizing my relationship to their understandings. I spend time with their series of questions for this kind of design and address them in what follows.

Goals and Assessment. The primary goal of this scripting was to render an expression and examination of brown feelings as they affect the engagement and experiences in the social and with the intra-other, in a way that queers the structural favoring of queer confession autobiographies by seeking ends other than a resolved stable and whole subject, in order to imagine raw materials displaced from identity and the body to flashbulb glimpses of queerness. I justified the vitality and utility of this research by recalling Queer of Color work on performance as a unique way to affect and unite my complex interests in crafting a more felt and invitational form of analysis in this section, to say, a queering of standard research within social-scientific structure. At this point, the assessment of the project will occur in the form of the defense and conference with the committee to assess the legibility of what I seek to craft as effective and doing what it claims to be doing. I will only even know if I achieved what I hoped to by making this form, but also defending the document to success with my committee. The larger goal of this

project is to fulfill my degree requirements by developing a unique queer contribution to QOCC and QIC research by imagining alternative modes of making research that examines the role of minoritarian feelings between self and other in an anti-normative mode of development and inquiry.

Audience(s). The audience at this point is the committee. In a fuller timeline, I would like to perform this work in real life as a touring academic production or also at festivals. The audience would be public, and academic-based in ideal scenario. With this in mind of the ideal audience, it does not necessarily inform the way I am developing the script. At the same time, I wish to explode the normative, so the aesthetic directions are encouraging a Queer of Color audience who would simultaneously recognize the niche and nuanced items and feelings. This show would not exactly be for anyone because the register of feeling is incompatible by the normative schema of social feeling. So, I write this knowing some people will not understand it, and I do not write it for them. This is a queer project to trouble the very sense and expectation they have organizing the narrative they may hold in their head while viewing. This too, is a goal of this scripting project.

Responsibilities to the Research Participants. At the time of data collection, this direction of the project was not in my mind's eye. There is clarification now that the data gathered will take the form of me engaging with their thoughts and positions. The original project stance did not require member checking and I will proceed forward in that fashion. All identifying factors since collection and through analysis and development, are obscured. At this point in the project, member checking is not a required component in building this script.

Responsibilities to the Audience(s). Again, this project works as a way to explore anti-normative structures of performances through Queer of Color optics. To this end, the audience

may have some background knowledge, but will not be supplemented. I would not offer a handout pamphlet defining words like “faggot” or “queer.” I desire to let these things live and breathe in a Queer of Color space.

Responsibilities to the Research-Artistic Team. At this point, that team is me. I take the lead and brainstorm with myself. In order to let this fully breathe, I work privately, and do not share or disclose the preciousness of this topic in order to avoid any critique in the development phase that would dissuade and discourage me from writing and exploring in the way I intend to queerly do. I am sensitive. Unedited critique deters me from my goals that I do not expect most to understand. In this, I am the research-artistic team at this point, and the leverage of responses and feedback will be my advisor, and the committee reading and reviewing this document. Questions regarding workshopping are not applicable at this stage of development.

Research Design. The guiding research paradigm is QOCC and QIC. This paradigm is compatible for such performative ventures, and the cited literature uses such ends to encourage the development and importance of these kinds of forms. The research questions drove the data collection and analysis, as well as the drive to stage and assess those questions in a fuller and unique capacity. The research and artistic assumptions are made explicit in the previous section. This project therefore places its significance to QOCC and QIC interfaces and fields. The kinds of identity, institutional, and systemic politics that may arise in the implementation of this project may be the same that require and forge normative narrative trajectories issuing hope and a whole happy subject. The field’s vantage therefore allows me to work against these claims in an effort to express myself and this research project more fully and accurately. As a non-linear adventure, this will also bring considerations of sexual orientation and racial minoritarian experience.

Aesthetic and Theatrical Design. The narrative and textual foundation of this project are inherently non-linear and work to make an analysis of identity that can be expressed as this mode of displacement to work rather with the raw materials of identity in a scripted and imagined performance. The staging itself would ideally be in a tradition proscenium style or could be envisioned as a black box performance. The acts would take place on some kind of raised stage. To better envision the aesthetic thresholds and visions I have in mind and execution, I included cues, and staging directions that accounted for descriptions of costumes, light effects and sound, as well as vocal nuances and stage directions. I include here a chart of the stage too.

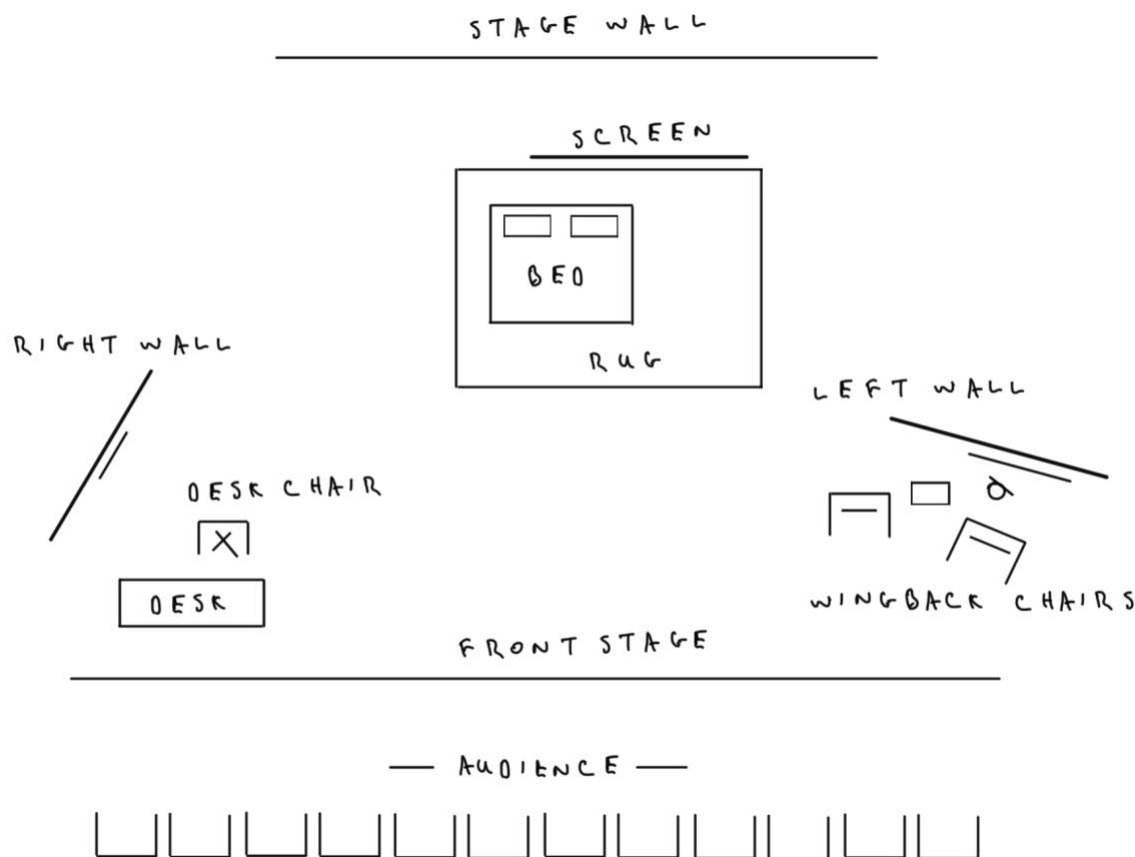


Figure 3

The audience and performer at this juncture have no direct interaction or intervention beyond the dismissal of the fourth wall, as the performer will speak directly to the audience,

perhaps not that specific audience on any given day, but in general, speak out to the crowd. The script now is the only archival item. The relationship between the audience, the performance, the research and participants are rendered through queer elements making anti-normative meaning and feeling. The staging is then a meta work about the sense of self in relationship to the discussion with co-researchers. The tools I used in staging oscillate between set design, reposition, body movement, and costumes.

Pedagogical Design. What I aim to do may in fact provoke and unsettle the audience interested in pleasant resolution. My refusal to do so here is a stake in queer world making but importantly, whether registered by a majoritarian audiences, rings as hopeful given the conclusion and remnants of Queer of Color materiality. I have no interest in designing a discussion guide to appease and assimilate into the normative logics shaping the expectations of how this ought to be structured. To do so would be to work against the effort of establishing Queer of Color world making that may be able to exist within needing to account for itself through normative logics of form.

Honoring and negotiating multiple commitments to research, aesthetic, and pedagogy. At this time, I am unable to consider these questions at this stage of development. But in general, I do not necessarily claim allegiance personally to these methods. I cannot embody a Queer of Color scholar identity. I am a scholar who uses and advocates QOCC and QIC. In general, I consider myself a cultural theorist. My triangulation between research, aesthetics, and pedagogy, are uniting explicitly now and strongly rely on one another to bolster the effort I envision and realize here.

I constructed six scenes in a two-act play-structure to performatively cohere and reconcile the emergent analytical themes. These scenes were composed in the style of a script for a staged

play, complete with verbal cues and the movement of the performers' perspective on the stage, known as stage directions, which describes the orientation of the performers' perspective on the stage, facing the audience. The movement direction "stage left" would appear to the audience as someone on the right side of the stage. I do this to put myself into fuller dialogue and scholarly consideration with the co-researchers, my own experience, and imagined audience. In distilling this information, I worked to harness the more emphatic possibility of a staged production in communicating feelings and experience at a more progenitive level of sense, especially when read and imagined beyond a page. I invited you in to perform alongside me. In this, I desired to highlight a different and more intimate dimension of analysis through the imagined staging. I provided no bridge to these moments other than introducing the scene. The shift in composition from this more traditional social-scientific style of construction into the format of a script for a staged play is a shift into the queerly fantastical spectacle; an imaginative dimension in which I call out from and call into use.

In its queer form of research, I forged a more intimate mode of analysis across several sections; identity as it encounters institutional categorical organization, identity as an enduring colonial form of relation, the regenerative possibility of the uncanny, sadness and the connectors of my queer relationality, self-hate from gay body standards and the toll it takes, and the destruction of forms of knowing the self in an attempt at building new bridges, and moving into new terrain of relationality.

Identity was the general entry into conversation about the self and other, and the uniqueness of New Mexican identity. Identity in bed more carefully interrogated the role and enterprise of the familial unit as a mechanism of relation and making of the self. The regenerative possibility of the uncanny was a brief moment, recalling the future ends and stasis

of thought. Sadness looked to shit as a metaphor for characterizing brown feelings, and more specifically examines the tools I relied on to make queer bonds. The last section worked with co-researchers, looking to the relationship with self, across spectrums of embodied characterizations and attributions of masculinity and femininity. The second to last portion performativity imagined a coherence in the wake of the destruction of forms of knowing and relating to the self and other. The goal here was to enter the Coatlicue state, and in some ways, be left there.

First, how do New Mexican sexual minoritarian men understand their ethnoracial identity? Second, how do New Mexican sexual minoritarian men experience melancholia? Third, how do New Mexican sexual minoritarian men feel about their chosen kinships? Three specific research goals are as follows: (1) Explicate experiences of New Mexican Queer of Color relationalities, (2) Interrogate the utility and function of the ethnoracial identity matrix as it affects the latinized panethnic imaginary, (3) demonstrate a peculiar format of a Queer Intercultural Communication examination of melancholia.

From this, I composed scenes adjacent to the emergent themes as collaboratively discussed with the coresearchers. As a performatively intimate and relational enterprise, I strived to capture the affective parameters of experience then and now to produce an enrichingly and invitational mode of inquiry that answers the guiding research questions. My goal was to work across this threshold of dialogue, theory, experience, and play into an affective model of composition. The form this work too is to rearticulate the collisions of theory, body, and the mundane social contours which reveal the echoes of compulsory normative paradigms of relationality.

Appendix B IRB Approval



DATE: April 3, 2020

IRB #: 04620

IRBNet ID & TITLE: [1571894-1] Melancolía X Queer of Color desire in the 21st century New Mexico

PI OF RECORD: Shinsuke Eguchi, PhD

SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

BOARD DECISION: APPROVED

EFFECTIVE DATE: April 2, 2020

EXPIRATION DATE: N/A

RISK LEVEL: MINIMAL RISK

PROJECT STATUS: ACTIVE

DOCUMENTS:

- Advertisement - Recruitment Email (UPDATED: 03/17/2020)
- Application Form - Project Information Form (UPDATED: 03/1/2020)
- Consent Form - Consent Form 031720 (UPDATED: 03/17/2020)
- CV/Resume - CV Eguchi (UPDATED: 03/1/2020)
- Other - Recruitment Script (UPDATED: 03/17/2020)
- Other - Project Team Form (UPDATED: 03/1/2020)
- Other - Scientific Review (UPDATED: 03/1/2020)
- Protocol - Protocol (UPDATED: 03/17/2020)
- Questionnaire/Survey - Questionnaire (UPDATED: 03/1/2020)

Thank you for your New Project 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 has been waived for this project. To obtain 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; or in-person at 1805 Sigma Chi Rd. NE, Albuquerque, NM 87106. You can also visit the OIRB website at irb.unm.edu.

Appendix C Email Recruitment

Subject Line: Opportunity to Participate in Research

Dear _____

I am conducting a research study about New Mexican sexual minority men's experience. You are receiving this email because you were recommended as a qualifying potential interviewee.

The purpose of this research study is to explore why gay New Mexican men are disinterested in gay mainstream participation and, instead, what kinds of relationships they value and benefit from.

If you agree to participate, this study will involve one (1) face-to-face meeting, from one (1) to two (2) hours.

Risks may include discomfort in recalling general experiences. There are no known benefits.

You do not have to be in this study, your decision to be in any study is totally voluntary. You are able to end the interview at any point.

If you feel you understand the study and would like to participate, please email me back stating your interest, as well as kindly provide a general schedule of availability for interview time.

If you have questions prior to participating, please reach out via email or reach me by phonecall.

Thank you for your time,

Anthony Rosendo Zariñana | azarinana@unm.edu | 847-899-2186

PhD Candidate

Principal Investigator: *Shinsuke Eguchi*

Study Title: Melancolía X Queer of Color desire in the 21st century New Mexico

IRB # : 1571894-1

Appendix D Interview Guide

Identification

A. Ethnorace

- 1) How do you understand your ethnic background?
- 2) How do you identify culturally?
- 3) What kinds of terms do you use to identify yourself culturally?
- 4) When do you use certain terms and for what reasons?
- 5) How do you usually define yourself culturally to a possible romantic partner?
- 6) Do you ever feel like any term is not enough?
- 7) How do people around you define you culturally? What terms do they use?
- 8) Has anyone ever questioned your use of an identity term?
- 9) When have you been questioned about terms you use?
- 10) How do you feel about your identity?

B. Sexuality and Desire

- 1) How do you understand your gender and sexuality? How would you name them?
- 2) When with other gay men, what do you call yourself? What do they call you?
- 3) How do your friends mostly identify as?
- 4) How have your former partners identified?
- 5) When do you feel desired?
- 6) How do you feel about queer monogamy?
- 7) What is your relationship status?
- 8) What is your ideal relationship?
- 9) What do you look for in a romantic partner?
- 10) Does your identity matter or play a part in romantic relationships?
- 11) Has anyone made you feel wanted because of how you identify culturally?
- 12) When do you feel desired in a good way? By whom?
- 13) Have you felt discontented with your identity in any kind of relationship?

Coalition

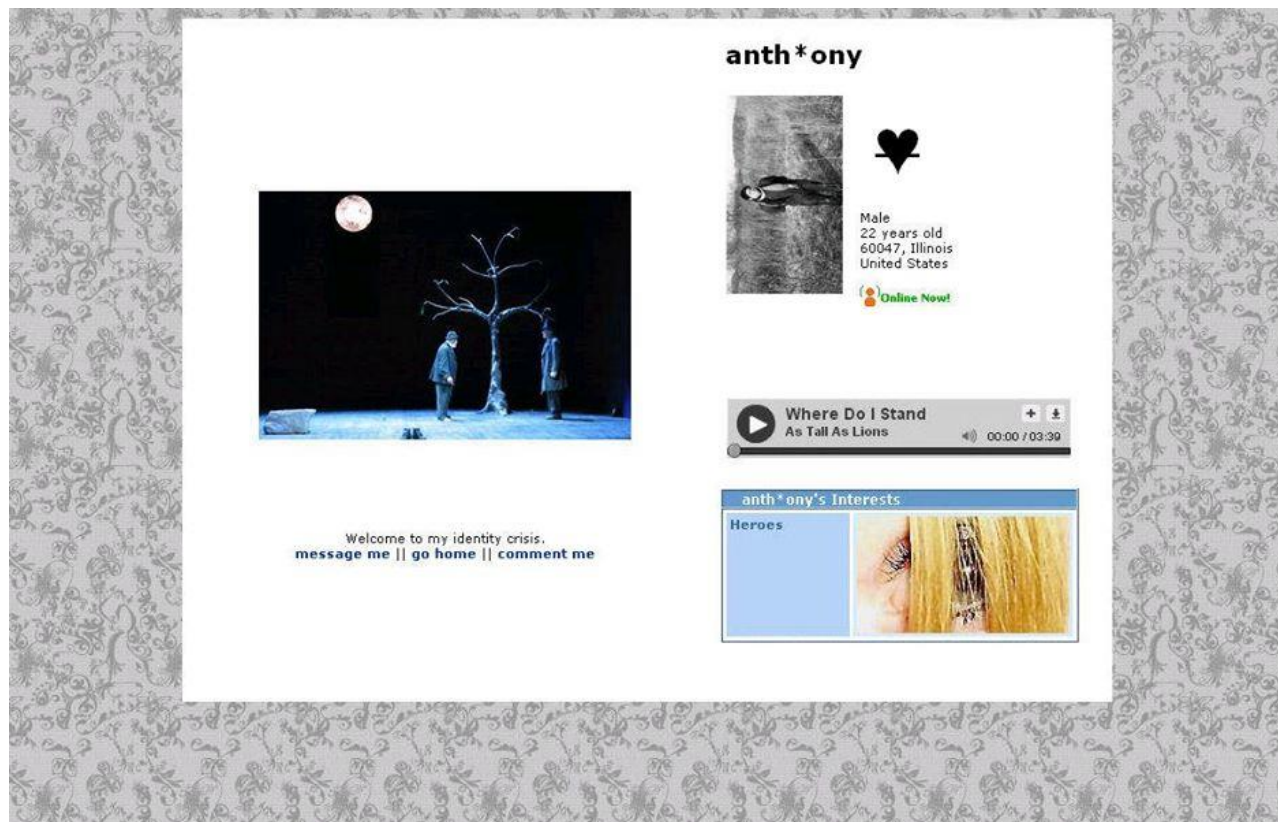
- 1) Where do you experience fitting in with your identities?
- 2) What relationships matter most to you and why?
- 3) What does support look like for you?
- 4) What has been affirming moments about your identity? With whom?
- 5) What kinds of friends matter to you?
- 6) What kinds of friends do you have culturally?
- 7) Have you ever felt along among friends or people?
- 8) Have you even felt isolate among friends or people?
- 9) How do you care for your queer friends?
- 10) How do you feel cared for in regard to your queer identity?
- 11) How do you feel about friends across identities?
- 12) Is diversity among your friends important to you?
- 13) Are queer connections important to you?
- 14) What does a queer connection mean to you?
- 15) How do you make queer connections?

16) How do you sustain queer connections?

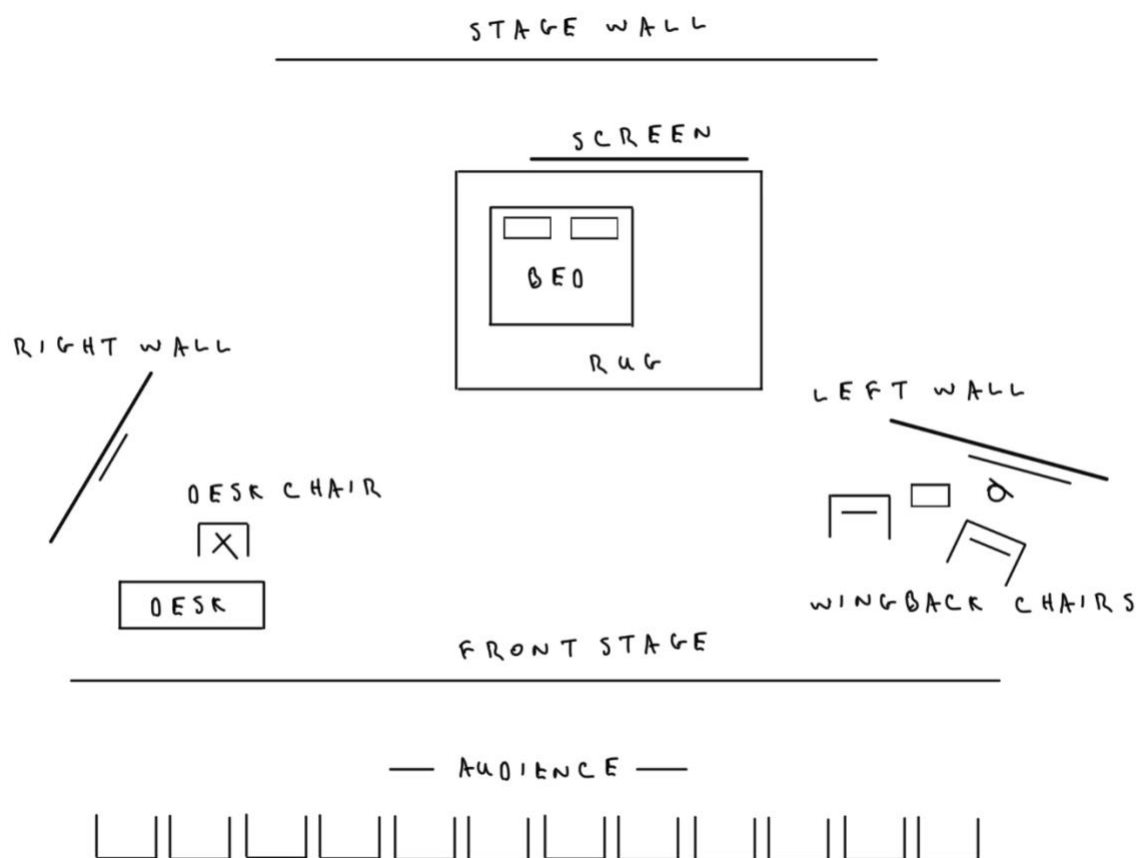
Additional Questions

1) Anything else you would like to talk about?

Appendix E Images







REFERENCES

- Abdi, S. (2014). Staying I(ra)n: Narrating queer identity from within the Persian closet. *Liminalities*, 10(2), 1-20.
- Abdi, S. (2020). Revisiting a letter for someday: Writing toward a queer Iranian diasporic potentiality. In S. Eguchi & B. M. Calafell (Eds.), *Queer intercultural communication: The intersectional politics of belonging in and across differences* (pp. 47-62). Rowman & Littlefield.
- Adams, T. E., Ellis, C., & Holman Jones, S. (2017). Autoethnography. In J. Matthes, C. Davis & R. F. Potter (Eds.), *The international encyclopedia of communication research methods*. Wiley-Blackwell.
- Alexander, B.K. (2008). Queer(y)ing the postcolonial through the west(ern). In N. Denzin, Y.S. Lincoln, & L.T. Smith (Eds.), *Handbook of critical and indigenous methodologies* (pp. 101-133). Sage.
- Allensworth-Davies, D., Welles, S. L., Hellerstedt, W. L., & Ross, M. W. (2008). Body Image, Body Satisfaction, and Unsafe Anal Intercourse among Men Who Have Sex with Men. *The Journal of Sex Research*, 45(1), 49–56. <https://doi.org.libproxy.unm.edu/10.1080/00224490701808142>
- Althusser, L., Jameson, F., & Brewster, B. (2001). *Lenin and philosophy, and other essays*. Monthly Review Press.
- Allen, B. J. (2011). *Difference Matters: Communicating social identity*. Waveland Press.
- Andrade, L. M. & Gutierrez-Perez, R. (2017). Bailando con las sombras: Spiritual activism and soul healing in the war years. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 23(7), 502-504.
doi:10.1177/1077800417718287

- Anzaldúa, G.E. (1987). *Borderlands/La frontera: The new Mestiza*. Aunt Lute Books.
- Atay, A. (2020). Intercultural Queer Slippages and Translations. In S. Eguchi & B. M. Calafell (Eds.), *Queer intercultural communication: The intersectional politics of belonging in and across differences* (pp. 141-156). Rowman & Littlefield.
- Awkward, M. (1999). *Scenes of instruction: A memoir*. Duke University Press.
- Badgett, M. V. L. (1998). Income inflation: The myth of affluence among gay, lesbian and bisexual Americans. Policy Institute of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, with The Institute for Gay and Lesbian Studies. Retrieved November 4, 2014, from <http://www.thetaskforce.org/downloads/reports/reports/IncomeInflationMyth.pdf>.
- Barrett, E. M. (2012). *The Spanish Colonial settlement landscapes of New Mexico, 1598-1680*. University of New Mexico Press.
- Beren, S. E., Hayden, H. A., Wilfley, D. E., & Grilo, C. M. (1996). The influence of sexual orientation on body dissatisfaction in adult men and women. *International Journal of Eating Disorders*, 20, 135–141.
- Bergling, T. (2013). *Chasing adonis: gay men and the pursuit of perfection*. Taylor and Francis.
- Bertrand, M. (2020). Performative theatre: a queer theatre? *Whatever*, 3, 213-232.
- Bettinsoli, M. L., Napier, J. L., & Carnaghi, A. (2021). The “gay agenda:” How the myth of gay affluence impedes the progress toward equality. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 1. <https://doi-org.libproxy.unm.edu/10.1002/ejsp.2762>
- Bolding, G., Sherr, L., & Elford, J. (2002). Use of anabolic steroids and associated health risks among gay men attending London gyms. *Addiction*, 97(2), 195–203.
- Boylorn, R. N. (2014) From Here to There: How to Use Auto/ethnography to Bridge Difference. *International Review of Qualitative Research*, 7(3), 312-326.

- Byrd, J. A. (2011). *The Transit of Empire: Indigenous critiques of colonialism*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Calafell, B. M. (2005). "Pro(re-)claiming Loss: A Performance Pilgrimage in Search of Malintzin Tenépal." *Text and Performance Quarterly*, 25(1), 43-56.
- Calafell, B. M. (2007). *Latina/o Communication Studies*. Peter Lang Publishing.
- Calafell, B.M. (2009). "She ain't no diva!": Reflections on in/hospitable guests/hosts, reciprocity, and desire. *Liminalities: A Journal of Performance Studies*, 5(5).
<http://liminalities.net/5-4/diva.pdf>
- Calafell, B. M., & Moreman, S. T. (2009) Envisioning an Academic Readership: Latina/o Performativities Per the Form of Publication. *Text and Performance Quarterly*, 29(2), 123-130, doi: 10.1080/10462930902774833
- Calafell, B. M. (2012). Monstrous Femininity: Constructions of Women of Color in the Academy. *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 36(2), 111-130.
- Calafell, B. M. (2013). (I)dentities: Considering Accountability, Reflexivity, and Intersectionality in the I and the We, *Liminalities: A Journal of Performance Studies*, 9(2), 6-13
- Calafell, B. M. (2015). *Monstrosity, performance, and race in contemporary culture*. Peter Lang.
- Calvente, L. B. Y., Calafell, B. M., & Chávez, K. R. (2020). Here is something you can't understand: the suffocating whiteness of communication studies. *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies*, 17(2), 202–209.
- Carrillo Rowe, A. (2005). Be Longing: Toward a Feminist Politics of Relation. *NWSA Journal: National Women's Studies Association Journal*, 17(2), 15–46. <https://doi-org.libproxy.unm.edu/10.2979/nws.2005.17.2.15>

- Chalopin, J., & Hayway, A. (Producers). (1986). *Kissyfur*. [Television Series]. National Broadcasting Company. Chaney MP. (2008). Muscle dysmorphia, self-esteem, and loneliness among gay and bisexual men. *International Journal of Men's Health*, 7(2), 157–170. <https://doi-org.libproxy.unm.edu/10.3149/jmh.0702.157>
- Chambers-Letson, J. (2018). *After the party: A manifesto for queer of color life*. New York: New York University Press.
- Chase, S. E. (2005). Narrative Inquiry: Multiple Lenses, Approaches, Voices. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research* (pp. 651-679). Sage Publications Ltd.
- Chávez, K. (2009). Embodied Translation: Dominant Discourse and Communication with Migrant Bodies-as-Text, *Howard Journal of Communications*, 20(1), 18-36.
doi: 10.1080/10646170802664912
- Chávez, K. (2010). Border (In)Securities: Normative and Differential Belonging in LGBTQ and Immigrant Rights Discourse, *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies*, 7(2), 136-155. doi: 10.1080/14791421003763291
- Chávez, B. (2013). Performing the Border: A Queer of Color Artist-Scholar and Ally Response to Tortilla Curtain. *Text and Performance Quarterly*, 33(2), 184–190. <https://doi-org.libproxy.unm.edu/10.1080/10462937.2013.770911>
- Chávez, K. (2013a). Pushing Boundaries: Queer Intercultural Communication, *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication*, 6(2), 83-95.
doi: 10.1080/17513057.2013.777506
- Chávez, K. (2013b). *Queer Migration Politics: Activist Rhetoric and Coalitional Possibilities*. University of Illinois Press

- Collier, M. J., Lawless, B., & Ringera, K. (2016). Negotiating contextually contingent agency: Situated feminist peacebuilding strategies in Kenya. *Women's Studies in Communication*, 39(4). 399-421.
- Collins, P. H. (1988). The Social Construction of Black Feminist Thought.” In M. R. Malson, E. Mudimbe-Boyi, J. F. O'Barr, & M. Wyer (Eds.) *Black Women in American* (pp. 297-325). University of Chicago Press.
- Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics, *University of Chicago Legal Forum*. 1(8). 139-167.
- DuBois, W. E. B. (1903). *The souls of Black folk*. Bantam.
- Filiault, S. M., & Drummond, M. J. N. (2007). The Hegemonic Aesthetic. *Gay & Lesbian Issues and Psychology Review*, 3(3). 175-184.
- Eguchi, S. (2009). Negotiating hegemonic masculinity: The rhetorical strategy of 'straight-acting' among gay men. *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research*, 38(3), 193-209.
- Eguchi, S., Calafell, B. M., & Files-Thompson, N. (2014). Intersectionality and quare theory: Fantasizing African American men's same-sex relationships in *Noah's Arc: Jumping the Broom*. *Communication, Culture, & Critique*, 7(3), 371-389. doi:10.1111/cccr.12054
- Eguchi, S. (2014). Disidentifications from the West(ern): An autoethnography of becoming an Other. *Cultural Studies↔Critical Methodologies*, 14(3), 279-285.
doi:10.1177/1532708614527562

- Eguchi, S. (2014). Ongoing cross-national identity transformation: Living on the queer Japan-U.S. transnational borderland. *Sexuality & Culture*, 18(4), 977-993. doi:10.1007/s12119-014-9234-5
- Eguchi, S. (2015). Queer intercultural relationality: An autoethnography of Asian-Black (dis)connections in White gay America. *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication*, 8(1), 27-43. doi: 10.1080/17513057.2015.991077
- Eguchi, S. & Roberts, M. N. (2015). Gay rapping and possibilities: A quare reading of “Throw That Boy P***y.” *Text and Performance Quarterly*, 35(2/3), 142-157.
- Eguchi, S., & Spieldenner, A. (2015). The two “gaysian” junior faculty talking about experience: A collaborative autoethnography. *QED: A Journal in GLBTQ Worldmaking*, 2(3), 125-143.
- Eguchi, S., & Asante, G. (2016). Disidentifications revisited: Queer(y)ing intercultural communication theory. *Communication Theory*, 26(2), 171-189.
doi:10.1111/comt.12086
- Eguchi, S. (2017). Japanese male-queer femininity: An autoethnographic reflection on Matsuko Deluxe as an onē-kei talent. In S. Toyosaki & S. Eguchi (Eds.), *Intercultural communication in Japan: Theorizing homogenized discourse* (pp. 73- 85). Routledge.
- Eguchi, S. & Collier, M. J. (2018). Critical intercultural mentoring and allying: A continuing struggle for change in the academy. *Departures in Critical Qualitative Research*, 7(2), 49-71. doi:10.1525/dcqr.2018.7.2.49
- Eguchi, S., Files-Thompson, N., & Calafell, B. M. (2018). Queer (of color) aesthetics: Fleeting moments of transgression in VH1’s *Love & Hip-Hop: Hollywood Season 2*. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 35(2), 180-193. doi:10.1080/15295036.2017.1385822

- Eguchi, S. (2019a). Transnational LGBTQ pride: Whiteness, health, and wellbeing in VICELAND's *Gaycation*. *China Media Research*, 15(3), 83-92.
- Eguchi, S. (2019b). Queerness as strategic whiteness: A queer Asian American critique of Peter Le. In D. M. D. McIntosh, D. G. Moon, & T. K. Nakayama (Eds.), *Interrogating communicative power of whiteness* (pp. 29-44). Routledge.
- Eguchi, S. & Long, H. (2019). Queer relationality as family: Yas fats! yas femmes! yas Asians! *Journal of Homosexuality*, 66(11), 1589-1606. doi:10.1080/00918369.2018.1505756.
- Eguchi, S. (2020). Sticky Rice Politics: Impossible Possibilities of Queerness in and Across Yellow Fever and Front Cover. *Women's Studies in Communication*, 43(1), 67-84.
- Eguchi, S. & Calafell, B. M. (Eds.). (2020). *Queer intercultural communication: The intersectional politics of belonging in and across differences*. Rowman & Littlefield.
- Eguchi, S. (2021). On the Horizon: Desiring Global Queer and Trans* Studies in International and Intercultural Communication. *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication*, 14(4), 275-283.
- Ellis, C. Adams, T. E. & Bochner, A. P. (2011). Autoethnography: An overview. *Historical Social Research*, 36, 273-290.
- Fields, K. E., & Fields, B. J. (2012). *Racecraft: The soul of inequality in American life*. Verso.
- Fisher, W. R. (1984). Narration as a human communication paradigm: The case of public moral argument. *Communication Monographs*, 51, 1-22.
- Ferguson, R. (2003). *Aberrations in Black: Toward A Queer of Color Critique*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Gandert, M. (2000). *Nuevo México Profundo: Rituals of an Indo-Hispano Homeland*. Museum of New Mexico Press.

- Ghabra, H., & Calafell, B. M. (2018). From failure and allyship to feminist solidarities: negotiating our privileges and oppressions across borders, *Text and Performance Quarterly*, 38(1-2), 38-54. doi: 10.1080/10462937.2018.1457173
- Goldberg, D. T. (1993). *Racist culture: Philosophy and the politics of meaning*. Blackwell.
- Goldstein, T., Gray, J., Salisbury, J., & Snell, P. (2014). When Qualitative Research Meets Theater: The Complexities of Performed Ethnography and Research-Informed Theater Project Design. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 20(4), 674-685.
- Gonzales, P. B. (Ed.). (2007). *Expressing New Mexico: Creativity, Ritual and Memory*. University of Arizona.
- Griffin, R. A. (2010). Critical race theory as a means to deconstruct, recover, and evolve in communication studies. *Communication Law Review*, 10(1), 1-9.
- Griffin, R.A. (2012). I AM an angry Black woman: Black feminist autoethnography, voice, and resistance. *Women's Studies in Communication*, 35(2), 138-157.
doi:10.1080/07491409.2012.724524
- Griffiths, S., Murray, S. B., Dunn, M., & Blashill, A. J. (2017). Anabolic steroid use among gay and bisexual men living in Australia and New Zealand: Associations with demographics, body dissatisfaction, eating disorder psychopathology, and quality of life. *Drug and Alcohol Dependence*, 181, 170–176. <https://doi-org.libproxy.unm.edu/10.1016/j.drugalcdep.2017.10.003>
- Guarnero, P. A. (2007). Family and community influences on the social and sexual lives of Latino gay men. *Journal of Transcultural Nursing: Official Journal of the Transcultural Nursing Society*, 18(1), 12–8.

- Gutierrez-Perez, R. M. (2017a). Bridging performances of auto/ethnography and queer bodies of color to advocacy and civic engagement. *QED: A Journal in GLBTQ Worldmaking*, 4(1), 148-56.
- Gutierrez-Perez, R. M. (2017b). A journey to el mundo zurdo: Queer temporality, queer of color cultural heritages. *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies*, 14(2), 177-181.
- Halberstam, J. (2018). *Trans*: A quick and quirky account of gender variability*. University of California Press.
- Halkitis, P. N. (1999). Redefining masculinity in the age of AIDS: Seropositive gay men and the “buff agenda.” In. P. Nardi (Ed.), *Gay masculinities* (pp. 130 –151). Sage.
- Halkitis, P. N., Moeller, R. W., & DeRaleau, L. B. (2008). Steroid Use in Gay, Bisexual, and Nonidentified Men-Who-Have-Sex-With-Men: Relations to Masculinity, Physical, and Mental Health. *Psychology of Men & Masculinity*, 9(2), 106–115. <https://doi-org.libproxy.unm.edu/10.1037/1524-9220.9.2.106>
- Halualani, R.T. & Nakayama, T.K. (Eds.). (2013). *The Handbook of Critical Intercultural Communication*, (pp. 1-16). Wiley Blackwell.
- Hammond, G. P., & Rey, A. (Eds.). (1953). *Don Juan de Oñate, Colonizer of New Mexico, 1595-1628*. University of New Mexico Press.
- Hartman, S. (2000). Reification and the Ecstasy of the Chelsea Boy. *Journal of Gay and Lesbian Psychotherapy*, 3(3/4), 169–185.
- Hordes, S. M. (2005). *To the end of the earth: a history of the crypto-jews of New Mexico*. Columbia University Press.
- Hennen, P. (2005). Bear Bodies, Bear Masculinity: Recuperation, Resistance, or Retreat? *Gender & Society*. 19(1), 25-43.

Hernandez v. Texas, 251 U.S. 475 (1952). <https://law.justia.com/cases/texas/court-of-criminal-appeals/1952/25816-3.html>.

Hernandez v. State. (n.d.). *Justia*. <https://law.justia.com/cases/texas/court-of-criminal-appeals/1952/25816-3.html>

Hollibaugh, A., & Weiss, M. (2015). Queer Precarity and the Myth of Gay Affluence. *New Labor Forum*, 24(3), 18–27.

Holling, M. A. (2006). Forming oppositional social concord to Proposition 187 and squelching social discord in the vernacular space of CHICLE. *Communication & Critical/Cultural Studies*, 3, 202–222.

Holling, M. A., & Marie Calafell, B. (2007). Identities on Stage and Staging Identities: Chicano Brujo Performances as Emancipatory Practices. *Text & Performance Quarterly*, 27(1), 58–83. <https://doi-org.libproxy.unm.edu/10.1080/10462930601046053>

Holling, M. A., & Calafell, B. M. (Eds.). (2011). *Latina/o Discourse in Vernacular Spaces: Somos de Una Voz?* Lexington Books.

IAMAMIWHOAMI. 2013. B [Song]. On *Bounty* [Album]. To whom it may concern.

Ibañez, G. E., Van Oss Marin, B., Flores, S. A., Millett, G., & Diaz, R. M. (2009, January 1). General and Gay-Related Racism Experienced by Latino Gay Men. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 15(3), 215–222.

Johnson, E. P. (2001). “Quare” studies, or (almost) everything I know about queer studies I learned from my grandmother. In E. P. Johnson & M. G. Henderson (Eds.), *Black queer studies* (pp. 124–157). Duke University Press.

Johnson, E. P. (Ed). (2005). *Black Queer Studies: A Critical Anthology*. Duke University Press.

- Johnson, A. (2014) Confessions of a Video Vixen: My Autocritography of Sexuality, Desire, and Memory, *Text and Performance Quarterly*, 34(2), 182-200, doi:10.1080/10462937.2013.879991
- Johnson, E. P. (Ed). (2016). *No Tea, No Shade: New Writings in Black Queer Studies*. Duke University Press.
- Jones, R. G. & Calafell, B. M. (2012). Contesting neoliberalism through critical pedagogy, intersectional reflexivity, and personal narrative: Queer tales of academia. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 59(7), 957-981.
- Julien, I., & Edwards, N. (Producers), & Julien, I. (Director). (1989). *Looking for Langston*. [Motion Picture]. USA: Sankofa.
- Kafer, A. (2013). *Feminist, Queer, Crip*. Indiana University Press.
- Klein, Mel. (1986). The Psychogenesis of Manic-Depressive States. In J. Mitchell (Ed.). *The Selected Melanie Klein* (pp. 115-145). Free Press.
- Klausner, J., & King, S. (Writers), & Walker, J. (Director). (2016). Patches. [Television Series Episode]. In Klausner, J., Poehler, A., Becky, D., Hernandez, T., & King, S. (Executive Producers). *Difficult People*. New York, NY: Hulu.
- Langellier, K. M. (1999). Personal narrative, performance, performativity: Two or three things I know for sure. *Text and Performance Quarterly*, 19, 125-144.
- Larson, R. W. (1969). *New Mexico's quest for statehood, 1846-1912*. University of New Mexico Press.
- Lee, W. (2003). *Kuaering* queer theory: My autocritography and a race-conscious, womanist, transnational turn. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 45(2), 147-170. doi: 10.1300/J082v45n02_07

- Liebmann, M. (2012). *Revolt: an archaeological history of pueblo resistance and revitalization in 17th century New Mexico*. University of Arizona Press.
- LeMaster, B. (2014). Telling multiracial tales: An autoethnography of coming out home. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 20(1), 51-60.
- LeMaster, B. (2015). Discontents of being and becoming fabulous on RuPaul's Drag U: Queer criticism in neoliberal times. *Women's Studies in Communication*, 38, 167-186.
- LeMaster, B. (2017). Unlearning the Violence of the Normative. *QED: A Journal in GLBTQ Worldmaking*, 4(2), 123-130. <https://doi.org/10.14321/qed.4.2.0123>
- Lugones, M. (2011). Methodological notes toward a Decolonial Feminism. In A. M. Isasi-Díaz & E. Mendieta (Eds.) *Decolonizing Epistemologies: Latina/o theology and philosophy* (pp. 68-86). Fordham University Press.
- Mack, M. A. (2017). *Sexagon: Muslims, France, and the Sexualization of National Culture*. Fordham University Press
- Madison, S. (1993). "That was my Occupation": Oral Narrative, Performance, and Black Feminist Thought." *Text and Performance Quarterly*, 13(3), 213-232.
- Martín Alcoff, L. (2011). Anti-Latino Racism. In A. M. Isasi-Díaz & E. Mendieta (Eds.) *Decolonizing Epistemologies: Latina/o theology and philosophy* (pp. 107-126). Fordham University Press.
- Mazzei, G., & Donelan, G. (1979). Who's Who at the Zoo? *The Advocate*.
- McArdle, K. A., & Hill, M. S. (2009). Understanding Body Dissatisfaction in Gay and Heterosexual Men The Roles of Self-Esteem, Media, and Peer Influence. *Men and Masculinities*, 11(5), 511-532. <https://doi-org.libproxy.unm.edu/10.1177/1097184X07303728>

- McCune, J. Q. (2014). *Sexual Discretion: Black Masculinity and the Politics of Passing*. University of Chicago Press.
- McElhenney, R., Howerton, G., & Day, C. (Writers), & Shakman, M. (Director). (2012). The Gang Recycles Their Trash [Television Series Episode]. In R, McElhenney, G. Howerton, & C. Day (Executive Producers), *It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia*. Los Angeles, CA: FX.
- McIntosh, D. M. D. (2020). Ain't My First Rodeo in Homonormative Whiteness: Queer Intercultural Lessons from the International Gay Rodeo Community. In S. Eguchi & B. M. Calafell (Eds.), *Queer Intercultural Communication: The Intersectional politics of belonging in and across differences* (pp. 117-140). Rowman & Littlefield.
- McRuer, R. (2006). *Crip theory: Cultural signs of queerness and disability*. New York University Press.
- McRuer, R. (2018). *Crip Times: Disability, Globalization, and Resistance*. New York University Press.
- Mereish, E. H., Parra, L. A., Watson, R. J., & Fish, J. N. (2022). Subtle and Intersectional Minority Stress and Depressive Symptoms Among Sexual and Gender Minority Adolescents of Color: Mediating Role of Self-Esteem and Sense of Mastery. *Prevention Science*, 23(1), 142. <https://doi-org.libproxy.unm.edu/10.1007/s11121-021-01294-9>
- Mignolo, W. (2011). Decolonizing Western Epistemology / Building Decolonial Epistemologies. In A. M. Isasi-Díaz & E. Mendieta (Eds.) *Decolonizing Epistemologies: Latina/o theology and philosophy* (pp. 19-43). Fordham University Press.
- Mignolo, W. D., & Walsh, C. E. (2018). *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis*. Duke University Press.

- Miller, J., & Glassner, B. (2004). The “inside” and “outside”: Finding realities in interviews. In D. Silverman (Ed.), *Qualitative research: Theory, method and practice* (pp. 125–139). Sage.
- Mora, A. P. (2011). *Border Dilemmas: Racial and National Uncertainties in New Mexico, 1848-1912*. Duke University Press.
- Moraga, C. (2000). *Loving in the war years: lo que nunca pasó por sus labios*. South End Press.
- Moraga, C. (1981). La Guera. In C. Moraga & G. Anzaldúa (Eds.) *This bridge called my back: Writings by radical women of 205 color* (pp. 24-33). Third Women Press.
- Moraga, C. & Anzaldúa, G. (Eds.). (1981). *This bridge called my back: Writings by radical women of 205 color*. Third Women Press.
- Moreman, S. T., & McIntosh, D. M. (2010). Brown scriptings and rescriptings: A critical performance ethnography of Latina drag queens. *Communication and Cultural/Critical Studies*, 7(2), 115-135.
- Muñoz, J.E. (1999). *Disidentifications: Queers of color and the performance of politics*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Muñoz, J.E. (2006). Feeling Brown, Feeling Down: Latina Affect, the Performativity of Race, and the Depressive Position. *Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 31(3), 675-688.
- Muñoz, J.E. (2009). *Cruising utopia: The then and there of queer futurity*. New York University Press.
- Nieto-Phillips, J. (1999). Citizenship and empire: race, language, and self-government in New Mexico and Puerto Rico, 1898-1917. *Centro Journal*, 11(1), 51–74.
- Nieto-Phillips, J. M. (2008). *Language of blood: the making of Spanish-American identity in New Mexico, 1880s-1930s*. University of New Mexico Press.

- Nguyen, T. H. (2014). *A View from the Bottom: Asian American Masculinity and Sexual Representation*. Duke University Press.
- 1954: *Hernandez v. Texas*. (n.d.). Library of Congress. February, 22, 2022, from <https://guides.loc.gov/latinx-civil-rights/hernandez-v-texas#s-lib-ctab-24712838-2>
- Olivardia, R. (2001). Mirror, mirror on the wall, who's the largest of them all? The features and phenomenology of muscle dysmorphia. *Harvard Review of Psychiatry*, 9, 254 –259.
- Olivardia, R., Pope, H. G., Jr., Borowiecki, J. J., III, & Cohane, G. H. (2004). Biceps and body image: The relationship between muscularity and self-esteem, depression, and eating disorder symptoms. *Psychology of Men & Masculinity*, 5, 112–120. doi:10.1037/1524-9220.5.2.112
- Ono, K. A., & Sloop, J. M. (1995). The Critique of Vernacular Discourse. *Communication Monographs*, 62(1), 19-46.
- Parent, M. C., & Moradi, B. (2011, January 1). His Biceps Become Him: A Test of Objectification Theory's Application to Drive for Muscularity and Propensity for Steroid Use in College Men. *JOURNAL OF COUNSELING PSYCHOLOGY*, 58(2), 246–256.
- Pearlman, L. (2015). 'Dissemblage' and 'Truth Traps': Creating Methodologies of Resistance in Queer Autobiographical Theater. *Theatre Research International*, 40(1), 88-91.
- Pérez, H. (2015). *A taste for Brown bodies: Gay modernity and cosmopolitan desire*. New York University Press.
- Perkins, D. O., Leserman, J., Murphy, C., & Evans, D. L. (1993). Psychosocial predictors of high-risk sexual behavior among HIV-negative homosexual men. *AIDS Education and Prevention*, 5(2), 141-152.

- Pope, H. G., Jr., Phillips, K. A., & Olivardia, R. (2000). *The Adonis complex: The secret crisis of male body obsession*. The Free Press.
- Pritchard, E. D. (2020). "The Fantasy of Queernes:" A Conversation with Roger Q. Mason about *Lavender Men: An Emancipatory Play* and Making and Queer of Color Creative Life in Theater and Performance. *QED: A Journal in GLBTQ Worldmaking*, 7(3), 63-100.
- Puar, J. K. (2007). *Terrorist assemblages: Homonationalism in queer times*. Duke University Press.
- Puar, J. K. (2017). *The Right to Maim: Debility, Capacity, Disability*. Duke University Press.
- Rand, E. (2013). An appetite for activism: The lesbian avengers and the queer politics of visibility. *Women Studies in Communication*, 36(2), 121-141.
- Rivera-Servera, R. H. (2012). *Performing Queer Latinidad: Dance, Sexuality, Politics*. The University of Michigan Press.
- Rosario, M., Rotherarn-Borus, M. J., & Reid, H. (1996). Gay-Related Stress and Its Correlates Among Gay and Bisexual Male Adolescents of Predominantly Black and Hispanic Background. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 24(2), 136–159.
- Salgado, C. D. (2020). Mexican American Identity: Regional Differentiation in New Mexico. *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity*, 6(2), 179–194. <https://doi-org.libproxy.unm.edu/10.1177/2332649218795193>
- Sedgwick, E. K. (2003). *Touching feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*. Duke University Press.
- Sohn, S. H. (2018). *Inscrutable Belongings: Queer Asian North American Fiction*. Stanford University Press.

- Soto Vega, K., & Chávez, K. R. (2018). Latinx rhetoric and intersectionality in racial rhetorical criticism. *Communication & Critical/Cultural Studies*, 15(4), 319–325. doi: 10.1080/14791420.2018.1533642
- Soto, S. K. (2010). *Reading Chican@ Like a Queer: The de-Mastery of Desire*. University of Texas Press.
- Spieldenner, A., & Eguchi, S. (2020). A call to arms: Two queer men of color's autoethnography of coalition politics. *Cultural Studies↔Critical Methodologies*. 20 (2). doi:10.1177/1532708619884962
- Tiggemann, M., Martins, Y., & Kirkbride, A. (2007). Oh to be lean and muscular: Body image ideals and gay and heterosexual men. *Psychology of Men & Masculinity*, 8, 15–24.
- Toyosaki, S. (2012). Praxis-Oriented Autoethnography: Performing Critical Selfhood. In N. Bardhan & M. P. Orbe. (Eds.) *Identity research and communication: intercultural reflections and future directions* (pp. 239-252). Lexington Books.
- Trujillo, M. (2010). *Land of Disenchantment: Latina/o Identities and Transformations in Northern New Mexico*. University of New Mexico Press.
- Tsuda, Y. (2008). English Hegemony and English Divide. *China Media Research*, 4(1), 47-55.
- Valles-Morales, J.I. & LeMaster, B. (2015). On queer of color criticism, communication studies, and corporeality. *Kaleidoscope: A Graduate Journal of Qualitative Communication Research*, 14(8), 77-81.
- Vasquez, E. P., Gonzalez-Guarda, R. M., & De Santis, J. P. (2011). Acculturation, Depression, Self-Esteem, and Substance Abuse among Hispanic Men. *Issues in Mental Health Nursing*, 32(2), 90–97. <https://doi-org.libproxy.unm.edu/10.3109/01612840.2010.528169>

- Washington, M. (2017). *Blasian Invasion: Racial Mixing in the Celebrity Industrial Complex*. University Press of Mississippi.
- Viego, A. (2003). The Unconscious of Latino/a Studies. *Latino Studies*, 1(2), 333–336.
- Weinstein, S. (2017). The unsung history of Circuit Parties, whee gay men seek sex and freedom. *Vice*. Retrieved February 22, 2022 from <https://www.vice.com/en/article/ywzjam/gay-circuit-parties-history-lgbtq-mickey-weems-interview>
- Yep, G. A. (2003). The Violence of Heteronormativity in Communication Studies: Notes on Injury, Healing, and Queer World-Making. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 45(2–4), 11–59. <https://doi.org/10.1300/J082v45n02-02>
- Yep, G. A. (2010). Toward the de-subjugation of racially marked knowledges in communication. *Southern Communication Journal*, 75(2), 171–175.
- Yep, G. A. (2013). Queering/Quaring/Kauering/Crippin’/Transing ‘other bodies’ in intercultural communication. *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication*, 6(2), 118–126. doi:10.1080/17513057.2013.777087
- Yep, G. A. (2014). *Queer Theory and Communication: From disciplining Queers to Queering the discipline(s)*. Taylor and Francis.
- Yep, G. A., Russo, S. E., & Allen, J. (2015). Pushing boundaries: Toward the development of a model for transing communication in (inter)cultural contexts. In L. G. Spencer & J. C. Capuzza (Eds.), *Transgender communication studies: Histories, trends, and trajectories* (pp. 69–89). Lexington Books.
- Zamboni, B. D., & Crawford, I. (2007). Minority stress and sexual problems among African-American gay and bisexual men. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 36, 569–578.

Zea, M. C., Reisen, C. A., & Poppen, P. J. (1999). Psychological Well-Being Among Latino Lesbians and Gay Men. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 5(4), 371–379.