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Cruising The Borderlands: Queer Latinx Creating Space in Lowrider Culture

By Elisia Ixchelle Campos

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements of Senior Independent Study Thesis

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Department of Sociology and Anthropology

2015-2016

Abstract

This ethnographic and interview-based study explores how queer Latinx lowriders create community through art, such as *The Q Sides*, an exhibition of photographs by Vero Majano, Kari Orvik, and DJ Brown Amy. Both lowrider culture and the queer Latinx community are marginalized communities that are often silenced, ignored, and not included in historical preservation or well documented. Lowrider culture and the queer Latinx community have largely been explored separately, such as ethnographer Ben Chappell and interdisciplinary scholar Michael Hames-García. My Senior Independent Study project examines the unique intersection of the queer Latinx experience in lowrider culture in the context of women of color feminist theory. My study employs activist scholarship and collaborative ethnographic methods to document the experience of the queer Latinx lowrider participants in *The Q-Sides*. My study highlights the ways that queer Latinx lowriders create space for their narrative through community dialogues and claiming their narrative in lowrider culture through *The Q-Sides* photography series.

Acknowledgements

To my advisor, Professor Craven: Thank you for teaching me the incredible ways of ethnographic methods and activist scholarship. You have been a source of inspiration for my career in activist scholarship. Thank you for the boundless encouragement and excitement about my project. I'm so grateful to have been paired with you as my advisor.

Professor Tierney: I am forever grateful for the support you have provided for me during my time at the College. Your open ears, kind heart, and wealth of knowledge have helped me to see that I am worth much more than my productivity (Yes that is a Marx reference. You've taught me well).

Professor Mariola: I was most certainly placed in your ARCH group four years ago for a reason, and I could not be more grateful. Though we did not reunite until my junior year, you have helped me learn countless life lessons. Thank you for being there even when you were on a different continent or in a different time zone.

Professor Navarro-Farr: Thank you for being like a mom away from home. Thank you for all the times you listened to me when I was stressed or just had some good news to share, and for all the tea that reminded to take a breath and take it one step at a time. Abrazos.

The Q Sides: Thank you for claiming space in our lowrider culture for all the queer Latinx around the world. Without your project and your countless connections with people, I would not have had such a successful process with my Independent Study. Con safos.

Maria and Al: Thank you for being open to being vulnerable enough to share your stories to help document and preserve the history of queer Latinx in lowrider culture everywhere. Con safos.

Ruby and Jaime: Thank you for sharing your story with me and for reminding me to be the most bad ass xingona I can be. Con safos.

My family: Thank you for being my best friends. Thank you for always encouraging me to keep going, even when I felt so alone and scared to be without you by my side. Thank you for all the sacrifices you have made to help get me where I am today. Thank you for the never-ending pride you have in me and for always believing in me. I love you guys and wouldn't be here without you.

To my best friends: The best kinds of friendships are the fierce lady friendships where you aggressively believe in each other, defend each other, and think the other deserves the world. I'm so proud of you and couldn't have gotten through these four years without you.

Heather Heckel: I wouldn't have gone to that art show if you had not sent me the link – thank you!

Henry J. Copeland Fund: Thank you for providing the resources for me to conduct my study.

Dedications

“This is dedicated to the one I love” – The Shirelles

To my tío José who never fails to be excited about learning, who is never ashamed of who he is or where he comes from, and embraces where he is going. I hope this makes you proud.

To all the queer Latinx around the world who feel like they don’t have a place in the world or feel alone, you’re not alone; and you do have a place.

To The Q Sides who dared to make space in a society that tried, and continues to try, to silence the voices of all the queer homies and homegirls from San Diego to L.A. to The Bay.

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Chapter 1 | Introduction

My earliest memories are of sitting on my father's lap in our 1973 Chevy Nova "driving" the car and singing along to Gene Chandler's "Duke Of Earl;" or walking back and forth in the garage between my father's hand and the toolbox where I would grab a socket wrench or a hose clamp to hand him, while Bloodstone's "Natural High" played in the background. I was raised in the garage with hands covered in a thick black layer of sticky car grease, oldies blaring over the speakers, and car shows on the weekends. For my college applications, I wrote about my journey building a car with my dad and our relationship's journey in the face of his alcoholism. The day before my family and I flew more than halfway across the country to move me into my new home in Wooster, Ohio, my father and I took a cruise around town in the same car that I grew up in to say goodbye for a few months to my home, my family, and the car that I helped to build with my own two hands. From the day I committed to the College of Wooster, I always imagined writing my Independent Study on car culture. Originally, I was going to investigate the sexism that exists in lowrider culture, because of my experience at car shows, by analyzing images of women on cars, in magazines, and different forms of harassment in the culture. This particular subject was of interest to me because at car shows, when admiring a car, I am often approached by men and asked to take a picture with the car. Then when I smile and say, "Thank you! I would love a picture with the car!" and hand them my phone or camera, the car owner's face melts into a disappointed grimace and expresses to me that they would rather take it on their own cameras. I kindly tell them that I am uncomfortable with that, and then signal for my father to help me get out of a sticky situation, and walk away. But I feared that analyzing these experiences for a year would be disheartening and turn me away from one of my favorite pastimes during the summer and fall months that I have enjoyed with my father since birth.

During my off-campus study experience I had shared with a professor that I was involved in lowrider culture. The professor sent me a link to an exhibition that explored the intersections of queerness and lowrider culture. I decided to attend the closing panel event where the artists, a participant, and the director of a documentary film focused on the experiences of queer Latino men who were once in gangs, would discuss the importance of exploring these intersections. The exhibit was hosted at Galería de la Raza¹, a non-profit community-based arts organization located on 24th Street and Bryant Street in San Francisco, California. Galería was founded in 1970 and has a mission to foster the public awareness and appreciation of Chicano/Latino art, and to serve as a laboratory where Latino artists can explore contemporary issues through art, culture and civic society, and encourage intercultural dialogues.

Galería exists in a neighborhood called the Mission. The Mission is one of the oldest neighborhoods in San Francisco, California. Since the mid-1960s, this neighborhood has been a home for San Francisco's Latino² community. Many of the residents are immigrants from Central and South America. The sense of community that existed within the confines of the U.S. Route 101 on the east and north ends, Dolores Street on the west, and Interstate 280 on the south end has always been *frime*, or strong. But today's technological revolution in San Francisco is drawing more affluent, often white, workers. Gentrification in the Mission has led to increasing housing prices and is pushing out families who have been there for decades. Consequently, it is forcing Mission residents to redefine the identity of the neighborhood, and many are fighting to

¹ Translates into "Gallery of the People."

² Throughout my paper I will switch between the usage of Latino/a and Latinx. Since the Spanish language is a gendered language, when referring to my own work I will use Latinx to be gender inclusive of males, females, and the transgendered community. When I am analyzing another scholar's work, I will use the terminology that they use to be consistent with their findings and analysis.

preserve the sense of Latino community. Around the same time (mid 1960s-70s) the Castro became one of the first gay neighborhoods in the United States. The Castro shares borders with the Mission with Market Street on the north, Eureka Street on the west end, 24th Street on the south end, and shares Dolores street on the east end. The Castro gained its status as a gay neighborhood because the European immigrants headed out to suburbs, also known as “white flight”, then gay business began to pop up and it became the neighborhood for, and continues to be an attraction for the LGBTQIA+³ community.

During the summer of 2015, Galería de la Raza hosted The Q-Sides, a series of photographs that explored the intersections of the Latinx lowrider community and the queer community. The Q Sides is an exhibition of photographs that challenge the traditional exclusivity of heterosexuality in lowrider culture. Artists Vero Majano, DJ Brown Amy, and Kari Orvik reinterpreted the album covers of the *East Side Story, Volumes 1-12*, a series of albums that many lowriders consider [these albums] the soundtrack to lowrider culture.

Through a meticulous re-staging and reimagination of the queer inclusion within the very traditional heterosexual and macho image of lowrider culture, The Q-Sides reinterpreted the lowrider narrative in San Francisco’s Mission District by collaborating with local queer Latinx as models, local lowrider car clubs, and staging the photographs in various locations throughout San Francisco. Through The Q Sides, the narrative of the queer Latinx has now been included in the traditional narrative of lowrider culture, and has started community dialogues about straddling the worlds between Latino lowrider culture and queer identities.

³ LGBTQIA+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual, and ‘plus’ sign represents all other romantic and gender or sexuality identities) represents the acronym for the queer spectrum.

Alongside these photos was Dino Dinco's documentary film *Homeboy*, which examines the cultural experience of queer Latino gang life through interviews from various former Los Angeles gang members. On the sidewall of Galería, the Maricón Collective displayed a digital mural installation titled *Por Vida*, or for life, by Manuel Paul. The Maricón Collective is a queer Latinx DJ and artist collective with a mission to preserve East Los Angeles queer history by organizing queer people of color and allies through art, music, and celebration (Villarreal 2015). Though the term *maricón* has traditionally been used as a derogatory term for the queer community, the collective has reclaimed the word to make a more visible generation of queer Latinx in public spaces.

Through my Independent Study I seek to further explore how queer Latinx lowriders create space within lowrider culture for the queer Latinx narrative. I begin with a theoretical analysis of Patricia Hill Collins and Gloria Anzaldúa to guide a deeper understanding of how race and gender affect a person's lived experience and oppression in society. The perspectives of woman of color feminists like Collins and Anzaldúa help to explain how dominant cultures can create a sense of inferiority and exclusivity between different identities. By analyzing their theoretical contributions to academia, I emphasize their work because it is important to use marginalized scholars to aid in explaining the lived experiences of marginalized groups. Additionally, I think it is important to use the work of scholars of color because often in academia, their contributions are not deemed significant or worthy. African American anthropologist, Lynn Bolles [explains in her] journal article "Telling The Story Straight" addresses "Black and beautiful" women in anthropology that their work needs to be recognized as valuable contributions to the field. Anzaldúa's extension of intersectional theory titled *Borderlands* is significant to my study because it analyzes the physical space of living on a

border town in Texas and how it impacts the identity of being a Mexican-American who is also a queer woman. The geographical location of a border town is the foundation for the metaphor of living within the borders of several identities as a queer person of color, specifically of Latino heritage. I will use this to support the borderland experience of queer Latinx lowriders.

Next I analyze how political, social, and economic forces impact the affects of space and the individual experience of a person's life. For many lowriders, custom car culture is something very ordinary, but it also holds specific historical, cultural, and political contexts that impact the meaning for the individuals, but also for spectators. According to social theorist Brian Massumi (2002), the cultural value of lowriding is an act of intervention, and in some sense resistance, to the dominant cultures of policies and various social forces. In this sense, Latino lowriders create their position in society. Massumi's theory is significant to my analysis of the lived experience of queer Latinx because I want to demonstrate how The Q Sides aided in asserting an identity within the lowrider community by creating a sense of nostalgia and belonging in lowrider culture, especially in the Mission.

I conclude my theoretical discussion by reviewing activist scholarship by Charles R. Hale, Laura Pulido, Dana-Ain Davis and Christa Craven, and others. Reviewing these works allows me to continue a dialogue about an overlooked marginalized community in academia that started within the community of the Mission by The Q-Sides. Concluding with this section is intentional because I feel it is important to remember the position of the community that I am advocating for, as well as my own position as a scholar who has the privilege of dedicating a scholarly work to their lives. There is a level of distance that I will experience because I can move in and out of the hostile environments that my participants often have no way of escaping. Being aware of this and being conscious of what my activist interventions are—to contribute my

interviews to The Q-Sides potential addition to the original project⁴, Wiki page, and bringing The Q-Sides to The College of Wooster campus—is essential to me as a (questioning)⁵ woman of color scholar.

My literature review delves into the history of automobiles in the United States, the historical contexts in which lowriding became a subculture for many Mexican-Americans in the southwest and west coast, and the political agendas that the art of lowriding carries to explain the social, political, and economical forces that shape the Latino lowrider experience. This background is significant to understanding how lowriding became a marginalized culture because it explains the significance behind the aesthetic of lowriders. Police have traditionally targeted car cultures that originate out of predominately Latino neighborhoods for various reasons that I will explore in my literature, including attacking the appearance of the car to be dangerous or that cruising was perceived as gang culture.

Next I explore the queer person of color experience by reviewing an edited collection of essays that covers the gay Latino (male) experience, followed by a section on social science work on the Black and Latina lesbian experience. This section of the literature review is important because it highlights the experiences of many queer people in communities of color where it can be difficult to be both a racial minority and a sexual or gender minority. This section also reiterates much of what Patricia Hill Collins and Gloria Anzaldúa argue through their intersectional theoretical lenses. I start by reviewing *Gay Latino Studies* by Michael Hames-García and Ernesto J. Martínez. Hames-García and Martínez argue that this racialized sexual

⁴ I will archive my transcribed interviews with my thesis. I will also be assisting Vero Majano with the next part of the project that will include interviewing the models and recording it onto vinyl records that will sit side by side to the album covers.

⁵ In the LGBTQIA+ community, this identification means that an individual is unsure about or is exploring their own sexual orientation and gender identity.

minority has been forgotten in mainstream academia and it needs to be pieced back together by analyzing the different intersections of being a gay Latino. One of the essays in the collection by Richard T Rodríguez titled *Carnal Knowledge* explores attitudes towards homosexuality and sexism in lowrider culture. This becomes significant in my analysis of the queer Latinx lowrider experience.

In the next section on the Black and Latina lesbian experience, Mignon Moore's study on the Black lesbian and family structures is explored because it is the first of its kind in sociology. Since Mignon Moore was the first in sociology to look at these intersections, she was having a hard time finding literature that explores the same intersections as her study. I included her in my literature review because I, too, am exploring intersections that have not been thoroughly explored. Laura Muñoz is one of the few social scientists that have explored the queer Latina experience. Muñoz argues that in order to fully understand the queer Latina experience society needs to be fully conscious of how race and queer identities intersect.

In the next chapter I introduce how I conducted my study. I made intentional decision with the methods in which I conducted my study because I want to have an activist approach to advocate for queer Latinx who participate in lowrider culture. I was fortunate to be introduced to Galería de la Raza and The Q-Sides by a mentor. It seemed a little like fate to have come across the project and the gallery. I was excited to learn about the gallery because they valued social justice and community dialogues about controversial topics in contemporary Latino culture. I decided to interview the artists behind the project, some of the models in the series, and a heterosexual couple from one of the car clubs that donated cars. Additionally, through my theoretical review of activist scholarship I learned about scholars wanting to contribute more to their communities they were studying. Throughout my research I thought carefully about what I

could contribute to queer Latinx who participate in lowriding besides my research project. I came to several conclusions that will be expanded upon in my activist scholarship section, methodologies, and conclusion. Additionally, I wanted to analyze news articles from national, local, and community news sources to help understand general attitudes towards the queer Latinx community. This allowed me to see how insiders and outsiders perceived the project and the larger message and advocacy of the project.

My analysis chapter is divided into themes that I discovered through my in-depth interviews and archival analysis of newspapers and The Q Sides photograph series. When I told participants about my project, each one described having love for the music that is connected to the lowrider scene. Since The Q Sides is a recreation of the *East Side Story, Volumes 1-12*, I titled this chapter and its sections after songs in the compilations. A common practice in lowrider culture is to associate different songs with different memories and individuals, so I decided to do the same with the stories I have documented for the purposes of this project. I will open each section with an analogy about the song and the theme. Each section is a theme that was addressed in my interviews. I address issues of community support, being pushed out on the periphery of lowrider culture, and taking pride by sharing the queer Latinx narrative.

Chapter 2 | A Review of Theory

Section I: Intersectional Theory

Black Feminist Thought

I begin my theoretical section by analyzing Black Feminist Thought because it helped to form the theory I will use to explain the experiences of queer Latinx in lowrider culture. In *The Social Construction of Black Feminist Thought*, sociologist Patricia Hill Collins (1989) explains the foundations and formations of Black Feminist Thought. Black women have been subordinated for both race and gender. Their lives challenge two previous approaches to studying the consciousness, or meaning given to acts through symbols, norms, and ideologies, of oppressed groups of people. The first approach is when the oppressed group identifies with the dominant power, thus leaving them with no interpretation of their own oppression. Second, is the assumption that the oppressed group is less human than the dominant power, therefore less capable of defending themselves against oppression. There are two overlaps between both approaches: (1) any independent thought or consciousness expressed by the oppressed group is viewed as inferior to the dominant group, and (2) the oppressed lack the motivation and collective power to for political activism (Collins 1989:747). Collins argues that Black women are able to have this unique perspective to intersecting identities because they have had the collective power and motivation to resist the social hierarchies of race and gender characterized by economic and political powers. While Black women may be aware of how race and gender impact their lives, it is still problematic in that the dominant powers have investment in silencing this consciousness and have control over the structures of society that preserve ideological hegemony. She argues that the principal reason why oppressed groups are silenced is because it

can encourage other oppressed groups in society to rise up against the hegemonic powers in place (Collins 1989:749).

Collins discusses the *knowledge-validation process*, which explains that any social thought will reflect the interests and standpoints of its creators (Collins 1989:751-752). This process explains how even though Black women have a standpoint, it can still be suppressed because of the social structures that are in place – their thoughts can still be controlled by the White male academic. For Black women academics to have some sort of legitimacy, their research has to take a *positivist approach* which distances the researcher from the subjects, enforces an “emotion free” research process, ethics and values are removed, and the arguments being claimed must be able to withstand assaults. This asks Black women academics to objectify themselves and distance themselves from any personal motivation for furthering knowledge (Collins 1989:754-755). Collins concludes that “living life as an African-American woman is a necessary prerequisite for producing Black feminist thought because...thought is validated and produced with reference to a particular set of historical, material, and epistemological conditions” (Collins 1989:770). Ideas claimed about Black women must be confirmed by Black women’s own experiences and who connect their knowledge in an “Afrocentric feminist epistemology” is true Black feminist thought (Collins 1989:770). Similarly, I will do the same through my research with queer Latinx in lowrider culture, creating an extended narrative of Gloria Anzaldúa’s Borderland’s Theory as a questioning Latinx woman conducting research in a queer Latinx community. Rather than being restrained by our positions of marginalization, Collins, Anzaldúa, and myself produce knowledge about and through living in the margins of race, gender, and sex or sexuality.

Borderlands Theory

To understand the affect of existing in lowrider culture as queer Latinx, I will examine Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. Anzaldúa uses her location of birth to theorize what it means to live in the borderlands. Borderlands Theory expands on the concept of double consciousness⁶ that W.E.B. Dubois introduced to scholarship. She established the geographical and national borders between the U.S. and Mexico as a metaphor for various crossings from political to sexual to social, cultural, and linguistic contexts. Anzaldúa argues that *la frontera*, the space that occupies the borderlands, creates a "third space between cultures and social systems" (1999:6). It is the space where elements mix, but the individual elements are never completely consumed by the other, but instead they mix in "unique and unexpected ways" (Anzaldúa 1999:6). Living in the borderlands helps an individual to make sense of the social constructions of social categories. Through making sense of this, individuals living in the borderlands are able to see how they are not truly accepted on either side (Anzaldúa 1999:102). Queer Latinx lowrider identities are not validated as one whole person with more than one identity, they are rejected from their cultural identities they have, thus forcing them to live in a borderland of sexual identities and ethnic identity. Anzaldúa defines *la facultad* as the "capacity to see in surface phenomena the meaning of deeper realities, to see the deep structure below the surface" (Anzaldúa 1999:60). This allows an individual to be able to comprehend their experiences in contradicting social systems as defined by cultures, language, social class, sexualities, and colonization.

⁶ A concept conceived by W. E. B. Du Bois in his landmark work *Souls of Black Folk* (1903). Du Bois argued that the exclusion of black Americans from mainstream American life meant that black people not only had consciousness of themselves as black, they also had consciousness of themselves as not-white as well (Buchanan 2010).

In her chapter *Movimientos de rebeldía y las culturas que traicionan*, she briefly mentions how her culture condemns things that are of the self because they do not focus on the kinship relationships between “the welfare of family, the community, and the tribe” (Anzaldúa 1999:40). She continues to provide an example of how the Chicano culture has no tolerance for deviance, and provides an example of how homosexuality is a deviant performance because it is the opposite of what is being upheld culturally (Anzaldúa 1999:40). There is a folktale from her neighborhood that features a woman that *la gente del pueblo* talked about, they called her *mita’ y mita’*, or half and half. The story says that she was half woman and half man, but the story could be applied to the queer community because there is something compelling about the positions of outside that they provide. Anzaldúa explains that they are not suffering from confusion of sexual identity or gender but:

What we are suffering from is an absolute despot duality that says we are able to be only one or the other. It claims that human nature is limited and cannot evolve into something better. But I, like other queer people, am two in one body, both male and female.

(1999:41)

Her experience as a lesbian of color allows her to affirm that the ultimate act of deviance she can make against her native culture is through her sexual behaviors because it goes against two moral prohibitions: sexuality and homosexuality. Latino culture expects women to show greater acceptance of and commitment to the value of system than men. In this culture, women are made to feel like failures if they don’t marry or have children, and they are to remain a virgin until they do marry.

Through Borderlands Theory I will be able to articulate how multiple oppressions and forms of resistance have produced spaces that are composed of multiple social, historical, and

cultural contexts. Additionally, I will be able to articulate how those who live in these spaces maintain their knowledge of what it means to live in the borderlands, the social, cultural, and political intersections that oppress them. As Ben Chappell explained, lowriding is not specific to one place. Lowriding happens wherever lowriders are, it is something that is carried with people and by cars. People who practice lowrider culture are aware of their position in society because of the historical origins. Lowriding grew out of an act of resistance in the Latino community, specifically Mexican-Americans, against the dominant culture other forces like socioeconomic powers. My Independent Study examines the intersections of this culture and the queer spectrum. I argue there is a “third space,” as does Anzaldúa, where queer Latinx find themselves in lowrider culture.

Section II: Affect Theory and Spatial Theory

In *Ordinary Affects*, Kathleen Stewart examines how economic, political, and social forces shape individual lives without asserting a larger, overarching system like globalization, neoliberalism, or capitalism. She focuses on the various, splintered, and seemingly insignificant experiences of everyday life to highlight the “ordinary” as essential to cultural politics. She avoids analyzing larger systems because it is not helpful to understanding the present cultural politics, thus leaving the small interactions of everyday life as useless (Stewart 2007:1). She says everyday life is an ever-changing collection of practices and practical knowledge that have the ability to affect and to be affected, thus giving meaning to the motion of relations, scenes, contingencies, and emergences of an individual’s personal life (Stewart 2007:2). Since ordinary affects are rooted in the potential for something to have meaning, they do not have “obvious meaning” their significance builds upon the thoughts and feelings that they have on their own (Stewart 2007:3). Ordinary affect is where everyday happenings overlap with flows of power,

thus creating their own significant space in the larger scheme of life (Stewart 2007:3). Analyzing ordinary affect requires one to look at the multiple layers the subject, the concept, and the world (Stewart 2007:4). For example, subjects that move, like lowriders, have to be mapped and analyzed through various, coexisting events, habituation, and composition because they have several layers to their ability to affect and to be affected (Stewart 2007:4). Narrative and identity are conditional, yet compelling details in which things affect each other (Stewart 2007:6)

The everyday life of lowriding is significant to understanding the culture and how it intervenes in the economic social and political forces already existing. Lowriding has experienced an evolution over time and it became something important to individual people rather than a whole society. In everyday happenings of lowriding, historical contexts and relationships between Mexican-Americans and social forces like police, one can see the overlap with flows of power. Stewart believes that narrative and identity are (conditional) details that affect surrounding spaces and cultures. Within the Latino lowrider culture, there is strong narrative that includes the historical contexts in which lowriding began in the Mexican-American community. Additionally, lowriders often assemble themselves in car clubs. A lowrider's club identity affects cultural space because a group has their own identity within the lowrider culture. This is a complex element of affect in lowriding, but it is significant because car clubs often go cruising together through streets of their city.

In *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*, Brian Massumi explores the significance of body in cultural theory. He argues that in the past, cultural theory has “tended to bracket” everyday happenings and their seemingly unmediated connection to affect culture because “the everyday was the place where nothing ever happens” (Massumi 2002:1). He believes that culture is what occupies the space between matter and larger systems (Massumi

2002:1). Through his book he attempts to bring large systems “back down to earth” in order to be able to harmonize the everyday “local cultural differences and the practices of resistance they may harbor” (Massumi 2002:2). As ethnographers and sociologists, we constantly think about our “position” in field. Massumi argues that our “positionality” was primarily developed to help signify the subject’s “position” in a larger system (Massumi 2002:2). Massumi uses the example of an arrow to help explain movement and how subjects are affected and can be affected. When an arrow is not doing anything it is only an arrow. In its journey from bow to target, it is absorbing potential to be something else. The moment it hits the target, it is a successfully shot arrow.

The space between matter, or a cultural material like a lowrider car, and a larger system reflects back on the historical contexts in which lowriding became a culture. Additionally, it reflects on the relationship that Mexican-Americans have with larger societal forces like police authority. Massumi’s attempt to bring larger forces “back down to earth” in order to harmonize the everyday cultural differences and the practices of resistance they might practice brings light to the historical evolution of custom car culture to lowriding culture. When police began to harass Mexican-Americans with lowered cars, the culture evolved and they began to use hydraulics so that they could alleviate the harassment from police. When lowriders saw police following them or coming up, they would higher the cars as a practice of resistance against a larger, oppressing force.

Section III: Activist Scholarship

Anthropologist Charles R. Hale argues that research and political engagement can be mutually enriching and provide more interdisciplinary perspectives (2008:2). His edited collection of essays was compiled to inspire and help others confront contradictions in social

science research. Hale notes that most institutional powers find activist scholarship to be threatening. Thus, activist scholars are typically found at the margins of our mainstream academic institutions. Hale intentionally selected scholars of color to include in his collection, many of whom are associated with ethnic studies programs and have stronger ties to political-intellectual thoughts around critical race theory, feminist theory, and activist scholarship, in addition to the disciplines in which they have been trained. Hale defines activist scholarship as “a practice from the margins, undertaken for us all out of motives that variously combine necessity and choice” (2008:3). Each contributor of his book explicitly defines their political alignments and rejects the idea that their scholarly work would undermine the disciplines, this is important to activist scholarship because the researcher becomes a committed ally to the community and is their mouthpiece to ensure that their voices are heard where they often are silenced. The final feature of activist scholarship that Hale defines is working in “dialogue, collaboration, and alliance with people who are struggling to better their lives.” Methodologically, this is important to activist scholarship because it allows people outside to become more educated and use theoretical understandings to better understand the marginalized community in the study. In my methodology I explain what it meant to work collaboratively with The Q-Sides. The Q-Sides was already starting a dialogue about the intersections of queerness and Latino identity; meanwhile I began the conversation in the academic sphere.

As a questioning woman of color attempting to write activist scholarship about and for the queer Latinx community, there are things I am concerned about as I begin my project. In “Frequently (Un)Asked Questions about Being a Scholar Activist,” Laura Pulido challenged the way I initially thought about the project. As an ally of the queer community, it is easier for me to

take an “individual careerism” or “luxury production”⁷ approach because I am in a way disconnected from the larger social movement. I also want to avoid taking a “romantic particularism” approach, which hesitates to portray the marginalized in all their complexity (Pulido 2008:342). However, since I am attempting to challenge the heteronormative and male-dominated culture of Latino lowriding, I plan to take a more active approach with my writing, which Pulido calls “organic praxis.” She defines this type of oppositional work as “the organization and promotion of ideas and bargaining in the political arena” (Pulido 2008:342). What distinguishes organic praxis from the other approaches is that the political bargaining because it connects the scholar to an “oppositional action other than the writing for an academic audience” (Pulido 2008:342).

In answering the question “as a scholar activist, how should I approach community work?” Pulido discusses what she considers the two fundamental issues that should be a scholar activist’s guiding light: accountability and reciprocity. Since I am a (questioning) woman of color writing about queer Latinx, accountability is a concern of mine because, as Pulido says, “these are the criteria by which you will be judged and remembered” (Pulido 2008:350). Pulido explains accountability as being “embedded in a web of relationships...it requires seeing yourself as a part of the community of struggle, rather than the academic who occasionally drops in” (Pulido 2008:351). How am I seeing myself as part of this community? How do I view myself as an activist in relation to other activists? Do I struggle the same way they do? Coming into this community as a researcher is difficult because they live such marginalized lives and wanting to share their story with the world is a huge commitment when much of their life they

⁷ Both individual careerism and luxury production emphasize theory production at the cost of being connected to the larger social movements (Pulido 2008:342)

had to hide the part of their life that I want to expose. I also realize that while I.S. is a long term project for myself, the effort I could be putting in, as an academic, is short term to the community because it is not rooted in the struggle the community experiences. During my interviews I saw this dissonance in understanding the changes happening in the Mission District. Though I live near the Mission, I do not live in it and do not fully comprehend the gravity of the issue, nor do I experience the consequences that they experience. In being accountable as an activist scholar, I need to be able to merge my desires as an academic and as an ally to the larger needs and desires of the community.

Like Pulido, I want to refrain from invading a community, taking what I need, and leaving without giving back. This is the concept of reciprocity, the community is giving me data for my research, so I wanted to give something to the community in return. I wanted to make sure I am being responsible to the community and the cause, and not just taking what I need from the community – interviews – and moving on with my life. For me, it is not enough to just narrate the lives of a marginalized group and never return to the needs of the community. I want to make sure I am doing more than telling a story of their subordination and marginalization. But my challenge was determining what I could provide for their community. I want my academic work to challenge the current politics and cultural norms, and contribute to the community in the spirit of activist scholarship. In the end, I decided I would help in the following ways: (1) Vero Majano mentioned to me over a phone call that she wanted to add a piece to the series which included interviewing the models and recording their stories onto a vinyl to accompany the album covers; (2) I wanted to bring the exhibit and the artists to The College of Wooster campus to expose communities that are unfamiliar with queer Latinx identities and lowrider culture; (3) during the Women, Genders, and Sexualities Studies Week on The College of Wooster Campus I

was introduced to the Wiki-Edit-A-Thon which encouraged scholars to make sure Wiki pages accurately represent gender and sexuality minorities on different pages, so I decided that creating a Wiki page for The Q-Sides project would be a significant contribution.

Pulido shares a story of a time when her reciprocity had failed as a researcher. During her research she was the only researcher of the same ethnicity as the community and so she had a much different relationship dynamic with the community than the other (white) researchers did. This made me think of my position as a researcher in the queer Latinx lowrider community. As a Latina who is questioning her sexuality, and participates in lowrider culture, do I have a larger responsibility to the community than a white, heterosexual researcher would have? Pulido discusses how her commitment to reciprocity could have been better if she had spent more time with the community. At times, I wonder how different my project would have been if I were able to conduct participant observation at the photo shoots and the opening party for the show. I also wonder what my relationship building would have looked like or helped my data collection in the end if I had spent more time with all three artists or with the models before conducting the interviews.

Pulido mentions several feminist theorists who have problematized the space between researchers and their subjects (2008:357). They say that any discomfort between the researcher and the subject needs to be acknowledged because it is a result of a power relation. Sociologist Judith Stacey talks about this in “Can There Be a Feminist Ethnography?” Stacey discusses two major contradictions in ethnography. I am drawn to the first since it is in regards to the relationships between the researcher and study participants. Ethnography depends on relationships between people, their levels of engagement and attachment, and at times that can create larger risk for manipulation and betrayals by the ethnographer. The participants will share

stories from their lives, tragedy or not, and it will then become my data. So when I decide to use information presented to me in interviews, I will have to be careful not to exploit my participants.

Since I returned to Wooster, there is not much opportunity for me to build strong, trusting relationships with my participants. One helpful thing to remember is that the artists of The Q-Sides are (1) members of the community, (2) have built relationships with the participants, (3) trust me enough to bring me onto their team for the interviews. I had a short amount of time to conduct my interviews and a short amount of time to interact with the participants, which I foresaw as being a potential limitation in my research since it may stop participants with sharing their full stories and sharing with me what it is like to be a queer Latinx in lowrider culture. However, I will argue that my insider perspective to being a Latina and someone who participates in lowrider culture, and is very familiar with the *East Side Oldies* albums gave me more leverage in making my interview participants feel more comfortable.

Pulido's sixth question is "I want to be useful to the 'community.' What kind of work should I do?" She said that she wanted to consciously contribute in other ways. For my own project, I assisted Vero Majano, DJ Brown Amy, and Kari Orvik by conducting interviews that will contribute to The Q-Sides in the future. The interviews will be archived and shared with Vero, DJ Brown Amy, and Kari so that they can use them as a tool when they begin the second part of the project. I also plan to help with conducting the interviews and helping them archive the stories of the models. This is important because, as a researcher who is practicing activist scholarship, my work acts as a preservation of the histories and lived experiences of those who I interviewed to advocate for queer Latinx in lowriding.

Michael Hames-García brings many of the same questions of ethics, reciprocity, and accountability up in his chapter in *Activist Scholarship: Antiracism, Feminism, and Social Change*. “Three Dilemmas of a Queer Activist Scholar of Color.” As a researcher, is my work relevant to the community? How am I remaining effective despite the distance that sometimes comes with being an academic researcher? When working in a heterosexual community as a queer scholar, concealing one’s sexual identity is a common challenge, and an important politic to think about. He explains “queer separatism requires a certain amount of class privilege, allowing a scholar to move through only the queer spaces within communities of color, avoiding those that are hostile or intolerant to queer sexualities and gender nonconformity” (2009:190) this means that researchers need to navigate not only the queer community, but the hostile environments and people they live in, like families and prisons. This is a dilemma I often fear: that I might say something out of ignorance and insult someone, and create a hostile environment in the interviews unintentionally. Hames-García explains that queer people of color (QPOC) in the United States often come from homes hostile to LGBTQ+ identities, and become exiled into predominately white gay ghettos (where there is often still a lot of hostility towards the QPOC). As a result of this, working in predominately queer communities does not mean activist scholars should only work with queer people, but the people they interact with. Thus, Hames-García argues that activist scholarship is more than interacting with and being an ally of the communities, it is working to change the social and political circumstances for QPOC.

Hames-Gracia defines activist scholarship as a method that “seeks to transform material conditions, communities, and lives – including the lives of the activist scholars...seeks to transcend the limitations and fragmentation that result from an oppressive and exploitative society” (2009:194). This is a significant reason for why I am doing this project – to learn more

about the QPOC experience, particularly queer Latinx. I also hope that through educating myself I can create a dialogue that will raise awareness about the experiences of queer Latinx in lowriding. Both Hames-García and Pulido argue that activist scholarship is more than telling a story; it is about creating social change by shifting the power dynamic and mobilizing marginalized communities. In my understanding as an activist scholar working collaboratively with queer people of color, it is important to not allow heterosexism and privilege to go unchallenged, and there is often value in discomfort.

Chapter 3 | A Review of Literature

In this chapter, I review several bodies of literature that contribute to my study of queer Latinx lowriding culture and provide a framework for the cultural ties to lowriding in the larger Latino community. I review the history of car culture and Latino communities through the work of sociologists and anthropologists, as well as interdisciplinary scholars. A detailed look at the history of this custom car culture is important to understanding the ethnic pride and culture within Latino culture. I begin by examining the historical contexts that helped to form lowriding as a custom car culture by looking closely at interdisciplinary scholar Charles M. Tatum's cultural analysis in *Lowriders in Chicano Culture: From Low to Slow to Show*, which maps out the pre-World War II origins of lowriding and its continued evolution as a car culture. It also explains how this subculture fits within the broader Chicano and Latino communities, thus reflecting how lowriding embodies the social, artistic, and political dimensions of one of America's fastest growing ethnic groups. I follow with a review of anthropologist Ben Chappell's *Lowrider Space: Aesthetics and Politics of Mexican-American Custom Cars*, which is the first ethnographic study dedicated to lowrider custom car culture. Chappell analyzes the mechanical achievements and aesthetics by which Mexican-Americans alter their immediate environments, thus creating spaces for themselves in an often segregated society.

In the second section, I look closely at the queer person of color experience and the failure of mainstream feminist work and queer studies work to look at the intersection of race, class, gender, and sexuality. I begin by reviewing Michael Hames-García and Ernesto Javier Martínez's call to "re-member" the gay Latino experience in the collection of essays *Gay Latino Studies*. A particularly useful essay in this collection for my study is Richard T. Rodríguez chapter "Carnal Knowledge: Chicano Gay Men and the Dialectics of Being," which examines

curiously ambiguous responses to Chicano gay male sexuality and how these responses are countered through self-representation. Given the historical and cultural politics of Chicano culture and its heteronormative and cis-gendered concept of *la familia*, or family, and *carnalismo*⁸, Rodríguez explores the Chicano gay male articulations of identity, desire, and experience.

The final subsection addresses Black Lesbian Studies. This broader research on queer lesbians of color is necessary since little has been written on or about Latinx queer women's experience. I begin with Mignon Moore's ethnographic study of Black and Latina lesbians titled *Invisible Families* because she is one of the first academics to look at the intersections of race, sexuality, and gender expression among queer women of color. Moore examines how Black lesbian women navigate coming out and the navigation of a black lesbian identity within the Black community. Lorena Muñoz' "Brown, Queer and Gendered: Queering the Latina/o 'Street-Scapes' in Los Angeles" is also important because she is one of the few scholars who addresses the Latina lesbian experience. She explores her positionality as a queer Latina scholar in her study of street vendors in Los Angeles and attempts to renegotiate the mainstream white feminism and queer studies to include the intersections of race, class, gender, and sexuality of Latina lesbians.

Both of these sections—one on lowrider culture, and the other on gender and sexuality in communities of color—are topics that have been explored largely in isolation from each other. This literature review highlights the scholarly and social histories of both so that I can explore the intersection of the two in my ethnographic research on queer lowrider culture. The literature

⁸ The allegiance between heterosexual men in shared roots in language, culture, religion, and Aztec heritage, that excludes women and gay men (Rodríguez, 118).

presented helps me to challenge heterosexual, gender-conforming norms in lowrider culture, particularly among Latino Americans, as well as racialized differences in the experiences of queer people in the U.S.

Section I: Lowrider History

To better understand Latino lowriding culture, the historical context of the automobiles industry and custom car culture within the United States is essential. In the late 19th-century German engineer Karl Benz invented the first gasoline-powered engine (Tatum 2011:2). While these automobiles were available for purchase in Europe, they were not mass produced or accessible to everyone. In 1914, an American entrepreneur, Henry Ford, became the first person to successfully mass-produce automobiles. Ford's concept of the assembly line assigned each worker to a specific task in the assembling of the car. Implementing this concept was so successful that the United States rose to the top of the automobile industry, internationally. While the accessibility of cars increased, the demand for speed and individuality grew among consumers (Tatum 2011:2). The Chevrolet brothers developed an engine that weighed less, which allowed the cars to go faster. People also began to strip down their Model Ts to make them lighter and more aerodynamic. After World War II (1945), young people began to purchase older models of Model Ts and Chevrolets and convert them into the first, what we know today as, hot rods, or stripped down cars to improve speed (Ganahl 2011:14). Those who "hot rodded" their cars began to organize themselves into clubs, an important trend that created the image of criminal youth gangs (Tatum 2011:3). Car owners began to customize their Fords, Chevrolets, Mercuries, Cadillacs, and Buicks by "chopping", or lowering the upper half of the car for a more sinister appearance, painting them dark and deep tones, displayed artistic design on the hoods and bodies, replacing seats, dashboards, steering wheels, and reupholstering the interiors (Tatum

2011:3; Ganahl 2000:13). The two styles quickly became two separate car cultures. While hot rodding's priority was speed, custom cars pursued a unique look and style to show off their artistry by cruising city streets low and slow. This custom car subculture is what we know today as low riding.

Since the late 19th century, Los Angeles has had the highest concentration of Mexican-Americans than any other city in the United States. As the economic power European Americans rose to the top, Mexican and Chinese immigrants were forced to move out of the city to live in poor conditions and work for cheap labor. East Los Angeles, an unincorporated city in Los Angeles became widely known as the most important "urban barrio," or predominately Mexican-American neighborhood (Tatum 2011:5). In these areas of East L.A. an ethnic consciousness developed among the Mexican-Americans. The community had a number of small businesses and mutual-aid societies (Tatum 2011:5). In the mid 20th century, the influx of returning veterans demanded Los Angeles to create housing for them, which created a higher demand for cars to commute to and from home and work (Tatum 2011:8). This, consequentially, led to greater dependence on their cars to transport them from home to their new jobs. Veterans from the World War II received a \$20 weekly stipend that became an extra income that gave Mexican-American veterans in particular the ability to afford a used car, since they could not afford the newer models of cars (Tatum 2011:8). Since many of them became advanced in their mechanical skills during their service, they were able to apply those skills to their new cars. In an interview with Cesar Chavez, an important Chicano, or Mexican-American, figure who organized with Central California farm workers, and *Lowrider* magazine, Chavez highlighted the significance of owning a reliable car. Owning a car allowed for Mexican-American families to be transported from one rural location to the next for agricultural work and well-paying manufacturing jobs in

the Los Angeles area. But when the automotive industry took a hit in the 1950s, Mexican-American families returned to their valley homes leaving Los Angeles back to its predominately white population.

The radical political movements of people of color in the United States during the 1960s also helped shape what we understand as lowrider culture today. Events in Los Angeles, like the Watts riots and the killing of Chicano journalist Ruben Salazar by L.A. police, heightened the racial tensions between ethnic communities and law enforcement creating more incidents of public confrontation. Police and Los Angeles media began using the term lowrider as a derogatory expression by associating it with gangs and criminal activity. Ironically, as the gangs grew more powerful, the more Mexican-Americans organized into lowrider car clubs as a way to distinguish themselves from the criminal activities of gangs (Tatum 2011:17). The Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department and the east side Mexican-American community leaders worked together to develop a strategy that would bring existing car clubs together to combat the growing gang problems (Tatum 2011:7). As lowriding popularity grew, the culture spread to other California cities, like San Jose and San Francisco, and places in the southwest like Arizona, Texas, and New Mexico.

In northern California, particularly San Jose, the lowrider scene was more developed than their counterparts in southern California, perhaps because of their proximity to the University of California at Berkeley and San Francisco. The lowriders in the Bay Area began to participate in protest marches against the Vietnam War and protested issues like police harassment (Tatum 2011:17). As a result, during the 1970s, lowrider scene experienced fluctuations in participation (Tatum 2011:18). It is important to note that while some lowriders were active politically, there were many who did not want to associate with those political views (Tatum 2011:18). What was

more important to these lowriders was displaying symbols of ethnic pride on their vehicles (Tatum 2011:18). The founding of *Lowrider* magazine in 1977 marks the renaissance of the subculture, nationally and internationally. The interest in the culture grew in the early 1980s, and soon over 100,000 subscribers were getting the magazine monthly (Tatum 2011:20). The magazine honored lowriders, hot rods, and early custom cars.

The Art of Customizing

The late 1950s is when the cruisers began to get systematically harassed by law enforcement. This stemmed from the long history of animosity between Mexican-American communities and media, public officials, and law enforcement that peaked during World War II (Tatum 2011:11). Cruisers would be stopped by law enforcement under the pretext that the cruiser was too low to the ground and was causing damage by scrapping the pavement or cement of the city streets. There was also growing public concern about the high numbers of Mexican-American-owned vehicles riding slowly through the streets of Los Angeles (Tatum 2011:11). Media coverage began to suggest that the cruisers were gang affiliated and were involved in criminal activity that threatened the livelihood of the white residents. While it is possible that some cruisers were in gangs, the media grossly exaggerated the claims that resulted in the public outcry for the prohibition of cruising. Consequently, this led to a new trend in car customization – hydraulics. This new trend allowed custom car enthusiasts to raise and lower the vehicle at any moment desired, but it when it was first seen, it was too expensive for everyone to have. Into the next decade the car customization subculture became skilled in installing hydraulics, making it more accessible to more customizers. Lowrider culture acknowledges hydraulics as the significant trend that began the use of the term “lowrider” (Tatum 2011:12).

The 1939 Chevrolet Deluxe, the 1949 Fleetline, the 1950 Chevrolet hardtop, and the 1949 and 1959 Mercury were popular among the Mexican-American barrio custom car enthusiasts because they are easy to customize (Tatum 2011:8). Customizers would use small tires, or use sandbags, to achieve the “low” look, an affordable method for Mexican-American custom car enthusiasts. Other less expensive ways to achieve this look, like cutting suspension coils and placing heavy objects in the trunk, were also employed (Tatum 2011:9). Many car enthusiasts visited local junkyards to rummage for other car parts like hubcaps, bumpers, grilles, and transmissions, which may have contributed to fostering community. There was a high demand for Mexican-American veterans that gained welding or ironwork experience during their service (Tatum 2011:9).

The term “lowrider” was seldom used in the 1950s, but much of the culture associated with the custom car subculture is associated with low riding today. For example, the custom car enthusiasts who organized themselves into clubs with names like “Honey Drippers, the Pan Draggers, the Street Scrappers, the Cut Outs, and the Renegades” (Tatum 2011:10). Club members would gather and cruise the streets in their lowered cars and drive slowly to *el parque*, or the park, as passer-bys would admire from the sidewalk. The cruise was the time to flaunt how low the car could get to the ground, the detailed paint work, the detail in decorative elements like hubcaps, fenders, and spotlights.

Ben Chappell’s book *Lowrider Space: Aesthetics and Politics of Mexican-American Custom Cars* is the first ethnographic study of Mexican-American lowrider culture. He emphasizes that this ethnographic account is both locally significant to the Mexican-American community in Austin, Texas, but also more generally to Mexican-American communities around the nation who participate in lowriding (Chappell 2013:27). Through his fieldwork in the

barrios, or predominately Mexican-American neighborhoods, of Austin, Texas, he learned enough about the everyday practices of car clubs and lowrider cruising. His observations allowed him to challenge the historical erasure, containment, and class immobility, thus emphasizing the politics of presence evidenced in lowrider car culture and style. Through participating in everyday practices, analyzing the interior and exterior adornments of lowrider cars, the production of space, the second-hand economy to obtain parts for his own lowrider vehicle, he ultimately demonstrates how space is made through lowriding and the art of customizing. Chappell conducted both formal, recorded interviews and informal (not recorded) interviews, but he found his participation in everyday lowriding yielded the most “poetic wisdom”⁹ that he sought (Fernandez and Herzfeld 2014:58, as cited in Chappell 2013:28). After establishing a relationship with a car club, he was able to travel “with the club to car shows, view film and music video representations of lowrider style with them; engage in the some of the same print and Internet discourses that they did” (Chappell 2013:28). For three years (1999-2001) he conducted field work in the everyday practices of the local Austin lowriding scene, which included car club meetings, fundraising car washes, and “taco plate” sales, the informal market of used cars and custom parts, and cruising the streets and parking lots on the weekends (Chappell 2013:28). After his graduate studies, he continued to conduct participant-observation for significant periods of time during 2002, 2003, 2005, and 2006. He documented his experiences in field notes, photographs, and recordings of soundscapes and audio notes made while driving.

⁹ Poetic wisdom is described as an embodied knowledge of the means of productive cultural action: the practices of making, understood through participation (Chappell 2013:28)

Through Ben Chappell's ethnographic study of lowrider space in Austin, Texas, he came to understand the car as a constant work in progress. Lowriders are constantly working to develop and elaborate the customization of their cars. There is a certain pressure to "come out" with something new as the car show season or cruising season returned every year (Chappell 2013:17). Chappell argues that this trend demonstrates how the Latino lowrider culture encourages exploration rather than conforming to traditional aesthetic ideals in lowriding. The goal is always to advance the state of the art of customizing, and to do this a lowrider must "invoke surprise" while remaining tasteful according to lowrider standards (Chappell 2013:18). Chappell views lowriding as "experimental and innovative" rather than a simple "reproductive memory and tradition" evoking the dynamism of the ever-changing identity of being a Mexican-American (Chappell 2013:17).

Due to the inaccurate stereotype that all lowriders are gang affiliated, the lowrider culture is one that has become exotic to its outsiders (Chappell 2013:5). As a result, the analysis of its spatial politics in the everyday lives of Latinos who participate in it have been taken for granted (Chappell 2013:5). Similar to some of the challenges that activist scholars like Laura Pulido (2008) and Michael Hames-García and Ernesto J. Martínez (2011) have discussed, Chappell worked to avoid the "exoticism" that accounted for differences in social position and treated lowriders as spectacles. Rather, Chappell approached his field work with "an arrangement that enmeshed us all in established political economic relations and circuits of cultural production and exchange" (Chappell 2013:5).

Chappell argues that "everyday lowriding is best understood as a material, space-making practice, and to view lowriding as a production of space illuminates the politics and the personal attachment that lowriders feel for their idiom" (2013:3). Since lowriding is traditionally found in

urban barrios, it is embedded in the politics of place-identity and spatial constructs (Chappell 2013:3). Not only does lowriding affect the surroundings of a social space, but they develop personal and cultural meanings, political valence, and emotional force, which Chappell argues are “lowrider significance” (Chappell 2013:4). Chappell describes his ethnographic experience as an intersectional experience because he was constantly moving in-between a place of privilege and to his field site (Chappell 2013:6). He says that critical scholars often forget that there are marginalized communities in the homes that privileged scholars, like himself, come from (i.e. Chappell attended school in Austin, yet many scholars find themselves leaving the country or the local area to study marginalized communities, but often forget that “there is not one Austin” (Chappell 2013: 6). As a researcher, I also wanted to remain aware of my position in the community. However, unlike Chappell, I am in some ways an insider because I share racial background, cultural practices, and love of lowrider culture with my participants. He acknowledges that in his research he crossed boundaries of race, culture, and political economy and these boundaries were materialized in the sites of social space used by lowriders. Chappell uses culture theory¹⁰, which suggests that culture is a set of meanings and values conveyed by practices or texts that “enjoy the status of being common sense,” to demonstrate how cultural products, such as a custom car, are approached are concealed behind practices and texts already viewed as culture (Chappell 2013:6). Instead, he suggests that the culture of lowriding is the production of “spatial fields” (Chappell 2013:7). For example, Chappell found that lowriders were often eager to speak about lowriding in a positive framework, while more often than not police officials and people outside of this culture would talk about lowriding as a negative activity Lowriders often spoke about the act of lowriding being “a family thing” that “expressed

¹⁰ Chappell cites Arjun Appadurai, Lila Abu-Lughod, and Sherry Ortner.

our culture” (Chappell 2013:15). He offers the following example to show that even Latino people can view lowriding as building a bad reputation. When Chappell met the president of the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce of a South Texas town he asked, “Why don’t you study people who are *doing* something for their community?” (Chappell 2013:20).

When a lowrider decides to build a car and cruise it, they are cruising within historical contexts of social and economic inequalities; thus, when lowriders engage in lowriding, they are actively engaging in the “larger struggle to create space for themselves in a diverse and stratified urban social landscape” (Chappell 2013:7). Chappell argues that lowriding, in addition to being a culture, is the production of social space (Chappell 2013:7). Spatial theory creates the foundation for Chappell’s ethnographic research by providing the language to understand what happens when outsiders experience a cultural form, such as lowriding, in a public space because it forces the outsider to confront who has authority in the space (Chappell 2013:7). An expressive culture, such as lowriding, intervenes into a contested social formations of race and class, and Chappell argues that his work with lowriders has provided stepping stones to theorizing how “people of color have developed cultural vernaculars that engage the politics of their social and spatial locations” (Chappell 2013:7).

In Chappell’s chapter titled “Auto Bodies” he analyzes the embodiment of lowriding and the use of gendered media in lowriding. Lowriders often adorn their cars with sexualized depictions of female bodies allowing mainstream norms gender and sexuality to be represented and enforced in and by lowrider culture (Chappell 2013:111). Chappell argues that despite the efforts and accomplishments of second wave feminism, these norms have been, for the most part, unaffected (2013: 111). The use of sexualized female bodies in lowrider culture, both on the cars and cultural materials such as *Lowrider Magazine* and calendars, is the performance of

heterosexual hypermasculinity. It is evident that lowrider culture has not given much attention to the queer lowrider narrative. In order to look at the intersections of sexual and cultural identity, the following section will explore existing literature on queer people of color.

Section II: Queer People of Color

Often the intersections of being a queer person of color are theorized by white queer academics, resulting in the failure to address race, creating a pattern of erasure, marginalization, and tokenization (Hames-García 2011:21). In order to understand the experience of queer people of color, interdisciplinary scholars like Michael Hames-Garcia explore self-narratives of queer theory and some of the consequences, and offers alternative ways of thinking about sexuality and race by applying intersectional thinking. To understand the queer Latinx experience, I will do the same by reviewing the recent literature that focuses on lived experiences of queer people of color. First, I review studies of gay Latino experience, and second I examine studies of Black and Latina lesbian experience. While the research is limited in these areas, it is important to my study to offer context for my exploration of queer/lesbian Latinx experience.

Gay Latino Studies

Michael Hames-García and Ernesto Javier Martínez open their edited collection of essays *Gay Latino Studies* by quoting Gloria Anzaldúa, a Chicana feminist, in *Borderlands/La Frontera*. Anzaldúa makes room in her theory of “mestiza consciousness” for the gay Chicano man by stating the need to have “mutual recognition and responsibility” for *nuestro hermanos*, or our brothers. However, the editors agree that the point of this collection is not to ask for solidarity from the Chicana feminist movement, but to “re-member”¹¹ the gay Latino men

¹¹ Hames-García and Martínez decided to spell “remember” as “re-member” because they understand that the lived experience of the gay Latino man has been dismembered and forgotten,

experience. Rather than simply nostalgically recovering the pieces of the dismembered and forgotten experience, “re-membering” this experience is remembering the conflict and coalition in the past and the possible collaboration in the present (Hames-García and Martínez 2011: 4). They see the intersections that overlap with the feminists of color, as reviewed in the previous chapter, and seek collaboration that draw on those insights and perspectives in order to highlight those lives of gay Latino men, and encourage more visibility and representation in literature and scholarship. To achieve this, all of the authors in this collection identify as gay, bisexual, and queer Latino men to provide perspectives on their lives that do not fall prey to tokenism, erasure, or marginalization (Hames-García and Martínez 2011:8). They avoid the generalizations often found in some of the most cited feminist and queer scholarship by committing to giving meaning to their own lived experience (Hames-García and Martínez 2011:9). This is a method of complementing the work done by revolutionary queer theorists of color and critical race theorists, and furthering the conversation on race and sexuality in ways necessary to understanding multiple oppressions and coalitional politics (Hames-García and Martínez 2011:9).

There are three reasons the title of this collection is *Gay Latino Studies*. First, the editors understand that *Gay Latino Studies* is an emerging topic, and hope not to be perceived as trying to replace other fields of study, but they hope to highlight the intersection of critical discourses, methodologies, and field of study overlap (Hames-García and Martínez 2011:9). This allows them to renew attentiveness to the politics and theorization of the forgotten gay Latino experience and the “intersectional and overdue interrogation of racialized masculinities”

so through their collection of essays in *Gay Latino Studies* they will bring together the lived experiences and piece it back together (Hames-García, 2011:3).

(Hames-García and Martínez 2011:8). Secondly, Hames-García and Martínez discuss their reasoning for using the term *gay* rather than *queer*. They decided to use *gay* rather than *queer* because *queer* often refers to issues of gender differences and sexuality. This choice was intended to avoid any false advertisement for potential readers that were seeking scholarship on transgender experiences and identities (Hames-García and Martínez 2011:10). This is important to note about their work because my work seeks to include all gender and sexuality identities. Third, they decided to address the intersection of race and sexuality because, as several scholars have noted, “queer politics can often mask not only an investment in whiteness, but also a Eurocentric insistence on whiteness as an unquestioned norm” (Hames-García and Martínez 2011:10). By using the title “Gay Latino Studies” and using gay, lesbian, or bisexual Latino authors, they are working against the whitewashing tendencies of some queer academic theorizing.

Richard T. Rodríguez’s chapter in this collection, titled “Carnal Knowledge: Chicano Gay Men and the Dialectics of Being,” looks at what he describes as “curiously ambiguous” responses to Chicano gay male sexuality, formed by “acknowledgement and repression” (114). Rodríguez opens his essay with the discussion on Gay Latino Studies versus the work of the lesbian Latina narrative. While influential queer commentators like Cherríe Moraga and Tomás Almaguer call on the gay Latino male to speak openly, they are perceived to be “weak links” and passive figures in the movement of queer Latino liberation (Rodríguez 2011:115). He focuses on how Chicano gay men counter these responses through various expressions of self-representation that is often said not to exist given the heteronormative prerogatives of the cultural and historical formations of family in Chicano culture (Rodríguez 2011:114). A curiously ambiguous response is one that is “formed by acknowledgement and repression” (Rodríguez 2011:114); gay Chicano

men balance a fine line between admittance and disavowal in the struggle to find solidarity against and through kinship. Often, this response roots in the “reproductive futurism” (often found in Chicano politics, the heteronormative prerogatives of *la familia* in its cultural and historical arrangements (Rodríguez 2011:114).

While there has been work looking into the homophobia and homosexuality in the writings of gay and straight Chicano authors, their work fails to wrestle with the “cultural-symbolic pressures” of Chicano/a politics, especially at the root of the intersecting discourses like family, nationalism, and community (Rodríguez 2011:116). Chicano gay men have been written out of the Chicano family life and their inhabited space is unclear because their place in the family has not been addressed (Rodríguez 2011:117). This is a consequence of their failure to be able to reproduce, so they are seen as antifamily. Rodríguez understands that gay Latino studies is an emerging field and it will not attempt to be its own field but wants to strive for collective consciousness with the queer Chicana movement (Rodríguez 2011:117). In order to do this several things need to happen researchers must: (1) collect materials; (2) conduct oral histories of Chicano gay men; (3) promote and distribute recent writings; and (4) critically examine representations of Chicano gay men in various social and cultural contexts (Rodríguez 2011:117). The goal of his essay is to claim recognition for the Chicano gay male within the Chicano/a cultural history (Rodríguez 2011:117). Rodríguez conducted a content analysis of two low rider magazines, *Firme* and *Lowrider*, to see the curiously ambiguous representations of Chicano gay men. *Firme* was a magazine “for Chicanos, by Chicanos” (Rodríguez 2011:125) it was clear their magazine was dedicated to *la causa*, or the cause, and the goals of the movement. His content analysis helped him to define and understand the significant of *carnalismo*, or the allegiance between heterosexual men in shared roots in language, culture, religion, and Aztec

heritage, that excluded women and gay men (Rodríguez 2011:118). Rodríguez questions whether this concept could be applied to the gay Chicano men. Gay and lesbian identities complicate the Chicano politics that are based on family. Women's and gay liberation movements chastise the values of machismo, which for so long, provided people with the skills to face the challenges of exploitation, discrimination, racism, sexism, and classism with self-confidence, determinations and dignity (Rodríguez 2011:122). The need for Chicano studies is because the white woman's liberation movement and gay movement reject the idea of machismo because it is a sign of male heterosexual superiority. The larger movements do not recognize machismo as part of their cultural politics, while in Chicano culture it is something that all people can have despite gender and sexual differences (Rodríguez 2011:123). This becomes significant in my data analysis because the concept of machismo and masculine identities is addressed in one of the photos in the series.

While *Lowrider* magazine was not transparent about who the authors were and whether or not they were as dedicated to the community. Given the nature of both magazines, it is evident that the subscribers to the magazines were sexist and homophobic, given that the women in the magazine were provocatively dressed and catered to the male heterosexual desires (Rodríguez 2011:126). For example, letters to the editor of *Firme* suggested that they "show more girls showing off their beautiful bronze bodies...make them pose in erotic positions that will make every Chicano proud. Sincerely, Macho Man" (Rodríguez 2011:126). Both magazines took this suggestion seriously and displayed more women next to cars, nearly naked. While there were public objections to this sexist practice, there serious attempts to eliminate it because the assumed reader was a heterosexual man whose gaze and libidinal desires were being courted (Rodríguez 2011:126). However, a letter signed by "Debbie Dyke" write to *Firme*, "Although I

know you probably won't print this letter, I have to tell you that your magazine stinks! I bet the publisher is a pompous male chauvinistic pig, who doesn't know the difference between a hole in the wall and the hole in his head and probably has an I.Q. of 3" (Rodríguez 2011:127). This was the extent of the largest attempts at complaining about the magazine's sexism and objectification of the female body.

In an interview in *Firme* titled "A Gay Life Style (Only If *La Familia* Approves)" Benjamin Hernández talks with Victor, a gay Latino male. Hernández opens the article by acknowledging the presence of gay Chicano men and their identity as a "minority within la gente"¹² (Rodríguez 2011:128). The interview opened a conversation on homosexuality among the readership, a predominately working-class Mexican-American population. At the time, and I would argue to this day, the interview juxtaposed two seemingly disparate identities: Chicano¹³ and gay. It displayed the differences between the politics of a homosexual lifestyle and the Chicano family lifestyle. This interview is one of the examples of the discourse about gay identity taking place within the Mexican-American community, and how it served as evidence of heteronormative impulses while undermining the familial and nationalist politics of the same community (Rodríguez 2011:124). The interviewer had clear misunderstanding of Latino homosexuality. For example, he questions Victor about courting a "transsexual, who because of a sex operation, turned himself into a beautiful woman" (Rodríguez 2011:128). Then he implies that his homosexuality is "wrong" by asking, "when you first started 'coming out,' as they say, was there anyone who told you that being a homosexual was wrong" (Rodríguez 2011:128).

¹² The people, the community, the Mexican-American community.

¹³ Another term for Mexican-American that Rodríguez uses in his essay. Originally a derogatory term, but the 1960s Civil Rights Movements reclaimed this term to create visibility for social injustices in the Mexican-American community.

Returning to the concept of *la familia* and *carnalismo*, while the families of the gay Chicano men may reject their lifestyle, they belong to the family nonetheless (Rodríguez 2011:131). Through attempting to reconcile the terms of being both gay and Latino, sometimes it is impossible to stay with the family physically, but they are still family and they are asking to be included in the heteronormative family arrangements but attempt to recast the terms that have traditionally defined *la familia*.

Black and Latina Lesbian Studies

Mignon Moore's study *Invisible Families: Gay Identities, Relationships, and Motherhood among Black Women* was one of the first sociological studies on lesbian women of color. As a family sociologist and an urban poverty researcher, she was interested in looking at how the Black lesbian couple found their place within a historically Black and Latino community. Through her research, she became particularly interested in the intersections of race and sexuality as they related to the formation of family and family process. She closely reviewed literature on family, gender studies, lesbian studies, and African-American studies to look at what social scientists were already discussing on the ethnic lesbian (Moore 2011:225). After her detailed literature review, she designed a research plan that included various methods of data collection including a survey, focus group interviews, and in-depth, in-person interviews (Moore 2011:226).

Her research led to an interest in the sexuality influences and structural experiences that impacted the racial, sexual, and gender identities in the families of Black women and other gay women of color, and further, how they understand themselves and their place in the world. During her research, she ran into the conflict that I am running into myself – a lack of literature on the lesbian woman of color. The intersections she was looking at had not been looked at

before and her study was going to break that trend. During her fieldwork she made observations about social settings where biological sex was held constant; self-understanding of one's sexuality while maintaining a strong racial identity; and what happens when Black female sexuality is revealed in a homosexual context (Moore 2011:225). In her study, she decided to question "how race, class, gender, and sexuality interact to shape contemporary identities for individuals with multiple, hyper-visible social statuses? What does it mean to "become" a lesbian and to publicly negotiate a lesbian identity and family in black communities (Moore 2011:226)?"

One of the few social scientists who have written on queer Latina identities is Lorena Muñoz, who conducted research on Latina street vendors in Los Angeles. In a collection on queer methodologies, she writes about her decisions to disclose or withhold her queer identity with different participants in her study. She further explores the queer of color critiques of white-queer epistemologies, which call for new methods of understanding the complex identities that queer people of color navigate. She discusses the limitations of doing fieldwork without a racialized queer consciousness and the possibilities that open up when we employ that consciousness (Muñoz 2010:56). Her cultural knowledge allowed her to understand that she needed to negotiate her queer identity in a "straight" Latino public space because her participants were not going to connect with her on issues of sexuality (Muñoz 2010:61). Her queer methodology needed to be flexible in order to produce a "pseudo" hetero-normative identity that would enable her to position herself well for her fieldwork. Unless she was in an explicitly "queer" space, she needed to embody the straight, cis-gendered Chicana identity.

She argues that in the Mexican imaginary, narratives of homosexuality are overwhelmingly representative of the gay Latino man, and the female homosexuality is still invisible in most spaces. She quotes Gloria Anzaldúa on lesbians being considered *malinchistas*,

or traitors, to the culturally and religiously assigned gender roles of mother and wife (Muñoz 2010:62). She concludes that Latina lesbians are constantly (re) negotiating and (re) constructing their multiple identities of their sexual identities and their culturally and religiously given gender roles so that they can take part in both the “reproduction of socially constructed heteronormativity in the ways she lives and performs in both her home and workspace” (Muñoz 2010:62). Queer methodology goes further and deeper than the deconstructing of heteronormative discourses, it is the reconstruction of practices in feminist and racialized disciplines. It allows more possibility for accepting and understanding that researchers “co-create” data with their participants and actively adjust their lens to make various methods of “knowing” and “being” become visible in marginalized communities. She concludes by emphasizing the importance of work being done through a queer of color critique and its position of challenge to the white queer deconstruction of heteronormativity because it excludes the racialized other, thus reinforcing homonormative white privilege. Her critique of this is wondering whether only researchers of color can use this lens and whether you can use queer methodologies in a heteronormative space, with no apparent queer subject? She does not confidently answer this question because she understands that not everything is “queer,” but she does suggest that heteronormativity is not always absent of queer social constructions. Therefore, spaces we perceive to be heteronormative are actually “pseudo” heteronormative.

One of the ethical questions I face as a researcher is whether I should disclose my own sexuality in my study and how my Latina identity will impact my fieldwork and interviews. Muñoz also experienced differences in interactions with Central American street vendors and Mexican street vendors (Muñoz 2010:60). Her racial identity both contributed to and hindered some of her fieldwork because the Mexican participants were more comfortable confiding in her

while her Central American participants were more reserved at first, and she had to build a trusting relationship with them before they consented to the interviews (Muñoz 2010:60). I anticipate that my Latina identity and lowrider identity will contribute to my participants being more willing to participate and share information about cultural and ethnic identity during interviews. Like Muñoz, disclosing my sexuality if it comes up seems appropriate. During my data collection, this never came up and was never an issue. My original concern about this being a challenge never became an issue.

Considering that lowrider culture and topics regarding Latinx gender and sexuality have mostly been explored independent of each other, the literature presented in this chapter has provided a history of lowrider culture and an insight into the scholarship on the queer people of color experience. Understanding both of these topics is necessary to explore how they intersect in my project on queer lowrider culture, as well as the ways that both cultures have been marginalized. Lowriding, a predominately Latino American custom car subculture, has been targeted by police because it was viewed as threatening and damaging to city property. Yet within lowrider culture, customizing cars is often viewed as a part of preserving Latino culture and practice lowriding is the preservation of their history. Queer people of color have also often been subject to being subordinated, silenced, invisible, and marginalized within their own cultures and within scholarship on LGBTQ communities. Citing the work of queer scholars of color, especially Latinx scholars, allows me to avoid the silencing and erasure that is often exists for these scholars. Lynn Bolles explains this in context with Black female anthropologists in “Telling The Story Straight,” but I would argue that it can be applied to Latina scholars as well. Laura Pulido discussed the politics of publishing as a woman of color activist scholar in “Frequently (Un)Asked Questions.” Though her colleagues never tell her not to pursue a topic,

she is aware that most scholars of color are often published in journals that are deemed “marginal to the discipline” (2008:345). Thus, it is important to me as a scholar of color to use the work of other scholars of color because I want to make more visibility for their work. Additionally, they have insider perspective to their work that I also have with my study. Many activist scholars work to create more visibility for scholars of color because their work is not cited as often or used as primary textbooks in classes. I remember when I was a sophomore I tried to make an “Ethnic Studies” or “Chicano Studies” self-design minor or track in my sociology major, but every faculty person that I reached out to told me that the school did not have any resources. So they suggested that I use my Independent Study to study the things I was interested in studying. Thus, through my Independent Study I wanted to focus on scholars that I would have studied from had I had the chance to make a track in my major or a self-design minor.

Chapter 4 | Methodologies

In Michael Burawoy's Presidential Address to the American Sociological Association in 2004, he spoke about the importance of public scholarship within the field of sociology:

As mirror and conscience of society, sociology must define, promote and inform public debate about deepening class and racial inequalities, new gender regimes, environmental degradation, market fundamentalism, state and non-state violence. I believe that the world needs public sociology – a sociology that transcends the academy – more than ever. Our potential publics are multiple, ranging from media audiences to policy makers, from silenced minorities to social movements. They are local, global, and national. As public sociology stimulates debate in all these contexts, it inspires and revitalizes our discipline. In return, theory and research give legitimacy, direction, and substance to public sociology. (Burawoy 2004)

As someone who lives within the intersections of many identities, I always found it important to keep inequalities in mind when discussing possibilities for public and activist scholarship. This statement from Burawoy's address captures the essence that I found intriguing about sociology when I first declared my major. I saw that through my discipline, I would be able to look at the larger picture, point out the inequalities, explain them, and then, hopefully change them.

Sometime after I declared my major in sociology, I wanted to do a self-designed minor in ethnic studies or Chicano studies at the College of Wooster, and I did not get the support I wanted because there was a "lack of resources." When my idea was shut down—it is also important to note that the College only allows self-designed majors—I decided that my independent study would be my only chance at reading material that I was interested in reading on Latinx/Chicano Studies, but was not "accessible" to me in my other classes. Through my I.S.,

I decided to approach my topic of queer Latino visibility and awareness by exploring Latino literature by Michael Hames-García, Laura Pulido, Gloria Anzaldúa, and others. Though there is not much published in this field, I pieced together what was available on queer Latino lives and used intersectional theory by Black women scholars like Patricia Hill Collins. I wanted to refrain from using work that did not reflect the experiences of the lives I was trying to highlight because I did not think that it upheld the value of creating more visibility for marginalized lives. Lynn Bolles discusses this topic briefly by explaining that often “Black woman intellectual’s work is more oriented toward activism rather than toward the academy” (2013:64). Black woman intellectuals, like herself, tend to conduct studies that are close to their identities and personal lives (2013:61) which can complicate the ethnographer’s role as a researcher who has an insider perspective. I wanted to be able to use the existing works of queer Latinx scholars to create a better understanding of queer Latinx in lowrider culture.

On June 2, 2015 my mother and I walked into a small non-profit, community-based gallery located on the corner of 24th and Bryant Street in The Mission District of San Francisco, California called Galería de la Raza. The mission of Galería de la Raza is:

Founded in 1970, the Galería is a non-profit community-based organization whose mission is to foster public awareness and appreciation of Chicano/Latino art and serve as a laboratory where artists can both explore contemporary art issues in art, culture and civic society, and advance intercultural dialogue to implement our mission, the Galería supports Latino artists in the visual, literary, media and performing art fields whose works explore new aesthetic possibilities for socially committed art.

When I walked into Galería, Brenton Wood's Oogum Boogum¹⁴, one of my favorite artists featured on the East Side Oldies albums, was playing over the speakers and people were hugging and smiling. Before I found a seat, I saw a wall that had a heading of "The Q Sides" and the blurb below described the exhibit I was about to experience. I read:

The Q Sides is an exhibition of photographs and film that challenge long-held assumptions regarding the traditional exclusivity of heterosexuality in lowrider culture. Artists Vero Majano, DJ Brown Amy, and Kari Orvik reinterpret the album covers of East Side Story, Volumes 1-12 through a re-staging and re-imagining of queer inclusion within the traditionally heterosexual public image of lowrider culture.

The Q Sides is a series of photographs that include queer Latinos positioned in the same poses as the original *East Side Story* album covers. The *East Side Story* anthologies are comprised of doo-wops and soul oldies that have been embraced by lowrider culture from the 1970s to now. The songs are a soundtrack to the love, heartbreak, and desires of lowriders and those who love the albums and lowrider culture. The original album covers feature a proud homeboy with his lowrider car, sometimes with his *ruca*, or girlfriend, in the traditional lowrider aesthetic lip necessity Black Orchid lipstick, and at other times with his homies. As I walked around the show I saw beautiful photos including the faces of Latino transmen and transwomen, gay, lesbian, and bisexual Latinos, and others in drag. As I looked around the room I saw some now-familiar faces from the photos and we smiled. I walked over to the back of the gallery and there was this wall titled "This Is Dedicated To The One I Love ..."¹⁵ I read love notes to people's loved ones,

¹⁴ This particular song is not featured on the East Side Story albums, but artist Brenton Wood is found on several volumes.

¹⁵ Inspired by "Dedicated To The One I Love" by The Shirelle's 1961 song. Featured on Volume 3 of the East Side Story albums.

loved ones people had lost, broken hearts, our deepest and most secret desires, and to all the people of the Bay Area. I returned to my seat with a recent printing of *El Tecolote*, a community newspaper based in The Mission District of San Francisco published by Acción Latina and an information card about Galería de la Raza that featured a beautiful lowrider car dubbed *Muerto Rider*, or death rider by John Jota Leños and Artemio Rodriguez. I sat down to enjoy the closing reception and fell deeper in love with the project.

The panel discussion of The Q Sides included the artists behind The Q Sides Vero Majano, DJ Brown Amy, Kari Orvik, Dino Dinco (director of film *Homeboy*, about former gang members who are queer Latino gay men), and Mickey (a participant of The Q Sides). This panel revealed to me that the population of people that they were highlighting was a population that lived in a historical context of marginalization (Tatum 2011, Chappell 2013). Not only have Latino lowriders been historically marginalized by police, but queer Latinos face marginalization because of their sexuality and gender identities that do not fall in line with the traditional, cultural norms (Rodríguez 2011). The exhibit, the panel discussion, and the mission of Galería de la Raza was not only something that I identified with personally, but I identified the entire project and the mission of the exhibit and gallery to fit what I was striving to do as an academic, because of my commitment to merging scholarship and activism. Right after the discussion I knew I wanted to talk to them personally and talk about possibly doing some academic work with the project. I walked over to Vero Majano and introduced myself. I told her that I really loved this project and that I was interested in working with her to possibly interview her and some of the models for my project. She handed me a flyer for The Q Sides that had her number written on it and told me to contact her about this idea. In this moment, Vero Majano became

what sociologists would refer to as my *gatekeeper*, a person who controls and helped me gain access to a community (Angrosino 2005:27).

In making methodological decisions, I relied heavily on Michael Angrosino's book *Projects in Ethnographic Research*, as well as the ethnographies I read about lowrider culture and the experiences of queer people of color. Together, these helped me to make a systematic foundation for my data collection that would help me gain perspective and insight with the queer lowrider community in the Bay Area.

Section I: Site Selection

The process of deciding where to conduct research is one of the most important decisions to make when beginning your research. In order for your research to work, the unit of ethnographic research that you decide should be clear in a countable, measurable, or describable way (Angrosino 2007:23). Initially, I was concerned that my unit of analysis (queer Latinos who participate in lowrider culture) was too broad because practicing lowrider culture can sometimes be transitory and there is no schedule or regulated times throughout one's day or general life in which members would participate in this community. Additionally, my literature review revealed to me that the unregulated practice of lowriding is an important characteristic of today's lowrider culture, but it is also something that is more of an emotion and "a lifestyle" than a hobby (Chappell 2013:15). As I began the project, however, I also feared that, in fact, the project might be *too specific* and that finding participants would be difficult, until I came upon the Q-Sides exhibit. Yet I was still concerned that the people who were in the photographs might not be connected to lowriding at all, and it was important to me that the participants were in lowrider culture. I chose The Q-Sides exhibit to be my "site" because it focused on the intersections that I was curious to explore. Even though I do not have a physical "site" that my project is centered

on, the people involved in the project were the carriers of the stories I wanted to document. Like Chappell argues in his study, lowriding is not a one-time thing or a practice that happens at certain times of the day, it is a “lifestyle” that is carried with participants at all moments of their lives. This idea is further proven in my in-depth interviews.

Section II: Conducting Collaborative Research

When I first called Vero Majano about doing an academic research project that was inspired by The Q Sides she mentioned to me that she was thinking of doing a second part of The Q Sides that included the audio recordings of the story of the models’ lives on a vinyl record, along with the re-created album covers. I told her that I would be willing to help her start this project by donating time and some of my own questions pertaining to topics in my research. Together we decided to give this idea a trial run with my project. We set up some interviews and brainstormed together about things we wanted to ask about, such as homophobia, participants’ personal connection to the music of lowrider culture, and San Francisco Mission identity. This idea came to her because she thinks it is important to document and preserve the stories of the Mission, but after growing up and never feeling represented, especially in terms of her sexuality, she wanted to preserve the stories on queer Latinx in lowriding.

In a conversation off tape with Vero and one of the interview participants we discussed a recent death of one of their mutual friends. The person who had recently passed was one of their mentors from their youth and one of the first to experiment with activism and art or performance. He was a queer Latino man who had a faculty position at a university. He was constantly explaining to them how important it was to document their lived experiences in more than one way. While documenting it in art and performance was important because it gave them creative license to express all that their hearts desired, documenting it in the academic world was just as

important because it is easy for their lives to be overlooked and forgotten in the midst of every other academic hot topic. At the end of the conversation they thanked me for allowing them to document The Q Sides and the stories they had that connected them to their sexual, racial, and gender identities in the academic world that they did not personally have the access to. In this way, collaboration was a humbling experience, and I look forward to the work I get to help her with in the future. As a researcher who has an advocacy component to my scholarly work, I felt honored that they were so grateful to have me document their stories in the world of academia. When I would think about what I would be contributing, I did not think that simply documenting these experiences would mean anything, but to them, it was significant. This reaffirmed that the study I was conducting was not only beneficial for academia, but also for the community. The stories of queer Latinx are beginning to appear more in social sciences, so my work is contributing to the field in that manner. Additionally, the intersections of queer Latinx and lowriding have never been explored before either. For the community, my project serves to continue a community dialogue that needs to happen because homophobia still exists in the community. In collaboration with The Q-Sides, my project extends the conversation in several social spheres and highlights the lived experiences of queer Latinx in lowriding culture.

Section III: Feminist Activist Ethnography

In their forthcoming textbook, *Feminist Ethnography: Methodologies, Challenges, and Possibilities*, Dána-Ain Davis and Christa Craven describe feminist activist ethnography as ethnography that is “committed to a struggle beyond the academy.” Davis and Craven believe that ethnography, a method used to illuminate social problems, and feminist social movements, with their commitment to progressive social change, can make productive contributions to both scholarship and activism through feminist activist ethnography. They acknowledge that although

activist scholarship is often critiqued for losing its objectivity and some ethnographers are accused of “going native,” long-held feminist commitments to promoting equity are not incompatible with disciplines that value public scholarship, like sociology and anthropology. In fact, they point out the passion for social justice is what encourages many feminist activists to become academics in the first place.

Extending *The Q Sides* into an academic research project is important because of the reasons explicated above. My literature review on the queer Latinx experience is evidence that there is a lack of representation in the academic world of queer Latinos. Conducting research on *The Q Sides* and furthering the research on the queer Latino lowrider experience is contributing important research to the field—in Sociology, but also in Latinx Studies, American Studies, and LGBTQ Studies. Additionally, the participants in my study have long been excluded from a culture that they claim as theirs, and have been ostracized by many of their family members for their sexuality. Additionally, because of their race and cultural practice of lowriding, they have been systematically harassed and marginalized by police and politicians. Reflecting on Buroway’s address to the American Sociological Association in 2004, documenting the lives of queer Latino lowriders contributes to ending their silence and is “defining, promoting and informing the public” about this intersectional life.

Section III: Data Collection

In-Depth Interviews

My data collection process included in-depth interviews and a content analysis. I found in-depth interviews essential to my I.S. because while collecting numerical and measurable data variables would have provided some insight into the lives of queer Latinos in lowrider culture, it would not have yielded the data that allows me to interpret “open-ended descriptive, narrative

responses” (Angrosino 2007:6). Through the months of August-December I kept in contact with Vero Majano and told her that I would love to interview her, Kari Orvik, and DJ Brown Amy (the artists of The Q Sides) about their project. We also worked on interviewing some of the models and car owners. Since Vero is a busy artist sometimes it was difficult to get her to return my phone calls, and one of my important emails detailing who I wanted to interview was lost in her email. Things were off to a rocky start when I returned to California for winter break and data collection. But at the beginning of January I conducted a group interview with the three artists: Vero, Kari, and DJ Brown Amy. Together we formed a list of *key informants*, or “those who are particularly knowledgeable and who can be counted on to serve as authoritative guides to certain aspects of the culture” (Angrosino 2007:47). The people they suggested were some of the people who they thought would contribute a colorful and informative narrative for the purpose of the project. It is important—both for academics and artists—to find people who are comfortable with the subject matter and who are willing to share their stories and knowledge. As seasoned ethnographers remind us, it is important to choose your informants wisely (Angrosino 2007:46).

I knew I wanted to interview some of the models, Al and Maria, because they were asked to participate in the project for a reason. Aside from fitting the description of the kind of person they wanted to be feature in the photo (queer Latino who participates in lowrider culture or has a connection to the East Side Story albums), they had stories to share with The Q Sides that helped to capture the intersection of being a queer Latino in lowrider culture. I wanted to highlight these lived experiences, just as the exhibit did in a visual way, in interview form. In deciding who I wanted to interview, there were several things I wanted to ensure appeared in my interviews including the participants of The Q Sides, the primary artists, and people who contributed to the

project by donating a car or helping with setting it up. I interviewed a total of seven people. Two interviews were conducted in groups (The Q Sides artists group mentioned above, and Ruby and Jaime, a couple from a local car club), and two separate interviews with two of the participants, Maria and Al. All of my interview participants chose to keep their names public except for two of them. DJ Brown Amy wanted to keep her stage name as a pseudonym, but it is also the name that is attached to The Q-Sides project, rather than her legal name. One of the models opted to have a pseudonym so we will call her Maria rather than her legal name. I found this to be interesting to watch when I gave each participant their consent form. Basically everyone of my participants chose to keep their name public. I perceive this as an intentional move because they are all aware of the purposes of the project and how documenting the real lived experiences of the participants is a performance to create social change. Keeping their names in the project is important because my participants are unapologetically the identities that they embrace. They are choosing to be even more vulnerable by sharing their stories through interviews and photos. Not only will my research preserve the stories on an academic level, but also I will be able to honor the work on two queer Latina artists from The Mission district of San Francisco who strive to raise awareness about their communities everyday.

The Q-Sides collaborated with local car clubs to find cars to use for the photo-shoot. I did not tap into as many car owners as I would have liked but I did get a chance to meet with a heterosexual couple who are both in the Califas Bombs Car Club of the San Francisco Chapter, Ruby and Jaime. Ruby and Jaime were mentioned in my interview with The Q-Sides artists for their support and acceptance. However, they are also members of the car club that started to hesitate when media about the “queerness” of the art project started conversations about homophobia in the community. I believed it was important to interview them because they are

the physical manifestation of heterosexuality that can exclude the participants of my research and The Q-Sides exhibit. In my literature review I also found that, traditionally, those who own lowrider cars, who are not openly queer, tend to exhibit homophobia; thus, I wanted to explore this with the couple that I interviewed (Rodríguez 2011).

Since Vero was interested in conducting interviews for the second part of The Q-Sides, she wanted to be there with me during the interviews and contribute to the questions and conversation. The type of interviews we conducted were *semi-structured exploratory interviews* because it allowed us to explore themes that I anticipated would come up after my literature and theory review (Angrosino 2007:44-49). Although conducting collaborative interviews was not what I initially anticipated, I appreciated the support that it gave me as the researcher. But I could also see how Vero was benefitting from being present at the interviews. Although adding an additional person into the mix of an interview setting can be disruptive or limit the ethnographic work, in my case having Vero there enhanced my interview experience in ways that I could not have previously imagined. Her relationships with the interview participants allowed her to engage with them in a way that I was unable to. Vero was able to mention things that happened during the photo-shoots or at the opening and closing events that would encourage the participant to comment on something. Additionally, my relationship to lowriding and the overlap of experiences with lowriding and our family histories allowed me to engage with them as an insider as well. Like Lorena Muñoz, she had similarities with her participants that have her an insider advantage. My ability to talk to my participants about what it meant to be in lowrider culture or be a Latina, and to see your story in photos made it easier for my participants to talk to me and share their stories

Each interview was comprised of questions that I had compiled, that focused on the significance of lowrider identity, queer identities, and what the project meant to the individual and what they perceived it to mean for the community of the Mission and the larger Latino community. Vero did not have a set list of questions, but offered points of discussion from events that I was unable to attend or from her personal relationship with the individual. During the interviews I also followed up with additional questions as things appeared to be of importance to the interviewee. Additionally, Vero asked additional questions about things such as the participants' favorite song from the albums or how they manage with homophobia within their family.

Content Analysis

Since a theme in my research focuses on homophobic attitudes in lived experiences of queer Latinos in their family, culture, and social life, I found it significant to collect things like articles from various news sources, such as *El Tecolote*, a community based newspaper in the San Francisco Mission District, *San Francisco Chronicle*, *KQED*, *Mission Local*, *Huffington Post*, and *Kron 4 News*. These news sources help me to consider whether and how homophobia and other attitudes towards queerness may impact work like The Q-Sides. Additionally, some of the sources, like *El Tecolote* and *Mission Local*, provide an insight to attitudes toward queerness in the local community. Using these sources I will analyze cultural attitudes from the local community as well as larger societal attitudes towards queer Latinx lowrider culture. Archived materials are “data originally collected for some purpose specific to the person or agency doing the collecting ... now open to the researcher in seeing what they reveal about the history and culture of a given community” (Angrosino 2007:55). The Q-Sides exhibit is itself a cultural product because it is a form of resistance that stands against the cultural norm of heterosexual

exclusivity in Latino and lowrider culture. The photos provide a lot of information about the queer Latino lowrider experience. The exhibit and artists' talk have augmented and helped to shape my interviews for the purposes of my research. Additionally, since I had been following The Q-Sides in the news, I have collected the news coverage and reviews of the exhibit to add to my analysis of different themes that developed through interviews and participant-observation.

While my literature review gave me a foundation to begin my data collection, the original data I collected revealed new themes that affect queer visibility in lowrider culture. Initially, I wanted to focus on the exclusionary practices of Latino families and lowrider culture. However, as the interviews progressed, I found there were other things that I, and previous researchers, overlooked in my literature review. For example, the concept of "claiming" and "nostalgia" and how the artists and local queer Latinx came together through The Q-Sides to claim space and initiate an inclusive environment in a traditionally exclusive one. Additionally, I was able to examine how homophobia and sexism is demonstrated and encouraged within Latino and lowrider culture. Through an analysis of my in-depth interviews and archival materials I will explore these themes further to demonstrate the importance of including the voices of queer Latino voices in academia. The following chapter will explore themes that I discovered in my data collection such as the importance of lowriding to establishing a sense of community, the avoidance of difficult topics like homosexuality, the impact of The Q Sides, and how it allows queer Latinx to participate in nostalgia of a past and to claim space in the culture that has constantly denied them.

Chapter 5 | Data Analysis

Track 1-2: “Story Untold” by The Nutmegs, “Tell It Like It Is” by Aaron Neville

Music plays a significant role in the lowrider culture, and many memories that lowriders hold onto are associated with songs from these albums and other compilations of music that lowriders listen to. In this chapter you will find tracks from the *East Side Story, Volumes 1-12* to represent the themes that presented themselves to me during my data collection process. The following sections are the soundtracks that I have chosen to represent the experiences shared with me. Each section has a song dedicated to the lives of queer Latinx who may be in the closet, or feel like they don't have a place in *nuestras comunidades*, our communities. To help identify the theme, consider listening to the song and possible meanings. To introduce my data analysis I chose the songs “Story Untold” by The Nutmegs and “Tell It Like It Is” by Aaron Neville because for some people, there are stories untold that live in their hearts, hoping for someone to hear their voice. Many queer Latinx do not share their stories for fear of being rejected by their families and are scared to deviate from traditional cultural norms. I chose “Tell It Like It Is” by Aaron Neville because *este rola*, or this song, taught *a todos*, or everyone, to never be ashamed of our true feelings.

On January 5, 2016 I took the Bay Area Rapid Transit train to the 24th St./ Mission station and took the bus to Vero Majano and Kari Orvik's home in The Mission District of San Francisco. It was a little rainy and cold, but typical for San Francisco. She opened the door for me and asked me to take off my shoes because “they are starting to be those people who ask people to take their shoes off.” I responded with “No problem, I come from an Asian background, I'm used to it,” and we both laughed a little. She welcomed me upstairs and offered me some tea with a splash of whiskey to keep warm, but I opt for some water. I looked around

and there were crates filled with records and a blown up copy of the one of the photos from the exhibit. It features a young queer Latina in front of Carlos's Auto Electric Shop posing with a green 1948 Chevy. It is clear that I am in the home of a true lowrider.

We sat down and we start to talk about what this project is about, what I want to do, whom I want to interview, and about The Q Sides project and why I loved it so much. We also talked about some of my personal life – my childhood in the garage with my father, my parents, my time in Wooster for school. Kari comes out from the back, where she was working on one of her art projects, to say “hi” and let us know that DJ Brown Amy is on her way. When DJ Brown Amy arrived we moved from the sofa to the kitchen table to begin the interview. I explain to Kari and DJ Brown Amy that I have been talking to Vero about my project and briefly explained my goals with the interview and my project. I preface the interview with a small statement about how I think their project revolutionary because this intersection is never talked about. I told them that I wanted to use my senior thesis as a method in which I can help them document the lives of marginalized people within our own community. This was my first activist intervention. From attending the closing panel, I already knew that they wanted to start a conversation about queer identities in the Latino community, but through my project, I would be able to bring this conversation to another community that also silences the voices of queer people of color – academia. This is important because lowrider culture and studies on queer people of color have largely been explored separately, and the existing research is limited. As a researcher, I saw that these intersections had never really been looked at through an intersectional lens and took the opportunity to preserve these stories because everyone's story deserves to be told and valued (Bolles: 2013). Vero, Kari, and DJ Brown Amy were all very aware of the lack of literature on racial and ethnic minorities and lowrider culture in academia so they were very honored to have

someone interested in documenting the queer Latinx in lowrider culture in a scholarly work. This gratitude was shared off tape from all of my participants. Every time an interview concluded, the interviewee would thank me for doing my project on their lives because their stories need to be included and heard by society.

Track 3: “Love Can Be So Wonderful” by The Temprees



Figure 1: The Q-Sides Volume 8.

Though The Temprees are singing about the love between boys and girls, no love compares, for lowriders, like the love they have for the oldies and *la cultura*, or the culture. As an artist, Vero Majano says that, “love is where you draw from to make art.” For the three artists who contributed to The Q Sides, much of the motivation and inspiration for the project started from their love of lowrider culture. In fact, in our interview, Vero described her queerness and lowrider culture as her “first two true loves.” DJ Brown Amy used to imagine herself “as the homeboy with the car and girl by his side.” As insiders to the culture that they were putting on

display, Vero and DJ Brown Amy emphasized that they were coming from a place of love for the music and culture with the project. Like many, DJ Brown Amy fell in love to the music, relies on it in times of heartbreak, and is reminded of her childhood.

When I started the interview with the artists, I wanted to return to the beginning of The Q-Sides before it was even an actual exhibit. DJ Brown Amy recalls when she ran into Vero on 24th St., when they sparked a conversation about the East Side Story records and how it would be “really cool to recreate these records with queer Latino people.” The artists began the project with a sense of pride and love for the culture and music, and also their queer identities. The intersections of sexuality and lowrider identity may, in a traditional lowrider’s perspective, be unconventional, but queer lowriders are proud of both their lowrider culture and queer culture. The Q-Sides photo series allowed queer lowriders to present their intersecting identities in a way that had never been accepted before. Re-staging a cultural icon, such as the *East Side Story Volumes 1-12*, allowed queer identifying Latinx in lowrider culture to proudly display their culture and sexuality. Like Anzaldúa explains in *Borderlands/La Frontera*, being queer and Latina you live in this “third space” that is between cultures and social systems. DJ Brown Amy and Vero were conscious of their position in their societies and wanted to talk about their narrative through the restaging of the photos. In Anzaldúa’s chapter *Movimientos de rebeldía y las culturas que traicionan*, she discusses how the intersecting identities of race and queerness are often condemned by their culture, but through The Q-Sides the artists wanted to discuss their identities while uplifting and being proud of their culture and heritage. Specifically, this chapter speaks about how things that are about one’s self and one’s personal life does not support the entire community. The Q-Sides addressed something that is deviant from Latino culture.

However, through this exhibit, they are stepping out of the third space and making space for their story in the already existing lowrider narrative.

Track 4: “Ain’t No Mountain High Enough” by Marvin Gaye and Tammi Terrell

Marvin Gaye and Tammi Terrell’s “Ain’t No Mountain High Enough” describes a couple that perseveres through challenges that come their way. This song was chosen to be the soundtrack to ideas and concerns about the community that was expressed during my interviews. This song taught lowriders to be able to trust their loved ones to be there when we needed them. Lowriders take pride in their *carnalismo*, or sense of brotherhood (Rodríguez). But how do queer Latinx trust their community when they are experiencing discrimination from their brothers and sisters? The concept of community is challenged in the face of homophobia and discrimination because the communities that you believed would always be there for you and support you, no matter who you are. Similar to how The Q-Sides created the idea out of love for the culture and their identities, the participants came from a place of love too, and were saddened by some of the things that were happening in the community.



Figure 2: Image of writing under the (defaced) Maricon Collective’s mural that reads, “Let love protect this mural and the people it celebrates.”

Both Vero and DJ Brown Amy were born and raised in the San Francisco Mission District so hosting the opening of The Q Sides at Galería de la Raza was an important choice for their first exhibition. Galería was founded in 1970 in San Francisco by a group of Chicano artists and community activists from The Mission. Galería has focused their exhibits on concepts that are central to the Chicano/Latino experience. They strived to make social activism and art in the Chicano/Latino community more accessible to the population that lived, and continues to live, in the San Francisco Mission District. At the opening night party, the car clubs came and lined up the cars along 24th and Bryant. Vero describes this night as “lovely” because they showed up to represent and take pride in the project they all contributed to, and to claim their queer brothers and sisters. Since The Q-Sides is an exhibit that challenges their cultural norms, Galería was the perfect host to start conversations in the community about the heterosexual exclusivity of lowrider culture. But before this night, there was a lot of backlash from the community.

During the interview, DJ Brown Amy asked Vero to retell the story of when Vero had to be a mediator between some youth and Galería. Ani, the executive director of Galería, called Vero in a panic one day while she was at the gallery. She asked Vero to come in because there were “a bunch of kids out here dressed in red, probably Nortenos [a gang originally from Northern Mexico, but have members in predominately Mexican neighborhoods]. They’ve been cruising around, blocking the front door.” Vero remembers being on her way to mediate and not having a clue what she was supposed to say or how to get them to stop. Where she was seated in the kitchen, she recreated the tough guy poses that lowriders usually stand in – lowered shoulders, chin up, feet pointed in both directions, and a self-righteous grimace on their face. When she got there one of the youth started to lament that, “These mother fuckers ain’t even from here. They’re taking our neighborhood away.” It is clear that what he is trying to say is that

homosexuality does not exist in these cultures. He was also referring to the Maricon Collective because they are from Los Angeles, not the Mission. But this comment also denied lowrider culture to the Latinos from southern California, when Latinos all through California and the Southwest have some ties to the culture. She listens to him and then tries to make a connection with him by asking about his mom and how she was born and raised in The Mission, just like him and his mom, but she continues to tell him and his friends that it is threatening to have them here blocking the door. He rebuts her statement by saying that they can be there if they want, meanwhile on his right hand side there was a heterosexual couple making out, pressed up against the glass of the gallery as a sign of protest. Ani and Vero decided, that since they weren't getting through to the kids, was to call a youth organizer from Precita Eyes (a Mission mural artist collective that works with youth to keep them out of gangs and off the streets) to help them remove the kids from the front of the gallery. She was successful in getting them to leave, after threatening to call the police.

Even though they threatened that the police would come and remove them from the area, no one involved in The Q-Sides or Galería wanted any of those kids to get in trouble for loitering. Moments like these are when Vero felt the lack of community that she wishes existed, especially in regards to an art project exploring queer sexuality. Vero began to talk endlessly about how “what really broke my [her] heart was that all these queer Latino kids who are here in SF, were out there on the streets marching when someone gets shot... Were out there fighting to make sure you don't become part of the gangs.” She could not wrap her head and thoughts around her support for the community in the face of the utter disapproval of her queer identity. She mentions that she works at a homeless drop-in center and a lot of those people are from The Mission who have lost their homes and they come in excited to see Vero because they know

she's going to "hook you up in here." But at the end of the day, they lack the courage to stand up for the queer community; and for her its like "I know you wouldn't have my back out there as a queer woman of color. Regardless of me having your back." In Hames-García and Martínez's book *Gay Latino Studies* they discuss Anzaldúa's concept of "meztiza consciousness." This concept addresses the need for solidarity amongst all queer Chicanos because they have mutual recognition and responsibility for each other. However, the edited collection is used as a call to "re-member" to forgotten and dismembered narrative of the gay Latino man. This connects well to how Vero was feeling about the backlash because she was hoping to see solidarity from her community and expected the general community to openly welcome her narrative as a queer Latina, but also for those stories of her queer *hermanos y hermanas*, or brothers and sisters.

Something special about The Q Sides is that it captured some places in San Francisco that are slowly disappearing. The Mission, in particular, is experiencing gentrification. Maria recalled the day that she had her photo shoot. The auto shop that she photographed in front of is now a cross-fit studio, "that garage has been there forever, like every time you were on the 14 or the 49 [San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency Lines], that was the spot you would always turn and see...that was like a historical part of the mission, and many people's visual memories of the mission." Vero comments on how when Kari and her approached the auto shop owners about using their garage as a photo set, they were very generous and welcome to having people use their garage as a backdrop. The owner mentioned that the film, *La Mission*, a movie about a father-son relationship with queer Latino boy and their connection to lowrider culture, was supposed to be filmed there as well. This is an indicator that this place is a cultural and geographical landmark for many people in The Mission.



Figure 3: The Q-Sides Volume 4.

Track 5: “The Agony & The Ecstasy” by Smokey Robinson

Smokey Robinson reminds the lowrider community that sometimes in love, we have to pay some agony for the ecstasy of our deepest desires to become realities. My literature review briefly explored how Latino culture is one built on a patriarchy and is homophobic. The Q Sides and the Por Vida mural triggered several hate crimes and acts of discrimination, and threatened many members of the Mission community. Galería, The Q Sides artists, and the Por Vida mural artists are paying some agony for the ecstasy of being able to start community dialogues that encourage inclusivity. For Maria, experiencing the discrimination attached to the project was difficult because she associates such a strong sense of community with The Mission. She says that there is a need for connection because the gentrification is impacting the community spirit so much, so she expected more support from the community because they were experiencing the gentrification as a collective. She remembers when she was posting the second installment of the

Maricon collective's digital mural and people were slowing down in their cars to say things like "get your faggot shit out of here!" This was the first time she had ever felt unsafe in the community. Vero says she understands why people reacted the way they did. She argues that people react in fear of losing things that are theirs. She doesn't necessarily agree with how people reacted, but she says, "All you have is reactions sometimes."

While the Kari, Vero and DJ Brown Amy were working on the project, Kari was simultaneously working on her own artist process. Her studio is located in Geneva and Mission in the Excelsior District of San Francisco, a predominately Latino and Black neighborhood, and she said that many of the same people were feeling "threatened" because the neighborhoods' histories were lowrider culture were being challenged. This was a reference to the gentrification happening in the Mission. When people started to feel threatened, the machismo and homophobia revealed itself. At times, Kari did not even know whether she should connect herself to the project because it represented so many things to the people of the community that truly upset them. In the beginning, people would ask her if she knew about the project. Initially she would say she had heard about it, but then she started to realize the importance of being connected to it and having the ability to advocate for queer Latinx in lowriding culture. Kari understood that queer Latinx hold a certain position in society that was subordinate in various ways. She soon realized that her denying her association with the project undermined the purpose of the project – to discuss the intersections of race, sexuality, and gender. Thinking back on what Collins argued with the knowledge-validation process, if Kari had continued to deny her association with the project, she would have been allowing the white male academic to control the knowledge available to people. This would contribute to the silence of queer Latinx voices that The Q-Sides was working against.

The lowrider cars are obviously an important component to re-staging the photos. But it is common that car clubs tend to be very sexist and homophobic. Vero continues to explain that she had an internal struggle when she was reaching out to the car owners because the cars are a crucial part of the album covers – there is only one album cover without a car. Having the cars in the photos was essential to recreating and achieving the lowrider aesthetic that the artists were working for. When asked about approaching the car clubs and car owners about using their cars for the project, the artists had some interesting stories. Vero’s cousin, Camilo, reassured one of the car owners that “it’s [the project] cool, they’re girls, its two girls together.” Kari interrupts the story to say, “we were like, ‘I don’t think they get it.’” Laughter broke out in the kitchen among the four of us because the story was funny to us all. This anecdote is significant because it demonstrates how the men would be more willing to contribute to the project if the subject were two women, rather than two men. Kari’s remark about them not understanding what they meant by two girls indicates that they were expecting the two girls not to be lesbians. Rodríguez analyzed responses to homosexuality in *Lowrider* magazine. The car owners not understanding that the photo-shoot was a queer interpretation of the *East Side Story* albums and expecting the two women to be hyper-sexualized acted as evidence to the exclusivity of heterosexuality in lowrider culture. It also reinforced the expectation that men have for women to be dressed in bikinis to cater to the heterosexual male’s sexual desires (Rodríguez 2011:126). Even in Chappell’s chapter titled “Auto Bodies” he discusses the gendered media in lowrider culture. Chappell cites Sarah S. Lochlann Jain to explain that the erotic images of the female body were a performance of hyper masculinity.

A lot of the homophobic and machismo attitudes that surfaced in the Mission stemmed from an online account from the Instagram account. Vero mentioned that her cousin Camilo

approached her about the negative attention that he was getting from other lowriders for being associated with the project. Vero shared a story about a conversation she had with Camilo; she explained how she “fixed” the problem by “taking care of his ego and taking care of the project”. When she talked to Camilo about it she had to tell him this: “I told you straight up what it [the show] was about and I just want to tell you that one way I would describe you is that you’re very comfortable in your manhood. You know exactly who you are and you know exactly who you’re not.” DJ Brown Amy and Vero explained, and I agreed that, comforting the egos of men in these cultures is so common that it is a natural instinct for many Latina women. Vero said that there was no other option for her to get around this because she needed his support, particularly his access to cars, for the project. Even while trying to combat sexism and homophobia they had to nurture his covert machismo and homophobia in order to begin the dialogue.

During the 1980s, Galería de la Raza began a tradition of hosting murals outside of their building. A decade later, an artists and Galería board member developed a program titled “Regeneration Project (ReGen),” a program that aims to provide emerging artists with exhibition and professional development opportunities that directly involved young Latino artists in the management of Galería. The “Digital Mural Project” (DMP) was born out of ReGen. DMP is an ongoing community art program that replaces temporary murals on Bryant street with computer-generated images. The Maricon Collective, a collective of queer Chicano/Latino DJs and artists, developed a digital mural for DMP and Galería. The collective’s mural is titled “Por Vida” (or “For Life”) and it depicts “two same-sex couples in lowrider, Latino style clothing gently embracing, and a transgender man in the center” (*El Tecolote*).



Figure 4: First defacement.

The first time (June 15, 2015) it was defaced the assailant defaced the gay male couple. Then the Instagram account that was encouraging this act of discrimination explained to his followers that the other same sex couple depicted was a lesbian couple, and promoted people to deface that couple as well. Within hours there is scribbled paint over the two same-sex couples and the title of the piece.

Galería released a statement the day after this happened explaining that these projects are being presented during the LGBTQ Pride Month and that this attack was a “reminder that homophobia is alive and well in our communities (Riveria 2016).” The statement had to inform the public that the intention of the work is to bring visibility to many queer individuals who grew up on the periphery of lowrider culture. The statement continues to inform the public that the people who created these pieces of art are community leaders that advocate for the community’s

needs, thus demonstrating the need to validate and advocate for community space for queer Latinx narratives. The statement further explains that queerness in the Latino community has always existed but it has been silenced by generations of patriarchy and machismo that control our communities. Manuel Paul, the artist who created the mural, says “to begin an honest conversation, we must accept that we live intersectional lives and we need to arrive with some level of open-mindedness, as we will encounter differences of opinions.” Anzaldúa and Collins would consider Paul’s statement as a call to consciousness. Collins and Anzaldúa’s work is geared toward creating a new consciousness and understanding of how race affects gender and sexuality. The social forces that suppress the racialized gender and sexuality minority, that were mentioned in Collins and Anzaldúa’s work, are depicted in the homophobic attitudes that were being demonstrated in the Mission (Collins 1989:770, Anzaldúa 1999:6). He finished his statement by saying that they will fix the mural as many times as necessary, but encourages people who are demonstrating violent homophobic attitudes to be openhearted and to have community dialogues. A week later (June 22, 2015), the vandals struck again. This time, the assailants were more informed about the mural and included the transgendered man who proudly displayed his scars from surgery, the same-sex couples, and the title.



Figure 5: Second defacement (KRON 4 News)

After another week, the mural was the victim of another act of vandalism. Late night Monday, June 29, 2015 the mural was set on fire. Henry Pacheco, Galería's communication representative called this an act of terrorism because this was putting far more people in harm than just the artists who knew they were risking their safety. By burning the building, the assailant was putting community members at risk. The entire situation brings up the conversation of community again because you cannot advocate for the community whilst continuing to endanger community members. Later that night Galería hosted a rally to help take this moment and transform it into a more inclusive community event.



Figure 6: Mural after third defacement.

During my interview with Al, he recalled an exhibit at Galería that was attacked because of the homoerotic imagery that included depictions of iconic figures in the Latino community like The Pope and Fidel Castro. Al expressed how insulted he felt by the acts of discrimination that occurred with that show, and with The Q-Sides, because he embodies what they are so aggressively upset with.

Al and his brother had a violent relationship. There were many physical altercations and a lot of mental abuse. In his youth, Al's brother made him an outsider to lowrider culture because he did not want him around his friends. Additionally, his sister did not want "her little brother tagging along with the girls." Since Al was always pushed outside of the culture, "coming to this park, to other brown queers," was very welcoming. Something interesting about Al's photo-shoot is that the original image is extremely macho and hyper-masculine. But in the re-staging of the photo with the queer Latinx, they were producing the same sense of masculinity but in a queer perspective by including gay men, trans-men, and masculine of center women. Vero describes it as "a sexy scene...very masculine and very queer."



Figure 7: The Q-Sides, Volume 3.

In many ways, this photo resists against many misconceptions of queer Latinx identities. This photo for Al was unique also because he has always been attracted to the masculinity within lowrider and cholo culture, something he attributes to his relationship with his brother, the

beginning stages of the punk rock scene, the military, and sadomasochism¹⁶. This shoot allowed him to participate in the archetypes of masculinity that he always desired to be apart of but was always kept outside of and through this he was able to tell his story. The larger Latino community associates homosexuality in males with femininity and lesbian Latinas with masculine gender presentations. The people in this photo are taking on a very masculine identity which goes against what the larger Latino community expects. Next, the masculine of center women who posed with the men are embracing their identities that are constantly being denied by their families because it is an act of defiance against Latino cultural values and norms. This photo breaks down stereotypes of the gay Latino male and femininity, and embraces the deviant behavior of masculine of center queer Latinas. The misconceptions about femininity and masculinity and queer identities probably would stem from the folktale that Anzaldúa mentions a half woman half man that personifies the queer identity for Anzaldúa: both male and female, or in this case feminine and masculine (1999:41). The following soundtrack is a subsection to this section on homophobia and masculinity because it relates to the roots of homophobia in Latino culture.

¹⁶ Al Lujan is the director a small documentary titled “S/M In The Hood” which explores this portrayal of masculinity in the predominately Latino neighborhood.

Track 6: “Have I Sinned” by Donnie Elbert

Donnie Elbert asks if he has sinned and begs to understand what he has done to make his loved one cry. The thought of going against church values is a huge concern for many Latinx who are coming out to their family, reiterating gender roles that are prevalent in Latino communities. Muñoz discusses how queer Latinx are constantly renegotiating and reconstructing their identities because of the gender and sexual identities that are being imposed on them through religious and cultural expectations (2010:62). When I walked into Al’s house, the first thing that struck me was how many religious icons were displayed around his house. The moment you walked into the house you saw a huge depiction of La Virgen de Guadalupe, the patron saint for Mexico, in the living room and even in the bathroom signs of the cross and images of Jesus being crucified were on every wall. Al’s entire back is tattooed in a huge image of La Virgen de Guadalupe. It was clear that church had a place in his life. Though Al did not talk about its significance in his life, based on my literature review, it is easy to see how coming out to his family may have been a challenge. La Virgen is another representation for The Virgin Mary. Jesus and his family (mother and father) are the ideal family structure. This family portrait is significant to the church, thus it is significant to the Latino family household. When your sexuality makes it impractical to perform this familial archetype, it disrupts the cultural and historical expectations of *la familia*, or the family.



Figure 8: The Q-Sides, Volume 2. Features a masculine of center woman with her son.

Additionally, Anzaldúa discusses the significance behind this figure in her chapter titled *Entering Into The Serpent*. Though La Virgen is not significant in Maria's story, Maria grew up in a Catholic household. Her mother firmly believes in the church and attends church frequently. When she came out to her mother, her mother's acceptance was conditional and she also did not want any one else in the family to know about her sexuality. She remembers her mom saying, "You're my daughter and I love you, but don't tell anyone else." Maria knew instinctively that it was because she did not want to be associated with something so deviant, especially her daughter. Her mother's reaction is easily interpreted as discontent with her daughter's sexuality because of her deviance from the ideal family structure. For Anzaldúa, La Virgen represents the virgin, the traitor, and the woman who lost her children, or La Llorona. A queer Latina can never the representation of this because her sexuality brings shame to her family. Though my literature

review did not have significant amount of religion, the interviews made it clear that religion and religious figure had an impact on how gender roles were assigned. The Q-Sides denied this ideology because of one of the participants featured in Volume 2. She is a masculine of center woman with her son. This is important because it forces the community to understand that a family or household can come out of a queer family.

Track 7: “There Is Something On Your Mind” by Big Jay McNeely

You know in my youth, one of the things I always knew for sure was being queer. I didn't have the word for it, but I knew I had to be cool about it. I always knew the first thing I had to be DL (down low, or secretive) about was being queer, even though it was the only thing I had known and was sure about my whole life. (Personal Interview, Vero Majano, 2016)

A common theme that presented itself during my interviews is not talking about queer latinx identities. For reasons explained like general homophobia in the community and connections to the church, families often avoid talking about it because it is easier to ignore it. I chose the song “There Is Something On Your Mind” by Big Jay McNeely because he is singing about how his loved one is not sharing whatever is on their mind. He is unsure what is on his loved one's mind but fears he will not understand. All of my participants expressed similar sentiments.

DJ Brown Amy believes that the habit of not speaking about things is just a cultural phenomenon in Latino communities. She reminded both Vero and I of all the times our families have said something that reinforced gender roles and our mothers and *abuelitas*, or grandmothers, would tell us, “*mija [daughter]*, ignore it.” When the mural was revealed, and then defaced, some of the queer Latinx in the community that were not involved in either of the

projects told Vero that she should have consulted with more people before allowing it to be posted. They feared that the hate crimes would extend to their physical bodies, so they did not want to start a conversation about what it meant to be a queer Latino in lowrider culture. As cited in Rodríguez’s essay, Cherríe Moraga and Tomás Almaguer call the queer Latino male the “weak link” and passive figures in the movement for queer Latinx liberation.



Figure 9: The Q-Sides, Volume 6.

I asked Al, as much as he felt comfortable with sharing, to talk about his familial relationships because he had mentioned that he had rocky relationships with his siblings. He took a deep breath, unlocked eyes with myself and said, “you know ... so ... yeah ... I don’t care. My brother molested me when we were young and that was part of him shutting me out.” He explained that that was just his brother’s violent way of dealing with the trauma in their lives.

His sister was Al's protector at home because their mother was working a lot to provide for the single-parent household. But his sister began to run away and his protector was gone. He recalled this one-day when his sister had returned home for a brief moment and she had all her friends over at their house. They were joking around and said that they were "going to put chola make up on Beto" (family nick name for Al). He remembers saying "No" verbally, but remembers having a deep desire for them to move forward with the dare. So they put the big eyebrows on him and they pushed him out onto the street, and everyone was laughing and having a good time, but he knew that his sister could tell that he was enjoying this moment because he was reacting unlike any other boy who would have been in this situation. But his sister never said anything.

A lot of his life at home consisted of ignoring things. Neither of his siblings ever spoke about the abuse. His sister and mother never had dialogues about his sexuality after his sister outed him. Throughout his youth his sister continued to runaway, he and his brother continued the abusive relationship. On the occasions that his sister was home, she would bring over a friend of hers and they would all dabble in some drugs, and then his sister would leave. He figured that his sister was trying to get her friend to seduce him and turn him straight. When his mother and grandmother died, though it was tragic and sad, he felt freer than he had ever felt before. He finally felt like all the ignoring and avoiding was done, so he joined the navy to get out of East L.A., then he followed his heart to follow someone he had fallen in love with to San Francisco. This reminded me of Rodríguez's analysis of an interview in *Lowrider* magazine. The interviewee was a queer Latino man and he was being asked questions about whether he would get married to a woman or whether he ever "thought about going straight." Through the analysis of the interview, Rodríguez can tell that the interviewers from *Lowrider* magazine were unable to

understand his deviant lifestyle and could only understand the interviewee as a confused person (2011: 131).

Maria's example was "the tía that never got married." She explains how everyone in the family is aware that this aunt is gay or queer, which explains why she has not gotten married. She laments about how Latino families try to hide these individuals in the family by ignoring the conversation of why she never married or why she never brings home a boyfriend. Ignoring conversations about a queer Latinx identity prevents the larger community from coming to consciousness. Collins and Anzaldúa both use their theoretical frameworks to move towards a new consciousness and understanding of intersecting identities. Anzaldúa discusses how coming to consciousness moves her forward every time she learns something new and she can never stay the same person after she learns. The things she learns bring in new insights to life and help her to become decolonized by social and cultural forces that work to keep her in a gender specific role (Anzaldúa 1999:70-71). When families actively ignore discussing queerness in the community, they prevent themselves from gaining a new consciousness about the marginal lives their loved ones are living. Anzaldúa describes this as a "reluctance to cross over" and out of the boundaries of the cultural norms that exist in Latino culture. Big Jay McNeely's song "There Is Something On Your Mind" is dedicated to everyone who do not cross over to talk about contemporary Latinx issues and experiences.

Track 8: "If My Heart Could Speak" by The Manhattans

Growing up in lowrider culture and knowing that you are queer often causes an internal struggle to share what your heart's true desires or to keep it inside. The Manhattans sing about being fearful about what will happen if they share how they truly feel. Vero talked about oldies music being a form of communication. DJ Brown Amy supports this idea by explaining that it

was the safest way for queer youth in Latino lowrider culture to communicate their desires because they couldn't come out, but the music was what let them imagine themselves with whomever they wanted to. The music was the portal to living their truth. Vero remembers her first album and it was by Donny Osmond. The song "Let My People Go" resonated with her because she felt like it was her, she wanted to leave her home because she knew her sexuality would not be accepted by her community. As often as Vero says that queerness saved her life, she thinks she owes a lot of her survival to oldies because she was able to put her feelings or desires in the music. She remembers singing along with the music and saying "Ok, I'm gonna put this [emotions/feelings] right here right now because I can't put it anywhere else." Vero remembers scratching girls names onto the back of records that she associated with each girl. She still has a mix tape with "I Love You For All Seasons" by The Fuzz, and every time she hears that song, she is transported to her first love.



Figure 10: The Q-Sides Volume 12.

Growing up, DJ Brown Amy lived in a religious household. The only music she was allowed to listen to was Christian music and oldies. DJ Brown Amy recalled her youth and not feeling like her home environment was safe for her to come out. She says that oldies are what allowed her to feel safe. Listening to oldies music was what allowed her to explore her deepest desires. She felt safe enough to think about her queerness and what her world would look like if it were acceptable. Through oldies she could imagine “if things were different, if it were safe for me [her] to come out at that time.”

Track 9: “I’m On The Outside Looking In” by Little Anthony and The Imperials

Little Anthony and The Imperials’ song “I’m On the Outside Looking In” paints the perfect image existing on the periphery of lowrider culture as a queer Latinx. My interview participants talked vividly of being on the outside of lowrider culture for various reasons, but the lack of queer visibility was a major reason. Vero remembers wearing her jacket with her neighborhood nickname “La Shorty ” and standing on the corner of the street as all the guys and girls flirted and went cruising. Growing up as a queer person in Chicano culture, DJ Brown Amy and Vero did not believe that other queer Latinx existed in the world. DJ Brown Amy always “thought that [she] was the only one.” As DJ Brown Amy grew up she realized that gay people had always been there, “closeted or not, they have always been in Chicano and lowrider communities.” DJ Brown Amy grew up in the Los Angeles area, and the neighborhood she is from is comprised of mostly Latino people, and unlike San Francisco, this area did not have a lot of out queer people. But she remembers her uncle calling someone a “faggot” and she did not understand what it was, but that it was bad, and she did not want to be that.

Kari recalls a community member speaking at the community gathering to discuss the defacement of the Maricon Collective’s digital mural about how he does not understand why this

is happening because he remembers how “we were cool back in the day, you know the gay people, we were cool.” Meanwhile Vero and DJ Brown Amy were confused and thinking, “who is he talking about?” Kari comes into the conversation and says he thinks that because many of those people were not out yet, so there was so possible way for them to “be cool.” Vero remember him saying, “we [straight lowriders] didn’t care if you were gay or whatever because we were all about brotherhood.” It is clear that the group of people he was talking about are similar to the men who interviewed a gay Latino man for *Lowrider* magazine – the people who do not want to accept people who are different from themselves. Without being aware, his macho, heterosexual character reinforces the traditional heterosexual exclusivity of lowrider culture.



Figure 11: The Q-Sides, Volume 11.

Maria’s coming out story was an emotional and beautiful story with so many poignant moments. She came home for the weekend because she was missing her family, and her heart

was heavy with wanting to come out to her family. Most of her life, her mother was the only person to cut her hair. So when she went home, she asked for a haircut and so her mother and her go out into the garage. Maria was sitting in a chair next to her father's mustang and her mother began to cut her hair. She wanted to share with her mother that she is in a relationship with someone she really loved, and that loved her back. But, she was a girl. She describes this scene with such intimate details of her mom running her fingers through her hair, something that she has done all of Maria's life. Maria describes her body's position as "vulnerable...with my head down and her hands running through my hair." Then suddenly she could not stop crying and shaking. Once she calmed down, she came out to her mom. But the conversation with her mom did not go as planned. The first thing she said was that she loved her and accepted her, as long as she didn't tell anyone else in the family. The next thing she said was, "That is your life in San Francisco and Oakland. That stays there." Her mom forced her to keep her lives separate and pushed her outside the moment she came out.

The constant exclusion that Al experienced in his youth forced him into another culture that was deemed "outside" of mainstream culture – punk rock. He explained in his interview that "people who grew up with siblings in the culture and were in the closet or obviously very feminine or very butch, they either fled or stayed and dug their roots into the culture" and ignored their true selves by staying in the closet. Punk rock was a subculture for the "freaks and outsiders and outcasts" so he was drawn to it because "I'm [he's] a [brown] queer and I [he] didn't know any other brown queers." When he was in middle school, he began to take a bus to West Hollywood and get the weekly newspaper and the gay magazines and where punk culture was blossoming. He collected the papers and magazines under his bed, and one time his sister found them when he was gone and she told their mother, thus outing him. When high school

started, he was not ready to come out so he stayed in the closet until he transferred to a different school in West Hollywood. When he was a student in East L.A. there was this one “queer, really feminine guy who wanted to be my [his] friend. He wore this pink fuzzy sweater with pearls on them and had orange bleached hair”, but he stayed in the closet at school for fear of harassment. Al remembers thinking to himself “I am not ready for it.” He was not ready to come out to the community that he knew would be so incredibly homophobic and unaccepting of his identity, especially if people associated femininity with queerness. For this reason he decided to switch to a school in Hollywood where the queer community was more open and the general surrounding community was less homophobic than East L.A.

Track 10: “Why Should We Stop Now” by The Natural Four

The Natural Four understand that they have a good thing going, so why should the progress stop? Even though there was some backlash from the community, there was also a lot of pride being taken and people were finally being heard. It has taken a long time to get to this point, but the song encourages lowrider to be strong and persevere. I was curious to know what Kari, Vero, and DJ Brown Amy thought about the impact of their project on the community of The Mission, and even people outside the community. When asked about it DJ Brown Amy emphasized that she thought that despite all the media coverage on the hate crimes and homophobia, there was a lot of love for the project. She recalls all the times random people came up to her and told her how much they were moved by the project and how much support they got on the opening night.

Vero remembers on opening night one of the many queer Latino Mission organizers born and raised in San Francisco came up to her after the opening night party and said, “I feel like we made it! We’re here now.” She said, “the hate took up a lot of the media, but...the love is so

much bigger.” She recalls a young queer boy from Fresno (about 3 hours away) came up to her and said, “I never thought I could be this.” He told her about how macho his father was and how much they both loved the music, but never though he could be included because of his sexuality. Kari remembers a young girl speaking to her and telling her how her mom was lesbian, but her husband kicked her out of the house when she was found out. He ostracized her from the family, and even her family did not speak to her until she married another man, but now she is unhappy. The young girl was so moved because after the trauma with her mom, she never imagined seeing her mom’s story represented in this culture.

Maria brought up a topic from the closing event panel. While much of the community wants to deny that queerness exists in lowrider culture and Latino culture, there were homegirls and homeboys that would hook up with each other after cruising, but never speak about it. When she came out to her dad, he had a much different reaction because of his own past. When he was younger, he had hooked up with one of his homeboys. This anecdote from her father, who is a traditional lowrider cholo with a macho identity, reaffirmed to her that queerness is something that has always existed within her community. Maria thinks that The Q Sides allowed for conversations to happen that will help to break down stigmas within our communities. She says that when the community members try to erase the presence of queerness in the community, they are trying to stigmatize and shame people who are still your friends and family.

After bringing home one of her transgendered Latino friends, Maria’s family became more invested in learning more about the queer spectrum. She remembers her 60-year aunt asking questions about hormones and what it means to transition. This experience makes her believe that the culture is shifting and having queer Latino narratives being publicized, like with The Q Sides, attitudes are changing and important conversations are being held. Without the

homophobia there would be no need for The Q Sides. The backlash, though scary and sad, was important because it revealed how much social change in terms of accepting the queer community that exists within Latino culture. She believes that for the younger generations, these changes are going to make it much easier for them to come out and to be included in the community where families will be more accepting and more aware.



Figure 12: The Q-Sides, Volume 9.

For Al, participating in the photo-shoot replaced the loss of never being able to participate in it when he was younger. He explained that, “being able to participate in something that may have been uncomfortable or painful, or something that you were excluded from was really empowering.” He said that every process of the project that he was involved in from the photo-shoot to the opening night, he got “to go back and live this life.” Something that was significant about the project was having so many different generations involved. For him it was exciting to see young people “in their neighborhood and represented.” Additionally, the amount of press that The Q Sides picked up was amazing to him because it started dialogues that had

never been started before and got various responses from various types of people like politicians, writers, artists, and community members. He mentions briefly that there is a possibility that maybe this conversation had been started before, but “in a very isolated bubble, of let’s say the literary world where people are coming together with like minds.” He argues that The Q Sides made it more accessible to the communities that needed it as much as the academic world. This reminded me of Hames-García and Martínez’s efforts to “re-member” the gay Latino experience. Hames-García and Martínez argue that the gay Latino male experience has been silenced and the narrative needs to be pieced back together. The way that Al described the morning he did the photo-shoot for The Q-Sides sounded like his narrative was being pieced together for the first time.

In the beginning, DJ Brown Amy really just wanted to represent their experience as queer Latinos in lowrider culture, and return to the idea of feeling like the only one when you were younger. But the night of the opening, and every night after that was a reminder that you were not the only person, and you are not alone. The way that my participants spoke about the opening night was as if their stories were being included in the traditional lowrider narrative. The Q-Sides was the vehicle that allowed the queer Latinx narrative to be included in the traditional story. Not only is it including the queer Latinx narrative, but also it is a source of encouragement, in the Mission district as well as Latino communities who participate in lowriding, to come to consciousness about how queer sexualities exist within the community.

Track 11: “The Town I Live In” by McKinley Mitchell



Figure 13: The Q-Sides Volume 10

As mentioned in the introduction, the Mission is experiencing gentrification that is causing the residents to redefine the identity of the neighborhood. Also mentioned in my introduction, the Castro district and the Mission share borders which sets up the perfect location to use Gloria Anzaldúa’s borderlands theoretical framework to demonstrate how queer Latinx in lowrider culture straddle borders in a third space where race, gender, and sexuality exist simultaneously in the heterosexual exclusivity of lowrider culture. My study’s participants have strong connections to the Mission, but also to their queer identity; in this sense, they too, live in a third space as queer Latinx in the Mission. McKinley Mitchell sings about packing his bags and getting out of the town he lives in, where he feels the loneliest. Growing up, a lot of my

participants felt lonely and as if they did not belong to the place they called home. For some queer Latinx, it can provoke an internal struggle of knowing where one belongs. Through The Q-Sides, queer Latinx who participate in lowrider culture are creating a third space that they can call their own and include in both of their worlds: Latino and queer identities. Vero tells a vivid story that she remembers from her youth that characterizes not quite having a space in the community that you love:

I was in a foster home when I was like maybe 11 or 12 and I wanted to get the fuck outta there and there was this 10 o'clock news [on television] and Mayor Feinstein was on 24th St. and there was like hella lowriders going by and [like] all these guys going the big "eme" (big 'M' sign to represent The Mission District) behind her, and I was like I gotta get outta here, I gotta get down there, and then she says, "It is 10 o'clock do you know where your children are?"¹⁷ I was like I'm leaving and I found a way to bust out of the foster home and went down to 24th St. and I know that the culture is so homophobic, but it is also the place I wanted to be at. (Personal Interview, Vero Majano, 2016)

The story she shared with me depicts how she wanted to be included in the culture and the presentation of something that she identified with, even despite the homophobia she knew existed. She had a strong desire to be there with the lowriders on 24th St. to engage with the space making they were conducting. Lowriding culture was formed on a sense of pride in ethnic identity as well as mechanical skill. Cruising became a cultural practice because it was the moment where you could take your car out and flaunt your artistic and mechanical skills to the *barrio*, or neighborhood. The San Francisco Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Pride Celebration Committee plans and hosts the Pride Celebration annually, where the queer

¹⁷ This is an example of the media and politicians stereotyping lowriders on the street.

community can “educate the world, commemorate heritage, celebrate culture, and liberate people.” The Pride Parade is day in San Francisco where the queer community can do the same thing that lowriders do during cruises, they proclaim their queer identities with pride and by honoring where they come from. In making space for social identities where they have often been excluded, The Q-Sides was the introduction of a conversation of two intersecting identities that have never been addressed before.

Vero, Kari, and DJ Brown Amy did not anticipate the political and cultural conversations that occurred because they did not approach the project with that original intention. When the youth were outside Galería protesting the queer-centered exhibit, Vero and Ani had to call a community organizer who works with youth in gangs and when she tried to encourage them to leave, they shouted that they belonged there and that it was their home. They were determined to claim this space as theirs, and only theirs. Part of this protest stems from what Kari explained as people feeling threatened and entitled to claim memories and history of Latino lowriding. The Instagram account that was harassing the exhibit over the Internet proclaimed that The Q-Sides was appropriating their culture (Rivas 2016). This made community members feel even more threatened, leading to community members wanting to have more authority over their sense of nostalgia. I think a lot of this is linked to gentrification in the neighborhood. As new people move in, and people move out, and the demographic changes, people are feeling more threatened than ever, thus are reacting to other issues with blame. Chappell experienced a similar phenomenon in Austin, Texas during his participant observation. People were moving in and out of Austin as people are currently doing in the Mission right now. The boundaries of the neighborhood that people defined as Austin or the Mission were being redefined and rapidly changing as locals are forced out and outsiders assume their places. The people in the Mission

reacted the way they did because they were desperately trying to hold one to the boundaries of their neighborhood, as they were trying to keep the boundaries of their culture.

Vero contributed to this idea of claiming space when she talked about the graffiti that happens in The Mission. She recalls growing up in The Mission and always seeing a tag on the street or random places and it said “Gomez was here” and for her, The Q Sides was a method of tagging and letting people know that queer Latinos are as present as anyone else and that they were going to make sure they were included in the story of The Mission and of the culture. The spatial politics of the art of graffiti and tagging, and the idea of The Q Sides as a form of tagging the queer Latino identity in The Mission allows for queer Latinos in lowriding to claim space that they have never been able to claim before. A popular oldie is “Dedicated To The One I Love” by The Shirelles. The Q Sides opening had a blank wall with a title saying, “Dedicated To The One I Love” where people could write names and love letters to people that they love, people they loved from the past, or to whomever or whatever they wanted. The act of doing this was inclusive of all people regardless of their gender or romantic interests. It was a beautiful sight to see because it had tags from different couples, friends, and even dedications to that special someone.



Figure 14:
Picture of the
dedication wall.

When Maria brought up this idea of nostalgia, Vero responded positively. She thought of all the queer Latino lowriders and how the project allowed them to include themselves and to be present in a sense of nostalgia that they have constantly been denied. The show allowed queer Latino lowriders to be more than an audience member in lowriding. Even more for the models in the series, it was more than the aesthetic, they took pride in being able to represent their history, culture, pain, and love that was embedded in the photos just by recreating it, and even further by including queer Latinx as the spotlights. In Kathleen Stewart's *Ordinary Affects*, she discusses how the ordinary things in one's every day life are never looked at as significant. In the case of lowriding, it is significant because lowriders understand that the historical origins of their culture stem from a lower socioeconomic background and from being systematically harassed by police. The Q-Sides allowed queer Latinx to make a place of their own in the narrative of lowriding while maintaining their queer identities in a Latino context.

For Vero, as an out queer artist who focuses on her queer identity in a lot of her work, she says she is also constantly coming out through her work. The Q Sides, for her was representative of the space she was constantly denied and she was creating the dialogue to speak about her role and position in this community as a queer Latina who loves lowriding culture too. But she argues that if she is representing herself through her work and if someone is not okay with asserting her position in the culture, then who do the memories belong too? Who has the right to experience the nostalgia? This question brought all of us back to the theme of coming from a place of love and memories that warm the heart. Vero explains that it is not just The Mission who shares this culture, but anyone who responded to oldies and to the music can claim this sense of nostalgia. For DJ Brown Amy, she has to constantly remind herself that she started from a place of love for the culture and the music, so despite the amount of political conversations that have emerged out

of The Q Sides, she still belongs to this and she can claim these things, even in the sight of homophobia.

The photography series are where you can see a lot of this idea of claiming. Kari, the photographer, wanted to make sure she was not hosting a fashion shoot. She said it was one of the more difficult things because you were asking people to pose, but asking these people to give something of themselves, and to claim identities and places. For example, in Volume 7 with Sarah and DJ Brown Amy, Kari really wanted Sarah to claim DJ Brown Amy as her partner. Another example is with Juanita MORE!¹⁸ in Volume 10. Kari really wanted Juanita to claim his drag fashion, the city of San Francisco, and the cars, which represent lowrider culture. I think this particular photo in the series is significant to the purposes of my study because Juanita is claiming the city of San Francisco, but if you know enough about the geography of the city, you can see where the Castro and Mission are. Not only that but the subject of the photo includes two beautiful lowriders and a gay Latino man dressed in drag. This photo addresses gender identities and sexuality with Juanita as the subject within queer culture, Latino culture, and lowrider culture.

¹⁸ A drag performer who is a gay Latino male. Featured in The Q-Sides Volume 10.

Track 12: “My True Story” by The Jive Five



Figure 15: The Q-Sides Volume 7.

Jive Five’s ballad “My True Story” describes how love will make you feel. Everyone has a story to tell, especially in lowrider culture. How you started, what your car looks like and the journey you had with the car all matter in lowrider culture. The Q-Sides is the true story of queer Latinx in lowrider culture. Contrary to what people perceived the photos to be, the photos did not have anything vulgar or “super scandalous,” in the words of DJ Brown Amy. DJ Brown Amy posed in Volume 7 with her wife, Sarah. This photo was chosen to be on many forms of paper media, including the flyer for the exhibit. DJ Brown Amy shares with me during the interview that this photo was chosen because it was “visibly queer.” They needed it to be visibly queer

because they needed to proclaim that it was not what people expected and that they were claiming this culture and history too; and that they were there to tell their true story.

In Al's interview Vero, Al, and I talked about the naturalness of the poses that everyone in the series had for the photo-shoots. While it was a photo-shoot and there was some direction to help replicate the same image as the original album covers, there was little direction given to the models because the "poses are internal." Vero says that "you guys have been carrying those [poses] like a language, and you speak it." Al jokes and says that "if you were to take any of us and say, 'put 'em in a garage with the other cholos,' that stuff comes out inherently, its natural. Your toes come out, your shoulders go back."



Figure 16: The Q-Sides Volume 4 featuring one of my participants, Maria.

Maria remembers the day of her photo-shoot by vividly describing how it was a busy

street and there were busses passing, people driving by, and most of the cars would honk or slow down and turn so they could check out the cars, or figure out what was happening. This anecdote describes how The Q Sides was literally making space for queer Latinos in lowrider culture. They made a public display of the inclusion of their identities. For Maria, The Q Sides was a way for people to be able to talk about their experience with lowrider culture, and being queer. The project was simply people claiming their identities and their culture; she says they were “being real about why we love the cars and the music.” The identity of lowrider culture is carried through generations and is a cultural memory that is held no matter where you are or who is around. For many Latinos in neighborhoods where you can find lowrider culture, you will see how the lowrider identity presents itself. Many of the neighborhoods where you find lowrider culture are weaved with the place-identity politics and spatial constructs of the *barrio*, or predominately Mexican-American /Latin American neighborhood (as defined in Chappell 2013:3 but I am using interchangeably with Latin American neighborhoods with histories of social activism). Posing the photographs in the series in Mission landmarks and locations significant to the city of San Francisco, like the Castro, The Q-Sides exercised the place-identity politics that come with capturing those neighborhoods in the photos. Photos like Volume 4 of The Q-Sides have my participant, Maria, posing in front of a Mission landmark. This is an example of what Chappell defines as “lowrider significance” (2013:4). The car and the location of the photo are “lowrider significant” because the photo is exposing a larger struggle that is happening within the community. For instance, having Maria posing in place of a man in the original photo, addresses gender and sexuality norms that do not include Maria’s identities as a queer Latina. Next, Maria mentioned that the car shop she is posing in front of is now a cross fit gym (personal interview, Lopez, 2016). The effects of gentrification are demonstrated in this

photo because a local business was replaced by a new business (according to my interview with Maria, a cross fit gym has replaced the auto shop that was a neighborhood icon). For the participants in the series, they were able to tell their stories with their bodies *sin pena*, or without shame, along side the power that a lowrider car has in affecting the space around them by carrying historical, social, and political contexts. Massumi discusses how the space between cultural material, like a photo from The Q-Sides series, and a larger system (i.e. homophobic attitudes in Latino culture), reflects the relationship between the two subjects. The Q-Sides is an attempt to harmonize queer Latinx in lowrider culture and homophobic attitudes in the Mission, and greater, the Latino community. Queer Latinx were able to claim space by using lowrider significance like body language and significant locations to Mission community members. For many generations, the queer Latinx narrative was never included, but now their “True Story” will be documented in Mission district and queer culture history.

Track 13: “These Oldies But Goodies” by Little Caesar and The Romans



Figure 17: Photo of opening night at Galería taken by Kari Orvik

Much of the music associated with lowrider culture is from the late 50s, early 60s and on. There is a song called “These Oldies But Goodies” by Little Caesar and The Romans that sings about the music that are associated with people and memories and love and heartbreak that haunt you, but there is nothing you can do because there are “oldies, but goodies.” Al finds it astounding that over half a century has passed since these songs has debuted, and since lowrider culture found place within Latino culture and history, yet the music and the culture still invoke such strong reactions. Both Amy and Al say that there are times when they will be up late doing things and they go into what they call “oldies mode.” Al says he gets sucked into this “hole of different feelings [from] pride, sadness...heartbreak...”

“It was so emotional. It was so beautiful. It was so beautiful,” Al recalls the opening night and describes all of the bombers lined up and ringing their sirens. Al grew up in East L.A.,

where most people would argue lowriding originates, and his mom would make him go with his older sister on the cruises down Whittier Boulevard so he could “chaperone.” He never really saw what people enjoyed about it or what the appeal was, but he says, “back then, you were just kind of driving back and forth and stopping at the gas station, but you know, you notice people are flirting and everything else...” For Al, the opening night brought him back to those days immediately. Beyond that, the amount of people who were there to support the project was amazing to him because a lot of his peers from his past were there, people who enjoyed the culture, and young queer folk were there to revel in the celebration of queer Latinx. For my participants, witnessing how it did not matter who you were, you loved the music and what it made you feel, you were there to support the project and the people that it celebrates.

The stories shared with me through my interviews affirmed what I uncovered in my literature review and provided data to help support my theoretical analysis of how queer Latinx claimed space, through The Q-Sides, in the traditional narrative of lowrider culture. My participants’ identities were constantly ignored and pushed to the periphery of both their ethnic culture and lowrider culture. As explained in Rodríguez’s “Carnal Knowledge” gay Latino men are aware of the cultural and historical value that the ideal family type has in the Latino community, which makes them fearful to be honest about their sexualities. As Rodríguez explains it “they have been written out of the Chicano family life.” This literally means that there is not space in Latino culture to include the queer Latinx narrative. Even in a form of community that Latino men have, *carnalismo*, or brotherhood excludes women of any sexuality, and most specifically gay men. Through the constant exclusion of the queer Latinx identities there have been many stories untold and voices unheard that are now struggling, as Rodríguez and Martínez would say, to be “re-membered” into the Latino narrative. Further, the added intersection of

lowrider culture pushes the queer Latinx narrative out to the periphery as well. While it reaffirms much of the same issues that occur with the general Latino culture, queer narratives were also never well documented or preserved in history in lowrider culture either. The constant objectification of women's bodies and reinforcement of heterosexual gender roles made closeted queer Latinx feel excluded from the culture. This forced queer Latinx to constantly have to re-negotiate and re-construct their identities within the borders of their race and queer identities. The Q-Sides allowed queer Latinx to practice *carnalismo*, "re-member" the forgotten and excluded queer Latinx narrative, and renegotiate and rewrite their experience into lowrider culture.

Chapter 6 | Conclusion

Galería de la Raza is a community-based art gallery that addresses contemporary Latino issues through art, culture and civic society, and encourages community dialogues to bring public awareness and appreciation of the Latinx experience. When Mission community members reacted negatively (the mural defacements) to The Q-Sides and the Por Vida mural by Maricon collective, it demonstrated how homophobia still exists in the greater Latino community. The Q-Sides and Por Vida mural challenged Latino culture to step outside of the boundaries of cultural norms that the community is comfortable upholding. By crossing over into lowrider culture, The Q-Sides tried to include queer Latinx narratives in a culture that excludes those exact voices that are always being silenced. Gloria Anzaldúa's Borderlands theory theorizes the geographical location of a border town on the border of Texas and Mexico to explain how she experiences the world as a Mexican-American lesbian woman. Her consciousness, in the words of Collins, allowed her to see how her gender, race, and sexuality affected her life. For the participants, and many others in the community, the Mission and the Castro share borders, creating a "third space" (1999:6) for queer Latinx in lowrider culture.

Lowrider cars carry historical and political contexts because of its historical origins in poor Mexican-American neighborhoods that could not afford new cars. The lowrider cars continue to carry some of the cultural resistance that developed out of subculture. Lowriders still work to create cars that invoke surprise and turn heads as their cruise down the street. Lowrider culture is an expression of racial marginalization and a manifestation of how the community reacted to it. The expressive nature of lowrider culture allows outsiders to engage with the historical and political contexts that are carried through the culture. Ben Chappell uses spatial

theory to provide a foundation to theorize how lowrider cars have developed their own cultural vernaculars that engage with large social forces outside of their social identities of race.

Lowrider culture and queer people of color, specifically queer Latinx have been explored separate from each other. *The Q Sides* was the first time that the queer Latinx narrative was explored in the context of lowrider culture. I wanted to address the lack of literature on lowrider culture and the queer Latinx narrative by employing activist scholarship and collaborative research. As an activist scholar, I wanted to avoid whitewashing tendencies of academia so I made an intentional effort to include scholars of color and queer scholars to contribute to more visibility for their work in academia. Using their works demonstrates that their work is valuable to their respective fields, further using their work. Further, using queer scholar and scholars of color, I can explain the intersectional lives queer Latinx by using people who also share those identities. Additionally, I tried to use scholars who also valued using marginalized scholars to explain marginal places in society. For instance, Michael Hames-García and Ernesto J. Martínez avoided using white queer scholars to explain the gay Latino experience because they wanted to resist the white washing tendencies of some queer academic work. Utilizing this method was important to me as a scholar of color because I wanted to create more visibility for their work. Additionally, since I was unable to do a Chicano studies or Ethnic studies minor or track in my major, I wanted to use authors that I would have been introduced to had I been able to do that.

My second activist intervention was to help Vero develop a plan for conducting interviews for her new idea to add onto the existing exhibition. She told me about her idea to record the participants' stories on to vinyl so that the record could go along with the photo. I explained to her that I would help her with the idea and assist in anything she asked. I also offered to help conduct and record the interviews after I graduate and return to California.

Though the interviews that I already conducted will not be included in the addition to The Q-Sides, we have now practiced the format that we will use when conducting interviews in the future. Vero once shared with me that finding funding for projects was difficult. So I offered my time and services as a volunteer assistant to alleviate some of the help that may be needed. Additionally, as I have grown very connected to The Q-Sides, I want to contribute to the artists and the participants by helping to document their stories beyond the photos.

When I got onto campus after conducting my interviews, I had this idea to bring The Q-Sides to campus. I felt like part of being an activist scholar for this particular demographic would be to expose people who are unfamiliar with both lowrider culture and the queer Latinx narratives that exist. I spoke to Vero, Kari, and DJ Brown Amy about the idea and asked if they would be willing to travel to Wooster, Ohio from San Francisco to have an artist panel and host the exhibit at The College of Wooster. Exposing people to stories that they are unaware of creates more visibility and awareness of those marginalized lives. Unfortunately the budget I created was too much for the school to afford with a last minute budget request in the Spring Semester. However, I still have hopes of bringing the exhibit to the school and joining the artists on a panel to discuss my role as an activist scholar in collaboration with the artists.

During the College of Wooster's Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Week, the department hosted a Wikipedia Edit-a-Thon. Wikipedia is the 8th "most read" website on the Internet (its forerunners include search engines, YouTube and other social media sites). It is evident that the general public uses Wikipedia as a source of information. Since Wikipedia articles on women, people of color, LGBTQ+ figures, and feminist/queer organizations are often incomplete, of low quality, or simply do not exist. Therefore, editing the existing pages or

creating one for something in one of those categories is important for public scholarship and it is important for activist scholars to engage in this intervention.

Something I learned about during my anthropology classes, specifically ethnographic methods, was the time spent with the subject of your study. I wish I had the opportunity to spend more time with my participants and with the artists. I feel like I would have been able to get more interviews with more participants and been able to build more of a relationship with them. Though I met the artists after the artistic process was finished, I would have loved to conduct participant observation at the photo-shoots. I think being able to do that would have allowed me to further discuss how the photo-shoots and the presence of queer Latinx in lowrider culture had affect on their surroundings.

I hope to one day revisit this intersection through another study. I would make it a more longitudinal and in-depth study. Also I hope to get in contact with one of my sources, Ben Chappell to discuss his use of spatial and affect theories in lowrider culture. I would also like to talk to him about the appropriation of Latino lowrider culture in Japan. I imagine myself conducting a study in Japan on this cultural phenomenon. As someone who is deeply connected to lowrider culture, this experience has been powerful and inspiring. The expressive nature of lowrider culture is overlooked by the harassment that lowrider culture receives, and I have become more knowledgeable in the depth of the history that lowriding exists within. Further I have really discovered my identity as an activist scholar of color and what I hope to achieve in the future in academia. I look forward to continuing my relationship with my participants and helping The Q-Sides further document the stories of queer Latinx in lowrider culture.

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