

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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Abstract Approved:

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In the contemporary United States, the process of “coming out of the closet,” or public disclosure of one’s non-normative sexual orientation or gender identity,¹ is ongoing and performative. Particularly within the context of dominant contemporary U.S. society, popular media favors a hegemonic set of defining characteristics, which thereby forces the exclusion of non-dominant identities. This thesis investigates the representations of non-heterosexual² Latinas and their coming out in three television programs, as well as the ways that these depictions contrast with the lived experiences of women who identify as lesbian, bisexual, or queer and Latina/Chicana. Narrative analysis, which incorporates the positionality of the investigator as a central tenet of research is also integral to this project. Findings suggest that the representations in popular media bear little resemblance to the lived experiences of the women interviewed.

¹ “Coming out” refers to the public disclosure of one’s non-normative identity. It was initially attached to sexual orientation, but has since become a term for gender expression or any other aspect of one’s identity that challenges dominant conceptions.

² “Non-heterosexual” in this context is self-explanatory, although for the duration of this thesis, I will use the term “queer” as an overarching identifier for “non-heterosexual” unless another term is specifically indicated. I do this with the intention of centering the destabilizing, queer theory interpretation of the term.

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Leaving the Closet: Coming Out Experiences of Queer Chicanas and Latinas and Their
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I understand that my thesis will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my thesis to any reader upon request.

Melissa R. Crocker, Author

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In the contemporary United States, the process of “coming out of the closet,” or public disclosure of one’s non-normative sexual orientation or gender identity,¹ is ongoing and performative. It can range from a terrifying, isolating, and sometimes-violent process to a liberating, fortifying, and cathartic set of experiences. Often it is through the pain and fear of exposing such a precious part of ourselves that we find community and support that we never knew existed. One important piece of embracing ourselves as queer individuals is being able to see ourselves represented in media. Particularly within the context of dominant contemporary U.S. society, popular media favors a hegemonic set of defining characteristics, which thereby forces the exclusion of non-dominant identities. Able-bodied whiteness, maleness, affluence, Christianity, and normative sexual behaviors² are among the preferred qualities in dominant narratives of acceptability. Individuals and communities who fall outside these norms are excluded not only in popular representations, but also in everyday interactions and navigation of systemic hurdles.

For queer Chicanas³ and Latinas,⁴ representation in mainstream U.S. media is limited, to say the least, especially considering that characters are often two-dimensional and fraught with harmful stereotypes. The long history of the sexual conquest of bodies of color by white (often male) bodies, the cultural conquest of Indigenous communities

¹ “Coming out” refers to the public disclosure of one’s non-normative identity. It was initially attached to sexual orientation, but has since become a term for gender expression or any other aspect of one’s identity

² Normative behaviors in dominant U.S. society refers largely to what Block (in interview with Kolodny, 2015) refers to as “penis-in-vagina sex.”

³ Chicana/o refers to Mexican American identities and is indicates a political consciousness associated with the Chicano movement that originated in the 1960s.

⁴ Latino/a individuals are from Central or South America or the Caribbean, but may also include Chicanas/os

and appropriation of Latin@⁵ identities, as well as the violent regulation of non-normative sexualities are all observable in popular representations of queer Latinas. This thesis investigates the representations of non-heterosexual⁶ Latinas and their coming out in three television programs, as well as the ways that these depictions contrast with the lived experiences of women who identify as lesbian, bisexual, or queer and Latina/Chicana. The purpose of collecting ethnographic interviews in addition to the narrative analysis of popular media representations is twofold: first, to draw attention to the ways that these representations, which originate from positions of power, are damaging and often maintain structures of inequity and oppression, and second, to re-center the voices of women who claim the identities that are often problematically depicted in these popular representations. By documenting lived stories and adding them to the collective pool from which popular media may draw, there is hope of bringing dynamic, nuanced, and empowering queer Chicana and Latina characters to television and other pop culture media.

Historical Background

Since the introduction of the heterosexual/homosexual dichotomy, sexual minority movements have historically been heavily focused on, dominated and defined by white individuals (Sedgwick, 1990). Usually, the most prominent individuals within

⁵ I use the “@” symbol in the style of Sandra K. Soto, who explains that the “queer performative ‘Chican@’ signals a conscientious departure from certainty, mastery, and wholeness, while still announcing a politicized collectivity... While some people pronounce Chican@ as ‘Chicana, Chicano’ or ‘Chicana/o,’ I prefer the diphthong *ao*.” When the *a/o* spelling is present, it is an indication of the preferred spelling and terminology of the time period.

⁶ “Non-heterosexual” in this context is self-explanatory, although for the duration of this thesis, I will use the term “queer” as an overarching identifier for “non-heterosexual” unless another term is specifically indicated. I do this with the intention of centering the destabilizing, queer theory interpretation of the term.

these movements are cismale-identified,⁷ which means that Euro-American notions of sexuality have infiltrated Subaltern communities and altered the experiences of People of Color (Anzaldúa, 1998). Particularly for Queer Women of Color, their sexuality is frequently regulated, consumed, and/or erased based on the demands of white hegemonic gender norms. One of the most visible examples of this white male influence is the notion of “coming out of the closet,” or the public announcement of one’s non-heterosexual or non-normative sexual orientation or gender identity (Sedgwick, 1990). Because of the unequal transmission of patterns and norms, from white Euro-American culture to non-white cultures, coming out has become an “essential” step in performing a non-heteronormative sexual orientation or identity, even when it conflicts with cultural expectations or increases the vulnerability of already marginalized individuals (Sedgwick, 1990; Anzaldúa, 1991). The decision to come out is also tied closely to dominant concepts of morality and truthfulness.

As queer theory developed, more nuanced identities began to emerge, such as “bisexual” and the term “queer,” itself. This shift in terminology is especially important because of its more inclusive nature, as well as its reclamation of the previously derogatory slur. However, queer theory sought to reject all things normative, but, in doing so, inadvertently created another essentialist category whose unifying theme is non-normativity. In many cases within contemporary LGBTQ+ discourse, “queer” is used interchangeable by individuals who previously identified as lesbian, gay, or bisexual, meaning that their terminology has evolved alongside academic discourse, but their conceptualization of the preferred gender of sexual or romantic partners has not

⁷ Biologically assigned male at birth with a corresponding masculine gender identity

necessarily changed. The terminology used to self-identify also varies by race, class, language, and geographic location within the U.S (Anzaldúa, 1998).

The Chicana Feminist movement arose as a result of the combined sexism experienced by women involved in the Chicano civil rights movement, and racism in the mainstream feminist movement, which was largely dominated by white women (Anzaldúa & Moraga, 1981). In the early stages of both movements in the 1960s-1970s, compulsory heterosexuality also contributed to feelings of alienation by queer Latinas/Chicanas. Because of the gendered and racialized nature of these parallel but distinct movements, queer Latinas/Chicanas were forced to exert disproportionate effort in order for their voices to be heard. Queer Chicanas/Latinas historically had very few outlets to voice their experiences and subsequently few resources to see those experiences reflected, which led to the Chicana Feminist movement, spearheaded most notably by queer women such as Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherrie Moraga, Chéla Sandoval, and Carla Trujillo.

Borderlands Theory (Anzaldúa, 1987) came about as critical responses to second wave radical feminisms, paralleled by Intersectionality Theory (Crenshaw, 1989), which was largely dominated by white feminist voices. Both theories originated from Women of Color communities and differed tremendously from white-dominated discourses through their deconstruction of essentialism, a shift away from the hierarchization of oppressions, and a focus on poly-vocality and embodied theory, or theory in the flesh (Anzaldúa & Moraga, 1981; Hull, 1982; hooks, 1984). Essentialism, or the “belief in innate, intrinsic, or indispensable properties that define the core features of a given entity or group,” formed a central point of focus for many second wave feminists (Mann, 2012, p. 175).

Intersectionality theorists rejected essentialism because it often overlooked the unique realities of Women of Color, non-heterosexual women, working-class women, or women with disabilities (Lorde, 1984; Bambara, 1981). Both *Borderlands* and Intersectionality Theory acknowledge the inseparable nature of multiple oppressions, although they each relate specifically to the nuanced experiences of different identities.⁸

While intersectionality theorists took issue with these broad definitions, they themselves were often guilty of essentializing these other categories in some ways—in many cases, assuming that there were universally shared traits or experiences for all Chicanas, or all non-heterosexual women, for example (Ramos, 1987). This inadvertent essentializing is evident in the use of the lesbian identity label—there was little to no room for sexual orientations that did not fit in either the heterosexual or homosexual box, even when the vocabulary was presented in Spanish, and much of the anthological and theoretical work of the time suggests essential, uniting traits shared by all Latina lesbians (Ramos, 1987; Alarcón, 1993).

In a similar vein, the idea that experiences of oppression could somehow be ranked began to shift, particularly because of the reconceptualization of oppression as dynamic rather than fixed. The equation of one oppression plus another one (in this case sexism plus racism) did not always equal a measurable experience that was twice as difficult than one or the other individually. Rather, “[b]ecause of their intersectional identity as both women and of color within discourses that are shaped to respond to one or the other, women of color are marginalized within both” (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1244).

This theory becomes further complicated when considering nuances such as

⁸ Intersectionality Theory specifically addresses experiences of Black women, while *Borderlands* Theory primarily discusses queerness and Chicanismo.

socioeconomic class, geographic location, religion, physical ability, and it becomes impossible to maintain a set hierarchy. When considering the experiences of queer Latinas/Chicanas, Intersectionality Theory is useful for its conceptual framework. In my mind's eye, the image I have when thinking about Intersectionality Theory as it relates to Borderlands Theory is the image of a crossroads. The literal "intersection" is the place/space where identities come together and interact with each other, but the roads diverge in such a drastic fashion that whoever stands at this crossroads is torn about the direction they should take at a given moment. This is, of course, a simplistic description of two complex and sometimes-conflicting theories, but I appreciate the imagery.

The focus on poly-vocality among intersectionality theorists emerged from the recognition that in order to create a more complete understanding of the intricacies of intersectional oppression, a larger body of accessible experiences was needed. Going back to the crossroads metaphor, there can be multiple perspectives and experiences that originate from that same space, and each experience is as valuable as the next. These lived experiences are what Anzaldúa and Moraga refer to as "theory in the flesh" in their anthology *This Bridge Called my Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, which upon its first publishing in 1981 marked a shift in feminist theory away from exclusively academic work to that of lived experiences of women whose voices had historically been intentionally silenced.

A theory in the flesh means one where the physical realities of our lives—our skin color, the land or concrete we grew up on, our sexual longings—all fuse to create a politic born out of necessity. Here we attempt to bridge the contradictions in our experience:

We are the colored in a white feminist movement.
We are the feminists among the people of our culture.

We are often the lesbians among the straight.
 We do this bridging by naming our selves and by telling our stories
 in our own words. (Anzaldúa & Moraga, 1981, p. 23)

This declaration was one of the first times women of color, particularly non-heterosexual women of color, demanded that their voices be heard and acknowledged.⁹ It is the work of these queer Chicanas that largely informs my research.

Theoretical Framework

I use borderlands theory¹⁰ and explicitly center Anzaldúa's conceptualization of queerness for a singular reason. As one of the first queer Chicana women to write openly about the conflicting experiences of navigating the borderlands of queerness, race, class, language, and physicality, her work is the inevitable place of return. Although I use Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera* as the basis of my borderlands theory, I also rely on more recent interpretations of her theory by scholars whose work has expanded the discourse around queerness, Latinidad, and the notions of home and family. Specifically, I look at the work of Marivel Danielson¹¹ and Katie Acosta¹² because their contributions also address issues of hegemonic masculinity/femininity and the "critical ramifications of an interpretation of homophobia as the fear of going home," although I have not limited my theoretical base to these scholars alone (Danielson, p. 2). In addition to borderlands theory, I examine the ways that both the television representations and the lived experiences of queer Chicanas/Latinas contribute or relate to Homonationalism

⁹ I leave direct quotes intact to center the words of Women of Color and avoid speaking over voices from historically marginalized communities.

¹⁰ I intentionally use lower-case letters to emphasize the plurality of theory. While borderlands theory is named for Anzaldúa's initial writings, it has since changed and evolved to include other voices. When I refer to Anzaldúa's work specifically, I will capitalize *Borderlands Theory* as a proper noun.

¹¹ *Homecoming Queers*, 2009

¹² *Amigas y Amantes: Sexually Nonconforming Latinas Negotiate Family*, 2013

(homonormative nationalism), for which I heavily reference the work of Jasbir Puar.¹³ I adhere to the notion that theory production and analysis is not limited to academia, nor is it fixed. Theory, particularly theory that deals with oppression, is often derived from lived experiences and observations made about one's surroundings, which in this increasingly digital age include sources from popular and social media.

For the purposes of this project I will outline my understandings of the tenets of Borderlands Theory that are most relevant to the themes of queer Chicanas/Latinas and media representations. Most central to Borderlands Theory is the concept of *Nepantla*, “an Aztec word meaning torn between ways” (p. 100). *Nepantla*, and the women who exist in this space (“*nepantleras*”), also heavily informs my understanding of the crossroads metaphor because the women discussed herein are constantly operating from this torn space. Because of the invariable origin of experience in *Nepantla*, these *nepantleras* begin to make a home here, and the feeling of being torn is evident in all aspects of this project, from the separation of identities depicted in television representations to the challenge of gender expression for the queer Chicanas/Latinas I interviewed. These in-between spaces are not fixed; rather, these *nepantleras* describe a range of borderlands, some of which are well documented and others are relatively unexplored. Specifically, there is little research on how television represents queer Latinas, or how well queer Latinas/Chicanas relate to the existing characters.

Related to the concept of *Nepantla*, Anzaldúa describes the “*Coatlicue state*,” which has its roots in Nahuatl/Aztec creation stories. *Coatlicue*, the serpent goddess, is comprised of elements of other deities, but is ripped apart in order to separate these

¹³ Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times, 2007

elements and compartmentalize them for the creation of the Virgin of Guadalupe.¹⁴ This feeling of being dismantled, or shattered, is often the place of origin for identity formation, but also for moving through the world. Moreover, nepantleras are often navigating their borderlands while simultaneously feeling shattered.¹⁵ Moving back to the crossroads metaphor, the Coatlicue state adds another layer of complexity to the feeling of being torn—quite literally dismantled and pulled in conflicting directions. The most glaring challenge to this metaphor is the idea that at a crossroads there are a finite number of possible directions. Rather, the image of a shattered Coatlicue conveys an infinite and changing number of pieces and possible directions. Much like this dismantled Coatlicue, queer Chicanas and Latinas frequently operate with a focus on different pieces.

Anzaldúa also describes the Shadow-Beast, which Acosta interprets as “the sexually nonconforming self, the rebel within that resists constraints” (2013, p. 59). Acosta specifically addresses the experiences of sexually nonconforming Latinas within family spaces without extensive discussion on racism experienced within queer spaces. The television representations discussed here rarely address racism, and so the interpretation of the Shadow-Beast in the analysis of those characters is similar to that of Acosta. For the women interviewed in this study, however, the Shadow-Beast appears in both family spaces as well as queer spaces and is thereby not simply the sexually nonconforming self, but a broader interpretation of “the part of the self that refuses to be caged” as any part of identity construction that challenges hegemonic gender norms, racialized domination, and compulsory heterosexuality (Acosta, p. 59). Compulsory

¹⁴ The Virgin of Guadalupe is a central figure in Mexican@/Chican@/Latin@ Catholicism and spirituality. Her first appearance is largely considered to be to a Nahuatl man, Juan Diego, on a hill near what is currently Mexico City with roses in his cloak.

¹⁵ Of course, this is not to say that all (or even any—that is not my place) are “broken” or in need of fixing.

heterosexuality is the assumption that heterosexuality is the norm or default sexuality, which thereby situates any other sexual behavior or desire as Other or deviant. Queer individuals experience compulsory heterosexuality in distinct ways, but often it takes the shape of inquiries about relationships and the gender of past, current, or prospective partners. The frequent interrogations, or microaggressions, of queer or gender-nonconforming individuals contribute to the feelings of simultaneous in-between-ness (Nepantla) and torn-apartness (Coatlicue).

Hegemonic femininity is that which compliments and serves hegemonic masculinity, or the dominance of men over women (Schipper, 2007). I interpret this to be the femininities that are geared toward the male gaze, particularly the white male gaze. Acosta (2013) describes a hierarchy of femininities ranging from hegemonic to pariah as they relate to sexually nonconforming Latinas. She argues that women who embody pariah femininities are susceptible to societal stigmas, but also that they disrupt hegemonic masculinity through their sexual nonconformity and their sometimes-masculine presentation. I challenge this notion based on the ways that queer Latinas are represented in television and argue that they still contribute to gender hegemony and cater to the white male gaze. Moreover, I employ Puar's (2007) contention that simply identifying as or engaging in behavior that marks one as sexually nonconforming does not indicate a disruption to hegemony, particularly as discussions of "inclusion" and acceptance of LGBT individuals take a more prominent space in dominant U.S. political discourses.

Homonationalism in its initial inception specifically focused on the Othering of Arab and Muslim individuals and communities as a result of the attacks on 9/11 and the

subsequent War on Terror. Since then, however, it has been applied to a wide variety of experiences, including my reading of these popular representations of queer Latinas as well as the interview responses of queer/lesbian/bisexual Chicanas/Latinas. Puar outlines the “ever-narrowing parameters of white racial privilege, consumption capabilities, gender and kinship normativity, and bodily integrity” as the criteria for inclusion into the category of “acceptable queers” (2007, p. xii). These parameters exclude racial/ethnic Others who are marked as always already queer as well as those without economic means to engage in the consumption driven economy, among a host of others. The sudden emphasis on marriage equality and the effort to repeal Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell, Puar argues, is an attempt by historically marginalized queers to be included in dominant U.S. narratives of acceptability through their mimicking of heterosexual norms and their support of U.S. empirical endeavors such as the War on Terror.

I apply these theories of Homonationalism to the television representation of queer Latinas and argue that the emphasis on monogamous marriage, child-rearing, and economic buying power is an attempt at inclusion in the narrative of acceptability. Further, I contend that Homonationalism in this sense is intimately tied to hegemonic gender norms, and the popular representations of queer Latinas are still aimed at the white male gaze. Lastly, I problematize the concept of *Nepantla* and borderlands experiences by questioning their contribution to the push for inclusion in the dominant U.S. narrative of acceptability. By that I mean to ask how the feelings of instability and being “torn” contribute to the desire to be included in a system that considers Queer People of Color, particularly Queer Women of Color to be already marked for death (Puar, p. xii).

Continuing with centering the experiences and voices of Queer Women of Color, I base my conceptualization of queerness on the work of Anzaldúa who in her piece, “To(o) Queer the Writer,” discusses her relationship to Anglo terms of sexuality:

What I object to about the words “lesbian” and “homosexual” is that they are terms with iron-cast molds. There are assumptions made, by both insiders and outsiders, when one identifies with these terms. The words “lesbian” and “homosexual” conjure up stereotypes of differences that are different from those evoked by the word “queer.” “Queer” also provokes different assumptions and expectations. In the ‘60s and ‘70s it meant that one was from a working-class background, that one was not from genteel society. Even though today the term means other things, for me there is still more flexibility in the “queer” mold, more room to maneuver. “Lesbian” comes from a Euro-Anglo American mold and “homosexual” from a deviant, diseased mold shaped by certain psychological theories. We non-Euro-Anglo Americans are supposed to live by and up to those theories. A mestiza colored queer person is bodily shoved by both the heterosexual world and by white gays into the “lesbian” or “homosexual” mold whether s/he fits or not (1998 pp. 266).

It is this flexibility and rejection of Anglo pathologies that I refer to when I use “queer” as an umbrella term in my work. It directly challenges the Euro-American and intrinsically racist notions that come with “lesbian” and “homosexual” (and even “bisexual” and “gay”). The context in which this was written implies that homogenizing all non-heterosexual individuals will make political visibility and social progress easier, without paying attention to the inherent racial, gender, and class-based inequalities within the queer community.

Anzaldúa also clearly addresses the practice of strategic essentialism, or claiming a group identity despite acknowledging the fact that it is problematic to do so. Anzaldúa argues that the term “[q]ueer is used as a false unifying umbrella which all ‘queers’ of all races, ethnicities, and classes are shoved under. At times we need this umbrella to solidify our ranks against outsiders. But even when we seek shelter under it we must not

forget that it homogenizes, erases our differences” (1998, p. 264). Strategic essentialism can still be seen in contemporary social justice movements, including those pertaining to non-heterosexual Chicanas/Latinas (Pérez, 1998; Blake, 2009). UndoquQueer and the Queer Undocumented Immigrant Project, for example, both enact strategic essentialism by claiming the “queer umbrella” while celebrating the individuality and diversity of constituents (Anzaldúa, 1998; UndocuQueer Manifesto, 2013). The inclusion of these examples of strategic essentialism is not meant as a criticism of either project, but rather a concrete reference to an instance where certain intersecting oppressions overlap and supersede others that are not always shared.

Puar’s (2007) theory of Homonationalism can also be applied to the experiences of those who may cross the U.S.-Mexico border without “proper”¹⁶ documentation, and further applied to those who do not fit into widely accepted categories of gender or sexual orientation. The immigration debate has only recently incorporated queer individuals in an explicit manner (there have always been queer immigrants); however, the individuals that are being considered under the proposed immigration reform are those that most closely fit within the existing structure of dominant Euro-American discourse, or narrative of acceptability. This focus on U.S. legislation for those who are already living and/or working within the U.S. takes focus and energy away from the immediate need for action for those individuals who are particularly vulnerable when crossing the border, or who are trafficked against their will. Understanding Homonationalism as it pertains to Chicanas/Latinas is essential to contextualizing their experiences. While immigration status was outside the scope of this project, it is important to mention here because it may

¹⁶ The discussion about paperwork and its validity falls outside of the scope of this project, but I include the quotations marks here to indicate the problematic state of affairs with U.S. immigration.

still impact the experiences of the women who shared their stories, and the complexity of these stories should not be overlooked.

One important step by and for Third World feminists was to challenge the assumption that women needed to compartmentalize pieces of their multifaceted identities in order to navigate normative scenarios. This shifting of identity becomes visible when considering the different identities that were suppressed depending on whether non-heterosexual Chicanas operated within a heterosexist Chicano sphere or a racist white lesbian sphere, and the women interviewed here displayed similar patterns. Allowing women to tell their own stories without requiring them to alter or tailor them to a specific audience is essential for deconstructing racialized and gendered notions of non-normative sexual identities (Pérez, 1998; Trujillo, 1998).

Intersectionality theory becomes especially relevant to this project when discussing the breadth of possible racial/ethnic identities that fall under the Latina/Chicana umbrella. Because Intersectionality Theory specifically addresses the inseparable experiences of Black women, the intersections of Blackness and Latinidad need to be foregrounded as they relate to the women and characters here. Black and Afro-Latina bodies are sexualized in a way that is different from the conquest of Chicana bodies, which are largely a mix of Indigenous and Spanish (white European) heritage.¹⁷ According to Molino Valdivia and Guzmán (2004), “Tropicalism erases specificity and homogenizes all that is identified as Latin and Latina/o... The tropes of tropicalism extend beyond those people with Caribbean roots to people from Latin American, and recently to those in the United States with Caribbean and/or Latin American roots” (p.

¹⁷ This is not to diminish or erase the other identities or women who identify as both Afro-Caribbean and Chicana, but rather to more firmly situate the ways that Borderlands (Chicana) and Intersectionality (Black) theories relate to one another.

211). These “tropicalized” archetypes of Latina femininity and sexuality are visible in the television characters analyzed in chapter two. The regulation and policing of the bodies and sexuality of Queer Women of Color plays into the larger trend of Homonationalism and the politics of inclusion, which only lead to the inclusion of a small portion of the LGBTQ+ community.

The push for gay and lesbian individuals to come out of the closet to increase visibility and awareness of the issues that affect them has targeted only a small portion of the non-heterosexual population. The individuals that are encouraged to come out are those who most closely resemble the heterosexual norm, which often does not include People of Color (Puar, 2007). Subaltern queer communities and individuals who “deviate” from the homosexual norm (i.e. partnered with children) are invisibilized because they challenge the heterosexual norm. Homonationalism, as described by Puar, has pushed for the inclusion of this small population in order to perpetuate the empirical U.S. government and social agenda, whereby People of Color face continuous systemic exploitation. In order to fully grasp the power of resisting dominant homonormative discourses, it is important to understand the discourse of coming out as a specifically Euro-American phenomenon.

When considering the experiences of gender non-conforming or non-heterosexual Chicana/Latina immigrants to the United States, it is also imperative to examine the imperialist and neo-liberal forces that influence their migration. Globalization specifically impacts Chicanas/Latinas in distinct and observable patterns. For example, the expansion of North American corporate business into Mexico, and Central and South America, has drastically changed domestic norms and altered migration patterns, which in turn has

created nuanced forms of gendered and sexualized violence (Livingston, 2004). The spread of Euro-American notions of homosexuality—or “appropriate” ways of being non-heterosexual—through imperialism, has altered the perception of non-normative queer-identified individuals and communities, leading to increased discrimination and targeted violence (Puar, 2007). When considering the increased discrimination of People of Color, specifically Indigenous communities and individuals, by dominant Euro-American meta-narratives, in combination with the disastrous environmental effects of globalization, a Native feminist approach becomes increasingly necessary.

A central tenet of Native feminist theory is that without addressing settler colonialism and Heteropatriarchy, we are actively participating in the perpetuation of both, as well as contributing to environmental degradation, which negatively affect all people (Smith, 2006). According to Arvin, Tuck, and Morrill (2004) “Settler colonialism is a persistent social and political formation in which newcomers/colonizers/settlers come to a place, claim it as their own, and do whatever it takes to disappear the Indigenous peoples that are there. Within settler colonialism, it is exploitation of land that yields supreme value” (p. 12). While early Chicana intersectionality theorists did not use the same vocabulary to describe Heteropatriarchy or settler colonialism, they did highlight a strong connection to Native interests, including Indigenous understandings of sexuality and gender (Moraga, 1993; Anzaldúa, 1987; Trujillo, 1998). By building on this embrace of Indigeneity and incorporating a contemporary Native feminist lens, coming out narratives of queer (non-normative) Chicanas and Latinas take on a new level of complexity. As was the case with early Chicana and other Third World feminist

literature, the telling of one's story is still in itself an act of empowerment and of resistance to oppression, as well as a theory-generating act (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1981).

Marivel Danielson, in her work "Homecoming Queers" (2010), describes the acts of "queer exodus," or the idea that in order to come out and become self-actualized, queer Latin@s often feel the need to move away from their families of origin. She also expands upon and challenges the notion of home and the process of "creating a new home through art, language, media, and academia" (p. 3). These re-formations of home are evident in both the television representations and their breaks from families of origin, and the interviews, where participants find community in extra-familial spaces.

Katie Acosta's work, *Amigas y Amantes* (2013), shares her interviews with sexually nonconforming Latinas, and their experiences around navigating their relationships with family. These interviews provide a reference for my own work, and cover topics such as gender presentation (hegemonic femininity), religion, and compulsory heterosexuality/gender roles. Both Acosta and Danielson add to a growing pool of depictions of the diverse and nuanced experiences of queer Chicanas and Latinas, I was eager to find out how and where the element of media representation, specifically that which takes place in television, fit with these and other lived experiences.

Situating the Research

One of the central tenets to narrative feminist research is acknowledging the social location of the researcher in order to more fully understand the subjective perspective and potential biases that are at play. For me, this means that I cannot do this work without first situating my whiteness and the privilege it affords me within the larger

context of systemic oppression and exclusion. Because of the ways that white bodies and white stories often overshadow those of People of Color, I constantly navigate and recognize the potentially problematic terrain of me as a white woman analyzing representations and narratives of queer Latinas. I address my whiteness here only to give context, and never for the sake of a “cookie.”¹⁸

This project has evolved into its current incarnation over the course of nearly three years of graduate study, and against a backdrop of major life shifts that weave themselves into my academic work. Particularly, my integration through my upcoming marriage into a Latin@ family has frequently mirrored my academic exploration. Of course, this is not to say that I would not have necessarily chosen this thesis topic were it not for this specific state of my personal relationships. I do believe, however, that personal relationships and experiences drive academic research in some capacity, regardless of the degree to which researchers are forthcoming about it.

I have been asked frequently about my motivation to do this work, and I have often found it difficult to articulate. I was raised in a relatively affluent Anglo household in an area with a large Latin@ population and a stark, racially corresponding class divide. I began learning Spanish at age 7, for reasons that my mother never shared with me. Whatever her motivations, I recognized the language as a gift with accompanying responsibilities that should not be confused with a white savior complex, although that has played a role in my development as well. When I refer to responsibilities associated with my bilingualism, I mean that through my own experiences with marginalization and

¹⁸ McKenzie (2013) describes the common failure of white allies who do ally work in exchange for “cookies,” or moral/social compensation, rather than because it is “the right thing.”

my advanced education of the complex nature of oppression, I have consistently arrived at the conclusion that I cannot be part of the problem. I know I am part of the problem some of the time—probably most of the time, since the advantages I have experienced and continue to experience based on my race, class, and gender identity/expression are countless. I cannot singlehandedly dismantle the structures that give me these privileges, try as I might. However, I can use my skills and my privileges to chip away at them. As Robin DiAngelo puts it, “The only alternative I can see is to not stand up and challenge racism. And that is not acceptable to me” (DiAngelo, 2015). DiAngelo also articulates the unfortunate truth that, in most cases, white people listen to other white people before, or in different ways than, they listen to People of Color—particularly on issues of oppression. This means that I make the conscious choice to sit with the discomfort that comes with doing this work while white, and then I do it anyway.

So, in the spirit of being forthcoming, it is important to describe my social location as a researcher. Both sides of my family are of western European descent and primarily lived across what is now the southeastern United States, in some instances since the late 1700s. I recognize that it is a privilege to have my family’s history recorded and validated, and this is a practice deeply rooted in white supremacy. I include it here to contextualize the information that was transmitted to me from a young age about race, particularly since I was raised with a differently disguised racism, in a relatively affluent suburb near Denver, Colorado.

I recognize that “[t]he need to split one’s political energies between two sometimes-opposing groups is a dimension of intersectional disempowerment that men of color and white women seldom confront” (Crenshaw, 1993, p. 1244). This understanding

of intersectionality is particularly crucial for the work in which I engage because it helps me to remember that my experiences with marginalization are my own, and are categorically distinct from those of queer women of color. By rooting my research in these theoretical underpinnings, I hope to further the conversation around representation in popular media while staying true to the ideology of solidarity that motivates me.

Research Methods

This thesis employs two parallel analyses, and necessitates the combination of multiple analytical approaches. For example, the use of narrative analysis allows for the examination of the distinct components of character creation and implementation in popular television characters, while the ethnographic interviews require the addition of content analysis. Once this narrative and content analysis is used as the methodological base, a feminist approach rooted in a combination of borderlands, intersectionality, and homonationalist theory will be used to relate the interview responses to broad themes of the television characters.

Because there are so few portrayals of queer Chicanas/Latinas in television, and even fewer who come out on screen, the selection process is made quite simple. I have chosen three characters with one or more coming out experiences depicted in a television series at some point within the last ten years: Carmen de la Pica Morales in Showtime's *The L Word* (2004, played by Sarah Shahi), Dr. Calliope "Callie" Torres in ABC's *Grey's Anatomy* (2005-present, played by Sara Ramirez); and Santana Lopez in Fox's *Glee* (2009-2015, played by Naya Rivera).

When examining these popular representations of queer Latinas in television and the ways that they are shown to experience coming out to family, I used a narrative analysis approach. Because the steps that go into television production are complex, and would be sufficient to merit a separate, more focused analysis, I specifically selected three primary components for discussion. I examine “how it is put together, the linguistic and cultural resources it draws on, and how it persuades a listener of authenticity” (Reissman, 1993, p. 2). As it pertains to queer Latinas in television, this led me to look at the creators, writers, and directors of each series, the use of Spanish and other cultural indicators, and how these indicators are used to signify authenticity to a viewer base that largely does not identify as Latin@ (Hunt et al, 2014). I intentionally excluded a detailed analysis of the actors that portray each character specifically because the agency of each actor varies widely with the series and is difficult to measure, and also because cultural/racial/sexual identity of each actor does not align with the characters they portray. One of the main goals of this thesis is to argue for the increased representation of queer Latinas in popular culture, particularly representation that originates from women who identify as queer and Latina/Chicana, because as it stands the inclusion of characters presented as having these identities does not necessarily indicate equitable or empowering representation. On the contrary, the tokenization of characters with historically marginalized identities often indicates an attempt to appease viewers with those shared identities and maintain the white supremacist status quo (Spectra, 2012).

I specifically selected narrative analysis because this method recognizes that the story itself cannot be separated from the creator, teller, interpreter, or audience/listener. The story of these queer Latina characters, which the writers understand differently than

queer Latina/Chicana viewers—who understand it differently than I—will be further changed as it is interpreted by anyone that reads or hears my interpretation. I ground my work in theory (using the broad conceptualization of theory from above), but also acknowledge that these interpretations are unique to me, and therefore I reject the use of “objective” or “academic” language that attempts to remove my voice from my work. Of course, as mentioned before, I struggle with the centering of my voice being understood as an attempt to center my experience or my whiteness, which is not the motivation for this style of writing. On the contrary, by using the first person here I am reminding readers that I am human and these are simply my interpretations of these experiences. They are not definitive, nor should they override the words of the women who graciously shared their stories with me.

For the ethnographic interview portion of this thesis, I chose to include three participants specifically to balance the analysis against that of the TV characters and to give ample space for the voices of each participant. Two out of the three interviews were conducted in person, and the third took place via Skype. All interviews were audio recorded either by a separate recording device, or through a third-party application. If recorded using the web-based program, the recording was immediately downloaded onto a secure laptop and erased from the program. They were then backed up on an external hard drive and password protected. Personal information was logged separately for confidentiality, and no identifiers were attached to the recordings or transcription documents. Participants were asked to choose their own pseudonyms to continue with the practice of self-identification and agency. The interviews varied between approximately 30 and 90 minutes. The interview questions were designed to be open-

ended to allow participants freedom to share their experiences in their own words. Some themes covered in the interviews include learned conceptions about queerness, specific experiences with coming out, being out, and being outed,¹⁹ family dynamics, and engagement with popular representations of queer Latin@s/Chican@s.

In order to analyze the ethnographic interviews discussed in chapter three, I employed a combination of content analysis and narrative analysis. Content analysis allowed me to code the transcripts from each interview thematically to align with the themes I address in chapter two, while narrative analysis made it possible to examine the ways that participants “impose order on the flow of experience to make sense of events and actions in their lives” (Riessman, 1993, p. 2). In order to do this, I first coded for word frequency²⁰ and second for key-word-in-context (KWIC) in order to identify salient themes across the experiences detailed by all interview participants as well as the specifics of the individual comments (Weber, 1990). I chose this combination of word frequency and KWIC coding to highlight the importance of similarities across stories and the power in centering historically silenced voices and identities (theory in the flesh), the individuality that exists among these broader experiences (intersectionality theory), and the unique descriptors of navigating these experiences (borderlands theory).

Chapter Summary

The body of this thesis is divided into two main chapters. The first deals with the analysis of popular depictions of non-heterosexual Latinas in television. The chapter is subdivided into discussion of three themes that emerge across all three characters: how they are presented to viewers in their first appearances, their interactions with cultural

¹⁹ Being outed refers to having one’s sexuality or gender identity disclosed without consent.

²⁰ Excluding articles and other purely functional parts of speech such as the, in, by, etc.

appropriation, sexual domination, and erasure, and the specific ways that coming out is approached for each character.

The second chapter is an analysis of ethnographic interviews conducted with women who identify as lesbian/bisexual/queer and Chicana/Latina. This chapter is broken down into similar themes as those identified in chapter one, and an additional section discusses how participants identify with queer Latinas in popular culture as well as elements that are relevant to interview participants but absent from popular representations of queer Latinas. The final chapter includes a discussion of my findings, concluding thoughts, and directions for future research.

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Chapter 2: Television Representations of Queer Latinas

Queer Chicanas/Latinas have been producing media for themselves arguably for centuries.²¹ Print media in particular saw an increase in the 1980s and 1990s, with the surge of the Chicana feminist movement. Part of the impetus for creating these pieces of media is to change the dominant dialogue around the experiences, histories, and desires of historically marginalized communities and individuals, and to reclaim agency within these dialogues. Television, however, has been a particularly bleak landscape for historically marginalized communities to see themselves portrayed in empowering, positive characters, although there is endless room for improvement.

Television shapes how individuals and collective societies understand the world around them (Dente Ross & Lester, 2011). “It is a given that media messages play a part in teaching us which lifestyles to value and what counts as appropriate behavior according to dominant society” (Elliott, 2011). The gay rights movement²² in the United States and the national debate on same-sex marriage has prompted a larger pool of explicitly LGBTQ+ characters in television and film with a primarily white viewer base. This increase in visibility, however, has not been representative of the larger demographics within the U.S. or within LGBTQ+ communities. Popular depictions of queer individuals on television are primarily white, male, and with homonormative plot lines. *Modern Family* is a prime example, wherein the white gay male couple easily

²¹ Writings by Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz in the 1600-1700s describe romantic feelings for women. The identity terms used here would not have applied during that time period, however, since they came into popular use in the 1900s.

²² The gay rights movement refers to the push for mainstream acceptance that has largely been driven by groups such as the Human Rights Campaign and the Gay/Lesbian Task Force. Both organizations are primarily affluent whites who identify as gay, lesbian, or bisexual and work on issues of “inclusion” such as the repeal of Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell (DADT) and marriage equality initiatives. They have been widely criticized for exclusion and discrimination of People of Color, trans* individuals, and low-income members of the LGBTQ+ community.

affords a large apartment in Los Angeles, adopts a Vietnamese child, and weds in a lavish ceremony. The parameters with which “acceptable queers”²³ are depicted in popular culture are constantly becoming narrower and more exclusive (Puar, 2007; Rodriguez, 2014).

When it comes to depictions of Latin@ queer characters in television, the tired archetypes of the Bandido, Latin Lover, and Buffoon abound²⁴ (Ramírez Berg, 2002). The Bandido presents Latin@ characters as thieving or criminal, and is a common trope in contemporary discourse, particularly as it relates to representations of Latin@s as undocumented immigrants. Ramirez Berg defines the Latin Lover as combining “eroticism, exoticism, tenderness tinged with violence and danger, all adding up to the romantic promise that, sexually, things could very well get out of control” (p. 76). The Buffoon is most easily identifiable as a clown—a target for mockery and ridicule that is often racially charged. Although these descriptions identified by Ramírez Berg initially referred to heterosexual characters, the damaging similarities remain visible and only slightly masked when applied to non-heterosexual Latina characters. This chapter will outline the components involved in the construction of three queer²⁵ Latina characters on broadcast and cable television ranging from 2004 to 2015, as well as three salient themes across their individual representations. The characters analyzed are Carmen de la Pica Morales, played by Sarah Shahi, on Showtime’s *The L Word*; Dr. Calliope “Callie” Torres, played by Sara Ramirez, on ABC’s *Grey’s Anatomy*; and Santana Lopez, played

²³ Puar defines “acceptable queers” as those who promote narratives of normativity and production through their desire to marry, raise families, and contribute to the U.S. capitalist economy. Unacceptable queers are those who fall outside these parameters. They are marked for death and removal.

²⁴ Ramirez Berg outlines several archetypes in “Latino Images in Film,” including the Bandido (thief), Latin Lover, and the Buffoon, whose purpose is humiliation and degradation.

²⁵ The characters analyzed herein all identify differently, so “queer” is used here as an umbrella term for non-heterosexual.

by Naya Rivera on Fox's *Glee*. Larger trends that emerge when examining these roles are physical appearances, interaction with cultural appropriation/erasure and sexual domination, and the ways that coming out experiences are specifically depicted on television.

These women are not the only lesbian, bisexual, or queer Latina characters on television,²⁶ nor do they provide an all-encompassing spectrum of Latinas—they all portray unique cultural and familial heritages that they embody in distinct and non-static ways. However, their coming out to family is representative of a larger trend of the perpetuation of stereotypes that surround queer Latinas.²⁷ What makes these harmful depictions worse is that they can sometimes be the only in-depth exposure whites have to people of color, and therefore queer/trans* people of color (Barreto et al, 2012). The resulting distortion in perspective is similar to that of the opinions held by many of the wealthiest Americans, who believe that “the poor have it easy in this country” (Ferdman, 2015). The realities of these marginalized identities are nearly impossible for privileged individuals to conceptualize due to the invisibility of their privilege.

When discussing white privilege, discussions of white fragility and white comfort must also be included. Peggy McIntosh lists as the first item on her list, “I can if I wish arrange to be in the company of people of my race most of the time” (McIntosh, 1989). Far too often, it is the case that the roles played by people of color are created, written, and directed by whites people, most often men. In the 2011-2012 television season, 60%

²⁶ Other examples include Dr. Luisa Alver (*Jane the Virgin*, 2014, played by Yara Martinez), Jocelyn Reyes (*East Los High*, 2013, played by Andrea Sixtos), and Adriana Mendez (*The Bridge*, 2013, played by Emily Rios)

²⁷ I make an overt effort to use the identifying terms provided by each character or the writers of each character to reinforce the importance of self-identification and agency. Additionally, there are instances where identifying terms are not present. I will make these instances clear.

of all comedy and drama shows on broadcast television had writing staffs that were at least 90% white. Additionally, 73% of broadcast comedies or dramas were directed entirely by white people at least 90% of the time, and 53% were directed by men at least 90% of the time (Hunt et al, 2014). What these statistics mean, then, is that by and large, the depictions of characters with marginalized identities are written by white men and aimed at white viewership, which further marginalizes people of color.

When it comes to the characters that are analyzed here, there is some differentiation in the writers and directors of the episodes that primarily deal with their storylines. *The L Word* was primarily written by its creators and producers, Ilene Chaiken, Michele Abbott, and Kathy Greenberg, with the help of contributing writers, none of which contributed to more than ten episodes. *Grey's Anatomy* first aired in 2005 and was created by Shonda Rhimes, who has been lauded for the gains she has made for more equitable representation in television. In addition to *Grey's Anatomy*, she created and produces *Scandal* (2012) and *How to Get Away With Murder* (2014), which have also received praise. Rhimes is credited for writing on all but four of the 232 episodes of *Grey's Anatomy*, along with a diverse writing staff. Of the ten contributing writers who have worked on more than ten episodes, five are women and at least one is a Woman of Color.²⁸ With *Glee*, the writing staff is far bleaker. Of the seven writers who contributed to ten or more episodes, six are men and all seven are white. The fact that over 50% of the population of Los Angeles, where all three series' were and/or are filmed, is Latin@ has little bearing on the diversity of their casts, crews, and staff (Marquez, 2014). Additionally, the nuances and depth of each Latina character has a direct correlation to the diversity of the writing and directing staff.

²⁸ in addition to Rhimes

Physical Appearances and Initial Introductions

The L Word first aired on the Showtime Network in 2004 and initially follows a group of upper class femme women who identify as lesbian, bisexual, or queer in Los Angeles, CA. The series aired until 2009 with a total of six seasons. The show was groundbreaking at the time for its explicit depiction and centering of queer women's lives, although it was not without its shortcomings and limitations. In many ways the show has since become outdated, particularly due to of the increasing speed of advancement in technology, changes in legislation affecting LGBT individuals, and the vocabulary used to describe queer/trans* experiences in the United States.

Viewers are introduced to the show's first Latina character during the first episode of season two. Carmen de la Pica Morales, played by Sarah Shahi, is an up-and-coming DJ who works at film studios during the day. Her hair and make up are feminine, while her clothing is slightly more butch "with a tough-girl streak that gives her barrio credibility" (Akass and McCabe, 2006, p. 179). Carmen identifies as either lesbian or gay, using the terms interchangeably to describe herself. She has tattoos on her hips, back, and arms, and her body is frequently made a focal point over her substance as a character. When probed about her tattoos in her first appearance, she explains that they are for her father because "supposedly he was some kind of Mayan medicine man." This statement, along with her name, signifies southern Mexican or Central American heritage. While the importance of Indigenous cultures and their longevity is undeniable, particularly within Latin@/Chican@ communities, the vague and stereotypical reference to Carmen's heritage is regrettable because it is mentioned as a marker for ethnicity rather than a central component to Carmen's identity. Shahi, the actor who plays Carmen,

was born in Texas, however her family is Persian and immigrated to the United States from Iran (Marquez, 2014). The choices made by the casting directors and the show's creator, Ilene Chaiken, suggest that they not only think all brown people look the same (Marquez, 2014; Sindu, 2014), but also that because the show was so desperately lacking queer women of color, they felt compelled to make Carmen's intended heritage clear as soon as possible, leaving little time for viewers to get to know her as more complex than her identities. Specifically, if Carmen's identity as a Latina were meant to be anything other than an attempt at diversifying the cast, it can be reasonably assumed that there would be a more in-depth exploration of her character and what it means for her to be queer and Latina. Instead, the creators chose a "racially ambiguous" actor to portray a mixture of harmful stereotypes for the purpose of "inclusion" (Marquez, 2014; Spectra, 2012). This ignorance surrounding representation of historically marginalized identities is directly related to the lack of diversity of the behind-the-scenes staff of the series and plays into the argument that any representation, however problematic, is better than none.

Grey's anatomy is in its eleventh season, and follows a group of doctors at a fictitious hospital in Seattle, WA. The show's creator, Shonda Rhimes, is well known for depicting a wide range of historically marginalized identities on screen. Rhimes uses a "race-blind" method for casting, where she excludes any signifiers of appearance when writing and casting characters with the express purpose of casting a more heterogeneous group of actors (Long, 2010). She contends that

The definition of equality isn't that you behave as a saint. The definition of equality is that you get to behave like everyone else behaves, for good or for bad. You get to make mistakes, you get to be flawed, you get to fuck up, you get to be who you are... we put everybody else's relationships in danger on a constant basis, so why not allow them and afford them the same opportunities as every character on 'Grey's Anatomy' who screws up

and deals with stuff and either gets back together or doesn't? (Rhimes, 2013).

Rhimes personally wrote the character of Dr. Calliope or “Callie” Torres, an orthopedic surgical resident at Seattle Grace Hospital, who joined the cast in 2006, during the show’s second season. While Callie’s cultural identity is never overtly disclosed, there are subtle cues that point toward a Cuban-American family based in south Florida.²⁹

When viewers first see Dr. Torres in the nineteenth episode of season two of *Grey’s Anatomy* she is wearing scrubs, although her intended personality is still detectable. Her vibrantly patterned long sleeve shirt is visible underneath her scrub top, her hair is in a high, messy bun and her makeup is defined. Callie’s appearance, even from this initial introduction onto the show, has consistently modeled hegemonic femininity.³⁰ She wears her hair long, with make-up and plucked eyebrows, and her wardrobe has become arguably more feminine as time has gone on, which may or may not have to do with the fact that she began entering into relationships with women, although based on the highly calculated nature of nearly all decisions related to television and cinema, it is likely that there is a correlation. As Long points out, “Simply stating that race is not (and that gender is) a factor in casting decisions does not necessarily preclude the possibility of reproducing dominant or otherwise problematic assumptions, values, and ideologies about race and gender” (p. 1068). These “problematic assumptions” that are transmitted about non-heterosexual Latinas (their appearance, desires, and capacity for agency) are arguably less overt in *Grey’s Anatomy* than with the other characters

²⁹ The character description on ABC’s website states that Callie “loves Cuban food.” Callie references her father flying 3,000 miles to see her, which is approximately the distance between Seattle and Miami. While affluence is not exclusively an attribute of Cuban-Americans in south Florida, the mass emigration at the beginning of the Castro regime was primarily by wealthy, light-skinned Cubans (López-Cabrales, 2007).

³⁰ Hegemonic femininity refers to physical appearance and behavior that supports and perpetuates dominant power structures of male dominance, white supremacy.

discussed herein, but they are nonetheless harmful. Specifically, with such a small number of representations on network television, each representation has a strong impact on the ideas viewers form about what women who share these identities in real life should look and act like—namely, they should be feminine, sexually wanton, and intent on getting married and having children. These assumptions about hegemonic femininity can lead to the exclusion or rejection of women who do not share these traits or goals.

Glee, created by Ryan Murphy, first aired on Fox in 2009 and concluded its final season in March of 2015. The premise of the show began with a high school show choir in Ohio struggling to form and find success. Santana López, played by Naya Rivera, is introduced in the first episode as a cheerleader and back-up singer to Quinn Fabray,³¹ the blonde, blue-eyed head cheerleader who is dating the quarterback of the football team. As is the case with Callie in *Grey's Anatomy*, Santana's familial heritage is not overtly discussed—instead, she embodies an unfortunate amalgam of stereotypes that span a wide range of Spanish-speaking communities.³² Santana is presented as a secondary character throughout the first season, although her construction as morally deviant from her first appearance. There are numerous references to her sexual encounters with boys at school, and her body fits the standards set by current demands in Hollywood. Her honesty and loyalty are questioned frequently, and her plot line initially focuses primarily on her allegiance to the cheerleading squad (the Cheerios) and its antagonist coach, Sue Sylvester.³³

³¹ Played by Diana Agron

³² Santana's grandmother has a Dominican flag on her refrigerator during her coming out scene. Brittany has sombreros, serapes, and maracas on "Queso por dos" (Fondue for Two).

³³ played by Jane Lynch

Santana is well known for her cruel insults and witty comebacks, which can be interpreted from divergent perspectives. On one hand, she appears to be excessively ruthless—attacking others for sport. On the other hand, however, and particularly as she navigates the constant pressure by others to come out publicly, they can be interpreted as a defense or coping mechanism against the unending barrage of microaggressions. When understood from this perspective, several of Santana’s comments take on a different air. Some, however, are still intended to cause pain and could easily be removed from the show without leaving a gap in the plot. *Glee*’s creator, Ryan Murphy, has been heavily criticized for his portrayal and character assassination of Women of Color, which is apparent in these plot choices for Santana (Love, 2010; Mey, 2015). By playing into the stereotypes about violence and anger, Murphy directly contributes to the continued perception of Latinas as out of control and in need of domination.

Interactions with Cultural Appropriation, Erasure, and Sexual Domination

The similarities between the physical appearances of these characters and their initial introduction on each show include their feminine presentation and the sexualization of their bodies. They are presented, almost immediately, as bodies available for sexual conquest even though there is elevated risk involved. Even when the characters are given deeper plot lines, as is the case in *Grey’s Anatomy*, the initial presentations of all three women perpetuate harmful misconceptions about Latinas. Molina Guzmán and Valdivia explain:

Within the Eurocentric mind/body binary, culture is signified by the higher intellectual functions of the mind/brain while nature is signified by the lower biological functions of the body. That is, Whiteness is associated with a disembodied intellectual tradition free from the everyday desires of

the body, and non-Whiteness is associated with nature and the everyday needs of the body to consume food, excrete waste, and reproduce sexually. Dominant representations of Latinas and African American women are predominately characterized by an emphasis on the breasts, hips, and buttocks. These body parts function as mixed signifiers of sexual desire and fertility as well as bodily waste and racial contamination (p. 211-212).

These signifiers are also readily observable in the other representations discussed here, where the correlation between sexuality and Latinidad, especially as it relates to queer sexuality, further objectifies and fetishizes the bodies of Latinas in popular culture. All three women are primarily involved with white partners, with the brief exceptions of Carmen, who discusses a sexual encounter with Lucia Torres at the age of 16, and Santana, who dates a character played by Latina singer Demi Lovato, although there is never any reference to the racial or cultural identity of Lovato's character, who is light skinned and presents as white. The racial dynamic of the relationships Carmen, Callie, and Santana engage in further solidifies the sexualization, exotification, and availability for white conquest that defines their initial introductions.

Within minutes of her first appearance on *The L Word*, Carmen is seen being passionately undressed by the show's most prominent white womanizer, Shane McCutcheon.³⁴ The prevalent and simultaneous narratives about Latin@s' reticence to work hard as well as the hyper-sexualization of Latinas reinforce white supremacy and are visible here through the decision to show Carmen not only shirking her work duties, but also further risking her job by engaging in sex at her workplace. Shane's contracted employer³⁵ absolves her of risk and guilt by encouraging her to pursue Carmen in the

³⁴ Played by Katherine Moennig

³⁵ Arianna Huffington, of The Huffington Post

scene preceding this encounter. Carmen, however, is not afforded the same absolution and thereby increases her risk of negative consequences.

The first interaction between Carmen and Shane, along with the presentation of Carmen's tattoos, serves additional functions than to introduce a new character. It provides an opportunity to pin down her cultural and ethnic identity, which then solidifies her function as a sexual object or conquest for Shane. In her article, "Tramp Stamps and Tribal Bands: Stereotypes of the Body Modified," Chema Salinas argues that popular media "continually associate body modification with criminal and sexual deviance through their stereotypic depiction of characters" (2011, p. 247). Combined with the frequent representation of Latin@s as gangsters or criminals, this first encounter with Carmen situates her as Other³⁶ and secures her status as a secondary character. Further, Salinas explains that

[r]epresenting modified women as a celebration of alternative forms of beauty does not ameliorate their treatment as sexual objects for consumption. In addition, 'alternative' can also be interpreted as 'deviant,' further reinforcing impressions of promiscuity and morbidity (p. 251).

While other characters in the show have tattoos, Carmen's are by far the largest and the only ones that are ever discussed. Carmen's ethnically symbolic tattoos now mark her as not only a racial Other, but presumably as sexually objectifiable—a pattern that unfortunately does not stop with this introduction. Later in the series, Carmen "repays" Shane for accompanying her to a quinceañera and pretending to be nothing more than a platonic friend by giving what Hall (2004) claims to be a "gratuitous" strip tease. This conveys that Carmen "owes" Shane for coming with her, and the fact that the repayment is in the form of getting naked and dancing further reinforces white domination over the

³⁶ Using "other" as a verb describes the process through which marginalized individuals or communities are further constructed as different, lesser, and worse than their privileged counterparts (Mackey, 1992).

bodies of Women of Color. Shane is constructed as benevolent and accommodating for suspending her morality (by temporarily closeting herself), and therefore deserving of sexual compensation. Carmen, on the other hand, is reduced to her ability to please her white lover out of gratitude for Shane's brief and problematic foray into Carmen's cultural reality. The awkwardness with which this entire plot line is addressed maintains whiteness and white culture as the default, while Latinidad is commodified and Othered.

Grey's Anatomy presumably does not intentionally Other Callie; however, the first exposure viewers have to her also establishes her as available for consumption by white bodies. Her character is meant to be edgy or alternative, and by the end of her first episode it becomes clear that she will be a love interest of a white male doctor, George O'Malley.³⁷ She actively pursues Dr. O'Malley through verbal and non-verbal come-ons and eventually writes her phone number on his hand in permanent marker. The fact that she offers her number rather than asking for George's simultaneously reinforces the notion that Latinas are both sexually aggressive and available for pursuit.

Shortly after her initial introduction, viewers find out that Callie has taken up residence in the basement of the hospital. When probed about her living situation, she states that because she "spends so much time here, it was just easier." During the same episode, she is seen dancing in her underwear in her living space. While most female characters on *Grey's Anatomy* are shown in their underwear at some point during the series, it is important to recognize the distinct implications of displaying women of color this way. As Molina Guzmán and Valdivia (2004) point out, the focus on hips and buttocks falls into the pattern of tropicalization, wherein Latinas are characterized and generalized by "attributes such as bright colors, rhythmic music, and brown or olive skin"

³⁷ Played by T.R. Knight

(p. 211). Her decision to live at the hospital and dance in her underwear there mirrors the problematic nature of Carmen's initial introduction in *The L Word*. Callie's desire to be closer to work reinforces the association between Latin@s and laziness, and her dancing presents her as hyper-sexualized while demonstrating her comfort with risk. She faces the same risks to her employment as Carmen does by engaging in sexual activity at work. In Carmen's case there is no retribution for her actions, while Callie is discovered by the Chief of Surgery and asked to move out. This relatively benign repercussion is unrealistic and largely plot-driven, since Callie then moves in with George and two other main characters.³⁸

The hyper-sexualization and white domination of Latina bodies continues with *Glee* when Santana returns in the second season with a much larger role. In the opening scene of the first episode, it is revealed that Santana has been demoted from head cheerleader due to her decision to have breast implants over the summer. She justifies her choice by saying "I wanted people to notice me more," thus constructing her character as vain and desirous of sexual attention. Santana is replaced by the former head cheerleader, who during the first season had unprotected sex and an unplanned pregnancy, but is still constructed as virtuous and virginal. The negative consequences that follow for Santana, enacted by those who make decisions about her success as a student athlete, and subsequently her chances for success in the future, convey that she does not have control or agency over her body. Within the same episode, she engages the new head cheerleader in a physical altercation, which constructs her as violent and serves the same purpose as Carmen's tattoos in *The L Word*, echoing the stereotypic criminality often associated with Latin@s. During their fight, Santana exclaims that she's from "Lima Heights

³⁸ Meredith Grey is played by Ellen Pompeo and Izzie Stevens is played by Katherine Heigl

Adjacent,” which later in the season she adds is “on the wrong side of the tracks” thereby furthering this construction of Santana as morally corrupt and creating the space for whiteness to again be situated as morally superior.

The moral corruption attached to all three characters and the sexual conquest of Latinas more generally has historical ties to the Spanish conquest. Particularly within Mexican and Mexican-American traditions, the *virgen/puta*³⁹ dichotomy is rooted in the history of Spanish conquest, wherein a Nahuatl⁴⁰ woman, Malintzin is accused of betraying her people and aiding Hernán Cortés in the demise of the Aztec empire. “She has long been regarded as a traitor to her people, a dangerously sexy, scheming woman who gave Cortés whatever he wanted out of her own self interest” (Townsend, 2006). The fact that none of the three characters analyzed here is portrayed as virginal exacerbates their sexualization and moral corruption when they are understood through the *virgen/puta* narrative of conquest, and of brown bodies that are meant to serve and be controlled by their conquerors. Much as Malintzin has been denied her humanity and complexity through the retelling of her story, so too are these popular depictions of queer Latinas distorting and erasing the complex realities of the women they claim to represent.

The popular, privilege-driven narrative that surrounds the act(s) of coming out has created a culture where individuals who are not out face pressure to disclose their sexuality and accusations of deception if they do not do so (Tatum, 2014). However, for individuals with intersecting marginalized identities, coming out is neither safe nor freeing, as the common myth claims it to be. This pressure to disclose often comes from

³⁹ *Virgen* is the Spanish word for virgin; *puta* is the word for whore. This dichotomy refers to the way in which women are frequently viewed as pure (*virgen*), traitorous (*puta*), or simultaneously both. Within this popular history there are narratives of oppression and erasure that fall outside of the scope of this analysis.

⁴⁰ The Nahuas are an Indigenous group that has historically resided in what is now considered Mexico.

the top down, whereby individuals who have the least to lose challenge the authenticity and integrity of those with more to lose when they decline to make themselves vulnerable and visible by coming out. While it is important to note the correlation between communities of color and marginalization based on class, access to education and health care, immigration status, and geographic location, the false assumption that communities of color are inherently less accepting of non-normative sexualities is manufactured in order to situate whiteness as superior based on its perceived progressive acceptance of queerness. This narrative of benevolence allows whites to feel entitled to comment on and involve themselves in the lives and decisions of Queer People of Color, and can be seen in distinct ways in all three of the representations covered here.

The most overt and unapologetic display of white dominance comes from *Glee*. One of the central themes to Santana's story arc is the friction between her reluctance to come out and the desire of her classmates for her to be out. She resists and actively works to maintain her privacy (which remains partially intact until the third season), even while other students (including her love interest and best friend, Brittany) push relentlessly to out her. It is worth noting that none of the characters of color have input on Santana's decision to disclose—it is exclusively white students and faculty who feel entitled to weigh in. The classmate who is most vocal about outing Santana is, not surprisingly, the white male protagonist, Finn Hudson.⁴¹

During the third season, Santana slowly begins to express feelings semi-publicly for Brittany, while also engaging in an informal feud with Finn. In one of their interactions, Finn proclaims, “You look like an ass-less J-Lo,” to which Santana rebuts with a slew of sharp insults. Finn's reference to Jennifer Lopez and her buttocks allude to

⁴¹ Played by Cory Monteith

the exotification of Latinas, particularly those whose racial heritage includes “resonances of blackness,” and also to the tokenization of two contemporary Latina models—Lopez and Salma Hayek (Molina Guzmán & Valdivia, 2004). These women, along with Sofia Vergara, have become widely understood modern archetypes of Latina beauty.

In response to Finn’s comments, Santana explains: “I’m from Lima Heights. I was raised on insults. It’s how mi abuela put me to sleep at night, and she is not a nice lady. You know she tried to sell me once? And it wasn’t until I was in Kindergarten that I learned my name wasn’t ‘garbage face.’” The use of Spanish (“abuela”) in this context serves multiple purposes. First, it is a reminder of Santana’s racialized identity, which is also embodied by her grandmother, and second, it specifically establishes ties between identity, family, and verbal abuse. By making the connection, viewers who are not exposed to Latin@ communities and families (namely, white viewers) are set up to form negative opinions about Santana’s grandmother and thereby about older generations of Latin@s. She then barrages him with insults and he, reaching for something to throw back, exclaims:

Hey Santana, why don’t you just come out of the closet? You know, I think I know why you’re so good at tearing everybody else down. It’s because you’re constantly tearing yourself down because you can’t admit to everybody that you’re in love with Brittany and she might not love you back. That must hurt, not being able to admit to everyone how you really feel. You know what I think you are? A coward.

Finn’s targeting of Santana’s sexuality and his accusation that she is opposed to coming out because she is not brave enough points to the “out is always best” mentality that has dominated mainstream discourse around the gay rights movement (Ballou, 2015). In further support of this agenda, Santana is outed publicly on a political ad later in this

episode, giving the impression that had she been “honest” about her sexuality, the repercussions would have somehow been fewer.

In attempts to support Santana and her family through the coming out process, Coach Sylvester calls a meeting with Mr. Schuester and Mr. Hummel.⁴² The fact that all three of the adults who claim to support Santana are white not only presents whites as superior, but also ignores the intersectionality of Santana’s identities. She reveals that she has yet to come out to her parents and leaves the office in tears.

Santana blames Finn for outing her and slaps him in public. When they are in the principal’s office discussing her punishment, Santana pleads innocence, explaining, “When I get really pissed off, Santana gets taken over by my other evil personality. I call her Snicks. Her wrath of words is called Snicks Juice. I’m kind of like the Incredible Hulk—you can’t blame me for anything Snicks does.” This perpetuates the idea that Latinas are hot-tempered and sometimes violent. Finn looks like the benevolent hero by lying about her hitting him in order to keep her on the glee club so that he can reach out to her, despite the fact that she doesn’t want him to. Finn insists that Santana come out publicly in order to avoid self-harm. When Santana resists, Finn decides that because they had a sexual encounter, he is now somehow entitled to provide input and override Santana’s agency about whether and when to out herself.

Finn is not the only privileged character to pressure Santana about coming out, and there is a clear leaning toward the “out is best” narrative even when the characters promoting it are unaware of Santana’s lesbian identity. During the sixteenth episode of the second season, Mr. Schuester attempts to use Lady Gaga’s “Born This Way” as a tool

⁴² Will Schuester is the coach of the glee club, played by Matthew Morrison; Burt Hummel is played by Mike O’Malley and is the father of the white gay glee club member, Kurt Hummel who is played by Chris Colfer.

to embrace things about each person that they may not be proud of or comfortable with. Before beginning the lesson, Mr. Schuester announces, “this is the only club at this school that represents pretty much every race, religion, sexual orientation, and clique.” At this point in the series, only one student in glee club is out as gay, a white male, Kurt. Rodriguez (2014) explains:

The inability to recognize the alternative sexual cultures, intimacies, logics, and politics that exist outside the sight lines of cosmopolitan gay white male urban culture is never benign. Instead, this denial colludes with a neoliberal scripting of identity politics that animates political agendas based on individual grievances against the state, as it obfuscates regimes of visibility that leave some bodies, gestures, practices, and violations unremarked” (p. 14).

According to the terms outlined in this episode, “pretty much every race” includes only white, black, and Asian, and “pretty much every ... sexual orientation” means only straight and gay, invisibilizing and devaluing all identities that fall outside this narrow scope. Additionally, of the twelve members, there are four students of color and the only religious affiliations (or lack thereof) that are referenced are Judaism, Christianity, and Atheism. This proclamation of inclusivity mirrors a larger trend in mainstream culture in the U.S. that Block (Interview with Kolodny & Michelson, 2015) deems a “pretend open society,” wherein the illusion of acceptance around sex and sexuality overshadows the reality that the discourses around them are often fictitious and harmful. The discouragement around engaging in and discussing sexuality, particularly queer sexuality, is increasing, and intentionally leaves very little room within the demarcations of recognized identities and thereby further marginalizes those who fall outside of this narrow definition of acceptable sexuality. The conflicting discourses around what constitutes acceptable sexuality and the simultaneous hyper-sexualization of female

bodies of color precludes Queer Women of Color from ever being able to be included in the discourse of what Puar (2007) describes as “acceptable queerness”—in other words, regardless of sexual habits, Queer Women of Color are always already queered and marked for consumption, death, or conquest by whites.

Homonationalism and Coming Out On Screen

In the service of the homonormative/homonationalist narrative, Carmen, Callie, and Santana are all depicted with parallel but not always intersecting identities. Their lesbian-ness or bisexuality is held up and celebrated through references to white queerness or white benevolence, while their Latinidad is associated with static intolerance, most visibly during their coming out interactions with family members. The quest for normativity and inclusion is also depicted in all three storylines through monogamous partnering, marriage, and children.

For Carmen, this manifests through her decision to come out to her family only when in a committed, monogamous⁴³ relationship, despite knowing she was gay⁴⁴ from an early age. It is as if Carmen is so enraptured by Shane’s love that she can no longer lie to her family, and she comes out to them during the ninth episode of the third season.⁴⁵ During this episode, Carmen and Shane go to Carmen’s mother, Mercedes’, house for a large family lunch, to which Mercedes has also invited a man named Pablo, with whom she intends to set Shane up. As Pablo is trying to make uncomfortable small talk with Shane, Carmen accuses her of “pimping Shane out” and then explaining in Spanish that

⁴³ Carmen and Shane agree to a monogamous relationship, although Shane is unfaithful on more than one occasion.

⁴⁴ While Carmen is trying on wedding dresses, she shares this insight about herself as a child, specifically using the term “gay” to describe her sexuality and saying she always wanted a wedding.

⁴⁵ “Lead, Follow, or Get Out of the Way,” written by the show’s creators and producers, Ilene Chaiken, Kathy Greenberg, and Michele Abbott. Directed by Moisés Kaufman.

Shane is not interested in Pablo. When Mercedes asks how Carmen would know this, she further explains in a mixture of Spanish and English that they are girlfriends, saying, “we live in the same house and we sleep in the same bed, mother.” When Mercedes demands that they leave immediately, Carmen’s grandmother, inquires in Spanish about what is taking place, saying, “a la familia no se le eche a la calle.”⁴⁶ Mercedes is not swayed, and one of the final phrases that she directs at Carmen before they leave, “mejor puta que lesbiana” (better a whore than a lesbian) also rings tragically true for many queer Latinas (Marquez, 2014). It is negative consequences such as these that deter Queer Women of Color from coming out to family and close friends; however, the homogenous portrayal of Latin@ families as reacting similarly perpetuates the false idea that this is the reality of all queer Latinas when they disclose their sexuality.

Callie’s coming out process is more thoroughly depicted than that of Carmen, largely due to the fact that she only realizes her attraction to women in adulthood whereas Carmen acknowledged hers at a very young age. While Callie’s storyline promisingly addresses some of the nuances of coming out as an adult, particularly the confusion and potential for identity crisis, the interactions with family reinforce the same stereotypes about intolerance and stubbornness among religious Latin@s.

Shortly after Callie’s initial introduction, she elopes to Las Vegas with George, beginning what is short marriage fraught with obstacles. After Callie divorces George she realizes she has romantic feelings for another female doctor at the hospital. They, too, share a brief romantic relationship, but the other doctor, Dr. Erica Hahn,⁴⁷ leaves the show at the end of season four, at which point Callie resumes a sexual relationship with

⁴⁶ Translation: “we don’t throw family out on the street.”

⁴⁷ Played by Brooke Smith

Dr. Mark Sloan,⁴⁸ an attending surgeon at the hospital and the future father of her child. While engaging in this relationship, Callie continues to question her sexuality, although she does not self-identify until season 11 when she discusses her partner's attempts to grapple with her bisexuality and viewers are introduced to a male love interest.

The final episodes of season five and the first several episodes of season six introduce us to Callie's eventual wife, Dr. Arizona Robbins,⁴⁹ and we see the beginnings of Callie's journey to come out to her family. After Callie introduces Arizona to her father, Carlos Torres,⁵⁰ specifically as her girlfriend, Carlos tries to convince Callie to come home with him. When she resists, he then threatens to take away her trust fund unless she discontinues her relationship with Arizona. This is the only time in the series that we hear Callie speak Spanish—when she has just received the ultimatum from her father. Ramirez (the actor portraying Torres) is bilingual, which is clear in this scene both because of the speed with which she speaks and the vocabulary and accent she uses. As is the case with Carmen in *The L Word*, these scenes are without subtitles, again giving Spanish-speaking Latin@ viewership a reprieve from their culture being immediately appropriated. As she is in the middle of her distressed monologue, she is interrupted by Mark Sloan, who grabs her by the shoulders, and cuts her off: “Hey! Stop Speaking Spanish. Because I have to go to surgery in a minute and I don't speak Spanish.” The light music in this scene indicates that this is intended to be comic relief, but by preventing Callie from expressing her distress in the language that is most comfortable for her the message is sent that it is more important for others to understand her and thereby removes her individual agency. It is unsurprising that even in other episodes

⁴⁸ Played by Eric Dane

⁴⁹ Played by Jessica Capshaw

⁵⁰ Played by Héctor Elizondo

where Callie and her family are speaking privately that they are speaking English, since the show is broadcast on an English-language network and Spanish is used for dramatic effect.

During episode five of season six, Callie's father returns to the hospital with a man identified as Father Kevin, who is presumably the priest at the family's home church. When Callie realizes her father's intentions, she exclaims, "you think you can pray away the gay. You can't pray away the gay!" Later in the episode, Callie, her father, and Father Kevin sit down to talk, but the mediation does not end well. Carlos begins by asking Callie where he went wrong and continues by quoting the bible, to which Callie replies, "Jesus is my savior, daddy, not you. Jesus would be ashamed of you for judging me. He would be ashamed of you for turning your back on me." Callie leaves the room, visibly distressed. The interactions between Callie and her father during this episode reinforce the stereotypes that Latin@s are devout, unwavering Catholics even at the expense of family relationships.

Carlos' reluctance to accept his daughter's sexuality is further highlighted and portrayed negatively later in the episode when Arizona shares the story of her coming out to her father, a colonel in the U.S. Marine Corps, which apparently leads to a change of heart for Carlos. This juxtaposition between Arizona's white, military, father who accepts her almost without question, and Callie's father who is struggling so vehemently constructs the white father as benevolent and tolerant, thereby situating Carlos as inflexible and backward. Just before the end of the episode, Callie is leaving the hospital and finds her father waiting for her outside. Carlos first tries to make amends for their earlier argument by sharing an anecdote about Callie's courage as a child. He then asks if

Arizona makes her happy, to which she replies yes, and he inquires about the possibility of a wedding and grandchildren that he claims would be for her mother, to which she replies, “If Arizona wanted to spend the rest of her life with me? Yeah, I’ll put on a big white dress and dance down the aisle.” The two of them then embrace and the episode ends. Callie’s willingness to conform to normative aspirations to maintain her relationship with her family is similar to that of Carmen and Santana, and promotes the rhetoric of inclusion used by mainstream gay organizations. Because all three women are partnered with white women, it is impossible to separate the normative goals from race. Normativity, as well as the process of coming out, are narratives that originate from places of privilege, and the undue pressure that Queer People of Color to come out or pursue normative lives are not addressed in these representations.

In Santana’s case, her race is constantly referenced, although not in affirming ways and almost never when her sexuality is addressed. She is consistently constructed as morally and sexually deviant, even in her quest for what the mainstream gay movement deems “self actualization”⁵¹ (Ballou, 2015). When she convinces Brittany that, despite her relationship with Artie Abrams,⁵² a male member of the glee club, the intimacy between Brittany and Santana “isn’t cheating because the plumbing’s different,” Brittany suggests that they talk to someone because “it’s better with feelings,” to which Santana replies “I think it’s better when it doesn’t involve feelings. I think it’s better when it doesn’t involve eye contact.” Santana’s aversion to dialogue could merit an alternate reading as a reluctance to conform to the mainstream narratives that privilege coming out.

⁵¹ “In the mainstream LGBTQIA+ narrative, coming out is the “happy ending” of our stories. It is self-actualization. It brings joyfulness, completion, and self-love” (Ballou, 2015).

⁵² Played by Kevin McHale

The more likely transmitted message, however, is that she is fearful, cowardly, and in need of rescuing by white saviors.⁵³

The two young women ask Holly Holliday⁵⁴ for help, at which point she creates a “sacred sexy sharing circle” and inquires about their sexuality and their relationship to each other. Santana replies, “Who knows? I’m attracted to girls and I’m attracted to guys. I made out with a mannequin. I even had a sex dream about a shrub that was just in the shape of a person.” The inclusion of these admissions alludes to accusations of queers as being pedophiles or interested in bestiality, while also reinforcing the gender binary⁵⁵ and the trope of the hypersexual Latina.

After Santana’s disclosure about her sexual attractions, Holliday then recounts her own experience at “an all girls college where the only industry in the town was the manufacturing of softball equipment. I still feel a tingle when I hear Ani DiFranco. Anyway, it’s not about who you’re attracted to, ultimately. It’s about who you fall in love with.” This effectively reinforces at least four stereotypes about women who have sex with women. First, since Holliday is introduced as something of a love interest for the straight male glee coach and this is the only time a non-normative sexual history is even remotely referenced (although not explicitly), she reinforced the idea that women who are sexually or romantically involved with other women in college—which is itself a marker for affluence that is often associated with whiteness—are just experimenting and will ultimately end up partnered with men. Second, even though Holliday is not the enforcer

⁵³ This is a reference to the white savior complex, which operates on the assumption that People of Color are incapable of acting in their best interests. In popular depictions, it is a “story that needs a white person to come and lift [people of color] up” (Williams in Denzin, 2014).

⁵⁴ The sexual education substitute, played by Gwyneth Paltrow

⁵⁵ The gender binary refers to the assumption that there are two biologically based genders. Contemporary literature, however, argues that gender is socially constructed, performative, and is observable along a spectrum.

of Santana's coming out, she sets up a racialized double standard. As a white woman who briefly engaged in sexual or romantic relationships with women (the extent of which is not clear), she is not encouraged to identify or present as anything other than heterosexual. Santana, on the other hand, is forcefully outed under the guise of inclusion and acceptance even though she is not entirely attached to a fixed identity. Third, Holliday presents two stereotypes about queer women: that they all play softball and listen to Ani DiFranco, whose music is largely associated with white feminism (Cooper, 2014). Lastly, her closing statement conflates sexual attraction with love. This not only reinforces the idea that the ultimate goal of everyone should be to fall in love (and presumably enter into a monogamous marriage and start a family), but also invisibilizes those individuals who have sex for pleasure or those who fall in love without sexual attraction.

Brittany decides to remain in her relationship with Artie, prompting Santana to team up with another closeted character, Dave Karofsky, to become each other's "beards"⁵⁶ and maintain social status at their high school. Santana's reference to "hiding" their sexuality promotes the idea that people who are not out are lying and therefore morally inferior to those who have publicly disclosed their non-heterosexuality (Ballou, 2014). When she comes out to him, Santana again references stereotypes affixed to the white affluent lesbians,⁵⁷ further conflating queerness with a particular aesthetic rather than allowing her identity and presentation to evolve organically. Even with these statements about what queer women look and act like, Santana's aesthetic does not noticeably change over the course of the series, which simultaneously reinforces ideas

⁵⁶ Santana defines beards as "when a gay man and woman date each other to hide the fact that they're gay."

⁵⁷ "Look, I'm not ready to start eating jicama or get a flat top yet either. Maybe in junior college."

about what “real” lesbians are supposed to look and act like (apparently they play softball, listen to Ani DiFranco, eat jicama, and go to Indigo Girl concerts), as well as what Latinas are supposed to look and act like (sex objects). By transmitting these contradicting yet parallel messages, Santana’s identity as a lesbian is negated and she is further stripped of her agency.

There are many instances both in *Glee* and *The L Word* where Santana and Carmen are either spoken for or about, rather than speaking for themselves, which mirrors the lived experiences of marginalized communities (Dawson, 2014). The episode that shows Santana coming out to her grandmother (viewers do not see her conversations with any other family members) centers the forced outing of Santana and involves the other members of the glee club singing to her about her identity. The first song, sung by the white gay couple is Pink’s “Pretty, Pretty Please,” after which Santana exclaims, “Thank you guys. Thank you Finn, especially. You know, with all the horrible crap I’ve been through in my life, now I get to add that.” Because Santana eventually gives in to the pressure to come out, this line is portrayed as comic resistance. However, the frustration of having her agency taken from her could also mean that she is in fact entirely serious. Santana later vocalizes her anger with the assignment after Finn attempts to pat himself on the back by asking what she thinks about the assignment. She replies, “Do you realize you’re basically forcing me out of the flannel closet?” and Finn backpedals by blaming the political ad for outing her instead of admitting that he has overstepped. Defensiveness is a frequent response to failed allyship, and is an immediate signifier of privilege (McKenzie, 2013). However, because Finn is clearly oblivious to his privilege and his offense, he charges forward with the assignment.

The episode concludes with three additional songs: Cindy Lauper's "Girls Just Wanna Have Fun" sung by Finn, to which Santana has an emotional reaction and thanks him; Katy Perry's "I Kissed A Girl" performed by Santana and the other girls in glee; and k.d. lang's "Constant Craving" sung by Santana alone after she comes out to her grandmother. After the performance of "I Kissed A Girl," Santana updates the others on coming out to her family: "I told my parents last night and they were actually ok with it. I just need to tell my abuela before she sees that stupid commercial. But luckily, she only watches Univision." Even though her parents responded positively, all viewers see is the negative rejection by her grandmother, which shapes how viewers form opinions about the reactions Latin@s have to loved ones disclosing queer identities.

The scene in which Santana comes out to her grandmother, Alma López, begins an antagonistic period in the relationship between the two that carries on to some degree until the eighth episode of the sixth and final season, which will be discussed in more detail later. Santana explains to her grandmother,

"Abuelita, I love girls the way that I'm supposed to feel about boys. It's just something that's always been inside of me, and I really want to share it with you because I love you so much. I want you to know me, who I really am. When I'm with Brittany, I finally understand what people are talking about when they talk about love. I've tried to hard to push this feeling away and keep it locked inside, but every day just feels like a war. And I walk around so mad at the world, but I'm really just fighting with myself. I don't want to fight anymore. I'm just too tired. I have to just be me.

By situating her feelings for girls in opposition to the correct way to feel, Santana's character is again constructed as ashamed and cowardly, for which the only remedy is to forge ahead and stay out at any price. Alma replies by telling Santana that "everyone has secrets" and "it's selfish of you to make me uncomfortable," before kicking her out of the

house. As is also the case with unsuccessful allyship, accusing someone else of being selfish generally signifies selfishness of the accuser and an unwillingness to acknowledge their own shortcomings (Boom, 2015; McKenzie, 2013). By highlighting this negative response instead of the positive responses of Santana's other family members, however, Alma serves as a representative for Latinidad and is now marked as selfish and stubborn.

In the case of all three characters, the only hope for reconciling the damage caused when coming out is marriage and the promise of children. Carmen's family refuses to acknowledge her relationship with Shane until they are informed that the two are getting married, at which point they come rushing to the ceremony.⁵⁸ As soon as Carmen reunites with her family, they whisk her away, citing the tradition of the groom not seeing the bride before the wedding—a theme that emerges again in Santana's wedding in *Glee*. During the same episode, Shane is reunited with her estranged father, whom she realizes is unfaithful to his wife. Concerned that she will inevitably follow in his footsteps, Shane leaves Carmen at the altar, and Carmen's time on the show is over. As Marquez (2014) points out, following Carmen's departure, "Chaiken realized there was a glaring role missing on a show set in LA, so to compensate she incorporated one giant Latino caricature" who is also constructed as exotic and existing only to please white women. The fact that Shane is continuously forgiven for her mistakes, while Carmen is discarded on a whim speaks to the larger oversights of the show's writers/creators. The conclusion of Carmen's storyline constructs her as disposable, and solidifies her as undeserving and marked for removal.

⁵⁸ The two plan to marry in a lavish destination wedding in Whistler, BC paid for by their heiress friend, Helena Peabody. This is yet another example of white savior complex and same-sex marriage serving capitalist interests.

Despite the fact that Carmen does not make it to the altar, the two other wedding depictions are nonetheless problematic. During the sixth season of *Glee*, Santana proposes to Brittany in front of the glee club, and they begin planning their wedding immediately. Brittany, in hopes of convincing Alma to attend the wedding, impersonates a home nurse and befriends her. It becomes evident that Brittany speaks Spanish when she recounts a (presumably false) story about being a young girl in Puerto Rico and singing the theme song for her internet talk show in Spanish (“Fondue For Two” becomes “Queso por dos”). Alma is the guest of honor on the show, and the decorations in the room are an unfortunate agglomeration of stereotypes, including cats in sombreros with maracas who are reading a book entitled “Forcing the Spring: Inside the Fight for Marriage Equality” by Jo Becker, which has been rejected by even some of the most privileged and problematic members of the gay community (Brekke, 2014). Alma shares the story of her life with her late husband, and inquires about Brittany’s upcoming wedding that she assumes is to a man. Brittany laments the amount of work that wedding planning requires and considers eloping, to which Alma responds, “If you do that, I’ll skin you alive! When two souls unite, it is a day of celebration! You should be surrounded by your loved ones, especially tu familia. Friends come and go, but family is your blood, and they need to share in your joy.” Alma’s immediate and visceral rejection of Santana’s relationship with Brittany suggests that this statement is accompanied by the caveat of heterosexuality.

When Brittany discloses to Santana that she has been spending time with Alma, Santana reacts with frustration, both with Brittany for going behind her back, and still with Alma for her continued silence. In attempts to justify her actions, Brittany argues

that “[i]f abuela gets to know us and see that we’re somewhat normal ... she’ll see us for who we really are—aside from the awesome lesbian sex part—that we’re just like everybody else.” Brittany’s aspirations for normalcy reflect the continued shift within LGBT movements toward normativity and acceptance, which are largely defined through heteronormative goals such as marriage and children (Duggan, 2003; Puar, 2007).

The episode with Santana and Brittany’s wedding aired on February 20, 2015, and brought a degree of finality to Santana’s queer identity, especially considering the series is set to end in eight episodes. As was the case with all three characters analyzed here, it took the convincing of a white character for the reluctant Latin@ family member to have a change of heart and embrace the sexuality of Carmen, Callie, or Santana. For Alma, it was Sue Sylvester, who showed up unannounced at her house with plans to ruin the wedding. Sue suggested that because of Alma’s religious opposition the two of them picket the wedding in the fashion of the Westboro Baptist Church, whose “God Hates Fags” signs have become iconic (Lopez, 2014). Alma then changes her mind and joins Sue at the wedding, ignoring Santana’s clear objection to Sue’s attendance. When Alma apologizes by saying, “I love you, Santana, and I don’t want to be the person in your life that causes you pain. I also don’t want to miss a day that I’ve been dreaming about my whole life, or the birth of your kids or any other important days.” This allusion to children further emphasizes the normative goals promoted by queer characters on television.

Grey’s Anatomy arguably challenges the normative narratives presented in the other shows, including the rhetoric of what makes a family. During the seventh season, when Callie and Arizona are separated due to Arizona accepting a fellowship in Africa, it

comes to light that Callie is pregnant with Mark's child. When Arizona returns, this causes additional stress on the reconciliation efforts, although eventually they decide to stay together and raise the baby with Mark, who happens to live across the hall. This nonnormative parenting arrangement is worth noting because it is one of the few examples of queer parenting that does not readily mimic that of heteronormative models. It could be argued, however, that the inclusion of the biological father was to appease viewers who are opposed to same-sex parenting, although Rhimes' repertoire and writing decisions do not suggest this is the case. When Callie is 6-7 months pregnant, Arizona plans to take her away for a romantic weekend to propose, but they are involved in a catastrophic car accident that almost takes the lives of Callie and the baby. An emergency C-section saves the baby, and both begin to recover. After a long recovery, Callie and Arizona prepare for their wedding.

The episodes leading up to the event show both the families coming together and meeting each other and their granddaughter Sofia for the first time. Callie's mother refuses to hold the baby, which visibly upsets Callie. Later in the episode, Callie has a veil custom made to resemble that of her mother, and they begin a candid conversation. Callie explains that she is making choices about the wedding to please her mother, to which her mother replies, "don't you dare imply that there's anything about a wedding to a woman or a baby out of wedlock that is for me." She continues, "do you know how devastating it is to raise a child, to love a child, and to know you won't see that child in heaven?" and later, "you are not a bride, and I am not the mother of a bride, and this isn't your wedding." Callie's mother leaves, and Callie insists that her father go with her. She

later finds out that the minister they had hired will not be able to officiate, and Callie is convinced that the wedding should no longer happen.

A friend and fellow doctor, Miranda Bailey,⁵⁹ comes over to try to change her mind, and she resists: “I know why they sent you. It doesn’t matter what you say—the wedding is still off. My mom’s right, it’s a joke. It’s not a wedding and it’s not happening. I can’t have a priest, I no longer have a minister, I’m not being given away by my dad, the wedding isn’t legal. What’s the point? This isn’t a wedding—it isn’t even in a church. It’s nothing. It’s a couple of girls playing dress up.” This statement alone would be quite troubling, as it would place undue importance on the power of the state to dictate when and how queers can make decisions about their lives. However, Bailey quickly sets Callie straight by reminding her that she does not need those people or entities to make her marriage real. The reference to “real” marriages alludes to the quest for equality and to be viewed as “normal” or equal to heterosexual couples—an idea that further marginalizes Queer People of Color and those who fall outside the parameters of normalcy as defined by the most privileged individuals within the LGBT community.

The pressure to conform to these narrow parameters, both in action and identification, is visible in all three representations discussed here. In all cases, these women are sexualized, objectified, spoken for or over, and robbed of their agency. The stereotypes about Latinas are alive and well, and the nuances of these tropes seem to be lost on most of the writers. Further, the messages are clear that in order to be accepted as queer, there are certain specific criteria for inclusion—monogamy, children, and affluence. Without these markers, or at least a desire to acquire these status symbols, queer Latinas are open to even more sexualization and objectification than would

⁵⁹ Played by Chandra Wilson

otherwise be the case. While these same aggressions are leveled in the lived experiences of queer Latinas in the United States and elsewhere, the ability to self-identify emerges as one of the most powerful tools for liberation. In the next chapter, I will discuss interviews with three Latinas who identify as non-heterosexual along the spectrum of sexuality, and who embrace their agency around self-identification. The chapter will explore the same emergent themes from popular representations of queer Latinas coming out as well as salient areas that are absent from television depictions—particularly, the importance of self-identification and coming out while not partnered.

Chapter 3: Interviews with Lesbian/Bisexual/Queer Chicanas/Latinas

When designing these interviews, I had a completely different project in mind. I had initially imagined a project that focused entirely on the details of what each woman considered her coming out narrative. I imagined that would look different for each participant, but that there would be easily identifiable and salient themes. What ended up happening, through the evolution of the participants as well as the project and some academic elements beyond my control, was that I chose to incorporate other elements of the coming out process and hold those elements up next to popular representations of similar events. As with the analysis in the previous chapter of salient themes in television representations, this chapter discusses three main topics. This chapter, however, differs in that the discussions of each topic have more depth as a result of the length of interviews with each participant and the focused nature of the questions. The three salient themes discussed here include physical appearance and gender expression, experiences with erasure, appropriation, and domination, and finally, coming out to family and friends and instances of homonormativity/Homonationalism. Additionally, there were some themes emerged in the interviews that were not present in the discussion of the television representations, which will be discussed at the end of this chapter.

The criteria for inclusion in this study were fairly simple. I requested that participants identify as Chicana and/or Latina and lesbian/bisexual/queer, and that they be out.⁶⁰ Of the three interview participants, Adriana⁶¹ grew up in El Paso, Texas to a Puerto Rican father and a Mexican-American mother. Both parents spoke Spanish, but Adriana did not learn as a child. She came out at age 16, while living in El Paso, and self

⁶⁰ For the purposes of this study, “out” indicates that participants have disclosed their sexual orientation to family, friends, and peers, and are not at risk for repercussions in the event of a breach of confidentiality.

⁶¹ Pseudonym

identifies as “Chicanariqueña”⁶² as well as “a butch”⁶³ lesbian woman.” Veronica⁶⁴ grew up in Denver, Colorado to second and third generation Mexican American parents. She spoke English at home and identifies as Hispanic⁶⁵ and bisexual. Bette⁶⁶ grew up in South Central Los Angeles and later in Riverside County, California. Her parents emigrated to the U.S. from El Salvador, and she grew up speaking Spanish and English at home. Bette identifies with the terms queer, Latina, Woman of Color, and Queer Woman of Color. All three women are currently partnered, have completed at least an undergraduate degree, and are between the ages of 25-30. I intentionally excluded geographic location, immigration status, and age as criteria for inclusion in the study because they did not relate directly to the scope of the project, although they would undoubtedly impact the experiences of women involved.

Physical Appearance, Gender Expression, and Identity

Because physical appearance contributes directly to the ways that individuals are treated and perceived as they move through the world, it has been an important component of queerness, particularly for many Queer People of Color, since physical appearance and sexuality have been so heavily policed already. Additionally, misconceptions about the relationship between sexual orientation and gender identity lead to varying degrees of visibility and are further complicated when intersecting with race and class. For example, Masculine of Center (MoC) or butch women are often assumed to embody traits of hegemonic masculinity, while Femme of Center (FoC) women are

⁶² Chicana and Puerto Rican, Adriana came up with this term

⁶³ Because Adriana self-identifies as butch, this is the term I use when specifically addressing her narrative. In more general contexts, I use Masculine of Center (MoC) because it refers to a wider range of identities.

⁶⁴ Pseudonym

⁶⁵ Hispanic is not specifically listed as one of the criteria for inclusion in the study because of the shift away from the word within academic circles, although it is not specifically excluded when used as a self-identifier.

⁶⁶ Pseudonym and ode to Bette Porter of *The L Word*, played by Jennifer Beals

assumed to embody hegemonic femininity or the complimenting, submissive opposite of toxic masculinity (Friedman, 2013). In many cases, this leads to the invisibility of queer sexuality of femmes, and contributes to the hypersexualization of femme women, particularly femmes of color (Boson, 2014). Conversely, MoC women who are attracted to men often find their sexuality invisibilized based on hegemonic assumptions that masculine-presenting individuals exclusively desire women.⁶⁷ The policing of sexuality and gender presentation serves these hegemonic systems and contributes to the perpetuation of normativity that necessitates exclusion. All three women here described experiences with attempts to have their gender expression and/or sexuality policed, and they all subvert these attempts in distinct ways, which I explore in the following chapter.

Adriana describes herself as having “always been a tomboy” who grew up playing sports. In discussing her individual identity development, she explains some of the connections she made between gender and sexuality before learning about political identity in college, saying, “for a while I thought that I was transgender because I dressed in men’s clothing.” The conflation between gender identity,⁶⁸ gender presentation,⁶⁹ and sexuality has shifted somewhat in many communities, as the conceptualization of each is now understood as independent of the other, and is even presented as such in some avenues of dominant popular culture.⁷⁰ This is not to say that the two are never related or dependent on the other, as is the case for many queer individuals who intentionally

⁶⁷ As is the case with the women discussed here, and which reflects the diversity within and across communities with shared identities, no two of them identify the same, nor are their experiences representative of all queer Latinas.

⁶⁸ Gender identity refers to the gender (or lack thereof) that a person identifies with and is independent of the sex assigned at birth.

⁶⁹ Gender presentation is the physical manifestation of one’s gender identity, or how they choose to express their gender identity.

⁷⁰ In the most recent season of *Glee*, the football coach comes out as trans* and discusses his continued attraction to men.

present their gender in a way that signifies their sexuality. Rather, they are not *necessarily* linked.

Gender expression as it relates to signifying queer identity is not always perceivable, and it becomes potentially complicated for Queer Women of Color, as Bette explains. For her, style of dress “is more about navigating the politics of respectability more so than the politics of sexuality.” This speaks to the intersections of race and sexuality and how they shift depending on the environment. In some instances, gender nonconforming or androgynous individuals are forced to choose a more binary gender presentation in order to maintain employment (Wysinger, 2015). Because dominant narratives dictate that People of Color are frequently perceived to be lazy, the impetus to dress to a higher standard is always present. When asked about the thought process of getting ready to move through the world each day, Bette explains,

I’m thinking about ‘should I dress fancy today, like should I wear nice pants? It’s not so much ‘do I need to look straight today?’ or ‘should I look queer today?’ It’s more about the types of space I’m going to be occupying that day or the kinds of people I’m going to be engaging with that day.

For Bette, the necessity of being respected as a scholar outweighs the desire to be read as queer, which is a common struggle for Queer People of Color, particularly in academia. Bette also identifies strongly with the academic community, which can inadvertently situate her in a Nepantla-esque space of feeling torn between sexual identity and gender expression and the politics of respectability.

Adriana’s experience with visibility is distinct, which she attributes to her MoC presentation. Conversely, Veronica attributes some of the acceptance to her femme appearance, although she notes that it is often a passive acceptance, particularly in the

case of her father: “I think it’s easier, too, because I’m a girl and I still look like a girl... He accepts it but he never, like, *accepts* it.”⁷¹ Veronica’s bisexual identity is further invisibilized by the fact that she is currently in a relationship with a man, and she frequently has to out herself to others. Dominant, hegemonic conceptualizations of what queer women are “supposed” to look like mean that Veronica and Bette are not always read as queer even when they are aware of and intentional about their queer identity when preparing to move through certain spaces. This invisibility as a result of white supremacist and hegemonic gender discourses also contributes to the engagement with entitlement around the sexuality of these women and other Queer Women of Color.

In addition to the vast underrepresentation of varied gender expression in television, Adriana and Bette both voiced concern around the types of roles that depict Latinas. Namely, the frequent portrayals of Latinas as two-dimensional versions of domestic workers, criminals, immigrants, and homemakers limit the depth and breadth of representation of the lived experiences of Latinas. As Adriana points out,

We are either over sexualized or the undocumented maid who is always threatened by deportation (and that is not to undermine domestic workers). Don’t even get me started on *Devious Maids*. Latin@s/Chican@s are also depicted as being unintelligent; especially when they represent someone who cannot speak English. This is a very important time for Latin@s/Chican@s in America because our being in America is questioned and criminalized; regardless of your citizenship status. So Latin@s/Chican@s are stereotyped as being a criminalized “illegal alien” (gosh I hate those words!) who have no place in this country. Our belonging is not only questioned, criminalized but is often ridiculed...made fun of.

This ridicule is also visible in the portrayal of Papi in *The L Word*. She has been described as “one giant Latino stereotype” or, as Bette puts it, “a very gendered version of the Latin Lover” (Marquez, 2014; Ramirez Berg, 2002). The Latin Lover trope

⁷¹ In the audio recording there is a marked change in inflection that highlights the nominal acceptance rather than a deep or complete acceptance. Italics are used to emphasize this change.

combines stereotypes of danger and risk that primarily fall on the People of Color. As with the other characters analyzed here, Papi's character is designed specifically for the sexual awakening of white women, which upon her initial introduction is depicted as directly connected to her employment.⁷² This again perpetuates the narratives about Latin@s and productivity, and the hypersexualization of Latinas, specifically that they cannot control their sexual desire and are therefore situated as inferior to whites, whose sexuality is primarily associated with mental functions (Molino Valdivia & Guzmán, 2004). Bette's description of Papi as gendered connects with Adriana's comment about what is often referred to as androgyny when it comes to queer women in popular media, but what is actually readable as feminine.

While it is possible to interpret these presentations of FoC women (even those who are labeled "androgynous" for their short hair, queer sexuality, and business attire) as contributing solely to hegemonic gender norms and catering to the white male gaze, it is important to acknowledge that some women have more freedom to dictate the terms of their gender presentation in the public eye. Adriana specifically identifies the lack of representation of diverse gender expressions, particularly for women.

Characters from *Orange Is the New Black* is probably the only mainstream show that has given a true representation of the fluidity of sexuality and gender identity. Boo (Lea DeLaria) is also probably the only character on the show whose appearance carries on out off the set and as a woman who identifies as being butch, that is truly inspiring... Even Ellen Degeneres and Rachel Maddow, who seem to barely cross the line of androgyny, are passable as women. They are people who society can still box into the binary of what a man and a woman are supposed to look like.⁷³

⁷² Papi is a limousine driver who, while on the clock, has sex with one of the white main characters in her limo.

⁷³ This excerpt is from an email follow up and is included in its original format

The fact that all three of the women that Adriana references here (Lea DeLaria, Ellen DeGeneres, and Rachel Maddow) are white highlights the racial privilege that these “acceptable queers” enact through their non-normative gender expressions. Gender non-conforming People of Color face much higher stakes and more critical eyes on their outward presentations because it interacts with popular discourses of class, consumption/production capabilities, and race. However, Adriana also points out the troubling reality that “androgynous” has come to mean short hair and a queer sexuality (rather than a more equal mix of masculine and feminine traits) as is the case with new *Orange is the New Black* addition, Ruby Rose (Rose, 2014).

This shifting interpretation of androgyny relates directly to white supremacy and hegemonic gender norms. Dominant culture in the U.S. operates almost exclusively in service of the white male gaze, which relies on self-importance. In other words, even representations of queer women are primarily designed for the pleasure of hegemonic white masculinity. This dominant masculinity conflates sexuality and gender in such a way that when MoC women are considered, they perform the same function as men, that is to conquer the bodies of women. Because of this reliance on self-importance, the inclusion of MoC queer women demands the exclusion or the reduction of sexual conquest performed by white males. The lack of butch women in popular culture invisibilizes the experiences and lives of butch or MoC women, particularly queer MoC Women of Color.

Particularly as they relate to gender expectations, all three women expressed distinct experiences, although there were similarities among their discussion of traditional and historic gender roles as they were growing up. Historically, gendered roles in Latin@

communities have involved women as homemakers and men as breadwinners. Changing and non-normative family structures have meant that women who are partnered with women often divide tasks based on skills or preferences rather than gender presentation. For example, Adriana explains that her family often makes assumptions about the division of labor between her and her wife, which are often false.

I think because they play into gender roles so much, they kind of have expectations of what our home life is between Zoé and I. I think sometimes they think I take on traditionally the man's role, and her the woman's role because of how we look. I don't know how to comment on that because we play our own roles and that's it. I think they automatically assumed that she would take my last name, so they still refer to her as Zoé Cruz. But I actually took her name.

Adriana's intention around the choice to take her wife's last name can be read as subversion of normative gender expectations. The expectations themselves, however, indicate the larger trend of conflating gender expression with hegemonic or historic gender roles. Moreover, the idea that MoC, androgynous, or butch women shy away from historic tenets of womanhood such as domestic work, childbearing, or motherhood, is indicative of the pervasiveness of compulsory heterosexuality (Rose & Dahl, 2014; Bendix, 2014).

Veronica's experience around the gender norms she observed growing up and how she conceptualizes them now is distinct. She described her mother as "the caretaker," who assumed a majority of domestic tasks, while her father "brought in the money and paid all the bills and that was it." She stated that she preferred the work to be divided "50/50," but admitted that she is both caretaker and breadwinner in her household, which includes her sister's daughter. Caring for extended family is common in communities of color as well as among Queer People of Color, who are more likely to

be affected by systemic inequity, although Veronica did not elaborate on the particular circumstances here, nor did she weigh in on the significance of her partner's gender as it relates to division of labor. Based on the experiences of Adriana and Bette in response to their ambiguous or MoC presentations it is likely that Veronica's gender expression and mutable sexuality contributes to her role as both caretaker and breadwinner.

Interactions with Erasure, Cultural Appropriation, and Borderlands

The experience of straddling identities and communities, particularly as queer Latinas/Chicanas, was a driving force behind much of the literature of the Chicana feminist movement in the 1960s and it is something that is rarely addressed explicitly in popular representations of queer Latinas. In their interviews, however, all three women discussed the disconnect between different parts of their identities and communities. While it is not possible to assume that all queer Latinas experience these feelings, it did emerge as a common theme in these specific conversations. For Adriana, she felt that the nuances of navigating the world as a butch lesbian were difficult for her family to fully understand. Bette, conversely, struggled with her white partner's inability to share experiences of being a Queer Woman of Color, and Veronica voiced her feeling of isolation from the LGBTQ+ community and her reluctance to hide her bisexual identity. All three women have unique and diverse experiences, but the feelings of navigating these metaphorical borderlands form a common thread.

Adriana specifically discusses the way that her gender expression and hyper visible sexuality shapes her lived experiences and how she moves through the world, which is distinct from the experiences of Veronica, whose sexuality is frequently

invisibilized through her FoC gender expression. Adriana explains, “It’s pretty obvious that I wear my sexuality, and I don’t think it should be obvious, but it doesn’t bother me and I want people to see my sexuality.” Her relative comfort with being identified as non-heterosexual is central to her identity as a butch lesbian, and she is not alone in reflecting on the problematic realm of navigating MoC gender presentation in the workplace (Wysinger, 2015). Her gender expression and its impact on her lived experience is one of the most salient areas of disconnect between her sexual/gender identity and her relationship with family, which is echoed by the participants in Acosta’s study with sexually nonconforming Latinas (2013, p. 36).

Veronica, who is currently partnered with a man, provides a unique perspective of her experiences of alienation and erasure that shares similarities with that of many individuals who identify as non-heterosexual but are in relationships with a member of the opposite gender (Beredjick, 2014). Particularly because of her appearance and embodiment of easily readable aspects of dominant femininity, her sexuality is not always as readily apparent. Femme invisibility means that, without widely readable signifiers, sexuality is rarely questioned to be anything other than the default heterosexuality.

Veronica also notes her partner’s pride in her sexual past, through comments such as “I changed her back.” While this disclosure was made seemingly in jest, and the implications behind the comment are not clear, it is reminiscent of the sentiment that bisexual women are “just experimenting” or “just need the right man”⁷⁴ in order to normalize their sexuality. Bisexual women are frequently the recipients of criticism from

⁷⁴ In the Glee episode “I kissed a girl,” which details part of Santana’s coming out process, a male Lacrosse player tries to use this argument to justify his sexual advances.

all angles, and the resulting isolation is observable. Veronica discusses her feelings of exclusion from the LGBTQ+ community as they relate to her current relationship.

I've kind of discovered as I've gotten older that it's harder to be bisexual in the GLBT community because you're shunned. Like, it's ok when you're with a person of the same sex. But the minute that you get with someone of the opposite sex, they—I always say you get kicked off Lesbo Island. So now I don't really identify with any community because I'm just kind of out there and it's more gossip, like "oh, now she's with a boy." And I don't really associate myself with the straight community because that's just, like, the everyday world. Now that I have a boyfriend I tend to go to less LGBT places, but it's not necessarily on purpose. It's just that where there's a lot of gay people is mostly the club, and I don't really go to clubs, period. I'm thirty. I don't have time to go and hang out at the bar anymore.

Here, Veronica also attributes her decreased involvement with the GLBT⁷⁵ community to age and responsibility, referring to the strong connection between this community and nightlife, which is largely the result of the historic criminalization of homosexual behavior in the U.S. that discouraged and often prevented queer individuals to gather in public spaces, and thereby relegating them to covert drinking establishments where they were vulnerable to violence (Rupp & Freeman, 2014). In the post-Stonewall era,⁷⁶ bars and dance clubs continued to serve as meeting places and formed a central part of queer communities, which Adriana experienced as well in her time working at an El Paso gay bar.

In addition to the isolation Veronica expressed around the gay community, she also describes feeling alienated from the Hispanic community as a result of her being monolingual.

⁷⁵ I use the same acronym here that Veronica uses to remain with her words rather than my own.

⁷⁶ Stonewall refers to the bar in New York City that was stormed by police in 1969 and the riots that followed. These events are largely considered a turning point in the modern LGBTQ+ rights movement in the U.S.

Because now I'm third generation and I don't speak Spanish, I get shunned on that, too. I mean I look like I would speak Spanish. I look like I'm probably from Mexico, but I'm not. And so people who their parents are from Mexico or they're from Mexico, they look down on me too. It's like the same thing. They don't like me because they say I'm whitewashed.

While Veronica did not express any resistance from Hispanic family for her bisexual identity, the experience of being called “whitewashed” describes yet another borderland that many Latin@s must navigate in the U.S.—the struggle for authenticity and the loss of identity. White supremacist discourse highlights the Otherness of bodies of color while they are simultaneously criticized for not maintaining enough of their cultural heritage to remain exotic and attractive. Her navigation of these sexual borderlands is evident in her descriptions of feeling alienated from both lesbian-identified community members and first/second generation Latin@s.

Coming Out, Compulsory Heterosexuality, and Homonationalism

The arguments presented by dominant queer culture in the U.S. that advocate the “out is always best” mentality work to reinforce not only compulsory heterosexuality, but also the parameters of acceptable queerness and worth. These tools that support the politics of inclusion are the argument for honesty, liberation, and social obligation. The honesty stance hinges on the idea that if an individual is not out to absolutely everyone that they can possibly be out to, they are being dishonest and thereby immoral.

Liberation, or the idea that immediately upon coming out, a queer individual will feel free and like a weight has been lifted. While this feeling of relief is not out of the question, the implications for People of Color who do not experience it are real and observable. The promise of feeling better is a manipulative motive for already marginalized individuals to

make themselves even more vulnerable. The social obligation myth dictates that by coming out, queer individuals are paving the way for acceptance. These motivations for disclosing one's sexuality ignore the unequal risks faced by Queer People of Color, low-income or working class queers, or queer individuals who experience violence, and also perpetuate the notion that the primary goal of the LGBTQ+ community⁷⁷ is inclusion into dominant U.S. society, which erases and excludes a large percentage of individuals who identify across the sexuality and gender spectra. The insistence to come out and stay out contributes to bullying, the practice of outing, increased violence against non-normative individuals and communities, and places already marginalized individuals at an even greater risk.

For the women whose experiences are documented here, the decision to come out was not always made individually, and it frequently intertwined with family relationships. Being out in their current lives is central to their identities, however, and often informs their navigation of the world around them. Both Adriana and Veronica came out to varying degrees while still in high school, although the experiences they shared were quite different. Adriana first discussed the bullying she experienced at school and the escape she found in the queer community and her church in El Paso rather than focusing on family reactions, which is where Veronica began her narrative. Bette came out to her family during her undergraduate studies, when she was living away from her parents' home.

⁷⁷ This argument also hinges on the assumption that there is a singular community with singular goals, which is not the case.

Veronica's candor about how her sexuality was first disclosed to family highlights the removal of agency through her mother's decision to share her identity with extended family.

Obviously I didn't want to come out. That's not a conversation you want to have. But I started dating girls and they always looked like boys, so my mom pretty much knew, and we had gotten into a fight and it kind of just came out during an argument about something completely different. And she was like, "ok, I already knew." And then I didn't tell anybody else, like, she told everyone else and they were like "whatever."

Despite the absence of negative reactions from Veronica's extended family, she expresses frustration with her mother's revocation of her agency. Her non-normative dating activity triggered intrusion by her mother, whether or not it was intentionally invasive, and it contributed to Veronica's sense of difference. Adriana explains that after coming out to her parents, "they did most of the coming out to family for me," although she expresses gratitude for their assumption of what she considers to be a large part of the burden. In both cases, the transmission of information along family lines is evident, and both women maintain relationships with extended family, which reflects the cultural narrative of familial importance that is evident in the television representations. While Adriana cites the last time she had to come out as over ten years ago, Veronica described needing to out herself frequently in order to maintain visibility. This assumption by those around her that she is heterosexual, particularly because she is in a relationship with a man, articulates the pervasiveness of compulsory heterosexuality.

Bette's experience with coming out was largely tied to her decision to move away from her parents for her undergraduate studies. Danielson (2010) refers to the elaboration of identities after moving away from families of origin as "queer exodus," and posits that

it is often a central theme in the coming out experience of queer Latin@s. Bette confirms that her relationship with her mother improved drastically after her physical separation, although the pressure to return to normative expressions of gender and sexuality is still a point of contention between them. Despite Bette's status as out right now, she explains that it is largely contingent upon her being partnered.

All three women challenge the assumed dissonance between queerness and religion, particularly the assumptions about queerness, Latinidad, and Catholicism, since they were all raised in Catholic households and have since developed dynamic relationships to the church and its teachings. While Adriana no longer identifies as a practicing Catholic, the centrality of her faith as she was coming out is noteworthy:

At the time I thought I had to come out to God. That was hard for me to negotiate, but I found that my—the community at church supported me before my own family did. I came out to them first, and that was a very—I think that was a very big part of my process and a big part of me being ok at that time, at 16, of being gay and to negotiate through that. I think I thought at that point that my faith kind of guided me through those tough years—of having to deal with being outed at school and deal with coming out to my parents and things like that. The reason it was so hard for me to negotiate is because we always hear, over and over, that homosexuality is a sin, and things like that. But in my church they never professed that. They never interpreted those sayings in the bible like that. I specifically remember my priest talking about judging others, and at that particular mass that I was going to it was mainly young adults in that it was all the confirmation classes and the catechist classes. So, he kind of started playing off the different stereotypes that teenagers deemed each other, like goths, nerds, and then he said gay people as well. I remember when he said that, I realized, you know, alright, this is going to be ok within this community. And it was.

Adriana's experience stands out because of how much it differs from the common conceptions about the Catholic Church and its relationship to LBGTQ+ individuals.

Although the current Pope has demonstrated what some consider an increased level of

tolerance than his predecessors, the Catholic Church is notorious for its conservative stance on LGBTQ+ identity, and this perceived acceptance is largely based on the assumptions of homonormativity. Veronica still considers herself a practicing Catholic, although she explains, “I don’t agree with everything the church says.” She did not express a conflict of interest between her bisexuality and her faith.

Bette takes on a unique relationship to spirituality, which she attributes largely to the writings of Gloria Anzaldúa⁷⁸ and her reclamation of the Virgin Mary as a figure of Indigenous identity. Both Bette and Adriana speak extensively about their identity development through higher education and feminist writings. Both women attribute their strong sense of racial/ethnic and sexual/gender identities to their coursework and extracurricular activities in both their undergraduate and graduate studies. Of course, higher education is not a requirement for a strong sense of identity. In the cases of Bette and Adriana, it gave them both the language to articulate their feelings and afford them the ability to connect those feelings with larger trends and communities

The experiences of women in interracial relationships with other women have not been largely documented, although they can provide insight into larger trends of interracial relations within the LGBTQ+ and feminist communities. Bette, who shared some of her struggles in navigating the world as a Woman of Color and her concerns around her partner’s ability to understand those struggles, echoed similar findings to those of Acosta (2013) in her work with interracial/interethnic couples.⁷⁹ Bette explains:

⁷⁸ In *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Anzaldúa recounts the story of Coatloapeuh, who Anzaldúa considers “the central deity connecting us to our Indian ancestry” (p. 49).

⁷⁹ “The issue of not feeling seen or understood was a very common concern for ... the study participants in their twenties who were at the height of their self-exploration and identity building. Because these women were so new in their journeys to explore their ethnic self, it was particularly important that their partners see them as racial and ethnic beings” (p. 73).

Since coming out I focused a lot on my identity as a queer person, and I feel like in focusing on that identity I kind of didn't relate to my other identities. And it wasn't until I felt that I'm as queer as it's gonna get—like there's nothing more that I can learn—then I really started to explore my Latina identity and my identity as a Woman of Color. And I'd say within the past 2-3 years, I've really focused on wanting to keep that identity close to me.

Because Bette has dedicated such a significant amount of energy into understanding her identity from an academic and theoretical perspective, the contrast between that awareness and the inevitable intrusion of white privilege is heightened. Bette explained that this challenged her certainty about being in a long-term relationship with a white woman, specifically, rather than expressing a desire to be in a relationship with another Latina, which suggests that the power dynamics of whiteness are at play. These same power dynamics, particularly that of white comfort, are easily identifiable in the television characters. The practice of People of Color ensuring white comfort, the most common articulation of which is “simply not bringing up racism in conversation,” contributes to the narrative of white supremacy—that whites deserve comfort at the expense of the comfort of People of Color, and is particularly visible in Bette's comments here, but also in the character arcs of Carmen, Santana, and Callie, who all make major sacrifices in order to provide comfort and stability for their white partners.⁸⁰

⁸⁰ Carmen tolerates repeated infidelity, Santana settles on a college closer to home because Brittany fails to graduate on time, and Callie foregoes career advancements to support Arizona in the recovery of a leg amputation.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

Discussion

Because pop culture is all around and nearly unavoidable in contemporary U.S. society, the images that are displayed and the messages they portray about marginalized individuals and communities matter. The women interviewed for this project all had varying degrees of connection with popular representations of Latinas, queer women, and queer Latinas. When asked about their degree of connection, their responses were not limited to the characters analyzed in chapter two. All three women were very familiar with the queer characters in *The L Word*⁸¹, which came at a pivotal time in their coming out process and queer identity development. In addition to the queer Latina characters on *The L Word*, Adriana and Bette identified other characters from the series as well as characters from other shows including *Orange is the New Black*⁸² (2013), *Cristela*⁸³ (2014), and *The Ellen Show* (2001). Veronica explained that she rarely watches television and as a result is almost entirely unfamiliar with these characters.

While all three women have some shared experiences under the umbrella of “coming out,” something they all do in a unique way is their subversion of normativity and rejection of hegemony. In the case of Adriana, her decision to take her wife’s name challenges the dominant notion that butch/femme relationships mirror hegemonic male/female ones, which encourages a reconceptualization of what queer relationships can look like. Veronica’s refusal to be closeted, even in the face of blatant attempts at

⁸¹ Carmen de la Pica Morales, played by Sarah Shahi, and “Papi” (no other name is given), played by Janina Gavankar

⁸² *Orange is the New Black* has been critically acclaimed for its revolutionary portrayal of women in a federal corrections center. It centers Women of Color, queer/trans* women, and women who come from a background of poverty and/or violence. However, because none of the current characters are identified as queer *and* Latina it is beyond the scope of this project.

⁸³ Cristela Alonzo is “the first-ever Latina to create, write, produce, and star in her own comedy on primetime US television,” (Escobedo Shepherd, 2014).

erasure, leads to increased visibility of bisexuality, particularly that of bisexual femmes of color. Bette, through her rejection of and her refusal to perform normative gender roles within her family setting, challenges the notion that Latinas are submissive (Rodriguez, 2014).

The responses from the participants in this project largely reflect the disconnect between lived experiences and what is depicted in television under the banner of shared identities. Primarily, the physical appearances of the women on screen and the self-description and discussion of gender presentation from the women interviewed vary drastically. Secondly, it is evident that the experiences of sexualization manifest in distinct ways for interview participants than those shown in the television shows discussed herein. Finally, the conceptualization of coming out and its repeated manifestation in the lived experiences of interview participants diverges radically from that of television characters. All of this suggests a need for increased and varied popular media representation of queer Chicanas/Latinas.

Although this study does not represent an adequate sample size for quantitative conclusions about perceptions of popular depictions of queer Chicanas/Latinas, Adriana and Veronica both discussed their awareness of the dismal lack of queer Latinas in popular media, and the further lack of diverse expressions therein. Each participant's explanation of their physical appearance and its relationship to their sexuality varied drastically, but none paralleled that of the television representations. They were unable to see themselves reflected and were unable to relate in complex, meaningful ways to the queer Latina characters presented.

The experiences shared by the interview participants around their interaction with or exposure to sexual domination or erasure also varied widely both in their relationship to popular media representations and from each other's. The most salient theme with relation to policing of sexuality was that there was some in all cases. For Veronica, this emerged through her partner's pride in her bisexuality as it related to their currently heterosexual relationship, whereas for Bette, her father's conflation of non-normative female sexuality with hegemonic masculinity meant that her political queerness was erased. All three women shared experiences of erasure and domination, but none reflected the explicitly sexual, corporeal domination that defines the representations of queer Latinas in television. Again, the disconnect is remarkable.

In the three television representations discussed for this project, the initial rejection and fracture between family members emerges as a common theme. The interview participants shared some similarities with these stories; however, the most poignant descriptions of rejection or disconnect shared by the interview participants were of public outings at school, or of moving through the world with a presentation that is readily visible as queer. I found it interesting that, despite this being the area with the most articulated crossover between the television representations and the shared experiences of interview participants, their ability for participants to relate to the experiences of the characters was minimal.⁸⁴ Largely, I attribute this to the general relatability of the characters—meaning that, because the characters were so abstract and disconnected from the lived experiences of the women I spoke with, they were either

⁸⁴ The crossover I am referring to here is not that the experiences of participants exactly or even closely mirror those of television characters, but rather that all three interview participants were able to articulate coming out experiences, whereas their descriptions of or relationships with hegemonic femininity/sexual domination were more difficult to define in relation to the television characters.

unable or uninterested in seeing themselves or their loved ones reflected in the problematic representations of specific snapshots of their lives. In all three interviews, the women had a difficult time relating to the characters, both in their presentation and coming out experiences, which reflects larger trends of misrepresentation in popular culture.

During the interviews, the most common thread when discussing representation in popular culture was the desire for more. All three women agreed that an increase in not simply the quantity, but also the quality of characters is sorely needed. These women called for strong Latinas that are valued for more than their bodies and their ability to please and appease white hegemonic masculinity and white sexual domination. Based on the diversity of experience across these three women alone, as well as the lack of characters with which they can identify, the necessity is clear.

After having examined the ways that three television programs represent queer Latinas and their interactions with hegemonic femininity, sexual domination, and cultural erasure, it is clear that there is a lack of quality portrayals and little diversity of experiences. Especially after conducting interviews with women who these shows claim to represent, the diversity of experience that exists and is missing from popular representations is painfully evident. When characters are written, directed, and played by QWOC, there is more agency around gender expression and less likelihood for hegemony. However, when the characters are designed by white (men) for consumption by whites, the likelihood for hegemonic intentions is quite high.

Conclusions

I began my research with the intention of projecting the voices from historically marginalized communities. Latin@s and Chican@s in the U.S. occupy a unique set of spaces as a result of the complex geographical, colonial, political, and linguistic histories that make up the conglomerate term “Latin@,” even so much as the term itself hardly begins to cover the breadth of other identifiers that it attempts to encompass. Just within this project alone, there is mention of women who identify or are identified as Mexican, Mexican American, Latina, Chicana, Hispanic, Salvadoran, Puerto Rican, and American. These identities become further detailed when gender identity and sexuality come into play, and subsequent combinations include butch lesbian Chicanariqueña or bisexual third generation Hispanic woman. The stories these women share are brave, complex, and above all human. They deserve to be seen and represented, but this representation should not come in the form of hypersexualized bodies marked for conquest.

One of the things that was the most challenging for me during this project was the timing with which the different components came together and the challenge of foregrounding the voices of the women I interviewed while still making this work my own. This final chapter will discuss my findings in the larger context of pop culture media analysis as well as directions for further research.

Particularly within pop culture analysis, much of the contemporary work being done is through social media and new media technology such as Internet news sites, blogs, and zines. The material available for analysis on social media is seemingly endless, and it evolves daily. With respect to representations of queer Latinas in television and in the larger sphere of pop culture, these avenues are overflowing with information from

voices within the social justice/activism communities about what positive and affirming representation could look like.

Directions for Future Research

As far as the characters analyzed here only one is ongoing, which opens more opportunities for researching new characters and impatiently awaiting the arrival of fierce new characters. I have high hopes that a queer Latina will soon shine on the third season of the Netflix original, *Orange is the New Black*, or that viewers will see more of Luisa, the lesbian doctor who impregnated *Jane the Virgin*. Shonda Rhimes, whose work has been “normalizing television” through its portrayal of queer love and historically marginalized characters, is sure to provide both new characters for analysis as well as exciting developments with Dr. Torres.⁸⁵ The pockets of resistance may seem small, but they are powerful and ripe with possibility.

Another area for future research is to examine the ways that Settler Homonationalism (Morgensen, 2010) relates to the experiences of queer Chicanas/Latinas. Morgensen (2010) expands upon Puar’s concept of Homonationalism, and explores the ways that U.S. Empire, exceptionalism, and expansion are built upon the necessary elimination of Indigenous communities and cultures, or settler colonialism. Moreover, while Puar focuses on homonormative enabling of U.S. empirical endeavors abroad, Settler Homonationalism addresses U.S. Imperialism as it pertains to the elimination and erasure of Indigenous communities within perceived U.S. borders. This is specifically important when understanding the experiences of Chican@s/Latin@s with

⁸⁵ In one of the most recent episodes of *Grey’s Anatomy*, Dr. Torres is introduced to another male love interest, police officer Dan Pruitt.

Indigenous heritage, since their experiences so often involve the crossing of these imposed borders. A more detailed look at how Settler Homonationalism informs the experiences and representations of queer Chicanas/Latinas makes it possible to expand the conversation around complex identities and systems of power and oppression.

By looking at issues in representation such as homonormativity and Settler Homonationalism, exotification, and erasure, we can start to break down the harmful depictions of queer Latinas and focus on those that empower. This also involves collecting more stories so that popular media has a larger body of narrative from which to draw. Some of the unanswered questions that emerged from this research include the connection between being partnered and coming out, the distinction between visibility and representation, experiences with chosen family, and the process of identity development among queer Latinas/Chicanas.

Part of expanding the breadth of representation in television comes by expanding the base of stories from which to draw from. Of course, there are already women who have shared their stories and many more who are willing. It is my humble hope to contribute by collecting and projecting a small few.

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